



tion



ties that bind



the



the psyche of feminist filmmaking  
sydney, 1969 - 1989.

bia



# **Ties That Bind**

**The Psyche of Feminist Filmmaking**

Sydney, 1969 - 1989

**Felicity Collins**

Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

University of Technology, Sydney

## Certificate

I certify that this thesis has not already been submitted as part of candidature for any degree and is not being submitted as part of candidature for any other degree.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me and that any help that I have received in preparing this thesis, and all sources used, have been acknowledged in this thesis.

Signature of Candidate

Production Note:  
Signature removed prior to publication.

---

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It was a privilege and a delight to engage with the following people who gave so generously of themselves in the interviews which form the heart of this thesis: Martha Ansara, Gil Appelton, Jo Bell, Annette Blonski, Sharon Connolly, Pat Fiske, Sarah Gibson, Hilary Glow, Helen Grace, Anna Grieve, Tina Kaufman, Carole Kostanich, Susan Lambert, Gillian Leahy, Megan McMurchy, Beth McRae, Vicki Molloy, Margot Nash, Margot Oliver, Penny Robbins and Jeni Thornley. This thesis would have been unimaginable without their spirited co-operation, not just in the interviews but in supplying further information, clarifications, photographs, stills and memorabilia (not to mention cups of tea, dinners and enthusiastic engagement with my follow up questions).

I would like to thank Jan MacKay for the storyboard sketches from *My Life Without Steve* reproduced in Chapter 7 (supplied courtesy of Gillian Leahy), Lee Whitmore for the FFW poster reproduced in Chapter 4, and Jenny Short for the drawing reproduced in Chapter 1.

I am grateful to the Australian Film Commission for granting me access to the files of the Women's Film Fund during 1991 and 1992. I would especially like to thank Kim Ireland and Cathy Robinson for facilitating my access to these files and searching out the ones that were hard to find. Jo Bell generously facilitated my access to the Women's Program files held at the Melbourne office of the AFC. Ken Berryman at the National Film and Sound Archive gave me a lengthy loan of his M.A. thesis on the EFTVF and Meg Labrun at the National Film and Sound Archive in Canberra went to the trouble of finding the uncatalogued boxes of SWFG/FFW files lodged by Jennifer Stott who made access easier by supplying a list of the files which the Sydney Filmmakers Co-op lodged with the NFSA. Particular thanks go to Jeni Thornley who trusted me with several boxes of her personal collection of SWFG/FFW files.

I am especially indebted to Tina Kaufman in her capacity as editor of *Filmnews* from 1976-1994, not only for access to the *Filmnews* files and for commissioning my first writings on film, but also for the years of avid *Filmnews* reading enabled by her unmatched capacity to prosper and publish in a politically volatile milieu.

My family has been more than tolerant of my driven state over the last three summers, lending me their spare rooms, cars, telephones and sympathetic ears - and reminding me to have fun on my many research trips to Sydney: love and thanks to Roma Collins, Janene Collins, Mark Collins, Ewen Charles, Tony Collins and Louise Collins.

Friends and colleagues have been unstinting in their support: Alison Tilson gave me a list of reasons for starting and Monique Schwarz never failed to supply a good reason why I should finish. For marathon telephone conversations and friendship beyond the call of duty I thank Therese Davis, Jen McCarthy, Maree Marsh, Nori Neumark, Shirley Law, Griff Clemens and Philippa Hawker ( who went over the limit by volunteering to do some proofreading). Special thanks to Jo Ann Lewis who gave me the space to grapple with my own psychic entanglements in this work, and to Catherine Gleeson - my beloved partner in crime - who not only survived my thesis but guided me through the obstacle course of producing the final document.

Highest praise and deepest gratitude to Susan Murphy Dermody who, in her capacity as supervisor, worked her magic on my inchoate attempts to find what interested me in this topic and then gave me licence to follow my own 'desire lines'. Susan's affection for this research and her imaginative capacity to put ideas into play with an enviable lightness of touch, have inspired me throughout. I can truly say that writing this thesis has been an enjoyable and satisfying experience, due in no small measure to Susan's bountiful good humour and unflagging confidence in the richness of the material.

---

## PREFACE

---

I take the Preface as an opportunity to define the subject and scope of the thesis, to indicate how it took shape, and to situate it in relation to my previous writings on Australian, independent, and feminist cinema.

My purpose in this thesis has been to track the psyche of a Sydney milieu - identified since the late 1970s as 'independent feminist filmmaking'. The focus of my research is the constellation of women who were attracted to both the Women's Liberation Movement (WLM) and to independent filmmaking in Sydney from 1969-1989. At the core of this milieu was the Sydney Women's Film Group (SWFG), which was formed directly out of the WLM's publications group, Words For Women. In 1978, the Feminist Film Workers (FFW) constituted itself (as a closed group) from within the SWFG to concentrate on a range of activities to promote a specifically *feminist* cinema.

A number of institutions were crucial to the ethos and identity of the SWFG/FFW - most importantly the Sydney Filmmakers Co-operative (formally established out of the Ubu film group in 1969) and its monthly publication, *Filmnews*. The State-funded institutions most important in terms of financing independent feminist filmmaking were: the Experimental Film and Television Fund (EFTVF) from 1970-78; the Australian Film, Television and Radio School (AFTVS) from 1974; the Women's Film Fund (WFF) from 1976-1987; and the Creative Development Branch (CDB) of the Australian Film Commission (AFC) from 1978-1989.

The imbrication of independent feminist filmmaking with the above institutions, organisations and groups has been substantially documented in the 1987 publication *Don't Shoot Darling! Women's Independent Filmmaking in Australia* (Annette Blonski, Barbara Creed and Freda Freiberg, eds). My research is indebted to this publication for its pathbreaking work of mapping the institutional histories, personalities and bodies of film which define the milieu.

Unlike *Don't Shoot Darling!*, this thesis takes 'feminist' rather than 'women's' independent filmmaking as its terrain. My interest is in the binding tensions between Woman/Activist/Artist/Mother in the arena of independent filmmaking: the shift in the mid 1970s from a women's liberationist to a feminist perspective was an enactment of the conflicting relations between

'woman/mother' and 'feminist/activist/artist' in the milieu's psyche. This thesis is about the constellation of politicised baby boomers who took as their project the explication and exploration, in cinematic form, of those tensions .

Martha Ansara's personal statement written for *Don't Shoot Darling!* in 1987, is a revealing sketch of what drew the politicised psyche to the imaginal world of the cinema ("to see the light") rather than to the *realpolitik* of the femocracy:

Maya Deren ... said that cameras do not make films; rather the filmmaker makes a film with her flexible body and her imaginative mind. Brian Probyn showed me how a cinematographer depends on her own eyes - to observe physically and psychologically - to see the light. My mother taught me the value to an artist of mastery of craft and the place of technical exercises. Tom Cowan once reminded me that a filmmaker has something in common with the priest or a communist. Ho Chi Minh made the American Declaration of Independence relevant to the modern world: 'All the peoples on the earth are equal from birth, all the peoples have a right to live, to be happy and free.' Dr Helen Caldicott warns us to get our priorities straight. The Cuban cinema inspires us to enjoy ourselves. And Mao Tse Tung put it in a nutshell: 'Dare To Struggle. Dare To Win.' (Ansara, 1987: 181)

The milieu of politicised filmmaking that emerged from the WLM was a *revolutionary* one. The revolutionary ideal of the WLM was defined by Ann Curthoys and Lyndall Ryan in a paper delivered to a women's liberation conference held in Sydney in January 1971:

[...] we see women's liberation as working for revolution, but not the sort of revolution which is an event that takes two or three days, in which there is shooting and hanging. 'It will be a long, drawn out process in which new people will be created, capable of renovating society so that the revolution will not replace one elite with another, but rather will create a new anti-authoritarian society, with new anti-authoritarian people who in their turn will reorganise the society so that it will become a non-alienated human society, free from war, hunger and exploitation.' These words of Rudi Dutschke are about the closest we have heard to the ideal some of us are seeking. Susan Sontag has stated the problem even more bluntly. For her revolution

means 'not only creating political and economic justice but releasing and validating personal, as well as social, energies of all kinds, including erotic ones'. (see Curthoys, 1988: 11)

The mobilising force of personal and erotic energies in attracting women to the WLM and to filmmaking posed a central difficulty for the research and writing of this thesis. In my previous writing on independent cinema (see Collins 1983a, 1984, 1987b) I performed historical analyses of the ideology and rhetoric of film institutions, leaving out the stories of passionately felt commitments, rivalries, triumphs, and failures that I was privy to while I was doing my research. I became vividly aware of the distinct personalities of Sydney film scenes, however, I tried in my writing to 'rise above' such knowledge which I considered 'too personal'.

When I embarked on the research for this thesis I felt immense inertia at the prospect of writing in the same vein as my previous work. This resistance to the thesis did not shift until Susan Dermody suggested in July 1991 that what I was interested in - in the stories I'd come across in the files of the Women's Film Fund - was the psyche of a milieu. This suggestion was the key that unlocked the thesis.

I take the psyche of a milieu as the intersubjective realm of experience where precious beliefs are made and remade in conscious and unconscious ways in the interaction of socio-political and psychic realities. Morris Berman in *Coming To Our Senses* (1989) suggests that historiography in the modern period has lost the ability to include what it is that really matters to us in the retelling of the past:

The major obstacle to understanding the past ... is, curiously enough, the problem of living in the modern period itself, i.e., during the time in which history became a professional discipline, modeled along the lines of the natural sciences. Previous to this time, history was by and large a mode of storytelling. This is not to say that it was "merely" ... fiction.... It would be more accurate to say that it had a very different sense of what "the facts" were. In this mode, "the facts" were first and foremost what happened on a psychic and emotional level; indeed, if this got left out, it was fair to say that *nothing happened* - there was no story to tell. The essential truth was an interior one; to omit this was to give the reader, or listener, no significant information whatsoever. In the transition to modernity, this emphasis on interior knowing was severely attenuated. (Berman,1989: 111)



When I sat down to write up my research into the psyche of feminist filmmaking (Sydney, 1969-89) I harboured an ambition to write "what happened on a psychic and emotional level". This desire to draw on "interior knowing" turned out to be more challenging than I had imagined, especially in the supremely rationalist form of the doctoral thesis. I had no model before me to show me how to proceed. My first inspiration came from chancing upon Dorothy Dinnerstein's 1976 account in *The Mermaid and the Minotaur* of the psychological underpinnings of the madness of history in the nuclear age, and finding resonances of Dinnerstein's argument in Martha Ansara's narration of the personal history she brought with her when she arrived in Australia in the auspicious year of 1969 - the year of the first WLM meeting in Sydney; the year of the founding of the Sydney Filmmakers Co-op, and the year of the inaugural recommendation for a national film and television school, a film development corporation and an experimental film and television fund (see "Interim Report ... " 1969, in Moran and O'Regan, eds, 1985: 171-174).

The synchronicity between Ansara and Dinnerstein on the genesis of the New Left became my starting point. The thesis has no endpoint, only a series of returns to the very questions that initiated the attempt by a politically motivated constellation of women to escape institutionalised motherhood as their adult destiny.<sup>1</sup> *Ties That Bind* is my account of a milieu founded on a utopian faith that the world, and women's place in it, could be remade. The milieu's precious beliefs (and their cinematic projection), as well as the sacrifices and griefs exacted by the activist ethos, define the scope of this thesis.

*St Kilda. 20 March 1995*

---

<sup>1</sup> See Lesley Johnson (1993) for an eloquent interpretation of the ways in which, in the 1950s and early 1960s, youth as a period of 'growing up' was meant to have an *endpoint* in mature adulthood, which for women meant becoming wives and mother.

---

**CONTENTS.**

---

Acknowledgments ii

Preface iv

List of Illustrations x

Abbreviations xi

Abstract xii

**Chapter One. ATTRACTION TO WOMEN'S LIBERATION 1**

We are the daughters of the atomic age: numb, silent, grieving. 2

The mothers who served. 7

Leaving Home. 14

Insurrectionary Women. 18

Two faces of the Medusan Woman. 26

**Chapter Two. ATTRACTION TO CINEMA 36**

The Imprint of the Father. 39

Neo-Modern cinema and the New Woman. 44

Infrastructure for a Marginal Cinema. 50

Inner City Eros. 54

Art and Politics. 64

**Chapter Three. REMAKING THE WORLD 76**

Womenvision. 77

A gloriously naive suggestion. 85

At the Crossroads. 90

Division in the ranks. 97

Women's Film Fund: 1975-1979. 107

**Chapter Four. THE PERSONA OF THE POLITICAL ACTIVIST 116**

Knowing the line. 120

Talking Revolution: the Feminist Film Workers. 135

What is a *feminist* film? 143

Taking sides at the Co-op. 152

**Chapter Five. MAKING THE SACRIFICE 158**

Duties and Obligations. 161

The propagandist and the artist. 163

Speaking in unison. 173

The Shock of the '80s. 184

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <b>Chapter Six. AGONY AUNT: THE WOMEN'S FILM FUND</b> | <b>198</b>                               |
| A Perpetual Balancing Act: 1980-83.                   | 200                                      |
| No Place for an Apparatchik: 1984-86.                 | 208                                      |
| Earmarked for Death: 1987-90.                         | 219                                      |
| <b>Chapter Seven. CAPTURED BY THE MATERNAL</b>        | <b>237</b>                               |
| The essential female tragedy.                         | 238                                      |
| Appeasing the mother.                                 | 245                                      |
| The spectre of child care.                            | 252                                      |
| One of the walking wounded.                           | 262                                      |
| The (abject) maternal body.                           | 269                                      |
| Intimate relations in the shadow of the bomb.         | 275                                      |
| <b>Chapter Eight. FAMOUS LAST WORDS</b>               | <b>290</b>                               |
| The new landscape.                                    | 291                                      |
| Loyalty of things past.                               | 294                                      |
| Gifts from the father.                                | 299                                      |
| <br>  |  |
| Appendix A  | Interviews. 305                          |
| Appendix B  | Programs of Women's Films. 306           |
| Appendix C (i)  | Women's Film Fund Grants 1975-1979. 312  |
| Appendix C (ii)                                       | Women's Film Fund Grants 1980-1987. 315  |
| Appendix C (iii)                                      | Women's Film Fund Other Initiatives. 325 |
| Appendix D  | Most Rented Women's Films 1981. 328      |
| <br>  |  |
| References.   | 329                                      |

## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

### Chapter 1

- 1.1 Their mother's daughters. *For Love or Money* (1983). 10  
 1.2 Martha Ansara and Jeni Thornley. Drawing by Jenny Short. 26

### Chapter 2

- 2.1 Leaflet promoting AS IF's *We Aim To Please* (1977). 37  
 2.2 Sarah Gibson behind the camera. 48  
 2.3 Jeni Thornley in *Secret Storm* (1977). 72  
 2.4 Robin Laurie and Margot Nash in *We Aim To Please*. 74

### Chapter 4

- 4.1 *Feminist Film Workers*: (photo by Sandy Edwards). 118  
 4.2 Jeune Pritchard in *Apartments* (1977, Megan McMurchy). 131  
 4.3 Sandy Edwards in *Apartments* (1977, Megan McMurchy). 131  
 4.4 Susan Lambert in *Ladies Rooms* (1977, Lambert, Gibson, Fiske). 132  
 4.5 *Size 10* (1977, Gibson and Lambert). 133  
 4.6 *What's The Matter Sally?* (1974, Dryen, Sharp, Torsh). 136  
 4.7 Lee Whitmore's representation of the Feminist Film Workers' Utopia. 139  
 4.8 Leaflet for Feminist Film Workers: a new feminist cinema. 142

### Chapter 5

- 5.1 *Behind Closed Doors* (1980). 163  
 5.2 Diana (Liddy Clark) and Amelia (Jan Cornall) in *On Guard* (1983). 171

### Chapter 7

- 7.1 Women Activists: Newcastle barmaids on strike. *For Love or Money* (1983). 249  
 7.2 Jan Cornall and Mystery Carnage in *On Guard* (1983). 251  
 7.3 *Serious Undertakings* (1983, Helen Grace). 255  
 7.4 *This Woman is Not a Car* (1982, Margaret Dodd). 259  
 7.5 Bad weather continues ... by Jan Mackay for *My Life Without Steve* (1986). 264  
 7.6 Kettle boiling ... by Jan MacKay for *My Life Without Steve* (1986). 264  
 7.7 *Landslides* (1986, Sarah Gibson and Susan Lambert). 271  
 7.7 *The Pursuit of Happiness* (1987, Martha Ansara). 277  
 7.9 Robin Laurie as "The Redhead" in *Shadow Panic* (1989, Margot Nash). 283  
 7.10 Rose Wanganeen as "The Investigator" in *Shadow Panic* (1989). 283  
 7.11 Kaarin Fairfax as "The Hothead" in *Shadow Panic* (1989). 284  
 7.12 The child in her mother's mirror. *Shadow Panic* (1989). 286

### Chapter 8

- 8.1 The Medusan daughter returns home. *Vacant Possession* (1994). 301  
 8.2 Tessa (Pamela Rabe) in the mangroves. *Vacant Possession* (1994). 304

## ABBREVIATIONS

|              |   |
|--------------|---|
| <b>ABC</b>   | Australian Broadcasting Corporation (formerly Commission) |
| <b>AFC</b>   | Australian Film Commission                                |
| <b>AFI</b>   | Australian Film Institute                                 |
| <b>AFTVS</b> | Australian Film and Television School                     |
| <b>ATOM</b>  | Australian Teachers of Media                              |
| <b>CDB</b>   | Creative Development Branch                               |
| <b>CDF</b>   | Creative Development Fund                                 |
| <b>CO-OP</b> | Sydney Filmmakers Co-operative                            |
| <b>EFTVF</b> | Experimental Film and Television Fund                     |
| <b>FFW</b>   | Feminist Film Workers                                     |
| <b>IWY</b>   | International Women's Year (1975)                         |
| <b>NSWIT</b> | New South Wales Institute of Technology                   |
| <b>OWA</b>   | Office of Women's Affairs                                 |
| <b>SBS</b>   | Special Broadcasting Services                             |
| <b>SWFG</b>  | Sydney Women's Film Group                                 |
| <b>UTS</b>   | University of Technology, Sydney                          |
| <b>WFF</b>   | Women's Film Fund   |
| <b>WFU</b>   | Women's Film Unit   |
| <b>WLM</b>   | Women's Liberation Movement                               |

---

## ABSTRACT

---

The purpose of my research for this thesis has been to investigate the psychic and emotional history of the milieu of independent, feminist filmmaking that began to form within the Women's Liberation Movement in Sydney in 1969. My interest in the psyche of the milieu has been two-fold: to explore the possibility of writing an interior or subjective history, not of an individual but of a political milieu; and to grapple with the trajectory of the utopian, activist politics of the 1970s into the 1980s.

I began my research by reading over five hundred funding applications from the files of the Women's Film Fund - an extensive archival record of the interaction between the funding femocracy and aspiring filmmakers. The building blocks of the thesis derived from interviews with founding members of the Sydney Women's Film Group (SWFG) and the Feminist Film Workers (FFW), and with former managers and Advisory Panel members of the Women's Film Fund. I consulted the SWFG and FFW records held (uncatalogued) by the National Film and Sound Archive, and I was given access to papers from the personal files of some of the filmmakers. I also viewed the body of films associated with the women's collections at the former Sydney Filmmakers Co-operative and the Women's Film Fund.

From 1969-89 there were three major reconfigurations in the psyche of the milieu. The 1960s liberationist ethos - characterised by energy, excitement and eros - was transformed into an ethic of duty, discipline and sacrifice in the late 1970s. In the 1980s, feminist activism reached a limit point which turned the milieu's attention to the psychic foundations of its own origins and to the question of what had been sacrificed in the formation of the feminist activist. This question haunts the films of the 1980s through the insistent figure of the maternal. The ties that bound this milieu to a luminous vision of the future had their origins in a deeply shadowed image of the immediate past. This psychic reality is a point of origin and return as the milieu continues to remake itself through the cinema, into the 1990s.

---

## Chapter 1

### ATTRACTION TO WOMEN'S LIBERATION

---

The story of the formation of the milieu can be traced in terms of the forces of attraction which drew disparate women into the constellation of the Women's Liberation Movement and its offshoot - feminist filmmaking. The uneven development of individual involvements in feminism, from the late 1960s until the late 1970s, means that elements of the story of attraction to Women's Liberation will continue to crop up in the following chapters.

One of the questions arising from these anecdotes, as they come together, is something like: *what did Women's Liberation want, and what did it want of the cinema?* The imperative to find political solutions to personal problems (to connect inner and outer worlds) is a key to answering this question - exemplified in Jenny Short's drawing of Martha Ansara and Jeni Thornley who were founding figures in the milieu's psyche.<sup>1</sup> The question of how inner (personal) and outer (political) worlds became disconnected and polarised, particularly in terms of the feminine and the masculine, is fundamental to the formation of the political psyche of the post-war, baby boom generation of feminists.

---

<sup>1</sup> Reproduced in Barbara Alysén (ed) (1979a: 40-41).

**"We are the daughters of the atomic age: numb, silent, grieving."**

Two historical moments preside over the birth scene of the milieu.

Turning the clock back to October 29, 1969, I see Martha Ansara flying into Sydney from the U.S.A., armed with a bundle of Women's Liberation pamphlets and a political personality forged in a Communist family in Cold War America. The second historical progenitor is that of Hiroshima and the atomic mushroom cloud that became the primal scene of political subjectivity in the postwar period. The psyche of the milieu has its origins in the intimate connection between these two moments.

Searching through the milieu's films for clues to its origins, I was struck by a resonant line from *For Love or Money* (1983), an archival, documentary film on the history of women and work in Australia. Introducing the postwar period, the voice-over declares:

We are the daughters of the atomic age: numb, silent, grieving.

I have no difficulty conjuring an image for the first part of the statement: *For Love or Money* abounds with footage of politicised women - mostly young and determined - marching behind banners in street demonstrations. The second half of the statement was more difficult to pin down. An image of this generation of outspoken feminists as "numb, silent, grieving" is not one that springs readily to mind. Yet in the interviews I did for this thesis I came upon reservoirs of silence and sadness. The emotional states of numbness, silence and grief might be said to constitute the shadow of radical activist feminism, an intimation I'll return to later in the thesis.

The profound relation between the global, political claim of the first part of the statement (*daughters of the atomic age*) and the emotional profile of the second part (*numb, silent, grieving*) continued to escape me until my recent, belated reading of Dorothy Dinnerstein's *The Mermaid and the Minotaur* (1976). In the final chapter of her study of *Sexual Arrangements and Human Malaise*, Dinnerstein puts her finger on the nostalgia and despair which Hiroshima cast over a generation of immobilised radicals in the United States of America during the Cold War years - a political



immobilisation out of which the young activists of the New Left, and eventually the Women's Liberation Movement, emerged.<sup>2</sup>

Dinnerstein's elegant argument concerning the historical amnesia of the postwar generation, and the ferocity of the anger which propelled New Left women in the U.S.A. into their own liberation struggle, has a particular pertinence to the beginnings of the feminist film enterprise in Sydney in the late 1960s. The figure who stands at the history-making juncture of Women's Liberation in the U.S.A. and feminist cinema in Australia, is Martha Ansara, an American who became a prime mover in independent filmmaking in Sydney. The motif of amnesia stands at the heart of Ansara's personal account of growing up in a muted political milieu.

In an attempt to describe what motivates her politically, Ansara looked to her unusual childhood in a Communist family in Cold War America:

I was brought up in the Left. I didn't know this because I was brought up in the Cold War. I didn't know my parents were Communists until my mother came here to Australia in 1975. It was such a deadly secret. We might have blabbed. It was a horrific period. Many people were jailed. My father lost his job. There were complete lies as to why this was so. He had to try to get work. The real reasons would have ...[trails off into silence]. [...] I actually knew who the Communists were but I could never have said the word, it was so taboo. I knew, but I couldn't face it because it was just ...[trails off into silence]. (*Ansara, 1992a*<sup>3</sup>.)

Ansara's knowledge of her parents' political lives has been constructed retrospectively, making sense of a mosaic of childhood scenes whose political significance remained shrouded in secrecy until well into Ansara's adult life:

My father could read and write Arabic and during the war he was drafted into the Board of Economic Warfare and then he went on to the

---

<sup>2</sup> See Hazel Rowley (1993: 337-427), for an account of the gruelling deprivation and chronic depression of the Cold War years for Left intellectuals and artists exiled in Europe.

<sup>3</sup> All quotes from Interviews with the Author are indicated by italicised surnames at the end of the quote. See Appendix A for complete list of interviews.

State Department which is Foreign Affairs. He was very valuable to them in terms of the Middle East because we're Lebanese. He lost his job in 1949. He was one of the first casualties. There were ten of them and they were told they could all go quietly or they would be exposed. My mother apparently argued that they should fight it, but anyway, they went. I think he might have been willing to stand up and fight it. Anyway, they should have fought it because once you let it start, it goes on. So he lost his job then, and it was just very difficult.

[My mother] was a painter but she had these young children. She worked with Spanish War relief and, after, in the southern states there was a poll tax which was what kept black people from voting. She worked a lot on that. I should have realised she was a Communist but you just didn't speak about such things.

I grew up in a funny sort of milieu but as things became more and more difficult for my family they became more and more isolated. The Left was completely shattered. Nevertheless I got a lot of ideas and they were confirmed by the economic difficulties that we had. I had a very odd life. A very peculiar life. One minute we'd be living in a mansion we couldn't afford, and the next, six of us in two rooms. I went to the best girls' schools in the country and then nothing. Up and down and in and out of all these different kinds of societies. I went to Lebanon with my father and met President Nasser in Egypt and shook his hand. All these things had a very big influence. (*Ansara, 1992a*)

In the 1960s, the New Left emerged out of student politics, civil rights and anti-war demonstrations, which connected with Ansara's childhood experiences:

My brother was very involved in student politics. I thought they were very dirty these people. I got interested in anti-war questions. I grew up with air raid drills - as a child I was very frightened of atomic bombs. We were also living in Virginia at the time of the big battle over integration and we went around with petitions - with Quakers it must have been - trying to stop some of the things going on. I was always knocking on little doors. I was very influenced by Quakers. (*Ansara, 1992a*)

The fragmentation and silences which mar Ansara's attempt to piece together the secret at the heart of her childhood, find resonance in Dorothy Dinnerstein's description of the emotional situation for Ansara's parents generation of former radicals in the post-Hiroshima years, and the consequences this situation had for Ansara's generation.

The Americans who were young adults on Hiroshima day have been largely inarticulate about the ways in which this explosion - and the light it shed on the period that led up to it - determined for them the quality of the years that followed. And it is during those years, steeped in what remained centrally unspoken, that the young adults of the new left - including the passionate, determined new feminists who were forged in the new left - were growing up. Among the mute spiritual progenitors of those young adults are people who were radicals before and during World War II, and who then spent all or most of the period between the war's end and the late fifties or early sixties in a state of moral shock: that is, in the condition of anaesthesia and blurred comprehension that follows catastrophe. In this condition, they withdrew from history ... into intensely personalistic, inward-turning, magically thing-and-place-oriented life. (Dinnerstein, 1976: 258-9)

It is Dinnerstein's contention that the McCarthyist persecution of communists "was an assault on a largely paralysed and comatose prey" (1976: 259). The more *fatal* assault on the radicals of the 1930s and 1940s was the slowly assimilated evidence of human psychopathology at the heart of large-scale, centralised, social structures embodied in Nazism, Stalinism and the American response to fascism with nuclear weapons. For "historically passionate livers" the public realm lost its aura "of worldmaking, death-transcending enterprise" and the realm of personal life "took on much of the magically self-transcending significance that future-oriented public effort had carried before" (Dinnerstein, 1976: 259-262).<sup>4</sup>

Ansara's generation was born into this radical disconnection between history and everyday life, between the anonymous brutality of industrial-

---

<sup>4</sup> Dinnerstein (1976: 260-262) defines "historically passionate livers" as those people whose "capacities for connectedness ... had embraced historic considerations and a temporally and spatially extended human scene". In the wake of the Holocaust and Hiroshima, these people withdrew from history and devoted themselves to a few beloved things, places and people.

military enterprise and the intensely personalised realm of hearth-and-home. The failure of the old Left to communicate to the next generation of history-making activists the "infernal vision of society" (Dinnerstein, 1976: 262) that instigated their postwar retreat from history, meant Martha Ansara left home to change a world whose immediate past was blanketed in her elders' silence, numbness and despair. It is the inheritance of this emotional situation and its quasi solutions of home ownership and hearth-centred life, consumerism and upward mobility through education - and the crisis in gender relations that these 'solutions' precipitated - that constitutes the unconscious of the Women's Liberation Movement.

## The mothers who served

While Martha Ansara's political persona was being forged in the Eisenhower era in the United States, the Australian Anglo-Celtic middle class - seeking security and upward social mobility under the paternal reign of Robert Menzies - was breeding its own rebellious post-war generation of activists who would eagerly take on board an imported carrier bag of New Left, counter-cultural and Liberation dispositions.<sup>5</sup> Jeni Thornley's meeting with Martha Ansara in Sydney in the late 1960s consolidated her fervent embrace of political ideas which challenged the mores of middle-class family life in the 1950s:

When I met Martha who was in a very radical feminist phase from the States - she brought in all this literature; *The Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm* was a pamphlet which we all circulated - it was a most amazing time because we were the daughters of the '50s; we were the products of that most reactionary decade.

Martha had just got back from America. She came back with the *Words For Women* pamphlets under her arm. It's so strange to think that now, where the books or the texts of feminism are so easily available, but back then, there was nothing. There was no feminism when I was at university. Even when I was a librarian later at Sydney University, women weren't allowed to wear trousers to work in the '70s. We had to conduct a campaign where the women all agreed to wear slacks to work one day. Can you imagine how backward things were in those days? (Thornley, 1992a)

The struggle by middle-class women to renounce domestic servitude and its concomitant consumerism and enter the public realm - facilitated by university education for most of the women involved in the feminist film project - was very much tied to the crisis in gender relations and explosions of feeling around that crisis, which Dinnerstein takes as germinal for the Women's Liberation Movement.

---

<sup>5</sup> See Judith Brett (1992) and Janet McCalman (1993) for long overdue studies of the formation of the postwar middle-class in Australia.

On the issue of the relation between the counter-culture, the New Left, Women's Liberation and the centrality of personal life in the post-war period, Dinnerstein proposed the following argument: anaesthetised adults, in the face of nuclear horror, the Holocaust and revelations about Stalinism, retreated from history into personal life by focusing the capacity for connectedness onto the home, turning the public realm of achievement into an arena of mere breadwinning or conscious gamesmanship. The New Left children of these anaesthetised elders inherited a profound distrust of large-scale, centralised enterprise - expressed in the brief flowering of the counterculture in the 1960s. The counterculture's disaffection for rational, technical, formal, public and long-term enterprise saw a shift toward Eros-based affective, intuitive, aesthetic, mysterious, private and short-term acts of self-creation. This trajectory contradicted the other major impulse in New Left politics - a rebirth of broad historical concern. For Dinnerstein, the two streams of feeling embodied in this burst of consciousness remained largely unreconciled except in certain general principles: that expressive, aesthetic, humanistic values must shape the new world; that eroticism must permeate history, not be encapsulated in genital sex; that first-hand, emotionally vivid experience, not theory-dominated policy which violates such experience, must shape social action (1976: 260-264).

The consequences of these shifts for the development of a new stage in the project of sexual liberty are Dinnerstein's main concern.<sup>6</sup> The unprecedented depth and ferocity of feminist rage, Dinnerstein argues, came from young women's disinheritance from the female's traditional role as *complicit critics* of the destructive, mindless, pompous and farcical aspects of male enterprise. In the New Left youth culture of voluntary poverty and unemployment, young men took over this critique of male enterprise, but - crucial to feminist rage - refused to inaugurate a new order whereby women could take an equal role in history-making:

What these men continued to want from women was maternal applause, menial services, and body contact. What they largely withdrew from women was the personal commitment that men in the traditional

---

<sup>6</sup> Dinnerstein's portrait of the 'Grey Flannel Suit' years finds its Australian counterpart in the film clips used in Part 3 of *For Love or Money*. See Janet McCalman (1993: 199-238) for a detailed account of diverse experiences of the postwar years from 1946-66 from the perspective of the parents of the baby boomers.

sybiotic arrangement have been able to offer them, the commitment one offers a deeply, centrally needed person. What they could not accept in women was the primitive impulse toward initiative, the straightforward self-reliant pleasure in making dramatic things happen, which is the healthy core of the human response to the loss of infant omnipotence... (Dinnerstein, 1976: 269-270)

In a Personal Statement written for *Don't Shoot Darling!* Martha Ansara recounts her first revelation that she could be more than the menial assistant to male filmmakers:

I fell in love with the cinema in Chicago in 1960, the year I also joined the Student Peace Union. Recoiling from politics after my first student demonstration, I went to the movies day and night, helped to run a film society and worshipped Alfred Hitchcock. When our group actually produced a film of our own, I was thrilled to be allowed to fetch and carry for young men no older or wiser than myself. I could not have put into words, much less challenged, the notion that filmmaking was the work of men alone.

The issue of peace refused to go away. In 1967, working to support conscientious objectors, I found a man with a movie camera, followed him to California and helped him make an anti-war documentary. There I also caught sight of Agnes Varda across a crowded rally. She was directing her own film crew. Quietly, I spent that month's supporting mother's pension on a Super 8 camera. (Ansara, 1987: 180)

At the heart of Dinnerstein's account of the emergence of Women's Liberation from the New Left in the 1960s is her precise understanding of the way that sexual arrangements which delegate fulltime child care exclusively to women, are responsible for the perpetuation of male privilege in the realm of history-making and the ambivalent status of female authority in the home. In Dinnerstein's view, the lopsided dominance of human infancy by the mother guarantees unequal access to self-creation and enterprise by men and women. Women expect to *become* mother while men expect to exercise their compensatory powers under the skeptical yet complicit gaze of their wives, who in turn take vicarious pleasure in male achievement in realms otherwise denied to women. The dilemma for the

daughters of the postwar mothers was given voice in the narration of *For Love or Money*:

We are the daughters of the women who served.

We watched them serve our fathers for years.

They wanted us to be like them. But they wanted us to be different.

We wanted to be different.



1.1 Their mother's daughters. *For Love or Money* (1983)

Initially, Australian women's liberationists wanted to be less like their mothers and more like their brothers, especially those on the New Left: Germaine Greer's writing owes something to her involvement with the satirical magazine *Oz* and Wendy Bacon made numerous court appearances over the 'obscenity' of her publishing activities.<sup>7</sup> Gillian Leahy's initial

---

<sup>7</sup> Donald Horne (1980: 19-20) gives a succinct account of Wendy Bacon's notorious publishing escapades which Horne characterises as emerging from "a gloomy anarchism" influenced by andersonian libertarianism which engages in protest for its own sake.



contact with Women's Liberation occurred in 1969 while she was at Sydney University where she was a well-known activist with ties to both Trotskyist and SDS (Students for a Democratic Society ) circles. At first, the Women's Liberation phenomenon, fresh from the USA, was viewed as a useful rhetoric for recruiting more women to the university's Labor Club. After attending a meeting of the Balmain Women's Liberation group, to which she was invited by Martha Ansara in 1970, Leahy quickly developed what she calls "a standard feminist whinge" about men on the Left.<sup>8</sup> Anne Summers in *Damned Whores and God's Police* gives a brief description of the male rebels who founded *Oz* magazine in 1963:

It was a late adolescent oedipal revolt, an assertion by a new generation of impatient young men that they were no longer content to subscribe to the view of the world defined by their fathers, that *they* had a few ideas on previously taboo topics which they were going to air and to hell with you oldies. *Oz* crystallized and for a while was the vehicle for a revised version of the national self-portrait. It devoted a lot of attention to the boorish and rapacious behaviour of drunken Australian men ... but its attitude was only mildly critical ... (Summers, 1994: 109).

Summers describes the schizophrenia felt by women defending this male rebellion against Australian puritanism:

... we *did* identify with it, and it played a major role in our acculturation to a position of radical protest against many facets of old Australia. Yet it could never entirely accommodate us and our needs ... there still remained an uneasiness that much of our protest was hollow for we defended something that gave us only honorary status. [...] It was only with the formation of Women's Liberation ... that we began to understand that our sensibilities had been split, our feelings fractured by trying to identify with a radical posture which had not thought it necessary to challenge, along with the other sacred cows it tore down, the view that it behoved Australian women to sublimate all their ideals and aspirations in dutiful wifedom and bountiful maternity. (Summers, 1994: 110 - 111)

---

<sup>8</sup> Source: Conversation with Leahy on May 2, 1994.

The task of developing alternatives to "dutiful wifedom and bountiful maternity" fell to the Women's Liberation Movement. Under the influence of writers including Simone de Beauvoir, Juliet Mitchell and Shulamith Firestone, the independent, professional woman - crucially, free of the burden of becoming wife and mother - would become an ideal which would define Summers' generation of activists.<sup>9</sup>

Summers' and Dinnerstein's accounts of the origins of the Women's Liberation Movement were developed as the movement took shape. *Retrospective* accounts of the origins of feminist political activism, proffered in the 1990s, tend to draw on the imprint of familial conflicts on individual psyches, and to find evidence of this imprint in subsequent political involvements. Jeni Thornley provides the following analysis of the place of the mother in her own - complex and contradictory - attraction to Women's Liberation as an alternative *feminine* domain:

At the time, I latched onto a political movement for the obvious reasons - I'm not diminishing the value of the political struggles of the Women's Movement either in saying that, whether it's for abortion, equal pay, or refuges - but I still think my own attachment to feminism grew out of a desire for merging back with the mother. And I think that was what *Maidens* (1978) was about. Some of the narration in *For Love or Money* is about that : 'we remember her labour, we remember that she gave, we remember how she ' - that's from Susan Griffin. It's a hymn to the mother. (Thornley, 1992a)

Thornley gives voice to the multiple pulls and tensions involved in rejecting the place of the mother as defined by the patriarchal father, while simultaneously longing for an impossible union with women which would be free from the power of men:

[Carrying the burden of feminism] I think comes from one's own childhood, probably one's relationship to the father. It depends what kind of Dad you had. It's terrible to put it back to men - 'I had to become a feminist because I had a terrible father'. But I *did* have to

---

<sup>9</sup> Anne Summers (1994: 512-514) cites Simone de Beauvoir, Juliet Mitchell, Betty Friedan and "the American women" as vital influences on the Australian WLM in the late 1960s, early 1970s.

become a feminist because of my perception of women. Because of the way I saw my mother treated by my father I vowed never to get married. I vowed never to be abused by a man again, like my father abused me and my mother. So I think for me, my feminism has very much come out of a struggle to have to prove that I am equal to a man, because I had that struggle with my father who believed that women were second class citizens and were there to serve him. He used to whistle - I'm so angry to this day (and I've learned to love my father who died of cancer two years ago and I reconciled with him) but he used to *whistle* my mother when he wanted something done.

When you grow up in the '50s in a family where women's only place is to be wives and mothers and to be abused and have no economic independence, it's obvious you either become that or you have to fight against it. (Thornley, 1992a)

The anger which fuelled the Women's Liberation Movement in the 1960s was anger at experiences that were conceived in terms of the misogyny of the patriarchal order, evidenced by rape, domestic violence, pornography, women's use of tranquillisers and in women's inequality at work and in the home. Enough women felt strongly enough about their experiences to form a movement which was, for a time, fuelled by rage at all things male:

I've had to fight the patriarchy both within the family and outside. Now, it's fighting it within my head, and ironically I've had to go back to Freud. ... I was more of the 'burn all the books' - not his books, but I came through that phase of the Women's Movement where women wouldn't have books by men on their bookshelves. Could you imagine this time? It was very scary, in retrospect to see that anti-intellectual, anti-free pitting of the genders against each other. It wasn't just me that did it. I went out into the world and found women who felt like me and we did it together. (Thornley, 1992a).

## Leaving Home

Gloria Steinem made the observation that "the growth of the women's liberation movement 'has happened not so much by organization as by contagion'" (quoted in Greer, 1971: 310-11). For Martha Ansara, revelation came out of cumulative contact with Women's Liberation propaganda, rather than from an explosion of rage from within the female ranks of the New Left:

In 1969 I belonged to a Film Group there [in the U.S.A.] and we had this big pin-up on our billboard and these crazy women came and pointed out that there was something wrong with this. I couldn't see it. I went to a women's conference. There were all these weird Left-posturing women. I took these pamphlets and when I arrived in Australia we thought well, we'll get together and discuss this question. I met some people - Jeni Thornley, Kathy Gollan [an ABC radio broadcaster, and daughter of Daphne Gollan, a former Communist Party member] and some women who went on in film. We discussed these questions. We took the approach of what was popular then - consciousness raising, which was not quite what it seemed to be. The personal is political means that you go from understanding what's happening to you personally to the broader implications. We did this and the penny dropped. So I was very active in the Women's Movement. (*Ansara, 1992a*)

The influence of concurrent anti-colonial and other liberation struggles was much stronger than any tenuous connection with the long history of feminist struggle, which remained quite obscure in the early years of WLM where immediacy and spontaneity were dominant values.

We didn't know the term feminism until fairly late on. We used the term women's liberation. Feminists were back in the First World War days. Primarily women's liberation was a social and political issue. We believed that women are oppressed within almost every strata of society and almost every social system. Our view was that we needed to free women - that's the liberation end- from that oppression. That was in the era of national liberation and all these anti-colonial struggles had made a big impact on people, so that term 'liberation' had a very broad meaning. We started in Sydney, our Women's Liberation group, at the end of '69. That was at the height of the Vietnam war so national liberation was

quite an issue. Things were going on in Latin America and all of this had an impact on the way we viewed women's liberation. (*Ansara, 1992b*)

Many Australian women's liberationists emerged from campus politics, the Vietnam Moratorium demonstrations and the campaign to elect the Whitlam government and end the twenty-three year reign of the Liberal-Country Party at the national level.<sup>10</sup> For Jeni Thornley there were several places where she found women who felt the same way she did:

In the '70s I was in the Labor Party and it was so important to us to get Labor into power. All of us put our energy into getting the Liberals out. It was an incredibly important struggle to get the troops out of Vietnam and that's where the 'we' voice of the Moratorium became important. I was politicised then.

Well no. I was really politicised through the movement for free abortion - or for legal abortion I should say, because I had my first abortion when they were illegal when I was a student at university. I suppose that's why I related to the single issue of abortion at that time in the '60s as a critical campaign to become involved in. I had my first abortion in '68 in my last year at Monash [University in Melbourne] and I was also very involved then - the whole campus was just rent asunder. (*Thornley, 1992a*)

The campaign for legal abortion was fundamental to a generation that assumed women's right to sexual autonomy *and* the right to refuse motherhood. For Thornley, personal experience and broad political events were interwoven in ways that did not neatly resolve into 'private' and 'public' categories.

I left Monash in '69 - dropped out of my M.A.. I was also a research assistant in the Politics Department with Michelle Grattan. She was doing a book on the history of women in the ALP which is where that research part of me was awakened, through her, to the history of the oppression of women. Strange to think that Michelle Grattan [former

---

<sup>10</sup> Donald Horne (1980: 157 - 167) describes the lead up to the 1972 election of the Whitlam Labor Government as a period of "nagging dissatisfaction" with the national image provided by political leaders. The baby boom generation was born into the television era of specular politics, which lent itself to the theatricalisation of political protest.

political correspondent for *The Age*; currently the editor of *The Canberra Times*] was one of my mentors. (Thornley, 1992a)

By the late 1960s, home and hearth had come to represent both maternal servitude and paternal authority. Entry into the (hitherto masculine) realm of history was made possible by the long boom in the postwar economy which enabled upward mobility through education in the 1960s. Leaving home was often the first step into the world of politics, via the academic institutions that remained inaccessible to most parents and put their daughters beyond the reach of the family.

I came to Sydney because I had a broken heart and I was running away. [...] I got on the train one night and just cut everything off that I was doing. And in no time at all I became involved in the ALP and with a group of Trotskyists who were trying to work towards getting the ALP into power. In that group I also met a group of women. (Thornley, 1992a)

The 'cutting off' from familiar ties is a significant element of the story. At the threshold of adulthood this new generation of women had been disenfranchised from history by the advent of the nuclear age and disinherited from the traditional female role of vicarious participant in, and complicit critic of male enterprise. It was also severed from the generational chain preserved in the institution of the patriarchal family. The image of Jeni Thornley as a young woman leaving behind a broken heart, the experience of an illegal abortion and an unfinished M.A., to hop on a train and go to Sydney to start a new life - removed from the family and community she grew up in - is quintessential to my understanding of the ethos or emotional tone of the feminist film milieu in which she quickly became immersed.

This generation of young women seems more alone in the world, more free to reinvent itself in its own image, and thereby escape the parental mould, than any other. It was also more blithely ignorant of what was at stake (because of the shroud of silence around recent history), than any earlier generation of women. As radical activists they wanted a great deal more than legal abortion, equal pay, access to male jobs and child care. These were symptoms, not causes. Coming from the margins of Australian society, they wanted something other, something that had not yet been imagined. Something that entailed integrating the profound split between what was

designated 'masculine' and what was designated 'feminine' in a culture where the complicit arrangement between the masculine and the feminine had brought the world to the brink of total destruction.

At the time, women who would become the new generation of activists saw only that men had something which women lacked:

I identified with women as a disadvantaged, lost sex.... I wanted something that we didn't have as a sex and I saw that men had it and I wanted it so I had to fight for the right to get it. That's to do with one's childhood and the '50s. And what was designated as the right and proper place for women. (*Thornley, 1992b*)

## Insurrectionary women

My image of 1969 is of young women - determined to overcome their disadvantage as a sex - getting an education, and cutting their political teeth on the campaigns of the day, either centre stage, mouth to the megaphone, or in the crowd, quietly thrilled to be part of history in the making. The overwhelming feeling is of a great wave of change picking up everyone in its path and sweeping the new generation towards a future whose outlines were just being sketched. These were heady times for young women like Susan Lambert, fresh off the train from Katoomba St, Katoomba in the Blue Mountains:

When I went to Sydney Uni I was thinking to do something artistic. That was in 1969 or 1970 which was great because it was the time of the anti-Vietnam war Moratorium, and the strikes - particularly in Economics. So I was politicised through Economics and Hogan and all that stuff.<sup>11</sup> That was terribly exciting. That was the beginning of becoming aware, not so much about feminism but about our place in the world and the [Vietnam] war and the fact that we as students, or as young people, could have a say. That was the beginning of becoming slightly politicised and understanding a very little bit about power.<sup>12</sup>

At the same time I was busy over in the Fine Arts faculty which spun off over into the Tin Sheds - the Fine Arts workshop. Terry Smith was my tutor and Donald Brook, who taught sculpture, had a tremendous impact. The whole of Fine Arts was busy sending us over to Italy - I didn't go because I couldn't afford it - to look at European art. Donald was beginning to voice a dissatisfaction with that and talk about Australia's relation with the Pacific and South-east Asia. Which I found fascinating.

---

<sup>11</sup> Economics and Philosophy at Sydney University were split by staff and student agitations over the structure, teaching and assessment processes and contents of courses. General Philosophy and Political Economy were formed out of bitter divisions over the ethics and politics of education. When I did first year in General Philosophy in 1974 we were led through a rigorously argued critique of empiricism in a series of lectures and tutorials in the first term, and in the second term we were handed a reading list on ethics and childhood and then left completely to our own devices. Both experiences had lasting effects on my views of what education could be.

<sup>12</sup> Like Thornley, Lambert later in the interview corrects herself and 'remembers' that what really politicised her was having an illegal abortion. (*Lambert 1992*)



Having come from the Blue Mountains I was all ears. I tended to gravitate, and always had, to the margins, to the voice that's going against the flow. (Lambert, 1992)

Gillian Leahy's voice on campus appeared to be one of the most confident, making a lasting impact on some of the women in the crowd, including Susan Lambert:

I was political but not like Gilly Leahy. I can remember Gilly Leahy standing up and giving fiery speeches and everything. I certainly was not up to that. Heavens! I can still see her doing that. I don't know where she got the confidence to do something like that. And Hall Greenland. They were all incredible figures. I was one of the crowd. But slowly absorbing it all. (Lambert, 1992)

Leahy's recollection of her campus speeches is less sanguine. Most vivid in her mind is *the Front Lawn speech that never was*. Only men spoke on the Front Lawn and Leahy realised that her reluctance to make her first Front Lawn speech was underpinned by the fear that she would be sexually ostracised for such behaviour. Rather than take that risk, she made her 'Front Lawn' speech at an anti-war rally in Manly.<sup>13</sup>

The extent to which women's liberationists were committed to *revolutionary* changes became a given of 1970s feminist film politics, eventually aligning the Sydney Women's Film Group with the Sydney Filmmakers Co-op and other grassroots organisations. From the beginning, Women's Liberation required an activist orientation and a willingness to undergo the rigours of consciousness raising. Liberationists had a more radical agenda than the residually remembered goals of early feminist reformers:

I was active in Women's Liberation meetings and I'd become a reasonably good public speaker. If you go right back, it's to do with being an asthmatic child and having to get on in hospitals, learning social skills at an early age and being very attuned to other people's relationships. [...]

---

<sup>13</sup> Source: conversation with Leahy on May 2, 1994.

Feminism meant at least coming to consciousness raising meetings, not just defining yourself that way. Nobody much defined themselves as feminist in those days unless they were actively involved. You invited too much flak. You wouldn't have done it unless you had a support network. Anyway, feminist wasn't the word. It was women's liberationist. No-one called themselves feminist. I didn't like the word feminist when it first began to gain currency. I continued to refuse to use it for some time. I'm probably a bit wrong about it, but to me it implied a more reformist position than a women's liberation position.

Women's liberation implied a total restructure of society. It was tied to anarchism for me then. You wouldn't have women's liberation without other people's liberation, including workers' and blacks' liberation. Feminist positions were merely about getting the vote or equal pay and didn't involve restructuring of the family and private property. (*Leahy, 1992a*)

Germaine Greer's infamous book *The Female Eunuch*, first published in 1970, vividly evokes the libertarian ethos of Women's Liberation politics in its earliest days. Greer's satirical voice - which addressed itself to an international Western audience - would be displaced in the 1970s by a more local, orthodox and moralistic feminism. Greer, who had written for the satirical publication *Oz*,<sup>14</sup> captured the insurrectionary spirit of the Women's Liberation Movement thus:

The key to the strategy of liberation lies in exposing the situation, and the simplest way to do it is to outrage the pundits and the experts by sheer impudence of speech and gesture, the exploitation of cliché 'feminine logic' to expose masculine pomposity, absurdity and injustice. Women's weapons are traditionally their tongues and the principal revolutionary tactic has always been the spread of information.

[...]

We have but one life to live, and the first object is to find a way of salvaging that life from the disabilities already inflicted on it in the service of our civilisation. (*Greer, 1971: 328*).

---

<sup>14</sup> For an account of the Australian publication of *Oz* see Richard Neville (1971:138).

Although Greer advocated that women take up their traditional role of exposing masculine conceit, she opposed the use of 'feminine' guile and meekness:

Women who fancy that they manipulate the world by pussy power and gentle cajolery are fools. It is slavery to adopt such tactics. (Greer, 1971: 328)

Greer's eclecticism, her erudition and satirical, hectoring style, foreshadow the anarchistic and libertarian sexual politics which would be the hallmark of some of the early wave of feminist films made in Australia. Margot Nash's story of the founding of AS IF (Anarcho Surrealist Insurrectionary Feminists) in Melbourne, captures the irreverent immediacy of anarchist gestures:

I'd been living in the anarchist Free Store in Smith Street in Collingwood. 'You can't steal it from the free store': it's like a free op shop. [...]

Robin Laurie and I formed *As If*. We wrote a manifesto. We did a poster. We had a Gestetner in the house and we put out two issues. The *As If Manifesto* is so passionate and wild. In 1972 we wrote it: 'we demand the end of this sexist, racist society; we shall fight with poetry and guns; all power to the imagination'. We were into the situationists and Emma Goldman. I was an anarchist. We were both involved in the Vietnam War protests separately.

I went overseas for a year and a half in '71, and lived in an anarchist commune in London where they printed anarchy magazines. I went to Chicago with this bloke and joined the IWW [International Workers of the World] and sent food parcels to Spain and came back and connected with the Melbourne anarchists. [...]

We'd become really passionate about feminism at that time. I had read *The Female Eunuch* when I was overseas - it had just come out in hard copy and I took it with me on the plane. Because I'd read Emma Goldman, I thought that anarchism as a philosophy incorporated feminism - if you were an anarchist, you were a feminist. At the Free Store was when I twigged about men and power.

*AS IF* started out as a joke. I still remember the moment when I made it up: Anarcho Surrealist Insurrectionary Feminists. It comes from the situationists and it was a joke. We got into writing the manifesto and different people got involved in it. When we put it out, the men freaked out. The men were physically fighting over it - feminism and us. We caused such a stir and all the women didn't know whether they should join us or not. We were just naughty but we felt serious about it.

When we did *We Aim to Please* (1976), it was the third issue of *AS IF*. We would do a poster, we would do a magazine, we would make a film, we would do a theatre performance. It wasn't that we were going to be filmmakers. We were anarcho surrealist insurrectionary feminists and we were going to do whatever we felt like doing. (Nash, 1992a )

The WLM's distinction between liberationist and reformist-feminist positions was translated by Greer into a further distinction between rebellious and revolutionary actions. Greer, typically cantankerous, presents campus-spawned feminism in scathing (and prescient) terms:

The impression that for them radicalization is an academic process is strengthened by the inclusion of a reading list, the first of a series which have become progressively longer and more comprehensive. Insofar as we are dealing with a movement of university women this is not surprising but for the vast majority of women who never gained any aptitude for this kind of assimilation of ideas, for whom argumentation has no value because they cannot understand it or practise it, such methods remain irrelevant. The most dubious aspects of academic liberationists is their assumption of leadership of a vast murmuring female proletariat, and their adoption of male kinds of grouping and organizational structure to which most women have little success in adapting. There is no indication in their theorizing that they have realized the full extent of the male-female polarity, that they have read their *Soviet Weekly* and been told that members of the State Institute of Teaching Sciences were very worried that the female domination of the teaching industry is producing boys who lack a 'due sense of male authority'. (Greer, 1971: 301-302)

As well as grasping the key problem for women in terms of the extreme polarity between male and female which divided *both* sexes from humanity, Greer saw the hilarious, terroristic and indulgent aspects of feminist

*rebellion* as seeds for a women's *revolution* which would owe more to Marcuse than Marx:

The summer of 1968 was not only momentous for the women's movement because women emerged as a coherent group in the New Left but also because Valerie Solanas shot Andy Warhol. [...] More than any of the female students she had seized upon the problem of the polarity, of the gulf which divides men and women from humanity and places them in a limbo of opposite sides. She advanced the most shocking strategy for allowing women to move back to humanity - simply, that they exterminate men. It was probably the fierce energy and lyricism of her uncompromising statement of men's fixation on the feminine, and their desperate battle to live up to their own penile fixation, which radicalized Ti-Grace Atkinson out of NOW [National Organisation of Women, USA], and even gingered up those ladies' slogans until they managed to purify their ranks of such brutality, and eventually gave birth to WITCH, Women's International Terrorist Conspiracy from Hell. (Greer, 1971: 308)

A few responses were beginning to emerge to that question: *what does women's liberation want?*<sup>15</sup> The end of marriage, private property and consumerism, and the beginning of sexual dominion and authenticity, were part of the answer. Sexual politics and the problematisation of marriage and private property opened up the potentially schismatic politics of lesbian separatism, which for a time was contained under the rubric of 'the lesbian continuum'<sup>16</sup>, which seems an appropriate way of thinking the sexual politics of both *Maidens* (1978, Jeni Thornley) and its feature industry sibling, *Journey Among Women* (1977, Tom Cowan).<sup>17</sup> These films were

---

<sup>15</sup> Anne Summers, in the 1994 revised edition of *Damned Whores and God's Police*, adds a "Letter to the Next Generation" (505-528) to her 1975 history of women in Australian culture. Summers states that it was not at all self-evident that her generation would be so receptive to feminism. After all, they were the first generation of Australian women to have access to tertiary education on a broad scale, and to effective contraception, and they could expect to be economically independent (513). It was precisely these unique conditions that established an arena in which women could embark on the task of confronting the deep polarisation between the masculine and the feminine that determined the nature of the 'human' enterprises from which women had been excluded.

<sup>16</sup> See Richard Dyer (1990: 175-177) and Adrienne Rich (1980: 631-660) for an account of the emergence of the 'political' lesbian in American radical feminism in the early 1970s.

<sup>17</sup> See Barbara Alysen (1977), Susan Dermody (1977) and Joan Weinberg (1977) on *Journey Among Women* as an allegory of contemporary feminism, in terms of its narrative and its production process. Thornley worked on the film as a camera assistant.

not about the issue of lesbian identity and oppression. Rather, both films assumed that lesbian sexuality was part and parcel of a woman-centred political consciousness. The exploration of relations between women in separatist spaces was part of the project of recovering a 'feminine' consciousness - to discover what mattered to women as women, beyond the patriarchal myths of romantic love, femininity and motherhood. The acceptance of the polarity between the feminine and the masculine, and the taken-for-grantedness of feminine superiority, was one factor in the eventual critique of separatist politics - based as it was, in part, on a further refining of the *God's Police* role that Summers described in her influential book.

Another part of the answer to the question *what does women's liberation want?* was that of purposive engagement - a recurring theme in American writing.<sup>18</sup> For Greer the measure of the correctness of revolutionary action was expressed as "*joy in the struggle*" in the manifesto-like statement with which she ends *The Female Eunuch*, calling for women's involvement on their own terms in the world-making enterprise which had previously been delegated to men:

Joy does not mean riotous glee, but it does mean the purposive employment of energy in a self-chosen enterprise. It does mean pride and confidence. It does mean communication and cooperation with others based on delight in their company and your own. To be emancipated from helplessness and need and walk freely upon the earth that is your birthright. To refuse hobbles and deformity and take possession of your body and glory in its power, accepting its own laws of loveliness. To have something to desire, something to make, something to achieve, and at last something genuine to give. To be freed from guilt and shame and the tireless self-discipline of women. To stop pretending and dissembling, cajoling and manipulating, and begin to control and sympathize. To claim the masculine virtues of magnanimity and generosity and courage. It goes much further than equal pay for equal work, for it ought to revolutionize the conditions of work completely. It does not understand

---

<sup>18</sup> See Adrienne Rich (1979: 203-214) on feminism "as an ethics, a methodology, a more complex way of thinking about, thus more responsibly acting upon, the conditions of human life, for which we need both self-knowledge and a 'community'" (213 - 214).

the phrase 'equality of opportunity', for it seems that the opportunities will have to be utterly changed and women's souls changed so that they desire opportunity instead of shrinking from it. [...] Privileged women will pluck at your sleeve and seek to enlist you in the 'fight' for reforms, but reforms are retrogressive. The old process must be broken, not made new. Bitter women will call you to rebellion, but you have too much to do. What *will* you do? (Greer, 1971: 330-31).

The proposed solution of joyful, purposive enterprise for women born in the shadow of Hiroshima brings to mind Dinnerstein's insistence on the *malaise* at the heart of modern modes of enterprise based on the holy trinity of progress, profit and technology. The story of the feminist filmmaking enterprise that unfolds out of the early days of the Women's Liberation Movement, is partly a story of how ambivalent faith in the public realm of enterprise, and *collective* answers to that most pertinent of questions - *What will you do?* - eventually produced feminism's own wounds - the wounds of activism.

## Two faces of the Medusan woman

There's a drawing by Jenny Short of Martha Ansara and Jeni Thornley in *A Catalogue of Independent Women's Films* (Alysen (ed), 1979: 40 -41) in which the two heads merge, and the faces look off in opposite directions.



1.2 Martha Ansara and Jeni Thornley. Drawing by Jenny Short

The symbol of the raised fist, inside the biological symbol for woman, is associated with Ansara's overtly political commitments, including the Communist Party. Thornley's image of herself as a young girl suggests an internally directed gaze. Thornley looks to the past. Ansara looks to the future. The image of the hen laying an egg between the two women indicates the fertility of their present relationship, and the camera lenses call to mind their shared love of cinematography, their dedication to the enterprise of producing new images of the feminine, and their long liaison dedicated to the cause of independent feminist filmmaking. In the course of my research I came across this drawing several times. Something in the monstrousness of the two merged heads led me to look up the myth of the Gorgon Medusa. For Jean-Pierre Vernant, in *Mortals and Immortals* (1991), Gorgo is the figure of alterity whose face is pure mask: monstrous and terrifying, it turns men who gaze upon it to stone. The alterity of Gorgo "at any moment and in any place, wrenches humans away from their lives and themselves ... to cast them down into the confusion and horror of chaos"



(Vernant, 1991: 112). Of the two goddesses most often associated with feminism, Athena, the warrior, wears the face of the Gorgo on her breast, and Artemis, the mistress of the wild, has a Gorgon side to her character and uses Gorgon masks in initiatory rites with the young (Vernant, 1991: 120).

The myth of Perseus, the hero who cuts off the head of Medusa, has a central theme which relates to Short's sketch of Thornley and Ansara as filmmakers: the theme of the eye, the gaze and the reciprocity of seeing and being seen (Vernant, 1991: 134-136). The myth includes the motif of the mirror and the play of splendid beauty and terrifying ugliness in the person of Medusa:

Superimposed on the mask of Medusa, as though in a two-sided mirror, the strange beauty of the feminine countenance, brilliant with seduction, and the horrible fascination of death, meet and cross. (Vernant, 1991: 150).

The two-faced Medusan woman invokes powers of destruction *and* creation. Hélène Cixous in "The Laugh of the Medusa" (1981) proposes that the radical, liberatory project for Woman is a libidinal one, involving the destruction of the deadlocked equilibrium between the sexes, and the projection of Woman into history:

Woman must put herself into the text - as into the world and into history - by her own movement. (Cixous, 1981: 245)

The face of the Medusa - which, if looked upon, turns men to stone - represents male suppression of the feminine by aligning Woman with that other unrepresentable face - the face of Death. To change history, Cixous exhorts women to write with their bodies, without censorship - showing men what they most dread to look upon - the feminine sex:

Let the priests tremble, we're going to show them our sexts!

Too bad for them if they fall apart upon discovering that women aren't men, or that the mother doesn't have one. But isn't this fear convenient for them? Wouldn't the worst be, isn't the worst, in truth, that women

aren't castrated, that they only have to stop listening to the Sirens (for the Sirens are men) for history to change its meaning? (Cixous, 1981: 255).<sup>19</sup>

In Jenny Short's sketch of Ansara and Thornley there are mythic resonances in the image of the New Woman - representing the Movement of women returning:

... from afar, from always: from "without," from the heath where witches are kept alive; from below, from beyond "culture"; from their childhood which men have been trying desperately to make them forget ... (Cixous, 1981: 247)

Women came not only from the USA or Melbourne or the Blue Mountains to join the Women's Liberation Movement. In a more profound sense, they came from the psychic wastelands of a culture which denied and feared those aspects of the feminine which had been excised from the masculine in the child's journey from the embrace of the mother to the footsteps of the father. Some women coped with this situation by taking male prerogatives for themselves - as in Ansara's story of quietly acquiring her own camera and moving in on the male territory of the Sydney Filmmakers Co-op in the late 1960s. Others went out on a limb trying to embody the feminine as a powerful (and superior) creature of *women's* imagining - as in Thornley's dream of women leaving the cities on horses to live together on the land:

Women were better than men: I think it was a doomed philosophy. Doomed, but I believed it. It's why I was a shareholder in Amazon Acres. I used to have dreams of the women on horseback who left the cities, left men and went and lived on the land on their horses. (Thornley, 1992a)

The vivid personality that was forged in the crucible of Ansara and Thornley's collaborative friendship is at the core of the milieu's psyche.<sup>20</sup> Each has played for the other the part of the *soror mystica* - the one who

---

<sup>19</sup> Stephanie Bunbury (1987: 239) notes the image of the Gorgon behind the "residual terror of an imagined feminist bogey" in the reception of feminist films in the Australian press: "... beyond the pale lurks some other kind of feminist gorgon.... We may never actually see her, but we know she is legion, heavily overalled and busting male heads with the sheer force of jargon."

<sup>20</sup> See Alysen (1979b) on Ansara and Thornley's filmmaking and its connections to the WLM.

"leads to internal movement and growth through relation to another" (Samuels, 1989: 182). Their interaction has been definitive and inspirational for many of the women who subsequently became involved in filmmaking.

When Ansara arrived in Australia, still ignorant of her parents' membership of the Communist Party, she found herself drawn to people who turned out to be members of the Communist Party of Australia (CPA). Ansara's account of what attracted her to Communist Party women is symptomatic of her grassroots, activist persona - the other side of Thornley's dedicated exploration of the province of the self:

[...] when I got here, instead of being a misfit, I found that there were heaps of people like me here, especially in the Communist Party. We shared a lot of the same perspectives. [...].

Part of the reason I joined the Communist Party was because in the Women's Liberation groups there were mainly people from the Left. There were a lot of people who talked really big. And the same in the anti-war movements. But when I looked to see who did the main work and who followed through on what they said they would do, and when I looked to see who had, what seemed to me, *real* experience, they turned out to be Communist women who were a bit older than me. They really had had experience and they understood how to get things done. I thought, oh well, I'll go with that mob. All the ideology was always confusing to me.

I was attracted to people who did things and who also were humane. I remember our first Women's Liberation Conference in May 1970. There were all these women who stood up and postured against the women who were wearing make-up, the women who were doing knitting, and how they shouldn't do these things. I thought 'these women are nuts'. [...] I remember Mavis Robertson took a break from all this and said 'oh they're going to be doing underarm checks to see if we shave under our arms soon'. The Communist women had much more of a genuine feeling for real life. It wasn't just rhetorical posturing. (Ansara, 1992a)

*A Film For Discussion* (1974), accredited to the Sydney Women's Film Group but widely regarded as an Ansara initiative and achievement, is one indicator of the problem-solution model which defined the politics of

consciousness raising. *A Film ...* begins with the image of a typewriter tapping out a quote from Marx:

Mankind (sic) always takes up only such problems as it can solve, since looking at the matter more closely we will always find that the problem itself arises only when the material conditions necessary for its solution already exist or are at least in the process of formation.

The montage sequence which follows this quote starts with images of women at work on the telephone, at the sewing machine, typewriter and cash register, at the pub, in the office and in the shop. Advertising, media and family photo album images appear next, and the sequence ends with footage of a Women's Liberation demonstration and of women working on building sites. The feminist rallying song, *Don't Be Too Polite Girls*, takes over from the radio montage on the soundtrack. If the opening sequence of the film can be taken as a dream-like condensation of the film's narrative, then *A Film For Discussion* can be taken as a parable of consciousness raising.<sup>21</sup> In the course of the film the female protagonist will become conscious of what ails her, and more importantly she will be made conscious, through her encounter with a feminist at work, that there is a solution to her dissatisfaction.

The body of the film is a dramatised narrative covering a day in the life of the central female character, an office worker played by Jeni Thornley. The film's narrative poses this character's discontent as the beginning of a desire for something different from the routine of menial office work, the familial conflicts played out at the dinner table, and the clash of expectations involved in courtship and marriage.

The film is shot in black and white, combining social realist dramatisation with a more experimental aesthetic which culminates in the subjective use of increasingly dissonant sound in the final scene, where the protagonist, alone in her room at the end of the day, removes her makeup in front of a mirror, for the duration of a long take. The film's slice-of-life narrative, its exploration of a boundary situation involving a crisis of existential

---

<sup>21</sup> See Julia Lesage (1986) on realist documentary and its congruence with the women's movement, and Richard Dyer (1990: 238-257) on Consciousness Raising as a film form.

significance, its use of subjective/expressive techniques, its recognisable Sydney locations and unknown actors, and its open ending are characteristics which fulfil David Bordwell's criteria for art cinema narration.<sup>22</sup>

The film was allowed to evolve out of its own process over the period of its production between 1970 and 1973, and this is what makes it a surprisingly authentic cinematic work, especially given its consciousness raising objective which is spelt out in the title.<sup>23</sup> For Ansara, this slow evolution was a favoured way of working, unhappily lost as the film industry began to professionalise in the late 1970s.

We made *Film For Discussion* on weekends slowly. We worked it through. People had plenty of time. We did what was required by the film, not by the schedule. (Ansara, 1992b)

Both *A Film For Discussion* and Thornley's much envied personal film, *Maidens* - made over a similarly extended period from 1975-78 - give a central place to the family and to history. Given the historical amnesia suffered by the Cold War baby boomers, and the fierce determination of women in the New Left to make history - rather than provide domestic and sexual support for their male comrades - it's no surprise that history is a concern in the first feminist films. *A Film For Discussion* places its protagonist in a historical and social context with the quote from Marx and the suggestion in the opening montage sequence that the solution to her mounting dissatisfaction is taking shape in the form of the Women's Liberation Movement. In this sense, the film ties the events of the present not to the past, but to the future.

The film's preoccupation with, and deft evocation of scenes of everyday family life are more curious. *A Film For Discussion* has as its protagonist a young woman who has a menial office job and still lives at home. The

---

<sup>22</sup> See David Bordwell (1985: 205-213) on art cinema as a distinctive mode of narration involving new forms of subjective and objective realism and an auteurial signature in a narrative form based on a crisis of existential significance.

<sup>23</sup> The film was first conceived during the train trip back to Sydney after the first WLM conference held in Melbourne in May 1970. (Source: Personal conversation with Ansara, 24 January, 1995).

scenes of the family at the dinner table and of the mother and daughter debating women's lot over the washing up, present routine family conflicts between husband and wife, parents and offspring. The film emphasises the *ordinariness* of the events which are pushing the protagonist into voicing her desire for something different from her mother's resigned acceptance. The examination of family relations is unsentimental and - given the WLM's clamorous rhetoric against the family - surprisingly unpolemical. It's in the final sequence, when the film moves into the daughter's bedroom and adopts expressive techniques, that we are given some sense of the tumult of feelings that propelled the New Woman into her quest for liberation. The overwhelming feeling of the film is of the main character pushing with increasing urgency against some obstacle, the precise nature of which eludes her.

In the light of my image of this milieu as essentially orphaned, I find the preponderance of family and mother-daughter scenes in *A Film For Discussion* and *Maidens* quite intriguing at this point in the story. Both films convey the sense that the crisis for the daughters coming out of these families has no solution forthcoming from within the family. Small wonder that these daughters chose to quit the family "as an arrow quits the bow ... in order to be more than her self" (Cixous, 1981: 248).

Jeni Thornley's film, *Maidens*, attempts to place the filmmaker's maternal family in history.<sup>24</sup> The core of the film is a chronological history of four generations of women as they marry and produce children and cope while the men are away at war. The film has an extraordinary framing sequence - which begins and ends the film - of the lesbian separatist attempt to conceive new familial links based on those between women and children, free from patriarchal rule. In this framing sequence, which brings the film full circle, the filmmaker's poetic voice-over accompanies a compilation of images of: a silhouette of a pregnant woman standing in a doorway; naked women and children at play in a backyard wading pool; naked or bare-breasted women undertaking self-defence classes in the bush or leaping through the undergrowth in slow motion shots. The first-person voice-

---

<sup>24</sup> See Toni Robertson in Robertson and Thornley (1978/79: 82) on *Maidens* as a history of Thornley and her family, as a history of the Women's Liberation Movement, and a history of feminist film.

over dominates the sound track, evoking the ethos and aspirations of a movement that drew women together in a common fantasy:

Suddenly it happened. The encounter became a family. Passionate.

A work of love. [...]

And this is how we made each of ourselves the mother and the daughter of each of the others. And sisters, determined to talk about precisely why we were orphans, and suffering, and destitute.

A new family. All of us linked in a chain. Each of us intermingling and trying on forms of the others as though attempting to possess each other, and succeeding in so doing.

Each of us impregnating first one and then the other in turn.

The rejection of marriage, and the concomitant debates over the politics of (hetero)sexuality, was a divisive issue within the WLM. The inclusion of lesbian sexuality in the feminist agenda was a double-edged move. On the one hand, it split lesbian women between the coalition politics of Gay Liberation, which at least offered a historical consciousness regarding the specific oppression of lesbians and homosexuals.<sup>25</sup> On the other hand, the attempt to reclaim 'lesbian' as a positive term for dissident women, gave many feminists an unprecedented opportunity to overcome the rampant homophobia and misogyny that had maintained the strict demarcation between lesbian and heterosexual relations.<sup>26</sup> Some women hoped they might discover, in feminist houses and communes, a viable alternative to patriarchal structuring of primary personal ties. Thornley made that journey into uncharted territory and documented the sudden shifts in her altering consciousness in *Maidens*.

The utopian visions were expressed in *Maidens* as the most blatant example. The narration - 'suddenly it happened, the encounter became a family' - came from the three Marias: *The New Portuguese Letters*. I was incredibly affected by *The Letters* when I read them in the '70s, and by

---

<sup>25</sup> See *Witches and Faggotts, Dykes and Poofters* (1980, Digby Duncan) for a documentary film on the gay/lesbian coalition politics that inaugurated the Sydney Mardi Gras in 1978, evidence that not all feminist lesbians saw the WLM as the preferred political base for lesbian activism.

<sup>26</sup> For Australian accounts of the debates over lesbian politics in the Women's Movement see: Jocelyn Clarke (1975), Lesley Rogers (1987) and Liz Ross (1988)

their imprisonment. They were imprisoned for their writing because it was too radical. Their poetry to me was about a utopianism they had to believe in because their actual lives were so painfully difficult. I identified with their poetry. (Thornley, 1992a)

In retrospect, Thornley sees a fascistic element in a utopian vision based on the belief that women embodied qualities that made them superior to men.

After *Maidens* I went to live at Amazon Acres with one of my girlfriends. It's hard to explain it without sounding cliched. I really wanted to believe that it was possible. It's only my therapy that's made me see that I was dreaming a secret desire for the lost mother - that I would be held or be in a mutuality with women and live happily ever after. I'm saying it very crudely. That wedded very easily with lesbian separatism as a political movement. [...] that politics and that utopia wedded perfectly. Where it didn't wed I didn't want to look, so I just kept that out.

I had my first lesbian experience in 1970 even before the birth of lesbian feminism together, which for me meant I'd found nirvana. That was the utopia: the possibility of feminism wedding with sexuality which was lesbianism. That was nirvana. I thought I'd found it. And then it turned sour. This oceanic oneness can't stay. The world is not all women. Some of the women couldn't bring their sons to Amazon Acres. That's what started to happen. It had the irrationality of a fascism. [...] Other feminists were able critically to discuss lesbian separatism and what its logical conclusion was ... where you felt if you didn't choose a woman partner you were less of a feminist. (Thornley, 1992a)

Thornley's interpretation of her involvement in one attempt to live out an exclusively woman-centred sexuality and politics, relates to the problem of the maternal which is at the heart of Dinnerstein's argument about the trouble between the sexes. The cornerstone of Dinnerstein's argument is that mother-dominated infancy produces profound tensions in gender relations. Unconscious images of the maternal as *both loved and hated* omnipotent figure, reproduce polarised gender arrangements that are stressful and oppressive within the family, and which also underpin the destructive megamachine of progress and technology (Dinnerstein, 1976: 207 - 228). The mother-daughter images of *Maidens* and *A Film For Discussion* circle around this deeply ambivalent relation of women to the maternal.



*Maidens* is a rich film for investigating the unconscious of the Women's Liberation Movement. The rupture of the generational chain came suddenly, without warning or preparation.<sup>27</sup> The cost of this rupture would take another decade to surface in the Sydney feminist filmmaking milieu.

---

<sup>27</sup> In German cinema the rupture of the generational chain is central to women's filmmaking. *Germany Pale Mother* (1980, Helma Sanders-Brahms), *The Hunger Years* (1979, Jutta Bruckner) and *Sisters, or the Balance of Happiness* (1979, Margarethe von Trotta) explore the effect of those years on the daughters of mothers defeated by the return to hearth which accompanied Germany's postwar reconstruction; in these films the mothers are incorporated into the patriarchal family, leaving their daughters unmothered.

---

## Chapter 2

### ATTRACTION TO CINEMA

---

The question, *what did women's liberation want of the cinema?*, opens up more than one line of enquiry. The constellation of Sydney feminist filmmaking took a decade to form, from Martha Ansara's initiatory romance with Hitchcock and Brakhage in a Chicago film society in 1960,<sup>1</sup> to the women's film workshops held in Sydney in 1974 and 1977. The attraction to cinema laid hold of individual filmmakers in a multitude of encounters - starting in childhood for avid Saturday matinee regular, Megan McMurchy, or with the advent of art cinema for Jeni Thornley and Margot Oliver, or, almost incidentally, as part of inner city communal networks for Margot Nash and Pat Fiske, or as an extension of existing or nascent political commitments for Gillian Leahy, Sarah Gibson and Susan Lambert. For some, the impetus to make films goes further back to the imprint of the father. For others, filmmaking was one of the bountiful opportunities suddenly available to a generation uniquely placed to enjoy the affluence of the postwar economic boom.

In the 1970s, cinema would become a crucial arena for organised contestation over the production of media images of women.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> See Martha Ansara [formerly Martha Kay] in Fiske and Kay (1975: 23) on seeing her first Stan Brakhage film: "I hated it - just hated it - but ever after I've been hooked on movies." See Ansara (1987: 180) on worshipping Alfred Hitchcock.

<sup>2</sup> *The Selling of the Female Image* (1977, Carole Kostanich) was one of the top renting films available from the Sydney Filmmakers Co-op. It featured a housewife watching daytime television, taking in images from soaps and commercials. The end of the film uses gender reversals to parody advertising.



2.1 Leaflet promoting AS IF's *We Aim To Please*. (1977)

Excursions away from the central question of women's representation in the cinema would include: Pat Fiske's broad Left films on urban redevelopment in Woolloomooloo and union *Green Bans*; Megan McMurchy's and Beth McRae's mainstream media, and, later, community video experience which was more broadly defined than feminist film; Martha Ansara's work on a wide range of projects from prisons to land rights and the peace movement.<sup>3</sup>

The tide of women flowing into cinema at a time when film production and training were about to receive a massive boost in government support,<sup>4</sup> meant unprecedented opportunities for women who had been trained as intellectuals and activists, rather than as artists. The emphasis on social equity and participation during the Whitlam era and its aftermath, gave a further stimulus to women's independent filmmaking - a factor which

<sup>3</sup> See Appendix B for programs of women's films which indicate the inveterate pluralism of the feminist film project in the context of seasons at the Sydney Filmmakers Co-op Cinema; see Nick Herd's filmography of Sydney Filmmakers Co-op films 1960-80 (Herd, 1983: 58-68), and Alysén (ed) (1979a) for the Sydney Women's Film Group categorisations of films 'which challenge patriarchal attitudes' and 'other' films by women.

<sup>4</sup> See Ina Bertrand & Diane Collins (1981), Helen Grace (1982), Ken Berryman (1985a); Albert Moran and Tom O'Regan (eds) (1985); and Susan Dermody and Elizabeth Jacka (1987) on the Australian film industry and government support from 1969.

would do much to shape the trajectory of the feminist film enterprise during the 1970s, and its painful undoing in the 1980s.

## The imprint of the father

If the attraction to Women's Liberation had its seeds in the rejection of the mother's place in the home, then the attraction to cinema, in a few cases at least, owed something to the father. Jeni Thornley's father ran a cinema as did Martha Ansara's father's uncle, while Beth McRae's father worked in television and Susan Lambert's father was a prolific amateur film documentarist. It was late in her own filmmaking before Lambert realised the extent of the impact of growing up with images of herself on film:

In the '70s it didn't occur to me that childhood had anything to do with anything. Now, particularly having made *Landslides* and used a lot of my father's material, I realise my father had a huge influence in that regard because he always had a movie camera and still cameras, and his part of the cupboard in my parents' room was jam-packed with slides and film and cameras, which I've now got here. It was very much part of his own creativity which had been buried in other ways. His early work was very beautiful and then it disintegrated quite quickly. I was the focus of a lot of his filming. Of course I didn't remember any of that, but when my father moved and sent me all that stuff - actually gave it to me, he's never given me much else - it was just before *Landslides* and I used a lot of that material in that film. So clearly that had a big impact on me when I was growing up. (*Lambert, 1992*)

Although parts of her childhood were documented in her father's films, it was travel rather than the cinema that set Lambert's family apart from her peers:

I grew up in the Blue Mountains. My parents had the hardware store. I had the classic Aussie small business background. Culture was not part of our life as such. Travel was. That's the difference.

[My father] wanted to be an architect but the war ruined that, as happened to a lot of men at that time. So he had a frustrated aesthetic thing. His father had a hardware store and he went into it. My mother came from Sydney and she worked at the ABC. She was a stenographer, but in production. [...] Both my parents had a great interest in travel which is one of the other things they gave to me. They'd work seven days a week all year and then we'd have the big holiday. When I was young

we went to Ceylon, as it was then, and Fiji and lots of places, which really changed my view of the world. Whereas a lot of people I grew up with stayed in the Blue Mountains, I knew there was something other than Katoomba St, Katoomba. (*Lambert, 1992*)

In retrospect, Lambert has connected her own involvement in cinema with the aspirations of her parents to find some means of self-expression and creativity in a limited sphere, which was dominated by the family business. The focus on home and garden, and family holidays is typical of the suburban Australia that Donald Horne described in *The Lucky Country* (1974: 25 - 41). Lambert's father focused his camera on personal life: the family garden, the family holidays and his daughter.

They had a beautiful garden so that's another area in which both my father and mother's aesthetic was able to express itself. They won a garden Herald competition. He photographed the garden and the flowers. I've come to really appreciate, in later years, his interest in beauty and his surrounds. That was the way he was able to express himself. He was the documentary observer. Although if you look at the footage, in regard to the stuff with me, and the flowers, there's a real intimacy in it.

My parents didn't have a great life. They worked very hard. But what had the biggest impact on me was that here was somebody who had a great love of beauty and captured it on film. That's the sad thing: in his film work I can see it disintegrate.

I've got my first photograph I ever took which was of Freddy, the gardener who used to come to our house. It was 1960 so I was eight. That was with my first Brownie camera I was given for my birthday. I always had my own camera and I've got a little album. We went to Tasmania and I took over from my father, in a way, taking photographs of our trips. From an early age I was more interested in people. My pictures to this day (I've got a lot of albums) are people pictures. (*Lambert, 1992*)

Jeni Thornley also has a retrospective understanding of the significance of her father's work in forming her relationship to cinema, specifically on the margins, as an outsider, rather than as part of the mainstream:

[...] having since discovered my relationship to film comes not from the Women's Movement but from my Dad's work, eventually that probably would have manifested in me. There was my father - a film exhibitor. And there was I - little Jeni Thornley stuck in his cinemas watching films at the age of four onwards. His beingness as a man with his profession had to enact through me in some way.

That's how I understand my outsider relationship to the film industry when it started. Instead of being one of those women who was already in there, I identified to be outside and I think that's how I must have felt in relationship to my father. Outside his work. So I then reproduced it on the playing field of film.<sup>5</sup> I placed myself outside and there was something I had to get, but could never get it. I want to get into NIDA [National Institute of Dramatic Art]. I can't get in. I want to go to the Film School. I can't get in. I want to make opportunities for women in the industry and it's hard.... So I'd say the Women's Movement must have intersected with an earlier childhood pattern of the women feeling separate from the male domain of work.... (Thornley 1992b)

The imprint of the father appears in two other respects, not specifically related to the cinema. One is the narrative of progress and upward mobility. The other is to do with the wounds of class and the envy generated by 'cultural deprivation' in childhood. Megan McMurchy recounts the impact of her father's career path on her own sense of life being about progress:

My father worked all his working life for a pastoral company and we travelled around like bank manager's children did, moved from town to town every four or five years. He went up a gradual, slow career development, getting a bigger town each time. In fact I think my generally absorbed '60s notion that life and history were a matter of constant

---

<sup>5</sup> There were women, including Joan Long, Pat Lovell, Lili Fraser, Anne Deveson, Margaret Fink, Jill Robb, and a number of younger women in the ABC who were forging different connections to the cinema, rather than working in the more marginalised areas of avant-garde, low budget, independent filmmaking. The Experimental Film and Television Fund, the Women's Film Fund, the Australian Film and Television School, and the Women's Film Training Courses would briefly provide places where professional women overlapped with those like Thornley who remained on the margins. The Sydney Filmmakers Co-op, in its exhibition and distribution activities, was a crucial meeting ground for the full spectrum of filmmaking practices.

progress, had a lot to do with the inexorable move from small town to larger town, from larger town to city. What I was always waiting for was the move to Sydney because that was really the biggest and the most urban place I could get to, at that stage, as opposed to Brisbane which was only halfway there. You could see more movies in big cities. You could see European movies. I felt consciously deprived of European movies. (McMurchy, 1992)

Sarah Gibson describes the sense of deprivation which stemmed from a rural childhood in a New South Wales country town that frowned upon culture:

In my childhood there were no newspapers, no books, nothing. It was in the country. Culture was really frowned upon. There was a book mobile that came around once a fortnight. I always envied women like Jeni [Thornley] whose father ran a cinema. I used to go to Feminist Film Workers meetings and plot their family connection to the arts and film. I'd assumed that everyone came in as a blank screen and developed these interests. It was a shock to find out that it was in their family or that their father had a 16mm camera or ran a cinema. It created a level of confidence in their right to self-expression that I argued for politically, then claimed personally, in that order.

[...]

Susan [Lambert]'s father filmed her all through her childhood (that's the material in *Landslides*). Looking at yourself on film is something that gets incorporated into your psyche.

Class issues came up in the Feminist Film Workers around confidence and where people placed themselves in relation to the industry. The uniqueness of everyone's perspective had a lot to do with class and their access to various things. Education was going to be the saving grace for my generation. I grew up in Blayney which is known for two things - it's the coldest place in NSW and it has an abattoir.

[...]

I had a university friend who went to the Sydney Film Festival. This was a complete shock to me. She used to sneak me in and I didn't know where I was or what it was all about. It was at the Wintergarden in Rose Bay. I thought maybe it was a Jewish activity. I saw socialist or Left documentaries as part of my political activity. I remember seeing political



films like *Hour of the Furnaces*. I saw these films for the content and was then stirred to action. I didn't have cinema as pleasure. I had it as propaganda and information. (Gibson, 1992)

Rather than the familiar image of the father as an oppressive force, in these stories there is a sense that 'the father' represented for his daughter a certain mobility. Andrew Samuels, in *The Political Psyche*, attempts to recuperate the father-daughter relationship for political ends:

Though it has been common to note the mobility, enfranchisement and emancipation of men in contrast with the oppression and subordination of women, very little has been said about the father's positive attitude to mobility, enfranchisement and emancipation for others. I want to suggest that father imagery carries a secret symbolism for social and political movement and change alongside the far better known symbolism of an oppressive and repressive political order. (Samuels, 1993: 126)

Samuels critiques depth psychology's main lines of thought about the role of the father as either: a necessary insertion that breaks up the dyad of mother and baby; the one who holds the mother while she holds the baby; or as the Name which assigns the child's place in the social world (1993: 137-142). Assuming that the daughter's psyche is the arena for both 'masculine' and 'feminine' elements, Samuels takes up the question of the father's role in mother-daughter differentiation. As the Other parent, it is the father who presides over the daughter's struggle to be whole and integrated and, at the same time, to be psychologically and socially diversified (Samuels: 1993: 151).

In other words, the father acts as an influence on the daughter so that she can begin to explore her full potential, not restricted to the role of mother. (Samuels, 1993: 153)

The milieu would not become fully conscious of the father's role in fostering his daughter's sense of her own potentials until the late 1980s (see Chapters 7 and 8).

## The neo-modern cinema and the new woman

For the university educated sons and daughters of a protected and seemingly prosperous economy, there were unprecedented opportunities in the late 1960s and early 1970s to become involved in some form of 'cultural production'. For those whose tertiary training in the social sciences was intellectual rather than artistic, the most accessible entry points to the arts were theatre and photography. Jeni Thornley brought elements of the nascent Australian theatre scene from Melbourne to Sydney, as well as a film society background. Thornley's theatrical experience developed on campus at Monash University (newly established in 1961 as part of the 1960s boom in tertiary education):

I was in the Monash Players and the Monash Film Society. I'd acted in two or three films at Monash. One was a script by John Romeril called *Socks* and the other was called *Smooth*. And I was always in the theatre group doing plays - acting. When my life blew apart in '69 in Melbourne ... I thought 'I'm going to go to Sydney to become an actress'. I joined the Australian Arts Laboratory in Paddington, which was doing a lot of Australian work by John Romeril and Alex Buzo. We did *The Front Room Boys* and other plays. We worked like an ensemble. Then we formed another group at Central Street Gallery and did the Grotowski workshops. I did all that and I auditioned for NIDA twice and didn't get in.

When I met Martha [Ansara] I was still on that - wanting to act. I was in a group for a year travelling - Pageant Theatre in Education. I was building up skills in acting so, when Martha wanted to do *A Film For Discussion* and we decided to improvise a script together, she had this idea I'd be good for the main girl and I was completely into the idea.  
(Thornley, 1992b)

One breeding ground for independent filmmakers was the Film Society movement where the influence of European art cinema was a significant factor in opening up the possibility of a non-Hollywood approach to filmmaking which would be personal, auteurist and subjective.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> See Adrian Martin (1988) for a fascinating essay on the fortunes of cinéphilie in Australia, and its nexus with film criticism, including feminist film theory. Barrett Hodsdon (1989) provides a corrective for Martin's speculative mode by providing some historical grounding

If I went back to Uni now I'd probably do film studies but then my degree in English was theatre studies. I joined the film group. We watched a lot of films. All the early Antonionis and Bergmans and Fellinis in the '60s. It was the New Wave of filmmaking really. Godard and all of those. It was a wonderful time. (Thornley, 1992b)

The crucial role of the art cinema in attracting women to filmmaking has been disregarded by feminist critiques which have focused on Hollywood, television and advertising since the late 1970s. The origin of independent cinema in Sydney has long been associated with the avant-garde, especially the Ubu film group which founded the Sydney Filmmakers Co-op in 1969.<sup>7</sup> However, the Co-op's St Peter's Lane cinema in Darlinghurst was also a site for regular screenings of New Wave cinema from Europe.<sup>8</sup> John Orr, in *Cinema and Modernity* (1993), proposes that the European art cinema, from 1958 until the early 1970s, constituted a *return* of the cinema to key questions of modernity.

In this period we call cinema 'modern' rather than 'classical' for two reasons. First, it can be seen as a critical and subversive rendering of modernity in Western societies. In the second place it can be seen as having made a decisive break with Hollywood narratives of the Studio system up to 1960. However, it would be more accurate to call this cinema 'neo-modern' ... because it is also a Nietzschean *return* to the modern, to the earlier moment of high modernism between 1914 and 1925 when cinema was still in its technical infancy. (Orr, 1993: 2)

---

for 1960s cinéphilie and its recuperation in the late 1980s as the authority of film theory began to wane.

<sup>7</sup> See Albie Thoms (1978); Nick Herd (1983) and Penny Davies (1984a and 1984b) on the UBU period and the Sydney independent filmmaking scene in the 1960s.

<sup>8</sup> See the first broadsheet editions of *Filmnews* (July 1975 - June 1976) which published the Co-op's cinema programs. Peter Wollen (1976) and Annette Michelson (1970) also make the connection between the European art cinema of Godard, Resnais, Straub-Huillet and the American avant-garde in their respective articles on the 'two' avant garde or radical cinemas. Dermody and Jacka (1987: 48-50) argue that the battle for dominance of the emerging feature industry in Australia from the late 1960s was lost by the art cinema lobby. This has implications for the imbrication of women with the independent sector where the avant-garde and documentary were the dominant modes.

Orr's concept of 'the return of cinema to the modern' is crucial for grasping the magnitude of feminism's attraction to cinema in the late 1960s. Firstly, the New Wave of art cinema, insofar as it drew from Vigo and Renoir the tradition of moving towards "the greater physical redemption of reality", shared feminism's concern with representing an objective, physical reality of 'real' women in everyday locations, as well as the possibility of representing a subjective reality - an inner world of memory, imagination and emotion. Simultaneously, neo-modern cinema unmasked the image's problematic nature in the modern world, and from Eisenstein's montage, discovered the congruence between cinema and modernity's fragmentations of reality (Orr, 1993: 3).

Secondly, 1960s art cinema offered a new and critical take on intimate relations between the sexes in the context of slice-of-life narratives based on existential dilemmas occurring in everyday life.

The neo-moderns have challenged the conventions of love and marriage as fruitful forms of intimacy, as the most appropriate responses to the felt lack of harmony in the public realm, as a refuge from the guilt and dissatisfactions of renewed bourgeois privilege. In so doing, they have fleshed out the prescient critique a decade earlier in *The Second Sex*, where Simone de Beauvoir had powerfully outlined the formidable dilemmas facing independent and professional women in a post-war male-dominated world. (Orr, 1993: 8)

Citing Alain Resnais' *Hiroshima Mon Amour* (1959, scripted by Marguerite Duras), Orr argues that both modern cinema and modern woman sprang from changing forms of modernity - given complex embodiment before the camera by luminary women including Emmanuelle Riva, Jeanne Moreau, Delphine Seyrig, Françoise Fabian and Monica Vitti - and later, explored from behind the camera by women directors including Agnes Varda, Marguerite Duras, Margarethe von Trotta and Chantal Akerman (Orr, 1993: 9).<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>9</sup> Varda, Moreau and Seyrig were written up in news items in *Filmnews* during the 1970s when they moved behind the camera to shoot their own films; their films influenced the formation of the milieu through the journal *Women and Film* (1972-74) and through the 1975 Women's International Film Festival (see Thornley 1992b). Duras and Akerman were the European directors most likely to be cited in the 1980s: see Lesley Stern (1980); Louise Burchill (1981) and Laleen Jayamanne (1982).

Finally, the neo-moderns understood cinema as a form of action, before and behind the camera, which gave expression to shifting conventions of perception, challenging both how we view and how we are viewed (Orr, 1993: 10). When Martha Ansara's aspiration to shoot films co-incided with Jeni Thornley's aspiration to perform, a new form of perception of women's experience began to shape Australian independent filmmaking:

I wanted to act in theatre then Martha came along and brought the film thing. And that coincided with the Women's Movement and this idea that women were outside the industry and we had to get training, and we had to get skills, and that there was a struggle there: I identified with all of that. (Thornley, 1992b)

The search for new perceptions is epitomised in the final sequence of Ansara and Thornley's first collaboration, *A Film For Discussion*, which ends with Thornley alone in front of her mirror, removing her makeup while she searches her reflection. The meaning of the scene is ambiguous, uncertain. The emotional effect is unsettling, and portentous of the quest for Self outside the available identities of daughter, wife, mother:

As Giddens has noted, the reflexive culture of modernity is one in which the searches for self-discovery, for new ways of seeing ourselves in the process of seeing, have all increased over the last thirty years as the certainties of absolute knowledge decline. The neo-moderns have sensed this from the start. Their cinema testifies to the paradox of that double acceleration, the increasing pace at which the search for self-discovery desperately tries to overcome our increasing sense of its impossibility. (Orr, 1993: 11)



2.2 Sarah Gibson behind the camera.

Cinema offered women the means to invent 'new ways of seeing ourselves in the process of seeing', both before and behind the camera. The collaboration of Thornley and Ansara, on *A Film For Discussion*, marked the beginning of the milieu's exploration of how women see, and are seen, in the cinema:

We wanted to make a film that challenged the ways women were being portrayed, and deal with what we thought were topical questions of the day. *Film For Discussion* seems a bit old fashioned but, if you look at it in terms of it's the '60s - it deals with women of my generation who are coming from their schooling in the '50s with the very strong politque of where a woman's place was, which was in the home - then the film really reflects the dilemma of the 20 year old girl. What I'm amazed about is how much the film reflected my own enquiry at the time, about direction. (Thornley, 1992b)

The best of women's filmmaking came out of this neo-modern impulse rather than the propagandistic and didactic imperative which informed much of feminist filmmaking after the 1977 women's filmmaking workshops. In the 1980s, the prospect of a nascent feminism, versed in the *contingent* nature of identity, truth and representation, would necessitate a further return to this founding riddle of the feminine imbricated with the modern.<sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup> See particularly the films *Serious Undertakings* (1983, Helen Grace) and *Landslides* (1986, Sarah Gibson and Susan Lambert) discussed in Chapter 7.

## Infrastructure for a Marginal Cinema

The renaissance in Australian cultural politics, which saw the 1969 recommendations for the establishment of the Experimental Film and Television Fund, the Australian Film Development Corporation, and the Australian Film and Television School, set the stage for a uniquely placed generation to participate in the production of a new cultural identity, in the wake of the emergence of the vernacular and contemporary in local theatre and on television.<sup>11</sup> In the first sustained critique of Australian feminist filmmaking, Lesley Stern (1978) made the point that although the economic connections between women's cinema and the renaissance of the Australian feature film are complicated, "there is a clear demarcation between the glorious rebirth of an independent and specifically proclaimed Australian cinema (ironically measured by its success at Cannes) and the irruption of a cinema which marks its 'independence' not as national but as sexual" (Stern 1978: 105). The relations between the 'independence' of feminist filmmaking, the yen for 'independent' heroines in narrative features, and the determined independence of this generation of women from marriage and the family, suggests another aspect of the psyche of the milieu which would have repercussions further down the track.

Martha Ansara, as a member of the Sydney Filmmakers Co-op in the days when it used to meet upstairs in Bob Gould's Bookshop, was quick to see the opportunities and to mobilise the resources that were available to the cognoscenti of the inner city. After Ansara saw Agnes Varda shooting a film about the Black Panthers in California in 1967, she returned to Boston and joined Newsreel - a group of Left filmmakers - where she continued her long standing involvement in screening films. Ansara's arrival in Australia in 1969 coincided with the setting up of the Experimental Film and Television Fund.<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>11</sup> See "Interim Report of the Film Committee to the Australian Council for the Arts, 1969" in Moran and O'Regan (eds) (1985: 171-174).

<sup>12</sup> See Ken Berryman (1985a) for a thorough history and analysis of the EFTVF's origins and operations; see Nick Herd (1983: 8-16) on the institutional history of the EFTVF in relation to the Sydney Filmmakers Co-op.



When I came to Australia we had our women's group and the Experimental Film Fund started up so I thought 'oh well, we could make a film'. So that's how I got started. (*Ansara, 1992a*).

Ansara was a driving force in the project of connecting filmmaking to the Women's Liberation Movement from as early as 1970 with an initial grant of \$1,178 from the EFTVF for the production of *A Film For Discussion*.<sup>13</sup> Jeni Thornley tells the story of the beginnings of her collaboration in film with Ansara:

I'd come up from Melbourne to live in Sydney because I wanted to act and I wanted to audition for NIDA [National Institute of Dramatic Art]. With a group of people I joined the ALP [Australian Labor Party] to work to get the conservatives out of power, to end conscription and to bring the troops home from Vietnam. Through that a women's group formed. It was the Balmain branch of the ALP.... There were a number of Trotskyists who joined the ALP in order to gain control of that branch and push for various socialist demands. I went to a meeting of the women's group and Martha was at it. I don't think it was an ALP meeting. It was a women's meeting of some kind. She was talking about film at one point and how it would be good to form a women's film group: the Sydney Women's Film Group (SWFG). I remember being really attracted to her. She was very outspoken and because she'd come from America where the women's movement was already in place and becoming organised, Martha seemed to have something that attracted you to her in terms of organising something. So that's how I met her. (*Thornley, 1992b*)

Thornley's meeting with Ansara - like Nash's meeting with Robin Laurie, and, in 1977, Gibson's meeting with Lambert - was the prototype for long-lasting, collaborative friendships as a production model for women entering the hitherto male preserve of filmmaking. Another influence was the importation of the *Women and Film* journal and the discovery of Agnes Varda, Nelly Kaplan and Dorothy Arzner as part of an emerging tradition of women making films that challenged both the representation of women in cinema, and women's place in society.

---

<sup>13</sup> See Ken Berryman (1985b) for a full list of EFTVF grant recipients and completed productions from 1970-78.

I wanted to act and Martha came along and realised that in film for me I suppose. It wasn't until the film workshop in '74 that the desire to want to make [films] started to grow - actually from working on *Film For Discussion* and seeing the process. Just getting exposed to the process - I wanted to do it. (Thornley, 1992b)

The institutional structures to support these ambitions were being put in place as the result of a decade of lobbying by producers, the film society movement and critics for an indigenous film and television industry.<sup>14</sup> From 1970, the most influential structures for the feminist film project would be the newly formed Experimental Film and Television Fund (later to become the Creative Development Fund at the Australian Film Commission in 1978), and the Sydney Filmmakers Co-op and its publication *Filmnews*. From the mid-1970s, the Australian Film and Television School and the Women's Film Fund would also become important infrastructural sites for sharpening the identity of the milieu.<sup>15</sup>

From the beginning, the feminist film project had a distinct and separatist organisational base in the Sydney Women's Film Group (SWFG) which was formed directly out of the Balmain Women's Liberation Group and its publications arm, *Words For Women*, in 1969-70.<sup>16</sup> However, women's involvement in independent film went beyond the WLM: screenings of short films organised by the SWFG at the Co-op tended to bring almost any young woman who had made a short film into the orbit of the SWFG in the early 1970s.<sup>17</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup> See "Part Three: Renaissance of the Feature" in Moran and O'Regan (eds) (1985).

<sup>15</sup> See Ken Berryman (1985a) on the EFTVF; see Albie Thoms, (1978: 346-406) for a detailed history of the Ubu group and the Co-op's first ten years; see Felicity Collins (1984) on the AFTVS; and see Anna Grieve (1987) on the WFF.

<sup>16</sup> See Jeni Thornley (1987a: 89) on SWFG as an extension of *Words For Women*.

<sup>17</sup> The filmography in Nick Herd's brief sketch of the history of independent filmmaking in Australia (1983), and the grants list in Ken Berryman's thorough documentation of the EFTVF (1985b), indicate the wider involvement of women in filmmaking in the early 1970s, beyond the sphere of the WLM or even the more broadly based SWFG.

The SWFG was forming at the same time that the feature industry was about to undergo its 1970s renaissance.<sup>18</sup> The cultural nationalism that underpinned the industry revival had less influence on the personality of the independent film milieu than the underground, counter-culture and liberation movements, which had reason to be skeptical about unifying nationalisms. However, the milieu participated in sustained attempts to focus on the local and the vernacular in a second-world economy that was loosening its colonial ties to Britain, and that was deeply divided over the American 'alliance' in Vietnam and American dominance of Australian popular culture.<sup>19</sup> In the case of the WLM, the dominant cultural myth of mateship and the bush, offered little to those urban women who drew on American and British sources for their feminism, and European and American avant-garde, agit-prop and new wave cinemas for their filmmaking.<sup>20</sup>

---

<sup>18</sup> See Dermody and Jacka (1987, especially Chapters 1 and 2) for an account of the forces which shaped the emergent feature industry during the 1960s and 70s.

<sup>19</sup> See the documentary film *Pram Factory* (1994, Anna Grieve and James Manche). La Mama Theatre and The Australian Performing Group, which moved from La Mama to the Pram Factory in 1970, were important cultural sites for giving voice to the vernacular, and for a theatricalised polemic opposing American cultural, economic and military imperialism, as well as challenging Australian censorship laws.

<sup>20</sup> It wasn't until the release of Gillian Armstrong's *My Brilliant Career* in 1979, Helen Grace's *Serious Undertakings* in 1983, and Sue Brooks' *The Drover's Wife* in 1985 that the place of the feminine in the bush legend was re-examined by women filmmakers.

## Inner City Eros

From the late 1960s, as the baby boomers left home, the inner city areas of Sydney and Melbourne began to be mapped by 'pathways of desire' between sites and events where Eros hit his mark.<sup>21</sup> As Margot Nash phrases it, people fell in love - with film, theatre, photography and each other. Nash was involved in the fecund days of experimental theatre in inner city Melbourne before moving to Sydney in 1978:

I did a couple years of an interior design course at RMIT which was an interesting influence because I learned about design and structure, and shape and light. I value those couple of years I did, as a film-maker. I dropped out of interior design because I wanted to be an actress, and taught art. Then I got this job at Melbourne Theatre Company and I worked in commercial theatre, and also at La Mama and in the underground. (Nash, 1992a)

The Women's Liberation Movement intersected with the resurgence in locally produced film and theatre to produce fertile, collaborative friendships that gave women the necessary confidence and daring to launch themselves into unknown creative territories.<sup>22</sup>

I met Robin Laurie, who is still my closest friend, and she was working in film. She worked on *Dalmas* [1973, Bert Deling] and she was teaching Super 8 and video at one of the colleges in Melbourne. Robin and I first met in the late '60s and then I went to Adelaide for a while and came back and we met again. We did a show at La Mama called *Night Flowers* written by a New Zealand man about lesbians, and Jude Kuring directed it. People like Kris McQuade, Jane Clifton, Jane Friedl were in it, and I was in it, and Robin Laurie came and did a little Super 8 film. Robin and I became very close friends - really kind of fell in love with each other - and moved in and lived together in that spirit of early feminism. We

---

<sup>21</sup> Town planners use the phrase 'pathways of desire' or 'desire lines' to describe the tracks that are made by an accumulation of people straying from the designated paths in parks and other public places.

<sup>22</sup> See Drusilla Modjeska (1981:77-78) for a precedent in women's creative collaborations in the work of Marjorie Barnard and Flora Eldershaw.

connected through that feminist politics very strongly, and she brought film to me and I brought theatre to her. (Nash, 1992a)

Those projects which excited the inner city imagination - from the Vietnam Moratorium protests, to the theatrical events at La Mama and The Pram Factory, to the screening of underground films by the Ubu film group at Sydney University - attracted clusters of enthusiastic participants, propelled by the desire to connect with the unfolding romance of their own generation.<sup>23</sup>

The ways in which Women's Liberation, coming out of the 1960s, sought to express itself were intimately connected to the counterculture and its ethic of creative-intuitive-affective opposition to the 'white collar salt mines'. However, fronting up to a Women's Liberation meeting in Sydney could be a formidable experience for the uninitiated, even those who had been schooled in the hard-edged campus campaigns in Brisbane in the 1960s. Megan McMurchy attended one WLM meeting and never went back.

I remember going to a meeting of the Women's Liberation group in Glebe Point Road down near Parramatta Road maybe about '70 or '71 when I was working at the ABC. I went along and I was so terrified. I was curious and I knew it was something I was deeply interested in. Whatever I had read about feminism at that point, which wasn't very much, made me think that I was going to be interested in feminism but I was scared to death by the women who were there that night and I never went back. They were too scary. I don't really know why. I think it had something to do with the problem that I've always had about being assertive in groups. My politics at [Queensland] university were as a lone participant in street demonstrations but if I was in a meeting I could never speak out. I was always verbally timid and I found the same thing with this particular Women's Liberation meeting. There were very assertive women at that meeting and I found them really scary.

---

<sup>23</sup> The baby boom generation was peculiarly conscious of itself as a new generation: its demographic dominance was one element of this self-consciousness; its image in the media and advertising industries was another. The prosperity of the middle-classes in the postwar period enabled a prolonged and rebellious adolescence. The baby boomers had a sense of being born into a new chapter in Australia's history: see Donald Home (1974: 13-24) for an account of the legacy of the first chapter of white settlement.

I can trace it back to my years as a Presbyterian Pathfinder on Friday nights. They were like Sunday School meetings when I was eleven or twelve. You had to sit in a circle and they'd go round and when it got to you, you had to say a line of a prayer or something ridiculous. I never could. I used to flip out and be led away because I couldn't contribute my line. [...]

It probably also had to do with an unconsciousness about my own unexamined sexual politics, or lack of sexual politics. I was working mostly with men in my professional life, and a lot of my working friends were men. I did read a lot of what I heard that night as being anti-male and it seemed narrow and unacceptable to me at that moment.

(McMurphy, 1992)

McMurphy's story of leaving her job as a producer with the ABC (the publicly funded national broadcaster) to travel around the U.S.A. in a Kombi van, picks up the countercultural thread, which was an alternative pathway into feminism for those who grew fainthearted in the face of Sydney WLM and its ethic of consciousness raising.

I came in through a back door of feminism, through a faintly hippy, not really separatist politics. Californian feminism had its roots in leftist politics but it had already taken on a 'return to the country, heal yourself' thing that was very different from the university based, much more cerebral sort of feminism. It had a lifestyle theme to it. I'm floundering to find the marks of distinction because feminism here had a lifestyle aspect to it too. In any case, it was through this Californian strain of feminism that I finally entered in, and then it became a transforming politic.

I'm not sure I can say that feminism has been more formative than New Left politics were for me because notions about the workings of imperialism and colonialism that became formative of my world view while I was at university, are still basic to me.

I just read a lot of stuff while I was in California, mostly magazines like *Country Woman*, which was a peculiarly Californian thing. It was this magazine that was about getting back to the land, growing your own food, the politics of food production, massage and getting in touch with yourself, and some analysis of sexual politics. I loved it. I don't think I

really had fantasies about going back to the land. I've never had that because I grew up in the bush and I've never wanted to go back. I always wanted to get away so I didn't absorb that, but I guess some version of the thing that drove women up to Amazon Acres, a desire to have a kind of utopian women's society - the self-sufficiency. It had articles about how to do your own plumbing and how to keep your VW on the road. I took all that stuff seriously. I've still got my VW maintenance book because I didn't know how a motor worked when I went to California. I did a motor mechanics Saturday class for several months and learned how to tune up my car and eventually I managed to do all kinds of repairs on the road on this Kombi van. It was an empowering movement, not just on that level but as a girl who's been disenfranchised from certain ways of being - certain competencies in the world - you can change that and that was part of what I got from it. (*McMurchy, 1992*)

Unlike Thornley, for whom the coming together of feminism and lesbianism represented nirvana, McMurchy was more circumspect about the possibilities that opened up for her in California:

That was the period in which I confronted my lesbianism openly and I was involved in a passionate relationship that was difficult and terrifying and part of what I was going through at that point. It all got tangled up. Having the portapak was also part of this thing of taking command of technical tools and acquiring means towards different forms of expression than I'd had access to, working inside a very structured professional institution at the ABC.

It was also a very big year politically. It was the Watergate hearings, which were running every day on television and the Patty Hearst kidnapping. I was living in Berkeley when that happened. And the Symbionese Liberation Army. (*McMurchy, 1992*)

Although Women's Liberation, as Germaine Greer has so acerbically pointed out, had the stamp of the university all over it, the inner city milieu and its ethos that anyone can be creative, provided several sites for the development of creative skills which propelled some women into filmmaking when the opportunities arose in the early 1970s. Photography and film workshops at places like the Tin Sheds at Sydney University were one entry point for Margot Oliver who had fulfilled her parents' aspirations

for her to transcend her working class origins through education, but who had no access to either the arts or artistic practice except through her role as a teacher. In the early 1970s, Oliver, who had been teaching physics and chemistry at Liverpool Girl's High School in western Sydney, started looking for a way to bring her interests in the arts and sciences together:

I was running a little Super 8 club, hiring films from the Filmmakers Co-op to show to the students that this is what you can do with film. In retrospect, I was the one that was probably most interested in what I was showing them.

[...] I finally took the big leap and left teaching, not knowing what I was going to do next, which was fairly frightening, and went on the dole. That was in the days when one could actually live on the dole, albeit frugally. It was 1973. I was 26 years old and had been wanting to leave teaching for a while. I was already aware that the Women's Movement had started to happen. I had been politically aware since the Vietnam days which was what radicalised me, but had no connection to any ongoing group.

I enrolled at Sydney Uni. Tin Sheds - it's interesting how these institutions come up in people's lives - in a workshop to learn still photography, just basic black and white development which I did and which I loved, and then took photographs for years thereafter and developed them at home. (*Oliver, 1992a*)

While many of her peers packed up and went to Nimbin for a week as part of the back-to-the-land movement, Oliver stayed in Sydney to do a filmmaking workshop run by Tony Hawler at Tin Sheds. In her first 16mm workshop Oliver discovered the quality of film movement that drew her to the cinematic image. She was later to regret the extent to which her feminist filmmaking commitments involved straying far from her original attraction to the black and white image which she first encountered in the art cinema.

In some ways I wish I could capture that again because one then strays far from the original interest, or I have in some ways. To be honest, I loved the quality of the black and white image and I loved the movement in the image. I responded to the black and white much better than I responded to the colour because of the interesting movies I'd seen up until then -



which wouldn't have been very many, and none of them would have been Australian, and none of them would have been American - they would all have been either European or English. [...] Colour to me was connected with Hollywood - I find Hollywood movies very boring. I totally escaped, or almost escaped the Hollywood fist. (*Oliver*, 1992a).

Pat Fiske's entry into filmmaking entails fortuitous encounters which pulled her into the orbit of both the Women's Liberation Movement and the cinema. Fiske's is a tale of chance, befitting the figure of the young American speech therapist working her way around the world:

I had no intention of staying in Sydney. I was going to be there and work a while and travel to Indonesia, Asia, the world. But I'd met Fred Hollows in New Zealand a few months before. I rang him up and he found me a place to live.<sup>24</sup> It just happened to be next door to a bunch of feminists from Sydney Uni. Through meeting those women, I got involved in Women's Liberation. I'd known about it of course in the States but the bra burning stereotype the press had given it - I steered clear of it. I didn't want to know about it. I put blinders down - that's not for me. But I was *ready* when I got here. I had a terrible time at some of my jobs because I was starting to get into feminism.

I moved into this big communal house. There were two gay men, one straight man and the rest were women's liberationists. Kay was important because she was a still photographer and I've always been interested in photography, but I never thought I could do anything until I got involved in the Women's Movement. I saw my life as an hour glass: 'be a speech therapist, get married, have children, maybe continue to work, maybe not': that was going to be my life. But when I got involved in Women's Liberation, all of a sudden the sky was open. I could do anything - *anything*. So, Kay helped me set up a darkroom and taught me bits and pieces about photography and then I just picked it up.

---

<sup>24</sup> In 1992 Fiske made *For All The World To See*, an award winning documentary about Fred Hollows and his work as a doctor treating eye problems in Aboriginal and Third World communities. Hollows, an outspoken campaigner who died of cancer in 1993, became something of a folk hero in the Australian media.

In the same house was a woman called Pat who was going to do a 16mm workshop at the Co-op and she said 'why don't you come and do it with me'. So it wasn't that I was really interested in film, although I liked going to films all my life, but I didn't have a love and a desire. I know it's because as a woman I wouldn't have thought or been encouraged to even think about making films. It was just outside my experience. Then I did the Blinky Bill Film Workshop in 1973 and I made a little film, called *Burst Forth*, which was about nature taking over the city in four minutes flat. Workshops were great because you only paid fifty dollars and you had access to all the equipment and you could make a film as well. (Fiske, 1993)

Unlike Ansara, Fiske's moment of epiphany came not from seeing a woman behind the camera, but from her day job as an office temp:

I'd gone in one day to this temporary job. I worked with this guy for one week. He'd been on holiday the week before. He was a lawyer and he was going on holiday again. He would call me in to take dictation and we would rave every day. We had all these discussions about politics and life - it was interesting, and I didn't have to do any work. He didn't have that much work to do and he wasn't interested in doing any either. Then on my last day he called me in and said 'I just want to say something to you.' He said 'I'm glad that you can't teach here because you would corrupt our children'. He went into this incredible, impassioned speech about what was wrong with me - and what was wrong with what I'd been talking about all week, about what I was thinking and the whole thing about feminism, the rights of women. He just decimated me. I'm going 'But, but but ....' And he said 'Alright. I've got to go to a meeting.' And I said 'You can't go anywhere. You sit right fuckin' down there. You have to let me reply.' He said 'I've got to be in a meeting', and walked out. I was like - I don't know. I've never been that way before. I was so angry. I stomped back to my desk and I was sitting there in disbelief when the male office manager came up and said 'You know, you'd look better if you wore a dress and some makeup', or something to that effect. I just screamed - a blood curdling scream. I grabbed my things and I ran out and never went back. That was it for me. I could never do any more of that kind of work.

I remember going to see Jan Reid, who also lived in my house, in hospital that same day. She'd had a car accident. And she said 'Ah well, welcome sister'. Jan was a builder's labourer and she said 'Come and be a builder's labourer. We'll get you a ticket. We'll get you a job and it'll be fine.' I knew I could do that kind of work. The BLF [Builders Labourers Federation] were encouraging women into the industry. So I started work as a builders labourer. I knew some of the BL's from the Left. They helped me do a film - helped me shoot the city from up on a crane. (Fiske, 1993)

Rather than coming directly out of the concerns of the WLM, Fiske's filmmaking projects were shaped by accessible film and photography workshops and the experience of becoming one of the first women builder's labourers - experiences that hooked Fiske into an inner city, Left network which then supported her documentary filmmaking.

In that Blinky Bill Workshop [organised by the Sydney Filmmakers Co-op in 1973] was Denise White. She was involved with the Randwick Council disputes and was involved in resident action groups, and I was in the BLF. She had made a little film too, and we talked about the fact that no-one ever made a film about the BLF and maybe we should do it. So we went to the AFC. That started my career really, because we got \$5,000 from the AFC - Martha [Ansara] was on the selection committee.

[...] I hadn't been in Sydney very long when someone took me to one of those debates at Sydney Uni. It was 'June Dally-Watkins: should she be deported or not'. In the middle of it, Gillian Leahy waltzed in with a green face, singing *Plastic Lady*. I thought 'Wow'. I met her after that. I think I met Martha [Ansara] around then as well. I hadn't gone to Women's Movement meetings. I became a projectionist at the Filmmakers Co-op to make some money, and I also met a lot of people through that. (Fiske, 1993)

Susan Lambert was also a participant in the inner city communal household network before quitting her retail management traineeship to travel to London via the Middle East:

Filmmaking didn't exist for me apart from some boyfriends who were film buffs. I'd go along to the movies with them and I started going to art films

at university, but I didn't go to the Sydney Film Festival which was at Rose Bay at the time. I had one boyfriend who was really influential in all that. I also came across people like Sandy Edwards who'd started still photography with Michael Snelling. What you have to remember is that we were all in big households and everyone was fucking everyone else and doing drugs etc. So it was pretty wild. People were encouraged to experiment. I always felt slightly the odd one out. Not coming from Sydney, I wasn't quite as comfortable and I had a number of different circles. I'd say Sandy and Michael really influenced me at that time because they had the camera and were doing it themselves. (*Lambert, 1992*)

Sarah Gibson, who would strike up a filmmaking partnership with Susan Lambert in 1977, got involved in organising creativity workshops as an offshoot of her political activities:

I'd been involved in the Women's Liberation Movement and Women and Education, and I'd organised the Festival of Women's Creativity with Penny Ryan at the end of '73. We did a basic Super 8 of the Festival. I had a sense that there had been an alienation in the structures in society from the possibility of women having access to technical skills. Crudely, my thinking was 'anybody can be creative and women particularly aren't aware of their creative potential'.

I was more involved in the socialist feminist perspective in the [Women's] Movement, and I felt that creativity within that framework got denigrated. That seemed to me quite limited. The political movement had to engage in creative forms and media, and women had to have more satisfaction than just going to rallies and going to meetings. I felt it was a form of politics which was very dry unless it was enriched by culture. I was of the minority in thinking like that. (*Gibson, 1992*)

These stories reveal the diverse and overlapping pathways of desire which drew key women into the constellation of feminist filmmaking. Differences of class, politics, sexuality and cultural capital were obscured in the ferment of youthful enthusiasms, at a time when to be young was to be in the grip of an Eros driven era of social change. In *Educating Psyche* Bernie Neville (1992) describes the role of Eros, emphasising his motivating love for Psyche or Soul:

Eros is firmly established in classical mythology and the European imagination as both the oldest of the gods and the youngest, as a god of union and communion, relationship, newness and process, romance and delusion, procreative power.

We know Eros most of all as a god of emotional attachment.<sup>25</sup> (Neville, 1992: 260)

Neville also points out the problems that can arise from a one-eyed 'Puer' perspective: the warmth, energy, playfulness, naivety, optimism and excitement of a libidinal politics can suffer from a lack of what Neville calls Senex qualities, including: distance, coldness, maturity, wisdom, work and pessimism (1992: 261-262). The erotic energy which forged friendships and attractions (to cinema and politics) resulted in converging desire lines, across the familiar terrain reaching from the Balmain Women's Liberation meetings across town to the Sydney Filmmakers Co-op in Darlinghurst.

---

<sup>25</sup> Neville (1992: 260-262) goes on to draw attention to the problems of developing a one-eyed perspective - of the folly of an excess of Eros in a Promethean driven society.

## Art and Politics

In the youthful, optimistic and narcissistic spirit of the times, the meshing of art and politics was to become a given. However, the sheer exuberance expressed in Pat Fiske's revelation that women could now do *anything*, is indicative of the extent to which the possibility of following your bliss was a more immediately felt motivation than that of raising the feminist slingshot to the mass media Goliath. For many fledgling filmmakers, the Women's Liberation Movement was a source of permission to take hold of their own lives and pursue paths that the wounds of gender, class, history and family had connived to prevent women from exploring.

Megan McMurchy was one filmmaker whose lifelong love of cinema led her to a job in ABC television, before she made the connection to feminism:

I have loved film my entire conscious life. I never wanted to do anything else as far back as I recall. Well, that's not entirely true. I hit on the notion of working in film, I think consciously and determinedly at about 18. Before that I might have had notions of doing other things. I did want to be a diplomat for a while so I studied Japanese and French for a time. Somehow that fell away when I went to work for the ABC while I was still at university. That's when I decided film/media was absolutely it.

A lot of my peers are women (I'm thinking of people like Susan Lambert or Sarah Gibson, there'd be lots more) who came to film consciously as a political activity and I never did. I came to it as a film buff, as somebody who'd consumed hundreds and hundreds of films as a child. For me that had to do with growing up in the country and becoming a devotee of film as the most exciting escape from - not escape, I loved my childhood, I had a really great childhood in the country - but film, for which I lived every weekend, was the most exciting thing going.

I remember the only time I ever ran away from home was one Saturday afternoon when I was forbidden to go to the movies and the desire to go and the expectation of being able to spend my Saturday afternoon at the movies was so strong that I had to leave home to do it. It was just a huge part of my childhood. I liked scary films and westerns, and all those fabulous Italian spectaculars from the late '50s ...

I also read hugely. I read a lot of serious literature in my young to middle teenage years and then I got turned off literature entirely by going to university. [...]

John Flaus came up [to Brisbane] to deliver a weekend session on American cinema while I was at university.<sup>26</sup> I signed up for it and he talked about American cinema in the '50s and the whole notion of how westerns and other genre films could be interpreted in the light of Cold War politics and auteurist theory. That was it, I was just sold. [...] American cinema became a kind of personal obsession for a long time: Sirk and Don Siegel, Robert Aldrich, John Ford, and people like that. I was involved in the university film group, programming, and editing a little magazine that we used to put out. In '68 or '69 I organised *Cinema of Violence*, which was a season of people like Siegel and Peckinpah. (McMurchy, 1992)

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, filmmakers working for organisations like Film Australia and the ABC helped form the independent sector as they attempted to make their own films outside working hours. However, McMurchy's professional beginnings were unusual amongst women who became strongly identified with the independent milieu:

I started working part-time for the ABC as a researcher on *TDT*, (*This Day Tonight*) a current affairs program, in '68, for a year and a half until I finished university. Then I applied for a job with the ABC down here against a large number of competitors and against some conservative resistance within the upper echelons of the ABC at that time because I was the first woman appointed to this specialist traineeship position. After I went to work there I eventually uncovered my own personnel file and discovered this great trail of correspondence between the then General-Manager and the Controller of Programs debating whether a woman could be appointed to this position. They were measuring the claims of my apparent dedication as a new broadcaster against my intrinsic problems as a woman. Which of course, in their eyes, meant that I would leave to have babies as soon as they had given me some good training. Luckily, progressive values prevailed and they gave me this job

---

<sup>26</sup> John Flaus is a well known and influential film teacher, actor, critic and radio commentator based in Melbourne.

as a trainee. I moved to Sydney at that point and stayed there for three and a half years until I came under the influence of notions about alternative media in '72-'73 and left. By that stage I'd had a gutful of professional media as I'd experienced it at the ABC. (*McMurchy, 1992*)

Helen Grace sums up the more common experience of women entering independent filmmaking from marginal, politicised spaces which were, to a large extent, indifferent or even hostile to institutionalised media professionalism (and often hostile to Hollywood cinema as well):

This was the time of people crossing barriers, the collapse of painting and engagement with mass reproduction processes like screen printing and photography. Film was on the edge of that. [...] All sorts of people of no ability at all, or no reason to regard themselves as artistic, were having a go. I was in that group. It was a historical moment that threw up certain possibilities. It wasn't about personal choices so much as what was possible at certain moments. It was about having a political commitment and wanting a way of elaborating and communicating it. It was all about educating the masses - a really crude version of '20s Russia. It's naive to imagine that, but the post-Whitlam time did give all sorts of people opportunities to do things that would not have been imaginable before.

Everyone was anti-art, even those people who came from it. We were coming in on the end of late '60s conceptualism. The anti-imperialist, anti-capitalist rhetoric of the time positioned all art production as being the production of commodities for the privileged market - the bourgeoisie. There was pressure to produce art for another market - the working classes, crudely.

Feminism and art was another cross current in all of this. There were a lot of challenges to art history and to that narrative of progress and masculine courage which is modern art. Feminism was not understood as a form of modernism. It was always seen as a counter, not so much to modernism but to that narrative of progress where men were always positioned as leaders and originators. (*Grace, 1992*)

A further point needs to be made here. The WLM in Sydney was distinguished from both the marxist-feminism emerging in the U.K. and from the radical feminism coming out of the U.S.A., by the long tradition of



libertarian-anarchism associated with the Sydney Push and with the figure of John Anderson in Philosophy at Sydney University. Gillian Leahy is the most prominent of the women's liberationists involved with film to be associated with this tradition. Her counterpart from Melbourne was Margot Nash, a founding member of *AS IF* (Anarcho Surrealist Insurrectionary Feminists). I'm going to end this chapter with Margot Nash's story of how she and Robin Laurie came to make their first film, *We Aim To Please*. As an EFTVF film made over a relatively long period of time (like *Maidens* and *A Film For Discussion*), *We Aim To Please* is imbued with germinal moments, before debates about feminist film theory began to take hold from 1978 onward. Margot Nash's story of the time it took to get started on the film after receiving the initial grant, and of the stop-start, fly-by-night process of production, signals a very different ethos from the one that would emerge under the aegis of the Women's Film Fund (WFF) and the Creative Development Branch (CDB) of the Australian Film Commission (AFC) in the late 1970s:

Robin [Laurie] went and lived at the Pram Factory and I ended up living at the Pram Factory too, and then I ran away. We had the money to make a film but we didn't do anything with it. Our lives shifted, all sorts of emotional things went on to do with relationships. I ran away to New Zealand in '74 and I did that theatre show, *The Cure All Ills All Star Women's Medicine Show* with nineteen women in Dunedin. I joined the Auckland Women's Film Workshop and one of the women in the workshop was a producer in television. She hired half the workshop and we did a non-sexist *Play School* for a while. But I had really got the film bug and I wanted to make the film, and I knew we had the money. I was taking lots and lots of photographs, and building endless darkrooms by that stage. I couldn't make films in New Zealand. I would have liked to have done camera, say on *Play School* but they wouldn't take me. They would take me as a presenter, but not as a camera person because I wasn't tall enough, because I was a woman. (Nash, 1992a)

When Nash returned to Melbourne for a visit, the opportunity to work as a camera assistant was attractive enough to make her stay. The EFTVF was about to rescind the unspent film grant so Nash made the most of her access to equipment to get started on her own film, after hours:

I was going to go back to New Zealand - I had a boyfriend, I had a whole life there. I came back for Christmas and John Hughes asked me if I'd like to be camera assistant on *Menace*,<sup>27</sup> which was about Menzies outlawing the Communist Party. I said yes, and stayed and that was the start of *We Aim to Please* too. While I worked on *Menace* as a camera assistant - I wanted to do cinematography, I didn't think of myself as a director - I looked after the gear and I used to bring it home. I'd ring up Robin [Laurie] and say 'I've got the camera' and then she'd come over and we'd film something. We had abandoned our script that we'd got the money on, so we just used to bring out our favourite poems, quotes and images to show each other.

Then I worked on various films for free, mainly Swinburne films. I shot Vicky Molloy's student film. I shot a film at the Pram Factory. I shot a whole lot of stuff. And whenever I would get the camera I would ring up Robin and say 'come over'. So, *We Aim to Please* was shot over a period of time - you can see how our hairstyles changed. In the middle of a shoot for something else we'd do a roll. If I'm on the camera she's behind it, and vice-versa, and if we're both there it's on its own. It's a real home movie. (Nash, 1992a)

*We Aim To Please* was made in an improvised, unconscious way. There was no preconceived idea of how to make a film, or of an audience for the film, so Nash and Laurie were remarkably free to experiment and to include their mishaps.

I remember once we filmed at the Pram Factory - do you remember when we throw the tomatos at the camera? - that was on the back patio of the Pram Factory. Robin was on the camera doing close-ups of the mouth, and I was trying to record myself. I had the headphones on and I tried to speak but I got that delay and I burst into tears because of someone watching me. And then we filmed tears. So it's all in it.

[...]

We didn't know what we'd done. We knew it was about female sexuality; we knew it was about how we felt about our bodies, but we didn't have a script. Robin had this brainwave that we should project all

---

<sup>27</sup> *Menace* (1977, John Hughes) was an attempt to break through the amnesia of recent history by 'uncovering' Australia's own Cold War witch hunts.

the rushes and record ourselves talking about it, so we got into Film House - Fred Schepisi's place - because I knew John Scott who was an editor, and he got us in there because he was cutting at night. We got into the studio there by ourselves one night and projected all the rushes and recorded our conversation and so that's how we did part of the soundtrack.

It was the first time I had followed the film process through. I actually learned to make a film through doing it. It got edited in my bedroom, and that was it. (Nash, 1992a)

Support for the film came from unexpected quarters, and the film's reception in Melbourne was mixed, especially compared with its acclaim in Sydney where it became part of the Co-op collection and is still one of the most well known films from that era.

The person who supported me through *We Aim To Please* and encouraged the project and thought it was fantastic was Rod Bishop.<sup>28</sup> He just said it was great.

[...] It premiered at The Pram Factory to everyone's shock and horror. *We Aim to Please* was in the context of *AS IF* - feminist wild girls, that's how we saw ourselves. In Melbourne people didn't quite know what to make of it. Around our milieu they knew us and they knew the theatre work that we'd done and they knew *AS IF*. It never got accepted to a film festival. It got rejected by every single one except it won a prize in Paris, at an ethnographic film festival called *L'Homme Regard L'Homme (Man Looks at Man)* and we refused to accept the prize on principle. The film got sent up to Sydney and all the feminist filmmaking, of course, was happening up here and they went 'wow' because it was really different to anything that had been made in Sydney. People like Gilly Leahy knew about *AS IF* - had read the manifesto. People had gone, 'who are these women' and then when *We Aim to Please* came up, they went 'oh my God'. So they immediately programmed it under the Women Waves package and it went around Australia and was really well received. (Nash, 1992a)

---

<sup>28</sup> Rod Bishop is best known in recent times as the producer of Philip Brophy's exploitation homage, *Body Melt* (1994).

The critical attention that *We Aim To Please* has attracted from Lesley Stern (1978) and Catriona Moore (1987), indicates that the film is a rich and elusive experiment which manages to slip through the theoretical nets of two different phases of feminist critique. In 1978, Stern cast the (anti-)realism/ideology net over the film and attempted, using the polemic of the day, to land the film as an example of Brechtian alienation for an anti-elitist popular audience cued "to read the film as a text" (1978: 118-119). In 1987, Moore threw the repressive-liberation hypothesis over the film in an attempt to capture it for Foucault (and footnote it for Lacan). Both critics found the film wanting for its 'essentialist biologism', drawing this conclusion from the final section where Nash and Laurie film each other's naked bodies in a garden undergrowth while discussing the appearance of their labia.

Moore attempted to read the film as falling into the error of becoming a narrative of liberation, concluding:

As *We Aim To Please* ultimately avoids formulating any workable theory of representation of women, in the end it is enough that women hold the camera, focusing on women's bodies. The control and circulation of the image of women by women is an end point which *We Aim To Please* never tries to move beyond. (Moore, 1987: 368)

Stern reached the same kind of admonitory conclusion, after a perceptive and appreciative reading of the film as an open-ended play of differences: "There is no exploration of the connections between women's oppression and capitalism and change for the better is implicitly posed as a return to nature." (1978: 120). Stern ended with the sober reminder that there are films "which are more revolutionary in their analysis of the socio-economic condition of women, and it is *vital for change* that feminist film production continue this line of development." (1978: 120; my italics). The longevity of this prescriptive mode of feminist critique owes much to the assumption, shared by filmmakers and critics of the time, that film and politics are the same thing. The burden of this assumption has weighed down both the filmmaking and theoretical aspects of the feminist film project.<sup>29</sup>

---

<sup>29</sup> Stern's closing polemic is standard for the era: every film had to be measured against a standard of political consciousness that was presumed to be 'vital for change'. I include my own writing on *For Love or Money* and *Serious Undertakings* (Collins, 1983) in this perpetually dissatisfied genre of feminist critique. The assumption that film and politics

The charge of essentialism was part of a polemic which argued that identity, gender and the self were socially constructed rather than innate. In terms of the Women's Movement, the charge of biological essentialism was directed by socialist (and other) feminists at those (variously labelled) radical feminists who sought to reclaim the feminine from the denigrations of a misogynistic culture, rather than destroy all gender-linked roles in a class based revolution. Individual filmmakers like Ansara, Thornley and Nash, could, and did, wear different feminisms as the occasion warranted. Ansara could be a member of the Communist Party of Australia, heterosexual, a single parent and still make a 'lesbian' film, *Secret Storm, or Diana in the Witches House* (1977), which drew on many of the motifs of cultural feminism in its investigation of motherhood, sexuality and desire. Thornley, in *Maidens*, could make a film which was both a social history of four generations of Australian women, and a poetic exploration of sexuality and the feminine in a lesbian community. Nash and Laurie, in *We Aim To Please*, were able to raid popular culture, experimental theatre, underground film and graphics, and cultural feminism's focus on the sexuality of the female body, in the name of an Anarcho Surrealist Insurrectionary Feminism which observed few political proprieties. What distinguishes these *unruly* films is that they were remarkably free from the concern 'to get it right' that would come to dominate feminist filmmaking and critique in the late 1970s.

Richard Dyer, with the advantage of hindsight, returned to the problem of the relation between art and politics at the end of his 1990 study of gay and lesbian filmmaking, *Now You See It*:

Politics demands immediacy and clarity. [...]

Art however is never as ruly as politics needs it to be. (1990:285)

To claim that the early films, from what I think of as the Women's Liberation era, were unruly is not to say that they had no allegiances. Dyer's study of five different, historically specific, incarnations of gay and lesbian filmmaking provides a useful framework for reconsidering aspects of *We*

---

were the same thing marked the beginning of a period when no film could ever measure up. *We Aim To Please* owes much to underground and theatrical aesthetics, yet this is lost on modes of critique which propose a model to which a political film should conform.

*Aim To Please*, *Maidens*, and *Secret Storm*, in terms of what Dyer calls lesbian cultural feminist film (1990: 174-210). Cultural feminism sought a new sense of self and new cultural forms for women, often by turning to lost or defamed feminine traditions. Images of female power were drawn from Greek mythology, the Bible, history and the mass media. *Maidens* evokes the myth of Amazon women, and of female convict escapees from the notorious Parramatta jail.<sup>30</sup> *Secret Storm* reclaims Diana (goddess of hunting) who leaves her suburban backyard - dominated by the washing on the Hills Hoist - and enters into the witches house, where she undergoes a trance-like encounter with the occult of female sexuality.



2.3 Jeni Thornley in *Secret Storm* (1977)

Cultural feminism gave voice to the autobiographical, and screen space to relations between women. Alternatives to the nuclear family were made explicit in the sudden rupture of the maternal genealogical chain in *Maidens* and the all-women witches house of *Secret Storm*. Both films explored and celebrated experiences specific to women, including pregnancy, menstruation, lesbian sexuality and the life of the psyche expressed in dreams and images. The female body was reclaimed for women in scenes where the immodest camera exposes the filmmakers' specifically female bodies.

<sup>30</sup> *Journey Among Women* (1977, Tom Cowan) was a notorious feature film which involved feminist women re-enacting the escape of women convicts from the colonial Parramatta jail as an allegory of radical feminism. See Karen Jennings (1993: 24-27) for an account of the contemporary significance of *Journey Among Women* in terms of relations between white and Aboriginal women.

*Maidens* and *Secret Storm* drew on the pattern of cultural feminism in that they emphasised women's sexual *and* procreative powers, offering 'lesbian' images of both to the viewer - 'lesbian' in that *women* offer sexual images of women/the maternal to female viewers. *We Aim To Please* singled out the male viewer of classical cinema for direct assault - hurling slogans and tomatoes at the camera and literally giving the viewer 'the arse' at The End.

These films have an intensity and immediacy born of a violent impulse to explode what they perceived as misogynist myths of womanhood. The filmmakers drew on avant-garde and underground cinema traditions, using superimposition, subliminal editing, spontaneous and ritualistic performances, and oneiric states to express emergent forms of woman-centred consciousness.<sup>31</sup> One of Ansara's influences from the American avant-garde was Stan Brakhage whose films "explore a range of sexual and mystical experiences, including masturbation, childbirth and ... male homosexuality" (Dyer, 1990: 137). The influence of the West Coast American avant-garde, particularly Maya Deren, is evident in the trance form of *Secret Storm*:

The films from the late forties take the filmmaker as subject-matter, her or his inner life, revealed by dreams, released by ritual, universalised by myth. (Dyer, 1990: 103)

*We Aim To Please* is more directly related to the East Coast Underground cinema of the 1960s where authenticity was replaced by intensity - "a commitment to incandescent performance that burns away any lingering concern with so-called realism" (Dyer, 1990: 143). The opening sections of *We Aim To Please* use performance to break with realism: we hear "camera rolling" and see Nash join Laurie in front of the camera; both women stand naked in front of a painted backdrop of a tiger prowling through the jungle; they recite their lines to the camera, paint each others eyes and mouths with red lipstick, write the film title on Nash's body, whisper "sex" on the soundtrack, and Laurie dons a full-length, blue, papier maché mask of a woman's body and caresses it with her face.

---

<sup>31</sup> See Herd (1983: 18-20) on the Australian avant-garde, and Dyer (1990: 134-145) on underground aesthetics in the 1950s and '60s.

There is a shift then from the personality of the film-maker to the personality of the performer which is also a shift from personality as an inner reality to be explored to personality as a (sic) outer surface to be observed. (Dyer, 1990: 104)



2.4 Robin Laurie and Margot Nash in *We Aim To Please*. (1977)

Laurie and Nash appear in *We Aim To Please* as both the filmmakers and the performers. The film picks up on Underground aesthetics of "apparent artlessness, the cult of spontaneity and chance, the use of pop material and pastiche" (Dyer, 1990: 135). It also delves into the inner world in a dream sequence where we glimpse faces, shadows, eyes, breasts, a hand licked by a cat, and we hear breathing, traffic noise, wolf whistles. The sequence ends with a graphic depiction of rape: a beer bottle smashes into the pink flesh of a watermelon which has 'Fuck Me' written on it.

The 'essentialism' of the naked bodies sequence shot in the garden, has to be seen in the context of the film's knowingness about performance, and its mixed modes which range from comic strip to theatrical representation. During the film we hear nervous laughter and see tears which arose out of the filmmaking process and which the filmmakers chose to include. At the end of the film a red rose opens out to fill the screen. The joking tone of the film in such shots tempers the film's assault on the cinema's long history of depicting the female body for the male gaze. The film is not an answer to



that long history - rather it answers back, literally 'gives cheek' in a way that never presumes that answers are, at all, the point.

The marginality of these independent, short films in a white-settler, colonial culture, is doubled by the marginalisation of the women who made them. In *The Newly Born Woman*, Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément (1985) focus on the specific forms of feminine 'madness' that are fostered by this marginalisation. The figures of the sorceress (who incarnates the paganism repressed by Christianity) and the hysteric (who transforms her body into a theatre for forgotten scenes from a childhood that survives in suffering) (see Cixous and Clément, 1986: 5), bear some relation to the occult scenes of female sexuality enacted and ritualised for the camera in *Maidens*, *Secret Storm* and *We Aim To Please*. In these films, the impulse towards liberation is never 'settled down' into a pragmatic program of rights and equity.

These unruly films, begun in the early 1970s, were released in 1977/78 just before the prescriptive tide which feared the potency of the image washed in.<sup>32</sup> By the time Nash moved to Sydney in 1978, the avant-garde at the Sydney Filmmakers Co-op was being elbowed aside by a new wave of social action documentarists. Chapters 3 and 4 will tell the story of radical activism and the attempt of the baby-boom generation to remake the world in its own image.

---

<sup>32</sup> See Laura Mulvey (1975) for the essay which became the foundation stone for the body of work called 'feminist film theory', inaugurating a ban on pleasure and spectacle in the cinema, especially in terms of the representation of the female body. See Constance Penley (1989) for a review of the psychoanalytic work on the cinematic apparatus and identification with the image - work which formed the less popular basis for a critique of the cinema itself, rather than the critique of Hollywood narrative codes popularised by Mulvey.

---

## Chapter 3

### REMAKING THE WORLD

---

I advocate revolution but ... I don't know what a women's revolution would look like. There's no reason why it should look like any other because there has never been a revolution of this kind. (Germaine Greer, 1972: ABC Radio Interview)

The Enlightenment belief that the situation of women in the world is made - not given - and can be remade through organised, determined, political activism, was fundamental to the milieu. This article of faith had to accommodate a number of tensions within the Women's Liberation Movement which surface insistently in every record of events on the feminist film calendar during the 1970s.

A revolutionary rhetoric of total change was adopted without the concomitant political means, in Australia (a liberal democracy which had no revolutionary tradition in politics), to carry it out. The projection of a radical activist imaginary was tempered at every turn by the broad-based coalition politics which underpinned the major events organised to address the question of women's relation to the media and the media's potential for influencing the rate and direction of social change.

The ethos of *consciousness* raising which suffused the milieu - regardless of how many of the participants belonged to Women's Liberation groups - provided an effective rhetoric for containing the troublesome and unruly activities of the *unconscious*. The milieu projected a powerful, utopian image of the future. The strong light that beamed this projection forward, blinded the milieu to its own deep shadows.

## Womenvision

The 1970s began, in effect, with the Womenvision weekend at the Sydney Filmmakers Co-op in St Peter's Lane, Darlinghurst in November 1973. Although the ethos of the 1960s, with its focus on the problem of misogyny and the repression of the feminine and 'women's culture', would continue to influence filmmaking, the 1970s would emerge as the era of the critique of ideology and its reproduction through the mainstream media and popular culture. The figure of the activist would work to repress the figure of the artist: politics would attempt to rule art. The problematic figure of the woman-artist would be circumvented: the madness of the marginalised artist as sorceress or hysteric would be circumscribed by the logic of the activist as organiser or agitator.

By November 1973, women's liberationists in Sydney were ready to put the issue of the media representation of women to an open public forum. The forum would pack out the Sydney Filmmakers Co-op with over two hundred women, some of whom would travel from interstate. The organisers had high hopes for a focused engagement which would result in a concerted program for media intervention. They were to be disappointed. The sheer diversity of women - from media professionals on women's magazines, in the film industry or in the acting trade, to raw recruits with neither media nor activist experience - flew in the face of the fantasy of unified, concerted, planned interventions based on solidarity between women. Despite the irreconcilable conflicts which riddled organised attempts at unity, this fantasy would prove to be a resilient one for feminists who believed that the consciousness raising process would result in 'getting it right'. For young women emerging from 'perfect' middle class homes in the 1960s, rebellion against the unhappiness and inauthenticity of their parents' lives did not free them from the perfectionism which they absorbed from their houseproud (though often depressed) mothers.

What few noticed was that the great weakness of the suburban ideal of the 1950s was its desperate perfectionism. It was a perfectionism born of idealism, and of idealizations. (McCalman 1993: 251).<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Janet McCalman (1993: 250-252) writes about the perfectionism of the postwar middle class which had idealised its pre-Depression, pre-WWII childhood into an image of how life *should* be. McCalman cites Joyce Nicholson (1982), as a feminist classic on the escape from domestic perfectionism.

The Women's Liberation generation transferred this capacity for idealism into the public sphere, quite unaware of the pitfalls of dreaming a perfect world. For newcomers like Margot Oliver, the Women Vision weekend was a life-changing revelation, charged with the energy and excitement akin to a conversion experience. Oliver's newfound sorority was born at the very moment that the first contractions of the national cinema renaissance began to register in the Australian psyche:

There's a fascinating conjunction between the Australian film industry and the feminist movement. They were virtually born at the same time. I think that's very significant in the Sydney story.<sup>2</sup> [...]

The Women Vision weekend was fabulous, absolutely fabulous - I mean a duck to water and all of that. It was a time of great movement not only in my personal life but also in the society in general, so you expected movement, you expected things like that to happen and I expected interesting and challenging and politically relevant things to keep happening in my life. (*Oliver, 1992a*)

If one emotion could be said to characterise the milieu at this time it would be excitement.<sup>3</sup> The sense of new vistas opening up pervades all conversion experience. Women's Liberation, combined with the renaissance in Australian filmmaking, carried the promise of new thresholds. The prospect of women producing images, in a political world where the media had an agenda-setting role, carried with it a redemptive, transcendent hope that a previously unimaginable connection to the world could be realised on screen and in the politicisation of everyday life. This sudden injection of vitality into the veins of an orphaned, amnesiac generation, was a powerful fuel for activism. Having glimpsed the promised land, these converts had nothing to lose by dedicating themselves to its realisation.

---

<sup>2</sup> See Tom O'Regan (1983) on the State subsidisation of the film industry in Australia and the circumstances that enabled debates about the social purpose of cinema.

<sup>3</sup> See *Pram Factory* (1994, Anna Grieve and James Manche) for a documentary which is full of statements about the excitement of the times which celebrated *energy* and physical intensity above all else.

The activist imagination has been described in existential terms by Dudley Andrew, writing about Andre Bazin:

Sartre, like Teilhard, Malraux and Bazin himself, conceives of art as an activity by which human beings try to remake the world and their situation in it. Art is just one way we deal with this impulse; it is comparable to daydreaming, to emotional release, and to certain acts of imagination, which for Sartre would include, among other things, lovemaking, political activism and suicide. (Andrew, 1990: 70)

Just how the cinema could become the vehicle for a women's liberationist remaking of the world - and of women's situation in it - was the focus for much of the Womenvision weekend of discussion and screenings. As part of the Womenvision weekend, Margot Oliver saw a number of feminist films, which she differentiated from experimental films by women:

We saw the two or three films made by local women that existed at the time - *Film for Discussion* (SWFG, 1974) and *Woman's Day 20c* (SWFG, 1973) and a movie called *Home* (SWFG, 1973). They were literally the only three films that had been made from a feminist point of view. There were probably a few other experimental films. Bev Clarke comes to mind. I wonder if she'd made a film called *Reflections* at that stage? And there's a couple of other women who had perhaps worked with men making little experimental films.<sup>4</sup> It was very easy to watch all the films that had been made by local women in one evening at that stage.

The next day we looked at Hollywood stuff and the one I remember, was *Morocco* with Marlene Dietrich. This was such a wonderful choice. The organisers had chosen to show the beginning, where she's a relatively independent woman, and cut out the middle, and then the end where she goes off, high heeled sandals in hand, barefoot, trudging across the desert after the man. It brought the house down. I'd not seen all those movies and I realised there was a whole group of people there who'd come raised on this Hollywood diet that to me meant nothing, so it was doubly

---

<sup>4</sup> See *Womenvision Newsletter* (January 1974) for the experimental films shown: Janet Isaacs' *Footage*; Leonie Crennan's *Finnbars Film*; Clem van Leuhen's *Green and Tobias Icarus Age Four*; Gillian Burnett's *Circuit* - mostly funded by the EFTVF. Also shown were Jane Oehr's *Four Women Filmmakers*, made at the BBC, and Joan Long's history of local filmmaking *A Passionate Industry*.

ludicrous to me because I didn't know any of the Hollywood codes. It was total fantasy, how could anyone make such a stupid ending. Little did I realise how obligatory it was. (*Oliver*, 1992a)

If Hollywood was always already doomed to be the bad object, then the prototype of the 'strong, independent woman' was to become the 1970s good object, in feminist cinema and in life:

A couple of women talked about the difficulty of being employed in the industry. Jude Kuring, who at that time was one of Australia's leading actresses, talked about the difficulty of doing these ridiculously demeaning female parts - that one simply never got offered parts where the woman was strong, independent, or something remotely like the life you might be leading yourself, or trying to. [...] It really struck me that if you wanted to be an actress you either chose to do the part in the soap commercial where the woman's greatest joy in life was the washing powder, or you didn't get work. It was a very good introduction to the real world of film and the constraints on women who wanted to work in that world. Having known about neither, this was some kind of initiating discussion about women in that world and what are we going to do about it. (*Oliver*, 1992a)

It is hardly surprising that the emergent feminist film aesthetic would champion marginal films and decry the stereotypings of Hollywood and the advertising industry. However, the response to the films shown during the *Womenvision* weekend was far from uniform. Women like Martha Ansara had been avid Hollywood fans, while others like Jane Oehr, Joan Long, Lili Fraser and Julie James Bailey were experienced and knowledgeable media workers from Film Australia, the ABC and the BBC. There were huge differences in cineliteracy evident in audience responses to some of the films screened:

I recall watching two films. In the audience were women waiting for that moment when a woman or man would appear to be cast as a stereo-type. At this point these people would hiss and stamp. This is what they were waiting for. They added an emphasis which distorted the film.  
(*Womenvision Newsletter* 1974: 6)

Jane [Oehr's]<sup>5</sup> write-up of the weekend in the same Newsletter, indicates the hopes and disappointments of the cineliterate and relatively experienced filmmakers who organised the event:

Patches of disillusionment among some of the organisers. No storms broke - no downpour to relieve the tensions hanging between us all. I know the unspoken vision of what could have been was shared by the dozen or so women who had brought about this event. We had avoided really wrestling or conjuring with the ways in which we could dramatise this coming together, believing individually that the mere ingredients would magically mix and produce the recipe for a real openness between us. (Jane, *Womenvision Newsletter* 1974: 4).

The emergence of factional allegiances was characterised as either destructive or enlightening by different participants. One contributor to the *Womenvision Newsletter* let off some steam about the 'undemocratic' decision to hold an open meeting which excluded men:

It is hard to describe why the sexism of the "radicals" has such a devastating effect upon these meetings.

It is insulting that they are called "radicals". They do not voice radical ideas or purposes. They are better described as the H-Women....the Hatred Women, who bear an all encompassing hatred which is overtly directed towards men but which in practice includes women.

These women are inevitably drawn to meetings [with] such a basic weakness as the lack of democracy. They come ignoring the purpose of the meeting; not attuned to the aspirations of the meeting; with no respect for others; without tolerance towards those who are trying to understand; humiliating, dominating and threatening the meeting with their dishonesty and self-indulgence.

This is why Women Vision was gripped in a tension which at times was so intense that one could believe it was a meeting of the Klu Klux Klan. (Lesley, *Womenvision Newsletter* 1974: 6)

---

<sup>5</sup>Articles in the *Womenvision Newsletter* were signed by first names only.

Margot Oliver experienced the exclusion of men and the challenges put by the "radicals" quite differently - as part of what would become familiar feminist debates, the most classic of which was the perennial topic of 'women only':

The personal details are interesting particularly since I haven't put this on tape before. The party on the Saturday night, I was totally blown away. Two hundred women were in that Co-op: women were bursting out the windows. I hadn't been with an all-women group, I realised, since I left high school and it was a total buzz. It was obviously a total buzz for all the other women too - two hundred women going hammer and tong makes a noise. An amazing kind of noise I can't describe, just the pitch of the voice. You know there's no men there because it's a general pitch but the excitement of it was extreme. Really exciting, very, very exciting.

That was partly being all women together, which was an unusual experience in itself, and the realisation that men are together in all male groups all the time. I could go on, that's a feminist rave but it is what was happening to me: the difference in what women will say to each other, and how they will say it, when there's no men around. And the big debate on the Sunday about whether we should invite the men to the last session on Sunday because we can't leave them out, and this terrible anxiety on the part of some women that they would have actually spent an entire two days without men, that we had to at least invite them at the end:... an absolutely classic feminist debate. It's one of the core questions. The interesting thing is I've actually forgotten the decision, the debate was the thing. [...]

Subsequent to that, I came down on the side of realising very clearly the benefits of having women only events. Not least because it was an unthinkable thought, an undo-able act, so let's do it and see what happens.

(*Oliver, 1992a*).

The other classic feminist debate that was an eye-opener for Oliver that weekend was the gauntlet thrown down by lesbian women:



I think it was that weekend that a woman called Lesley Lynch stood up on the Sunday afternoon and made a lesbian statement which went like this: 'I'm sick of all you women assuming that every woman on the planet is heterosexual because I'm not for starters. I'm a lesbian and I'm sick of women in the Women's Liberation Movement putting down the lesbian, for example, when some man says to you, oh you're all just a bunch of dykes anyway, you all go, oh no, no we're not, no, no, no we're heterosexual'. And I just sat there with my mouth open and looked at this woman - the classic jaw drop; it was a bit of a jaw drop weekend. I thought, not only is this woman actually standing up in public and saying she's a lesbian, and not dropping dead or being struck by a bolt of lightning, but I actually took the political point of what she was saying very strongly.

[...] In retrospect, this is my lesbian story: I decided then and there if any man ever walked up to me and said, 'you're just a dyke anyway', I'd say, 'yes I am and what's it to you' No man ever did, but subsequently I became a lesbian. (*Oliver, 1992a*).

When Oliver left the Co-op after the Saturday night party she saw the world through different eyes:

The extraordinary experience of being with two hundred women at this all women's party was absolutely high energy field. And virtually coming straight out the door onto William Street, Kings Cross on a Saturday night with every yahoo from the suburbs, the prostitutes and so forth - all you had to do was walk out and some man was propositioning you, or giving you the finger - it was culture shock. That was amazing, I'll never forget that moment because it was the same culture that I'd lived in for twenty-six years, albeit on a Saturday night in one of its extreme versions. [...] all I had done was be with women for a day and a half and it was already like I came from another culture. The culture I grew up in was the alien one. (*Oliver, 1992a*)

The tensions between women which surfaced at the Womenvision weekend would continue to worry women's film groups during the 1970s. However, the power of the conversion experience in many cases was strong enough to override the apparent discord. In the excitement of the 1970s, it was possible to wear feminism as a shifting, breathing, lifegiving (and in

some cases, lifesaving) mask which, in Peter Brooks' words, "liberates the person by taking away their habitual forms" (Brooks, 1987: 228). Margot Oliver's account of her conversion experience and the instant culture shock afforded by her new perspective, conveys something of the exhilarating shift in habitual forms experienced by those who donned feminism as a lifegiving mask. There was the promise of being able to inhabit this mask, not in order to conceal or lie, but to embody powerful emotional forces which had a political intent rather than a personal value.

### A gloriously naive suggestion

The wave of excitement that carried Margot Oliver, undaunted, through the tensions of the Womenvision weekend propelled a number of women to respond to Martha Ansara's rallying cry 'Who wants to help organise a women's film workshop?'. This can-do spirit overrode the sense of disappointment and incoherence which some of the organisers experienced that weekend. Margot Oliver remembers that it was Martha Ansara's proposal "that we try and actually teach ourselves to make a film and that this was very connected to the politics which was, OK if we don't like the image of women in film, let's make our own films - a gloriously naive suggestion now, in many ways" (Oliver, 1992).

From the beginning, the participants in the 1974 Women's Film Workshop were collectively responsible for organising it. A month after the Women Vision weekend, an application to the Australian Film and Television School had been submitted and the workshop was awarded \$6,000 (\$1,000 more than requested). The application argued strongly for a *women-only* workshop:

We feel positively that when women teach women, especially through a democratic and sharing structure, the emotional, social and political benefits are equally significant as the more technical learning. (Quoted in *Women Vision Newsletter* 1974: 10)

The 1974 Women's Film Workshop is indicative of the political ethos of the milieu in several ways: the participants were involved in the administration of the workshop including finding their own premises and instructors; the aim was to train them as all-round filmmakers although several discovered an affinity for a particular craft such as cinematography or sound; and the workshop participants succeeded in producing nine completed films for distribution (see Appendix B). Martha Ansara was a staunch advocate of the low-budget, do-it-yourself mentality that saw ten films come out of the workshop:

We had a volunteer mentality. You didn't have expectations that people would hand over money to you, because there was a political agenda. You know that it's an extraordinary coup that your interests, which are oppositional, and the established interests coincide enough for the

established interests, which control the money, to give you what you want.

Later, as the mentality became a handout mentality, you held out your hand and if they gave it to you, you could do it and if they didn't give it to you, you couldn't do it. Later, our agenda got moved without our even noticing it.

[...] It was also a time of economic plenty. There was virtually no unemployment. Things were very cheap. People's standards of living hadn't become quite as consumerist. Even things like hot water - you didn't expect to have running hot water. You settled for a lot less and things cost a lot less. (*Ansara, 1992b*)

It was taken for granted that the workshop participants would learn every aspect of the filmmaking process by working collectively and rotating crew roles in a non-hierarchical way.

The workshop model was derived from the Co-op but also from a documentary filmmaking concept which was quite alive at Film Australia where young production assistants came in and were trained to do every aspect of filmmaking. That was the notion of a filmmaker. Dick Mason who was head of production at Film Australia, still calls himself a filmmaker, not a film producer. Some of us still call ourselves filmmakers.

It was a different organisational phase of filmmaking. Here I am [in 1992] with Graham Isaacs doing a film budget in the authorised way - all sorts of expenses, non-productive in my view, enter into it. We're having difficulty keeping this budget under \$300,000. It's going to be a very tight budget. Can you imagine? (*Ansara, 1992b*)

Margot Oliver threw herself into the workshop with her customary enthusiasm, starting from a point of complete ignorance about film funding and the filmmaking process, and ending up doing distribution work at the Sydney Filmmakers Co-op. One of the unique aspects of the 1974 workshop was the learn-as-you-go ethic, similar to the approach Margot Nash and Robin Laurie engaged in to make *We Aim To Please*. In this way, the first workshop films were made unconsciously - the process was allowed to dictate:

I got into the group where we were the leftovers. We didn't have a particular idea or a particular friendship or a particular affinity. [...] Out of that group of three came what's actually become known as my movie, *The Moonage Daydreams of Charlene Stardust* (1974) which ended up being thirteen minutes long. But there were two other women, Jan Milne and Jan Carroll, involved in it with me. We shared the roles of script, direction and production and it was a genuine sharing - we did do a third of that each, and sound recording and camera, to try out the different roles, but when it came to the editing stage they both had other commitments - one had children - and they didn't go through the editing phase so I sat down and edited that film. It seemed to take me ages. I edited it in Martha [Ansara]'s house in Glebe because she had an editing room so it was by her good graces really that the film even got finished. It seemed to take me longer than anybody else. (*Oliver, 1992a*)

Although there was no pressure to make a feminist film, the 1974 workshop had been generated by a feminist event and attracted a number of feminists whose films would join *A Film For Discussion*, *Woman's Day 20c* and *Home* to form the core of the women's collection at the Co-op. Martha Ansara's selection of films for the workshop screenings provided a rudimentary education in experimental film - which was the dominant Co-op aesthetic at that time - for some of the participants.

I remember the films that we saw were really interesting: they were a lot of the experimental films of the time. [...] I look back on what was being done by men, by boys, in pushing film for its possibilities, and I'm quite sorry in some ways my subsequent history hasn't allowed me to play with film ... I was very interested to use some of the so-called experimental possibilities of what you could do with the film image, and learn to meld that with content, because very few of the boys' films were particularly interested in content. (*Oliver, 1992a*)

The final stage of the workshop process involved the discovery that a film is incomplete until it finds an audience. This revelation completed Margot Oliver's initiation into the mysteries of cinema and propelled her into distribution work with the result that her nascent desire to work with the film image was sacrificed to the political end of getting the feminist message out to audiences. This involved a feminist push into the Co-op which

would displace the Co-op's Ubu founders and inaugurate a new regime where the focus would be distribution driven, social action filmmaking:

We had a screening at Anzac House down here opposite Hyde Park, for friends and cast and anybody interested. We advertised it and no doubt got some of the general public, probably mostly Women's Movement to it, to a packed auditorium which was absolutely a buzz. It was showing a film made for an audience - this was unexpected to me. When I look back I think how naive, but I didn't know the process - hadn't a clue, had never been through anything remotely like it before. What was extraordinary was to sit in an audience watching one's own film and having them laugh at the bits that you'd intended to be funny or having them groan at the bits that you thought were groansome and that's what actually happened. It was such an experience: ... this movie actually means something to other people ... and noticing that some of the other movies didn't work so well. [...]

And then of course, going home with my little blue baby - you know, blue film can - in my arms and putting it on the bedroom shelf and thinking, 'Well what happens next? Oh films only exist when they're actually put through a projector and they're screened, otherwise they're just this odd bit of celluloid that sits on a shelf'.

That's why I got involved in film distribution. So the process was organic for me. [...] And of course there was already a whole organisation, the Film Co-op, there to do that and of course I was at that period in my life where I'd stopped school teaching and didn't know what I wanted to do. Well, here it was, it was all unfolding fairly organically in front of me. I got involved in the Film Co-op meetings just as a co-operative member, first of all, once again instigated and pushed into it by Martha [Ansara] who was already highly involved in the Co-operative ... Then a job came up, I think in February '75, a full time distribution job ... (Oliver, 1992a)

Not all the participants in the workshop were as new to filmmaking as Margot Oliver, although some, like Carole Kostanich and Gillian Leahy, also followed their films through to the distribution stage and found themselves at the beginning of a long involvement with the Co-op. Others, like Pat Fiske and Jeni Thornley used the workshop to expand their previous involvement with filmmaking, while Martha Ansara, Gillian Leahy and

Dasha Ross launched themselves from the workshop into the Australian Film and Television School's first three-year fulltime program in 1975.

## At the Crossroads

Women's Liberation filmmaking began to acquire a recorded history as reviews of the available films were prefaced with thumbnail sketches of the origins of the films, starting with the story of the Sydney Women's Film Group, the *Womenvision* weekend and the 1974 workshop. Loma Scarles' 1975 review of nine of the workshop films argued that feminism "needs to deeply concern itself" with the film industry because of the "compellingly 'real' nature of film, plus the general ignorance about film-making in the community" (1975: 33). The workshop was seen in terms of its demystifying function "proving you can learn the basics and even make a film in a few weeks" (Scarles, 1975: 34). Scarles saw the workshop films as heralding a new wave of film art: "With all this going on in the prime myth-making machine of our times, we WILL invent ourselves, the age of the New Image is at hand ...". (1975: 37)

Despite her own enthusiasm, Scarles had reservations about the readiness of some audiences to identify with some aspects of the workshop films. Gillian Leahy describes her workshop film, *Hearts and Spades*, as a typically overambitious first film which, despite problems with coverage and inexperienced actors, "has some sort of raw emotional power about ambivalent feelings towards men" (Leahy, 1992a). Scarles saw the film's "best use among women who have been through a fair amount of consciousness raising and are used to the idea of women's and men's groups" (1975: 37). Doubts about the capacity of suburban middle class or working class women to identify with the final cathartic retribution sequence in Leahy's film, promotes a view of the ideal audience for these films as already feminist - as if consciousness raising guaranteed a true response, and as if suburban, middle-class and working class women were other to the Women's Movement.

Jane Oehr's review of *A Film For Discussion* in the *Womenvision Newsletter* reveals a much greater trust in the film and in audiences:

Martha's film is intended as a propagandist piece for women. It transcends this role, and becomes a fragment of social realism. I say fragment because the film ends far too soon, and the audience is left with unsatisfied sympathies, and curiosities about the people who are so acutely observed.



[...] in the car ride home, which must be a ritual among Australians, Jenny discusses some of the things she has been thinking about with her boyfriend. He has opted for the system, the status quo, grudgingly and you feel rather innocently. Their talk is unsatisfactory because he reduces everything to the trivial level. The conflicts in Jenny's mind are further dramatised around the dinner table with her family. [...] The film is much better than it thinks it is. It should definitely not be confined to women audiences - because it is about the Australian condition and the human condition. (Jane, *Womenvision Newsletter*, 1974: 4-5)

Sarah Gibson's first encounter with the 1974 workshop films provided a strong impetus for the future direction of her own work in documentary:

When I came up from Melbourne to see the Women's Workshop films I knew their context because of the Women's Movement. I knew the audience they were trying to reach. I had a friend who'd done that workshop and I knew the women had gained a lot personally by acquiring the technical skills. I was envious that they'd done it as a group. I was very interested in the films they'd made. I wasn't interested in questions of form. I was interested in learning the technical skills. Now I look back and I don't understand why that was - whether the fervour of feminism meant the acquiring of skills which were going to become propaganda skills. It was in that frame of mind. I knew very little about film until I did the [media production] course at Latrobe University. (Gibson, 1992)

Looking back on her responses to the workshop films, Gibson recalls recognising the beginnings of a distinct aesthetic which involved an ethics of closeness rather than distance. The shift from Hollywood erotics to documentary ethics would be central to the feminist film project.<sup>6</sup>

I felt intuitively that the workshop films were trying to express women's experience. In *What's The Matter Sally* or Margot Oliver's first film, *Moonage Daydreams of Charlene Stardust*, certain moments in those films touched a commonality of experience. *Woman's Day 20c* has some fantastic things in it. I was aware of the *Chequerboard* [ABC-TV]

---

<sup>6</sup> See Bill Nichols (1991: 76-77) on the ethics of the documentary gaze and its relation to the erotics of classical Hollywood spectatorship.

programs that tried to deal with women's issues. I remember the one that was done on women on antidepressants. I remember thinking *Woman's Day 20c* was more effective. There was a sense of being *in* the film as opposed to being the subject of the film. Already I'd developed an intuitive critique about the victim mentality. I felt the very early Women's Workshop films had freed themselves from that. I remember the very early *Women and Film* journals. I remember thinking this is an enormously rich area and women overseas are thinking about this, so there was a sense of it being international as well. (Gibson, 1992)

The 1974 workshop marks the beginning of the emergence of a distinctive feminist film project which managed to clear a path through the tangled undergrowth of the 1973 Womenvision weekend. In the reception of the workshop films, there is a shift away from acknowledging the cacophony of antagonistic voices evident in accounts of the Womenvision weekend. Jane Oehr's ability to generously and perceptively review the wide range of films shown during that weekend - including historical and anthropological films, psychological drama, short experiments, and self-proclaimed feminist propaganda - without a hint of prescriptiveness, would prove to be quite rare. Oehr ended her review of the Womenvision weekend by voicing her fear that the preoccupation with critiquing the media would draw women away from their own creative ground:

Sure it's important for women to be able to work in the media systems that exist, but what happened to those fantasies, and those ideals, that we have, each one of us, buried somewhere in our bodies, about the way it could be. And how can we move towards making it happen?

I am afraid of dispensing all that energy we have onto useless blotting paper ground; afraid that our creative spirits will dissipate themselves in exhausting tussles with the giant, while all the time we could have been making music in the valley. (Jane, *Womenvision Newsletter*, 1974: 5)

The *Womenvision Newsletter* is exceptional for the forthright expressions of joy, anger, fear, reflection and blame (aimed at 'disruptive' radicals and lesbians), and for the concluding question in one contribution: "Does a women's movement need to be singular?" (Carolyn, *Womenvision Newsletter*, 1974: 8). Existing sects within the Women's Liberation

Movement had been brought together with women professionals working in the media, revealing just how troublesome a dynamic this could be.<sup>7</sup>

An interview with Martha Ansara (at that time, Martha Kay) and Jane Oehr, published in *Refractory Girl* (Fiske and Kay, 1975: 22-31), reveals more fully the emergent points of conflict between grassroots and institutional sites of feminist filmmaking. I've already set up a spurious distinction here - the fact that Jane Oehr made films for Film Australia and the BBC and that Martha Ansara made films on EFTVF and other grants seems to separate them into institutional and independent camps, yet they had both been assessors for the EFTVF and directors of the Sydney Filmmakers Co-op - an indicator of the extent to which movement between different sites of film practice characterised the milieu. The paths of women filmmakers, in particular, criss-crossed the city - an indication of the artisanal, ephemeral and transient nature of film production in Australia.

Attempts to contain and channel the pluralism of the feminist media project are evident in the issues that were debated by Ansara and Oehr in a wide-ranging interview which explored their different paths into filmmaking (Fiske and Kay, 1975). A (christian) political ethic of sacrifice and duty is evident in the setting up of either-or choices for women: should distribution work take priority over the development of individual creativity; was the need for women-only productions a more important goal than individual women making an impact in existing media institutions; should women represent a constituency of women filmmakers when they are given token positions on funding panels; is the emotional impact of a film more important than a coherent and correct political analysis; should an activist group linked to the Women's Liberation Movement be given more commitment than broad based coalitions concerned with increasing the numbers of women in the industry; should an interest in experimental

---

<sup>7</sup> The antagonisms and political discord which surfaced at the Womenvision weekend were common at Women's Liberation Movement events. See Jan Mercer (ed) (1975: 395-426) for writings which record some of the disputes between WLM revolutionaries and WEL (Women's Electoral Lobby) reformists. Anne Summers' report on four conferences that she attended between 1970-73 is instructive here. Summers in Mercer (ed) (1975: 418-419) warned against assuming "the arrogance and the lack of critical awareness which all too often characterizes those who see themselves as holding a monopoly of revolutionary truths. [...] We should not regard the others (whoever they be) as 'less developed' women who 'need' to receive the blessing of our profound insights."

work on the cinematic image be sacrificed for the clarity of the message in the documentary form?

In 1975 Ansara still did not see herself as a filmmaker although shooting two of the 1974 workshop films had given her the chance to admit that she "wanted to be the one that takes the pictures" (Fiske and Kay, 1975: 25).

Ansara also admitted that she was much more interested in experimental films again, "although I've gone through a period when I felt obligated to documentaries or semi-documentaries" (Fiske and Kay, 1975: 24).

The conflict between political obligations and creative exploration underpinned the splitting of propaganda and experimental work, and feminist and women's films.

MARTHA: I think you can have women who make films but that's not the same thing as, say, feminist filmmaking. Women can become successful now in the system and women can adopt all sorts of ways of being special, being superior; they can become successful. I think we are going to see more and more women trying to do that - trying to make careers.

JANE: Are you opposed to the fact that women who want to realize themselves as "artists" creatively through film are therefore part of the system and neglecting their real task which is feminist filmmaking?

MARTHA: I think there is almost no point in women making films unless they question the whole basis on which films are made. [...]

JANE: The nature of the work is not necessarily just a woman's problem: it is every person who is involved in media or any power communication tool at all, isn't it? (Fiske and Kay, 1975: 26)

Oehr raised the problem of women being typecast into making films about women's issues. Ansara saw it as a question of political consciousness, emphasising that "there is nobody to speak for women except us women and that is a big priority to me."<sup>8</sup> This leads into a discussion of whether

---

<sup>8</sup> In 1975, during her first year at the Film School, Ansara made the agit-prop documentary *Don't Be Too Polite Girls*, which addressed the issue of women's double day at home and at work. The film used a feminist street theatre group and interviews to raise questions about women's lack of job security (the 1974 recession was taking its toll on women's employment in manufacturing industries) and the union movement's backward attitudes towards women. The film also emphasised the vulnerable position of non-English speaking migrant women in the labour market. The film's overall message was solidarity and struggle. In 1977 Ansara, with David Hay, made another film about women factory workers, *Me and Daphne*, which the

it's possible to speak in a unified voice when there is an incredible fracturing of interests within the women's movement. Ansara proposed pulling together as a group. Oehr pointed out the difficulty that any collective faces in trying to present a unified point of view. Ansara claimed "you can go much more wrong by yourself" (Fiske and Kay, 1975: 27-30). Ansara separated the pleasure of immersion in the creative process from 'the practical level' of leading an ethical life:

MARTHA: What I like about making movies is that while I do it, I completely lose myself in the activities. I'm concentrating; there aren't any pieces of me elsewhere. I'm integrated, doing what I'm doing. But on a practical level you try to lead your life in a way you feel good and sensible. Which for me, means being a communist feminist. This is something I feel very deeply.

JANE: But I'm very interested when you say you lose yourself.

[...]

MARTHA: Well, for me the only equivalent is sex; you completely concentrate.

JANE: Right, that is being totally alive, isn't it?

(Fiske and Kay, 1975: 31)

Oehr tried to focus the discussion on the issue of the specificity and power of the creative process. Ansara countered with an analogy of working in the shoe factory, taking responsibility for the work and trying to change the kinds of shoes that get made by trying to get control of the factory and the society. The hunch that film and politics must be connected at a profound level faltered in the face of such workerist analogies which were at odds with Ansara's own experience of integration through creative immersion in an artisanal, rather than factory, process.

Earlier in the interview Oehr and Ansara discussed the efficacy of film as an agent of social change:

JANE: Do you believe, though, that the way in which you do have an effect on people ... or bring about some change in the way they feel

towards their life or issues has to be an emotional experience? Is that one of the virtues of film, that it can do that?

MARTHA: I don't think film can affect people very much. It can only be part of a process in which people are changing, but yes I think that unless people make a thing theirs, emotionally, in their feelings, that they can't change themselves or bring about social action that is meaningful to them.

(Fiske and Kay, 1975: 24-25)

It's tempting at this point to try to imagine the kind of feminist interventions in the media that could have taken place if the workings of the creative process (in the filmmaker and the audience) had been given centre stage, over and above the demand to fulfil the duties and obligations of a feminist filmmaker. The gradual polarisation between 'women making films' and 'feminist film work', meant an overall loss of integration for the milieu, as women attracted to the cinema *and* to Women's Liberation found that there were considerable incongruities between art and politics. In this regard, Ansara was the milieu's most emblematic and diametric figure - standing at the crossroads between cinema and revolution, stretching herself in both directions, determined to map one path onto the other.<sup>9</sup> Oehr was a staunch defender of the creative process, trusting it implicitly as the true task of the filmmaker: by implication, to put the creative work first is to refuse the logic of the bureaucracy and the marketplace. Ansara was an initiate and a devotee of that process, and yet she did not wish to overemphasise it for fear that the political struggle (in the real world) would be lost.

---

<sup>9</sup> My image owes much to the image of the pregnant woman standing at the crossroads in Jean-Luc Godard's *Vent d'est* (1969), asking 'which way to political cinema?'

## Division in the ranks

The excitement and energy generated for some women by the Women Vision weekend and the 1974 Women's Film Workshop inaugurated a short-lived period when the sky was the limit for newly born filmmakers. One fantasy shared by different groups of women was that of a production house, making and distributing films for the Women's Liberation Movement. It came as quite a shock then to discover that some of the sisters were planning to flee the nest, by applying for admission to the new three year program at the Australian Film and Television School (AFTVS) in 1975. It is striking just how sensitive an issue this still is for Margot Oliver and Jeni Thornley who were both rejected by the school three years in a row. Margot Oliver:

I felt that there was a working group of women film-makers developing, who had, let's say, political interests - I don't say identical but *political* interests - in making films that were to do with feminism and other progressive type ideas. And that we were developing in effect, a production group or production personnel who could then become production teams on each other's films. To me it seemed like we had started a process that could logically continue - to make films that were basically independently generated. [...]

I felt I was walking off in one direction and the next thing I turned around to see all my mates walking with me, and they were all walking off in the other direction. They were all walking off towards the Film School.  
(*Oliver, 1992a*)

The opportunity for training through the Film School pulled the rug out from under a fledgling community of feminist filmmakers that had been born in a burst of excitement but was now threatened with premature death:

Suddenly from a very collective process - it felt to me like a very collective process - there were these atomised individuals who were all individually deciding that for their individual careers it was best to go to the Film School. And not only that, because of the process ... we were all in competition with each other to see who would get selected and who wouldn't. [...] And that was it. That was the end for me. That was the end of the filmmaking community or group that had a potential for me or

was already in a nascent form: a production group, a criticism group, a distribution group, a political group ... (Oliver, 1992a)

Martha Ansara and Gill Leahy, who were accepted into the Film School, believed that women needed to insist on access to technical training that was usually the province of men. Although Leahy had no ambitions to become a filmmaker - unlike others who were rejected by the Film School - she had a broad view of Women's Liberation as part and parcel of a range of activities which could include filmmaking as an alternative to an academic career path:

I never saw working in film as something that women did. The only women I knew of who did it had family or class connections. It was not a career I had envisaged. Lower middle class people without connections didn't regard themselves as having an in to that. I didn't think about continuing past the [1974] workshop, except we happened to be editing at the Film School and they were recruiting for the first fulltime course at that time. Ken Cameron was helping me with the editing while he was editing his film *Sailing to Brooklyn*.

I hadn't taken a great deal of interest in the Co-op movement. I wasn't interested in the cinema. I didn't go to see films. Martha [Ansara] was the only one who had any film buff experience. When I went for the interview for the Film School they asked 'what's your favourite film?' You think everyone else is saying Antonioni or Pasolini. I sat there with this sinking feeling for a while and then said 'Have you ever seen *Whistle Down the Wind* with Hayley Mills and John Mills?' I was lucky because Storry Walton knew the film and was a fan. It had things a film buff might have been attracted to - real kids from Yorkshire, untrained actors and it was quite symbolic. [...]

I'd been taking still photographs at demos and I'd taught at one of the women's creativity festivals. I was showing an interest in camera which dates back to my father buying me a Box Brownie when I was eight. I used to develop and print the pictures.... I compared myself with my brother who was mapping out an academic career for himself. I saw myself as someone who had organisational and social skills that were being wasted in academic life. When filmmaking came along it seemed to be an area that would suit me in lots of ways, although when I got to the



Film School I felt huge inabilities, not being a film buff. I didn't feel I had any strong visual ability, which I've since developed.

[...]

After the [1974] workshop I went to Co-op meetings and in later years I came in and gave weekend workshops on production management and lighting. The Co-op distributed *Hearts and Spades* (1974) and my first Film School film, *The Settlement* (1976). I became involved in the Co-op as people did then because they were distributing their films. (Leahy, 1992a)

The School had selected students who would have an impact on the film industry, although as a result of the outspokenness of its first intake, the selection process became more cautious, and selected only a handful of women in the following intakes.

The first fulltime intake into the Film School reflects its interest in people who had something to say. That's why someone like me got in. They clearly chose a lot of people who had political agendas and weren't hiding them. Some of them were feminist agendas. We were all quite good at organising and we gave them hell. They had the belief that the film industry needed shaking up by people from different walks of life and with different interests and barrows to push. They were trying to pick people who were highly motivated for various causes.

People who thought of applying were encouraged to by their feminist friends in the sense that we need to get in there, we need to get these skills, we need to be able to disseminate them to others in the movement. That's one area where I might have been thought to be failing. I say that because of my paranoia about my exclusion from Feminist Film Workers. I was found wanting, having gone off with the Film School mob. Martha [Ansara] kept going to meetings, doing pamphlets and made that film *Secret Storm* with the lesbian collective that lived in the Witches House. That was more of an admitted site than my associations with gay and libertarian people, and anarchists and Tin Sheds people. (Leahy, 1992a)

Three years training at the Film School was an enviable privilege precisely because entry was so competitive and because the Film School was extraordinarily well-resourced. Fulltime training did make a difference to the women who got in, in terms of setting them on a professional path, but their commitment to activism and their skepticism of institutional agendas

meant that many would continue to work within the independent sector. Martha Ansara had a particular view of her relation to institutions, expressed in the *Refractory Girl* interview where she described thinking of herself as a representative of the group (Fiske and Kay, 1975: 30). This sense of identification with grassroots movements clearly defined for Ansara her various roles within institutions.

Ansara's commitment to collective, grassroots activism had to accommodate her discovery of a great love for cinematography which three years at the Film School enabled her to develop:

In making some of these films right from the beginning I discovered that the part that I really liked to do was the cinematography. [...] I don't have a good memory but anything to do with the camera I can remember. I can remember where I put the lights everytime. This is my real interest as it turned out. I had a genuine ambition for a career.

Camera work is so concrete. You work with your hands and you work with your imagination. I love lighting. If you're shooting a documentary - it's got the same function as sex I think. It takes you out of yourself. You just dissolve. Of course you use your eyes but I like working with my hands. Your hands know a great deal. That's why you need to keep up shooting. You don't think 'oh I've got to focus there'. Your hands go to the ring and they focus where it needs. You don't know how you load a magazine. Your hands know. As well, I have a little kind of vice: mostly when I look at things I look at light. So if that's your pleasure - looking at light - what else would you want to do. I like to sit places and just watch things. Well, [as a cinematographer] you've got a real reason to do it.

More than that I love going places. I love documentary films for that reason. I don't like the responsibility of picking up the whole film really. I even like editing more than producing and directing. But I don't know enough about editing and I don't like to be in dark rooms. I like to move around. I like physical labour.

[...]

I learned everything from Brian Probyn [at the Film School] and we'd have these cups of tea and just somehow this knowledge would pass from him to me, through a cup of tea. Every time I talked to him I could do more. ... I used to ride around in his old car and play Mah Jong with him. He used

to be a communist. He left the Communist Party in '68 over the issue of the dictatorship of the proletariat. We got along really well. Anybody who was willing to learn from him he was open to. But you had to go to him. He had a very Zen attitude. If you asked he would tell you. If you didn't ask you weren't ready to know. [...]

Bill Constable was the head of the camera department. He became very angry with me for the things I was doing in the School that went on and on. There was a strike ... and it was very unpleasant. The odd thing is that at that school a lot of the students didn't take the exercises seriously. I took them very seriously. It's quite ironic that they tried to get me out on a missed deadline, in the end, which was not my fault. I actually was the one student that never missed a deadline. In the end they had to ban me from doing too many exercises. I spent a week in the Film Lab which was wonderful. On the day the assessors came in, they behaved as if we were just all so happy together and I dressed up in my highest red stilettos and a little skirt and only showed them two films that were done perfectly, one for lighting and one for [camera] operating - Sophia [Turkiewicz]'s *Letters From Poland* (1977). I was bombarded with technical questions and of course I knew the answers. I'd set my hair and put on some make-up and I teeter-tottered out in my heels and I thought 'that'll give them something to think about'. Just for fun. (Ansara, 1992b)

The first fulltime intake into the Film School in 1975 was exceptional. It pulled in a number of the baby boom generation who were highly politicised, vocal and prepared to take strike action to support each other. Ansara's discovery of a vocation for cinematography did not temper her political activism:

They dismissed a very good student called Mick Clark and I tried to organise his defence. They sacked three students including me because they thought we weren't the kind of people the Film School would be proud of in their work although we'd been guaranteed a full three years - didn't measure up culturally, not snazzy types. This was in the early years of Fraser and the School was full of auditors.<sup>10</sup> It was fighting for

---

<sup>10</sup> Malcolm Fraser, as leader of the Liberal-National Party coalition, ended the Whitlam government's second term with a historically unprecedented double dissolution in November 1975. Fraser's 'Razor Gang' proceeded to audit the 'excesses' of the Whitlam years.

its life. I was sacked on this pretext of a missed deadline. We organised a strike but we were careful not to let anyone know it was on because we didn't want the media to attack the School. I was a real troublemaker but I was still the only person who went to Professor Toeplitz's lectures all the time - everybody found them dry. I saved those notes forever. They were brilliant. Dry, economic: addressed the structural issues in the film industry at different periods.

At the same time I had one little baby who was quite young and another 8/9/10 years old. (*Ansara, 1992b*)<sup>11</sup>

Envy of the fortunate Film School students had its roots in an ingenuous, collective ethic which, in the independent sector, was an ethic born of necessity for those seeking to make and distribute films on tiny grants. Jeni Thornley saw the collective muffling of individual ambition in terms of the tall poppy syndrome:

It was part of the movement then. We were all equal. We don't want anyone climbing to the top of the pile. The tall poppy stuff. It's actually about not being able to confront difference. It's trying to challenge the structure and roles. It's got some good aspects to it but it didn't face the reality that people are ambitious and do have drive and so on. [...]

There were those who went to the Film School and those who didn't. Those who got in and those who didn't. Which was a very divisive thing especially if you look at that politic of SWFG and not having roles or hierarchies and not naming anything. Then the school comes along which is the industry model totally and everyone's scrambling for a place. There was a lot of unresolved hostility about that time. I went to work with Margot Knox on the [International Women's] Film Festival and that took the place of the Film School.<sup>12</sup> It was like: OK, I'll be educated about the work of women in film and organise a national travelling film festival. That took all of '75. Somewhere in that year I was writing the script on

---

<sup>11</sup> Ansara (1987: 181) took some relish from the circumstances of her rejection by Toeplitz from the 1973 Interim Year at the Australian Film and Television School: "Professor Toeplitz spotted me as a communist and a trouble-maker but missed the fact that I was five months pregnant."

<sup>12</sup> See Suzanne Spinner (1987) on the 1975 International Women's Film Festival.

abortion which changed to *Maidens*. I started *Maidens* in '75 (until '78) and I went into analysis in '77. (Thornley: 1992b)

For Thornley, her rejection from the Film School in 1975 would not have been made easier by the School's acceptance of Dasha Ross, after their collaboration on their 1974 workshop film *Still Life*. The film is a moody, wordless evocation of the process of looking and being looked at in the context of a woman posing naked for an art class. The sharply observed and humorous mise-en-scene and the temporal rhythm of duration and pause, have a strong impact formally and emotionally. The film's joint credit and the workshop's ethic of rotating roles made it difficult to claim any individual contribution, a factor which would also shape Thornley's career after the collective work on *For Love or Money*.

For activists who did not go to the Film School, the years from 1975-78 were far from idle. Although much of the initial energy and excitement had dissipated, the mid-1970s were apprenticeship years when the groundwork was laid for the resurgent activist years of the late 1970s. Some members of the SWFG were busy making their own films, organising the 1975 International Women's Year Film Festival, and simultaneously attempting to acquire craft skills - cinematography for Carole Kostanich and Jeni Thornley and sound recording for Pat Fiske. After the 1974 workshop, Thornley, Fiske and Kostanich established a pattern for independent women filmmakers by crewing on other people's films and making their own films, on grants, over an extended period of time.<sup>13</sup>

Fiske had done sound recording in the 1974 film workshop and, together with Kathy Gollan who worked for ABC radio, she bought Paul Lyneham's Nagra and microphone. When she returned in 1979 from a year overseas with *Woolloomooloo*, Fiske made a conscious decision to pursue sound recording in order to support herself while she made the BLF film, *Rocking the Foundations* (1985), which ended up taking five years to complete.

---

<sup>13</sup> Thornley made *Maidens* from 1974 to 1978 on two EFTVF grants; Fiske made *Woolloomooloo* with Denise White on two EFTVF grants from 1974-78; Kostanich made *The Selling of the Female Image* on an EFTVF grant in 1977; Margot Oliver made *Charlene Does Med At Uni* on two EFTVF grants from 1974-77. See Ken Berryman, 1985(a) Appendix B.

I came back in '79 and I started hanging around feature film sets to learn sound recording. Haydn Keenan and Esben Storm were making *Going Down* and Lloyd Carrick was the sound recorder on it. He usually used Chris Goldsmith to boom operate, but Chris couldn't do the first couple of weeks so Haydn Keenan suggested he use me. I asked Lloyd question after question. I didn't stop. I learnt a lot from doing that. I watched what he did and I hung around the set a lot after that. I went on as many sets as I could, and all along I was working on the BLF film and teaching swimming. I stopped teaching swimming once I got back actually. Most of the money I made from 1979 onwards, was from sound recording.  
(Fiske, 1993)

Thornley and Kostanich took up alternative training options to the AFTVS Fulltime Program to improve their chances of getting work as camera assistants. Thornley enrolled in a camera assistant's course in the AFTVS's Open Program in 1977:

Wendy Freecloud and I were the only women on that course and about twenty blokes. I used to hate it. I was getting work in the industry as an assistant. Jon Rhodes, who was then a documentary cameraman at Film Australia and a friend of mine, said to me one day in '75 - he'd taught camera in the Women's Film Workshop - 'Women aren't allowed in the camera department at Film Australia. Do you want to try and challenge that?' I said yes. He said 'I'll try and employ you as my camera assistant. See if we can break through it that way'. [...] So he took me on and I worked with him as a freelance camera assistant at Film Australia for four or five documentaries. Then I started to get a spate of jobs.

There were very few women camera assistants then. I used to assist Martha [Ansara] whenever she wanted an assistant. I got jobs at the Pram Factory when they made *Super Smoke* - an anti-cancer film with all the Pram Factory people in it. I got the job on *Journey Among Women* as Tom Cowan's camera assistant. There was this cluster of work. I wanted to learn everything. I wanted to do all roles. You know how Pat Fiske has maintained her sound recording skill plus made her own films? I thought, get a skill and maybe train to become a camera operator. And make my own films. It just seemed like a reasonable way to go.

I liked shooting. I liked framing. I was drawn to that. Martha had worked on various films and I'd assisted her on a number of films and she used to say 'Always the bridesmaid, never the bride.' To make the leap to cinematographer was really hard. [...] I shot Megan [McMurchy]'s film *Apartments* with Wendy Freecloud and we also shot Jeune Pritchard's amazing film on Frances Farmer. Both of them came out of the '77 workshop. (Thornley, 1992)<sup>14</sup>

Carole Kostanich, who had also been in the 1974 workshop, enrolled in the North Sydney Technical College's filmmaking course but dropped out after the instructors insisted that no woman would ever be hired as a camera assistant by institutions like the ABC, where most of the course graduates expected to find employment (Kostanich, 1992).

Margot Oliver became an enthusiastic distribution worker at the Co-op and a lobbyist in the revamped Sydney Women's Film Group:

I loved film distribution and I still do to this day, actually matching films to audiences, getting films to the appropriate audiences. [...]

There was this fledgling collection of essentially feminist films, and the collection I walked into, which was experimental films, almost all by men ... So I was interested in the experimental side of things and here I was answering the telephone and writing publicity material for people to see these films. I loved it. I knew the films intimately, I knew them back to front. I was very good, I think, at representing what they were. [...]

Those films travelled because it was that time of the Women's Movement that no matter how technically rough they were - they were pretty technically rough - women wanted to see them. They just loved seeing films that spoke to their own experience - that were made by women who might be roughly like them ... Like hotcakes, they travelled. (Oliver, 1992a)

From the mid-1970s, the Sydney Women's Film Group began to meet regularly, focusing on distribution activities and political lobbying. The

---

<sup>14</sup> See Thornley (1977) on the Camera Assistants' course at the AFTVS.

Film School became a prime target after its 1976 intake of twenty-five students included only three women. Margot Oliver remembers her first effort to lobby the Film School to adopt an Affirmative Action policy:

The Film School had generated probably the first of these many reports that documented how under-represented women were in all roles in the film industry ... To address this imbalance it was particularly important that the women got trained in the first place. I think Julie James-Bailey was one of the architects of that report and she was actually working for the Film School.<sup>15</sup>

[...] So we said, 'ok, we agree with this, how about the Film School taking a leading role and having an affirmative action policy that their intake from now on is going to be fifty percent men and fifty percent women'.

We had a meeting with the Board of the Film School, most of whom managed not to be there for the discussion, except Jerzy Toeplitz and Storry Walton and maybe one or two others who managed to hang around. [...] 'Oh well', says the Professor, 'Fifty percent women and fifty percent men: we could not do this, it would be discrimination against men'. [...] Of all the responses that I expected, that wasn't the one. It was another one of those jaw drop occasions. It took him three seconds to say that. What do you say? We're not actually talking about men, we're talking about positive action in favour of women? He could only see that that meant a negative outcome for men. (*Oliver, 1992a*)

The Film School did eventually come to the party with a less controversial offer - Open Program workshops for women in Sydney in 1977 and in Melbourne in 1978. These Film School workshops were organised quite differently from the 1974 self-managed workshop, bringing more women into filmmaking and also bringing incipient tensions between radicals and reformists to a head. The consolidation of the International Women's Year Women's Film Fund at the end of 1976, was a further factor which sharpened the identity of the feminist film project.

---

<sup>15</sup> See "Women in the Media" AFTVS, 1976.



### Women's Film Fund: 1975 - 1979

While the feminist film project was taking shape in the independent arena, a parallel formation was taking place within the bureaucracy under the auspices of International Women's Year (IWY). From 1976 until 1986 the Women's Film Fund (WFF) played the part of an accomplice, advocate and arbiter in the project of working women into the burgeoning project of an Australian cinema.<sup>16</sup>

From its inaugural days as an initiative of the IWY National Advisory Council, the Women's Film Fund took on a distinct personality which demarcated it from the independent feminist filmmaking milieu. If the Women's Liberation milieu was populated by women in revolt against institutional forms of authority, then the emerging femocracy was the stomping ground for a generation of professional women fired by the postwar mission to implement a new social contract based on access and equity. Gil Appelton who worked for the IWY secretariat tells the story of how the WFF became an on-going initiative:

The idea to have an ongoing funding mechanism for women's filmmaking actually came from one of the clerical staff in the unit whose name was Sandra. I was wracking my brains last night to remember her last name. She was terrific. It was a mark of the marvellous, pervasive, feminist atmosphere in that secretariat that ideas would be floated up from the clerical staff. She floated this idea and she should have the credit for it. It really was her idea because she'd been on the periphery of women's filmmaking. She felt it was a terribly important part of the revived Women's Movement, and that we must do something during the year that should be ongoing. And wouldn't just finish at the end of the year.  
(Appelton, 1992)

From 1975 until 1979 the WFF was located in Canberra in the Office of Women's Affairs which assessed applications for funding. The dispersal of the funds to successful applicants was handled by the Australian Film Commission (formerly the Australian Film Development Corporation) in Sydney. This arms-length relationship set the tone for an autonomous

---

<sup>16</sup> See Anna Grieve (1987) on the formation of the Women's Film Fund.

Women's Film Fund which, from the beginning, enjoyed an uneasy truce with the AFC - the major film funding organisation.

As the [International Women's] Year started drawing to a close there was a bit of a panic about how we were going to set up this fund ... I wrote the guidelines and I remember going with Pat Galvin, who was the male co-ordinator of the secretariat, to Sydney to see John Daniels at the Film Commission. That was a pretty salutary experience because Daniels sat there - there was me and another woman from the secretariat - he kept referring to us as ladies: 'what do you ladies think.' We could see that, ideologically, he was just not attuned to the idea at all. That meeting had a very profound effect and caused longlasting problems in terms of putting the funding to the AFC. There was a very strong feeling the AFC was just not ideologically attuned to having the [Women's Film] Fund within it. (*Appelton, 1992*)

While the Sydney Women's Film Group was steeped in a collective, anti-institutional, grassroots ethos, the Women's Film Fund was a bureaucratic initiative, spawned in the last days of the Whitlam government's three year spending spree. From the beginning, the WFF was at the centre of political controversy, initially over the decision to allocate \$100,000 to Germaine Greer's proposed epic television series on human reproduction. The withdrawal of the allocation to Greer's project, and box office returns from *Caddie*, provided the revenue for the WFF.

I think the decision [to rescind Greer's grant] was made in principle even while the Whitlam government was still in power, because it caused such a furore. Looking back on it, I find it unbelievable because, by the standards of 1990, it was a very admirable series. The proposal for it was extremely well thought out and Germaine had done some location work. I thought it could have been the most wonderful series like *The Ascent of Man* - which we didn't like the title of, but something along those lines. She was such good talent that, with her presenting it, I thought \$100,000 was a drop in the ocean. There was such an outcry. I still find it amazing the sorts of reactions that happened. Those terrible sexist headlines. Since (as well as being the person in charge of arts and film) I was also the public relations officer, it was a nightmare. It was damage control all the time. [...] There's some very elemental anti-Germaine feeling amongst the male media. They just hate her. Anything she does,

any new book she puts out, they take bits of it out of context and go beserk. That all played a role in it. And the fact that she was expatriate.

You have to put it in the context that everything we did that year, almost, got adverse publicity. If we set up women's refuges they'd question why weren't there men's refuges. The pervasive sexism was just incredible. So the whole atmosphere was ripe for [Greer's project] to be canned.

(Appelton, 1992)

As a bureaucratic initiative which was a sitting duck for broadsides from the media, the WFF and its defenders were forced to adopt a responsible, defensive, non-partisan persona. As a federally funded program, the Women's Film Fund could not proclaim itself as a *Feminist Film Fund*, even though its assessment of projects was informed by a feminist critique of 'negative' images of women in the mass media and the desire to counter these images with more 'realistic' ones, preferably produced by women. Its funding decisions were also hamstrung by the initial decision to appeal to a wide audience through the mainstream media, although it would never have the resources to fund largescale or mainstream projects.

During 1976, when the Office of Women's Affairs was being set up and mechanisms for funding decisions were being devised, \$50,000 of the Fund's limited budget was allocated to *The Picture Show Man* (1976) - a film which failed to meet the WFF's three key criteria of films by, for and about women.

People were furious about that. Apart from the fact that Joan Long was the producer, it had no component that was in accord with the guidelines at all. That, I'm pretty certain, was a unilateral decision made by the Film Commission without reference to anybody else - maybe passing reference to somebody in Canberra. There was a lot of anger about that. The fact that that could happen was an indicator of what a schmozzle the whole thing was during 1976. (Appelton, 1992)

The character of the Women's Film Fund was largely determined by its embattled position in the new Fraser government's priorities. It was deemed politically astute to set up an Advisory Panel which had sufficient credibility when it came to defending funding decisions to a skeptical, if not hostile, government and media. Panel members were, by and large, middle

class, articulate, educated women who had the ability to work harmoniously with other members of the Panel, rather than see themselves as representing a particular constituency.

IWY was a public relations disaster, and a lot of women were brought into that secretariat who had no public service background at all. The files were unbelievable. [...] At the end of the year, all of us were just shunted off to Sara Dowse's Office of Women's Affairs [OWA]. They had an awful job trying to sort [the WFF files] out. I remember going down a couple of times and talking to Sara [Dowse] and Lyndall Ryan so we could try to sort out what had happened, how we could best set it up, so that explains why it took such a long time before anything was announced [about the future of the WFF]. As far as I remember the Panel was to be nominated by the OWA so that it could be kept at arms-length from the Film Commission, and the only role the Commission itself would play was as a banker. It would keep the money and dole it out as advised by the committee.

That was the system that was finally arrived at, although as you're no doubt aware, there had to be an AFC representative on the committee - Jill Robb - who was great. It was terrific that she was on the committee. [...] Jeanette Hungerford, a beaut woman, carried over from the National Advisory Council for IWY.... She was an occupational therapist from Victoria. She was just a fantastic, down to earth, no nonsense person. Even though she didn't know anything about filmmaking, she could always cut through the crap on any proposal and say 'why should we be funding this? what's it going to do for ...' That original panel I think was really good. Jeni Kendall from the ABC would have been my recommendation - I'd worked with her at the ABC. We had four panel members and a back up person. Eventually I became a member of the Panel. I suppose it would've looked like favouritism if they'd given me a full panel job straight away. Not that there was any profit in it. It was bloody hard work. Some meetings we'd get literally hundreds of applications to read. (*Appelton, 1992*)

The public relations disaster of the Fund's first year continued, on a smaller scale, until the late 1970s. After the financial success of *Caddie* (1976, Donald Crombie) the WFF naively believed that its investment in feature projects would return profits which could be ploughed back into more films.

There wasn't a great deal of film expertise in IWY. There was plenty of good will but not much expertise. There was a strong ideological view that there was no point in funding things that were not going to get out to the wide audience. I remember Elizabeth Reid saying it'd be much better if we got a feature story in the *Women's Weekly* than something in *Hecate* or one of those feminist magazines because they're read by such a tiny number of people. The *Women's Weekly's* read by a huge number of women. The ideological underpinning to funding the Deveson film [*Do I have to kill my child?*] and *Caddie*, was theoretically they could reach a very wide audience, one through television and one through cinema. That attitude hung over for a while, until we got people on the panel who just knew about the realities of filmmaking who said 'We're never going to be able to give substantial production funding. This is crazy. What we should be doing is putting out small amounts of seed money to get smaller projects going or get training initiatives, and just forget features'.

(Appelton, 1992)

Although the IWY Advisory Council had allocated \$25,000 to the International Women's Year Film Festival which was initiated by the Sydney Women's Film Group, relations between the WFF and the SWFG were underscored by paranoia and mutual distrust, fuelled by the Fund's early decisions to invest in mainstream features which had minimal involvement by women, notably *Caddie*, *The Picture Show Man*, and *Dawn!* (1979).

Our relations with the SWFG were very prickly. I can remember going with Vicki Molloy - we did a whistle stop tour - I remember going to Brisbane and South Australia, to Adelaide. I used to get so nervous, partly I think because we'd had a very tough time in IWY because we had the responsibility of this very large amount of money and nothing we did seemed to be right. I'd been through some horrendous experiences at meetings being heckled and screamed at. So I guess I was always very nervous when we met with the women's film groups. [...] they did subject the IWY secretariat and subsequently the WFF to a lot of criticism, a lot of which was quite justified, but some of it came from that feeling of 'we're not going to take any gift horse at face value. We're going to pull it apart and see if it works'. So I'd say 'prickly' is the word for those relationships. Which got better, because as time went on, many of the

women who'd been prime movers in those groups got funding. (*Appelton, 1992*)

Until the transfer of the WFF to the AFC at the beginning of 1980, and the appointment of Vicki Molloy as the Fund's project manager in May 1980, the Fund was meant to survive by making a profit on its investments in film projects:

This situation has constituted a very severe constraint on the effectiveness of the Fund in establishing any specifically feminist film culture, or even indeed, in removing some of the worst excesses of media manipulation of the image of women. It is precisely the profit orientation of the capitalist media which has created the mindless, insecure, acquisitive stereotype of women that the Women's Film Fund was intended to eliminate, or to which it was, at least, intended to provide alternatives.

Related to this lack of ongoing support has been the curious notion that the Fund should eventually "self destruct" when women are equitably represented in the Australian media industry, and when the image of women in the Australian media is one which fairly represents the true lives of women. The Australian Film Commission and the government must know something that the sisters don't if that glorious day is coming before the couple of hundred thousand dollars in the Fund runs out. (*Alexander, 1979a: 72*)

The politically and aesthetically significant work that was coming out of the feminist film project in the 1970s emerged from training workshops and from EFTVF grants, rather than from the WFF.<sup>17</sup> The 1970s saw several attempts to clarify the guidelines for WFF applicants, as the Fund sought to attract suitable projects. From the outset, in December 1976, the fund was set up to provide equality of opportunity based on two assumptions about women in the industry and women on the screen:

- i) the underrepresentation of women in key areas of filmmaking;
- ii) the exclusion of important female characters or themes from the subject matter of films; Australian films particularly, have reflected a male ethic

---

<sup>17</sup> See Appendix C (i) on WFF funding allocations, 1975-79.

dominated by the strong, silent bushman or the 'ocker' mate, and have placed women in essentially supportive roles. ("Women's Film Fund Guidelines", 1977: 5)

The original formula of 'films for, by and about women' attracted so few appropriate applications that in 1977 the Panel sought to clarify its criteria in terms which reveal the utilitarian and literal mindset of a Fund besieged from all sides:

- 1) Films by women meant gambling on inexperience to enable positive discrimination in the key areas of writing, directing, production, camera operating, sound recording and editing;
- 2) Films for women meant looking favourably on films which focused on an area or problem seen as of primary interest to women and "likely to help alleviate areas of discrimination or suffering among women.". Suggested subjects, to be treated "in a sympathetic and unsensational fashion, included: "job discrimination, abortion, contraception, cystitis and female sexuality". No WFF film was to be intended exclusively for a female audience.
- 3) Films about women tackled the issue of the media's portrayal of women in supportive roles or as appendages of men or children. This was seen as part of the general pattern of social conditioning which leads girls and women to suffer from low self-esteem and low expectations of their potential. Women were to be shown as real people, neither stereotyped nor idealised (see "Women's Film Fund Guidelines", 1977: 5).

The suggested topics outlined in the above criteria (for women's films - imagine a similar list for men) marked out an exceedingly bleak prospect for delving into questions of women and cinema.<sup>18</sup> The 1977 guidelines took the *feature* film industry as the norm, seemingly oblivious to the body of short films which were already definitive of feminist film in the independent sector. From 1976, the Sydney Women's Film Group lobbied the Fund to make its investment priorities: apprenticeship training; low budget shorts, and productions where women could share skills (Alexander, 1977: 1). In 1978, following a meeting in April between the WFF Panel and a

---

<sup>18</sup> See *Films From the Women's Film Fund*, December 1984 for a catalogue of twenty-nine completed films, including synopses, credits and stills. The catalogue covers films which vary from the most lifeless to the most lively of films, bound together by no apparent logic, vision or policy for a contribution to cinema specifically from women.

small group of independent women filmmakers, the Fund began to respond to demands that it focus its limited resources on a commitment to the funding of short films and videos, grants for script development, and the employment of a project officer to advertise and co-ordinate the fund (see "Developments re Women's Film Fund", 1978: 5).

The Women's Film Fund's defensive origins as an instrument of *social* rather than cultural policy was important in establishing its level-headed personality, its pragmatic and consensual approach to funding projects, and its ethos of equity which would largely determine the functional films that were funded in the late 1970s.<sup>19</sup> In the 1970s, the WFF was fired by the same enthusiasm for social change as the Co-op milieu. However, its complex bureaucratic location, the inexperience of its panel of advisors, and the hostile public scrutiny of all its decisions and mistakes, made the Fund very cautious when it came to dispensing its scarce resources to film projects. The dispersal of the energy and excitement of the Women's Liberation era is nowhere more evident than in the bureaucratic entanglement of the WFF.

Until it moved to Sydney to the AFC in 1980, the WFF remained isolated and illegitimate in a political climate that was hostile to the legacy of initiatives from the Whitlam era, including those to do with the arts and women. The Women's Film Fund was forced to wear a mantle of shame over the early days of poor management during the handover from the IWY Secretariat to the Office of Women's Affairs, and in relation to some of the funding decisions made in its name. Although the Fund was deeply imbued with feminist aspirations, it was mired in a femocrat milieu which was on the defensive under the cost-cutting regime of the conservative Fraser government.<sup>20</sup> The outstanding personality trait of the WFF in the late 1970s was its retreat into a cautious literal-mindedness (for a graphic example, see the 1977 suggested list of topics for films, above) which distinguished it from the utopian, rebellious imaginary of the independent

---

<sup>19</sup> 'Functional' films from the WFF include: *As A Matter of Fact, A Film About Abortion* (1979, Abortion Film Collective); *Awake and Aware, A Caesarian Birth* (1981, Christine Cranswick); *Australian Women Composers* (1983, Adele Sztar); and *Working Up* (1980, Chris Warner and Maureen McCarthy).

<sup>20</sup> The successful adaptation of the femocrat to the conservative regime after the December 1975 election of the Fraser government is evidenced in the spate of publishing about feminists in the bureaucracy. Allen and Unwin has published a series of titles on the phenomenon of Australian femocracy, including: Hester Eisentein (1991); Suzanne Franzway et al. (1989); Marian Sawyer (1990); Sophie Watson (ed) (1990); Anna Yeatman (1990).



filmmaking milieu. The early years of the Fraser government were lost years for the Women's Film Fund as it tried to defend its small allocation and develop a funding policy in a climate which was hostile to publicly funded initiatives for women and which took the feature film as the norm. In the following chapters it will become evident that the WFF was not alone in attempting to project a shadow-free image of itself, as the responsible face of feminism, onto the political stage.

---

## Chapter 4

### THE PERSONA OF THE POLITICAL ACTIVIST

---

A useful concept for understanding the persona of the feminist activist and her motivating desire to distinguish 'the feminist filmmaker' from 'women who make films', lies in the Jungian idea of the Shadow - recognisable in what one fervently detests (or idealizes) in an other, especially of the same sex:

In other words, the shadow is the inferior part of the personality, the sum of all personal and collective psychic elements which, *because of their incompatibility with the chosen conscious attitude, are denied expression in conscious life* and therefore coalesce into a relatively autonomous splinter personality with contrary tendencies in the unconscious mind. (O'Connor, 1990: 46, my italics)

The outstanding characteristic of feminist activism was its attempt to invent a Shadow-free politics. In its desire to remake the world in its own image, this historically privileged (and historically innocent) generation - assuming itself to be good - projected all evil onto 'the system'. One consequence was a flattening of vitality: a milieu initially ruled by Eros, was tamed and homogenised by the discipline involved in 'knowing and following the right line'. Another consequence was an intensification of internecine rivalries: it was a grossly paranoid time marked by repeated attempts to sort out, in a number of contexts, who and what counted as *feminist*.<sup>1</sup>

Writing about this period has been extraordinarily difficult. There is an abundance of documentation of the late 1970s in the Women's Film Fund files and at the National Film and Sound Archives, yet in the interviews,

---

<sup>1</sup> The main filmic contexts for this dispute were: the 1977 Women's Production Courses at the Australian Film and Television School; the Sydney Women's Film Group and the Feminist Film Workers; the feminist film theory debate in *Filmnews* and WLM publications including *Refractory Girl* and *Scarlet Woman*; the Sydney Filmmakers Co-op which published *Filmnews*, distributed approximately 260 women's films and was the venue for SWFG meetings.

nothing about that crowded time stands out in people's memories.<sup>2</sup> My account of this excessively busy, and curiously inert, period exhibits the very flatness that afflicted the project of defining a *feminist* cinema.<sup>3</sup> As rebel girls turned into righteous activists, the psychic nerve of the milieu went numb. The emerging ethos of hard work and endless political struggle in the name of a greater good had a particularly deadening effect which lingers on in my shaping of the material from the late 1970s. The defeat of Whitlam's Labor government at the December 1975 election was a turning point for the milieu which went, overnight, from riding a wave of change to fighting a rearguard action as the long boom of the post war years ended in a major recession.<sup>4</sup>

Some sense can be made of the intense struggle and paranoid rivalries of the late 1970s in terms of Andrew Samuels' suggestion, in *The Political Psyche* (1993), that "involvement and investment in political culture" and the "capacity to survive therein" can be partly gauged by extending primal scene imagery in a political direction:

[...] the kind of image held of the parents' relationship to each other demonstrates, on the intrapsychic level, a person's capacity to sustain

---

<sup>2</sup> This chapter and Chapter 6 are indebted to the uncatalogued archival material made available to me in 1991/92 by the AFC, the NF & SA and by Jeni Thornley from her personal collection. In July 1991 the Australian Film Commission in Sydney gave me access to approximately 550 files of the Women's Film Fund which, for the most part, are organised chronologically in terms of applications for funding, and which include notes on the assessors' responses as well as funding details. In March/April 1992 the National Film and Sound Archives in Canberra gave me access to three uncatalogued boxes of material from the Sydney Women's Film Group and the Feminist Film Workers, deposited with the Archives by Jennifer Stott when the Sydney Filmmakers Co-op was closed down in 1986.

<sup>3</sup> Part of my difficulty with this chapter has to do with the silences around the kinds of things people did to each other in the name of politics. The sectarianism of the Left is a well known phenomenon generally only hinted at in print (see Ann Curthoys, 1988: 11-12) - specific instances of political hatreds tend to remain off the record. In this thesis I have documented the disputes that are on the public record. The significance of this quarrelsome period only begins to emerge in the following chapters, as the milieu itself slowly began to recognise its own shadow.

<sup>4</sup> See Bruce Grant (ed) (1986), and the television mini-series, *The Dismissal* (George Miller, 1983), on the Whitlam years. See Meaghan Morris (1988:175) for an account of her own "classical trajectory" after her attendance at a feminist meeting to discuss "the tripping of the Whitlam government in 1975". After "a month of recriminations and accusations it ended up with a few paranoid coteries. I don't know what they did because I didn't fit in to one - and began henceforth to work ... either completely alone just writing, or engaged in intense but ephemeral group actions in the purely cultural sphere".

conflict constructively in the outer world - a crucial aspect of the person's political capacity. In the image of mother and father in one frame, the scene can be harmonious, disharmonious, one side may dominate the other side, one parent could be damaging the other parent, there will be patterns of exclusion, triumph, defeat, curiosity, or total denial. These great and well-known primal scene themes are markedly political.

(Samuels, 1993: 167)

The formation, in early 1978, of the self-selected, exclusive and closed group - the Feminist Film Workers - out of the increasingly amorphous Sydney Women's Film Group, is symptomatic of the ideal of a like-minded, goal-oriented collective that the activist mind imagined was necessary to the realisation of its utopian plans.



4.1 *Feminist Film Workers:*

Beth McRae, Carole Kostanich, Sarah Gibson, Jeni Thornley,  
Martha Ansara, Margot Oliver, Susan Lambert (photo by Sandy Edwards)

By the end of the 1970s, the mask of feminism had lost its initial life-giving quality. It had become a social mask or persona. Total identification with the feminist persona entailed the repression or projection of those elements of the milieu's personality that were out of step with its conscious, *feminist* attitudes.

My image of the activist in this period is that of a righteous persona masking a depressed psyche. This chapter charts some of the preoccupations and quarrels that kept the milieu busy while the 1970s, as a distinctive political era, was drawing to a close.

## Knowing the line

The persona of the feminist *activist* was definitive of the feminist film project in the late 1970s. This activist persona was forged out of different elements. Firstly, the Women's Liberation Movement, rather than the film industry, was taken to be home-base for the feminist filmmaker. This entailed a fulltime commitment which was proclaimed in the lifestyle aspects of feminism which constituted something of a subculture: communal, inner city households; anti-consumerism and living poor; 'poor' filmmaking on minimal incomes including grants, unemployment benefits or casual work in Left or women's organisations; an anti-market and anti-bureaucratic ethos which led to the creation of alternative organisations which were mostly dependent on government funding.<sup>5</sup>

Secondly, the feminist activist was both pragmatic - as an organiser, lobbyist and fundraiser - and utopian in her vision of a better world. She believed that concerted, dedicated activism would bring about a social revolution unlike any other, in the lifetime of her generation, and that feminist cinema would help envisage this better world for women.

Thirdly, the feminist activist was woman-identified - *perceived* as politically, if not sexually, lesbian. She believed in, and organised women-only groups, workshops and filmmaking collectives. The myth of the strong, independent woman was a vivid one, which included women's friendships but was hazy on the problematic place of intimate connections with men and children.<sup>6</sup> Few feminist filmmakers had children, and of those who did, Martha Ansara is a notable exception for achieving more than one or two films (and having more than one child).<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup>See Meaghan Morris (1983) on the dependence on the State of 'independent' filmmaking in Australia.

<sup>6</sup> See Helen Grace (1988: 80) on feminist attempts to shift the focus from 'the woman problem' to 'the man problem': "... some feminists have readily enough identified it as the main problem, but even here it has been dismissed - men are violent, war-like creatures, who rape, miam, kill; this is their nature and nothing can be expected of them.... Under this order, woman is good, kind, peaceful, in touch with her feelings and incapable of evil. Another impossible dream."

<sup>7</sup> See Ann Curthoys (1988: 129-133) for a discussion of feminism's failure to adequately address the fundamental question of why women mother. In the core group defined by this study, only Martha Ansara, Helen Grace and Carole Kostanich had children during the 1970s. At times, all three women were 'single mothers' inventing their own alternatives to the suburban, nuclear family. Ansara in *Secret Storm* (1977), Grace in *Serious Undertakings* (1983) and

From the outside, the 'lesbian', activist definition - no matter how inaccurate in a literal sense - was crucial for distinguishing feminist filmmakers from 'other' women whose entry into institutional or mainstream filmmaking milieux was often facilitated by their network of relationships which included men who became part of the renaissance of the Australian feature film and television industries.<sup>8</sup> The feminist activist, by contrast, did not necessarily identify herself as a filmmaker: a range of political imperatives, rather than creative or career ambitions, were to be served by filmmaking.

The emerging infrastructure for a film industry/culture had as much impact on the feminist film project as the diversifying Women's Movement during the late 1970s and early 1980s.<sup>9</sup> Martha Ansara (who was active in the Women's Liberation Movement, the Communist Party, the Sydney Filmmakers Co-op, the Australian Film and Television School, the Sydney Women's Film Group, and as an assessor for the Experimental Film and Television Fund, and later for the Women's Film Fund) sees the late 1970s as a period when the consolidation of the film industry and its institutions changed the nature of grassroots activism:

Jeni [Thornley] pointed out that in fact it was the opportunity for training that really broke up our film groups. People were able to take those opportunities and that meant that collective action was no longer essential to their making a film. One of the reasons we were collective, not just in the [Sydney] Women's Film Group but in the Film Co-op and in

---

Kostanich in *Mum's the Word* (1982) produced distinctive films that touched on the experience of motherhood. See Chapter 7 on the figure of the maternal in the unconscious of the milieu.

<sup>8</sup> This other (heterosexually and professionally defined) constellation of women who were involved in feminist initiatives in the media, is a rich one worthy of further study. It would include (ex-) ABC and Film Australia personalities, notably Jan Chapman, Sandra Levy, Julie Rigg, Janet Bell. They followed in the footsteps of Joan Long, Pat Lovell, Caroline Jones, Lili Fraser and other women who worked in media institutions, especially the ABC and Film Australia. There were significant points of contact between members of the two constellations through the SWFG, the Women's film workshops and the Women's Film Fund. See Joan Long and Meg Stewart (1977) on women working in the film industry.

<sup>9</sup> See Dermody and Jacka (1987: 15-47) on the industry/culture rhetoric which was deployed in the 1960s and 1970s to agitate for government funding of feature filmmaking in Australia.

the film industry as a whole, was that it was the only way we could get to make films. (Ansara, 1992b)

The more the feminist film agenda was dictated by factors in the emergent film industry, the harder feminist filmmakers had to work to connect their filmmaking back into what was henceforth know as the Women's Movement.

In 1977, the Australian Film and Television School (AFTVS) as part of its Open Program, ran two Women's Production Courses in Sydney (followed by two in Melbourne in 1978).<sup>10</sup> The hierarchy established between administrators and course participants would give the Women's Production Courses a markedly different flavour from the 1974 workshop's do-it-yourself ethos. In a 1978 article in *Hecate*, Sandra Alexander described the aims of the Open Program Courses: "to upgrade the skills of women media workers, and to give them the confidence to seek promotion in their professional situation" (1978: 116). Career goals were anathema to many feminists who saw the acquisition of filmmaking skills as a means of creating radical alternatives to the hierarchical media institutions that, in their view, would remain substantially unaltered by the mere presence of more women higher up the ladder.

For Martha Ansara, who was involved in the selection of participants for the 1977 Production Courses, the significant differences between the 1974 and subsequent AFTVS workshops were: the loss of the grassroots political context of the WLM which initiated the first workshop; the training in discrete skills without a filmmaking base in regional centres like Adelaide; and the loss of *time* to become immersed in the filmmaking process:

One of the things that happened was the pace of filmmaking changed. As you began to get this complexity of organisation you lost time. As films began to enter the distribution and exhibition structures, particularly television, all sorts of deadlines came into place, so you began to have more people and less time.

---

<sup>10</sup> See Alexander (1979b) for a detailed record of the 1977-8 AFTVS Women's Production Courses - in itself the thoroughness of the report was a sign of the new emphasis on accountability and professionalism.



With more people the actual creative elements became more constrained. We didn't have a producer led model to begin with. It was all the films that people wanted to make. Now people develop packages, first through the AFC and now through the FFC [Film Finance Corporation]... The control went from the people who had a passion to do a thing to people who were doing it partly because they were interested and partly because it looked as if it might succeed.

All of this affected women. With the 1974 workshop we didn't separate skill from feminist ideology (a consciousness of women, although it wasn't all feminists in the workshop), or from considerations of film form. They went together. That was the concept that we had. (*Ansara, 1992b*)

*Time* was of the essence when it came to distinguishing the professional industry production model from the independent filmmaking process. In terms of psyche, a shift to the 'masculine' model of deadlines and efficiency entailed a suppression of the 'feminine' processes of immersion which had enabled the unconscious to influence *Maidens, We Aim To Please* and *Secret Storm*. In the late 1970s, feminist films would become much more literal-minded and distribution-oriented, addressing ideological issues in documentary form in order to impart a clear political message - a strategy which guaranteed a short shelf-life for the films which, although immediately popular, dated quickly.<sup>11</sup>

The antagonistic playing field of the first 1977 Course was decidedly unpromising as a source of renewal for the cause of Women's Liberation filmmaking. The course, which included a range of women from the independent and institutional sectors, was notorious for the conflicts which arose between what Jeni Thornley (who was a participant) dubbed the Reds and the Experts:<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>11</sup> See Appendix B for programs of women's films from 1974. See Susan Lambert, Victoria Treole and Sarah Gibson (1981a) unpublished paper for Amsterdam Conference) on the way that the CDB made the likelihood of distribution a criteria for funding short films as a result of the Co-op's success in creating audiences for social action films. See articles by Helen Grace (1982), and John Cruthers & James Kesteven (1982) on the Creative Development Branch of the AFC. These critiques were an extension of the Ubu polemic which defined 'film culture' as a legitimate site of publicly funded, non-feature film production, distribution, exhibition and critical activities in an arena carved out historically by independent filmmakers.

<sup>12</sup> See "Women's Training Course Begins"(1977:3) for a list of those accepted into the first 1977 workshop. Participants now associated with the ABC and feature films included: Janet Bell, Jan Chapman, Sandra Levy and Julie Rigg. Independent sector participants included:

All I can remember - I've repressed it. I can't remember anything specific. There was a difference in attitude between the women who were doing the course who were already established in the industry and were using the course to go up the ladder or step sideways. And there were those of us who had come from the Women's Movement and were the feminists. There was a clash between different forms of feminism in a way - between a bureaucratic right feminism and a left feminism. What the Chinese called a Red - Expert conflict. (Thornley, 1992b)

The Reds were more concerned with running the training course on feminist principles while the Experts were keen to gain skills to improve their prospects in their male dominated workplaces.<sup>13</sup> Megan McMurchy, in the second, more orderly, 1977 workshop, was an ABC trained professional who crossed the great divide by finding people she wanted to work with, rather than aligning herself on ideological grounds:

Making *Apartments* I developed a really terrific working relationship with certain people. Jeni Thornley and Susan Lambert worked on it. I had a sense of really enjoying that as a collaborative experience.

[...]

Jeni Thornley and a woman called Wendy Moore, who was at that stage going under the name Wendy Freecloud, doubled up with Jeni Thornley to shoot *Apartments*. Sandy Edwards was involved. We invented a name for ourselves. We had a fantasy about becoming a women's production group. We liked working with each other so strongly that we would try and invent things or find jobs to do together. It never came to anything but that was part of the origin of *For Love or Money*, particularly the bond between Jeni Thornley and me.

The bond with Jeni is a bit shrouded in history. I can't remember how we actually met. I must not have known her before I did *Apartments*. I

---

Digby Duncan, Wendy Freecloud, Carole Kostanich, Margot Oliver and Jeni Thornley. Others associated with the SWFG included Ros Gillespie and Jeune Pritchard.

<sup>13</sup> See Sandra Alexander (1979b: Appendix G) for examples of some of the responses to the group dynamic between industry and independent filmmakers: responses ranged from an appreciation of the diversity of the group to the opinion that "Strong, active, militant feminists should have their own course."

remember going around to her house and nervously knocking on the door and asking whether she would shoot it for me. How did I know her? Maybe through the Co-op. She was working on *Maidens* then and I got to know her very closely in the latter phases of *Maidens* and after she had filmed *Apartments*. So we were a duo in this swirl of women who thought it would be a good idea to have a women's production group.  
(McMurchy, 1992)

The second 1977 Women's Training Course is also the beginning of the story of the filmmaking partnership between Sarah Gibson and Susan Lambert which, in some ways, came to stand for 1970s feminist filmmaking until the mid-1980s (just as Ansara and Thornley stood for 1960s liberationist filmmaking into the mid-1970s). Sarah Gibson vividly recalls the circumstances of her first political alliance with Lambert:

I was disappointed about not being in the first [1977] Film School Workshop but as the tales came back about what a cesspit of conflict it was, I felt enormously relieved. This is how Susan [Lambert] and I met. Having heard there were difficulties, we decided at the SWFG to have a meeting before the second workshop began - a socialising event so the women from the industry and the feminist women could meet together and the set of assumptions that one group held about the other could be eroded. Two of the major problems with the first workshop were that people hadn't had enough time to get to know each other, and the assumption that you couldn't put the two groups in the one workshop. We thought this was absolutely ridiculous and that we could overcome this by talking it through. We wanted the list of who was in the second workshop. The Course co-ordinators from the Film School said there was no way that we could get the list and in fact we were going to be expelled from the second course. I said 'Expelled for just wanting to call a meeting? You've got to be joking. There's no way you're expelling me for that.' Then one of the course co-ordinators rang up and said 'You are called to this meeting and we're going to call in Susan Lambert as well.'

I'd seen Susan at SWFG meetings. She'd come back from London and she had beautiful green lace-up boots. I thought I wouldn't mind getting to know her. But meetings are meetings and you don't have much personal contact. So Susan and I ended up meeting in the co-ordinator's living room over this threatened dismissal. We hadn't lobbied each other on the

phone but we knew we were on the same side and it was like we were fated to meet. Without having to caucus we knew exactly what the line was and how to fight. We must have won because we were in the course. That formed my link to Susan. When the course started we had already made this strong embattled connection. (*Gibson*, 1992)

Susan Lambert's story of the formation of their 'embattled connection' differs in detail but not in essence:

I heard about the conflict in the first workshop so I organised with Sarah [Gibson] and Pat [Fiske] because what I'd learnt in London was organising. How you organise. It was the same here. People learned that here. Certainly Sarah had. I don't know how I even met Sarah. So I said 'this seems stupid to me. What's going on.' They were of the same opinion so we decided we would have a big meeting before we actually went to the course so we could work out what we wanted to do and how we wanted to run the course - how to have some say in it, which seemed perfectly reasonable to me. We sent out a thing to the participants to say let's all meet before we go to the course. But we didn't invite the coordinators. And they found out about it . [...]

I can't remember the actual gripes but it was getting right up my nose. We were duly called to a meeting. I hardly knew Sarah, and Pat couldn't come. Sarah and I went to the meeting - I'll never forget, we were given an ultimatum. Either we stopped the meeting or we got chucked out of the course. Sarah and I looked at each other and we both said we wouldn't stop it.

That was the beginning of Sarah's and my collaboration, which lasted ten years. That solidarity based on a political ideal. I could trust her and she could trust me. We hadn't ever discussed it. It was just like 'well, chuck us out'. That was very important to me, probably personally and also in terms of what had happened to me in London: you had to know who was on your side. At a political level you had to know that. So then of course we weren't chucked out but we were bad girls. (*Lambert*, 1992)

A new, militant tone enters the story at this point: knowing what the line was and how to fight; knowing who was on your side; forming embattled connections. Gibson and Lambert were the 'bad girls' who rebelled against

the authority of the workshop co-ordinators. Ironically, they would become the 'good girls' of feminist filmmaking, enforcing self-discipline and toeing the feminist line. Gibson and Lambert's focus on making films quickly for distribution, and the sense of urgency about getting the message out, is evident from Lambert's account of the second workshop:

The fight in the first [workshop] was they weren't able to make films. I'm the sort of person, not only do I learn by doing, I have to have a reason for doing. It seemed to me to be a matter of urgency, to get these ideas out. Why on earth were we going to go and potter around learning how to be cinematographers in an industry that didn't even employ women? I'm an ideas person. Why weren't we just making the films and getting the ideas out? Sarah was the same at the time. That was the real bond between us. We had things that we felt had to be said. Not only had they to be said, they had to get out there and there was an urgency to it. That three months would be a complete waste, both creatively and politically, if we didn't come out of it with films. We were able to make our workshop films in our own way, under our own control. And that was the difference. They weren't able to in the first one. (*Lambert, 1992*)

Lambert's training in conscious political strategies which valued knowing what the line was and which side everyone was on, came out of her involvement with the London *Spare Rib* collective:

The *Spare Rib* collective operated along the lines of consciousness raising. The whole thing was constantly everyone challenging everyone. It was not consciousness raising at its most gentle. It was a place where people could say what they thought but were very inhibited by class positions and correctness. It was very difficult. We used to have nights where we'd have themes and we'd talk about things. But I never felt able to participate because it was - I felt such an outsider. (*Lambert, 1992*)

In Lambert's view there was a huge struggle by women to break the mould which had shaped them as young women growing up in the 1950s. Leaving home in the 1960s involved questioning what was expected of women. Joining one of the many collectives associated with the Women's Movement meant casting oneself in a new mould.

To break out of one mould you needed to know that you were part of something else, or there was nothing. To be part of something else you had to be accepted. I think it was like a family. It was very important to me to be accepted, to be correct.

Particularly in London you could articulate how important it was to make mistakes, but people were very scared of making them. Political women were very scared of making them because there were too many people pointing the bone at you - pointing the finger at you. So it was a very quickly cast sort of solidarity.

[...]

As feminists we didn't think we were trying to be approved of but, my god, we were. This is a London thing, but because a lot of feminist leaders in London at the time were from the upper classes, they had a desperate need to be approved of by the working class. And by the union movement and by Marxists - people were scared somebody would go 'well, what do you know, you're upper class'. There was a woman from that background who worked on the *Spare Rib* collective. Terrific woman. Terribly articulate but totally, at the time, like a terrified little mouse. Terrified somebody was going to point the bone at her. And then if you were heterosexual, not that that was such a big issue then, but the lesbians in the group - it was like the more oppressed you'd been before, then the more everyone was scared - everyone was so guilty about who they were, we made our own little Hitlers, although nobody wanted that.

[...] There was a huge split between the mind and the heart. One would talk about feelings and the importance of them, but really, in every day situations, they didn't matter all that much. (Lambert, 1992)

For Gibson the division in the 1977 workshops - between industry women and activist feminists - had its roots in the gap between women who saw themselves as filmmakers and those who were unable to take on that identity. Oddly enough it was the latter group that wanted most urgently to make finished films for distribution:

The feminist women wanted to make films that had a beginning and an end and went into distribution. We already had that focus of getting the films out and about. For the industry women it was more of an exercise to develop technical skills. I didn't identify for myself that it was

possible that I could enter the industry. I saw the gap as enormous. I didn't identify myself as a filmmaker for a very long time. I saw it as skills I'd developed. (*Gibson, 1992*)

In retrospect, Lambert sees her commitment to filmmaking-as-political-activism partly as a screen for fears about laying claim to filmmaking as a mode of creativity:

I think in retrospect - not that any of that was not worthwhile - ... but I don't think any of us were really able to claim a notion of ourselves as creative people in the world. Part of what fuelled the activism was as a justification for wanting to express ourselves in the world. I think we thought of ourselves as political first, which is bizarre when I think of it now. But because we were doing something and changing our lives and hopefully other women's lives, it was OK to make films, right? (*Lambert, 1992*)

The difficulty that women had in living the myth of the artist was exacerbated in the late 1970s when all art was claimed as political and the 'artist' was rejected as a romantic fiction. For Gibson and Lambert, feminist filmmaking was inextricably linked to the Women's Movement, in a way that seemed natural at the time. Primary identification with the Women's Movement as a way of life, was the key criteria for sorting out the *feminist* filmmakers from 'women who made films':

The Women's Movement would be more our life than anything else - to a degree now that I go 'that's incredible that we could even think that'.

[...]

It was a big thing for me, in terms of identity, when I look at how I differentiated myself from the women who went to the Film School. [...] The difference between the Film Action people and FFW [Feminist Film Workers] was the most bandied about. If you were a feminist but making big 'P' Political films you were more likely to be involved in Film Action.<sup>14</sup> If you were making little 'p' political films about women's experiences you

---

<sup>14</sup> Film Action was associated with the Co-op's social action documentaries and the work of documentary filmmakers including Carolyn Strachan and Alessandro Cavadini, notably their documentaries on Aboriginal issues: *Protected* (1976), and *Two Laws* (1981) made with the Borroloola Aboriginal Community. See Nick Herd (1983: 29-36).

were more likely to be in FFW. But that would break down for someone like Martha [Ansara], though her primary political activity was still feminist.

[...] Someone like Megan [McMurchy] we would not have seen as a feminist. It wasn't part of her identity to be actively involved in the Women's Movement. That was the whole problem then and it's still the problem now - having a monolithic perspective of it. And the whole problem of definition - of what people took upon themselves to describe themselves as. I do think we were making judgments about who was in and who was out, but also, who could we work with. (Gibson, 1992).

The 1977 Women's Production Courses produced two potential modes of feminist filmmaking, exemplified in the differences between Megan McMurchy's *Apartments* (1977) and Gibson, Lambert and Fiske's *Ladies Rooms* (1977). McMurchy made the film she wanted to make and remains loyal to it even though it attracted a degree of critical attention for the way it used classical codes of editing to develop a relationship between two women living in the same apartment block who glimpse each other leaving or entering the building, and who begin to have more and more explicit sexual fantasies about each other until finally they come face to face with their mutual attraction:

I'll always be grateful to Helen Grace who, many years later, suggested that if feminist film-making had followed the trajectory of *Apartments* rather than *Size 10* (Gibson and Lambert, 1978), perhaps some interesting results would have been had. I don't know what in fact she had in mind when she posed that, but it was a little bit of acknowledgment that there were some points of interest in *Apartments* that weren't situated entirely outside the feminist discourse. She was prepared to give it some credit that other hardliners at the time weren't. (McMurchy, 1992)

McMurchy's film was highly cineliterate - a tribute to and a transgression of Hollywood codes of cutting on the look. Through these cuts McMurchy manipulated shifts between subjective and objective modes of reality, constructing a dynamic of desire between two women who had looked but not yet spoken. As an exploration of lesbian desire the film raised a challenge to Mulvey's heterosexual dynamic of the active male who looks and the passive female who is to be looked at. One of the women has a



male lover who is a silent, unsuspecting witness to the growing attraction which propels the women together at the end of the film.



4.2 Jeune Pritchard in *Apartments*  
(1977, McMurchy)



4.3 Sandy Edwards in *Apartments*  
(1977, McMurchy)

Pursuing the cinematic inclinations evident in *Apartments* would have led to a more extensive engagement with Hollywood narrative codes and the problems of theatrical distribution. Instead, from 1977-1983, feminist filmmaking, which was deeply suspicious of the feature film industry, went down the path of the social action documentary, relying on an alternative, affiliated network of educational, community and political organisations to generate non-theatrical audiences for its films.<sup>15</sup>

A shared commitment to feminist principles underpinned the film partnership of Gibson and Lambert. Their early documentary films are revealing on this score in that *Ladies Rooms* (1977) and *Size 10* (1978) are both focused on four feminist women who speak from their own experience, in accordance with the consciousness raising (CR) paradigm, described by Richard Dyer:

Affirmation documentaries are like CR in that they centre on the individual voice as the source of knowledge and the vehicle of truth, with the image situating, corroborating or occasionally being interrogated by

---

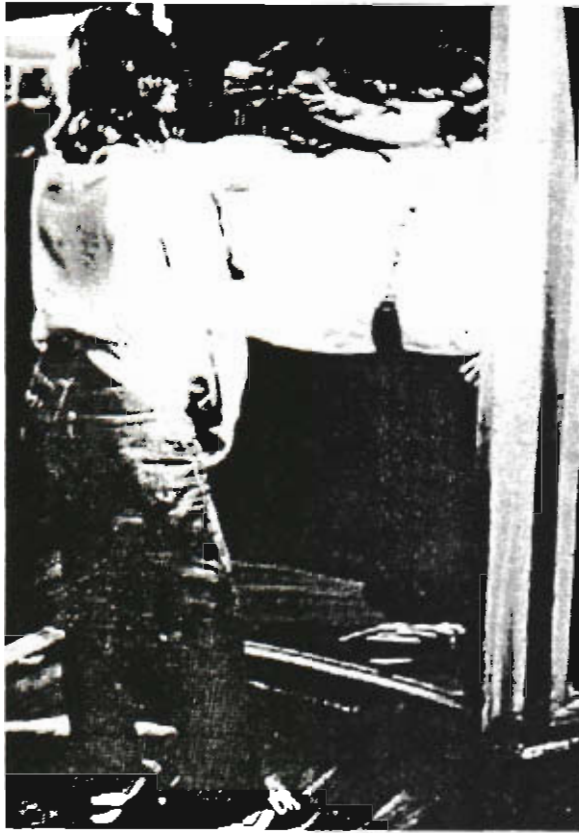
<sup>15</sup> This neglect of the problem of theatrical distribution has come back to haunt the milieu in the 1990s as it moves into the marketing of low-budget features including *Talk* (1993, Susan Lambert, director and Megan McMurchy, producer) and *Vacant Possession* (1994, Margot Nash). It also has repercussions for the funding of films whose budgets now represent a significant investment on the part of funding bodies. Jeni Thornley's difficulties in obtaining funding for the production of *Requiem* is a case in point (see Chapter 8).

that voice. Most often several voices are brought together in ways that both establish ... identity and demonstrate the social dimension of personal experience. (Dyer 1990: 243)

*Ladies Rooms* and *Size 10*, were films of the moment, which addressed audiences of women anxious to see images of the new lives that they were in the process of inventing for themselves. In *Ladies Rooms* the filmmakers (Fiske, Gibson and Lambert ) and an art director (Jan Mackay) each take a turn in front of the camera, appearing in their bedrooms and talking about the importance of their own personal space. The cumulative effect establishes a feminist line of argument about a woman's need for a room of her own as a place of self-expression and individuality.



4.4 Susan Lambert in *Ladies Rooms* (1977, Lambert, Gibson, Fiske)



4.5 *Size 10* (1977, Gibson and Lambert)

In *Size 10* four women of markedly different body shapes and sizes recount their fears about not conforming to an ideal of the female body.

From the vantage point of the 1990s, the women in both films represent a 1970s feminist ideal of no make-up, casual hair styles and comfortable, loose clothing. In attempting to break with old myths, these films were propagating a new one: the independent, natural woman freely exploring her own identity outside the constraints of consumerism and the dictates of advertising, in households where husbands and children were conspicuously absent (in *Size 10* one of the four women is pregnant, however the main worry she expresses about her body image is the problem of growing up wearing glasses).

It seems that questions of how to live as a feminist were more popular with audiences than questions of how to represent desire and fantasy between women in the cinema.

While *Apartments* gained limited critical acceptance and admiration from cinephiles, *Ladies Rooms* and *Size 10* had a powerful impact on their audiences, emphasising and affirming the immediate steps that women could take to improve their current situations. *Apartments* and *Ladies Rooms* put participants in the milieu in front of and behind the camera.

Sandy Edwards and Jeune Pritchard in *Apartments* play characters who belong to a diegetic world that is displaced in time and space into a more glamorous setting which evokes the romance of the movies. In *Ladies Rooms* each of the filmmakers takes a turn in front of the camera in her own bedroom, before a final sequence literally explodes the walls which separate them and they find themselves surrounded by their personal treasures, in the open space of a park. *Apartments* has no political message. *Ladies Rooms* ends each sequence with a statement which generalises personal experience into a message relevant to 'all' women.

### Talking revolution: the Feminist Film Workers

As more women began to make films, a core group, driven by a sense of urgency, was forming within the Sydney Women's Film Group. One of its aims was to define a specifically *feminist* filmmaking project which would be directly responsible to the Women's Movement. Susan Lambert saw Women's Liberation as life-saving in her own case. Getting the feminist message out was an urgent matter if the cycle of women's wasted lives, repeating from mother to daughter, was to be broken for her generation of women:

The reason I became a feminist, which I omitted to say, is that I had an abortion. At that time it was illegal. I was in a situation where I was told I couldn't do what I wanted to do with my own body - to use the language of the '70s - and that to me was horrific and terrifying and slap bang up against the patriarchy, which was men in white coats saying 'you'll have a lovely child'. My whole future was disappearing in front of me. I managed to have an illegal abortion, but soon after that I was one of the people who wore white aprons outside Parliament House. [...]

Also, my mother was alcoholic and had a wasted life, so I think the urgency was to do with having come up against that: seeing my mother's wasted life and then experiencing how you didn't have to have that anymore. And I really felt that information had to get out to other women. Because I had been privy to it and privileged by it and it had changed my life so totally, from ending up a housewife in the Blue Mountains - I was engaged to the boy next door, the whole thing. I genuinely wanted to get those ideas out.... We weren't talking charity here. We were talking revolution. (Lambert, 1992)

The feminist film psyche in the late 1970s was dominated by three vividly imagined figures: the professional woman working her way up the ladder in the film and television industry; the feminist filmmaker working as part of the WLM to realise radical alternatives to the institutions that supported patriarchal rule; and the housewife in the suburbs living a quietly desperate, if not heavily tranquillised, life.<sup>16</sup>

---

<sup>16</sup> The figure of the depressed or oppressed housewife appears in many films including: *Woman's Day 20c* (1973, SWFG); *What's the Matter Sally?* (1974, Robyn Dryen,





4.6 *What's The Matter Sally?* (1974, Dryen, Sharp, Torsh)

In their 1978 article, *Dilemmas of Two Socialist Feminist Filmmakers*, Sarah Gibson and Susan Lambert tried to grapple with the tensions between the professional media worker, the feminist filmmaker and the ordinary woman. They began with the contention that feminist filmmaking is political work within the Women's Liberation Movement "but feminist filmmakers have become increasingly isolated from the movement" (Gibson and Lambert, 1978: 26). This sense of disconnection from the WLM was attributed to the fact that the Sydney Women's Film Group was not a closed group, "nor was a feminist perspective even a prerequisite to involvement" (Gibson and Lambert, 1978: 27).<sup>17</sup> The SWFG had become a loose alliance of *women* filmmakers which had peaks of activity around lobbying for training and around seasons of new films made by women. In 1977, *Women Waves*, a festival of thirty-five films and videos made by

---

Megan Sharp, Dany Torsh); *All in the Same Boat* (1977, Deborah Kingsland), *Cradle Song* (1977, Gillian Coote) and *Roma* (1980, Jane Oehr).

<sup>17</sup> Thornley (1987: 89) describes the beginnings of the SWFG as a spin-off of Words For Women which was connected with the Balmain Women's Liberation Group: "Only women who made a commitment to both socialism and feminism were encouraged to join the group."

women, accepted any film or videotape that arrived in time to be programmed (see Appendix B). The month long season, which toured nationally in 1978, brought to the surface some of the pressing issues which were emerging as the numbers of women involved in filmmaking increased. The desire to promote feminist rather than 'other' films made by women, was fundamental to the formation of the Feminist Film Workers:

Part of the debate going on in the programming of Women Waves was 'if any woman makes a film does it get screened or are we only talking about feminist films and where do we draw the line.' [...] The FFW made the decision to focus on some films.

It seemed a perfectly appropriate thing to do then, but now I really wonder. More and more women were coming to the SWFG to have access to both feminism and filmmaking. It attracted an enormous number of new women all the time, which in a practical sense drove me mad. It didn't have an ongoing way to absorb that energy. It seems now, if you looked at FFW historically, it would be seen as distribution driven. That was only part of it. I wonder now if FFW was an effort to clarify what a feminist perspective was. In hindsight, we were responding to the sense of 'what's happened to the Women's Movement' by becoming tighter, smaller, more manageable, more in control, and having more energy and focus to move forward, as opposed to the merging of borders in the SWFG. (*Gibson, 1992*)

The model proposed for moving forward was that of the Film Action group which already involved some feminist women from the SWFG:

The attraction of Film Action has been that here was a group of people who were prepared to state their political perspectives; who were committed to revolutionary change; who were organised; who saw as a priority the distribution of political films. (*Gibson & Lambert, June 1978: 28*)

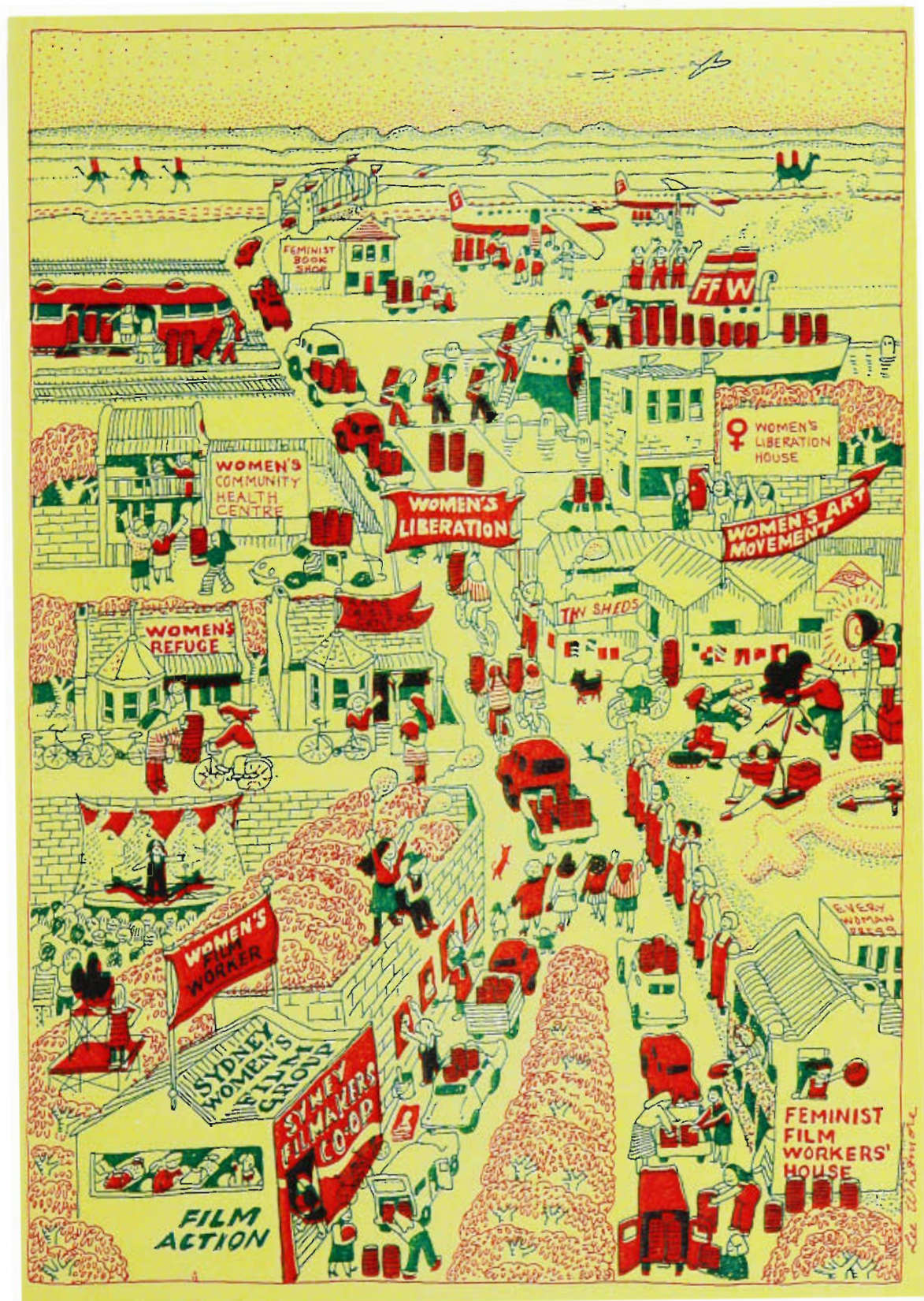
Although the rhetoric of the late 1970s relies heavily on standing up to be counted as a feminist in word and deed, clarification of the feminist perspective was constantly muddled by the problem of how to conceive the relationship of feminist filmmakers to the WLM.

The WLM has been the "audience" for women's films and an ambiguous one at that. Feminists have looked to women's films for entertainment, extension of their understanding of feminism and in order to see some parts of their own lives reflected and developed, ie, a positive alternative to the mass media version of women. At the same time they have asked questions of the films such as - how will it relate to women in the suburbs?

[...] At no point has the WLM as a whole or groups within it, ever clarified what films they want, why and how either the existing films or the ones yet to be made could be best used and distributed. At this point the notion of propaganda is at a low ebb. (Gibson and Lambert, June 1978: 28)

The desire to clarify and control the feminist perspective led logically to a smaller, self-selected group which had a vested interest in denying that anything at all had 'happened to the women's movement.'





4.7 Lee Whitmore's representation of the Feminist Film Worker's Utopia of an integrated community.

In December 1978, Feminist Film Workers, in a bold move, published a supplement in *Filmnews* to promote a season of films under the banner: "Feminist Film Workers Propose A New Feminist Cinema" (see Ansara, et al, 1978). What is unusual about the FFW supplement is that some of the articles were written by feminist activists who were not involved in filmmaking. A preview of the program of films on body image (see Appendix B) was written by Penny Gulliver (1978), a worker at Leichhardt Women's Health Centre, and the article on the prison film, *St Therese* (1978, Daniela Torsh; script by Anne Summers), was written by Sandra Wilson (1978) whose release from imprisonment was secured by feminist activists in Women Behind Bars. Links between the films and the WLM are specified in the readings, the films, and the women's health organisations listed at the end of Gulliver's preview, and in Sandra Wilson's detailed account of Women Behind Bars. This direct link with WLM groups is one indicator of the attempt to cast the FFW in the mould of the early SWFG - with Thornley and Ansara as founding members of both groups.

FFW obtained a grant of \$20,000 from the Women's Film Fund in 1979 and, in conjunction with the SWFG and the women's film worker at the Co-op, engaged in a flurry of distribution, exhibition and critical activity before merging back into the SWFG sometime in 1980. The dream of a singular vision for a feminist cinema, to be implemented by a like-minded collective, was undermined by internal tensions within FFW and the reality of the inherent diversity of the Women's Movement:<sup>18</sup>

I felt Jeni [Thornley] and I were more interested in provoking theoretical debate at screenings. Martha [Ansara] had a political driving force that was pretty relentless. There were debates around class and what were good projects to be involved with. I remember a shocking debate about prisons. Somebody must have been proposing a project of working on prisons.<sup>19</sup> [...] There was a lot of discussion about the Film Action

<sup>18</sup> Anne Summers (1975: 408) describes the drawbacks of the WLM's anti-organisational politics which, on principle, had no formal organisation, leadership, membership or rules, platforms or theories of the relation of factions to the WLM as a whole: "... quite often *de facto* elites have arisen, the small groups have not known how to cope with incorporating new members and there have inevitably been problems in maintaining continuity..."

<sup>19</sup> During the 1970s, in Sydney, prison reform was a major issue. Women Behind Bars and Prisoners Action Group had high profiles and a number of feminists were instrumental in campaigns to reform women's prisons and girls' remand centres. Some of the films include:



group. About the whole political perspective and who were socialist feminists and who weren't. There were some hot debates within the group on what was the right line on certain things.

[...] I had a complex response every week. We met every week. Very committed. It was religious really.... It had the women's network holding feel, but the intellectual level was fundamentally unsatisfying. We'd have these political right line arguments which was an old style, guilt-inducing tactic. That's where people would form up on certain positions and I found it infuriating. This was before I was a [distribution] worker. Then when I was a worker I felt unsupported and had the sense people were happy to offload the work. People would come up with great ideas and expect the distribution worker to carry them out.

When you look back there was a lot of drive. It was extremely productive over a short space of time. (Gibson, 1992)

FFW exacted a religious commitment and required a certain missionary zeal. The signs of a narrowing vision are apparent when a filmmaker as intensely poetic as Jeni Thornley (who had just completed *Maidens*) could write in *Camera & Cine*, November 1978:

This is the first in a series of brochures planned by the Feminist Film Workers at the Co-op, which will cover such subjects as Women and Health, Jobs for the Girls, Women and Work, Sexuality and Sex Education, Motherhood and Child Care. (Thornley, 1978: 34)

This uninspired list of topics and issues could not hold the energy of even the most committed of feminist filmmakers for very long. It rivalled the literal-mindedness of bureaucratised and sponsored filmmaking which women's liberationists had rejected for the freedom and autonomy of the independent sector. During 1978-79, much of the energy of the Feminist Film Workers was channelled into the activity of debating and writing about what made a film *feminist*.

---

*Home* (1973, SWFG); *In Moral Danger* (1976, Jenni Neil & Jeune Pritchard); *Not Guilty, Not Insane* (1977, Jeune Pritchard); *Prisoners* (1977, Martha Ansara and Mark Styles); *St Therese* (1978, Daniela Torsh). See Nick Herd (1983: 38).

*a season of new films and videotapes by women, to be screened in two programs:*

---

**It's Not a Bed of Roses**

Friday to Sunday, November 24 to December 3 at 5.30 and 8.30pm

---

**With Babies and Banners**

Friday to Sunday, December 8 to 17 at 5.30 and 8.30pm



---

**Filmmakers Cinema, St Peters Lane, Darlington, Ph: 31-3237**

### What is a *feminist* film?

At the end of the 1970s there was a flurry of debate over feminist aesthetics in the pages of *Filmnews* and in feminist publications including *Scarlet Woman* and *Lip*.<sup>20</sup>

I see the relationship between feminist filmmaking and feminist film theory in the late 1970s in this way: the activist persona privileged productive engagement with audiences (through distribution and exhibition activities) over personal expression as a filmmaker. To avoid the reality of the dispersal of the Women's Movement and its revolutionary goals, the FFW sought to carve out a distinct feminist identity for itself by engaging with the emerging texts of feminist film theory in order to define a distinctively *feminist* aesthetic for filmmakers.<sup>21</sup> Questions of how to engage an audience were extended from the logistics of exhibition and distribution to an examination of the modes of address of the film 'text'.

The Women Waves program of films (see Appendix B) was a catalyst for the debate over what made a film specifically feminist. The critical reception of Women Waves was split between a celebration of the diversity of the films and a critique of the formlessness of the season. In *Filmnews* Marsha Bennett wrote that the season was more "a few ripples" than a wave:

[...] now that we have hopefully come through expression of introspection and contacted our sisters and brothers through the film medium, we can start doing something about the important and burning socio-economic issues that cry for exposure.

Now that we have been recognised and united through the projection of cunts, blood, pain in relationships and a non-advertising dominated image of women, now that we know the process of film, let's move on....  
(Bennett, 1978: 7).

---

<sup>20</sup> See Suzanne Spinner (1987: 97-98) on the Melbourne origins of *Lip*.

<sup>21</sup> See Jeni Thornley (1979: 4) for a FFW reading list. See Laura Mulvey (1975); Claire Johnston (1976) for influential feminist film theory articles; and Lesley Stern, Laleen Jayamanne and Helen Grace (1988) on the trajectory defined by British screen theory, and its circulation in Australian feminist circles.

In *Hecate*, Sandra Alexander (1978) reflected on this urgency to move on from personal to 'burning' social issues, arguing for the importance of the personal and domestic:

We cannot ever see our lives wholly, nor objectively, but the [filmic] processes of selection and emphasis ... force us to consider and evaluate our world. The films are important also, in that the women choose to take private and domestic lives, traditionally the total and exclusive realm of female concern, out into the public arena. (Alexander, 1978: 117)

Barbara Alysen's concern in her *Cinema Papers* (1978) review was that some of the films "appear more intent on entertaining than on preaching or informing":

Obviously, there is nothing wrong with entertainment *per se*, but the market for independent films is still largely a non-theatrical one, and people who are prepared to set up a projector in their home, school or hall, are still more likely to want to be instructed than entertained. (Alysen, 1978: 328-329)

In November 1978 the Feminist Film Workers invited thirty-five women from Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane to Minto for a weekend of screenings and discussions on feminist film theory and practice. Martha Ansara (1979) wrote up a summary of the recorded discussions that took place during the weekend on documentary, experimental and narrative modes. Lesley Stern's germinal 1978 paper was circulated and it is clear from Ansara's 1979 *Filmnews* report that a number of participants were well-versed in film theory's complex critique of realism, documentary truth and narrative catharsis. The Minto weekend, as reported in *Filmnews* by Ansara, was striking in two respects: the range of issues debated at length without foreclosing on the difficulties raised; and the rejection of a prescriptive role for film theory. There was however, underlying the discussion, a strong sense of feminist obligations. Ansara began her report with a statement of intent:

The underlying assumption of the weekend was that we were there as revolutionaries - if one can brazenly use such a term today. That is, implicit in the discussions was a questioning of the nature of change and

the understanding that our work is aimed at overturning utterly the society which we now have. (Ansara, 1979: 7)

It was this commitment to "overturning utterly the society which we now have", that distinguished the activist filmmaker and determined her relation to feminist film theory. The publication of Laura Mulvey's germinal article in 1975, opened up a new era of (Freudian/Lacanian) critique of the exploitation of 'woman' in popular culture. For those women who were dedicating themselves to the propagation of a feminist cinema, Mulvey's article transcended the analysis of stereotypes and 'images of women' that had informed feminist film criticism.<sup>22</sup> Mulvey's work, and the work of the post-May '68 Europeans which looked back to Eisenstein and Brecht, seemed miraculously to open a locked door into the secret of women's oppression in and by the cinema as a patriarchal and capitalist institution.<sup>23</sup>

The work done post-May '68, to critique the cinema as an ideological apparatus, appeared to offer just the kind of rigorous break with old ways of thinking, that was demanded of the revolutionary. Mulvey's polemical call to destroy voyeuristic and fetishistic pleasure based on Woman-as-spectacle for the male gaze in Hollywood cinema, also sat well with the low-budget documentary and experimental modes of filmmaking that feminists had already developed in the context of the Sydney Filmmakers Co-op and its avant-garde and social action ethic.

Discussion during the Minto weekend tended to valorise the categories of documentary, experimental and narrative cinema. It was proposed that these categories be replaced by anti-realist and dialectical modes which would: cut across the truth/fiction dichotomy with film essays, poems, arguments, explorations, polemics and stories;

---

<sup>22</sup> See Molly Haskell (1974) and the four issues of *Women and Film* (1972-74) for influential examples of pre-Mulvey feminist writings on cinema. Also, Barbara Creed (1987a and 1989) for a condensed history of feminist film theory in Australia. See Helen Macallan (1994: 10) on the fortunes of Mulvey's 1975 article in teaching and film culture from 1976-1994: it was fourth or fifth on the Top Ten articles used between 1976-1981. From 1982 it maintained the No. 1 position, sharing this spot with Michel Foucault's "What is an author?" after 1988.

<sup>23</sup> See Sylvia Harvey (1980) and Martin Walsh (1981) for influential accounts of the emergence of a politics of cinema aesthetics in post-May '68 filmmaking and film criticism.

expose rather than solve contradictions, producing new ideas in the process; transgress and subvert male projections of women in narrative cinema; offer new forms of narrative, rich in the genuine ambiguities of a changing world (see Ansara, 1979: 8-9).

These aspirations for a radical feminist aesthetic were founded on the idea of a break with oppressive cinematic codes and the advent or invention of new modes which would bring about and speak to a changing social order. Towards the end of her report, Ansara set aside the above aesthetic questions and invoked the concept of narrative as a manifestation of a universal and timeless need in the human psyche, akin to dream and myth (Ansara, 1979: 10). The discussion circled back to the conviction that there is more to cinema than questions of form, realism and ideology:

So ... if you accept the position that the same stories and conflicts persist in human life, then the feminist task in making stories is to shift the ground of the central conflict so that it can be seen to be the female psyche just as much or equally with the male psyche. Whenever there is the perception that the woman is not outside history but within it and an agent of the turmoil of decision, you have an opening up to progressive elements. (Ansara, 1979: 10).

If the theoretical discussion was fairly freewheeling, it was in the reception of some of the films screened during the Minto weekend that a more prescriptive agenda emerged. Megan McMurchy's ambivalent response to the Minto weekend criticism of her 1977 film, *Apartments*, is evidence that the feminist critique, when applied to particular films, could become both prescriptive and dismissive:

*Apartments* had an odd reception at the Feminist Film Workers' Conference at Minto where it was programmed. It was discussed under the heading of 'voyeurism' and it was damned as falling into the trap of voyeurism. It wasn't dealt with at length. It was just lambasted for not avoiding all the traditional formal elements that made it available for voyeurism, or for a voyeuristic reception.

[...] I didn't internally accept that critique, but I don't think I would've had the means to argue strongly in my own defence, because you can say that about the film if you like. Actually I don't care, because it was the



film I wanted to make and I really didn't care. I was a bit stunned but I wasn't mortally wounded....(McMurchy, 1992)

The Minto weekend offered a temporary reprise of the excitement of the late 1960s. There was a sense of doors opening and scales falling from one's eyes.

For me, that weekend was the first sense of - I know this is a cliché about that weekend, but certainly in my experience it was the coming together of feminist film practitioners and theorists, all theorising about feminist filmmaking, beyond reading articles sporadically. It was an active meshing of those two levels of film practice, and it was very exciting. (McMurchy, 1992)

Although the problems and pleasures of narrative - and the dynamic of the shot-reverse-shot technique - were discussed exhaustively at Minto, it appears that the contribution of *Apartments* to this debate went unrecognised. One explanation for the neglect of *Apartments* was the difficulty of lesbian characters *who were not marked as feminist* and of a narrative whose open ending was not redemptive. Feminist filmmaking was not able to recognise in *Apartments* the specificity of lesbian filmmaking and the questions it posed for theories of gender and spectatorship.<sup>24</sup>

Another explanation of why feminist filmmaking did not follow in the footsteps of *Apartments*, which explicitly depicted sex between women, is that the Mulvey critique was quickly reduced to a concern with blocking the voyeuristic/fetishistic male gaze by banning the erotic spectacle of women's bodies from feminist films. In this way, the psychoanalytic/semiotic critique was absorbed back into the tradition of content analysis. During the Minto weekend questions were asked about audience identification with characters, filming women's bodies, and using exemplary feminists as talking heads. Ansara, in her *Filmnews* report, summed up Sarah Gibson's statements on filming women's naked bodies in *Size 10*:

---

<sup>24</sup> The advent of 'queer theory' in the 1990s finally ventures into these territories that feminism in the 1970s was unable to address on screen or in film theory. See Lisa Duggan (1992) on queer politics; Chris Berry (ed) (1993) and Barbara Creed (1993) on queer theory/queer cinema; and Rosemary Hennessy (1993) for a review of emerging queer theory.

Particularly with bodies, we decided not to show the whole of the body together but segments thereof and to tint that film. At the same time we kept the structure of the honest woman talking to you from experience. (Gibson cited in Ansara, 1979: 8)

Ansara goes on to discuss the problem of using the talking head to find an entry point with an audience which is not aware of feminist ideas:

Do you pick women who have a feminist consciousness and therefore are not representative of most women or do you pick women without that analysis as Debbie Kingsland did in *All in the Same Boat*.(1977) (Ansara, 1979: 8)

As often as not, the solution was to use feminist women to represent 'the honest woman talking to you from experience'. In *Ladies Rooms and Size 10* this Everywoman was not overtly marked as speaking as a feminist.<sup>25</sup>

Political modernism's focus on formal innovation as a gauge of a film's political credentials was put to work in Kate Legge's 1980 article in *Lip* which proposed that *A Film For Discussion* (1974, SWFG) is a successful feminist film while *Still Life* (1974, Jeni Thornley and Dagmar Ross) ultimately fails to make the grade. Legge claimed that *A Film For Discussion* completely expresses the concept of a feminist film in its production process and in its use of filmic techniques:

Ideas for the structure and content of the film evolved through a series of group discussions which contributed to its experimental form. The scenarios were improvised on the basis of personal experience, and each scene could only be shot once. The film's tableaux form interrupts the sustained flow of the narrative, so that each segment raises specific questions concerned with women and work, consumerism, the family, relationships with men, and a new state of consciousness. Even the title,

---

<sup>25</sup> A rare exception to casting the *feminist* in the role of the 'honest woman' was one of the 1977 workshop films, *The Carolina Chisel Show* (Jude Kuring and Virginia Bell), which Barbara Alysen (1978: 329) describes as a musical parody of the better known feminist polemic, cliches and political manoeuvres, "which has been curiously well received, considering that it has something to offend nearly every faction and tendency currently in vogue". See Julia Lesage (1986) on the feminist documentary form which relies on the realism of women talking from their own experiences.

*Film For Discussion* draws attention to the medium as it is used to stimulate discussion of ideas, and thus attempts to undermine the illusionistic potential of film.

Through the use of innovative techniques, the viewer is denied identification with the diegetic world of the screen as the structure of the film encourages an awareness of the viewing experience. (Legge, 1980: 132).

In line with the anti-realist critique, Legge went on to claim that the film disrupts the voyeuristic relationship between the audience and the screen through Brechtian alienation techniques, including the character's direct look at the camera "to exact a confrontation between actor and audience" (1980:133). Legge's review remained oblivious to *A Film For Discussion's* debt to art cinema and its specific modes of objective and subjective realism.

The practice of measuring the feminism of a film by its use of anti-realist and anti-voyeuristic techniques leads to Legge's damnation of *Still Life*, which for her was a prime case of articulating a feminist perspective in terms of the dominant ideology - a practice which "perpetuates the very ideology it tries to subvert" (Legge, 1980: 133). *Still Life* contrasts scenes of a woman posing *nude* for a male life drawing class, with a scene of the model *naked* with a friend:

The contrast is neither strong nor direct and is sacrificed to the more powerful image of the body as a sex object, which the film exploits by recreating a voyeuristic relationship between the audience and the screen. That the film is self-defeating, can be demonstrated by the pornographic fantasies which Michael Wilding describes in a short story he wrote during and after taking part in the film.<sup>26</sup> (Legge, 1980: 133)

The case against *Still Life* is unsubstantiated with reference to the form of the film itself, which is why Wilding's story was so handy - as if the story somehow 'proved' that the form of the film was responsible for Wilding's response. Legge's conflation of the cinematic representation of female

---

<sup>26</sup> Wilding's story was called "The Night I Took Part in a Woman's Film" (1976). Jeni Thornley was influenced by her experience as an artist's model and by John Berger's *Ways of Seeing* (1972) when she and Dasha Ross decided to make *Still Life* (see Thornley, 1992b).

nudity/nakedness with voyeurism and the dominant ideology is only one example of the rush to censor images of the female body which followed in the wake of Laura Mulvey's seminal article. The viewer of *Still Life*, strangely enough, is never assumed to be either female or feminist despite the film's limited distribution to mostly female and feminist audiences. The possibility of *women's* sexual fantasies, like the lesbian question, remains unspoken.

A more open-ended debate over feminist film aesthetics took place between filmmakers and critics in the socialist feminist magazine *Scarlet Woman* during 1978-79. Sarah Gibson and Susan Lambert opened the debate in 1978 by posing a dichotomy between clear political messages and creative expression through new forms:

The dilemma we face is the compromise between the need to express ourselves visually with new forms and images, ie creativity and the need to communicate feminist ideas in the clearest and strongest way. (Gibson and Lambert, 1978: 29)

Anna Gibbs, et al, (1979) challenge this 'false' dichotomy in their review of Jeni Thornley's film, *Maidens*, which had been the subject of intense and divided discussion among feminists in Melbourne:

If you're looking for a clear, forceful, right-on political statement made through characters with whom you or other women might be able to identify, *Maidens* is not the film for you. And ... we think that might not be a valid expectation to have of any film that intends to undermine the forced separation of 'form' and 'message', or to question the relationship between film text and viewer. (Gibbs, et al, 1979: 20)

Jeni Thornley and Sarah Gibson took up the Gibbs, et. al., reading of *Maidens* as a film about film:

So far, there have been two types of feminist film criticism. The first stems from America. Its emphasis is legitimising women's own reactions to films and making women's own contribution visible. This means a tendency to offer testimony as theory. The second is that which uses the tools of critical analysis like semiology and psychoanalysis. These theories (arising from work in Britain) analyse the structure of the film, the

way in which the images are placed together as language. The audience of the film then becomes the reader of the text, encouraged to participate actively in deciphering the signs and codes of the visual image [...]

While some of the second approach is immensely valuable, it can lead to ignoring the strong, personal and subjective response the viewer can experience while watching and participating in a film.... It also assumes that the analytical tools are "neutral", when they are, in fact, legacies of the patriarchal intellectual tradition of Marxism and Freudianism. Ruby Rich argues for a combination of both these approaches. She points to the work of feminist writers Adrienne Rich and Mary Daly who use the traditional tools of analysis with a personal vision that changes both and creates a new way of seeing and a new language. (Thornley and Gibson, 1979: 30)

This hybridisation of neo-Marxist and radical feminist critique is a peculiar characteristic of Australian feminism, at least in its Sydney filmmaking branch. It raised some hard issues for filmmakers in ways that could be both productive and proscriptive. The acceptance of the ban on erotic spectacle reveals a degree of submission to the insights of feminist film theory, when taken literally by filmmakers:

The experience of *Journey Among Women*, coupled with some criticisms of *Maidens*, *Size 10* and *We Aim To Please* means that we can no longer naively approach the visualisation of desire: nakedness, nudity, eroticism and sexual pleasure. Feminists have criticised the last three films on the grounds that the visual images of naked women perpetuate the exploitation of women as sex object and maintain the voyeuristic relationship of the audience to the film text. (Thornley and Gibson, 1979: 30).

This acquiescence to theory as a higher authority reveals the limits of feminist rebellion: new rules replaced the old. What remained intact was the need for rules.

### Taking Sides at the Co-op.

The ideal of an autonomous feminist film group was tested out in this period, with mixed results. In practice, members of the Feminist Film Workers remained just as enmeshed with the Sydney Filmmakers Co-op, *Filmnews*, Film Action and the resurgent Sydney Women's Film Group as they had ever been, and the fantasy of both a feminist film distribution company and a unified feminist perspective emerging from within the WLM, remained as elusive as ever.

The Feminist Film Workers attracted considerable flak from excluded feminists who revived the Sydney Women's Film Group and organised the Femflicks season of films in March 1979 to celebrate International Women's Day (see Appendix B). A promo for Femflicks in *Filmnews*, signed by "The Gang of Three", referred to FFW scathingly as the "gang of seven, or vanguard of vision" and declared that "it's really no wonder that the Co-op and *Filmnews* and no doubt every poor bugger who breathes the air there is suffocating from female domination" (The Gang of Three, Gill, Bev and Lis, 1979: 1).<sup>27</sup>

When Margot Nash arrived in Sydney from Melbourne in 1978 she was immediately drawn into the ferment of activity at the Filmmakers Co-op:

The women up here were really organised. When I finally came up to live in Sydney, *We Aim to Please* had preceded me. There was this little community here which there wasn't so much in Melbourne. There was the Melbourne Filmmakers Co-op. I got cranky with the Melbourne Filmmakers Co-op because they took *We Aim to Please* but they put a little thing on it saying that some parts might offend people, and I was furious.

---

<sup>27</sup> The theme of the feminist 'takeover' of the Co-op in the late 1970s is a well rehearsed one: see Jennifer Stott (1987). However the success of feminist films in distribution has to be seen in the context of the creation of a distribution network for social action films. See Albie Thoms (1976b) on the Ubu group at the Co-op (especially in terms of its distribution and exhibition strategies), and Barrett Hodsdon (1983: 288) on the new Co-op era of the late 1970s. See Albie Thoms (1981) replying to Charles Merewether (1981) on how the UBU era *included* politically conscious avant-garde and documentary filmmaking.

I met Ned Lander and I had a relationship with Ned and he was living in Sydney and then I got offered a film to shoot in Sydney. I was sick of Melbourne so I decided to come to Sydney and leave Melbourne, pack up.

[...] I really wanted to work in film. Sydney had the Sydney Women's Film Group, the Filmmakers Co-op: it had all the unknown. I'd travelled a lot. I'd spent time in New Zealand, in Adelaide, I'd been overseas, and it was the next move to come to Sydney. So I came to Sydney in '78 and went to work at the Co-op despatching films, job-sharing with Victoria Treole, cleaning films.

That was kind of wild and it was great to work at the Co-op because I met everyone there. All the girls: Gilly Leahy and Martha Ansara and Jeni Thornley and Megan McMurchy and Jeune Pritchard and Sarah Gibson and Susan Lambert, and I met Helen Grace during that time. It was a very active time. [...] And I had *We Aim to Please*. I was accepted as a film-maker. I was seen as a film-maker not as an actor who was playing around with films. John Whitteron - a lot of people I'm still really close to - my friends I met during that time: Digby Duncan, heaps of people, Marg Clancy who I knew from *The Pram*, she was around the Co-op too. And that old guard, like Albie Thoms, was on the way out. And there were the women, *the women*. (Nash, 1992a)

The shift to documentary filmmaking was sustained by the success of distribution activity around single issue films marketed to a non-theatrical network of educational and community groups. Feminist films performed consistently well in sales and rentals (see Appendix D), giving feminist filmmakers significant influence in the Co-op, shifting the original Ubu group of experimentalists from centre stage. Nash worked at the Co-op, became involved with Film Action, moved into a feminist household, and along with Carolyn Strachan, was eventually invited to join Feminist Film Workers. In order to become part of the milieu, Nash realised that her interests would have to shift to documentary projects:

I was interested in people like David Perry and Albie Thoms. They were still around the Co-op but backing off, and people like Susan [Lambert] and Martha [Ansara] were more powerful and stronger and bigger voices. The old guard were more like the old experimental mob and the new guard were more like the political issue-based documentary makers.

Because I'd made *We Aim to Please* and I'd been doing experimental theatre I loved all that, but if I wanted to make films in Sydney I had to make documentaries.

I lived in Redfern with Carolyn Strachan, amongst other people, in that big house. *Lorraine* it was called. Glenys Rowe lived there and I lived there, and a lot of people. There were five women who bought it. It's sold now, sold ages ago. It was a continuing fantasy of 'we'll have somewhere to live when we're old', except we all fought with each other. I'd lived there for years before we bought it. It had been a women's house for a long time and it came up for sale and we didn't really want to move, so we bought it; it was really cheap. The *Lorraine* experiment. I've lived alone ever since. (Nash, 1992a)

When it came right down to it, there was only a small number of women available to do the large amount of, mostly volunteer, work of distributing women's films. To alleviate this situation FFW applied to the Women's Film Fund for a \$20,000 grant for a distribution worker in 1979, and at the same time a submission was put to the Co-op's Board for the appointment of a fulltime Women's Film Worker to promote the 250 titles by women in the Co-op's collection. The production of *The Catalogue of Independent Women's Films* by the SWFG began in 1977 and was published in 1979 (Alysen ed). It was envisaged as a boost to the distribution work of the FFW and the Women's Film Worker at the Co-op, promoting women's films that were available through the Co-op.<sup>28</sup>

Apart from distribution activities and close co-operation between the FFW and the Women's Film Worker at the Co-op, the other important site for feminist intervention was the Co-op's monthly publication *Filmnews*. From 1977 until 1983 an ongoing debate over the specificity of a feminist cinema was conducted in reviews, publicity for women's film seasons, interviews with filmmakers and reports on women's film events.

---

<sup>28</sup> The National Film and Sound Archive has uncatalogued files from the Sydney Women's Film Group/Feminist film Workers: see correspondence regarding the Catalogue, and minutes of SWFG meetings from 1977 to 1979. Correspondence between Barbara Alysen (editor and art director of the catalogue, 1979a) and members of FFW and SWFG who were on the Catalogue committee indicates some of the tensions that arose between volunteer and professional workers. Alysen's voluminous correspondence with FFW members and the SWFG over payment, copyright ownership and accountability attests to the antagonisms that arose between the Co-op's paid workers, the SWFG and members of FFW.



*Filmnews* also regularly reported on the Women's Film Fund and other initiatives affecting women filmmakers. From 1976-1994 Tina Kaufman edited *Filmnews* (with Barbara Alysen until 1979) and was the privileged witness of many impassioned Co-op meetings where one faction moved against another. The 1980 AGM of the Sydney Filmmaker's Co-op (held over two Sundays on 28 September and 12 October) was typical of the intense factionalism that dominated Co-op politics at the time.<sup>29</sup> Film Action members were pushing for an editorial collective based on their critique of media imperialism, and some workers at the Co-op believed that *Filmnews* was taking too large a slice of the Co-op's meagre budget and wanted the monthly publication to be cut back to six issues a year, produced by a staff of four part-time workers. Two proposals regarding *Filmnews* were published on different coloured paper and became known as the White Paper and the Yellow Paper. When it came to Co-op politics, members of FFW lined up on different sides. FFW members Martha Ansara and Jeni Thornley, along with SWFG members Pat Fiske and Gillian Leahy, who had been an outspoken critic of the elitism of FFW, supported *Filmnews* editor Tina Kaufman and the Yellow Paper's proposal for an editorial board. Susan Lambert, Margot Nash and Victoria Treole supported the White Paper's proposal that would abolish the editor's position, appoint four part-timers, and turn over editorial policy, content and design to monthly meetings of Co-op members. Tina Kaufman recounts the resolution of the conflict:

So we had these two counter-proposals, it went to this incredible debate that went on for nine hours and then there was this incredibly close vote.

The Co-op AGM was the one day of the year when practically everybody who had anything to do with the Co-op would all turn up at once. Normally you wouldn't see people from one year to the next unless they were having a film on, in which case they'd come in and be very active for a month. So everybody turned up, we had like forty-nine people there.

[...] What happened at the end was, we got this half and half thing. We kept *Filmnews* going, but we did have a little bit of a cut in budget but we didn't get anything like the cut they wanted. But we had this Editorial

---

<sup>29</sup> See Susan Lambert, et al (1980: 1; 15) for a report on the 1980 AGM which was split over the future management and direction of *Filmnews*.

Collective imposed on us which turned out to be half and half [White paper and Yellow paper proponents] once again; we had Alessandro [Cavadini] and Carolyn [Strachan] ... and Margot [Nash] who were the bad guys as it were, and Gillian [Leahy] and Pat[Fiske] and Jeni [Thornley] - and Hall [Greenland] and me obviously, and that was it. (Kaufman, 1992)

After a bitter debate, a "positive reconciliation" was achieved by the election of equal numbers of supporters of each paper to the new editorial board, and the policy guidelines were produced out of an amalgamation of the Yellow and White proposals (Lambert et al, 1980: 1). Initially, the editorial meetings of this new collective were quite divisive over the look and stance of *Filmnews*:

And then we'd have these arguments about photos: we couldn't have photos of single people because it was idealising the person and it had to be a group thing and headlines couldn't be clever or funny or anything because Hall was always being flippant. And I had this terrific interview I'd done with Michael Thornhill. It was really good and said all these outrageous things and they wouldn't let me run it. They kept making this argument that you have to know the enemy.... Finally, I got to run it five months after it was done. (Kaufman, 1992)

By the early 1980s, changes were taking place across the independent sector and new members of the *Filmnews* editorial collective, including Helen Grace and Sylvia Lawson, brought different voices into *Filmnews*. In the film distribution area there was a shift from rentals to print sales, and the professionalisation of distribution work precipitated the abolition of the Women's Film Worker's position and changed the relationship between the Co-op and its members:

Things changed, the structure of things changed, people's interests in various areas and everything changed. [...] Later on, people ... weren't coming in to fill in a year between films; they were there because that was their career area ... so therefore they would have a much more professional attitude to the work they were doing. [...] If a film-maker came in they'd be there for a year or six months or whatever but you knew that at some stage they'd want to go off again. You really didn't want to have that sort of staff turnover because everytime someone left they'd

take a certain amount of knowledge with them and you'd have to start from scratch with the next person. (Kaufman, 1992)

In 1981, members of the FFW - by that time, active in name only - were still holding onto the ideal of an autonomous feminist film distributor, who would be free of time-consuming entanglements in the independent sector which arose from doing feminist work at the Co-op. The argument was that out of 900 films and videos in the Co-op's collection, the 260 films in the women's collection had earned 62% of the total income from rental distribution at the Co-op in 1980, reflecting the high level of feminist activity at the Co-op.<sup>30</sup> Yet there was a conviction that more could be achieved if priority was given to "the formation of a strong and autonomous feminist film culture/movement" rather than to the building of "a strong and politically orientated independent film culture/movement" (Lambert et al, 1981a: 6).

The express wish for a home base in a unified Women's Liberation Movement was a dying refrain by 1981. This desire for a pure place, separate from the bureaucracy and the marketplace - and even from the alternative public sphere premised by the Co-op - has been a powerful one for feminism. Chapter Five will take up that part of the story which is about the gradual giving up of the precious illusion of an independent, autonomous, feminist film culture which would be held in the sure embrace of the Women's Movement.

---

<sup>30</sup> See report and interview with Lambert, Treole and Gibson (1981a: 2-4) for an account of how the success of EFTVF/CDF films in distribution then became incorporated into the CDF's funding criteria for new films.

---

## Chapter 5

### MAKING THE SACRIFICE

---

In an article published in *Feminist Film Workers Discussion Papers*, Meaghan Morris (1979) put a prescient finger on what was to come for the strong, independent woman who occupied the highest place in the feminist imaginary. Writing about the return of romance between men and women on screen in 'anti-depressant' films, Morris states:

One of the interesting side-effects of this shift is a series of highly entertaining films in which women are rescued from a more or less grim future of independence (sic.) by a dashing and superior male;

[...]

[These films] include a more or less convincing, 'realistic' image somewhere along the line of a day to day life which is more or less depressing, and which for women characters is an ordinary sort of (middle class) *working* life - as bank officer, librarian, glamorous model - in which independence is unproblematic in theory but mortally dull in practice. (Morris, 1979: 12-13)

As the years of activism took their toll, feminism hit a wall, plunging its activists into crises which cried out for individual attention. Consciousness raising proved to be no match for the demands that were being made from the inner reaches of the psyche. The precious belief that all the problems were 'out there' had to be sacrificed if the activist woman, who had determinedly remade herself in the image of the strong, independent feminist, was going to be able to ask herself 'why aren't I happy?'<sup>1</sup>

For feminist activists who had spent the better part of a decade on a quest dedicated to what Women's Liberation wanted, the question 'what do I want?' had become almost unutterable.<sup>2</sup> Susan Lambert describes how the

---

<sup>1</sup> See Lesley Johnson (1993) on how the ideal of the mature, autonomous, responsible feminist had its roots in social practices of the 1950s and early 1960s which aimed to produce the mature adult as the end point in a process of 'growing up'.

<sup>2</sup> Questions of individual unhappiness were routinely quashed by political imperatives which sought to override 'bourgeois individualism'. The concept of the individual was understood to be the cornerstone of capitalist ideology. In Australia, two decades of Robert

activist persona was sustained by a well-preserved ethic of self-sacrifice in the 1970s:

[My persona] was pretty hard line. I don't have a sense of myself back then. But I had a sense that I was uncompromising, and focused and not terribly open. Into doing. But on the other hand also wanting more knowledge, though that came in the '80s. [...]

In all that time of the '70s there was a huge amount of denial - not so much a denial as a misunderstanding - of what was constructing that motivation: an ideology of sacrifice in a bizarre way, fuelled by feelings of not being good enough and therefore having to do more: share everything; be better; don't make mistakes. Very tough. Very Methodist - the clothes I wore and what we all wore. Everything was hard working and not much fun, not much pleasure. (*Lambert, 1992*)

The fun of rebellion had rigidified into an earnest discipline of political struggle during the 1970s.<sup>3</sup> In the 1980s, the edifice of the Women's Movement would come under increasing scrutiny as it began to reveal its fault lines.

In those days we projected everything out, so the problems were out there, the solutions were out there. We were still victims. For me now, I feel completely opposite to that. I look back to those times where we had meetings after meetings after meetings, all tense and struggle, angst and whatever, and I think ... what were our goals? Sure our goals were for change, but for what? More work, more angst, more disillusionment, despair? That's what happened in the early '80s. More bad health. Who'd want to live in a world like that? (*Lambert, 1992*)

---

Menzies' Liberal Party rhetoric supporting private enterprise/the market as the realm of individual liberty, as opposed to the Cold War image of the Communist totalitarian State, had branded 'the individual' as a conservative construct whose only real liberty was as a consumer in the marketplace. Andrew Samuels (1993: 15-17) suggests that the polarisation between pro and anti-market needs to be rethought in the 1990s for a politics which can hold both views as distinct "necessarily existing opposites" (17).

<sup>3</sup> The faith in political struggle as the source of change was endemic to the milieu. In a review of the Sydney Film Festival Helen Grace and Jeni Thornley (1981: 3) wrote: "... sensitivity and moral values do not in themselves lead to change - which only comes about through a process of struggle."

There is a sense that feminist filmmaking was under attack from a number of directions -internal and external - by the 1980s. Feminist film theory had entered a newly rigorous phase as academics and graduates of new interdisciplinary media courses began to displace filmmakers as the main voices in this arena. Post-structuralist writings, particularly from French theorists like Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault were confounding political projects based on self-evident truths and the goal of overthrowing repressive regimes.<sup>4</sup> The Creative Development Fund became more implicated in the funding of an innovative, politically modernist cinema which differentiated itself from the 'transparency' of social action cinema.<sup>5</sup> This swirl of activity introduced new levels of sophistication into political discourse. Yet the real break with the 1970s was happening in the depressed psyche of activism. The early 1980s is a period when feminist filmmaking found itself displaced from centre stage. Waiting in the wings were presentiments of what was to come for the milieu in the form of a crisis which began to surface in the films of the mid-1980s (see Chapter 7).

---

<sup>4</sup> In the 1970s and early 1980s small publishing collectives like Feral Publications and Local Consumption were keen purveyors of post-structuralist writings. See Meaghan Morris (1988) for a collection of such essays which were avidly read in the margins of academe. See Susan Sheridan (ed) (1988) for a collection of papers from the Feminist Cultural Criticism Conference run by the Humanities Research Centre at Australian National University in May 1986. This conference was a 'homecoming' event for work which had been almost invisible in 1970s feminism. The consolidation of Cultural Studies in the academy in the 1990s has seen this work enter its careerist phase in a newly corporatised tertiary sector.

<sup>5</sup> See Ross Gibson (1988: 20) on the way the CDF (within the industry-oriented AFC) kept faith with the modernist dream where "a rhythm of alienation and innovation was supposed to propel society into the future, into an ever-improving life". See Megan McMurchy and Jennifer Stott (eds) (1988) for a catalogue of the CDF's most citable work.

## Duties and Obligations.

During the 1970s, the liberationist conception of politics as the sphere of freedom had been tempered by the feminist conception of politics as the sphere of organized struggle. As activism became a lifestyle, feminism became more religious in its demands. Jeni Thornley describes the pervasiveness of the duties and obligations demanded of the feminist:

It's like being married to someone, feminism then. [...] There's a set of duties and obligations that went with being a feminist then. It wasn't a written list but it was there. That sense of betrayal would come up when different people would have different notions of what was on the list of duties and obligations.... It's a complex enactment of unresolved family issues being enacted on the political stage. This is what I think now. That's not to deny the need for political action. (Thornley, 1992b)

When Jeni Thornley won the Greater Union Award at the Sydney Film Festival in 1978 for *Maidens*, she felt the obligation to make 'the political speech':

There was always the sense that if you were a filmmaker and you got a prize that, when you went up to collect the prize, you'd make the political speech. That was one of your duties.... When *Maidens* won the Greater Union Award and I had to go up and get the cheque, I made a speech about the Film Commission's promotion that year at Cannes - 'Our Product's Got Great Legs' - and I wore the bag up on stage.... I felt the obligation to make a political speech.... There was an issue there. A number of us were angry at the Film Commission for making a promotion that we regarded as sexist.

[...] As I was making the speech there were people booing and people cheering. Geoff Weary and a group of students made a film about it called *Quite A Long Development*. They filmed me going up on stage. It was this weird feeling. There was David Stratton and Jacki Weaver, and I had these big black boots and this big black coat on. I can just see Jacki Weaver looking up at me thinking 'what's she going on about?' because I was driven. I was so angry about this bag of a woman from the waist down in a bikini with good legs. I was personally driven as well, as someone who hasn't got good legs. [...] To go up there and make a statement about 'Our Product's got Great Legs' and call it an insult both

to Australian women and to Australian filmmakers was like I was driven to say it from my own personal experience of being totally constructed by notions of how you're supposed to look as a woman. [...].

That set of rules and obligations that feminism imposed on us - or we imposed on ourselves through a masochistic working of feminism - is in the acceptance speech where I say 'This film couldn't have been made without the Women's Movement'. There was a very anti-auteur notion in the Women's Movement then.... There I was getting the prize but I had to pretend that I wasn't. I gave it away because I felt guilty for being acknowledged for the film. So I had to say 'This couldn't have been made without Martha Ansara and the Women's Movement.'

When for instance Jane Campion got a standing ovation for *Angel At My Table* (1990), I was in about the fourth row, and she went up on stage and she made a speech but she just thanked people and everyone cheered. I was crying. And my tears were very confused. There wasn't a sacrifice involved there. She'd made the film. It was a good film. She got the acknowledgment. She said 'Thank you' and everyone said 'there's a good filmmaker'. But there was something about the '70s and me that was twisted and convoluted. I'd made a good film, I got recognised for it but I couldn't just say thank you. I had to go and make a political speech, thank the Women's Movement. (Thornley, 1992b)

From the earliest days of feminist film production the pressure was on to work collectively, to assert solidarity and common purpose by denying individual authorship, and to have the films go into circulation as the product of a political movement. Susan Lambert describes the factors which prevented filmmakers from taking up the stance of the artist rather than the activist.

I had friends at the Tin Sheds who were artists, but they were all political artists. A whole bunch of them putting their art to a political cause. Not that that was wrong, just that it's interesting that everyone felt more comfortable in that. And there was a lot of judgment in those days of people who were expressing themselves creatively and, in retrospect, probably making their own contribution in different ways. Really, our criticism of them was a statement we were making about ourselves and our own creativity. (Lambert, 1992)



## The propagandist and the artist

By the end of 1980, Sarah Gibson and Susan Lambert - often described as "our most prolific feminist filmmakers" (Thornley: 1980: 8) - were straining against the imperative to make single issue films in accordance with the consciousness raising model which relied on talking heads. The success of *Age Before Beauty* (1980) as a discussion starter on ageing, yielded less satisfaction than the critical success of *Behind Closed Doors* (1980) which Gibson and Lambert had made as an exercise in film without worrying "about funding bodies or even the women's liberation movement, in a way" (Thornley, 1980: 9). Thornley described *Behind Closed Doors* as "the most integrated, refined and coherent of their films to date ... a stunning film that is both formally innovative, experimental, and absolutely concise in its descriptive, yet analytic treatment of domestic violence" (Thornley, 1980: 8). *Behind Closed Doors* is a seven minute film which uses a compilation of women's stories on the soundtrack to weave together a story of the pattern of a relationship based on domestic violence. On the image track, the camera records the alternating states of tidiness and disarray in a parental bedroom.



5.1 *Behind Closed Doors* (1980)

The room which is furnished with a bedroom suite from a chain store stands for marriage, suburbia and the alternation of truce and violence in the relationship between husband and wife. The mise-en-scene is a powerful evocation of primal scene imagery: the warring parents are more

vividly present in the imagination because of their physical absence from the screen.<sup>6</sup>

Despite the success of their discussion starter films in distribution terms, Gibson and Lambert were beginning to feel the limitations of working specifically as feminists. Their attempts to seek work in the industry or on other independent films were being stymied by their reputation as feminist filmmakers and by their non-traditional rotation of roles (see Thornley, 1980: 9).

When I look back, there was no way I could've engaged with the filmmaking process at an individual level. The collective structure supported my development. I couldn't as an individual have made an individual film. It amazed me, women who made their own films, like Jeni [Thornley]. Not just their own film but a film about themselves. Secretly, I always envied *Maidens* - that singular immersion in the process. But I knew I couldn't work that way. It was easier for me to work collaboratively. I enjoyed the partnership work as opposed to the solitariness.... All my feminist work was group work. I worked in alternative schools in a group and collective structure. I lived in group houses. I was completely immersed in a collective mode of work. I saw that as the best way to work and in fact the favoured political way to work. (Gibson, 1992)

In 1979 Gibson and Lambert had formed their own production company, Red Heart Pictures, which they promoted as a feminist production company. The principle of collective work was taken for granted:

I saw that some people didn't have the capacity to work together. I saw it in those terms - that they were unable to work collaboratively. They were too individualistic and too self-absorbed. It never entered my mind that something might be hiding behind the collective mode. Susan and I had trouble after *Size 10* when we decided that we didn't have to do all

---

<sup>6</sup> The pretty but anonymous bedroom in *Behind Closed Doors* recalls the personalised, anti-consumerist bedrooms in *Ladies Rooms*. Significantly the latter bedrooms are places of solitude: they are not places where lovers enact their own patterns of intimacy. *My Life Without Steve* (1986, Gillian Leahy) brings the parental relationship into the subjective space of a grieving daughter, whose work of mourning a lover is given to us through the mise-en-scene of a room with a view.

the shooting and whatever ourselves - that you could have people who did that. It was extremely difficult to shift from that mode of doing everything ourselves. We had a lot of conflict in that period. I wrote and directed *Age Before Beauty* and Susan produced it. *Behind Closed Doors* seemed to be an old style of working but Susan did more directing work on that. We both agreed exactly on everything and then on the day Susan did more directing. *Age Before Beauty* was much more on the industry model - to see what effect that had. I wanted to test out editing to see whether or not that was a technical area I wanted to develop. As it moved on, there were a lot more things at stake [in working out our respective roles]. I'm sure people on the outside used to think we were just making films together, still. Internally we were exploring those issues. (Gibson, 1992)

In 1980 Red Heart Pictures took up the idea of using the conventions of the adventure film to make a feminist thriller. Lambert and Gibson came at the idea from quite different places:

[Jeni] What's motivating you to move towards narrative?

*Susan:* When I did the Actors/Director's workshop at the AFTVS Open Program I had the most incredible week. To see the craft the actors have, and use it in a way that explored the feminist text I was working from was a revelation.

*Sarah:* It's a powerful medium that hasn't yet been used to its full potential. I want to see an adventure story that reflects my life up there on the screen. And it's not going to be there unless I make it. Also because of my anger at so called women's films.<sup>7</sup> (Thornley, 1980: 8-9)

This mix of excitement over discovering actors, and a stance that all the feminist work in narrative cinema was still to be accomplished, indicates how marginal Gibson and Lambert were in terms of the cinema. All their acclaim had been in the small world of independent filmmaking and non-theatrical distribution. Their venture into narrative would be a hard lesson after their relatively painless establishment of themselves as key figures in feminist 'discussion starter' films.

---

<sup>7</sup> See Carolyn Strachan (1979: 8-11) on images of women in recent Australian feature films including *Caddie* (1976) and *Picnic At Hanging Rock* (1976) which FFW critiqued as 'so-called women's films' because of their adherence to classical codes.

The story of the production and reception of *On Guard* (1983) is one that brings out a quintessential conflict which Gibson and Lambert embodied in their ten year partnership - the conflict between the propagandist and the artist. Their discussion with Jeni Thornley about *Behind Closed Doors* reveals how Gibson and Lambert each gave voice to the propagandist *and* the artist:

*Susan*: ... We wanted to have absolute control over everything that was in the frame and everything on the sound track. It was an exercise in film.

[...]

*Sarah*: I was uneasy about it to begin with. The fact that it didn't tackle anything new about explaining why domestic violence happens - are we just going to be descriptive?

[...]

*Susan*: It has always been an emotional experience for me, very provocative.

[...]

*Susan*: We allowed ourselves to let go of the responsibility of making the big film, the definitive film about domestic violence. We heard the Half Way House film was being made. Great. Thank goodness. ... We knew we didn't have to justify it to anyone. [...]

*Sarah*: This is the area that interests me most at the moment. Trying to find images that affect people, at the level of the symbolic or the psychic. And that film's got it. However it came to be there it's got it.

(Thornley, 1980: 9)

Red Heart Pictures lived out the tension between the propagandist's need for 'absolute control' over everything in the film, and the artist's need 'to find images that affect people' psychically. It's clear from the interview that Gibson and Lambert readily moved between these two positions, with Gibson emphasising political analysis *and* the mystery of what makes an image impact on the psyche, while Lambert exhibits both the desire for absolute control *and* the letting go of political responsibility in favour of emotional impact.

During the 1978 Minto conference on feminist film theory and practice, Gibson expressed strong reservations about the aptness of narrative for

feminist purposes. Martha Ansara summarised these reservations in her *Filmnews* report:

For Sarah Gibson and others, however, there was a whole set of limitations to narrative cinema which the discussion was not making explicit enough. She questioned foremost the notion that we can substitute a woman as main character, can create a single heroine. The notion of singling out one woman as heroine to run through a set of experiences seems to work against the other things we want to do as feminists. (Ansara, 1979: 9)

*On Guard* (1983) was released as a 51 minute, 16mm feature with four female protagonists in the role of the heroine, and a documentary-within-the drama to fulfil the propagandist objective of clarifying the film's political issue (secrecy over the control and uses of reproductive engineering by faceless corporations).

Red Heart Pictures had a long run from 1977 to 1986, sustained by a steady progression through the available funding sources, chiefly the Experimental Film and Television Fund, the Women's Film Fund, the Creative Development Fund and finally the Documentary Fellowship Fund. These funds supported the notion of a career progression from short experimental and documentary forms to feature length narratives. From their record, it would appear that Gibson and Lambert were the type of filmmakers that the AFC sought to support and foster. Yet their relation to the AFC as the chief funding body was far from cosy. In April 1982 the Women's Film Fund gave Red Heart Pictures \$4,800 for *On Guard* for script development and a script editor, despite reservations some of the Panel members had about the script. The main reservations were: the shallow characters who seemed like new stereotypes; the image of women as terrorists, and the attitude of the applicants who were deemed to be at a point "where nobody could tell them anything" (WFF File No. 275 I&II/W20). In October 1982 Red Heart Pictures was granted joint production funding from the CDF/WFF despite continued reservations from the assessors about the propagandistic script and the lack of dramatised tension and conflict - "It's all talk, talk and relationships until right near the end" (WFF File No. 275 I&II/W20).

During the year in which Red Heart Pictures was trying to raise the money for *On Guard*, Gibson took a job teaching filmmaking at NSW Institute of

Technology (now University of Technology, Sydney) signalling a shift out of the independent sector and into tertiary education (as an alternative to the bureaucracy and the marketplace) for several of the milieu's participants:

After I'd taken up the job they [Digby Duncan was the producer] raised the money. Originally we were going to jointly direct. The only way to resolve the dilemma about my having taken the job was for Susan to direct it and for me to associate produce it. ...

[Susan] has a completely different experience of the *On Guard* process than I do. [...] She had a clear objective for her own work whereas, still at that stage, I don't think I had a sense of my own work.... Getting the job was part of resolving that whole conflict about my heart not being in the industry model. I wanted to make films I wanted to make.

[...] As a consequence of our different roles, Susan felt of *On Guard* that she bore the brunt of a lot of the criticism of the film in a way that I didn't. (Gibson, 1992)

Red Heart Pictures survived *On Guard*, but the issues raised in the process of the film's critical reception, as a genre film and as a lesbian film, have yet to be laid to rest. One issue was that of a terrorist politics of direct action - a fantasy of European politics imposed on the more pragmatic, reformist ethos of Australian feminism. The other point of debate was the representation of women as erotic spectacle in narrative films, especially in terms of the lesbian relationship between two of the film's four female protagonists. Fear of producing lesbianism as erotic spectacle for the fetishistic/voyeuristic spectator resulted in a domestication of sexuality reminiscent of a Hays code film - without the sparkling repartee.

Although Gibson and Lambert's films had chronicled the lives of feminists, they had been curiously silent on lesbian sexuality which was a significant part of life in the Women's Movement. *On Guard* sought to incorporate lesbian relations as a given:

I'm very clear about the lesbian content of the film and the decision that the lesbianism in the film was not going to be foregrounded. It was going to be part of the lived experience of the characters. It wasn't going to be a

lesbian film. Yet the way in which the film was taken up was as a lesbian film.

We set out to write a drama and to write something that explored this whole issue of the representation of lesbians. We wanted an action genre - we wanted to have strong women doing things as part of that idea about how to develop different sorts of characters. I remember that Christine Pericoli [director of *The Power of Men is the Patience of Women*] was out here from Germany. She was big on guerilla actions. She'd been involved in them in Germany. We were writing about them and here was a woman, who walked into our lives, who was living them. That was one of the things that led to the film being the way it was. (Gibson, 1992)

The question of making films as feminists and/or as lesbians was much more difficult to articulate in the 1970s and 1980s, before the advent of queer cinema and queer theory in the 1990s. At the time it was by no means self-evident that feminist filmmakers, who were striving to project an exemplary image of women, would or could highlight lesbian sexuality. The hegemony of the feminist agenda (and the assumption that it included a lesbian agenda) was accepted when it came to propaganda work.

The issues we were interested in and which we made films about, affected lesbians directly too. As much as heterosexual women. And we did get to a stage where we thought well, why don't we have lesbians in our films. So when we made *On Guard* - it's not as simple as that. There was a lot of discussion about tokenism and representation and how to do it and was it a big deal anyway. And the whole thing about eroticism of course which was a big bugbear. In *On Guard* it was a deliberate decision that we definitely saw the two women in bed together so everybody definitely knew that they were on together and that they were lesbians and that they were having a love affair. That we didn't slide away from that. That we didn't avoid it.

But beyond that what was interesting was passion. What don't you want. And that's pretty difficult as we know from films that attempt to do it. With *On Guard* we had that classic thing of you try to do everything and end up with lots of problems.

I can't answer [why lesbian sexuality was mostly unrepresented in feminist films]. I just wonder myself. Quite frankly. When you think about all the energy of lesbians involved at the time. (Lambert, 1992)

The urgency of getting the message out there to other women, combined with an ethic of sacrifice for the greater good, resulted in representations of feminists as essentially 'ordinary' women who had made significant changes in their lives.<sup>8</sup> Politically, Gibson and Lambert represented themselves as socialist feminists, an identity which left aside the shifting complexities of sexual identity.

Red Heart Pictures had focused on the anxieties of everyday life, shared by women in general: the need for a room of one's own; the daily tyranny of trying to be Size 10; the process of ageing; living with domestic violence; and, in *On Guard*, the practicalities of women sharing the shopping, and other domestic tasks, while holding down jobs *and* co-ordinating a political act of sabotage.

---

<sup>8</sup> In 1989 Sue Brooks and Alison Tilson made an acclaimed pseudo-biographical documentary film titled *An Ordinary Woman*. The film gets to the heart of the formal devices which construct such a portrayal, while harbouring a respect for the notion of ordinary, everyday life and the ordinary people who live it.





5.2 Diana (Liddy Clark) and Amelia (Jan Cornall) in *On Guard* (1983)  
Planning an act of sabotage after the gym and before the shopping.

The thing behind *On Guard* - there was a strong pressure on us to make a film that took lifestyle and included political lifestyle and lesbian lifestyle and put them to a mass audience. The audience question was very important. Goody. We wanted to do a thriller, and goody, people like thrillers and will go and watch them. (Lambert, 1992)

The cool reception accorded *On Guard* was a serious letdown after the excitement of conceiving the project as popular entertainment with a politically radical message. For Lambert, the film's ending provided an image which encapsulated the dilemma faced by feminists who had well and truly paid their dues by the early 1980s.

Ultimately I was so crushed after *On Guard*. What happened at the end of that film is that those women who did all the things we were doing - they went for this mini-revolution, they said no, they blew up the enemy

and they escaped - but where did they go? They ran into that tunnel. We didn't have a clue where they went because we didn't know where we were going. We didn't have a clue. (Lambert, 1992)

Living up to the image of the prolific feminist filmmaker, tackling the issues of the day in an innovative way, was quite a burden to carry, even when it was shared between two. Feminism had paved the way for Gibson and Lambert to take up filmmaking. They had a tremendous loyalty to the Women's Movement, yet the weight of expectations placed upon them shows up in the rather too literal, too proficient workings of their films. In one sense, although they envied the personal voice in Thornley's work, they were making personal films about their own lives as feminists - or rather, about a desired image of feminism. It was a publicity image and as such it lacked depth and attempted to smooth over all but the most palatable of contradictions.

Kathe Boehringer (1984), in a post-screening discussion of *On Guard* with Penny Davies and Peter Kemp, put her finger on some of the film's political problems. Boehringer registers particular concern about the *abstract* loyalty to a cause (exposing reproductive engineering) which does not directly involve the activists (in *On Guard*) who carry out a *clandestine* act of sabotage on behalf of women in general, going "against a perceived ethos of women's activities" to stimulate the greatest possible public debate (Boehringer, et al, 1984: 10). This act of sabotage against a reproductive engineering plant also involves a degree of amnesia about early 1970s feminist hopes that reproductive technology might free women from the oppression of motherhood. As Boehringer argues, there is something symptomatic in these silences in the film, and something worrying in the manipulation of one of the women (significantly, the only one with children) into joining the saboteurs (1984: 10-11). The foreclosure of difficult political questions for the sake of direct action is a characteristic of the activist persona who achieves her most vivid, warts and all portrayal in *On Guard*. This might explain the film's arms-length reception in 1984, and its interest now as a portrait of the activist persona multiplied into the four protagonists who are barely individualised in the narrative. As Lambert said at the beginning of this chapter: "I don't have a sense of myself back then." The huge task of achieving a sense of self had been postponed, leaving an eerie blankness in the character of the feminist activist, on screen and off.

## Speaking in unison

If Red Heart Pictures is the story of an attempt to integrate the propagandist and the artist into a political perspective in a series of short films, then the epic story of *For Love or Money*, made over five years, is about a sustained attempt to hold in unison the various voices of an increasingly pluralised feminism.

*For Love or Money* is a film which overcame great odds to reach completion. For one thing, it took over the lives of four women for a number of years, particularly between 1979 and 1983, getting in the way of other projects and bringing all other aspects of their lives to a standstill, including earning a living. For another, unlike Red Heart Pictures, there was no singular political perspective uniting the filmmakers. Different and inconsistent feminisms jostled for space in the editing room without annihilating one another. McMurchy's combination of New Left socialist ideas and her non-aligned, practical feminism sat down at the table with the lesbian, communist and cultural feminist allegiances of Margot Oliver, and the radical, socialist, cultural and sometimes separatist feminisms of Jeni Thornley, and they were joined in 1980 by the anarcho-surrealist and (erratically) hardline feminisms of Margot Nash. This summation is an incomplete sketch of the actual feminisms that gathered around the editing bench on any particular day. What it indicates is that something other than doctrinal harmony saw the film through its arduous journey to completion.<sup>9</sup>

The filmmakers who came together to work on *For Love or Money* had already made their personal films - namely *Maidens* (Thornley); *Apartments* (McMurchy); *The Moonage Daydreams of Charlene Stardust* (Oliver), and *We Aim To Please* (Nash). What they had in common was the experience of individual immersion in the process of making a film they wanted to make, regardless of what anyone else thought about it.

*For Love or Money* had its origins sometime after the 1977 Women's Production Courses, when Sandra Alexander suggested to Thornley and McMurchy that it might be a good idea to get together all the images of women in Australian films and have a look at them. When this dovetailed

---

<sup>9</sup> See Meaghan Morris (1984) on the proliferation of feminisms in Sydney.

with a request from the organisers of the first Women and Labour Conference to the SWFG for some feminists to make a film of all the archival images of women at work, McMurchy and Thornley were ready, not only to embark on a piece of historical research, but also to work together. Thornley knew that it would be a very big project requiring fulltime commitment and the help of someone with a historian's grasp of Australian history. Margot Oliver was invited to join the project and Sandra Alexander left. The project required an acceptance of a certain impoverishment which James Ricketson has described as 'poor cinema'.<sup>10</sup> Commitment to the project would have been impossible for anyone who had a paid job or responsibility for children or who would have been unable or unwilling to survive on the dole. Megan McMurchy was finishing a videotape on migrant youth for Film Australia when Thornley urged her to make the commitment to *For Love or Money* fulltime from July 1979:

[Making *Apartments* in the 1977 women's film workshop] tuned me into the notion of working with other women film-makers, and then *For Love or Money* came along and satisfied that in a huge way for a very long period of time because we were all equally involved in the conceptualising of it - in the creative planning and achieving of it. So it became such a big thing, that nothing else happened, nothing else could happen during that time of being involved in *For Love or Money*. It was very big. (McMurchy, 1992)

A question remains as to what it was, in either the project itself or in the feminism brought to bear on the film, that captured these filmmakers for so many years. During the late 1970s there was a surge of interest in writing the history of Australian women in the context of class politics with a focus on women's working lives. The Women and Labour Conferences were powerful forces in bringing different generations of feminists into this project of historical recovery. McMurchy believed that *For Love or Money* was part of the feminist history project, a project that was more broadly conceived than the Women's Movement agitational propaganda produced by Red Heart Pictures:

We did feel that we were delving into areas of historical research and bringing forward historical research drawn from all those feminist

<sup>10</sup> See James Ricketson (1977) and (1979) on poor cinema as a viable mode for a local film industry, including feature production.

historians who had been overturning male versions of Australian history. And our role as film-makers was to make that new evidence and information available in a populist vehicle. The importance that we gave to the project derived from that sense of purpose that saw us digging up stuff that other women, other feminists would find helpful and informative and important in terms of being able to argue for a repositioning of women in Australian history. (McMurchy, 1992)

The filmmakers were made acutely aware of class, race and ethnic differences between Australian women as they did their research. The question of integrating a perspective on lesbian sexuality into a film about women and work was more difficult:

In terms of lesbian politics, all of us spent time together articulating the possible contradictions of our working on a project - as lesbians - which was going to be largely dealing with stories of heterosexual women. But the outcome of those discussions which would come up - almost regularly - was to find ways of inserting a kind of frail, lesbian sub-text into the film. There wasn't much space for the images we could find to suggest that, but we were conscious of trying to find those openings for the film and to insert ourselves, not just as lesbians but as women of a particular generation. The whole thing of how can we make a film which doesn't represent lesbian women in Australia was our first question, and that evolved into a question of how can we leave aside our own presence as the makers of this film, as women growing up post-World War II through the education boom of the '60s, and so on. That's what we tried to do in the last quarter of the film.

[The question of Aboriginal women] was a bigger question than the one of ourselves as lesbians or women of that generation.... Margot Oliver was the leader of the force in the group in terms of digging around to find the books that had been published. And there's a specific strand in the film that deals with migration all the way through. (McMurchy, 1992)

*For Love or Money* tried to encompass the diversity of Australian women and, in the final section of the film, to include the filmmakers' own generational break with the past. The joy of discovering a labour history for themselves specifically as Australian women, was one of the deeply

rewarding aspects of researching and compiling the film.<sup>11</sup> The historical amnesia which had incited and accompanied their rebellion against 1950s prescriptions for women, was slowly and painstakingly being replaced by collective memories salvaged from the archives and from interviews with a pre-war generation of activists. Thornley and Oliver had done some historical recovery work in *Maidens* and *Charlene Does Med At Uni* (1977). As feminist filmmakers they had a sense of contributing to the burgeoning industry of women's histories which dominated feminist scholarship in the second half of the 1970s.<sup>12</sup> Megan McMurchy was fired by the excitement of discovering women *and* Australian history together:

I'd done practically no reading in Australian history since I was in high school. I was certainly completely unaware of all the academic research which had been going on and which was coming through the Women and Labour Conferences. That was all new to me. Ideas of political economy were pretty new to me. I loved that part of the film. That was my part of the film really, if there's anything I can lay claim to. Jeni can lay claim to the poetic voice.

The patterning you can observe in women's relationships - was something I'd never thought about. The stuff about white/Aboriginal conflict and the large scale, deliberate destruction, breaking up of Aboriginal families and the Aboriginal Protection Acts, was all new to me. (McMurchy, 1992)

By discovering and assembling an image-repertoire of and for Australian women, the makers of *For Love or Money* added a new dimension to the historical books and journals being produced at the same time. The film is one of the few instances of a feminist film engaging positively with issues of cultural nationalism which were being hotly debated in the reception of historical dramas of national identity funded by the AFC.<sup>13</sup>

---

<sup>11</sup> See Ann Curthoys and Susan Dermody (1987:348) for a detailed description of the film and the suggestion that it might be a move towards "a repository of consensual, community-forming self-recognition and self-restoration." Curthoys and Dermody (349) also account for the coolness of the film's reception (see Collins, 1983b) in terms of the asynchrony between its concerns and the prevailing 'negative romanticism' that accompanied the post-modernist moment of 1983-4.

<sup>12</sup> See for instance: Beverley Kingston (1975); Edna Ryan and Ann Conlon (1975); Anne Summers (1994); Drusilla Modjeska (1981).

<sup>13</sup> See Susan Dermody and Elizabeth Jacka (1988a) on the AFC genre; Graeme Turner (1986 & 1989) and William D. Routt (1989) on national identity in/of Australian films; and Stuart

We went everywhere to bring in original research and to find the patterns amongst it. We could give ourselves credit as amateur historians in terms of bringing together all that material, and then finding a shape for it. And to some degree doing our own thinking about somebody's specialised research on let's say boot workers in Victoria in the 1880s - how that fitted with patterns in the textile industry in the 1970s. We did have to work very hard to make a shape of all that very diverse and very, very detailed and specialised academic research that we drew into the film.

I'd say for me it was the most sustained intellectual stimulation I've ever experienced over a protracted period of time. It was exciting up until the last minute. It never lessened in its demands or in its interest.

*(McMurphy, 1992)*

The film took five years to make, a fact which the filmmakers have been called on to defend more than once. McMurphy gives a searing description of the painstaking process involved in obtaining copyright on over two hundred films and then putting those extracts through the lab to be printed, running into every conceivable technical and accounting difficulty, and trying constantly to raise funds to complete the film. Fortunately, the film and its makers were well matched in terms of tenacity and vision. At one stage they showed a five hour cut to Vicki Molloy at the AFC:

We had clips from over 200 films that we eventually printed from, but prior to that there were hundreds more that we'd looked at and we had to sift and sort that out. [...]

And at the same time, I was managing all the copyright clearance, which was another incredible saga, because the film came from all over the place. A lot of it was housed at the Archive but the copyright ownership resided with God knows who up in the bush or somebody dead. Every piece of lousy little film that ended up in the film has a thick little set of cards, line by line telling the story of how I tracked down the copyright clearance. Margot and I worked very closely on that for two years.

Meanwhile the script was evolving, we were starting to patch together this great thing which eventually came to a five hour assembly, which horrified Vicky Molloy [Manager of WFF 1980-83]. She was, I think, probably the first person that we asked to see it - we'd got most of the stuff through the laboratory so we were finally in a position to have everything glued in together and more or less in the order that we wanted it to be. And it was five hours long, and it was a nightmare, and it was turgid and ghastly and Vicky just about flipped her wig when she saw it and ripped into us in a most productive fashion. We were reeling for a couple of days, but all her criticisms were absolutely sound. Not that we thought we could make a five hour film -we certainly didn't. We had this wall-to-wall voice-over and it was just ghastly. It was an ordeal for *us* to sit through - far more so for her. But her criticisms were really useful and that was the beginning point of actually bringing it down from five hours to 107 minutes or whatever it is, which took us about a year maybe. (McMurchy, 1992)

*For Love or Money* was finished in 1983, just as the new era of professionalism and career paths was being inaugurated under the auspices of the WFF and the CDB. In the wake of these changes it's hard to imagine the wholeheartedness with which the *For Love or Money* collective dedicated itself to the process of completing the film. Rather than hire a professional editor they invited Margot Nash to join the project in 1980:

At the end of shooting *Filmwork* (1981) for John Hughes, I really thought about whether I wanted to continue trying to shoot films because I could never do it as well as I wanted to. I could never get my vision on the screen. That was when I started to think maybe I'd have to go to Film School... I felt that people who had been to Film School and had that benefit of training, had it over me. [...]

I went into retreat and started doing a bit of editing assisting because I loved the editing process of *We Aim To Please*. [...] I can't remember who formally approached me to edit *For Love or Money* but I know Margot Oliver must have come into the cutting room once and seen me there and gone 'ooh', and I must have told her I wanted to edit. And she must have gone back and told the girls. [...]



Working with those women on *For Love or Money*, working in a collective, the whole idea of it sat well with what I thought was important, and also the opportunity to really learn about editing, to really cut, and to learn a lot about film-making. And I did. It was like an apprenticeship. It was a fantastic experience.

When we divided up the roles as to who did what, it was my job to do all the copying through the laboratory and set up the editing room and buy the equipment. So I set up a room at *Lorraine*, it got cut at *Lorraine*. (Nash, 1992a)

Margot Nash's three years in the editing room that she'd set up in her communal house, *Lorraine*, were years well spent in terms of what she learned about history, editing and film. For Margot Oliver who had an on-off-on relation to the film, there were also considerable gains from the historical research and the interviews she did which eventually provided the basis for the book she wrote to accompany the film (see McMurchy, Oliver and Thornley, 1983). The book in turn fed back into the script of the film, so, although Oliver was not involved in the laborious editing process, her historical perspective informs the film's chronological structure. The editing room was run on democratic lines with a vote being taken to decide contentious issues. McMurchy provided the mediating, diplomatic balance point between the more volatile, emotional forces represented by Thornley and Nash:

Megan is a fabulous organiser, fabulous diplomat, fair, sensible, clear; a bit pedantic at times, but that would be counter-balanced by Jeni and me who would be much looser and wilder. Jeni would always want to push boundaries and stir things up. And because I was the one that had my hands on the film, who was actually doing it, both of those two influences went through my little hands. (Nash, 1992a)

One of the things that made *For Love or Money* a landmark film, was the tremendous sacrifice of time, money and outside interests which saw the project through the painstaking process of its production. Margot Oliver's on-off-on relation to the film testifies to the cost exacted by the project: it needed a casualty. From the time they started work on the film fulltime in July 1979, McMurchy and Thornley had concentrated on archival research and Oliver had undertaken the task of conducting oral history interviews.

When it came to the editing process the interviews could not be integrated into what had become, by then, an archival compilation film. Oliver came back to write the book of the film (see McMurchy, Oliver, Thornley, 1983) after a six month break:

I was writing the book after I'd had a six month break from the project which I thought was going to be permanent. I thought I was off the project, that was the decision I had to make. It was a difficult one to make but it was obvious because I simply wasn't functioning.... It was partly, in retrospect, to do with the film. It was to do with having built up these very intense relationships with twenty different women and got inside their lives ... and then suddenly one day it was finished. I got very involved, emotionally, with the interviewees - it was impossible not to. Women talking about their lives is very involving, and then all of a sudden one day it was finished ... and it was like, what's the difference, the line between the professional and the personal? (Oliver, 1992b)

Ten years after the film's release, when I did these interviews, there was a shared sense of relief that Oliver had been able to return to the project, write the book and contribute to the film's narration. A potential wound in the collective's psyche was salved. To meet the final deadline for the release of the film with the book, the collective had to work flat out for seven months. One of the things that kept them going was the sense that there was an audience for the film and that the film would have a long life:

It is now 1992 and the film and the book were released in 1983, but they're still being used - they're still in currency. All of us still get feedback from teachers in educational institutions that they're using it, that they're showing it particularly in the tertiary courses that involve women re-entering the workforce or women re-entering tertiary training; some high school teachers as well. There still isn't anything else like it which is what we were banking on when we were doing it, giving up so much of our lives and being so poverty stricken while we were doing it. We knew that it was going to have a long life. There was a lot in this film and that's what we were banking on, and indeed it's turned out to be that way. (Oliver, 1992b)

There are no visible scars attached to *For Love or Money*. Although everyone who worked on the film is aware of what it cost her in terms of

time out of the paid workforce and lost opportunities to develop in other directions as a filmmaker, there is little residual tension over the making of the film. This is not to say that the filmmakers were not keenly aware of the film's structural problems:

There were times when it got very frustrating because we would have liked to have structured it differently, had a different approach. Have you ever seen the Showreel? The Showreel was great to cut; it was such fun because it wasn't chronological and I could really play, in the editing, across periods. It didn't have that dreadful rigid chronology. In trying to find another structure that was not chronological, there just came a time when we had to let go because no one came up with anything; no one solved it.

[...] It was such a huge project and it was always intended for schoolrooms, and to be used in four parts as an educational tool. So it had to be very informative and that's one of the things that's the problem - that you're trying to say everything in it, cover everything, rather than making broader brushstrokes. (Nash, 1992a)

There were limits to what could be synthesised in the collective process, and in the film as a chronological, archival history of women at work. Jeni Thornley expresses deep reservations about the collective process which found its echoes in the contentious "we" of the narration. An innovative and much debated stylistic feature of *For Love or Money* was the first-person plural address of the narration which infused the film with an interiority quite startling in a labour history documentary. The film's interior voice was part of Jeni Thornley's contribution to the film:

I don't think I could have embarked on a film like *For Love or Money* if I hadn't done the interior work that resulted in a film like *Maidens*. It's similar to now: the kind of interior work that I'm doing in my analysis I'm trying to make the subject of a film. (Thornley, 1992a)

At the time, Thornley was puzzled by the critique of the forced unity of the 'we' of the film's narration. The voice-over was meant to supply the poetry that was missing from the film as a labour history documentary:

[...] "we remember her labour, we remember that she gave, we remember how she..." - that's from Susan Griffin. It's a hymn to the mother. Griffin's work in *Woman and Nature* began for me, to speak the poetry that *For Love or Money* was lacking. We were stuck in the editing room with this at times boring sociopolitical history about women's work in Australia, and it wasn't touching anything about the interior work. For me it was only through Susan Griffin that we began to at least try and tap into an interior voice. I still think it's incomplete and owes a lot to Susan Griffin and not to our own voice. We couldn't write our own voice; you couldn't get the four of us writing such a voice because that was a myth as well: that the four of us could continue to work together for that length of time. (Thornley, 1992a)

The film's detailed and at times overwhelming historical information and political economy critique came out of the distribution imperative to make accessible, intelligible and useful films for the alternative network of education and community groups.

We had to find the lowest common denominator and that's why the film has all its shortcomings. It's got its strengths. Some are because we found the way of working together so that it wasn't just a Film Australia film with a director, a producer. I still think the film has a quality about it that has come from the way we worked, which was attenuated, laborious, slow and argumentative. There were lots of fights and arguments and debates. It took six years out of my life. I still haven't fully recovered. Six years that you're out of the workforce making a film about work. Contradiction - living on the dole and making that. What happens at the end of it? (Thornley, 1992a)

At the end of *For Love or Money* in 1983, the members of the collective walked out of the editing room which had concentrated their energies while the rest of the world had shifted. They walked out into an inner-city Sydney in the grip of the opposing (but not dissimilar) postures of post-modernism and economic rationalism which would become the twin hallmarks of the 1980s.<sup>14</sup> The concepts of liberation, representation and identity which had

---

<sup>14</sup> See Michael Pusey (1991) for a study of the executive level of the Australian Public Service and its response to the implementation of policies based on economic rationalism during the Hawke Labor government's peak years of 1985-86. Pusey's study portrays economic rationalism as an abstract theoretical system requiring an ideological commitment from its

underwritten the consciousness raising politics of the WLM were being deconstructed. From the perspective of this theoretical mode of critique, the political activism of the 1970s was seen as a naively inadequate response to contemporary circumstances.

## The Shock of the '80s

The tremendous sacrifice exacted by the milieu was not specific to feminist film projects. Some feminist filmmakers were engaged with broad left politics, working with community based groups ( Gill Leahy's collectively made film on youth unemployment, *Doled Out*, 1978, Pretty Vacant Collective), or union activists (Pat Fiske's BLF film, *Rocking the Foundations*, 1985) or following through on threads from the recent political past (Martha Ansara's postwar Vietnam film, *Changing the Needle*, 1982). Pat Fiske spent ten years making two films on the inner city and the impact of the Builders Labourers Federation's Green Bans on the boom in property development.

While making *Woolloomooloo* with Denise White and doing *Rocking the Foundations* on my own in the early '80s, it was hard to think about making other films. They took all that time, ten years, to make - mainly because I had to go out and earn money to live. [...]

I was obsessed with *Rocking the Foundations*. I felt I had to get it right. It was a really important part of Australia's history. I was concerned and anxious for a lot of those years to get it right. I had Jack [Munday, a leader in the BLF's Green Bans] giving me a bad time, saying "Oh you'll never do it". [...]

When I finished the BLF film in 1985, I felt like Rip Van Winkle. I had been working on two films about the early 1970s and I'd been obsessed with them, living those years again and again in the editing room. I hadn't done any of the reading - everyone was talking about postmodernism. I didn't know what the fuck it was. I felt so behind the times. I liked the early '70s. It was exciting, and when I came out and it was 1985 I didn't like it at all: I'd come out of the early '70s into 1985 and it was such a shock. I was depressed for a long time. Not much was happening in terms of political activity. People were talking about genres - using filmmaking terms I didn't even know. I felt so naive and so behind the eight ball. And the same with feminism. I had done reading early on in bits and pieces - I didn't have the theory. I'm a much more practical person. I'd make films about things I was interested in and I was much more involved on the Left and with people in the Communist Party. I

was involved with the Green Bans - throwing scabs off building sites - and then other political action.

[...] To get the BLF story right was all important. All encompassing. It was more important than me. I saw myself as one small part of that huge thing. I'd think 'who am I to make this film, but I am, so I've got to do a good job'. For history. For the future. For all time. I think that's probably what it was. It was really important. I didn't see myself as very important in the overall scheme of things. (Fiske, 1993)

To believe that the political struggle was more important than the individual was fundamental to the milieu and gave it much of its dedicated and righteous flavour. It also provided a smokescreen for the anxiety and sense of inadequacy that drove some of these filmmakers to great lengths 'to get it right'. For this generation of women who wanted to be different from their self-sacrificing mothers, the image of the political replaced the image of the family. No matter what it cost, the ideal (of a greater good) came first. There was a sense in which all the films were answerable to a constituency - whether that be a union leader like Jack Munday, or the whole of the Women's Liberation Movement, or even History itself. This produced the interesting situation where no film could ever be good enough - a familiar place for women to find themselves. For a generation of women hauling themselves out of the great 'feminine mystique' of the 1950s, determined to make history, it was highly disturbing to encounter the inherently contingent nature of 'masculine' endeavour, especially as the bulwark of a united Women's Movement began to disintegrate and leave them without an existential safety net.

Unlike Pat Fiske's time-warping experience of prolonged isolation, Gillian Leahy found herself immersed in the changes that were happening in the emerging arena of cultural politics. Leahy's modus operandi as a political activist was very much a social one, geared to involvement with community based groups rather than isolation in the editing room. Some of the community based projects that Leahy was involved with include *The Settlement* (1978), *Doled Out* (1978), *Shot to Pieces* (1984) and *With Inertia* (1987). After immersing herself in the politics of the Film School for three years, Leahy found a base for her political activism through the Co-op where she became a director and a member of the *Filmnews* editorial collective. Leahy provides a succinct description of how the revolutionary ethic of the

political action documentarists, which carried over from the 1970s into the early 1980s, met with the experimental ethic of the Co-op's founding filmmakers and continued to oppose itself to any notion of the industry or the mainstream:

There was an us/them about independent filmmaking. Martha [Ansara] was responsible for a lot of that definition of yourself as always on the revolutionary fringe, and always remaking cinema and remaking the concerns of cinema, and revolutionary content as much as revolutionary form. The whole Co-op ethic. Albie Thoms's article on the first ten years of the Co-op was good for looking at where that came from.<sup>15</sup> It was interesting to re-read that recently and see how much of what I thought, was formed by those ideas. I don't even remember reading Albie's article at the time. It was like I knew it all. Another seminal article was James Ricketson's 'Poor Movies, Rich Movies' [1979] - that argument that the way for Australian filmmaking was low cost, independent, not an imitation of the American model. In so far as we at the Co-op regarded ourselves as a movement around those ideas, we didn't have a lot of truck (nor did they with us) with people working in television. There wasn't a big film industry then. (*Leahy, 1992b*)

Leahy was a lynchpin in revamping the SWFG, publicly criticising the FFW for its elitism, and setting up public occasions where the emerging critique of feminist cinema could have a voice to counter what she saw as the hegemonic feminism represented by FFW:

It was only when I first started teaching at UTS in '79 that I became aware of 'Film Theory'. In one class when I was talking about coverage in terms of master shots and reverse shots, students like Renee [Romeril] and Gabe [Finnane] turned on me, fired up as they were with that critique of narrative at the time, and said 'you're teaching us reactionary filmmaking.' I probably said something like 'you have to know the rules to subvert them'. That basically alerted me to the fact that there was a lot going on that I knew nothing about.

---

<sup>15</sup> See Albie Thoms (1978: 346-405) for the most detailed account of the revolutionary Co-op ethic in its distribution and exhibition practices from 1966-1976.



Because I was influenced by Renee and Jen [McCamley] and others, I organised a screening of their films to the SWFG at the Co-op. I thought the UTS students had a lot to offer the feminist filmmakers and that they should be confronted by their ideas. But they didn't turn up. That incident led to Gabe's continuing contempt for them and the famous WIFT discussion about *For Love Or Money*. Gabe got up and went on and on about what a reactionary piece of work it was, and then it transpired that she hadn't seen the film. She more or less said 'We can tell what it would be like. We don't need to see it.' To me she represented a position that was well argued and really angry about what they were doing. She was ridiculous but what she was driving at was the hegemonic feminism that appears throughout that film in the function of the 'we' of the narration. (Leahy, 1992b)

A renewed vigour in feminist film theory exacerbated the growing divide between 'theorists' and 'practitioners' in the early 1980s by privileging rigorous attention to the reading list. Initially it seemed that feminist film theory in its Althusserian/semiotic/Lacanian incarnation would revitalise questions around feminism and cinema. This theoretical work was imbued with the same ethic of hard work and the sacrifice of pleasure which dominated feminist filmmaking in the late 1970s. It was enamoured of a Brechtian cinema of distanciation which demanded a cool-headed viewer seeking the pleasure of work rather than the seduction of identification, and it was wedded to what David Bordwell (1989: 72) has termed a "hermeneutics of suspicion".

Lesley Stern's 1980 review of the *Feminism and Cinema* Special Event at the 1979 Edinburgh Film Festival, kicked off the debate, noting that although there were more 'feminist' films being made, "there is markedly less assurance about what constitutes feminist cinema" (1980: 8). After registering relief at there being "less pressure to define positions" Stern declared her own definition of the feminist cinema project in 1980 as "work within film language to produce a different viewing subject" (1980: 8). At the Edinburgh forum there was a division over the films of Chantal Akerman - rejected for their avant-garde, inaccessible formalism and their artiness, or hailed as "an articulation of the feminine voice and a radical restructuring of point of view of feminine desire" (Stern 1980: 8). The problem of clarity and accessibility in both film theory and practice was

touched upon, along with the urgent question of rethinking the audience in terms of distribution practices (Stern 1980: 10-11).

In February 1981, Lynne Hutton-Williams extended Stern's definition of the feminist film project in her review of the Women's Film Fund's showcase season of five films: *Consolation Prize* (1979, Rivka Hartman); *Flamingo Park* (1980, Clytie Jessop); *Age Before Beauty* (1980 Sarah Gibson and Susan Lambert); *Climbers* (1980, Ros Gillespie); and *Pins and Needles* (1980, Barbara Chobocky). After an appreciative review of Martha Ansara's cinematography on the first four films, and a brief account of the attractions of each film, Hutton-Williams seeks to specify a feminist perspective. The result is a list of proscriptions and a number of prescriptions for feminist filmmaking. The banned list includes portraying *individuals* when representation of individuals cannot uncover the political and the personal, and any notion of something *essentially* female. The mandatory list includes: the use of psychoanalytic theory to look at the construction of the viewing subject by and through language in terms of sexual *difference*; sabotaging identification by using distancing devices that produce unpleasure; and interrogating the dominant mode of classical narrative/realism (Hutton-Williams, 1981: 9).

This list of attributes of a properly feminist perspective is refuted to some extent in *Filmnews* articles by Louise Burchill (1981) and Meaghan Morris (1981).<sup>16</sup> Burchill argues for a *restriction* of the name 'feminist film' to films defined by their relation to the WLM, and points to the difficulties of claiming that any cultural artefact is intrinsically feminist. Defining feminist film by its instrumental relation to the WLM, Burchill deliberately excludes the films of Chantal Akerman and Marguerite Duras from the feminist canon on the basis of their radically different approach to film as process (1981:15). The implication is that the latter films warrant attention from a filmic/aesthetic perspective whereas feminist films are defined by their service to politics rather than art. Burchill queries the belief that political effectiveness can be measured by distribution/exhibition statistics:

Claims of political effectiveness figure pre-eminently, with this effectiveness judged precisely by the extent of dissemination.

---

<sup>16</sup> As early as 1975 Meaghan Morris had published an article in *Cinema Papers* polemicising against reductive, prescriptive and predictable modes of feminist film critique.

[...] a theory of political change through exposure to the "truth" (or even one version of it) seems sorely to lack historical - much less theoretical - validation. Distribution, in itself, would seem meagre support for any argument of political effectivity other than one couched in terms bearing dismaying similarity to basic behaviourism. (Burchill, 1981: 11)

Whereas Burchill professes that feminist filmmaking is condemned to restricted, realist forms because of its politically motivated desire for clarity, Morris takes a less castigatory approach, using her review of *Sigmund Freud's Dora* as an opportunity to demonstrate that the feminist demand for clarity, in the name of politics, tends to disavow that there is a politics to 'what makes sense' in our culture (Morris, 1981: 7). Drawing attention to the Lacanian paradigm dominating feminist film theory, Morris points out the paradox "that what seems to be far and away the most comprehensive account of language and subjectivity is also - apart from being "hard" - avowedly phallogocentric":

At worst, this can produce "feminist" texts ... which assume that women are always-already never where it's at. At best, it poses a problem of disengagement for feminists who seem ... to be drawing their greatest strength from their strongest opponent. (Morris, 1981: 7)

Between the hardline taken by feminist filmmakers and the 'hardness' of feminist film theory, the outlook for the feminist cinema project for the 1980s remained bereft of the Eros qualities which had launched the project in the late 1960s.<sup>17</sup> Although Gillian Leahy managed to straddle both sides of the divide after she began teaching filmmaking at NSWIT (now University of Technology, Sydney), she paid a price for putting her energies into political work and other people's projects instead of her own creative work:

A continual conflict for me and for a lot of feminists, in that whole period, is that of competing loyalties to yourself and to the group. It's a conflict about doing what you do politically and doing what you do as social engineering and doing your own creative work.

---

<sup>17</sup> See Helen Macallan (1994: 7-9) for evidence of a repudiation, in the 1990s, of the psychoanalytic-semiotic paradigm in film theory which fed a new wave of criticism, some of which was published in *Filmnews* in the early 1980s.

One thing that really knocked me for six recently was a distributor ringing me up after he'd read the script for the road movie (*The Weather Man Lied*). He said 'It's a great script. It's not particularly commercial but it should get made and you should be making films. I'm sick of seeing your name on other people's films as 'Thanks to...'. You're helping other people to make films and you're not making them. You should write this as a novel'. I hung up the phone and burst into floods of tears. It's constantly constructed as the conflict that what you do politically takes away from being self-interested about your own creative work. What I envy is the ability to focus on your own creative needs and to follow them. It's easier to be selfless in a way. It's harder to - [trails off]. (*Leahy, 1992b*)

In the early 1980s, Martha Ansara's ambitions as a cinematographer were curtailed when she had her third child.

After Alice was born in 1982 ... I tried to do a couple of films. I did the tests for *On Guard* when I was seven months pregnant, climbing up on ladders. It was clear I couldn't go on. I did another film for Madelon Wilkins, which was very beautifully lit, and I was delighted because I hadn't lost it (*Taking A Look*) and it was nominated for an AFI cinematography award, and I did a couple of documentaries but it was impossible with a young child. (*Ansara, 1992b*)

In 1987, Ansara won the annual Byron Kennedy award for her contribution to the film industry, which for her, ironically highlighted the on-going tension between activism for social justice and following her own ambition as a cinematographer. Ansara claims that her Cinematography nomination was more deserved than the prestigious Byron Kennedy award which she found an acute embarrassment in the light of her doubts about awards in general:

I got it [the Byron Kennedy award] partly for doing all these women's things when they weren't done, partly for making films that were a bit unusual, but really for always trying to be involved in the collective work and take my share. That's why I say it was for being a good little communist. I believe that that was it. I felt very embarrassed. I felt I didn't deserve it. But the cinematography nomination I deserved. (*Ansara, 1992b*)

At the same time as various ambitions were struggling to survive in the world of low-budget, independent filmmaking, a challenge to the milieu's political aesthetic was being mounted, mainly on the critical front under the auspices of 'Theory', but also on film - notably in the polemic which surrounded the funding, production and marketing of Helen Grace's *Serious Undertakings* (1983). After a stint in London in 1975-76, Grace returned to Sydney and located herself on the periphery of the marxist-feminist intellectual milieu which was evolving an anti-essentialist critique of radical feminism, during the late 1970s:

I was doing a degree which took about ten years to do at three different institutions. I was doing Philosophy and Government at Sydney Uni and never wanting to write an essay, only wanting to give them photographs and images. Hellishly difficult student. I wanted it to be possible to make arguments in visual forms. I was arguing against the prejudices of the literary and a conventional pedagogy and academic demand which I was furiously trying to resist. I wasn't very articulate. I just knew what I didn't like. This was a time of having a politics of immediacy, so you didn't want any of this crap that slowed you down. The slogan in everyone's mind, a decade after '68, was immediacy. Not the counter culture demand for reality. By this stage I was beyond spontaneity. I was just difficult. And above all, I had a baby. That was the really immediate thing that made me cranky. Not having enough sleep, and all these questions of feminism and child care. When it came to the demand within a university degree to do some rational activity like write an essay, I was just hitting out against that.

[...]

Freudo-Marxism and the publication of Juliet Mitchell's book, *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* in the mid '70s began another trajectory which was a critique of consciousness raising. The experience of living in England and being caught up in the politics of culture led to the development of a marxist flavour. This was the height of Althusserianism. The first conference I went to when I got back to Sydney in 1976 was a Freud conference at Sydney Uni. *Working Papers* was already doing those unauthorised publications of poststructuralist

work.<sup>18</sup> There was a tension between the English situation which was so doggedly functionalist-marxist and the Sydney situation which was traditionally libertarian-anarchist. It was all pretty confusing really.

Semiotics was one of the key inputs. The crude way we understood or worked with it had to do with a new way of analysing images - a Barthesian approach to analysing images which gave me a way to connect my political interests and my interests in the visual. [...]

I'd wanted to make a film for some time, coming out of the concerns of groups like Blatant Image [formed through the Women's Art Movement at Tin Sheds]. I'd had some contact with film through Erika Addis. We shared a house when she came to Sydney to go to the Film and Television School. I got to know the people going to the Film School. Tim Burns was tearing around Sydney in '78-79 making *Against the Grain* which I'd been involved with. So film was just another possibility. (Grace, 1992)

*Serious Undertakings* positioned itself outside the feminist filmmaking community, even though Grace - as a member of SWFG and the *Filmnews* editorial collective - became an active participant in the milieu in the early 1980s.

By this stage [1980] I didn't feel comfortable with this thing called feminist film because of what I saw as the essentialist aspect of it. Whenever I heard the word feminism I wanted to talk about class. I was irritated by just feminism. I thought it was about the gaining of certain privileges for certain women. I was just bad tempered really. Easily antagonised. I just didn't believe that women were better in the way that feminists claimed that they were. There was a rigidity about how you were supposed to live. Maybe that was just an anti-wowser tradition that I came out of in some way.... I wasn't an anarchist but I was powerfully influenced by a whole lot of anarchists and libertarians in Sydney. (Grace, 1992)

In trying to define the influences which differentiated her position from that of established feminist filmmakers, Grace attempts to juggle at least

---

<sup>18</sup> See Paul Foss and Meaghan Morris (eds) (1978): includes, under the name of Feral Publications, translations of Eco, Baudrillard, Deleuze and Guattari, and Irigaray.

three balls: on the one hand, she refers to her own capacity for paranoia, antagonism, jealousy and general crankiness towards the claims that institutions or groups might make about themselves and on behalf of others; on the other she identifies strongly with the British marxist-feminist critique; and yet again, as an Australian living in Sydney she was aware of the different pulls internationally between American radical feminism, British marxist feminism, French post-structuralism and the Sydney libertarian-anarchist and anti-wowsler influences.

At the time, it seemed to Grace that there were clear distinctions between the critique that formed her approach to filmmaking and that of the feminist filmmakers whom she saw as caught up in an essentialist feminism. Grace's 1981 critique of *Violation*, Beth McRae's documentary on rape, is one instance when an aesthetic named 'feminist' was defined and then analysed for its political ineptitudes. Grace takes issue with the production of truth and authenticity in feminist films (and much political filmmaking) citing the use of realist representation and the talking head as the chief culprits:

A number of women tell their stories and these stories are given the status of truth by the use of the talking heads form - dependent on an assumption that "it really happened" to these individuals, and this assumption is based in turn on their convincing performances, i.e., it is essential that the women be able to act out their stories convincingly, and it is partly *this* ability which endows the stories with truth. (Grace, 1981: 11)

Grace registers a frustration that all the work that has been done to problematise representation in the cinema has had little effect on feminist filmmaking:

The same forms continue to be used, even though through overuse there is a considerable risk of being ineffective.

*Violation* ... functions in opposition to its feminist intent. The film, in a sense, operates to constitute its subjects as victims, able to be helped by the services provided by the government, so that it becomes a significant part of the production of social institutions and policy.

[...] It is ... important to recognise the other political considerations and determinations which are always operating. To fail to do so is to remain in the naive position of imagining that the filmmakers' creativity can transcend all limitations if only it is left alone to express itself freely. Or to imagine that one's feminist/political commitment automatically guarantees that one's films will be "feminist". (Grace, 1981: 11)

In this article Grace established the premises which would result in her 1983 film *Serious Undertakings* - produced as an intervention into film, politics, cultural nationalism and feminism. The film has a long section where four talking heads give convincing performances as academic experts on Australian landscape painting and questions of nationalism, and also answer questions about their experiences of child care and feminism - until the filmmaker's parodic interventions, with subtitled questions and digitalised dissolves of the filmic image, prompt the audience to realise that the 'experts' are actors, not academics imparting knowledge or speaking the truth about their own experiences.

Grace also paid exemplary attention to the conditions of production and reception of *Serious Undertakings*, publishing a critical history of the Creative Development Branch (Grace, 1982) just before the film's release, and orchestrating the film's reception by drawing attention to current debates on cultural nationalism and cinema at the 1982 Australian Screen Studies Association conference and in publicity for the film.<sup>19</sup>

Although in 1983-84 there was a strong public stand-off between feminist film theory and independent feminist filmmaking, in retrospect, Grace sees her own interventions as integral to the overall project of feminist critique of the representation of women:

Now we have to contextualise those different approaches as being part of a similar overall project. I hope it's possible to move beyond this terrible sectarianism that produced these oppositions between people trying to do the same thing but disagreeing on how to do it. We had those

---

<sup>19</sup> See Erika Addis and Helen Grace (1983) on promoting discussion about the film; see Sylvia Lawson (1984) for a defence of *Serious Undertakings* in terms of the very debates about cinema, cultural and national identity that produced the film. See Grace and Addis (1984) for the release script.



disagreements and they were bitter - not that bitter I suppose - but they produced forms of mistrust. That's a problem of a certain oppositional politics of the period. The shared project was about the representation of women and the disruption of what appeared to be the dominant ones at the time. Now I don't feel as strongly that what the mainstream media is doing is as harmful as what I thought it was at the start. It's possible to laugh at a lot more than it used to be. (*Grace*, 1992)

Although *Serious Undertaking* came from a feminist politics which had allegiances to the work produced under the aegis of post-structuralism, the film drew on the communal wellspring of specular politics which inaugurated the baby boomers into the nuclear age. In a paper delivered in July 1985 at the Conference on Culture, the Arts, Media and Radical Politics, Meaghan Morris suggested that the specular era of postmodernism began in 1945 at Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the 'reality' of which could only be confronted through an *image* of what had happened:

The postmodern begins with an experience in which it is impossible to 'see' unmediated empirical reality and survive; an experience which would-be survivors, potential victims, can only evoke and express with images, metaphors, fictions and rhetoric which they must try to convert into actions to ensure that we may never know that 'reality'. (Morris, 1988: 186)

By the time of *Serious Undertakings'* 1983 release a sense of crisis was beginning to reverberate throughout the milieu. It could not be assuaged by the Holy Grail of a new (structural, materialist) model of political cinema. Perhaps the only intervention that could have had profound repercussions for feminist cinema would have been the advent of a series of preposterous, or 'unmade' films which lurked in the deeper recesses of the milieu's psyche.<sup>20</sup> Megan McMurchy harboured for many years an idea for a film that drew on her childhood fascination with adventurers, explorers and the exotic contrast of the South Pacific and the Antarctic:

I don't think I can put it together very tidily but, it somehow linked an obsession that I'd - not an obsession actually, but a strong interest that

---

<sup>20</sup> There were two categories of 'unmade' films: those that were developed into treatments and scripts but not funded; and those that were figments playing at the edges of the filmic imagination, deemed too preposterous even to develop into a script.

I'd had for some time in the Antarctic. The idea of going to the Antarctic ... was a dream that I'd had for a long time. It reminded me of the adventure stories that you read as a girl child, or as I did as a female child growing up in the '50s and reading about the adventures of Empire. Most of my childhood reading was very British and all from the point of view of a male explorer usually, or adventurer - one of those adventurers on the high seas. It was about the romance of exploration and trying to work out one's relationship to that as a subject of fantasy when it's utterly unachievable (probably) in real life because you are a girl and you will never get to do those things that boys do, or are said to do.

And somehow I had that connected up to a set of ideas [which] had to do with my mother's family history of growing up on Thursday Island, and some of those images you get in Frank Hurley films of wild New Guinea representing the exotic - all this sexual threat of exotic blackness, and my mother's childhood stories of growing up with native children on Thursday Island, and her position as a residual colonial figure - given her father's role of shipping agent in that part of the world which has a history of being seen as exotic from a white colonial perspective.

[...] It was some attempt to examine my own childhood conditioning as a far flung colonial who is still partly a product of those very old-fashioned now, but potent ideas and images and stories - and try and examine how much of that is still with me, because it still is. The romantic questings that I lived through in my imagination as a child were tremendously structured by Robert Louis Stevenson and all those literary representatives of the Empire. (McMurphy, 1992)

Although McMurphy applied for a documentary fellowship to develop this project she was unsuccessful - one of the costs of five years or so on the one project was the absence of a 'track record'. McMurphy's desire to work with ideas, images and stories that had formed her imagination "as a far flung colonial" presages a turn away from the social issues agenda of documentary filmmaking which dominated the transition from the 1970s into the 1980s. The burden of feminist duties and obligations had exacted a cost, leaving the milieu in an imaginatively and economically impoverished state.

By the time *On Guard, For Love or Money* and *Serious Undertakings* were commanding critical attention in 1983-4, the feminist film project, and its

utopian and revolutionary ambitions, was beginning to quietly unravel. The story of this unravelling, and the journey back to the mother which accompanied it, will be the subject of Chapter 7. Chapter 6 will focus on the Women's Film Fund and its contribution to the murky body of 'unmade' films that lurks just below the waterline of a conscientiously feminist cinema and its citable films.

---

## Chapter 6

### AGONY AUNT: THE WOMEN'S FILM FUND

---

The utopian project of a feminist revolution was tempered by a strong dose of pragmatism which was especially evident in the clarification of the role of the Women's Film Fund and its transfer to the Australian Film Commission in early 1980.<sup>1</sup> Anne Summers has something to say about the distinctively pragmatic character of Australian feminism in the 1994 revised edition of her 1975 book *Damned Whores and God's Police* :

Australian women were ... fortunate to have burst onto the political scene just as Australian politics was emerging from the long conservative hibernation of the Menzies years. [...] The Whitlam Government's promises to women were the result of pressure from the women's movement, especially the Women's Electoral Lobby (WEL), ... but the presence of this reformist government in turn created a pressure on *us* to engage with it. The distinctive pragmatism of the Australian women's movement was born in those years. Unlike the American movement ... Australian feminists quickly learned to grapple with the intricacies of the government submission and the techniques of lobbying politicians and bureaucrats. (Summers, 1994: 515-516)

The Sydney Women's Film Group had been both beneficiary and critic (see Chapter 3) of the Women's Film Fund since its early days. It also contributed to the Fund's assessment of projects and, from 1983, to its management and Review. Anna Grieve describes the early hostility between the Women's Film Fund and the SWFG while the fund was located in Canberra and administered by the Project Branch (responsible for feature films) of the AFC (1987: 78-79). When the Fund was relocated to

---

<sup>1</sup> The WFF's initial balance of \$146,523.75 on 1 July 1975, had dwindled to \$5,666.44 on 22 January 1980. The WFF needed \$45,264 to fund its March 1980 approved projects. It also needed a full time administrator. These were the circumstances of the WFF shift from the Office of Women's Affairs in Canberra to the AFC in North Sydney. *Caddie* (1976, Donald Crombie) provided substantial returns on the WFF investment, boosting the fortunes of the Fund for a short period before the realities of film financing began to make inroads into the initial tiny allocation of funds in 1975. Information obtained from Women's Film Fund Policy file no. 76/112.

Sydney and placed within the Creative Development Branch in 1980, it was allocated an annual budget of \$100,000. Grieve argues that such a low level of funding was a deliberate policy strategy by the AFC which maintained that women already had access to all its funds and that any special fund for women should operate under a sunset clause (1987: 79). This dire funding situation had repercussions for keeping the WFF marginalised and its projects severely impoverished.

Feminists who became involved with the WFF as assessors and/or managers found themselves becoming what Anna Yeatman calls "custodians of policy" (Yeatman, 1993: 238). This femocratisation process was an important influence on the personality of the milieu in the 1980s in terms of the new emancipatory voices within feminism which contested white, Western, middle-class privilege:

It is a salutary and uncomfortable experience for subjects who have been interpellated as emancipatory voices to find themselves the custodians of policy. [...]

Historically, the custodians of feminism drew discursive legitimacy from the universal civilizing mission of the middle class.... They could speak on behalf of *all* women, including those less privileged than themselves. It is this which the new emancipatory movements within feminism specifically contest. (Yeatman, 1993: 238)

Within the AFC, the WFF embarked on a determined struggle for recognition and legitimacy. At times, this struggle clashed with the intemperate desires and reprobate fantasies that flooded into the WFF in the form of applications for funding. The inchoate state of many of these applications was a worry and an embarrassment to the Fund which played Agony Aunt to its feminine constituency and Professional Femocrat to its masters in the AFC.

### **A perpetual balancing act: 1980-83**

The appointment in April 1980 of Vicki Molloy to manage the WFF inaugurated an impressive balancing act which became the hallmark of the Fund until its review and redirection in the mid-1980s. Molloy's varied career in independent, feminist and mainstream film and television proved an ideal template for the Fund's broadbased mission which entailed straddling a range of sites in order to produce a national constituency for the WFF. A graduate of Melbourne's Swinburne Film and Television School, Molloy had worked on independent films and mainstream features in Melbourne, had a Monash University Film Society background, and had spent two years overseas gaining production experience in television. Molloy's initial involvement in film coincided with the heyday of the Women's Movement in Melbourne.

The Women's Film Festival in '75 was really influential. Saturday night at the Palais, a whole bunch of us raced out into the foyer and said 'if they can make that sort of film we can make them too'. A lot of the films were still quite primitive and from everywhere else in the world except Australia. A lot of people got quite stirred up about wanting to make films.

After '75 I went to Swinburne - the first year of their graduate diploma. We set about making quite strongly feminist influenced films. It was a pretty torrid time. [...] We were absolutely rabid about every instance of sexism and all our attitudes about filmmaking - and also we knew bugger all about filmmaking, like everyone else. We came into a college which had never had any female teachers. Michael Pattinson was making an epic about a tram and all the teachers were falling over themselves to assist with that. And when things would go wrong a lecturer would pull you aside and tell you you should be home having babies. (*Molloy, 1992*)

Molloy's story about the making of her Swinburne film exemplifies the activist fervour of the times which linked filmmaking directly to the perceived needs of the WLM: the image of itself that feminism wished to project was more important than the reality of the situation Molloy was filming:

I decided to make a film about the Women's Liberation Halfway House. My interest was to do films about women's lives. I'd acted as a volunteer there the year before with the Melbourne Women's Movement and Halfway House collective. It interested me because it was a conjunction between young ideological feminists and strongly socialist leftwing feminists and worldly tough and desperate working class women who were coming to the Halfway House.

I wanted to make films that investigated women's lives and proved that women could do things. I set about making an ideological film to show how a collective was capable of saving working class women from desperate situations and changing their lives. I learnt quite the reverse actually. And then had to spend much of the film working out how to make the film say what I wanted, instead of reflecting the real goings on of that collective and that house. (Molloy, 1992)

When Molloy returned to Australia in 1980 after two years overseas, there was no production work in Melbourne so she made the move to Sydney where she did some editing on Sarah Gibson and Susan Lambert's *Age Before Beauty*, funded by the WFF. Gibson and Lambert encouraged Molloy to apply for the newly created job managing the Women's Film Fund. The decision to go into administration was not an easy one for Molloy, and indeed, her plan to return to production work after two years in administration never eventuated.

It was in her second year in the job, after streamlining procedures and publicising the Fund through a national tour of WFF films under the rubric of *Moving Pictures*,<sup>2</sup> that Molloy turned her attention to the gulfs and tensions between different constellations of women involved in filmmaking. By this time the whole tenor of the debate over feminist film had shifted and FFW and SWFG had become enmeshed in the Co-op's

---

<sup>2</sup> For a review of the promotional season of WFF films, *Moving Pictures*, which toured nationally in 1981, see Susan Stewart (1987: 259-266). It was a more streamlined and inoffensive program than those put together by the SWFG at the Co-op, yet the five films were selected for their diverse subject matter and style, ranging from comedy to dance to documentary. A bland form of 'diversity' and a kid gloves approach to subject matter was to be the hallmark of WFF films (with some notable exceptions) in the 1980s. See Appendix B for the *Moving Pictures* program of films. See McMurchy and Stott (eds) (1988: 32-131) for the WFF's citable films, 1978-1988.

project of defending independent film culture.<sup>3</sup> As manager of the Women's Film Fund Molloy initiated the setting up of Women In Film and Television (WIFT) groups in the major filmmaking centres. Molloy hoped the national network of WIFT organisations would be a bridge between industry and independent filmmakers (as well as a constituency for the embattled WFF) :

The next year [1981], the thing I was finding most difficult was the sense of acting as an advocate policy maker, in isolation, in a large organisation, and I really wanted to see women's groups addressing the myriad issues I was becoming sensitised to in the job. So I worked with different people to get the WIFT organisations set up. My personal agenda ... would've been to do with trying to forge some sort of bridge between successful women working in mainstream film and the brilliant women working in independent film. I was having dealings with both groups, but terribly aware of the tensions and hostilities between them, and also the potential of very productive relationships. So that was my driving motive in getting WIFT groups set up. I think it was probably wrongheaded really. The independent women's scene had its own defiant culture and beliefs and was ideologically driven, and professional women also benefit from each other's support and company, analysis and networking, but the needs and interests and working styles and beliefs of the two groups weren't particularly compatible. (*Molloy, 1992*)

Molloy gradually wore down the AFC's longstanding resentment over housing the Women's Film Fund, shifting the Fund from its inherited social equity agenda towards an alliance with the Creative Development Branch's modernist project of supporting a national, independent film culture of innovation and experimentation. Just as the FFW was institutionally enmeshed in the Co-op rather than the Women's Movement, the WFF found itself becoming more aligned with the aims of the Creative Development Fund within the AFC, rather than with national priorities for women.

---

<sup>3</sup> See Lis Stoney (1987: 250-258) for a comprehensive survey of the shifts in the debate over the specificity of feminist film in the pages of *Filmnews* from the late 1970s until the early 1980s.



Soon after I was appointed I went to the Office of Women's Affairs in Canberra. It was clear the origins of the [Women's Film] Fund were allied to other programs in health, welfare, whatever, and the main attitude would've been one of overcoming disadvantage, breaking down barriers, and giving women equal access. [...]

Inevitably, by being located in the Film Commission ... the involvement in broader industrial and cultural issues concerning film and the arts ... influenced the management of the Fund. And coming from my background I had two main drives : one was women's issues and the other motivation, since the early '70s, was Australian culture and Australian indigenous art forms - from hanging around Carlton and Melbourne Uni and LaMama and the Pram Factory. (Molloy, 1992)

During Molloy's period as manager of the Fund from 1980-83, the problem of reinventing the wheel with every aspiring filmmaker - which, within the SWFG, had caused the breakaway formation of the Feminist Film Workers - also had to be faced by the WFF's Advisory Panel. Each assessment period was dominated by a costly and frustrating process of sifting through many underdeveloped applications from women who had little or no experience in filmmaking. Often good ideas arrived on Molloy's desk without the craft skills or know-how to turn them into films. Each round of assessments would see the pattern repeated. By 1982 the Fund was responding to criticisms from its constituency by emphasising in a *Filmnews* interview "that we'd really like to see more projects that are moving towards developing a new feminist film language or doing innovative things. But you could count on one hand material of that kind that is presented" (Appelton and Molloy, 1982: 12-13). The Advisory Panel debated the possibility of becoming a de facto producer by specifying the films it wanted to fund, but always arrived at the same conclusion:

We always came down on the view that we weren't a producer, that the purpose of developmental funds and government assistance bodies was to respond to the creativity and directions emerging from the community they served and sought to develop, rather than utilising government funds to act as a pseudo producer. So we ended up deciding against a direction

in which the Fund finally went [after 1987 with *Roundabout*].<sup>4</sup> (Molloy, 1992)

Surprisingly, given the gulf separating the different constituencies represented on the WFF Panel, the assessment process revealed a high degree of consensus over fundable projects. The Panel was comprised of a femocrat from the Office of Women's Affairs, a 'community' representative, including Pat O'Shane and Margaret Valadian from the Aboriginal community, and professionals from film production or distribution, including Natalie Miller, Sandra Levy, Pat Lovell, and independents including Martha Ansara and Sarah Gibson.

Strangely enough, and I'd say it was true of every funding panel I've been associated with ... you'll get a group of ten people, take one look around the room and think, 'we are never going to get a decision in a year'. By the end of a process of discussion and responses, you usually get to about ninety/ninety-five percent agreement and then all hell will break loose over marginal decisions. (Molloy, 1992)

The shared focus which united the Panel would be the problem of how to get the best results with the money available. Although the assessors' comments on individual projects reveal a high degree of consensus over the preferred ideological orientation of scripts, when it came to giving out the money other factors came into play.

I could probably come up with another ten variables which would have informed a decision. Things like an interest in supporting some film-making in Western Australia - regional issues. Things like ages - these are the youngest applicants we've had, wouldn't it be good to support a couple of really young enthusiastic people. Or subject matter - we've gone for all this heavy serious stuff, why don't we just support an abstract, artistic-expression animation. (Molloy, 1992)

The difficulties of envisioning a feminist project for the cinema and translating it into policy, were sidestepped by the WFF to a large extent. The exigencies of responding to individual projects established a case-by-case

---

<sup>4</sup> See below for the saga of *Roundabout* - the exception that proved the rule.

approach to the allocation of funds, a procedure that pre-empted developing a policy for the WFF. Molloy did harbour an ambition for the Fund to produce an exemplary body of films which would influence what was funded elsewhere, protect the Fund from attacks within the AFC, and have a flow-on effect in television and the feature film industry. In this respect, award winning shorts - rather than a coherent body of work - became individual exemplars. Citable films from Molloy's period as manager of the Fund included: *For Love or Money* (1983, McMurchy, Thornley, Oliver and Nash); *Ned Wethered* (1983, Lee Whitmore); *Greetings From Wollongong* (1982, Mary Callaghan); *Serious Undertakings* (1983, Helen Grace); *On Guard* (1983, Susan Lambert) and *Every Day Every Night* (1983, Kathy Mueller).

On the one hand, the Fund, through its survey, *Women in Australian Film Production* (Ryan et al, 1983) and the WIFT organisations, sought to develop a climate for structural change which would increase women's participation in the film and television industries. On the other hand, restricted to a tiny budget and low status within the AFC, the Fund was cast in the role of agony aunt as it became the arbiter of all the ills that afflicted the state of womanhood in Australia and that sought expression on film. Molloy recalls the effect these applications had on the Panel:

I remember some WFF panel meetings, where at the end of a couple of days of discussions and interviews, there'd just be a deep-seated, really profound sadness or depression.

And that reaction was caused by ... meeting after meeting with people ... who were often coming to us reflecting one aspect or other of women's place in the culture and the society, and it would become almost personally devastating. It had nothing to do with filmmaking or projects, but just this terrible array of - I mean, the majority of projects that came to us were personal films ... you'd begin to think 'how's the WFF going to make any difference at all?'

There was also this terrible frustration that often projects were coming to us because of our ideological orientation. We were getting the issue, as opposed to the professionalism, the craft, the hard work, the drive or whatever it was to create projects. We all wanted to see ourselves using what resources we had to support a filmmaker who was going to stick in

there, a film that was going to get seen, as well as an idea that was going to change life and change the world.

It was a fantastically confronting experience, because you were always weighing up notions of finance, professionalism and judgment against an overwhelming need to get all sort of views and personal pain expressed. (*Molloy, 1992*)

In its attempts to implement an agenda of equality the WFF was profoundly distrustful of the defiant, rebellious and wounded aspects of women's psyche which filled the Fund's files in the form of unrealisable film projects. If anything emerges from my reading of the Fund's 550 odd files, it is the gulf between the preoccupations of its applicants and the ambitions of the WFF administrators and advisors. The shadier sides of desire, written over the pages of application forms, indicate a body of films that Australian women longed to see, rather than films they expected to make (many of the applications were half-formed ideas for films rather than developed proposals). The WFF was unable to move into the domain of the kinds of 'unfundable' projects it continually attracted. Unfundable projects fell into two categories: uncontroversial propaganda films on work, health, education or migration which were often poorly conceived in filmic terms by applicants who had no filmmaking experience; or applications which proposed to delve into subjective experience in the realms of rape, incest, prostitution, violence, death, suicide, dreams or sexual fantasy. The WFF wanted to protect audiences from hectoring propaganda, on the one hand, and from the unleashing of female subjectivity, on the other. Some films in both categories were funded, usually with disappointing results - most of them were never put into distribution (see Appendices C i, C ii, C iii on the WFF's grants and other initiatives).

The WFF advisory panel took seriously its civilising mission (see Yeatman, 1993), castigating 'depressing' topics of 'women as victims', claiming that such films would only add to the stockpile of 'negative, destructive images of women'. Assessors invoked the feminist critique of the inherent voyeurism of the cinema as a further rationale for rejecting explicit depictions of rape, incest or violence. The Fund also rejected projects which challenged the ideal of the independent woman, or drew on lowbrow genres

like horror, or which neglected social and historical context.<sup>5</sup> (It is evident from the WFF files that all the above reservations could be waived in the rare case of a fully developed project from an experienced filmmaker - Gillian Leay's *My Life Without Steve*, 1986, is a prime example, which against all odds was successful in its insistence that it be shot on 35mm rather than 16mm). Most often, the WFF was treated as a beginners fund: experienced filmmakers looked elsewhere for their main source of finance.

If the WFF Advisory Panel members had reflected longer and harder on the sadness and depression that engulfed them at the end of some assessment rounds, perhaps some serious attention may have been given to the desire of so many applicants to see the more disreputable (or shadow) aspects of women's subjectivity and experience on screen.<sup>6</sup> Instead, the Fund went along the safe path of producing a small collection of respectable documentaries and 'innovative' films in the style sanctioned by the Creative Development Branch. The possibility of finding the means to encourage the realisation of another body of work, emerging from the deeper recesses of female subjectivity, was never broached.

---

<sup>5</sup> More of these disreputable, unfundable, lowbrow projects came from Melbourne than Sydney. See Virginia Fraser (1979: 7) for a satirical comparison between an imaginary film, *Girlfriends*, made in Sydney and made in Melbourne. The Sydney film "would feature four articulate, healthy, pleasant looking women (mostly in their late twenties) talking intelligently about their fulfilling relationships with each other. Their personally unrevealing anecdotes would be punctuated by occasional, slightly bitter ... reminiscences of an adolescence misspent in trying to be friends with boys." It would be a 23 min. colour documentary funded by the WFF and distributed by the Co-op and FFW. The 13 min. abstract narrative in black and white from Melbourne would have been started four years ago at Swinburne Film School: "The two weary, cynical-looking girlfriends of the title, experience their relationship as a series of glancing blows against children, ex-husbands, domestic hazards and a lover who beats them up. The film ends in silence as they look at each other then turn their backs."

<sup>6</sup> James Hillman (1984: 17) makes the point that soul emerges when the will to consume, spend, do breaks down in depression: "Soul makes the ego feel uncomfortable, uncertain, lost. [...] We have to concentrate on making soul out of the lost and inferior conditions." The WFF came up against these 'inferior' states at every assessment but the Fund's drive to prove itself in the eyes of the AFC overrode intimations of other aspirations coming from its unbiddable constituency.

### **No place for an apparatchik: 1984-86**

The dispersal, in the early 1980s, of the feminist film project and the groups (FFW/SWFG) and organisations (Sydney Filmmakers Co-op; WFF) which had provided its infrastructure, had inner and outer world aspects.

Women's Movement narratives which involved the defeat of patriarchy/capitalism and the inauguration of political participation, economic equality and sexual freedom, were being re-written in the face of the manifold contradictions of class, race, sexuality and gender which defied unifying discourses addressed to a global constituency of women. These issues were raised with great vigour in relation to the 1984 NSW Women's Film Unit where some of the 1977 'reds vs. experts' conflicts were replayed with added ingredients of race, ethnicity and class (see "Jobs for the Girls", 1984 and Martha Ansara's response, 1984b).

A new generation of independent filmmakers had arrived on the scene: its political pubescence was inaugurated by the Whitlam government's unprecedented dismissal in November 1975, and its education in postmodernism led to its repudiation of master narratives of revolution, liberation or cure.<sup>7</sup> Its dance with nihilism would be shadowed by the nation's subjection to economic rationalism during the Hawke-Keating era of the 1980s. For women of this new generation, gender based politics and Affirmative Action programs were potentially restrictive - bound as they were to unproblematised notions of identity and an unfashionable *realpolitik*..

When Vicki Molloy became head of the Creative Development Branch at the beginning of 1984, the management of the WFF was taken over by independent filmmakers who, in the early years of the Fund had been vocal in their criticism of its investments in feature films. Molloy's position was filled by former SWFG/FFW members - first by Martha Ansara and then by Jeni Thornley and eventually by Beth McRae. From 1984-87 the WFF was under Review. Thornley, McRae (and Megan McMurchy as head of the

---

<sup>7</sup> The AFC's No Frills Fund was set up in response to the proliferation of Super 8 and video work shown at Fringe festivals and other alternative venues. A flurry of small magazine publishing in the early 1980s (*Art & Text, Tension, On the Beach, Local Consumption*) marked the arrival of this new generation. The 1984 Futur\* Fall Conference in Sydney, whose opening night included screenings of Super 8 and video in a nightclub, marked the ascendancy of a cultural critique that had taken the new media technologies and postmodern discourse beyond cinema.

Creative Development Branch after Molloy's departure in 1986) were unable to rescue the WFF from its history of marginality and tokenism. The WFF Review recommended that the renamed Women's Program be closed down in 1990 after a 'sunset' period of three years from 1987.<sup>8</sup>

Given the onerous and all consuming nature of independent filmmaking, and the years, for some, spent making one big project, coming out of the editing room into the mid-1980s was an unnerving experience. The world had changed and the politics which had seemed to serve feminist filmmaking well in the 1970s, were casually dismissed as anachronistic in the 1980s. Time out in the film bureaucracy was one way to recoup not only the financial costs of independent filmmaking, but also to connect with a broader spectrum of film projects and engage in ongoing debates about the prospects for women in cinema, and about the viability of an independent, oppositional film culture. The two occasions for this process in the Women's Film Fund were the biannual assessments of individual projects and the formal Review of the WFF as it sought to reconstitute its role within the AFC.

By 1986 a number of key personnel from independent film organisations were working at the AFC, including Beth McRae, Victoria Treole, Jennifer Stott, Megan McMurchy (from the Co-op) and Cathy Robinson (Media Resource Centre in Adelaide). The boundary between the independent sector and its principal source of revenue, the AFC, had become extremely permeable in terms of personnel. The Co-op had proved a proficient training ground for personnel who used their experience in distribution and exhibition to move into the film funding bureaucracy or into commercial distribution.<sup>9</sup>

During her period as caretaker manager of the Fund, Ansara attempted to articulate some of the niceties of being responsible for the WFF and the Women's Film Unit (Molloy's last initiative as manager of the WFF) while

---

<sup>8</sup> For the rationale which saw *feminists* close down the WFF see McMurchy and McRae (1987).

<sup>9</sup> The closure of the Co-op deprived film bureaucracies and distributors of a valuable training ground. The current push for a more corporate style at the AFC and its funded cultural organisations, including the AFI, draws on different sources for its personnel, pushing the ethos of film institutions further down the path of user-pays, market driven policies and productivity based practices.

espousing a politicised disposition. In her article "Apparatchik in search of a base?", Ansara (1984a) outlined the problems facing the WFF and foreshadowed the Review which would lead to significant changes after 1986. Interestingly, apart from the Fund's "modest resources", Ansara saw most of the problems in terms of the failure of the Fund's grassroots constituency to organise, form caucuses, and participate in media lobby groups to guide and monitor "the work of our very valuable film bureaucrats" (1984a:1).

An extension of this unproblematic view of the role of the film bureaucracy is Ansara's repetition of the perennial complaint about women who apply to the Fund without the necessary training and experience to realise their ambitious projects, and who "somehow see film as a means of expression to which they too have right of access" (1984a:1). Women who had studied film theory "and now wish to apply these half digested texts piecemeal on a grand scale", were singled out, while it was seen as regrettable "that we are not getting as many women as we would like who are speaking out strongly from the grassroots of the society or from specific subcultures" (1984a:1). Ansara reiterates the Fund's unsolved problem of how to attract exciting and innovative projects from experienced women filmmakers, rather than "the traditional subjects directly related to the female's bodily orifices" (1984a:1).

In her responsible, political persona, the director of *Secret Storm*, no less, appears to favour social issue films and projects from trade union, migrant and Aboriginal groups. Given the Fund's tiny budget (\$134, 500 for the March 1984 assessment) Ansara's wish list - fostering talented women to break into the mass media; lobbying and research to change industry structures; and the production of socially and culturally significant films (1984a: 1) - is evidence of the on-going blind spot at the heart of the desire of the Fund to cover all bases without any plan to increase its resources.

Ansara's experience of supporting women's projects that were knocked back by the CDF validated her commitment to keep the WFF going:

We gave more of a chance to people without these so called 'track records' - what a term. Two examples: One was Kathy Millard's film *Point of Departure* (1987). She wrote script after script. I eventually helped photograph a test scene for it. The CDB kept knocking her back.



We were convinced she could do the film. They thought she lacked experience, they weren't convinced by the script. That sort of thing. We stood up for that film. The other one was *Red Matildas* (1985, Sharon Connolly and Trevor Graham) which gave two filmmakers a start. [...]

We had more of a continuing relationship (as a Panel) and a continuing relation with the Office of Women's Affairs in Canberra. So we had that feeling that we were linked to a wider social movement, that is to the Women's Movement. In fact what was happening at the time I was at the WFF was that the organisational forms, the collective forms of the Women's Movement had virtually died away. Or existed in a very different form from the one we pretended we were responsive to. (Ansara, 1992a)

Ansara and Thornley shared the belief that it was not the role of the film bureaucracy to become a de facto producer. It was assumed that the censorship, orthodoxy and 'house style' that would emerge if the WFF tried to initiate fundable projects, would be to the detriment of the filmmaking community. Yet the WFF's dwindling budget was already dictating a 'poor' style of filmmaking:

[It's true that] small amounts of money for women to make films was beginning to create a whole body of work which was like the poor cousin of filmmaking. You wouldn't find many male filmmakers going to a Male Film Fund and getting their \$5,000 to live off bread and dripping while they made a tiny little film about a men's issue. The '80s was the time when that just was not on. You couldn't keep asking women to work like that unless they really chose to. I think for apprentice filmmakers it's not a bad way - small amounts of money to cut your teeth on, and I suppose that was what was happening to the Fund.

(Thornley, 1992a)

For Ansara the Women's Film Fund could not solve its problems in the 1980s because its potential constituency had dispersed and gone quiet. Although Ansara offers no alternative to 1970s forms of activism,<sup>10</sup> there is

---

<sup>10</sup> Ansara was not interested in radical action for its own sake: see her letter re Women's Film Unit (Ansara, 1984b), criticising ultra radical modes of complaint which make enemies out of potential allies.

a sense in which the sheer enormity of the task of defending and expanding the WFF, proved too much for one person facing her third decade of activism.

Without a very vocal base which won the Fund in the first place - positions in the Film School weren't just handed to us, they had to be won; we had to argue and persuade people, be outrageous, stomp around - the WFF couldn't claim its appropriate or necessary share of the budget because there was nobody to make the argument. You can't have Vicky or me or one person saying we should have more - you can't be listened to like that.

[...] One of the things I found about the job - there I was with a little child on my own doing this job. The sheer amount - this is one of the reasons why this Review came about - the sheer amount of day to day work kept me there late, 8 o'clock at night - me with children - always. [...]

Also, because I was filling in, I just went along with the jobs set up by the Panel of which I'd been a member, ie, to service the applications, and then to try to develop a way out of what seemed to be a dead end. But when it didn't go any further I didn't have the strength to continue it. (*Ansara, 1992a*)

Jeni Thornley took over from Ansara at the end of May 1984, embarking on a series of meetings to survey women filmmakers' views on the future of the Fund. Like Ansara, Thornley used the pages of *Filmnews* to publicise the WFF review and to try to make the process truly consultative (see Women's Film Fund Advisory Panel, 1984; and Thornley, 1984). Thornley quickly discovered that the politics of bureaucracy required a different approach from the politics of activism:

It's a different approach to life. I might have the skills for some things but I'm not into the look and the dress. It's all values I don't identify with. That is not for me political work. It's bureaucratic political work. Affirmative Action meetings I used to loathe venomously. I felt like I'd been dropped into this hell pit. It had nothing to do with my experience of the Women's Movement. It was so divorced from the work that I'd done in the Women's Movement. To be suddenly sitting in these board rooms with blokes, most of whom couldn't have cared less about women and the

Women's Movement. It was just that they were forced to have to deal with Affirmative Action because the government said every organisation has got to have an AA program. (Thornley, 1992a)

Thornley streamlined the assessment process and did the ground work for the Review, but her deep ambivalence about working as a bureaucrat, in what she saw as the inherent repressiveness of an institution, was partly resolved when she handed the Review over to the new Manager of the Fund, Beth McRae, and left the AFC a month before the birth of her daughter.

I'm much better with the \$500 a year and pen and paper. I've been much happier since I can write and have a very free open structure that also combines with a free roaming in my unconscious - a tapping into where the repressed is and digging into that area. That doesn't work for me with being in an organisation. (Thornley, 1992a)

When Beth McRae came into the Fund in mid-1985 she brought with her a similar background to Vicki Molloy. McRae had worked as a television journalist in Tasmania and later in Sydney, after a stint in film production in New York. In 1977 she enrolled in the Women's Film Workshop at the Film School while working for the Willesee Show on Channel 7. McRae then became involved in the Filmmakers Co-op and Feminist Film Workers before setting up a production company with Nina Saunders (producer of *Greetings From Wollongong*) in the heyday of 10BA. When the finance for Jackie McKimmie's feature, *Australian Dream* (1985), fell through Saunders decided to go overseas and McRae decided she needed a secure income: "I didn't want to work in that roller coaster world trying to be a film producer without any kind of stability, although I still wanted to be a producer" (McRae, 1992). By her own admission McRae, who was to take over and complete the WFF Review, did not have a vision about the Fund's future or how it might change. McRae continued the tradition of responding to projects and defending the Fund within the AFC where the WFF was seen as part of the 'beginners fund' - the CDF.

The real achievement was putting funding into projects that turned out to be really good films. One that springs to mind is Merilee Bennetts's film *A Song of Air* (1987). Annette [Blonski] was an assessor on it. I think it's a

wonderful film. One of the best the Fund ever supported. Merilee had not made any films prior to that. She was a stills photographer. And Tracey Moffat's first film [*Nice Coloured Girls* 1987]. [The achievement was] being in that job, supporting those women, encouraging them, also being able to lever out some funds from Creative Development where we often jointly funded projects. (McRae, 1992)

Unlike Thornley, McRae enjoyed the institutional experience, including policy work on the Affirmative Action report and funding *Don't Shoot Darling!* (Blonski, Creed & Freiberg (eds), 1987). The particular work experience offered by the AFC was a highpoint in McRae's career.

Of all the places I've ever worked it was one of the best. The calibre of the people that I was working with in Creative Development and the women who'd work as assessors on the WFF and the filmmakers themselves, were wonderful people to work with - amongst the best people I've ever worked with in my chequered career. That's something I've missed a lot. In that job I was working as a peer with a whole lot of talented, exceptional people. (McRae, 1992)

McRae found the support she needed in the job within the AFC rather than in an outside, organised constituency:

I had really good women working as assessors. Sylvia LeClezio, Jeni Kendall, Annette Blonski, Sally Semmens, Barbara Grummels. [Within the AFC] I had Cathy Robinson, Megan McMurchy, Vicki Molloy, Richard Keyes, Marion Marsh, to talk to. Victoria Treole and Jeni Stott in marketing. I didn't feel bereft of women to talk to. A lot of the assessors had been involved with the Fund for years. Vicki [Molloy] knew all about it and understood it and our offices were next to each other. I can't remember it being problematic. Maybe at times she felt a bit proprietorial about the WFF. I got a lot of support. (McRae, 1992)

Although there was a great deal of support for McRae as manager of the Fund from within the CDB, the antagonism between Projects Division, which funded features, and the CDB spilled over onto the WFF which McRae felt was overlooked and underrated:

The 'us and them' thing was rampant in the AFC - the 'real' stuff happening in the Special Production Fund/Projects Division down one end of the corridor and CDB down the other. So there were a lot of tensions in the AFC over that relation. It was driven by money. CDB didn't have anywhere near the budget of Project Division which regarded the CDB as a beginners fund. The director of Film Development (Malcolm Smith and then Greg Ricketson) was in charge of both. There were conflicts over trying to get the fund to have the recognition it deserved in the rest of the AFC. (*McRae, 1992*)

The Review of the Women's Film Fund, which had been initiated by the Advisory Panel when Ansara took over from Molloy in January 1984, was not completed until the end of 1986. Even then, after a prolonged period of discussion and consultation, the recommendations put to the AFC were rejected at the executive level and the 'sunset clause' suggested by the Chief Executive, Kim Williams, was finally accepted by the defenders of the Fund. The plan was that the WFF would have a three year period, from 1987 - 1990, to complete its projects before it was abolished.

Going back to the WFF review, I had no idea how you went about doing a review. When I started talking to Kim Williams about it he said, 'What's the outcome that you want of the review?' I said 'The process of doing the review is to reach an outcome, a set of decisions.' He said 'You must've known what you wanted out of it?' It wasn't until then that I realised there was a strategy about how you do a review. You do have clearcut objectives and you probably also should have a hidden agenda so that you know what you want out of it so you set it up to achieve certain objectives and goals. But no-one had told me that that's how you do it.

[...]

The recommendations in my report were not what was finally adopted. There was a messy process there where Kim Williams and others in the decision making area persuaded Megan [McMurchy, by then the manager of CDB] and me that the Fund should have a sunset clause, given that the situation of women in the industry had changed so much, and there were so many good opportunities now, and there was no longer any discrimination against women so why would you go on needing a Women's Film Fund?

For some reason I bought the line. It hadn't been what I'd initially recommended which would've been supported by Megan [McMurchy] as well. But I bought the corporate line and thought 'well, there's a logic in that.' ... The reason I bought it was I thought that Creative Development, in terms of being a production fund, was actually handling the kinds of projects the WFF was handling. There wasn't much point in this joint funding arrangement.... And if other areas of the Commission can take on the policy work, you shouldn't have to need it forever.

When that decision was announced - there was a big reaction. The decision to relocate [the new Women's Program with a three year sunset clause] to Melbourne, because Penny Robbins got the job, was supported by lots of women. Then there was a series of meetings and discussions about why it was going to be closed down in three years time. There was a lot of opposition. The decision was a good trigger for discussion which was much more widespread than what had gone on during the review itself. It was something to react against. (McRae, 1992)

The end of the WFF as a *production* fund was prefigured in *Women in Australian Film Production* (Ryan et al, 1983). The Survey gave the WFF a purpose and direction it had never previously enjoyed. The facts and figures in the Survey enabled the Fund to embrace an equal opportunity rhetoric of increasing the numbers of women in creative and technical areas in the film and television industry. Fear of scandal had stymied the Fund since its first controversial funding decisions in 1975. In the mid 1980s it grasped the opportunity to rid itself of the frustrations and ill-repute of being a beginners' fund by adopting a rhetoric of supporting women who had hit a glass ceiling 'mid-career'.

Even amongst the [WFF Advisory] Panel there had been discussions about whether we were perpetuating a ghetto as opposed to taking our rightful share of all of the programs of assistance that were available. ...

[...] it had simply got to be really wasteful of time and energy for all this horse-trading to be going on between peer project officers, one who was called Women's Film Fund and three others who were called Creative Development Fund, who were receiving projects that were trying both funds in parallel.

[...] All that the WFF was doing was giving the untrained newcomer - one out of hundreds who wanted it - a chance to make their film for their satisfaction. But that was having absolutely no impact on the by now very crowded film production scene. [...] So in that environment, the WFF was neither succeeding in having much influence on the feature film area or professional area, and was too limited in its resources to have very much impact in the independent area either. In any case, Creative Development didn't seem to be demonstrating any form of prejudice or limitation to women applicants. (Molloy, 1992)

At the end of 1983, as her last initiative in her role as manager of the WFF, Molloy obtained \$400,000 from a Commonwealth Employment Program to set up a Women's Film Unit at Film Australia.<sup>11</sup> The emphasis was on career development for women who already had craft skills. The demands from women for more training and job opportunities shifted the focus of the Fund to Affirmative Action. The issue of women stuck in 'mid-career' became the focus for the post-Review period, culminating in the notorious *Roundabout* project (see below) which absorbed the Fund's energies for its 'sunset' period.

There is something of the restricted role of the cantankerous aunt in the WFF's mode of criticising, reprimanding but finally nurturing and defending the projects presented to it by a younger generation of women. As its financial power dwindled the Fund began to tell its supplicants it was time to grow up and get a profession - that the aunt's nest egg would not last forever. There is also something of the martyr and the saint in the WFF - it worked *so hard* for so little money and took so much flak from its rebellious constituency. The Fund was never truly appreciated by those it served and was regarded (at best) with bemusement by the AFC. It was motivated by duty, responsibility and a sense of rightness about its function. It was routinely denigrated in practice, yet its virtues were just as routinely extolled in public. It was the AFC's 'little woman'. When former SWFG/FFW members took over the running of the Fund, their long held rejection of 'becoming mother' created conflicts between the desire to

---

<sup>11</sup> See Nicolette Freeman (1987) for an account of the NSW Women's Film Unit at Film Australia from the point of view of the filmmakers involved in each of the six short films produced in 1984. See Blonski and Lethlean (1987) and Collins (1987b) on the Victorian Women's Film Unit which repeated the pattern of following in the footsteps of initiatives from Sydney.

protect and nurture fledgling women filmmakers, and the desire to see women hold their own in the cut-throat world of mainstream film and television. This conflict found a powerful expression in the saga of *Roundabout*.



### **Earmarked for Death: the Women's Program, 1987-1990**

The story of *Roundabout*, which encapsulates the distinctive ethos of the milieu in the late 1980s, was told to me late at night around Pat Fiske's kitchen table in a North Bondi block of flats, inhabited by a number of filmmakers, including Anna Grieve and Sharon Connolly - the chief tellers of this tale. Even the Eastern suburbs beachside location is a significant factor, marking the geographical shift of the independent filmmaking milieu from the large, rented, communal households of the inner West in the 1970s, to individually owned apartments stretching from Bondi to Coogee in the late 1980s.

*Roundabout* is partly the story of the Women's Film Fund and its attempts to outwit the three year sunset clause imposed on it by the AFC at the end of 1986. It is also the story of an attempt by the relocated, refocused and rechristened Women's Program to boost the fortunes of women writers, producers and directors who had reached a 'mid career' glass ceiling. Most of all it is a necessarily elliptical account of internal relations at the AFC as they impacted upon women who were unwittingly networked into what was ostensibly a project for a television series, but which was to become the hapless dupe in a long running saga of naive ambition and ideological conflict, with dark hints of sabotage. The version of the story that I offer here is told from the point of view of two independent filmmakers and the first Women's Program manager. It is by no means comprehensive - more of it remains off-the-record than all the other stories I was told, put together.

Although the series was never produced,<sup>12</sup> the circumstances of its nongensis are, at times, hilariously and darkly instructive of the women's filmmaking enterprise, in the second half of the 1980s, as both a dastardly soap opera and a black comedy of manners.<sup>13</sup> The shift in tone, evident in the rueful, ironic mode in which the story was enthusiastically narrated by Sharon Connolly and Anna Grieve, is evidence of a film-world rather than a Women's Movement ethos. I include the *Roundabout* story in such detail because in it I hear the new voices of the next wave of women who came

---

<sup>12</sup> Helen Hodgman's published version of one episode of the final draft, in the form of a short story (in Dale Spender, ed. 1991) is all that remains of *Roundabout* in the public sphere.

<sup>13</sup> It needs to be stated, at this point that many of the people at the centre of *Roundabout* have gone on to have very successful careers in film and television.

into film, influenced by feminism in many cases, but blessedly free from the obligation to project themselves as flagbearers for the Women's Liberation Movement. As Sharon Connolly [SC] and Anna Grieve [AG] narrated their versions of the story in tandem, I've used their initials to indicate who is speaking at any particular point.

*Sharon Connolly:* My part of the story is relatively early. I was working at the ABC in Melbourne as a script editor in drama and I was about to leave when Penny [Robbins] got the job at the WFF. It was earmarked for death. It had been given a stay of execution of three years at the point at which Beth McRae exited and Penny took over the job.

Penny had a double agenda. One was to do something useful with the WFF money ... to be seen to be doing something which makes a bit of a splash. ... Her other agenda item was to try and overturn the three year death sentence, ensuring the continuity in some way, of what became the Women's Program. That's basically what I think she was up to. [...]

When she first came to see me about it I was very depressed and disillusioned with life in the ABC which was at a particularly weird point in its history prior to the appointment of Sandra Levy as head of drama. There'd been a long vacuum without a head of drama. Things were pretty crook. David Hill had announced the 100 hours of Australian drama but the ABC internally seemed to have no way of fulfilling that expectation. Then what happened in the ABC was this full on rush into series television which resulted in *Last Resort*. Melbourne did quite badly at that period though things got better later. So I was pretty depressed at the idea of any kind of non mainstream television happening, even at the ABC.

Penny came and put the idea that the WFF or Program would initiate this series. She just floated this idea. I tried to talk her out of it for a number of reasons - one was my own despair and disillusionment and the other was that I had real doubts, and I've still got them, about whether an institution like the AFC should be acting as a producer, which was in effect what it was doing by initiating this thing.

In some ways, this was one of the first moves into a more entrepreneurial approach, which has resulted in the situation we have today at the AFC.

I left the ABC and went back into my own company. At that point Penny had gotten this thing on the road. Women from around the country submitted proposals. There were in excess of a hundred of them and Penny and I read them all and short listed them. From memory, five or six got developed beyond the initial two pages. The panel decided on two. At that point [Penny] asked me if I'd become involved as a script editor. (Connolly and Grieve, 1992)

Two proposals were chosen for development: *Secrets* by Wendy Thompson and Susan Dermody, and *Roundabout* by Chris Sammers. Several writers were appointed to work on developing six half-hour episodes for each proposal. Initially Sue Smith, based in Sydney, was appointed script editor to work with the mostly Melbourne based writers on *Roundabout*, and Sharon Connolly, based in Melbourne, became script editor on the Sydney based *Secrets*. This situation soon became unworkable and the script editors swapped projects. From the outset, the project had only a de facto producer, Penny Robbins, who was also carrying the load of administering the Women's Program from the Melbourne outpost of the AFC.

SC. Someone has to run with the ball. Projects like that need a leader. Penny did her best to lead it. There were enormous pressures on her time, and also, she'd never produced series television before.

Inexperience was quite obvious. There were six writers of whom, from memory, only two had written series television before. ... Maureen McCarthy and Deborah Parsons were the two with [television] experience. Then there was Rivka Hartmann who'd written and directed a couple of shorts and a telemovie, *Bachelor Girl*. There was Christine Sammers whose idea *Roundabout* originally was, and who had written and directed a short drama; Hannie Rayson, a playwright at that stage hadn't done any TV writing; and Mary Callaghan, who was in the process of post-production on *Tenderhooks*. Between them not a lot of experience. Then there was me, who as a script editor had had 18 months in ABC drama, and had script edited one series and a number of other television things. My experience wasn't huge at all. I hadn't worked in such demanding circumstances before. (Connolly and Grieve, 1992)

The script editors were paid for 16 hours a week, yet the development process - in competition with the other proposal, involved the onerous and

time consuming horrors of decision making by the group in the absence of a producer. Resentment about underpaid work in the emotional hothouse of a group writing project, would build into a steady undertow.

SC. Storyline meetings were not just storyline meetings. They were, in the end, the meetings that had to somehow decide - because it wasn't a conventional storyline meeting where the story editor and the producer would have the final say after everyone had discussed. It was whoever could argue or slog it out the best. They were all pretty strong women. They were amazing women. But right from the start there were problems. (Connolly and Grieve, 1992)

Pushing six highly individual writers to a consensus was no easy task. Connolly tried a research approach to clarify the project's theme of sexuality in the 1990s:

SC. To that end I remember photocopying numerous articles about sexuality, about men as well as about women, and distributing them to the group. Some of it was fairly sociological and jargonistic, but I thought it was interesting. Some people responded but there were others who said 'oh fuck that, we've just got to invent good characters' ... Others were more interested in getting the plot mechanics right and starting from that point. (Connolly and Grieve, 1992)

Chris Sammers' original idea had been based on *La Ronde* - originally a play by Arthur Schnitzler which had several incarnations, most notably, a film in 1950 by Max Ophuls - updated to explore women's sexuality in the 1990s. The problem of how to do a six-part series rather than an anthology of six discrete but thematically linked dramas would eventually lead to what Penny Robbins believed finally killed off the project - scriptomania. Although SBS accepted the first draft and agreed to fund it, subsequent redrafts saw it become three one-hour episodes and finally, two 90 minute episodes of a mini-series. The re-writing process took its toll on the goodwill of all involved.

SC. Penny and I met privately and had a number of storyline meetings and we started to get somewhere. We were really taking control of it and shaping it and starting to make it happen before I nicked off to Tahiti. By the time I came back, a decision had been taken that that process of re-

storylining had to happen as a group, including everybody and Lynn [Gailey, who had been appointed consultant producer by the AFC]. I argued against it because I don't think that creation by committee is necessarily a good way to go.

But there we were - all the writers and a new writer, Claire Jaeger, Penny and me, and Jennifer Hooks was present at the meetings as a scribe to record what was going on. Well, those meetings turned into a complete brawl like you wouldn't believe. It was a nightmare. [...] It went on for days. Things were just not resolved. People would go off on a tangent and there was lots of broadranging discussion but there were too many participants to get any clear direction. There were no lines of authority so there was no one to say 'that's a great direction to pursue'. At the end of the third day when we'd got nowhere and everybody's time was exhausted, the writers all left and went down to the pub, leaving Jennifer, Penny and me in this room. [...]

It was as plain as the nose on my face that the collective process had failed and that the whole thing was going to fall apart unless someone took the lead and ran with it. I did it, for that stage. So we struggled through. I storylined everything, we wrote first drafts. They had lots of faults, they got finished in an incredible hurry. The sixth episode was always problematic. Claire Jaeger had a serious personal crisis in the middle of writing and couldn't finish. I ended up writing it with Claire by my side at the AFC to get away from everything. I remember horrendous nights with Penny at the AFC where we'd work til three o'clock in the morning to get them typed up and presented. That's the point at which SBS decided to run with *Roundabout* and not with *Secrets*. (Connolly and Grieve, 1992)

After the first draft was accepted by the AFC, Lynn Gailey - who, through her experience as a production manager in the feature film industry was aligned with Hilary Furlong and the Special Production Fund within the AFC, rather than the CDB and the Women's Program - was brought in to do the budget. Along with scriptomania, the blowout of the budget - attributed to a professionalised, industry oriented mentality - was the beginning of the end for *Roundabout*. It imposed expectations on the project that were far beyond what was originally envisaged. The project also had to meet the requirements of SBS Television, in terms of its brief as a publicly funded,

multicultural broadcaster. After reading the first draft, SBS wanted a greater ethnic diversity among the characters which was quite difficult to achieve because by that stage the characters had taken hold.

SC. The other thing everybody wanted was a stronger location or event or theme around which the whole thing was happening. The idea of these people turning up haphazardly at a hotel wasn't strong enough to hold the whole thing so we tried to come up with a conference of sexologists or something and that became the central thing. And we had to find another writer, which I think we resolved by Deborah Parsons writing two episodes. (*Connolly and Grieve, 1992*)

Not only was the project starting to losing writers, for a variety of reasons, the budget drawn up by the AFC's consultant producer blew out astronomically with the second draft to \$2.063 million.<sup>14</sup> In the occasional moment of paranoia, the instigators of the series wondered if the budget blowout was meant to push the project over the line, into the realm of impossibility.<sup>15</sup>

SC. It'd all got so problematic by that stage that I'd had enough. I pulled out. I felt immensely relieved and a bit sorry because the next stage was shaping up to be more manageable. We were going to cut the number of writers. Six half hours with three writers would've been more manageable. (*Connolly and Grieve, 1992*)

The project had had no directorial input at all, although the original idea had been to involve as many women as possible in the project - partly to justify the continuity of the Women's Program by showcasing the work of a large number of women in creative and technical roles. Two anthology

---

<sup>14</sup> A memo dated 8 September 1988, from Megan McMurchy in the CDB to Sue Murray in Marketing, suggested that an overseas pre-sale would be critical, given the doubling of the budget. (Roundabout File: PT 5092/1).

<sup>15</sup> Of the approximately 550 Women's Film Fund files that I read in the course of my research, only the *Roundabout* file was jam-packed with correspondence over contracts and money, and little else. It was clear there had been a remarkable legalistic and bureaucratic shift in AFC procedures which bogged the project down in an unprecedented mass of paperwork. When Anna Grieve came on board as producer in 1989 she re-did the budget, bringing it down to \$1.8 million, knowing that that was the combined SBS/AFC/Film Victoria monies available for the project.

series which did make it to television in the 1990s - *Six Pack* on SBS and *Seven Deadly Sins* on the ABC are often cited as examples of what *Roundabout* might have been if only the concept had been optioned out to a producer in its early stages instead of remaining in the hands of the factionalised and bureaucratic AFC.

In September 1988, a year after the project was initiated, Anna Grieve - while in London on the inaugural Kenneth Myer Fellowship from the AFTVS - was contacted by Penny Robbins about becoming the producer of the series. Grieve returned to Australia in February 1989 to take up the job. Her story is one of initiation by fire into the internecine relations which the project had spawned in its first year.

AG. I'd gone overseas, travelling to festivals where *Custody* was screening. I was King of the Kids. Then this script showed up on my doorstep in London with a letter. Penny [Robbins] had rung me and I didn't even know if I was coming back at that stage. She talked to me first on the phone about it and told me about this project, its great potential, etc. I was just at that point in terms of my experience, my naivety and my ambition for those three things to collide - and Penny's incredibly persuasive - to think well, maybe it's been chosen for me.

I'd actually submitted a concept years before, which had been thrown out in the first round, about weddings. I remember when Kate Stone and I submitted it we knew already it was going to go to SBS. I don't know how we knew. We'd tailored a multicultural approach from the very beginning. So I said I was interested - this is the naivety - I didn't ask too many questions about where it had been coming from. I thought I'd been handed this golden egg. Penny and I had talked figures on the phone. It was virtually said if you can pull these elements together over time the money will be there and that was a real incentive. Great! come back and do a TV series. Wonderful! working with women, coming in at this stage when all these problems have been ironed out. Terrific! Up until the time I got the script. (*Connolly and Grieve, 1992*)

Scriptomania, which would be the hallmark of the project, arrived with the script on Grieve's London doorstep:

AG. This was a big change in my life because I was moving from Sydney to Melbourne for this project. So it was a major commitment. Then I got the script, read it and I really didn't like it. I didn't warm to it, I didn't fall in love with it. None of those things you're meant to do as a producer. Now at that point if my ambition and inexperience hadn't collided, I would have rung up and said 'no, thank you very much, not appropriate; it's not what I want to do'. [...]

In hindsight, I don't think I had developed enough critique about script reading ... Now I'd be able to read a script and say 'No, I don't like it enough, thank you very much' ... And not even think about the possibilities, but I was reading into it all these possibilities.

That was in October and I didn't come back until January ... by that time I'd fallen in love in America and I realise I should have just stayed and had the love affair and not come home. Then unfortunately, because I'd made this choice which no-one else knew except me, between this love affair and this women's project, the whole year when I was punishing myself and going through hell about it, I always had a resentment that I'd given up something for something and it wasn't paying off. I have to be absolutely honest. I thought I'd whip back, in a year, produce this series, make the bucks and piss off back to America with this great credit behind me. Fantasy, total fantasy. (*Connolly and Grieve, 1992*)

The project needed a producer in October 1988 but Grieve didn't arrive back in Australia until January 1989, by which time the three writers for the third draft, and the script editor, had already been appointed.

AG. By the time I got back the script editor had been hired. Jutta Goetze from a Crawford's background - highly experienced in series television but had not worked in this way before. It was mad. Now, in retrospect, you can say all these things.

The first thing I did was talk to Penny. I didn't bother to find out the history. I've done that on two major projects now, and I've learned never to do it again. But I didn't want to find out the dirt, who was slagging off who because I thought that would just taint me ... I spent two days at Jutta's place where we talked out what we wanted because we were two fresh approaches to this project. We were going to take it on and do one more draft. By this stage SBS wanted three one hours. The characters



had been developed not to appear in every episode. We had to work out the continuity etc. so we sat down and did a game plan before anyone else came on board. (*Connolly and Grieve, 1992*)

Grieve had developed her own concept for the series. With each 'fresh' approach the series seemed to move further away from the possibility of being realised.

AG. By then I had this whole concept. It was going to be EROS - this plastic surgery, rejuvenation clinic. This is what I wanted to deal with in the 90s - this whole rebirthing of women and the way women got locked into changing their appearance. This hotel was a boutique hotel ... We were all tinkering with the Titanic in a sense. I'm shuffling deckchairs, superimposing ideas which aren't coming from the inside. They're coming from the outside.

Then we had the first meeting - Penny [Robbins], Deborah [Parsons], Maureen [McCarthy], Jocelyn [Moorhouse, who was new to the project] and me trying to run this meeting. Thinking I was a producer, trying to do this producer stuff. I'm clearly over excited. Everyone else is clearly underexcited. Jocelyn has a bike accident on the way to the meeting so she never arrives. Deb was totally pissed off. By then everyone had their histories. They basically didn't want to be there. If I'd realised that, I would've been off the project then, or at least have said 'hey we've got a real problem here'.

I remember my mum came home in the middle of it. She'd just come back from overseas. She could hear all these women's voices talking - 'I think this and I think that and I'll go with that'. I remember afterwards Mum said 'Get out. Get out now. This is a nightmare. You're going to have nothing but problems with this project. They don't agree on any ideological basis. You're talking at cross directions and there is no way you're going to make this work Anna.'

My problem as a producer is taking on a degree of difficulty of 10 just to prove I can deal with the hard stuff. I'm ignoring every criticism - being a fantastic producer, absolutely positive and absolutely directed. Unfortunately I'm going in the wrong direction.

SC. It's funny that ideological thing because that was the problem I was having way back at the start, when I was trying to do all that stuff of let's find out what this is about ... and they didn't really want to listen.

(*Connolly and Grieve, 1992*)

By that stage the writers had their own agendas. Although Grieve got them to reach some kind of agreement, there was conflict over the commercial television approach to script editing. In no time, two of the writers were off the project and Goetz and Grieve were madly retyping the various drafts they'd been handed, desperate to get something in so that the budget could be moved out of the AFC's coffers before the end of the 1989 financial year.

AG. There's not enough money in the budget. I'm on virtually nothing. I was given a producer's support grant for \$5000, and then some to do this stage - a total of \$7,000 til June.

Tony Mahood did the schedule, strongly recommended by Hilary [Furlong]. I had Penny, Hilary and Anne Bassar [from SBS] ... to tell me what I should be doing, how I should be doing it. It was a classic case of trying to please all the masters. Doing what the masters want because then you get better points.

Tony did a schedule. I did the budget. He was good, but it was another \$2,000. Just for the schedule. Given how little the writers were being paid, given the fact that budgets and schedules had already been done, and I was being paid virtually nothing, then we were going out and getting these mainstream professional men - very nice men - and paying them professional rates, as we were with the lawyer. That's always got on my quince a bit. (*Connolly and Grieve, 1992*)

Reports on the (third) draft from independent script assessors for the AFC were less than encouraging.<sup>16</sup> One assessment (dated 1 May 1989) found the script perplexing and erratic: "Stylistically, it veers from naturalism to surrealism to satire." The assessor thought there was difficulty in establishing who the drama was about and suggested that it was more suited to a feature film rather than a three hour mini-series (AFC File PT 5092/1).

---

<sup>16</sup> Astonishingly, Anna Grieve, as the producer, was never given any of the assessments of *Roundabout* to read during the time she oversaw three drafts of the script.

The other assessment (dated 29 April 1989) stated that "One finds it curious that a more or less feminist enterprise ... opts for the bleak and the conventional, employing central characters who're scarcely exciting. [...] apart from the 'racey' bits, the show, overall, is a touch ABC 'nice' ... soap with sex scenes. The treatment of the world of business seems as thin and guessed at as most Australian attempts in this direction." (AFC File PT 5092/1) The assessors were not the only ones to find the third draft of *Roundabout* disappointing. Grieve expected the AFC to pull the plug on the project:

AG. I thought they'd all say 'No. Thank you very much. You've tried your best and we'll let go of the project.' In the back of my head I thought that was what was going to happen. But they say 'Film Victoria's in with \$375K, contingent on the AFC being in, and the AFC is in, contingent on one more draft of the script before production. SBS is in'. Somehow in this nightmare, the AFC is in, wanting to get rid of the money before the end of the financial year. That's why I'm under this total pressure. Early in the new financial year, I had \$1m. in my company bank account and I'm going into production by September [1989].

SC. It was in that period before the FFC [Film Finance Corporation] and after 10BA. There was this hiatus period when it was actually quite difficult for those institutions to get shot of their dough. They were doing that a lot. (Connolly and Grieve, 1992)

At this point Penny Robbins resigned from her position as manager of the Women's Program, leaving *Roundabout* effectively in the hands of its producer, Anna Grieve. The 18 month saga of getting the script to third draft, and obtaining SPF investment on the basis of the SBS presale, had taken its toll.

It was a bizarre situation. Down here [in Melbourne] was the Women's Program that put 30/40/50 thousand dollars into the development of this series. Up there [in Sydney] is the Production Fund [SPF] which has got all this money - after much pressure and the SBS presale, they agree to put some money in on the condition that the scripts are satisfactory. And ultimately, the scripts were never satisfactory, as far as they were concerned. (Robbins, 1992)

By stipulating the right to script approval as the condition of its \$1m. investment, the SPF always had an 'out'. Its commitment to *Roundabout* was never less than ambivalent.

There were all sorts of problems with the project. I'd be the first person to admit it. It was not rigorous. It was quite sloppy. It was very rough and varied but nonetheless, in its first phases, it had a lot of energy. And if you try to remove yourself from that perjorative desire to produce work that is ideologically OK and fulfils perceived notions about what women ought to write about, I actually think it was quite an interesting project. And, as much as *Under the Skin* and *Six Pack*, it should have got made and didn't - unfortunately for Anna [Grieve] who basically had quite a rough time.

(Robbins, 1992)

During that period, Peter Sainsbury took over from Hilary Furlong at the AFC, and after Robbins' departure, Sainsbury and Lynn Gailey (who was now employed at the AFC) became key players in determining the fate of *Roundabout*. After the surprise approval for continuing the development of the project to a fourth stage, despite the inadequacies of the script, Grieve was given the task of finding a director.

AG. I'd decided Jackie McKimmie was the one for me. She'd directed comedy. She was experienced enough for all the funding authorities. I really liked her. I wanted to work with her. Of course, not thinking 'Jackie McKimmie's in Brisbane, I'm in Melbourne - trying to get things up and down'. But Jackie said 'yes, in principal'. So we got the funding. I had the million dollars in my bank account, and we were all set to go. It was on 16mm. The budget was \$1.8m. and it was going to work.

At the suggestion of SBS, it'd turned into two 90 minute episodes by then. Again my inexperience as a producer - I should have said 'get fucked'. Terry Jennings at Film Vic had said to me 'Anna it's like bread. You slice it any way they want it.' So I thought 'O.K. it's bread. I'll cut it into different slices'. After you cut it into three slices how can you cut it into two?

Jocelyn had decided not to continue. She's got other work. Maureen had dropped out. That left me with Deb [Parsons]. We fly up to Brisbane

and stay around the corner from Jackie in this underground flat that Jackie had found for us, and spend this week working. I'd sensed Jackie had some reservations but ... I was thinking it'll happen. By the end of the week Deb was clearly resenting the process. She was over committed on it and couldn't get out by this stage.

At the end of the week, Jackie tells me she doesn't want to do it. By then things had become clearer for her about what the project was. I'd told her all the mud because I didn't want to keep on carrying all the mud with me. She had her own project happening. I burst into tears. Deb is incredibly angry, feeling she's wasted a week going off in Jackie's direction. So we fly back to Melbourne. Deb doesn't want to talk to me on the plane, announces she just wants to write it and be done with it. She wrote it very fast the way *she* wanted to go. It was meant to be the finished thing.

There was no more [development] money and it just was not good. It was a real dilemma. And I've got no director but I've got the production budget. So I'm going around to Ann Turner, to any number of directors who were all saying 'no thanks'.

SC. By this time the mud had been flying so furiously it had stuck to everybody.

AG. The money was in the bank and yet everyone was saying no. Then I had this script that SBS rejected, that AFC rejected. That I'd personally rejected. Then I had this awful thing of saying to the writer I didn't want her to continue on the project, and she didn't want to continue either. She wanted to be paid out that day. I borrowed money off my mother to pay her out. I was now cash flowing the production.

What really annoyed me was the project was still owned by the AFC, though Penny wanted me to option it. Then I had to option it to move the money out of the AFC. Penny had left [the AFC] because she was pregnant. Suddenly I had no-one. Hilary left the AFC and Sainsbury had come in - who'd had no history of the project and wasn't particularly into television anyway. He was friendly but he obviously wasn't enthusiastic. (Connolly and Grieve, 1992)

Feeling deserted on all fronts, Grieve went to Sydney to meet with Sainsbury and Gailey, without knowing that Gailey had a history with the project.

AG. I had no idea at all Lynn didn't like the project and had been on as a consultant. I said I could do it for this money, and the budget - based on her breakdowns - was good. But she'd already decided it couldn't be done for that amount when she'd been involved.

I had this meeting with Sainsbury and said 'It's fucked up. I've done my best. This is the story.' He said 'Do you want to go on Anna?' At that point any sane sensible producer would've said no. But no. 'I'll go on if you back me'. I don't want to be the one to sell it down the river.

(Connolly and Grieve, 1992)

At this meeting (19 July 1989) Sainsbury stipulated that a final draft was to be submitted for approval by mid-September. Sainsbury's *Note to File*, dated 21 July 1989, indicates that support for this final draft was, at best, ambivalent: "I alerted Ron Neale by telephone conversation of the possibility that we may in September 1989 repossess the money placed in a production account before 30 June 1989." (AFC File PT 5092/2). In the meantime Grieve had to find a new writer to do a 'fix it' job on the script, and a director. Di Drew agreed to come on board as the director, provided the writer was either Helen Hodgman, Moya Wood or Laura Jones.

AG. Helen [Hodgman] said yes, but she wanted to change things. Then Di [Drew] wouldn't come in unless there was a deal (which the AFC refused) with a payout for her if the project didn't go ahead. So again, just me and the writer. Helen was getting \$15,000 and I was getting \$4,000. Then Helen got a teaching job in Wagga.

... Lynn Gailey's on my back about the legal documentation. She had to authorise every cheque I wrote. Ann Basser, representing SBS, was very sick through all that, but she was determined to see it happen. She was being my best support and I was looking to her too much for advice.

I got the script from Helen .... I remember driving back down the Wagga freeway and the sun was just setting. I was in the middle of nowhere in my little car thinking all these things - 'it's a fucking nightmare. I might as

well drive off the road now'- and my car broke down. I was stuck in the middle of nowhere.

Then I came back to Melbourne. This stupid contract I'd signed with the AFC meant there was not time between the time Helen delivered the script and the time I had to send it to the AFC. That was a real bone of contention considering how much work I'd done on the other drafts. Film Vic and AFC were playing a game together - my contracts were locked into a September shoot, even though Film Vic was saying it was okay for a January start, but no-one told me. [...] Helen agreed to do another draft for nothing. It had a lot of good things in it and it flowed, it had black humour, I liked it. (*Connolly and Grieve, 1992*)

Both of the script assessments on the final draft were quite positive, with one expressing reservations about the lack of depth of some characters:

I suspect the audience will respond best to the corporate character of the hotel and its 'backstairs' staff - and to DR ROSEN. LUISA's age excuses much but ... I thought something more directly apologetic to CHRIS over her reaction to the lesbian revelation would suggest a greater substance in her capacity for friendship; and that a suggestion of something more than physical allure would help us accept her falling in love with PARIS. (AFC File PT 5092/2)

The other assessment praised the satiric elements of the script, the warmth in the writing and "simply but well developed characters". It found that the plot was not strong: "Each of the main stories is really just a depiction of a moment in the characters' lives where a shift occurs." (AFC File PT 5092/2) The 'weak plot' was a reflection of the project's original intentions when it was proposed as a thematically linked package of six discrete stories.

Sainsbury and Gailey continued to cite script and budget problems as the basis for their doubts about the project (AFC File PT 5092/2: *Note to File*, dated 5 December 1989), however Film Victoria and SBS were still willing to proceed and Di Drew was interested in directing it, after revisions. Grieve was in pre-production mode, believing the money was still there.

AG. I had an audience with Sainsbury at the Windsor Hotel. I was in pre-production mode. Film Vic was saying 'we're only in if the AFC is in'.

SBS said to the AFC 'stay in, stretch the time frame, we really want this to happen'. (*Connolly and Grieve, 1992*)

After the Windsor Hotel meeting, having heard nothing from the AFC about whether it was willing to go ahead, Grieve wrote to Sainsbury about the concerns he had expressed:

... I understand from Film Victoria and my recollection from our meeting that there is an overall concern that the series is too 'light-weight', 'a bit soapy in parts' and presents an ambiguous ideological message in regards to its feminist concerns.

Helen and I were deliberately aiming for a light and ironic tone in the series, a comedy of manners ... in order to avoid the perennial criticism of feminist drama that it is stamped with good intentions and worthiness but in the process of providing all the right messages is often dull. (Anna Grieve to Peter Sainsbury, 14 December 1989, AFC File PT 5092/2).

On 18 December 1992, Sainsbury notified Grieve by fax that the AFC was withdrawing from the project which, in Sainsbury's view, "had already been in development for an extremely long time at very great cost" and which "remains in an early stage of development despite everything". Why the AFC needed a 'speedy resolution' was never specified, although there were a number of low budget features in development in which the AFC was keen to invest<sup>17</sup>. Sainsbury requested that Grieve return "the production finance to the AFC for use in other investments" (AFC File PT 5092/2). Grieve found Sainsbury's fax waiting for her at the Melbourne SBS office:

AG. The thing that gave me the nervous breakdown was that there was no one. Anne [Basser] was in Sydney. I was sobbing for four days. Jane Cameron rang me to commiserate because she'd been the agent for [Hodgman and Drew], forcing these hardnosed negotiations onto me - which I had to fulfil in a time frame, set out by the AFC, that meant I had no power to negotiate because she knew she had the upper hand with me and with the Commission.

---

<sup>17</sup> Peter Sainsbury's style of 'picking talent' did benefit a number of women filmmakers including: Gillian Leahy, Tracey Moffat, Margot Nash, Susan Dermody. See "Going to Sainsbury" (1989) for a description of the new era in funding at the AFC.



For the fax to come through - Sainsbury had no idea of the impact - to not ring me, just this cold professional 'we have no other choice ... and it's your fault'. For everyone at SBS to read that before I got to it.

The irony was, I was on this women's project and I felt I had no one.

(Connolly and Grieve, 1992)

The Women's Program was also a disturbingly isolating experience for its first manager, Penny Robbins who tried to develop a focus for the Women's Program so that it would survive the sunset clause. In the course of developing support mechanisms to advance women's position in the industry, Robbins found that women in commercial areas of the media were extremely reluctant to have anything to do with an Affirmative Action program, while women in the independent arena realised that without the power to invest in productions, the Women's Program was an even more marginalised force within the AFC than the former Women's Film Fund:

One of my hobby horses is structural change, but ... it's a very depressing area to work in because the change - you can barely see it. ... Nobody wants to feel that what they're doing is completely insignificant. I felt it was really important. I was completely obsessed by it. ... But it's not something you can do for a very long time. I found it an incredibly lonely job. In personal terms, it was incredibly lonely. To do that job you have to have some commitment to women and to a vision of where women might be - however nebulous or however broad. And you're working within an environment [at the AFC] that doesn't share that or reflect that.

(Robbins, 1992)

Sharon Connolly and Anna Grieve's last words on the *Roundabout* debacle touch on the fundamental problem that had dogged the aspirations of the Women's Film Fund since its inaugural year in 1975:

AG. Series television needed a much more experienced producer than me. You couldn't give everyone a break on the project. If the crew was inexperienced then you needed a really experienced director... if you gave everyone a break the whole project would break - which is exactly what happened.

SC. After the Women's Film Unit it was clear that boys get breaks because experienced men take boys under their wing. This was none of that. This was a whole bunch of girls all going to do this great thing together. You can't have a whole bunch of inexperienced and unconfident people. It's the lack of confidence and the insecurity that breeds all the shit fights. (*Connolly and Grieve, 1992*)

In its first decade the Women's Film Fund had taken the safe, realisable projects under its wing more often than it had taken on the projects that - as Sharon Connolly warned Penny Robbins at the outset of *Roundabout* - "were bound to end in tears" (*Connolly and Grieve, 1992*). The WFF's tenuous position in the AFC bureaucracy put the brakes on the Fund's fleetingly grandiose desires - of which the 1984 NSW Women's Film Unit and the 1985 Victorian Women's Film Unit, and *Roundabout* produced the most notorious 'shit fights'. The era of large-scale women's film projects came to an end with the nongensis of *Roundabout*.. The Women's Film Fund had toyed with the idea of taking an initiating role for many years. When it chose *Roundabout* and *Secrets* for development into scripts for television, the Women's Program was finally taking a cautious step into the murky underworld of feminine sexuality, secrets and desires that the Women's Film Fund had never been able to countenance. With *Roundabout's* demise the Women's Program retreated into small scale support programs for individual women, arousing little curiosity or controversy in the 1990s (see Carole Sklan, 1989).

---

## Chapter 7

### CAPTURED BY THE MATERNAL

---

My mother could not give me what I needed [in order to write about women]. When feminism began to reawaken, she hated it, called it "those women's libbers"; but it was she who had steered me years and years before to what I would and did need, to Virginia Woolf. "We think back through our mothers," and we have many mothers, those of the body and those of the soul. [...] Our mothers have been returned to us. This time, let's hang on to them. (Le Guin, 1990: 234).

Fearful of backsliding into the motherhood myth of 'babies not books', feminist activists had substituted the community of the Women's Liberation Movement for the family life from which they had absconded in their youth. In the 1980s, as they tried to recover what they had sacrificed in the process of escaping their mothers' lives, they began to grapple at a preconscious level with the cost of matrophobia - the fear of becoming their own mothers. In their attempts to become filmmakers in their own right (rather than in the name of the Women's Movement) they came face to face with the elusive task of facing their real mothers.<sup>1</sup>

The most striking feature of the films of the 1980s is the insistent image of the mother - an image which has been scarcely remarked upon in the reception and critique of the films. In this chapter, I want to track the return to the scene of the sacrificed mother through the films, keeping in mind my initial image of this generation of feminist filmmakers as essentially orphaned: " We are the daughters of the atomic age: numb, silent, grieving." (from *For Love or Money*; see Chapter 1).

---

<sup>1</sup> The therapeutic myth of psycho-analysis becomes central here: the 'healing fiction' that facing her real mother is necessary if the daughter is to truly leave home, rather than merely escape her mother's fate only to repeat it in another form.

### **The essential female tragedy.**

The most precious illusion which would be sacrificed in the upheaval faced by feminism in the 1980s was the belief that the daughter could refuse the place of the mother without cost to herself. Because this belief was unconsciously held, the process of giving it up was protracted and circuitous. The momentum for relinquishing this belief was precipitated by the wounds of activism (often referred to as burn out) which necessitated a painful, and not quite conscious, grappling with the activist ethos: the item of faith that change occurs through political struggle with the external world. Evidence of a tentative exploration of the self-wounding ethos of feminist activism lies submerged in the films of the period.

In writing about what blocks the achievement of sexual liberty, Dorothy Dinnerstein brought to the foreground the less tangible obstacles in the path of the activist:

[...] the stone walls that activism runs into have buried foundations. Any reader who has pushed ... against ... barriers blocking change ... knows how sturdy these concrete societal barriers are, and how fiercely defended. But what must be recognized is that these external problems are insoluble unless we grapple at the same time with internal problems, of feeling and understanding, that are at least equally formidable.  
(Dinnerstein, 1976: 12)

For Susan Lambert two major crises precipitated her re-evaluation of the forms of political activism in her life:

One was a relationship breakup which made me really begin to deal with my relationship with my mother and her death - and go into therapy. And the other thing was my health. I didn't know how to nurture myself. [...] Really, we were so far out on some kind of an idea that the rest of our lives - you turn around and there's nothing there. It's frightening. You can't live like that.

[...] All of us I think probably hit brick walls in the early '80s. Then as we all found our way to various therapists or healers or whatever else, we'd share that with the others. For myself, I got to a point where I didn't have any choice. That's required letting go of a lot of old ideas, friendships,

old ways of doing things, finding out about things I don't particularly like about myself. A lot of family work. (*Lambert, 1992*)

For Lambert, the therapeutic turn towards grappling with inner problems was a necessary continuation - even deepening - rather than a rejection of the project of Women's Liberation:

There we were fighting away for a world or a community that is nurturing and that is non-judgmental and has equal relationships between the sexes and that encourages individual creativity and affirms people to be who they are. That's what we wanted. None of us knew how to do it. We'd begun that journey but in order to get anywhere close to that we had to drop all those things in ourselves. [...] I didn't want to end up with the same kind of thing only with us in power. I didn't want to live in a society like that. So I think that was the next step for all of us: to go OK, what is it? Why aren't we happy? (*Lambert, 1992*)

The Women's Liberation Movement emerged from, and remained crucially concerned with, the great sea of unhappiness which engulfed women. During the 1974 Federal election campaign, Elizabeth Reid, Women's Advisor to the Whitlam government, spoke on ABC radio on issues which the Labor Party would need to address if re-elected:

We must look much more closely at what's happening to the women in the suburbs - the women who choose to stay at home and who choose to become mothers. And we know lots of figures about these women: we know that they're beginning to take drugs in large [amounts], to be distressed, to have mental breakdowns, to commit suicide. The rate of alcoholism is incredibly high. The cost in human terms is too great. (*Elizabeth Reid, 1974*).

In the 1980s, it was slowly dawning on some participants that the years of activism had not enabled them to slip through the net of their mothers' discontent. As part of its search for an answer to that question - why aren't we happy? - the milieu found itself cautiously circling the designated place of the mother, the place where rebel daughters had first become attuned to the unhappiness of their own mothers.

The sacrifice on which the Women's Liberation Movement was founded was the sacrifice of the maternal. By 'the maternal', I mean the relation between the mother and her daughter whereby the mother who gave birth has seemingly magical powers over infantile life. I take the revelation of the limits of the real mother's powers, along with her capitulation to patriarchal arrangements, as one of the sources of the feminist anger that sustained an anti-motherhood stance during the activist years. By 'the maternal', I also mean the daughter, in turn, becoming a mother (or not), and her relation to the archetypal mother who, as both Creator and Destroyer, embodies a regenerative dialectic of birth and death.

The precious (and at one point, enabling) belief that the daughter could dispense with the maternal at no cost to herself had become (a decade later) a disabling wound in the psyche of feminism. The paradox of rejecting the maternal, and its feminine trappings, from a *woman*-identified perspective constituted the buried foundations of the brick wall that activism hit in the 1980s. In a prescient move, Adrienne Rich in her influential book *Of Woman Born*, first published in 1976, characterised this split between the mother and the woman in terms of matrophobia, or fear of becoming one's mother:

Matrophobia can be seen as a womanly splitting of the self, in the desire to become purged once and for all of our mothers' bondage, to become individuated and free. The mother stands for the victim in ourselves, the unfree woman, the martyr. Our personalities seem dangerously to blur and overlap with our mothers'; and, in a desperate attempt to know where mother ends and daughter begins, we perform radical surgery.  
(Rich, 1992: 236)

The refusal to mirror their mothers by becoming someone else's mother was almost a given of the milieu. The 'radical surgery' which severed the bond to the mother produced a series of blind spots which entailed an almost blanket rejection of motherhood as an oppressive myth.<sup>2</sup> The

---

<sup>2</sup> *Maidens* and *Secret Storm* are rare exceptions to this notable neglect of the maternal in feminist cinema in the 1970s. Their explorations of the power of maternal images contrast strongly with Carole Kostanich's film on single mothers, *Mum's the Word* (1982) or Gillian Coates' 1977 film, *Cradle Song*, which more typically focuses on the dissatisfaction of a wife/mother who has everything she is supposed to want, yet yearns for something more.

activism of the 1970s had attempted a clean break from the depressed underworld of the feminine by marshalling the anger of a generation and directing it onto the external world. This created a circumscribed sphere of action for feminists: the founding critique of myths of motherhood, femininity and romantic love rendered the maternal/the feminine as a deeply suspect zone for feminists who were attempting to live without myths. Radical feminists who reclaimed something of the feminine for themselves were charged with essentialism: biology was not to be taken as destiny. There was enormous resistance to any sustained attempt to go deeply into questions of the maternal: in the film arena these questions were restricted to seasons of birth films, the child care issue and problems faced by single and/or tranquillized mothers isolated in the home. Inhibited from approaching the mother directly - to mourn her loss, to reconcile with her, and to incorporate a (modest form of) female power garnered from the remains of the relationship - the psyche of feminist filmmaking found itself captured within the very landscape of the maternal which it had long disavowed.<sup>3</sup>

It was not until the 1980s, when the milieu was breaking up in an organisational sense (with the demise of the FFW, the SWFG and eventually the Co-op and the WFF), that feminist filmmaking would begin its convoluted return to the image of the maternal, to investigate what had been sacrificed and to deepen the milieu's understanding of its cost and its significance.<sup>4</sup> The struggle to face their mothers, in order to become more fully themselves - to give up the need for external authorities and for authoritarian forms of power - would require a prolonged work of mourning and reparation.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> Becoming the father's daughter aided the disavowal of the maternal. See Chapter 8.

<sup>4</sup> In writing, Drusilla Modjeska (1990) undertook this gargantuan task of investigating the mother's story from the point-of-view of her feminist daughter. *Poppy* ends at a point where the mother's story has been told; however, the daughter's own story has yet to take on a distinctive shape.

<sup>5</sup> A central tenet of Dinnerstein's treatise is that *the pain of mourning* is what we avoid by colluding in the current (unsatisfying and potentially lethal) balance of power between the sexes where female rule over infancy is compensated for by male rule over the external world (Dinnerstein, 1976: 188-197) The beauty of Dinnerstein's argument is that the work of mourning heals not only the wounds of childhood but also, and most urgently for the political imagination, our relation to the world.

One starting place for this reparative work lay in the embryonic recognition of the deep-seated psychological truth buried in Rich's statement that "The loss of the daughter to the mother, the mother to the daughter, is the essential female tragedy." (Rich, 1992: 237). Recognition of this mutual loss enabled great scope for potent images of the maternal at a time when the feminist film project was undergoing a more profound shift than that of its much heralded passing into the afterlife of post-feminism.<sup>6</sup>

The films which came out of the hiatus of the 1980s are richly symptomatic of the ills of the psyche of feminism, and of the varied attempts, not so much to cure these ills but to enter into a deeper relation with feminism's primal scenes, especially with regard to the figure of the mother. Looking at the films again, with these ideas in mind, it was startling to see that, *from the beginning*, the image of the mother and the ambivalence of the daughter were central to the milieu's representations of its own origins.

In 1973, *A Film For Discussion* explored the mother-daughter nexus quite literally over the washing up. The mother's acceptance that men are just like that - "I couldn't imagine it being any different" is answered by the daughter's insistence that things have to be different for her: "I don't want to get married and do what you do. Or stay where I am in the office and do the work I do." The question of where the rebellious daughter goes, is explored in *Maidens* (1978) in the utopian images of women together "each of them the daughter and the mother of the other".

The release in 1982 of *This Woman is Not A Car*, entailed a searing and surreal look at the assigned role of the mother as suburban housewife. Margaret Dodd's spotlight on the sexual politics of motherhood in Australian suburbia was followed in 1983 by Helen Grace's orchestration of the insistent and insoluble question of child care into the fragmented montage of *Serious Undertakings*.

---

<sup>6</sup>At the time of the release of the films I am about to discuss, there was considerable disaffection with feminist filmmaking and its rhetoric. (See my 1983 article for one example, and work cited in Chapter 5 as carving out a new epoch in feminist critique). Even the more generous receptions of the films tended to take them literally as being either about cinematic form according to the modernist political agenda (*Serious Undertakings*, *Landslides* and *A Song of Ceylon*), or about their professed subject matter of women and work, child care, romantic love, the body, imperialism and the nuclear threat (*For Love or Money*, *This Woman is Not a Car*, *My Life Without Steve*, *The Pursuit of Happiness*).



In the same year (1983) *For Love or Money* sought to recover, and re-examine with great ambivalence, the filmic image of the mother's work - done for love not money - in the suburban postwar years of the filmmakers' own childhoods, before their inevitable attempts to escape the inheritance of that 'work of loving', only to find themselves, years later, also working (on the film) for love, not money.

In its thriller sub-plot about invitro experimentation, *On Guard* (1983) deployed the figure of the independent feminist turned would-be terrorist whose task was to orchestrate a media event which would expose the exploitation of women and protect their sovereignty over motherhood as reproduction.

The figure of the mother returned with renewed insistency in the late 1980s, starting with the release in 1986 of Gillian Leahy's experimental documentary on romantic love, *My Life Without Steve*, at the centre of which is the woundedness handed down from mother to daughter, mobilised by the painful aftermath of the daughter's abandonment by her lover.

The 'unmasked' feminist of *My Life Without Steve* returns in a new guise in Sarah Gibson and Susan Lambert's documentary fellowship film of 1986, *Landslides*. The bemused and laconically self-conscious filmmakers turn the camera on themselves as they embark on a journey which seeks - through the metaphor and materiality of the body - to connect inner and outer worlds, their past feminist film work and home movie footage of mother and child. The 're-found' image of the mother-and-child, which closes the film, functions as the lost point of origin of their quest.

In 1987 Martha Ansara's feature film, *The Pursuit of Happiness*, provided a curious update on the pressing issues that propelled Ansara's generation into political activism: the end of history in the nuclear shadow of Hiroshima and what these monumental and seemingly unassailable economic, military and political structures have to do with the increasing privatisation of personal life within the family and women's unease with their complicity (as wife/mother/daughter) in maintaining these lethal arrangements.

In 1989, Margot Nash's experimental short, *Shadow Panic*, resurrected the image of the lost mother of childhood as a source of hidden treasure. In this film the *image* of the mother-daughter relation becomes rich and enabling territory for the filmmaker.<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> The pain and ambivalence of this imaginal relationship becomes especially vivid in Tracey Moffat's 1989 film *Night Cries* - a film which marks the beginning of a new era of women's work in film, an era which cannot be absorbed into the feminist film project of the 1970s and its epilogue in the 1980s, but which nonetheless owes something to the area of independent, experimental and modernist cinema opened up in the late 1960s, and extended and defended by feminist filmmakers, critics, teachers and administrators in the 1970s and 1980s.

### Appeasing the mother.

The films of the 1980s were not self-evidently about the mother. *For Love or Money* was regarded by filmmakers, critics and audiences as being a history of women and work since the arrival of the First Fleet. The most controversial aspect of the film at the time of its release was its subjective voice-over. The first-person plural 'we' was used to infuse a subjective feminine voice into an objective political history. The lack of fit between the historical recovery work on the image track, and the feminine subjectivity carried by the voice-over, becomes evident in the awkward structure of the fourth and final part of *For Love or Money*.

We couldn't get Part Four to work. Part Four is still not right. It's as lumpy as anything. But it's got some interesting stuff in it. It's got about three endings. (Thornley, 1992b)

Overburdened with an excessive ambition to be the definitive film history of women and work in Australia (and something else besides, evidenced in the subjective voice-over), *For Love or Money* was unable to pull its wealth of material into a satisfactory ending. The first of the film's endings begins with an image of a frontline banner declaring 'Women's Right To Work' carried in a street demonstration, accompanied by the voice-over which seeks "new meanings for work", challenging "work ruled by profit, efficiency, progress, war". A note of melancholy enters when the image changes to a slow motion shot of women in black, arms linked, faces quietly determined as they participate in the first Anzac Day commemoration of women raped in war. The voice-over continues: "We are women of the nuclear age. We resist. We place our bodies in the way." The image track cuts abruptly to a second ending, beginning with a shot of Aboriginal artefacts hanging on a wall and then an aged photo of Aboriginal women. A new voice speaks over the Aboriginal song:

Listen to us. Our country is very beautiful. It is our grandfathers' country and our grandmothers' country from a long time ago. It is the sacred soil of the dreamtime. Why do you never understand? <sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup> See Nash, Oliver and Thornley (1983: 8) on the Aboriginal Land Rights song and the way its link to uranium mining and the nuclear age is a point of unity for Australian women, despite differences of race and class.

The third ending begins with stills of the filmmakers, seeking to understand, as they work with images and stories they have uncovered: "The story of hard labour. The story of endurance. The story of survival. The story of resistance." Whereas the daughter's story is that of resistance, the mother's story is "The story of the kitchen, the story of the clean house". The daughter's ambivalence toward inheriting the story of the clean house is evident in the oft cited, seductive, slow motion shot of a woman shaking out a tablecloth and smoothing it over a table. Margot Nash described the moment at the editing bench when she put this image into slow motion to show the contradiction of domestic work as the site of oppression *and* of values of nurturing and loving:

It was a beautiful moment, it was about domestic work , housework ... the love and care that goes into "the work of loving", and slowing it down gave it that never ending nature. ( Nash in Nash et al, 1983).

It is the ambivalent attraction to this sensual image which provides the key to the puzzle of why a feminist film about women's work could not find its ending in the celebration of women's hard won gains in the workforce. Reprising the topic of the eventual equal pay victory the voice-over says: "Of course it was progress but it didn't really change things."

For its true ending, the film returns to its discovery that the work of women, paid and unpaid, is demeaned and denigrated because it is seen to be in women's *nature* to undertake "the work of loving". At the end of the film a compilation of still photographs of mothers with their daughters is accompanied by this voice-over:

We remember her labour. We remember that she gave.  
What we were to each other. What she taught me.  
That she made words. That she fed me, suckled me, clothed me,  
cradled me.

The image cuts to shots of men holding their children, at the races, on their knees.

We ask what might happen if men learnt the story of women's work. The cries of waking at night. The length of caring. The work of loving.<sup>9</sup>

At this point the film seems to be over, but there's a last minute reprise of the activist ethos which pulls the film out of the difficult territory of the maternal relation and the problems it poses for the feminist daughter. The film's final refrain, "She'd seen women fight; she'd seen them unite ", serves as an activist call to arms. At the last moment, the film shies away from ending with a succinct positing of the dilemma at the heart of women's work - that *because* it is aligned with the maternal, it is unpaid, underpaid and not valued. The persona of the activist has the final say in the film.<sup>10</sup>

There's an overwhelming sense of another film pulling at the edges of the historical-political one. A sense that work itself is not the proper/adequate focus for an analysis of the specificity of the relegation of women/the feminine/the maternal to the margins. The pleasures offered by the archival images unearthed by the filmmakers are of a different order from the history of women's work which provided the alibi for the epic labour of love that went into the film's assemblage. On the one hand, the film exhibits immense, primeval loyalty to the mother. On the other, immense anger at the demarcation of 'women's work' and the exclusions and inequalities that flow from the denigration and restriction of the feminine. In honouring the mother, and her work of loving, there is a hidden agenda of appeasing the all-powerful and implacable mother who ruled over infancy. In rejecting 'women's work' and becoming filmmakers, these ardent feminists ran the risk of perpetuating the unconscious denigration of everything associated with the maternal.

---

<sup>9</sup> At the time, Thornley was influenced by Dinnerstein's argument that a shift in child care arrangements was the bedrock upon which a shift in sexual relations would occur. There's no space in the film to explore the deeper implications of Dinnerstein's argument that it is female dominion over childhood that leads to adult denigration of the mother by both men and women. *For Love or Money* was unable to look at the psychopathology at the heart of human relations which Dinnerstein takes pains to articulate in terms of the maternal.

<sup>10</sup> The images of resistance in *For Love or Money* are overwhelmingly images of *activism* - of women out in public places demonstrating, striking, invading arbitration hearings, chanting, chaining themselves to buildings, making speeches. The everyday political work done by feminists *within* institutions, political parties and unions remains unrepresentable in the film. This is an interesting omission given the reputation Australian feminism has for invading the bureaucracy and creating the phenomenon of the femocrat.

In 1983, in a cultural milieu which had recently tuned into a cool postmodernism, it was quite an achievement to value the warm, sensual, nurturing aspects of the work of mothering. *For Love or Money*, as a labour history, was unable to delve further into what underpinned the sexual politics of *making* history:

Woman stands outside history because man, on balance, wants her outside of it. But she stands there voluntarily as well. She has a number of motives for doing so which are peculiarly her own. (Dinnerstein, 1976: 211)

These two motives, according to Dinnerstein, are: "*Motherhood*" which offers women their own impressive achievement of ensuring physical continuity of the species; and "*Socially sanctioned existential cowardice*" whereby women take vicarious pleasure in men's (compensatory) achievements "while enjoying immunity from the risks he must take" (Dinnerstein, 1976: 211 - 213, her italics). This split is maintained in *For Love or Money*: The film's nostalgia for the nurturing mother of early childhood remains separated from its overt celebration of those women who pushed against the forces that conspired to keep them outside history. In the psyche of feminism, Mother remained split off from (independent, history-making) Woman.<sup>11</sup>

---

<sup>11</sup> There is an image in *For Love or Money* of women pushing prams and strollers in a street demonstration - an incipient image of the Mother making history. However, as Freda Freiberg (1982/3: 62) pointed out in a review of Mary Kelly's *Post-Partum Document*: "We have tended to assume that mothers and feminists are two different species of women, with little in common."



7.1 Women as Activists: Newcastle barmaids on strike.  
*For Love or Money* (1983)

*For Love or Money* and *On Guard* are the last of the milieu's films to be made from inside of the myths of feminist activism. At a time when faith in grassroots political activism was being tested and the fantasy of quick solutions was coming under fire, *On Guard* (and, in a more ironic mode) *Serious Undertakings* (both released in 1983) toyed with the attractions of terrorism. In the image of woman-as-terrorist there was little room for the image of woman-as-mother, although there are elements in *On Guard* and *Serious Undertakings* which suggest that the nexus between woman and mother is not one that is easily severed. One of the four protagonists in *On Guard* has children and therefore does not see herself as free to go into hiding after committing a terrorist act. As Kathe Boehringer (1984) was quick to point out, the film's interest in the politics of reproductive engineering *and* women's sovereignty over motherhood was fairly abstract. When it came to tackling the issue of the (reluctant) terrorist as a mother, the film turned a blind eye to the consequences of its activist ethos:

... there is a degree of violence, or at least oppressiveness, when the woman who is the mother is in a moral sense forced to come along because she is a security risk if she doesn't. Her choice in the matter is very severely constricted, and little recognition is taken of the fact that she is a victim of the other women's errors and excesses in bringing her in in the first place ... There is something very male there in the sense that

there is the woman who is always saying "no, no, I don't want to do it"  
but when she finally gets into it she likes it.... (Boehringer et al, 1984: 10)

With *On Guard*, feminist activism hit a very particular brick wall. The film skims the surface of the motherhood issue, careful not to cut too close to the bone. When the terrorists disappear into a tunnel at the end of the film, the children left behind are given no further thought.<sup>12</sup> As an insight into the psyche of the activist, the absence of feeling (for the homes and children left behind) in the film is striking. Dinnerstein puts her finger on the problem when she writes about activism and its mandatory suppression of "nostalgia for the familiar":

In the context of historic activism, people have typically treated open expression of nostalgia for the familiar as a grave offense: at best a dangerous distraction from, at worst an actively malevolent sabotage of, the worldmaking effort. We are just starting to see how necessary a part of that effort it is. [...] part of what has kept history malignant is that in making it people have mainly disowned or denied ... their homesickness for the magic that inhered in these renounced roots.

[...] So long as homesickness is not felt through, what made staying at home out of the question is not fully felt through, either. (Dinnerstein, 1976: 229 - 230)

---

<sup>12</sup> Ten years later in Lambert's second feature *Talk* (1994) the issue of the abandoned daughter is a painful one for both female protagonists - one was abandoned as a teenager by her mother's early death; the other leaves her young daughter with her husband when she decides not to return to the marriage.





7.2 Jan Cornall and Mystery Carnage in *On Guard* (1983)

The image of feminist activists running into the tunnel at the end of *On Guard* turns out to be the truest image the milieu produced of itself in 1983. It is an image of the historic impasse that occurred under conditions of modernity when to leave home and renounce one's roots was the norm rather than the exception.<sup>13</sup>

---

<sup>13</sup> Rosalind Coward (1992) has written a study based on interviews with a number of women who have taken up their traditional role in the family, rather than continue with the feminist repudiation of the institution of motherhood. However, as Dinnerstein (1976: 230) points out, the option of "sinking back into the familiar" is not really available.

## The spectre of child care

*Serious Undertakings* is the film which is explicitly about the cluster of issues that would distinguish the 1980s from the 1970s, including: the breakdown of certainties, evident in the film's episodic montage of styles and genres; the foregrounding of cinematic style with a nod to film history and film theory; the reflexive mode of appropriating images of terrorism, child care, art history, feminism and national identity; and the exasperated, apocalyptic, skittish mood that puts an image into play and then refuses to play on, impatient with available modes of discourse and yet unable to escape their authority.

In *Serious Undertakings*, Helen Grace was finally realising her ambition of making an argument in visual form. It was an argument that took place on the cusp between the modern and the post-modern in that it refused to take a position, to be pinned down to a politics or to allow the discursive production of positions - from which questions are posed or answers are posited - to go unnoticed.

The film's ostensible goal was the demolition of feminism's naive relation to representation. In order to differentiate itself from the feminist film work that had preceded it in Australia, *Serious Undertakings* drew on critiques of Hollywood realism and Art Cinema auteurism, and sought to go beyond positive, realistic images of women, citing the work of Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen, Chantal Akerman and Yvonne Rainer on questions of representation and visual pleasure (*Application for funding*: WFF file 240/I & II, Box W16)

*Serious Undertakings* was a seductive film which promised much. Yet it steadfastly refused to be *about* any of the topics it deployed to lure its audiences into the cinema: terrorism (and child care); Australian landscape painting (and child care); film spectatorship (and childbirth). Above all, the film and its publicity offered no explanation for its insistent claim to be about the perennial, unfilmable question of child care.<sup>14</sup> Grace's

---

<sup>14</sup> Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen's *Riddles of the Sphinx* (1977) is the canonical attempt to invent a cinematic discourse on child care. See Helen Grace in Addis and Grace (1983: 15) on the "attempt to make a film about childcare within the realisation that you can't make a film about childcare ... or at least you can only make certain sorts of films which give a pretty depressing picture and don't give much pleasure".

application for funding to the Women's Film Fund in April 1981 provides some clues to the genesis of the film:

The idea of the film originates in the personal experience of childbirth during the Schleyer kidnap, the Lufthansa hijacking ending in the Mogadishu airport seige, and the subsequent deaths of the hijackers, Schleyer and the remaining Baader-Meinhof gang in German prisons. All these events took place in October 1977.

The desire to understand personal experience within a political context led to a consideration of the use of images of women and childcare in other political situations and in Australian cultural history. (*Application for funding*: WFF file 240/I & II, Box W16)

Child care was *the* feminist issue that shadowed social action filmmaking. Every Women's Film Fund panel dreaded the perennial 'child care' film application.<sup>15</sup> If the feminist filmmaking project, in the 1980s, had had to define itself negatively it would have declared itself as filmmaking which was *not* about child care. If I take this idea of the (yet to be made) film on childcare as the *shadow* of the feminist filmmaking enterprise - as that which feminist filmmaking most fervently does not wish to be but nonetheless is - then it takes me back to Dorothy Dinnerstein (1976) and her insight: that the madness of history stems from something as banal as human sexual arrangements on the basis of which women get to do the child care. In the light of this revelation, *Serious Undertakings* has to be taken seriously when it claims to be a film about child care.<sup>16</sup>

The rejection - and insistent return - of child care as *the* cinematic subject for feminist filmmakers stems from the rejection of the place of the mother.

---

<sup>15</sup> Women's Film Fund applications involving child care include *Working With Child Care* (Women's Trade Union Commission) and *What Happens To Kids?* (Shalagh McCarthy and Rosalind Dey). However, the definitive child care film is yet to be made. A film about a woman driven to child abuse, *Do I Have To Kill My Child?* (1976, Donald Crombie and Anne Deveson), was one of the first films in which the WFF invested in 1975.

<sup>16</sup> See Catriona Moore and Colleen Hoebein (1987) for a reading which claims that the film is *about* the politics of discourses which construct femininity and maternity as natural, not cultural; see Sylvia Lawson (1984) for a detailed description of the film in terms of its Australian cultural references which enable a reading of the film in terms of national and gender relations in a postcolonial culture.

For a whole generation to refuse to do the child care was to refuse the ordained place of the self-sacrificing mother. The Medusan feminist - this monstrous/lesbian woman whose look could turn men to stone (or, in the case of *Serious Undertakings*, dissolve their talking heads into abstract video images), was monstrous and 'lesbian' (i.e. not mother) precisely because her refusal to do the child care (under the traditional patriarchal arrangements) threatened to upset the traditional hierarchy between the masculine public world and the feminine realm of private life.<sup>17</sup> One of the pleasures *Serious Undertakings* offers its feminist audiences is the sight of Left male intellectuals sheepishly describing their involvements with feminism and the unglamorous politics of child care. When it becomes apparent that these 'interviews' are performances by actors it hardly matters.

The film's capriciousness extends to its interplay of child care and terrorism. The figure of the terrorist is imbricated with the problem of child care - explicitly in the hospital ward scene, in the opposition between the maternal enterprise and 'serious undertakings' which underpins the film, and in the film's cocky enactment of a terrorist kidnap'scene' placing a woman and her pram at the centre of the terrorist act - not as innocent victims but as decoys.

---

<sup>17</sup> See Ann Curthoys (1988) for a collection of her own writings from 1970-1986 on women's liberation (and its mutations into the women's movement and feminism) in Australia. Curthoys consistently raised the issue of child care as the fundamental structural problem that would make or break feminism as a political movement. In a 1975 essay, "Men and Childcare in the Feminist Utopia", Curthoys raised the issue of feminism's neglect of child care, and pointed out the shortsightedness of the lesbian separatist prescriptions against women's relationships with men and the family (1988: 20-25).



7.3 *Serious Undertakings* (1983)

At the risk of imposing a spurious coherence which is absent from the film, the threads that I want to draw out from *Serious Undertakings* are those to do with the mother. The film opens with a set of choices: existential feminism insists that women face a choice between having children or being free for serious undertakings. *She* wants to make a film about childcare; *He* would rather make a film about the Baader-Meinhof gang. *She* takes up the gauntlet with a jazzy montage of shots - her terrorist film would place a woman with a pram at the centre of the action. Her brief foray into high-speed montage has *Him* confused: "What is this? A tragedy or a comedy?" *His Mate* replies: "Don't know. You can never tell with a woman."

*She* leaves them to their speculations and cuts to the scene of a birth - a long shot that tracks slowly down an empty hospital corridor, away from the doorway where we glimpse a hospital bed and chair. A woman's voice-over gives an unsentimental account of her initiation into the routine of childcare. Her tone is one of wry awareness of her complicity in the manufacture of innocence as she is anointed into motherhood - an institution which demands that she remain innocent of politics (in this particular instance, the shooting of hijackers).

But *She* is a feminist, and intellectual of sorts, and cannot remain innocent. Instead, in her new incarnation as mother, *She* must investigate her



construction within Australian cultural history - in writing, painting and the cinema. *She* finds her self in the image of (Henry Lawson and Frederick McCubbin's) unsentimental drover's wife who, the voiceover tells us: "loved her children but had no time to show it", and who set out every Sunday afternoon on a lonely walk, pushing an old perambulator through the "everlasting, maddening sameness" of the Australian bush. (This bush woman is the ancestor of the quintessential feminist image of the isolated, depressed housewife who first appeared in *Woman's Day 20cents* (1973), pushing a stroller through alienating city streets and supermarkets).

In the tradition of feminist critique, *She* interrogates the origins of this stalwart bush woman in male literary and artistic traditions founded on elitism and separatism.<sup>18</sup> It is here that the film takes an unexpected turn. Rather than uncovering female literary and artistic traditions to counter male myths of "feminine half-minds" *She* turns her attention to the conditions of representation itself. We return to the birth scene - this time in a cinema with a female spectator wearing a raincoat, attending the cinema like a midwife attending a birth, helping the film to be born (contrast this with the earlier 'birth scene' shot from the vantage point of a hospital corridor - where birth is usually represented in the cinema, from the father's point of view). This cinema spectator turns her head to address the audience directly and aggressively: "What do you want? Who are *you*?"

From this point the film's centre no longer holds. The talking heads rapidly lose their authoritative status as they begin to discuss aspects of their own performance and their personal history with feminism. *She* begins to ignore what they have to say, dissolving their images, even as they speak, and addressing us directly with subtitled questions running across the screen, distracting us from what their discourse, making us pay attention to her. After posing a number of questions about history, truth and performance, the film cuts abruptly from this recounting of experience and opinion - suddenly impatient with the its own problematisation of the authenticity and authority of the talking head.

---

<sup>18</sup> See *The Drover's Wife* (1985, Sue Brooks) for a film which takes the wife's side in a sly filmic rendition of this Australian tale. Brooks' film is indebted to Murray Bail, Russell Drysdale and Henry Lawson.

The final section of the film is titled: Throwing out the baby with the bathwater. It reprises Eisenstein's Odessa Steps sequence where the pram goes hurtling out of control as the soldiers advance. Just as the sequence awakens our sense of horror and moral indignation, a voice-over ends the film with the declaration: "So! We were politicised through moralism but came to realise moral protest was nothing. It was irrelevant." *She* has turned out to be a trickster: both mother and feminist, Australian and intellectual, irreverent prankster and skeptical critic.

I set out to discover what images of the maternal *Serious Undertakings* sought to project. I discovered that *She* is the place of the maternal from which the images of this film *are projected*. In a sense the whole film is projected from the maternity bed in the hospital ward, where Grace first conceived the film during the early days of her own initiation into motherhood. The maternal in this film is a highly ambivalent place where innocence and moralism go hand-in-hand, threatening to keep the feminist daughter, who becomes a mother, forever in the place of the righteous Mother, morally (therefore ineffectively) condemning the patriarchal arrangement which guarantees the mother's own complicit place in the family and in the culture. As Dinnerstein (1976) and Anne Summers (1994) have shown, the 'god's police' role performed by women serves to keep *women* in their proper place. *Serious Undertakings* suggests that improper feminists have been unwittingly seduced into adding their own voices to the chorus of moral indignation which is expected of women, rendering their struggles ineffective.

The spectre of 'child care', which underpins the much-written-about *Serious Undertakings*, makes a further appearance in another film released in the same year - Margaret Dodd's much-exhibited *This Woman Is Not A Car*. (The latter film is often included in retrospectives of women's filmmaking, yet has received nowhere near the critical attention of the former film<sup>19</sup>). Margaret Dodd and Helen Grace were both baby boomers who were part of the reinvention of motherhood outside the bonds of

---

<sup>19</sup> See Erika Addis in Addis and Grace (1983: 10) on the postcard campaign which created an expectant audience for the film before it was made. See Sylvia Lawson (1983: 10) on her series of screenings and discussions of the film in Britain with well known film writers and teachers including Steve Neale, Paul Willemen, Claire Johnston and Pam Cook. The film was referenced by Lawson in terms of Barthes and Benjamin, Brecht and Eisenstein, Godard and rock clips - evidence of its origins and its destinations.

marriage, under the influence of feminism. Their films come from the daughter-as-mother, rather than the daughter-as-not-mother of *For Love or Money* and *On Guard*.

The potent images from *This Woman Is Not A Car* have all the strangeness and insistence of images from the unconscious - that reviled and irrepressible image-producing faculty of the psyche. The images in *Serious Undertakings*, by way of contrast, are consciously appropriated from media-saturated culture where the image is believed to precede, if not altogether displace, the real.

The opening shots of *This Woman is Not a Car* are grimly realistic in their depiction of a suburban cul-de-sac of brick veneer project homes and the morning ritual of the housewife - in a nylon, floral dressing gown and hair rollers - farewelling her husband as he is picked up for work by a mate in a yellow sports car. If the pram is the motif which signifies 'child care' in *Serious Undertakings*, then the family station wagon is the vehicle of *This Woman's* daily round of picking up and delivering children from school to ballet to the supermarket to boy scouts and finally, to the beach.

Although the film uses neither dialogue nor voice-over (its soundtrack is sprinkled with snatches of daytime radio: "Out of the terrifying darkness...!"), *This Woman* is by no means a silent film. If anything, the absence of conversation and commentary draws us more powerfully into the everyday, made strange. The pre-title sequence establishes the film's principle motif of the car in a series of intercuts between black and white shots of the woman picking up children in the car, and colour shots of the woman seated at her dressing table taking rollers out of her hair as she faces her reflected image. Her face is expressionless - she is used to a certain level of depression. Her daughter approaches her with a sci-fi, superwoman doll wearing a ceramic costume and a mirrored mask. The woman's dressing gown falls open as she leans forward into the mirror and we see a car headlamp where we expect to see her breast.

The body of the film is structured around three sequences. The first is a journey to the beach which repeats the pattern of the pre-title sequence, cutting between black and white shots of children being piled into the car, and colour shots of the drive to the beach where the rear vision mirror intercuts a close-up of the mother's eyes and a shot of the kids in the back



seat. She is alone in the car, behind an invisible barrier, as she is alone on the sand in a long wide shot accompanied only by the voices of the children as they play on the swampy beach. The sequence ends on a note of rising panic with an ominous tracking shot as the car races away from the beach - away from the fish-eye shots of the children devouring pasties and tomato sauce while a menacing tide seeps in.

The central sequence of the film begins as the car pulls into a garage for petrol. Three overalled mechanics, working on a pristinely restored FX Holden, look the woman over as she waits for service. One saunters towards her while the others watch. Time slows down. She is wearing the metallic mask and costume of her daughter's Sci Fi doll. Her family station wagon has turned into the FX Holden and every gesture involved in filling the petrol tank and checking the oil becomes a prolonged metaphor for sexual intercourse. Whose fantasy is this? The film's rapid editing refuses to clarify a point-of-view. The shock of recognition of each gesture, as the mechanic's fingers caress the headlamp, slide under the bonnet, check the oil and insert the petrol pump, has a double register. The scene is both powerfully erotic and hilariously parodic.



7.4 *This Woman is Not a Car* (1982 Margaret Dodd )

At the point where the mechanic's two mates join him in ravishing the car, another scene opens out from inside the framing fantasy. We hear the sounds of a car crash and a scream as the mood turns dark and violent. A black ceramic car rolls over revealing its vulnerable pink underbelly. A knife cuts into a wedding cake and we hear laughter. A white, veiled bridal car, a flashlight and the fleshy inside of the black car are intercut to the sounds of a woman's cries. A rape turns into a wedding as a blood-red veil is peeled off the screen to reveal a kiss. Two hands on the knife cut the wedding cake - the bridal car's veil is replaced by hair rollers.

At the end of the rape-wedding sequence the film cuts back to the scene at the garage: the petrol hose is withdrawn from the tank and the last few drops are shaken off the end of the hose. The mechanic struts away in slow motion to the sound of applause. The mates toast their success with a Fanta. The woman drives off in the immaculately restored FX Holden. In the back seat, the kids are naked under a red blanket.

The soporific mood at the end of the garage sequence is broken by the end-credit sequence. A woman in pain is attended by medical staff in what turns out to be a delivery room. Her cries and moans - the sounds of her labour - accompany a repeated shot of the doctor cutting the umbilical cord and handing her a pink ceramic car. Because the ceramic cars are part of Margaret Dodd's art work, the final image is double-edged: the woman who gives birth is both mother and artist, alienated reproducer and creative sculptor.

In *This Woman is Not a Car*, the drive through the suburbs to the beach, the sexual arousal in the petrol station scene, and the surreal nightmare of the rape, marriage and birth scenes constitute a journey which starts with the familiar and banal image of the woman's reflection in the bedroom mirror and ends 'elsewhere' - in a metaphoric world where the dulled body of the housewife takes on the dimensions of horror as the maternal body turns monstrous in its birthing of the beautifully crafted ceramic car.

As spectators we are deftly delivered from the humdrum world of the family station wagon to the wilder reaches of the phantasmic in a roller coaster ride reminiscent of Jim Sharman's 1971 feature, *Shirley Thompson vs the Aliens*. Freud's primal scene is relocated, in *This Woman*, from the marriage bed to the birth chamber of horrors where the conjugal relation of

the parents delivers its ill-begotten offspring. Or where the woman-as-artist gives birth to her own ceramic creations rather than, as mother, to the heirs of Australian masculinity. These are powerful images of the incipient rebel mother - the mother who has been missing from the limited feminist pantheon to date.<sup>20</sup> The cars-as-artworks suggest both the alienation of women's labour (epitomised in childbirth) and resistance to that alienation. Dodd appropriates her own artworks so they take on a second order of meaning in her film. The 'horror' of female sexuality and the 'unnatural' horror of the woman-artist, are mapped onto the image of mutant birth as the horrific fate of women in marriage. Out of this scenario comes the enduring artwork - the film itself.<sup>21</sup>

Dodd's film was made over an extended period from 1976-82 in Adelaide as a collaborative project which had its origins in Dodd's horrified return to suburban Adelaide after a sojourn from 1964-68 in California. Dodd was influenced more by artistic traditions, including Dada, than debates over feminist aesthetics. Her experience of living in the suburbs with young children after beginning a promising career as an artist, set her apart from her peers living in communal households in inner-city Sydney.<sup>22</sup> The image of the suburban housewife is no longer an image of 'the other woman' in Dodd's film.<sup>23</sup> *This Woman* is the occasion for a surreal journey into sexual desire and its hilarious, violent and fantastic manifestations. On this journey, sexuality is linked to the resurgent creative and destructive powers of the woman who is both mother *and* artist.

---

<sup>20</sup> For the daughter who will become a mother (or not) perhaps the primal scene is located in the birthchamber as well as in the bedchamber: the daughter's primal scene is the forbidden scene of the mother giving birth. The return of the home birth movement, natural birthing and birth films may be attempts to put this taboo scene back into the imagination of a generation of women who were brought up on the story of the stork - a story which equated motherhood with housework rather than with the powerful scene of a woman birthing her child.

<sup>21</sup> See Mia Campioni (1994) on the artist/woman/mother in recent Australian art works.

<sup>22</sup> Dodd had close ties to the Sydney milieu in the completion stages of the film: Sara Bennett was appointed to ensure the film reached completion; Tim Burns and Sarah Gibson assisted with the editing; the film premiered at the NSW Women and Arts Festival in Sydney in 1982, after a double-head screening at Frank Watters' well-known Darlinghurst gallery in 1981. (Source: conversation with Dodd, September 1994). See Jen McCarthy (1994).

<sup>23</sup> See Collins (1988) on the difficulty of representing 'the other woman' in feminist films.

## One of the walking wounded

There's an argument to be made that in the 1950s, despite her efforts to initiate her daughter into the institution of motherhood, the mother's unconscious message to rebel was more powerful than the conscious one to conform.<sup>24</sup> The deeply ambivalent relation between the dutiful mother and her rebellious daughter was to be essayed most forcefully in Gillian Leahy's 1986 film about abandonment, *My Life Without Steve*. The film opens with a voice-over which attempts to locate prolonged mourning in terms of rebellion against loss:

Doctor Freud, Steve. I'm reading Doctor Freud. In mourning the person is supposed to give up the loved person, the object of desire ...  
You may rebel against the loss. Sometimes so intensely that you forget reality and cling to the lost lover by means of what Freud calls an "hallucinatory psychosis of desire".

Later in the film, Liz says: "Women do not take husbands to replace their fathers. They do it to replace their mothers. It doesn't work unfortunately." In terms of the crisis in the psyche of feminism in the 1980s a film about loss (of the mother; of her substitutes), mourning and rebellion against that loss, was timely.<sup>25</sup>

Although it was *Serious Undertakings* that constituted its project as a critique of a certain feminist orthodoxy, it was *My Life Without Steve*, released three years later in 1986, that drew the fire of feminist wrath at what appeared (to some) to be a betrayal or repudiation of feminist politics.<sup>26</sup> When it came to producing a devastating allegory of the pain of the loss of a beloved paradigm, the 'cool apocalypse' of Helen Grace's much acclaimed film was no match for the 'tragicomedy' of Gillian Leahy's aching lament .

---

<sup>24</sup> See Lesley Johnson (1993) on the social pressures and institutional measures taken during the 1950s and early 1960s to educate girls into norms of femininity.

<sup>25</sup> Timeliness might explain why the film finally won the battle to be shot on 35mm (unheard of for a WFF/CDF film) despite severe reservations from the assessors. The elegiac mood of *My Life...* was certainly in synchrony with the milieu's mood of lamentation for the past and for what had been repressed during the peak years of feminist activism.

<sup>26</sup> Barbara Creed (1987b: 354) describes the polarised responses to the film between women disappointed with or still committed to feminism.

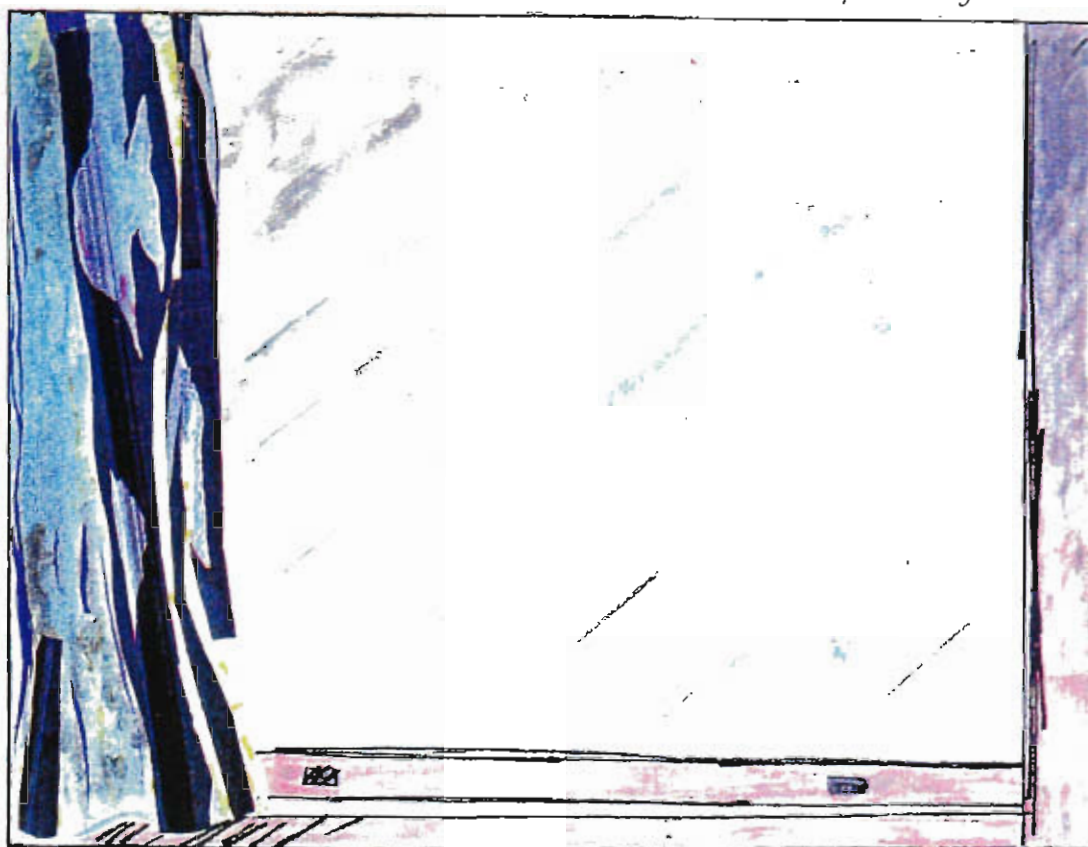
Although *My Life Without Steve* has generally been promoted as a film about romantic love,<sup>27</sup> for my purpose the film has a two-fold interest peripheral to the theme of romantic love: its allegorical take on the crisis in feminism in the mid 1980s; and its love-hate relation with the mother which lies at the heart of its protagonist's paralysed despair over the likelihood of history always/never repeating.

If *Serious Undertakings* and *This Woman is Not a Car* are about the sacrifice demanded of women - either the maternal role or serious undertakings, then *My Life Without Steve* is about the demand that the rebellious daughter sacrifice her precious illusion - that becoming Not-Mother (becoming a Feminist) will immunise her from the pain of isolation and anxiety, dependence and depression, abandonment and loss.

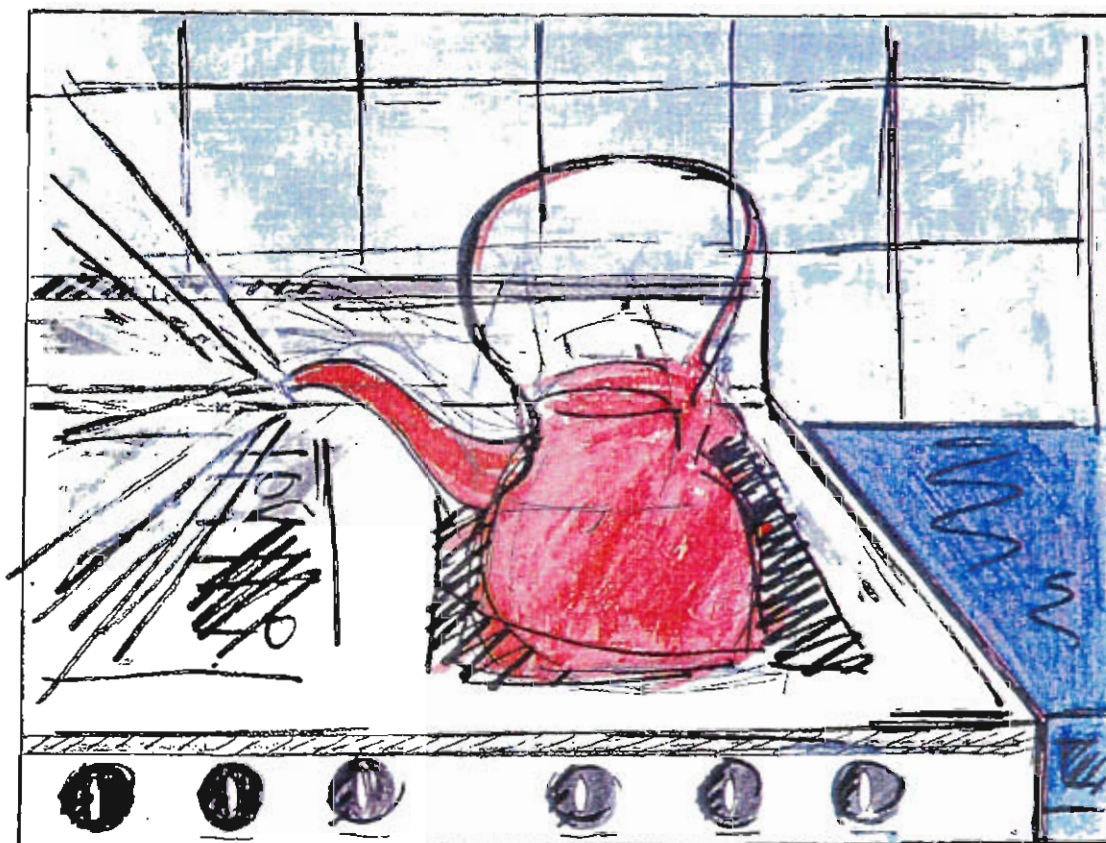
---

<sup>27</sup> See Kemp (1986); Creed (1987b); Gilroy (1994); Leahy (1986) & (1994) on the theme of romantic love in *My Life Without Steve*.





Sc.9  
Curtains flap on the wind. Bad weather continues



Sc.9  
Kettle boils incessantly on the stove.

If *Serious Undertakings* is shot from the bed in the maternity ward, and *This Woman...* is shot from the driver's seat of the family station wagon, then *My Life...* is shot from the (writer's) desk at the window overlooking the bay. The question of how to connect these spaces - the inner/subjective/affective and the social/public/discursive - became a central question for the milieu as the feminist slogan of the 1970s - the personal is political - lost its efficacy.

*My Life Without Steve* was a milieu event in 1986 in several important ways. It gave screen space to the couplings, passions, jealousies and woundedness of the sexual relations definitive of the milieu. It portrayed the aftermath of women's attempts to reinvent the rules of romantic love in terms of sexuality - outside the safe, known, familial bonds of marriage and motherhood. And for once, the jealousy and competitiveness shadowing the new arrangements were given a voice in a film coming out of the feminist heartland:

I am sick of the boyfriend snatching, so-called feminists of today. Everyone is supposed to be so fucking liberated and no one is supposed to mind. It is me that is supposed to feel guilty when Jenny runs off with my boyfriend. Guilty because I feel jealous. And because I hate a 'sister'.

There's an ambivalence towards marriage in the film which is a move away from its outright condemnation as the instrument of women's oppression and dependence. Liz addresses Steve on the topic:

Was she [Jenny] the only refuge for him from a nagging wife? Snagging wife. Old bag. Or did she turn me into one? Not that you ever offered me the boons of marriage. Bans of marriage.

To her mother she says something quite different:

No, I'm not going to do the right thing by you. What do I have to do to please you? I'm not going to have babies and get married. Why don't you admit to some of the hatred and resentment you had for me as a child.

The rejection of marriage had done nothing to destroy the longing for a "safe central spot where I am loved", yet there seemed to be no hope of

finding such security: "This psychiatrist I'm seeing is always talking about hope. About how I haven't got any at the moment." A letter from an old friend asks "What happened to the promise of the past? Where's the new material conditions for more than just survival? Is *this* what we were fighting for?" The brave foray into open sexual relationships opened wounds of rejection: "...if the desiring body has already ceased to exist for the other, then what remains is a wound, disembodied."

In refusing the image of the independent, enlightened feminist - or of the wounded woman who is eventually *cured* of her abjection - *My Life ...* posited a more complex model of the psyche than had been broached in the *feminist* arena before. By 1986, feminism was no longer able to sidetrack (as it had done at Minto in 1978) critical debate from this genre of 'the suffering woman' film.<sup>28</sup> This was not a redemptive form of suffering, amenable to consciousness raising. In the film, Liz remembers how the love affair turned sour:

The breakfast kiss unreturned. You wanted time "to yourself". I was no longer your independent fantasy feminist. Living with you became a state of torture.... I became craven. I lost my pride.

This intractable, inconsolable kind of suffering tested the redemptive capacities of feminism by refusing to explain away the abjection and masochism of the abandoned woman by resorting to political categories of oppression and ideology: "Knowing that women are depressed because they are oppressed doesn't help me much at the moment. In fact it almost feeds the wounds." There's a strong sense in the film of James Hillman's insistence that depression doesn't demand a cure: that it demands to be listened to - that it wants something (see Hillman, 1977: 55-112).<sup>29</sup> *My Life* is a film to be listened to as much as watched. For the duration of the film we cannot escape that small apartment - we envy the camera its relative

---

<sup>28</sup> The suffering woman genre takes into account 'other' films by women, not canonised as feminist: *Paralysis* (1977, Barbara Levy), *Just Out of Reach* (1979, Linda Blagg); *The Singer and the Dancer* (1976, Gillian Armstrong); *Circuit* (1972-74, Gillian Burnett) and all those rejected 'negative' image films in the WFF files.

<sup>29</sup> Hillman (1977: 57) introduces the term *pathologizing* "to mean the psyche's autonomous ability to create illness, morbidity, disorder, abnormality, and suffering in any aspect of its behaviour and to experience and imagine life through this deformed and afflicted perspective."



mobility while we are stuck in our seats with this woman who is stuck in her depression. At the end of the film Liz says: "The pain was unavoidable. It was not to be avoided." After a decade or more of intensive activism it is almost a relief that the drive to move forward has ground to a halt - that the mania for 'doing' has been overtaken by other demands which require a more depressive mode.

In seeking the source of women's pathology/depression in the dynamic between mother and daughter, the film took on board some fundamentals of psycho/analysis/therapy. Seasons on the couch were becoming the common place from which the milieu sought to shed light on, and hopefully ease, the intractable nature of the anguish, anxiety and suicidal depression which follow when loss (of a lover) is experienced as abandonment - and, in an allegorical sense, when the shifting of a political paradigm is experienced as loss, failure and disillusionment.

Inevitably, the hours on the couch shifted the spotlight from the faithless lover to the culpable mother. In the middle of the film there is a lyrical montage of shots of flowers and floral patterns on domestic objects. This sequence of garden (of Eden) shots opens with a shot of a saucepan of cumquats simmering on the stove, and ends with a shot of a tap dripping onto a plate in the sink. The variety of floral patterns on the image track attracts us to the feminine sphere, while the clash of expectations voiced on the soundtrack drives apart the mother and daughter who are bound together by their inherited femininity. In an angry contestation the mother asks the unbearable question: "What have I ever done to you to deserve such a daughter?" The overburdened daughter replies: "I feel that nothing I can do will make you happy. I have enough of my own guilt without your extra load. You make me feel like a failure." This enactment of the loss of the mother to the daughter ends in the bathroom with a shot of water running into the basin and Liz's face reflected in the bathroom mirror (one of the rare glimpses we have of her in the film). She says:

Grandma Roberts used to stick her head in the oven.

You threaten to die unhappy with no respected place in society.

I threaten to slit my wrists.

The mother's shadow is projected onto her daughter from one generation to the next. By refusing motherhood, did this generation hope to slip out from

under their inherited shadow? The shadow of never being good enough for the critical mother; the shadow of *becoming* the unappeaseable mother.

*My Life Without Steve* offers an extended metaphor for the fate of feminism in the 1980s. A crisis - Liz asks, "What is its *name*?" - prompts a review: of how it started out so hopefully in a burst of love; the glory days when it seemed so simple discovering what 'we' liked together; and then the moment when difference asserted itself, breaking up the myth of unity, the myth of 'we'.

At the end of the film Liz is left with the problem of how to let go without denying even the most abject aspects of her experience: "I want to lay down the knife. I am writing to tell you." Gillian Leahy's film was accused of 'wallowing' in pain. Critics never stopped to ask themselves why someone in Leahy's enviable position was in such extremity. Leahy had the courage to wallow *and* to own up to the most humiliating and unworthy moments in her life as a feminist. Her film undoes the myth of the strong, independent 'fantasy' feminist. In the abject figure of the suffering woman we are not offered a new model, a new heroine. Rather, at the end of the film the feminist woman (and her Shadow) are on the verge of rejoining unredeemed humanity.

## The (object) maternal body

In 1986 Sarah Gibson and Susan Lambert's Documentary Fellowship film, *Landslides*, also took up issues of abjection, dependence and the maternal. This feature length documentary represents a pivotal and necessary moment in the milieu's return to the altar upon which the sacrifice of the mother had taken place. The journey back to the mother would be particularly arduous for this generation of independent feminists for whom 'the mother' represented the victim, the martyr, the self-sacrificing housewife. *Landslides*, in its false starts, dead ends and detours, is the film which testifies most vividly to the resistances and vacillations the journey would entail. The beauty of *Landslides* is the assembly of all the baggage for the journey. The pity is that the end of the film arrives without the journey having properly begun. For my purposes, *Landslides* is a necessary metaphor for the natural disasters that block the path back to the disavowed mother. The inadequacies of the film were the inevitable inadequacies of the too-easily arrived at solution - preliminary failures which were necessary if the milieu were to go deeper into the mystery of its own beginnings than the idealised and forever lost Mother of *For Love or Money* or the 'God's Police' mother, as site of innocence and moralism, in *Serious Undertakings* or even the culpable mother of *My Life Without Steve*.

On first viewing, *Landslides* is a puzzlingly seamless film. Its dominant formal strategy is a temporal displacement of the sound track from the image track. The film opens with a montage of shots from Gibson and Lambert's previous films. These shots are accompanied by a male voice-over talking about the problem of what to do with 'old bones' - whether to return them to Aboriginal custody, put them in a museum or use them for scientific purposes. This juxtaposition of seemingly disparate concerns is the film's dominant formal device. It rescues the film from literalism. The problem of 'old bones' becomes a metaphor for the problem of what do to with old films. The other device which structures the film involves footage of the filmmakers and their recorded conversations. The effect of stylistic unity is reinforced by the unifying motifs of 'the journey' and 'the body'.<sup>30</sup>

---

<sup>30</sup> The essayistic mode of the film generated considerable debate about the merits of the 'open' text which purports to leave room for the viewer to make her own connections. It also provoked some discussion about academics endorsing certain modes of filmmaking which conformed to the tenets of film theory. See Ross Gibson (1987), Barrett Hodsdon (1987) and Gillian Leahy (1987).

*Landslides* is richly symptomatic of the trouble in which feminism found itself. Early in the film Gibson and Lambert discuss the "incredible omission" of the mother from their film work, in the context of a discussion about "where do you go? where would you want to go?" The filmmakers embark on three journeys that go to: Uluru, the sacred site at the 'dead centre' of Australia; underground into the Jenolan Caves; on board an observation flight to see Haley's Comet. Each journey proves uneventful, failing to yield the hero's reward of a vanquished foe and a triumphal return home. Dejected at the end of the Halley's Comet flight, Sarah reflects on the feeling of anti-climax, wondering if she'd done enough homework.

Given the disappointment of external adventures, the 'inner journey' becomes the new metaphor for feminism, displacing that of the 'revolution'. In a conversation about making the film, Gibson and Lambert invoke desire and pleasure, in an effort to displace the ethic of duty and responsibility which dominated the recent past.

Gibson: The journey for me is linked with the notion of desire - the desire to have an experience beyond the present one.... I think going into the body is also about pleasure.

Lambert: The journey for me is about control in my life, increasingly wanting to have, to allow myself to have less control, to be open to more surprises, to be more adventurous, to be less fearful. The aim of my journey is not to have an end.

As we listen to this conversation, a shot of a man walking in space - linked to his space shuttle by an umbilical lifeline, is replaced by home movie footage of a mother tending her baby. As we look at a close-up of the baby suckling at the mother's breast, we hear a male astronomer explain that when we use instruments to look at the cosmos now, we are actually "looking at extremely young objects ... that possibly no longer exist".

The image that we are looking at of the baby at the mother's breast, has the same quality as the home movie footage shot by Susan Lambert's father during her childhood. This filmed image of the maternal serves as a point of origin for the filmmakers' exploration of the desiring and pleasure-

seeking body, and returns as the final image with which the film comes to rest. As such it is an image replete with connotations. The return to the maternal image in the context of the creative journey displaces the matrophobic image of mother as victim/martyr and suggests a new image - of the maternal relation as Muse to the daughter recycling images at the editing bench.



7.7 *Landslides* (1986)

The image of the sacrificed relation to the maternal proves too disturbing for prolonged contemplation. The filmmakers retreat from this task by 'mapping' the body in terms of discourses and practices (anthropology, surgery, biomedical technology) whose referent is the body.<sup>31</sup> Within the film's many discourses there is one which is carried by a female voice. This soothing, philosophical voice promotes a corporeal feminism which was

---

<sup>31</sup> See Laleen Jayamanne's film *A Song of Ceylon* (1985) which adds an interesting footnote to the theme of the cinematic body and the figure of the maternal. Jayamanne (1985)'s published 'interview' with her mother, Anna Rodrigo, about the film, stands as a testament to the possibility of an other mother-daughter relation, this time between the adult daughter as filmmaker and her responsive, adult mother. Jayamanne (1982: 12), in a review of Akerman's *Les Rendezvous D'Anna*, drew attention to the scene where the mother and daughter spend the night together in a hotel room, as "that which up to now has been represented as an impossible love: the love between mother and daughter". See also Jayamanne (1982/3: No. 28) for a photo-montage on the woman who is free of the responsibility of being a daughter and a mother.

becoming popular on campus among young feminists, and which also attracted graduates from an earlier era back to the lecture rooms at Sydney University. Lambert had been studying with Elizabeth Grosz in the Philosophy Department at Sydney University for two years before making *Landslides*.<sup>32</sup> In one sequence, extracts from Gibson and Lambert's films are superimposed over close-ups of the filmmakers with their eyes closed while the female voice-over speculates on the relation between desire and the body:

Desire is a kind of bodily feeling, a bodily process and a bodily movement towards something ... a supplement to that body.... The body supplies all the raw ingredients which desire is able to organise into a structure that's meaningful.

In this case (analogous to the maternal image where the child is a supplement to the mother's desiring body), the image of the filmmakers is supplemented by projected images from their films.

The film's conscious intention of exploring the splits - mind/body, outer/inner, scientific thinking/magic thinking - underpinned by the masculine/feminine dichotomy, provided the rationale for the film. Within this rationale was another driving force - to heal the split between doing and feeling, between the political persona and the inner self, to find what had been repressed or lost in the formation of the activist. The revelation of abjection and *dependence* on the maternal as a *necessary* condition for the formation of a stable identity was a difficult one for feminism. These were big questions which, in the end, the film addresses only obliquely. A travelling shot of the drive towards Uluru, past the magnificence of the Olgas, was accompanied by an editing bench recording of the filmmakers arguing about how to deal with the big questions:

Gibson: I've been brooding since we started to edit.

Lambert: Why? You don't want to begin editing?

---

<sup>32</sup> Mia Campioni and Elizabeth Gross (1983) and Moira Gatens (1983), publishing in a marxist journal, initiated a new round of work about the significance of the body in social/psychic life and in the establishment of sexual identity/difference. See Elizabeth Grosz (1994) and Rosalyn Diprose and Robyn Ferrell (eds) (1991) for further elaborations on philosophical approaches to the body.

Gibson: Well I think that I feel a level of commitment ... but that I was confronted by 'This is the film'...

Lambert: And what, you want to run away?

Gibson: Oh no. I don't want to run away. I want to draw back.

Lambert: That's what I'm reacting to, see. Your drawing back.

Gibson: Mmmm. It's a bit far. And you're just like a little machine that keeps going on.... You don't want all these big questions thrown up in your path....

Lambert: No. I want to start dealing with images and sounds and the stuff I love about filmmaking.... I don't want to sit around with the big questions endlessly. It frightens me because I just think big questions lead to more big questions ...

Despite its tendency to chase after each tantalising possibility held out by, mostly, scientific discourses, *Landslides* does occasionally touch base with what I take to be its unconscious concern. At the heart of the film is the home movie footage shot by Lambert's father, which acts as a refrain and a breathing space in an otherwise busy film. This footage cautiously indulges Dinnerstein's 'nostalgia for the familiar' of an Australian childhood spent in backyards populated with pools and swings, hoses and clotheslines. In the context of the electronic, archival, biomedical and scanning images used in the film, the home movie footage evokes an *other*, meditative, time and space. Unlike the objective, scientific and digitally generated images in the film, the home movie footage has the effect of both detachment and subjectivity. It has the ability to disturb. The father's presence behind the camera is palpable yet distanced. The mother is present as arms, breast, body - an extension of the daughter who occupies the centre of the frame.

The daughter in *Landslides* is an infant: at the mother's breast; pushing a pram full of dolls; on the swing with her father. She is also the grown-up daughter who has left home for a world that is lost to her parents' familiar suburban outlook. This daughter, who is busy with her own ventures, is increasingly in need of something. There's a sequence which lists Sarah and Susan's respective visits to the optometrist, herbalist, hairdresser, gynaecologist, astrologist, skin specialist, psychic, masseur, dentist, therapist, acupuncturist, chiropractor, family planning, doctor, and jungian analyst. Images of the spaces which provide treats for the ailing body/psyche, are accompanied by a male voice-over which enthuses over the immense scientific breakthroughs wrought by the discovery of DNA and quantum

mechanics - breakthroughs in scientific knowledge which have yet to impact on everyday life - while older knowledges continue to promise 'magical' efficacy.

*Landslides* is underpinned by attempts to return to the mother - to the maternal body - as the source of identity. However, in the film's narration the mother is reified as 'the body' or 'bodily processes'. The only thing to do with such a body, ultimately, is to separate from it and to find it abject. And forever after, seek to supplement one's pristinely independent body. This unilateral declaration of independence is precisely what has not worked for feminism.<sup>33</sup>

In *Landslides*, Gibson and Lambert turned the camera on themselves. They asked themselves what their work as filmmakers had been about. By taking 'the body' as their point of departure they were able to forge a link between their early feminist work and attempts in Sydney in the mid-1980s to reinvent feminist discourse. This is precisely what holds the film back. Updating their feminism appeared to move their film work out of the sphere of propaganda. Yet, having represented a number of discourses on 'the body', the film rests on its laurels as a timely voice for a new corporeal feminism which emerged in the wake of the fierce anti-essentialism debates of the late 1970s.

I think *Landslides* let us catch up with ourselves really. Let us put it all into perspective and that felt satisfying. I don't think I could go back and do that again. I did feel at the end of *Landslides* that we'd become very much about corporeality.... *Landslides* is quite tidy. I found that a restriction. It could only allow certain ideas about the body in. It's convenient that they're the right ones for the time. (Gibson, 1992)

Ultimately, the film stands at the threshold, displaying but not reflecting upon the very images (of childhood, of the maternal) which could serve as keys to the locked doors of memory and desire for the 'familiar' - desire for all that has been rejected and suppressed in the formation of the activist.

---

<sup>33</sup> The sacrifice of the maternal was literally a founding moment for some feminists: Thornley and Lambert both cite the experience of having an illegal abortion - the refusal to be a mother at the risk of their own lives - as the catalyst for their politicisation as feminists.



## Intimate relations in the shadow of the bomb

*Landslides* refused to engage in a hermeneutics of suspicion in its explorations of scientific enterprise, attempting to imagine a feminine specificity founded in the relation to the maternal body rather than one defined as Not-masculine. The fundamental question of how intimate relations connect with internationally deployed technology and capital, was reconfigured a year later, in 1987, in Martha Ansara's feature film, *The Pursuit of Happiness*. The central intimate relation in the film - the marriage of Anna and John - is a reprise of the feminist attempt to represent the 'other' woman - the one who did marry, who did become a mother, who now faces a crisis. This woman has a teenage daughter who is protesting against the presence of American warships in Fremantle, and a husband whose collusion with visiting Americans in a business deal strains the marriage.

The relations in the film are schematized in the interests of drawing a parallel between Anna's dependence in the marriage and Australia's defence and business dependence on the United States of America. The coming to consciousness of an ordinary middle-class woman is the stuff of feminist filmmaking. The film also returns to that other place of origin of the Women's Liberation Movement: the threat of annihilation in the nuclear age and the temptation to amnesia which Dinnerstein describes so succinctly.

The mother-daughter relation shifts ground as the question of dependence on the husband-father is brought to a head over his support for the American presence in Fremantle in the lead-up to Alan Bond's defence of the America's Cup. *The Pursuit of Happiness* is one film which consistently places the mother-daughter relation in the context of the husband-wife relation. This produces a new perspective on the rebel daughter as not only Not-mother but as also Partly-father. In the film this is established through the daughter's relation to her paternal grandfather - a relationship which enables her to escape the tensions and strictures of her parents' marriage crisis and find her own identity. The mother is liberated not by her daughter's example, but by her own halting efforts which, because she is a *wife* as well as a mother, must be directed towards different obstacles from those which confront her daughter.

Two scenes parallel the relationship between mother and daughter, at the same time revealing the very different positions in which they are located in the family. Sharing the task of shopping, mother and daughter engage in the following conversation about Anna's husband/Mandy's father in the aisles of the supermarket:

Mandy: He just seems to come home from work, these days, sit down at the table, get out his papers, grab his calculator, and that's it for the night.

Anna: Mandy, that's not fair. He's only doing it for us.

Mandy: All he cares about is work and money.

Anna: I don't hear you complain about the clothes you wear or the house you live in. He's trying to look after us the only way he knows how.

Mandy: I have to think the way he thinks. And, I mean, just because he's Dad doesn't mean he's right.

The economic advantages of dependence on the husband/father pose different problems for the wife - who has invested her resources in the marriage partnership - than they do for the daughter, who has not yet had to face the difficulties of juggling (in)dependence with raising children. Later in the film, the marriage reaches flash point in a typical setting for marital strife - in the car, on the way home after an election night spent in the tally room. John, who has had too much to drink, insists on driving, angry with Anna for her truculence during the night:

John: I'm trying to impress people. How can I expect them to let me look after their business if it seems I can't even take care of my own.

Anna: If I'm quiet you complain. If I say what I think I'm undermining you.

John: Well you do. You're supposed to have confidence in me. Anna, do you want me to succeed in this or not?

Anna: What do we get out of it?

John: Oh Christ! Well, let's see. You look terrific tonight. No, you do. You really do. And it might have something to do with the clothes you're wearing. What do you reckon they came from?

Anna: I thought they were a gift. I didn't realise there was a price ...

At the end of the film Anna and John pause at the entrance to a crucial business reception. She is unable to cross the threshold. He can't pull out of the race now: "You get into it to win. I've got to find out if I can." Alone in the cold light of dawn, watching the departure of the American fleet, Anna

reaches her own declaration of independence. Only then, as the credits roll, is she joined by her daughter and father-in-law.



7.7 *The Pursuit of Happiness* (1987)

The fantasy of this film is double-edged. It imagines a mother who finds her own way to her daughter's side. And it imagines a daughter who is able to separate from her family without being orphaned as a result of her refusal to be the dutiful daughter. Because she is the daughter of both a mother and a father, Mandy is more than an extension of maternal hopes and expectations. And because Anna has been able to separate her own aspirations from both her husband's and her daughter's she becomes the mother who does not lose her daughter.

Although the film carefully plots these desired moves - and renders the intimate, familial scenario as a mirror image of Australia's dependent 'alliance' with the U.S.A. - it does not take the viewer on the journey it maps out, remaining literal and schematic as a result of large ambitions and limited means.<sup>34</sup> It does, however, touch directly on the themes of the collusion between men and women in bringing history to the brink of destruction, explicated by Dinnerstein (1976) as central to the dilemma faced by Ansara's generation of activists.

---

<sup>34</sup> See Ansara (1988) on the making of the film, the budget constraints and the deadline imposed by the 10BA tax concession requirements.

Margot Nash's 1989 film *Shadow Panic* takes a different tack in its explorations of the feminine, the maternal, and the independent woman in the political shadow of nuclear holocaust. The story behind *Shadow Panic* encapsulates the late 1980s in relation to: political shifts in film funding, the refocus on subjectivity in the light of psycho-analysis, and the residual influence of post-structuralism on film aesthetics.

Margot Nash's trajectory as a filmmaker since finishing *For Love or Money* exemplifies the particular tensions that became definitive of 'independent' filmmaking under the patronage of the Australian Film Commission in the changing political and economic landscape of the 1980s. Although Nash was to become one of the chosen few under the AFC's policy of 'picking talent', the loss of the Co-op and the women's film groups would be deeply felt:

The way that the Film Commission operates is to isolate people and construct them as individuals. That's the whole way it's been going for a long time now. The Co-op lost its base and then look what happened: a lot of people who were working at the Co-op went to work at the Film Commission and became bureaucrats ... looking after careers, buying houses; you know - things change.<sup>35</sup>

[...]

One tries to hold onto one's politics, if you like, but I feel as though I've also been bought off in a way, and constructed as an auteur to have a great career.<sup>36</sup> None of us started out to have a career. I started out to be an anarcho surrealist insurrectionary feminist and cause trouble and stir things up. But I'm now in my mid-forties and I don't own a house and don't have any security or superannuation and I have to pay the rent and be pragmatic.

---

<sup>35</sup> On the events which precipitated the closure of the Co-op, which involved members of the Co-op who were also employees of the AFC, see Hall Greenland (1986a) and (1986b). See also Jennifer Stott (1987: 125).

<sup>36</sup> Nash was one of the beneficiaries of Peter Sainsbury's largesse where filmmakers no longer faced up to peer assessments at the AFC (see *Filmnews* editorial "Going to Sainsbury", 1989). After completing *Shadow Panic* in 1989 Nash was given a grant to spend a year developing a script for a feature film (see *Vacant Possession*, 1994). On the Sainsbury philosophy of film funding see Sainsbury (1989a) and (1989b), and on the restructure of the AFC after the setting up of the Film Finance Corporation in 1988, see Robinson, Sainsbury and Murray (1990/91).

[...] I don't know what my politics are except I feel much more powerless than I felt in those days and I feel upset even talking about it ... and I think the whole theory stuff separated the theoreticians and the practitioners. I think a lot of the post-modernist stuff didn't help. That's my opinion, it did not help. (Nash, 1992a)

After *For Love or Money* Margot Nash made *Teno* (1984), the first of the Women's Film Unit's productions at Film Australia.<sup>37</sup>

When *For Love or Money* finished, the Women's Film Unit was set up at Film Australia. It was for women to upgrade their skills, to do things that they hadn't done before. The first thing I thought about, because I saw myself as an editor, was maybe I'd like to cut 35mm ... and then I thought, wait a minute, why don't I direct - why don't I say I want to direct. So I had *I's Eyes* which was the beginning of *Shadow Panic*. Well, they didn't want me to go and make my personal experimental film. They wanted me to make a documentary. I said, 'well at least can I do a fiction', but no, they wanted me to do a doco. And so I remember being quite resentful about it, but nevertheless they gave me the opportunity to write, research and direct a short documentary.

[...] having been in the *For Love or Money* editing room for so many years where we had no money, to be in a setup like Film Australia was like being in a lolly shop. It was just fantastic - access to fantastic equipment, sound studios, transcripts, everything we wanted was there. It was wonderful. And also, they had so much on their plates, they let me go, and didn't control me very much at all, and liked what I did. (Nash, 1992b)

At the same time that external forces were reshaping the milieu's collective ethos into an individualistic one, the milieu's psyche was being refigured under the influence of various schools of psychotherapy.

Shifts that I've gone through on a more personal level have come from doing seven years of Jungian based psycho-analysis which I went into at

---

<sup>37</sup> See Nicolette Freeman (1987) on the 1984 NSW Women's Film Unit. See Appendix B for a list of the WFU films.

the end of *For Love or Money*. I've hardly read any Jung but a lot of my thinking has been influenced by some of the people like James Hillman who has written from a Jungian perspective. So that places me in a very different position to a lot of the feminist theoretical work that's happened. (Nash, 1992b)

To enter analysis was to undertake a search for what was missing from the utopian politics of the 1970s and from the relationships that people had with each other in the name of a new sexual politics. By the mid-1980s it was clear that a Shadow-free politics, based on the assumption that the problems were all 'out there' in the capitalist, patriarchal system, was not working. The milieu went into analysis in order to grapple with inner demons and to discover within its own psyche the Shadow aspects in Left politics which had long been disavowed.<sup>38</sup>

What I think is lacking within utopian politics, I would talk about in terms of 'soul' - not in a Christian sense, but as creativity, imagination, depth, complexity, difference. It's within that area that I have looked for some solace, or some answers, or a framework with which to understand the world, because that very simplistic one that a lot of us had as early feminists - and I had as an anarchist before that - does not explain why things don't work and does not explain why the revolution didn't happen. We should have made dramatic changes, but of course people are very human. (Nash, 1992b)

In 1985 the ambitious project that would become *Shadow Panic* received some development funding from the Women's Film Fund and the CDF. The project was to go through several stages of development before it was granted production funding. Nash found it difficult to break with her feminist persona, based on *For Love or Money*:

I think there was a part of me that was sick of working in documentary and sick of being labelled as a feminist/historian/documentary filmmaker because of *For Love or Money*, which was not how I saw myself. After all those years on *For Love or Money*, that was enough, I had paid

---

<sup>38</sup> See Samuels (1993: 78-102) for a persuasive argument about the necessity of bringing to consciousness the disreputable, Machiavellian, Tricksterish aspects of political deal-making.

my dues. I think there was a part of me that was trying to throw that persona off, throw that image off and go, 'No wait a minute, I'm an anarcho surrealist insurrectionary feminist'.

[...] I wanted to really explore film and the creative possibilities of the image. I was in psycho-analysis and I wanted to work very intuitively with images from the unconscious, and work politically, but in a less issue-based, overt kind of way - in a more poetic way. (Nash, 1992b)

*Shadow Panic* began life as a collaborative venture between Nash and Sava Pinney in the early 1980s, and received script and development funding as *Worlds-A-Part* in the mid- 1980s. After finishing *Teno* for the Women's Film Unit and making a documentary, *Speaking Out* (1986), about homeless girls for the NSW Film and Television Office, Nash was ready to go for production funding for *Shadow Panic*.

I was starting to think I was never going to make it because when I went for production funding they knocked me back. They knocked me back because the original script had eight characters. *Shadow Panic* has three. The original had eight characters. It was completely over the top ... it was wild and they thought it would be the *Heaven's Gate* of Australian independent filmmaking. They just thought it was wild - too wild, too big, too much, too extreme, too over-the-top. And it was. It was terribly extreme. (Nash, 1992b)

Nash was attempting to work with images in the same way that archetypal psychology worked with dreams - by staying with the dream, savouring its richness and atmosphere, rather than analysing or interpreting it - in order to produce images that would resonate in the viewer's imagination. After being knocked back for production funding, Nash took the unwieldy script to Sydney writer, Sasha Soldatow, who told Nash there were 'too many characters - get rid of the men' (Nash, 1992b). With Soldatow as script editor, and knowing she only had one more chance to apply for production funding, Nash cut the original script back to three women characters and dropped some of the more expensive or impossible special effects.

Although Nash's process of drawing on the unconscious to produce compelling images was a strong influence on the film, she was also

attempting to work with ideas about deconstructing narrative which had considerable credence in political filmmaking at the time.

*Shadow Panic* ...is not a literal representation of archetypal therapy - not at all. It's more an attempt to come out of some practice of that. *Shadow Panic* is funny actually because it's got such funny roots. Archetypal psychology is story based and *Shadow Panic* is not story based at all. In a way - I've never said this before, but it's true - I think there was a part of me that was still trying to get 'hip' with the non-narrative post-structuralists and bring my mad, anarchic, imaginative creativity and my film-making skills into it. So it's a funny film. It's a film that people don't understand at all and don't know what to do with. They either like it or they don't. (Nash, 1992b)

The film that was released in 1989 as *Shadow Panic* was the culmination of a long period of rewriting and rejection by funding bodies. Looking at the film now, it's possible to see it as a reprise and a reworking of the major motifs of the feminist film project in the 1980s. *Shadow Panic* touches base with Dinnerstein's supposition that the (nuclear) madness of history has its origins in the relegation of the masculine to the fields of science, technology and capital, and the feminine to the realm of subjectivity, domesticity and child care. The post-war rebellion against this arrangement finds its embodiment in the independent woman who is Not-Mother. In *Shadow Panic* this woman is pluralised into three figures: the redhead, fossicking for gold in the treasure house of the Oedipal past; the investigator, collecting evidence of dirty deals in a post-colonial State; and the hothead, cruising for love in a cosmically ruled universe.





7.9 Robin Laurie as "The Redhead" in *Shadow Panic* (1989)



7.10 Rose Wanganeen as "The Investigator" in *Shadow Panic* (1989)



7.11 Kaarin Fairfax as "The Hothead" in *Shadow Panic* (1989)

Each figure pursues her phantasms, haunted by memory and shadowed by an apocalyptic future which has already arrived. Crucially, only the investigator is taking pains to set the world to rights. The redhead and the hothead dream and search in realms of memory and desire that are beyond mastery.

Stylistically, the film pulls out all the stops to produce what Linda Williams, in her work on surrealist film, calls the *experience* of the Imaginary, by focusing on a primary belief in the image itself:

[...] the exploitation of the film's resemblance to the dream image led to a new kind of film content: the film itself considered as an image-generating process of unconscious thought.... Instead of showing what a character thinks, the Surrealist tendency in film was to show how images themselves can "think" and how the apparent unity of the human subject is really a succession of identification with such "thinking" images.

(Williams, 1981: 51)

Nash's visual formulations of states of desire and dread - her search for images that would haunt the political imagination - was ably assisted by Sally Bonger's distinctive cinematography, Jan MacKay's art direction and Elizabeth Drake's sound and musical score. Feet emerge in startling close-up from primeval slime; the planet Saturn spins outside a loungeroom

window; a dry, unsettling wind whips through desolate urban streets; a red sports car flies over the ocean to a marooned mansion on a mysterious beach; storm clouds gather with frightening speed, and tension rises and reverberates to breaking point on the soundtrack.

Structurally, the sketchy events of the narrative take place over the course of one day, commencing with the redhead's early morning dream and ending that night with apocalyptic visions of cosmic chaos, followed by the restoration of calm. The inconclusive events of the narrative are linked by synchronicity as characters cross each other's paths, exchange looks, or engage in similar activities like watching television or searching along the shore.

*Shadow Panic* has ties with the images of childhood in *Landslides* and the familial triangle in *The Pursuit of Happiness*, which carry traces of the Oedipal problems specific to the father-mother-daughter trinity. In the figure of the investigator it also has affinities with the pursuit of knowledge of masculine enterprise which structures *Landslides* and *The Pursuit of Happiness*. In the figure of the hothead - 'the fool for love' - there are echoes of the abandoned woman of *My Life Without Steve*. In its sudden shifts from realist to subjective and surreal modes, *Shadow Panic* is closest to the fantasies and horrors which haunt *This Woman is Not a Car*. And in its evocation of a specific place and time (Redfern, Sydney Harbour, The Gap, eastern suburbs beaches, the races, 1980s entrepreneurial greed and black deaths in custody), the film comes close to *Serious Undertakings* insofar as it alludes to the peculiarly contemporary, Australian aspects of its concerns.

*Shadow Panic* opens with a long pre-title sequence, richly hued with blues and greens: a foot squelches over seaweed, an ear listens, an eye looks, a voice says: "My trouble out here is memory. I remember myself as a powerful creature" (quoted from *This Old Angel* by Pamela Brown). The sound of helicopter blades overhead intensifies as a shadow passes over the redhead's face. We see her leap from a rock onto the beach below. As she lands, the redhead woman is transformed into the redhead child sifting for precious green stones. A saxophone cuts in over the noise of the helicopter blades as a close-up of the child's eyes cues the transition to a classic mother-daughter scene: the child sits demurely on her parents' bed as her mother, dressed in a backless evening gown, spins slowly around in the space



dressing table drawer and picks out an earring shaped like a starfish. A shadow passes over the dreamer's face on the pillow. A voice-over says: "I am the dreamer, the redhead. I search for hidden treasure. Which fragment would yield the gold? Which memory would haunt forever?"

As the redhead searches along the shore and through city streets, the memory that returns is that of the man's hand reaching into the drawer and the sharp intake of breath that accompanies it. It has the power of a primal scene image. But what of the image of the man tumbling down the narrow staircase - man's fall from grace? It's followed by an image of the father in a dinner suit zipping up the mother's dress - which in the earlier shot was already zipped up. The dreamer has re-run the scene to include the father and shift the daughter from centre frame.

The film draws no conclusions from its images. The intrusion of the father does not end the daughter's search for the lost mother. We see the redhead walking, in a thin cotton dress, along a cliff top, standing too close to the edge. A man in a business outfit, carrying a briefcase walks past. We glimpse a shot of her/the mother suddenly naked under a thick coat.

*Shadow Panic's* anarcho-surrealist flow of images and selected literary texts answers mainly to its own logic. On the soundtrack we hear quotations from the writings of Cixous, Kincaid, Irigaray and other women writers. These quotations seem connected with the three characters and their quests, but at a remove. Like the images, the quoted texts are elusive and evocative moments, providing a succession of fleeting glimpses of an order of reality which is both interior *and* part of a collective experience, which fiction - in film and literature - does much to represent. The last voice-over in the film, quoting Luce Irigaray, puts it quite succinctly:

Yet, in this nocturnal wandering where is the gaze to be fixed?

The only possibility is to push onward, into the night, until it becomes a transverberating beam of light. A luminous shadow.

Unlike the other films discussed in this chapter, *Shadow Panic* manages not to pose a choice between becoming an artist/independent woman or becoming Mother. The maternal relation in *Shadow Panic* is an internalised one. The mother and her grown daughter are both played by Robin Laurie, and their relationship is mediated by the child - who is part of



the daughter's psyche, not the mother's. So the problem of the mother is laid to rest with the daughter. Her exchanges are not with the mother but with elements of her own psyche which include the father.

The choice for this daughter is not between becoming the mother *or* becoming an artist. During the 1980s, the mother had been redeemed from the passive image of the tranquillised housewife. However, in this redemption of the loving and beloved mother, her powerful, destructive and tyrannical aspects were still obscured from vision. In the 1990s the adult daughter would come face-to-face with her wounded father in *Vacant Possession* (1994, Margot Nash). An equivalent face-to-face confrontation with the real, personal mother, in her maimed and destructive aspects as well as her loving, nurturing ones, has yet to take place in the films of the milieu. Such an absence indicates an abiding fear: perhaps to look upon the face of the mother in her most human aspects is to risk death.<sup>39</sup> In this sense it is the mother's face that remains Medusan *for her daughter* who, in looking upon the twisted, writhing face of the Medusa, risks the horror of seeing her own face.<sup>40</sup> Jean-Pierre Vernant suggests that the face of Medusa represents otherness: not as an other person, but as the other of the person (1991: 111).

Masculine and feminine, young and old, beautiful and ugly, human and animal, celestial and infernal, upper and lower (Gorgo gives birth through the neck ...) inside and outside (the tongue ... protrudes outside like a masculine organ - displaced, exhibited, and threatening): in short, all the categories in this face overlap in confusion and interfere with one another.  
[...]

---

<sup>39</sup> Dinnerstein (1976: 235-237) addresses the problem of why the mother's human flaws are felt to be far more threatening and calamitous than those of men, of why women serve as scapegoats for men *and* women: "Woman, who introduced us to the human situation and who at the beginning seemed responsible for every drawback of that situation, carries for all of us a pre-rational onus of ultimately culpable responsibility forever after." (Dinnerstein's italics). Feminist filmmakers had been caught in a double bind: to represent women's hatred and fear of the mother on screen was to risk buying into the pervasive misogyny of the culture. So the first feminist image of the mother was that of a victim of the sexual division of labour in a consumerist phase of capitalism; the second image was that of the mother as nurturing and loving, yet denigrated because her work had no value in the marketplace.

<sup>40</sup> In a personal conversation in February 1995, Margot Nash pointed out that not only had she and her peers believed the revolution was going to happen, they also believed in their own innate goodness. The turn to psycho-analysis and therapy in the 1980s was a step towards being able to face their own monstrous, Shadow aspects.

The monstrousness of which we speak is characterized by the fact that it can only be approached frontally, in a direct confrontation with the Power that demands that, in order to see it, one enter into the field of its fascination and risk losing oneself in it. (Vernant, 1991: 137)

The Le Guin quote at the beginning of this chapter reclaims the *idealised* mothers who have been returned to us by the feminist archival project (which include *For Love or Money*). If we could look upon the Medusan mother (the dark side of the maternal) we might be able to salvage from the encounter a 'weakened', non-heroic, modest form of power.

FAMOUS LAST WORDS

---

If I could get out of filmmaking it would be good. It's an addiction. Filmmaking's the last thing I need to do, but to me it's everything.... The drudgery is unbelievable, but the non-drudgery - I love it. More than that, it's my social milieu. All these years I was in politics, the peace movement, the Communist Party and so on, I never made a base there for myself. I always felt I belonged with the filmmakers. It's like being in a club with the most arcane knowledge. [...] I imagine Bikies are the same. They have a whole shared experience that's separate from everything else in the world. It's a big problem for many film people because there is nothing else in their world.

People who are in film only stay in it because they love it and they're obsessed by it. It's not normal. [...] to do this film we have to put our houses at risk. It's just crazy. Nobody would do it. You have to be quite odd and obsessed. So you're with all these other odd, obsessed people and we're obsessed about the same thing. [...] I wanted to get out of it - I thought. I just keep drifting in. I'll get out. It's like being a drug addict. I know I'll do it. It's bad for me. I need to lead a different kind of life.

*(Ansara, 1992b)*

There is no end to this story, hence the title of this concluding chapter. The milieu is a shape-shifter capable of re-forming itself to meet new contingencies. As Ansara indicates, filmmaking exerts a powerful hold over its initiates - the lure of each new project overrides pervasive disenchantment with the industry as a whole.

To describe the milieu in its current form I need to backtrack into the 1980s, before turning to three film projects which pick up threads from the last chapter. If I take the milieu as a precinct which contained, melded and transformed the ambitions, loyalties and prejudices of its denizens, then I would have to say that, sometime in the 1980s, the milieu's borders were redrawn. Suddenly, those who had been inside known territory found themselves in an unfamiliar landscape. Like arrivals in a new colony they



continued to see with eyes whose vision had been trained in the home county.<sup>1</sup> However, the changed landscape gradually wrought re-visions in their perceptions of both politics and filmmaking. In the 1990s, the milieu can be characterised by the peculiar mix of a sobering recognition of lost opportunities and changed circumstances, and a sense of an abiding loyalty to things past in a competitive field of new opportunities.

### The new landscape

A number of structural features have altered the landscape of independent, feminist filmmaking. They can be summed up as: poverty; television; disappearance of the Co-op, and the triumph of professionalism.

The advent of economic rationalism and user-pays in government policy has had repercussions for independent filmmaking. The establishment of the Film Finance Corporation in 1988 changed the charter of the Australian Film Commission whose high profile activity since the late 1980s has become the production of low-budget features, including documentaries. The personal cost (in terms of time, money and isolation) of dedication to independent, 'poor', modes of film production has become increasingly evident in the widening social divide between bureaucrats and filmmakers:

The push to influence institutions and policy [in the early 1980s] has meant everyone has moved into those areas. There's a lot of pressure on everyone to be doing policy and to be engaged at the bureaucratic level. [...] There's a deadening logic of bureaucracy that means you've got a comfortable sector of infrastructure and a starving sector of producers. It's not only in cultural institutions. It's everywhere - in primary production, manufacturing, casualisation of work in the service sector. The whole thing has to be seen as part of that.

It used to be a luxury to be a student. Students can't live now. You've got all these cultural institutions operating on the user-pays system, yet the users can't afford to pay ... We had the luxury of dissidence and of petulant opposition. It's just so much worse now. (*Grace*, 1992)

---

<sup>1</sup> See *Camera Natura* (1985, Ross Gibson) for a sequence which demonstrates how the colonisers' first attempts to represent the Australian landscape resulted in the transformation of the unfamiliar Australian bush into an English landscape painting.

The media landscape in which social action documentaries are produced and circulated has been radically altered by television, and by the demise of the Sydney Filmmakers Co-op. When Jeni Thornley worked on the International Women's Year Film Festival in 1975, there were no films being made in Australia on social issues from the viewpoint of women:

You could look back through old *Chequerboards*, but because *Chequerboard* [ABC-TV series] wasn't feminist there was nothing that looked at women's place in any conscious way. So there was a polemic agreed upon, at some level, that we must make films that fill this gap. [...] Now, television provides the social action information film via the ABC and SBS. *60 Minutes* and other current affairs programs are now at the forefront of sexual abuse, sexual harassment. Jana Wendt [*A Current Affair* and *60 Minutes* anchor and reporter] stands up and says 'I will not have a topless girl on the news' and she refuses to do the story. It never happened in the '60s. Finally the media has caught up on some level. Yet the paradox is that women are still oppressed within the whole thing. (Thornley, 1992a).<sup>2</sup>

The political battle waged in 1985-6 around the (under)funding of the Co-op as the main distributor of independent, social action and experimental films, resulted in its closure and the dispersal of its film collection (mainly to its long-term rival, the Australian Film Institute).<sup>3</sup> Although the death of the Co-op is felt as a keen absence by many filmmakers, especially those working in relative isolation, its closure is seen as a tragicomedy of political errors by some of its own members:

What happened to the Co-op was a tragedy and a series of political blunders and mistakes. It was a strategic failure. To say that it was

---

<sup>2</sup> An episode of ABC-TV's long running series *G.P.* on February 21, 1995, "Band-aids", exemplifies Thornley's point. A young doctor, on probation to join the medical practice, moves home with her family to discover that her father is still physically abusing her mother. By the end of the episode, the complex emotions and collusions of the situation have been exposed. The episode, which takes feminist rhetoric on male violence as a starting point, has neither villains nor innocent victims to carry its strong emotions of fear, rage, helplessness and love.

<sup>3</sup> See Hall Greenland (1986a & 1986b) on the closure of the Co-op. *Filmnews* is the only surviving organ of the independent sector (see Tina Kaufman, 1986). See Thoms (1976a and 1976b) and Collins (1983a) on the historic rivalry between the AFI and the Co-op, especially over the allocation of government funding for distribution and exhibition of Australian films.

inevitable is to accept a certain logic of economic rationalism. That was a dominant logic emerging at the time of the demise of the Co-op. It was a factor. But there were also political mistakes. We didn't have enough strategic sense and we didn't keep in mind the long-term view in terms of the centralist tendencies of cultural organisations in the democratic state. The tragedy was the tragedy of the no-compromise politics that informed this whole era. It was unable to survive because of the rigidities of the positions it took. (*Grace, 1992*)

For Martha Ansara, disillusionment with the Co-op set in before the cash-flow crisis which precipitated its closure:

I remember when I said goodbye to the Co-op and the Sydney Women's Film Group. We had an annual general meeting ... The feeling of the meeting was great congratulations that there were only leftwing people at the meeting. I thought 'Oh that's it.' You had a *Co-operative*: if it doesn't represent a much broader spectrum of filmmakers, it's finished. The actual practice within the Co-op was less and less realistic, which led to its demise. No one shut it down. It shut itself down through its perspective on management. [...] it wasn't my political perspective and I thought I'd be wasting my time. (*Ansara, 1992a*)

Time, and the setting of priorities, became more precious as the milieu reached middle-age and faced the financial penalties of continuing to make films from marginal spaces. There was more wariness about taking on thankless political work in organisations which were becoming imbued with the ethos of career paths and professionalism. The national network of WIFT (Women in Film and Television) groups was convened by the Women's Film Fund to improve the status of women in the industry, an agenda that proved largely irrelevant to many former members of the Sydney Women's Film Group:

WIFT is a much larger organisation than we ever had, and broad the way we always thought it should be, but nevertheless it operates almost as a social club, where the ambition of women is each to get higher in the structures that exist. In our previous groups ... we wanted to change the whole structure. We didn't exist because we were given money. We existed because we felt the real need for changes. (*Ansara, 1992a*)

## Loyalty of things past

Two themes emerge from looking at the changed landscape from within which the milieu continues to operate. One involves regret and nostalgia for a more bountiful period when it was easier, in some ways, for women to make films: Ansara says, "We were the fortunate generation. We had the period of plenty." (Ansara, 1992a). Helen Grace's perspective takes into account what was wasted in the boom time:

Opportunities were thrown away. There's a tendency to say women have it so much better now; they don't know how lucky they are. We were in an era when, in a sense, we had a much easier time. This is not a nostalgia for the past, but the opposite - having been unable to make enough of what was possible. (Grace, 1992)

The other theme is that of a firm (even if misguided) loyalty to the political ideas and values which defined the milieu, in the face of a future that is turning out to be different from the revolutionary one that was imagined in the 1970s:

I still like the ideas that formed me. I still think a lot of them are relevant. I get irritated by the latest thing because I don't think it's useful. [...]. There was a time when what we were thinking was more useful. However useless it turned out to be. This sounds rather romantic. (Grace, 1992)

There is a sense in which the past has, in turn, remained loyal to the milieu - sticking to it, refusing to be disavowed - as the milieu attempts to remake its concerns in the present. We can see this 'sticky' quality in three feature film projects which, between them, map the contours of political subjectivity in the psychic landscape of the 1990s. Two of these projects (*Talk* and *Vacant Possession*) have been completed while *Requiem* lurks just below the waterline, awaiting production funding.

The most significant outcome of the subjective turn taken by feminist politics during the 1980s is the embrace of a non-heroic, weakened or modest form of politics which is crucially informed by interiority. This involves an acceptance of 'getting it wrong', of risking confusion and tolerating ambivalence:

Today, I don't feel any less about inequality, but I don't feel the need to justify who I am or what I do or how I am in the world either, through political (mental) gymnastics. I had a huge need to not only change myself but to change structures that I felt were not right. I still have a need to change, but I don't have the same arrogance about what's right and wrong. (Lambert, 1992)

*Talk*, produced by Megan McMurchy and directed by Susan Lambert, brings to mind Germaine Greer's edict that women's principle revolutionary weapon would be their tongues. The film's plot is structured around a day-long conversation between Stephanie Ness and Julia Strong, friends who meet to work on an adult comic book, and manage to distract themselves with a series of errands which takes them on a meandering course through the inner and beachside suburbs of Sydney. The film is suffused with the light, heat and breezes of a Sydney summer. This lightness is shadowed by a number of comic-strip style, fantasy sequences wherein scenes from Stephanie and Julia's conversation are enacted in a more sinister and threatening narrative which takes place in a B-grade, *Bladerunner* landscape ruled by desire, aggression and the improbable.

*Talk* is imbued with the comic attitude where acceptance of the vagaries of life is essential to the film's play with the question of how to do motherhood outside the myth of the long-suffering (house)wife. The comic task required of Stephanie is to recognise, in the TV repairman, a chance to make good a missed opportunity to conceive a child in Tokyo. For Julia, her comic task is darker, relying on misrecognition of a young woman as her husband's lover. Confronting the speechless young woman at a fruit barrow propels Julia into a classic telephone break-up scene, where she finds the words to release her repressed rage in a satisfyingly public display of indecorum. *Talk* does not split Woman from Mother. It does however separate becoming a mother and being a wife, but at a price. The price Julia pays for leaving her marriage is the loss of her young daughter whom she leaves at home with her husband. Meanwhile, Stephanie has found herself in the unexpected position of having a spontaneous sexual encounter with a man who is keen to become a father. That taken care of (perhaps), the film leaves their future relationship open.

For Lambert, *Talk* continues with the major preoccupations of her earlier films, particularly the concern with ordinary life as a rich arena for women:

*Talk* is still within the tradition that Sarah [Gibson] and I were exploring: that our lives as women are extremely rich and exciting, and that the ordinary is a thrilling arena in which to work. There's an interest in humour. There's the incredible importance of creativity in helping us work out how we are in the world. There's the idea of the journey - that idea that you are constantly changing. And the idea of the little revolution is there too, that moment when you take the risk.

But there's an acknowledgment now of the role of the shadow and how fabulous that energy is once we harness it. The other thing is accepting ambivalence, confusion, uncomfortableness. People either love [the script] or they hate it. It's not in the middle. It's not trying to please. (Lambert, 1992)

Margot Nash came face to face with the impossibility of 'getting it right' during the process of drafting and redrafting the script for *Vacant Possession*, a film about returning home and discovering what home means in Australia, post Mabo.<sup>4</sup> After attempting to draft a script which would be acceptable to the La Perouse Aboriginal community, Nash eventually realised that she had to stop trying to please everyone (Nash, 1994: 26). The script finally came to life after Nash decided to write from the point of view of the main character, Tessa, a white woman who, in resolving unfinished business "had to be wrong but she had to gain something from it." (Nash, 1994: 23).<sup>5</sup>

*Vacant Possession* explores the necessity and difficulty of change. Events in the external world resonate internally and these resonances run through the fabric of social relationships which are *already* constituted through long, partly buried, subjectively experienced histories. When Tessa returns to the family home after the death of her mother, the house from which she fled as an adolescent appears empty and neglected. Tessa comes to discover that,

---

<sup>4</sup> The historic Mabo decision handed down by the High Court in 1992 is a turning point in terms of Aboriginal land rights. It overturned the principle of "Terra Nullius" whereby Captain Cook took possession of Australia as uninhabited land in the name of the British Crown in 1788.

<sup>5</sup> See Margot Nash (1994) for an illuminating account of the blocks and breakthroughs entailed in the writing and production of *Vacant Possession*.

from the ceiling to the shed, the house is alive with family scenes which take on new significance as she re-enters the theatre of her childhood and youth. The self-sufficiency of habitual independence is slowly broken down as Tessa reconnects with the living and the dead, and sees through new eyes what made it necessary for her to leave home - and to return.

Although *Vacant Possession* is neither a personal nor an autobiographical film, Nash dug deep into her own experience to touch the collective imagination. To her surprise she found that there was a missing character waiting in the wings: the war-damaged father.

While I resisted the father entering the script in any substantial way, when he did, I recognised that addressing the father/daughter relationship had in fact been a substantial part of my own personal analysis. Feminists have analysed power, locating it in the world of the fathers, yet many feminists like myself have chosen to locate our work with the mother; naming her oppression, valuing women's work, retrieving female wisdom. It was surprising and confronting that my journey led to compassion for, and a humanising of, the father. (Nash, 1994: 10)

It was Nash's ambition to find the archetypal in personal experience, to move from individual to collective concerns:

What I really wanted to do was find the archetypal in the father. The father myth I worked with in analysis was King Lear: the mad and ageing King, war torn and desperate for acknowledgment from his daughters... While [in the writing of the script] I became focused on the confrontation with the father, and the naming of his repressed grief as the key to compassion and understanding, grief for the mother lay beneath the surface. (Nash, 1994: 28)

The relation between grief and compassion is central to the task Jeni Thornley has engaged in, over a number of years, to produce a script based on her own experience of motherhood and the deaths of each of her parents.<sup>6</sup> Unlike Nash, Thornley works directly with the material of her own family life:

---

<sup>6</sup> *Requiem* has developed through several stages: from 1986-90 it took the form of a documentary script, *The Dawn of Love*; in 1991 it was developed as a dramatised documentary, *To the Other Shore*; in 1993 it was written as a low budget feature, *Room of*

I can look at my work in the past, including political organisations, and it's been to do with keeping the repressed down. That's why I now avoid groups. [...] Those organisations have a notion of what's public and what's private. I don't. That's why my filmmaking is so difficult for me. *Maidens* and my current film are something very personal inside me. People get frightened (me as well) but I can't work in any other way. (Thornley, 1992a)

I'm circling the same themes all the time ... and I feel like I'm refining my understanding of them. [...] In my current script I'm back in that site again: I'm trying to get some insight into what happened in my family: my mother and her children. (Thornley, 1992b)

For Thornley, there's a politics, in both psychoanalysis and motherhood, which is about growth and change in a broader sense than issue-based politics.

One of the things I've got from somewhere is that motherhood's about sacrifice. Not to be a masochist, but you actually have to make the sacrifice to experience the journey of it. And then, once the child's out of your hands ... you've got to learn to let go in a graceful way. There's a sacrifice embedded in the relationship and it's a positive feeling. I'm only trying to get a grasp of it. I'm not trying to heroise motherhood. I think the maternal is one of the mythic journeys that women can undertake. Virginia Woolf, as the single woman artist, is another mythic journey. Our society has made them oppositional so you have Woolf having to suicide and Plath having to suicide. It's so interesting to me: those two manifestations of femininity around the site of the maternal. (Thornley, 1992b)

---

*Secrets*. At the time of writing (February 1995) *Requiem* has been presented to the AFC for production funding as an experimental, compilation documentary. I refer to it in this chapter partly because I believe it will be made, and partly because, as an unmade film, it represents that mass of imagined films which lie submerged beneath the small outcrop of finished films that represent the milieu. *Requiem* is also very much a missing film in terms of the filmic representations of the milieu's psyche. Its direct focus on the interior journey facilitated by a Kleinian analysis is an essential representation of the (slightly 'disreputable' and therefore not quite public) psychological turn taken by the milieu in the 1980s. To my knowledge Andrew Samuels (1993) has written the first thorough account of the current phenomenon of 'politics going psychological'.



Thornley's script on the maternal has evolved a central preoccupation with reparation, with both the dark side of the mother *and* the damaged, abusive father. *Requiem* moves on from the oceanic, archetypal mother of *Maidens*, and the loving mother of *For Love or Money*, to look at the pain inherent in becoming someone else's less than ideal mother. The script also brings into focus the figure of the analytic mother - the one who makes space, in the therapy room, for the working through of repressed grief. In an important move, *Requiem* brings the search for the absent, wounded father into its exploration of the maternal. In her filmmaking, her analysis and in becoming the mother of a daughter, Thornley has discovered aspects of the father in her own psyche. For the daughters who refused to become their mothers, this is a profound recognition: to discover that to become someone else's mother is not necessarily to incarnate your own mother. Something of the father is also present.

### Gifts from the father

In *Talk*, *Vacant Possession* and *Requiem* the daughter receives a gift from her father. The gift from Stephanie's father in *Talk* is a literal one: a pearl necklace, which is all that is left of her mother's jewels, an inheritance which the father has withheld for sixteen years. In *Vacant Possession* the gift takes the form of an unexpected visit, an elemental storm and a new dawn. Tessa, on her return from exile, has refused to see her father, but he arrives anyway, and they join forces in surviving the storm which facilitates their reconciliation. For Thornley the gift of the father has been the mobility of her search for him, which has taken her into the worlds of filmmaking, politics, love affairs, yoga and therapy.

In Chapters 1 and 2, I touched on the rejection of the place of the mother, and the imprint of the father on the psyche of feminist filmmaking. In Chapters 3 and 4, I looked at the way a uniquely placed generation was drawn to the cinema in an attempt to remake (and represent) the world in their own image. In Chapters 5 and 6, I tried to bring to the surface what was sacrificed and repressed in the making of a feminist cinema. In Chapter 7, I explored the renaissance of the image of the maternal relation in the 1980s films made by the daughters who refused to see child care as their (sole) domain. In the limited space of this concluding chapter I can only point to the incipient return of the image of the father in the 1990s, and speculate on

what this might mean for a politics of subjectivity (of which feminism has been a founding member).<sup>7</sup>

In her work on *Vacant Possession*, Nash drew on the myth of Athena, the father's daughter, to transform her personal experience into a story others could enter. Athena sprang fully armed from the head of her father, Zeus, after he swallowed her pregnant mother, Metis, for fear of being dethroned by their more powerful offspring.

Athena, warrior goddess, patroness of the arts of peace and learning, denies she has a mother and places herself in the world of the fathers. I saw Athena's soul journey as away from obsession with the father and towards a revaluing and acknowledgment of the mother. (Nash, 1994: 11)

---

<sup>7</sup> In recent films made by Australian women the father takes on a central role. Gillian Armstrong's *Last Days At Chez Nous* (1992) includes a set piece where the adult daughter is reconciled with her father during a trip to the desert. Jane Campion's *The Piano* (1993) enacts a (necessary) betrayal of the mother by her daughter; the maternal dyad is broken apart in a drama involving the daughter's new father and the mother's new lover. In Anna Kokkinos' *Only the Brave* (1994) at the heart of a friendship between two teenage girls there's a shared fantasy of finding one girl's runaway mother, and an unspoken secret involving the other girl's father. Only Gillian Armstrong's *High Tide* (1987) enacts a direct confrontation (and tentative reconciliation) between the real mother and the daughter she abandoned long ago to the care of the grandmother.



8.1 The Medusan daughter returns home. *Vacant Possession* (1994)

At the end of *Vacant Possession*, Tessa becomes reconciled with her father by entering into the fearful, psychic reality of the bunker in which he has dwelt since the war. The ghostly figure of the mother, whose death occurs before Tessa arrives home, remains idealised. After the storm, Tessa lingers along the shore. She joins two vagabond women, old showbiz friends of her mothers, around a campfire. One of them offers Tessa her mother's engagement ring which was sold to pay for an abortion that the teenage Tessa refused to have. The mother enters the frame, nodding at Tessa to accept the ring. Tessa's hand closes over the ring. She opens her hand and the ring magically disappears. The contempt and anger the teenage Tessa felt for her mother is laid to rest. However, the mother is still something of a cipher, whereas the father (even in his madness) is truly present from the moment we hear his haunting song, *Unfallen Rain*, which he sings while standing at the kitchen window waiting for the daughter who has refused to see him.

In 1976 Dorothy Dinnerstein gave us the indelible image of the great sexual divide in which there is a hidden collusion between men and women in "the project of getting back at mama" (Dinnerstein, 1976: 237). Feminist filmmakers, in their attempts to face their own fear and dread of the

maternal, have undertaken an enquiry into this collusion against the mother. As part of the process of revaluing the feminine, the patriarchy has come under heavy fire. In the 1990s, for women (especially those who were their fathers' daughters) to discover something *liberatory* in the image of the father, without projecting guilt and blame back onto the mother, represents a substantial psychic gain.<sup>8</sup>

Feminism, like other utopian movements, has had an investment in being a Shadow-free politics. The recovery of the image of the father, and primal scene imagery,<sup>9</sup> for a politics which can accommodate psychic reality (and its Shadow aspects) is a project most recently undertaken, from the perspective of depth psychology, by Andrew Samuels (see Samuels: (ed) 1985; 1989 and 1993). Samuels proposes that, as well as the oppressive, authoritarian image of the father, there is a Tricksterish, plural, subversive side that needs to be recuperated for the development of a political subjectivity which is able to tolerate cultural diversity and engage in a more flexible politics of bargaining or deal-making (1993: 126 & 99).

We can see examples of the Trickster father beyond the Bible: Zeus, King Lear, Jung and Freud - all of these operated as fathers in their relations with others and moved in the kind of Trickster territory [of bargaining and dealmaking] mapped out in the previous chapter. The peculiar Trickster blend of unconsciousness, grandiosity and a kind of wild, politically transformative capacity are, to some degree, locked up in father imagery on the ordinary, human level. (Samuels, 1993: 127)

Drawing attention to the pluralistic edge in the image of the father as a less *containing* image than that of the mother, Samuels proposes that the father represents a 'tension-rich simultaneity':

My view is that the father's affirming physical response to his daughter at all stages of her life helps her to achieve a kind of psychological pluralism

---

<sup>8</sup> A well known feminist profile is often described jokingly as 'I know: loved your father, hated your mother.' To champion the cause of women from the position of matrophobia entails a complex political project which I believe is still being worked out, as evidenced by the films discussed above.

<sup>9</sup> Primal scene imagery begins to appear in the films of the milieu with the image of the mother and father in the same frame, observed by the daughter, in *The Pursuit of Happiness*, *Shadow Panic* and *Vacant Possession*.

(to be one person and many persons). It is the father who communicates to his daughter that 'You can be this ... and this ... and this and still be your (female) self.' [...]

When these various processes are going well enough, the daughter is receiving confirmation from the father that, in his mind, she is not restricted to the role of mother. This is a political message. (Samuels, 1993: 152)

Dinnerstein insisted, in 1976, that internal and external problems be grappled with *at the same time*, if the stone walls that activism runs into are to be surmounted. In 1993, in a move that extends Dinnerstein's proposition, Samuels offered the psyche "as an autonomous source of social change and movement" whose "*active presence in poor politics, blended into subjective political discourse, may spawn modes of organization and production that we are not at present familiar with..*" (1993: 99; his italics).

Listening to the stories of women who chose (at one point in their lives) to make films rather than babies, watching the films to find the patterns of political imagery which suggest the personality of the milieu, and reading the files, leaflets and articles which the milieu spawned in its activist days, I have been immersed in psyche. This immersion has entailed tracking the milieu's psyche "as an autonomous source of social change and movement" - as it was made by, and helped to remake, an often grandiose vision for a feminist cinema which has made fleeting appearances on cinema screens (see Appendix B).

The image uppermost in my mind as I decide to end here, is that of Tessa in *Vacant Possession* returning home through the heads, across the waters into Botany Bay. The film begins with this return journey and Tessa's recounting of a recurring dream:

All I could think of was that my mother was dying and I wouldn't reach her in time.

In the dream I thought of her mother and her mother's mother. I followed the links in the chain one by one, back to the ancestors, sweating and hungry in the dark hulls. I thought of my father and his father's father. Fear of the unknown gripped me like a cold chill.



8.2 Tessa in the mangroves. *Vacant Possession* (1994)

The return home enables, in the era of post-affiliation feminism, a retelling of the riddle of the polarisation of the feminine and the masculine. There is an on-going imbrication of the feminine with the problems of modernity - problems flowing from the enfranchisement and mobility which are liberatory for women, yet which take us far from home.

If I take the feminine to be the submerged underbelly of the rational consciousness which characterises modernity, then the point is not to bring the feminine to the surface and straighten it out in order to return it to its proper place. Rather, to allow for its unruly existence and to make space for it in political discourse. The writing of this thesis has been an occasionally grandiose (in its ambition) and mostly modest (in its execution) contribution to (and about) that project of making space for the feminine.



## APPENDIX A: INTERVIEWS

The interviews listed below were recorded on audio cassette (unless otherwise stated) on the dates given. Quotes from the interviews used in this thesis are taken from transcriptions of the recorded interviews. During the interviews, the interviewees specified any material that was to remain off-the-record. Some (usually grammatical or factual) revisions were made at the final draft stage when I was double-checking details with my informants.

No quotes from the interviews are to be used in any material published or cited from this thesis unless specifically approved by the interviewees prior to publication. Tapes and transcriptions of the interviews are held by the author.

- Ansara, Martha. *Interview (1)*. University of Technology, Sydney: 23 March 1992a.  
 \_\_\_\_\_. *Interview (2)*. Kings Cross, Sydney: 21 April 1992b.
- Appelton, Gil. *Interview*. University of NSW, Sydney: 2 April 1992.
- Bell, Jo (see Glow, Hilary and Jo Bell below),
- Blonski, Annette, *Interview (unrecorded)*. Carlton, Melbourne: 26 August 1991.
- Connolly, Sharon, and Anna Grieve. *Interview*. Bondi, Sydney: 21 April 1992.
- Fiske, Pat. *Interview*. St Kilda, Melbourne: 8 April 1993.
- Gibson, Sarah. *Interview*. Leichhardt, Sydney: 13 April 1992.
- Glow, Hilary and Jo Bell. *Interview (unrecorded)*. AFC, South Melbourne: 15 May 1991.
- Grace, Helen. *Interview*. Lewisham, Sydney: 2 July 1992.
- Grieve, Anna (see Connolly and Grieve above).
- Kaufman, Tina. *Interview*. Paddington, Sydney: 10 July 1992.
- Kostanich, Carole. *Interview*. Balmain, Sydney: 16 April 1992.
- Lambert, Susan. *Interview*. Newtown, Sydney: 11 November 1992.
- Leahy, Gillian. *Interview (1)*. Lilyfield, Sydney: 16 April 1992a.  
 \_\_\_\_\_. *Interview (2)*. Lilyfield, Sydney: 3 July 1992b.
- McMurchy, Megan. *Interview*. Bondi, Sydney: 28 April 1992.
- McRae, Beth. *Interview*. Brunswick, Melbourne: 9 February 1992.
- Molloy, Vicki. *Interview*. St Kilda, Melbourne: 11 February 1992.
- Nash, Margot. *Interview (1)*. Coogee, Sydney: 1 July 1992a.  
 \_\_\_\_\_. *Interview (2)*. Coogee, Sydney: 8 July 1992b.
- Oliver, Margot. *Interview (1)*. St Peters, Sydney: 26 April 1992a.  
 \_\_\_\_\_. *Interview (2)*. UTS, Sydney: 27 April 1992b.
- Robbins, Penny. *Interview*. Northcote, Melbourne: 27 July 1992.
- Thornley, Jeni. *Interview (1)*. Darlinghurst, Sydney: 30 March 1992a.  
 \_\_\_\_\_. *Interview (2)*. Darlinghurst, Sydney: 13 November 1992b.

## APPENDIX B PROGRAMS OF WOMEN'S FILMS 1970-1981

As this thesis is a biography of a milieu rather than of individuals I have decided to include programs of women's films that were exhibited as special events or at the Sydney Filmmakers Co-op and on national tours, rather than include a filmography based on individual work. I have also included my imaginary program of films for a projected season on the psyche of feminist filmmaking. (1980s: see Chapters 5 & 7)

|   |                  |
|---|------------------|
| <b>Sydney Women's Film Group</b>                            | <b>1970-1974</b> |
| <b>Women's Film Workshop</b>                                | <b>1974</b>      |
| <b>Women Waves</b>  | <b>1977</b>      |
| <b>Feminist Film Workers Propose A New Feminist Cinema</b>  | <b>1978</b>      |
| <b>Femflicks</b>  | <b>1979</b>      |
| <b>Moving Pictures</b>                                      | <b>1981</b>      |
| <b>My Imaginary Film Season on the psyche of the milieu</b> | <b>1995 ...</b>  |

(Some of the films listed below are undated: they seemed to disappear from the public record after one screening).

**Sydney Women's Film Group 1970-74**

*Living Together*, 1972. Julie Gibson. 7 min. b&w.

*Women's Day 20 cents*, 1973. SWFG. 11 min b&w.

*Home*, 1973. SWFG. 19 min. b&w.

*Film for Discussion*, 1974. SWFG. 25 min b&w.

**Women's Film Workshop 1974**

*Hearts and Spades*, 1974. Gill Leahy, Pat Fiske and Virginia Coutts. 9 min. b&w

*The Moonage Daydreams of Charlene Stardust*, 1974. Jan Carroll, Jan Milne and Margot Oliver. 13 min. b&w.

*Ruth*, 1974. Naomi Christie. 7 min. b&w.

*Sophie*, 1974. Dinah Van Dugteren. 11 min. b&w.

*Still Life*, 1974. Jeni Thornley and Dagmar Ross. 7 min. b&w

*Take Five*, 1974. Margaret Clancy and Carole Kostanich. 5 min. b&w.

*This Juice and all this Joy*, 1974. Helen Carey. 15 min. b&w.

*What's the Matter Sally?*, 1974. Dany Torsh, Meg Sharp and Robyn Dryen.  
12 min. b&w

*Women's House*, 1974. Anne Roberts. 8 min b&w.





*My Friend Joe*, 1977. Rosalind Gillespie. 18 min. b&w. and Col.  
*Katy*, 1977. Daro Gunzberg. 10 min. Col.  
*Secret Storm*, 1977. Martha Ansara. 14 min. Col.  
*Apartments*, 1977. Megan McMurchy. 12 min. b&w.  
*Frances Farmer*, 1977. Jeune Pritchard. 25 min.  
*Time Changes*, 1975 - 1977. Sue Ford. 30 min. Col.

### **Feminst Film Workers Propose ...**

**A New Feminist Cinema 24 November -17 December 1978**

**PROGRAM ONE: *It's Not a Bed of Roses*. 24 November - 3 December 1978**

*Witnessing*, Bev Clarke. 7 1/2 min. Col.  
*Margaret: A Beauty Queen at Seventeen*, 1978. Monique Schwartz. 9 min.  
 Col. and b&w.  
*Size 10*, 1978. Sarah Gibson, Susan Lambert. 17 min. Col.  
*Come On*, 1978. Elizabeth McRae, Joanne Horsburgh. 8 1/2 min. b&w.  
*St Therese*, 1978. Daniela Torsch. 12 min. b&w.  
*Letters From Poland*, 1977. Sophia Turkiewicz. 30 min. Col.  
*The Emerging Woman*, 1974. Women's Film Project Inc. USA.,  
 dir. Helena Solberg Ladd. 40 min. b&w.  
*Margaret's Story*, 1978. Lis Rust. 30 min. b&w (U-matic)  
*They Treat Us Like Slaves*, 1978. Jenny Neil, Pam Blacker. 15 min. b&w.  
 (U-matic)  
*Hysterectomy - A Group Discussion*, 1978. Digby Duncan. 20 min. b&w.  
 (U-matic)  
*Does It Feel Like a Long Ten Minutes?*, 1978. Lis Rust, Andrew Vial 15 min. Col.  
 (U-matic)

**PROGRAM TWO: *With Babies and Banners*. 8 - 17 December 1978**

*A Nursery Tale*, 1978. Rosie Lilley, Anitra Hadley. 3 min. Col. Super 8  
 animation  
*Cradle Song*, 1978. Gilly Coote. 27 min. Col.  
*One, Two, Three*, Liberation Films. 32 min. Col.  
*Fifteen*, 1978. Jenny McIntyre. 20 min. b&w.  
*Pauses*, 1978. Monique Schwartz. 37 min. b&w.  
*With Babies and Banners: The Story of the Women's Emergency Brigade*, 1978. Women's  
 Labor History Project. 44 min. Col.

**Femflicks: New Films by Australian Women 9 March -1 April 1979****PROGRAM:**

- High Fidelity* Antoinette Starkiewicz. 2 min. Col.  
*Jetlag* 1978 Carolyn Dartnell. 15 min. b&w.  
*Andrea* 1978 Erika Addis. 7 min. Col.  
*The Clown and the Mind Reader* 1978 Daro Gunzberg. 22 min. Col.  
*A Mill of Hooks* 1979 Sandra Richardson. 30 min. Col.  
*The Battle of Mice and Frogs* 1978 Rivka Hartmann. 3 min. Col.  
*A Whale of a Day* 1978 Sue Wilson. 5 min. Col.  
*Working With Child Care* 1978 Carolyn Dartnell. 20 min. Col.  
*I Never Saw Him Again* 1978 Gillian Leahy. 20 min. Col.  
*Bake-Off* 1978 1978 Elizabeth O'Neill. 26 min. Col.

**Women's Film Fund: Moving Pictures 1981****PROGRAM (National Tour)**

- Consolation Prize* 1979 Rivka Hartman. 23 min. b&w  
*Flamingo Park* 1980 Clytie Jessop. 20 min. Col.  
*Age Before Beauty* 1980 Sarah Gibson, Susan Lambert. 18 min. Col.  
*Climbers*, 1980 Rosalind Gillespie. 29 min. Col.  
*Pins and Needles* 1980 Barbara Chobocky, Genni and Kim Batterham. 38 min. Col.

**My Imaginary Film Season on the psyche of the milieu.**

- Woman's Day 20 cents* 1973 Sydney Women's Film Group.  
*A Film For Discussion* 1974 Sydney Women's Film Group (Ansara and Thornley)  
*What's The Matter Sally?* 1974 Robyn Dryen, Megan Sharp, Dany Torsh  
*Hearts and Spades* 1974 Gill Leahy, Pat Fiske and Viginia Coutts  
*The Moonage Daydreams of Charlene Stardust* 1974 Jan Carroll, Jan Milne and  
 Margot Oliver.  
*Still Life* 1974 Jeni Thornley and Dagmar Ross.  
*Cinemandrew* 1974 Barbara Levy.  
*Don't Be Too Polite Girls* 1975 Martha Ansara.  
*Seeing Red and Feeling Blue* 1976 Jane Oehr.  
*Not Take It Anymore* 1976 Vicki Molloy.  
*Just Me and My Little Girlie* 1976 Linda Blagg.  
*Paralysis* 1977 Barbara Levy.  
*The Selling of the Female Image* 1977 Carole Kostanich.  
*We Aim to Please* 1977 Robyn Laurie, Margot Nash.



APPENDIX C (i) WOMEN'S FILM FUND GRANTS 1975-1979

Source: Women's Film Fund Policy File: 76/112.

| Applicant  | State      | Year                       | \$Grants                      | Project  | CAT              | Complete |
|--|------------|----------------------------|-------------------------------|--|------------------|----------|
| Buckley, Tony (Prod)<br>Crombie, Donald (Dir)                | NSW        | Mar 75<br>Sept 75          | 4,500<br>45,500               | Caddie   | Feat.            | C        |
| Committee for Sydney Women's Film Festival                   | NSW        | Mar 75                     | 25,000 guarantee against loss | International Women's Year Women's Film Festival (National & N.Z.)                   |                  |          |
| Deveson, Anne (Exec. Prod)<br>Crombie, Donald (Dir)          | Film Aust. | Aug 76                     | 25,000                        | (Baby Bashers) Do I Have To Kill My Child?   | Tele             | C        |
| Long, Joan (Prod)<br>Power, John (Dir)<br>Lime Light Prodns. | NSW        | Dec 76                     | 50,000                        | The Picture Show Man   | Feat.            | C        |
| Folland, Ann & Anne Brooksbank                               | NSW        | Mar 77                     | 1,180 Script Devt.            | First Love - A trilogy<br>(1st Application IWY)<br>AFC & WFF 7,476<br>(Script:5,296) | Feat             |          |
| Cavill, Joy (Prod)<br>Aquataurus Prodns.                     | NSW        | May 77                     | 15,000                        | (The Deep End) Dawn!   | Feat             | C        |
| Duncan, Janice   | NSW        | Rec. Oct 77<br>Paid Feb 78 | 250 Script Devt               | Hysterectomy<br>(Requested \$7,921)  | 30min Docu Drama | C        |



|  |     |   |                    |   |                |         |
|--|-----|---|--------------------|---|----------------|---------|
| Women's Trade Union Commission   |     | Rec Oct 77<br>Paid Jun 78<br><br>Oct 78 | 3,500<br><br>2,000 | Work Based Community Child Care   | Docu.          | C       |
| SWFG   |     | 1978                                    | 36                 | Leaflets on Women's Filmmaking  |                |         |
| Callaghan, Mary  | NSW | Paid Oct 78                             | 1,822              | Training attachment to Odd Angry Shot as assistant editor                           |                |         |
| Hartman, Rivka   |     | Paid Nov 78                             | 6,518              | Consolation Prize (unsuccessful application to EFTF)                                | Short          | C       |
| Leichhardt. Women's Health & Resources Foundation (Abortion Film Collective) | NSW | Rec Oct 78                              | 2,100              | (Abortion Film)<br>As A Matter of Fact - A Film On Abortion                         | Educ.<br>26min | C       |
| Feminist Film Workers  | NSW | Rec Oct 78                              | 20,000 Grant       | Fulltime Worker for one year (Sarah Gibson 1979)                                    |                |         |
| Sydney Women's Film Group  | NSW | Rec Oct 78                              | 4,985              | Catalogue?  |                |         |
| W.E.S.T. Film & Video Unit   | Vic | Oct 78                                  | 1,000              | Roma  | video drama    | C       |
| Ansara, Martha   | NSW | Oct 78                                  | 2,560              | Camera Attachment   |                | Revoked |
| Gillespie, Rosalind  | NSW | Paid Mar 79                             | 11,429             | Climbers (Orig applicn for In Der Nact rejected - WFF suggested this dance instead) | Dance film     | C       |
| Jessop, Clytie   | NSW | Rec Mar 79                              | 9,965              | Flamingo Park   |                | C       |
| McCarthy, Maureen<br>Chris Warner  | VIC | Rec. Mar 79                             | 7,400              | Working Up  |                | C       |

|                                    |      |                |                     |   |       |             |
|------------------------------------|------|----------------|---------------------|---|-------|-------------|
| Kendall, Jeni<br>(ex Panel Member) | NSW  | Rec.<br>Mar 79 | 2,447<br>Post Prod. | Birth and Beyond                              |       | C           |
| Batterham,<br>Genni                | NSW  | Rec.<br>Mar 79 | 19,000              | Pins and Needles                              |       | C           |
|                                    | N.T. | Rec.<br>Mar 79 | 10,000              | Alice Springs Pioneer Women<br>(on condition) |       | Revok<br>ed |
| Deveson,<br>Anne                   |      | Rec<br>Mar 79  | 7,500               | The Ingham Affair                             | Feat. |             |
| White,<br>Eleanor                  | NSW  | Rec.<br>Mar 79 | 1,500               | Man Into Number                               |       | Revok<br>ed |
|                                    |      |                |                     |   |       |             |

Financial Statement as at 24.9.79 \$49,742.52 available

22.1.80 OWA to AFC: \$5,666.44 available.

25.2.80 OWA to AFC: \$45,264 needed to fund 7 (out of 33) applications for March 1980.



## APPENDIX C (ii) WOMEN'S FILM FUND GRANTS 1980-1987

Sources: AFC Annual Reports

| Applicant   | State | Year  | \$ Grants                | Project   | CAT   | Completed |
|---|-------|-------|--------------------------|---|-------|-----------|
| Woodcock,<br>Christine &<br>Jacqui Fine           | NSW   | 80-81 | 1,290<br>Script<br>Grant | Edith Murray - Puppeteer                              |       |           |
| Sztar, Adele                                      | VIC   | 80-81 | 2,500 Script<br>Grant    | Australian Women<br>Composers                         | Doc.  | C<br>1983 |
|   |       | 81-82 | 7,327<br>Prod Inv.       |   |       |           |
|   |       | 82-83 | 14,596<br>Prod Inv.      |   |       | 1983      |
| Novak, Olga                                       | VIC   | 80-81 | 1,500 Script<br>Grant    | The St Kilda Story                                    |       |           |
| McCarthy,<br>Maureen & Chris<br>Warner            | VIC   | 80-81 | 2,000 Script<br>Grant    | (Everybody Wants To Be<br>Just A Little Bit Skinnier) | Doc   | C         |
|   |       | 81-82 | 13,000<br>Prod Inv.      | ( Everybody ...)Eating<br>Your Heart Out              |       | 1984      |
| Whitehead,<br>Anne                                | TAS   | 80-81 | 4,000<br>Script<br>Grant | Spring Tide and Ebb                                   |       |           |
| Duigan, Virginia                                  | NSW   | 80-81 | 3,000 Script<br>Grant    | The Hit Man   |       |           |
| Green, Natalie &<br>Jenni Pitts                   | VIC   | 80-81 | 1,000 Script<br>Grant    | Women and Sculpture                                   |       |           |
| Latham,<br>Marianne                               | VIC   | 80-81 | 2,000<br>Script<br>Grant | A Lady's Visit To The<br>Gold Diggings                |       |           |
| Blankenship,<br>Beverley &<br>Michael<br>Brindley | NSW   | 80-81 | 4,000 Script<br>Grant    | (Jade)<br><br>Shame                                   | Drama | C         |
|   |       |       |                          |   |       |           |
| Brady, Wendy &<br>Elizabeth<br>Schaffer           | NSW   | 80-81 | 1,200<br>Prod Grant      | (Turning the Clock Back)<br>Bread and Dripping        | Doc   | C         |

|   |     |                         |  |   |                   |           |
|---|-----|-------------------------|--|---|-------------------|-----------|
| Tilson, Alison & Jan Van Bommel & Virginia Geddes | VIC | 80-81                   | 2,693<br>Prod Grant  | Never Eat Out At Shepparton                 |                   |           |
| Fookes, Maggie                                    | VIC | 80-81                   | 4,970<br>Prod Grant  | (Dream Australia) Dream (Swinburne 87)      | Animation         | C         |
| Licari, Rosanna                                   | NSW | 80-81                   | 562<br>Prod Inv.   | Women Who Decided                           |                   |           |
| McMurphy, Megan & Margot Oliver & Jeni Thornley   | NSW | 80-81                   | 10,000<br>Prod Inv.  | (The Women and Work Film) For Love or Money | Doc               | C         |
| Flashback Films                                   |     | 81-82                   | 15,000<br>Prod Inv.  | For Love or Money                           |                   | 1983      |
| Whitmore, Lee                                     | NSW | 80-81<br>81-82<br>82-83 | 6,000<br>Prod Inv.<br>9,293<br>Prod Inv.<br>3,000<br>Prod Inv. | Ned Wethered                                | Animation<br>35mm | C<br>1983 |
| Kostanich, Carole                                 | NSW | 80-81<br>81-82          | 11,330<br>Prod Inv.<br>6,270<br>Prod Inv.                      | (Single Parents)<br>Mum's The Word          | Doc               | C<br>1982 |
| Tilson, Alison & Joan Rowlands                    | VIC | 80-81                   | 2,000<br>Prod Inv.   | For Ourselves - Pro Feminis A Feminis       | Doc               |           |
| Callaghan, Mary                                   | NSW | 80-81                   | 23,021<br>Prod Inv.  | Greetings From Wollongong                   | Drama<br>Doc      | C<br>1982 |
| Alexander, Sandra                                 | NSW | 80-81                   | 628<br>Prod Inv.   | (The Sky Will Not Fall In) Role Call        | Doc               | C<br>1981 |
| Abbott-Smith, Sally                               | VIC | 80-81                   | 6,000<br>Prod Inv.   | Women In The Making                         |                   |           |
| Kelly, Catherine                                  | SA  | 80-81                   | 5,567<br>Prod Inv.   | Comrade Birch and Minnie Appleby            | Doc               | C         |
| Fraser, Liliias                                   | NSW | 80-81                   | 2,210<br>Prod Inv.   | Who Cares                                   | Doc               |           |

|   |     |  |   |  |                                  |                        |
|---|-----|--|---|--|----------------------------------|------------------------|
| Lovett, Louise  | VIC | 80-81  | 5,382<br>Prod Inv.  | Arthur and Clementine  |                                  |                        |
| Lambert, Susan &<br>Sarah Gibson &<br>Digby Duncan<br>Red Heart<br>Pictures | NSW | 81-82<br><br>82-83                           | 4,800<br>Script Inv.<br><br>20,000<br>Prod Inv.   | On Guard   | Drama                            | C<br><br>1983          |
| Gillespie,<br>Rosalind  | NSW | 81-82  | 2,560<br>Script<br>Grant  | The Choreographer  |                                  | Revoked<br>330<br>84-5 |
| Bell, Lorre   | NSW | 81-82  | 1,700<br>Script<br>Grant  | Black Diamonds   |                                  |                        |
| Pointon, Susy   | NSW | 81-82  | 2,500<br>Script<br>Grant  | The Greening   |                                  |                        |
| Sargent, Anne &<br>Elizabeth<br>Rapsey &<br>Shirley<br>Heppingstone         | WA  | 81-82  | 4,600<br>Script<br>Grant  | Isobel   |                                  |                        |
| Martin, Helen   | NSW | 81-82<br><br>82-83<br><br>84-85<br><br>85-86 | 1,800<br>Script<br>Grant<br><br>2,000<br>Script Inv.<br><br>4,000<br>Prod Inv.<br><br>13,360<br>Prod Inv.<br>Revoked<br>3,360 | (The Last Laugh)<br><br>(The Last Laugh)<br><br><br><br>(Characters)<br>Broad Humour ? | Doc<br><br><br><br>16mm<br>8mins | C<br><br>C<br><br>1985 |
| Oehr, Jane  | NSW | 81-82  | 2,500<br>Script<br>Grant  | Mirror Mirror  |                                  |                        |
| Wild, Katy  | NSW | 81-82  | 3,200<br>Script<br>Grant  | No Detours   |                                  |                        |
| Burt, Hilary &<br>Ginny Lowndes   | NSW | 81-82  | 1,500<br>Script<br>Grant  | The Second Step  |                                  |                        |
| Turner, Anne  | VIC | 81-82  | 3,500<br>Script<br>Grant  | Wronged Women - Ghosts<br>of Australia   | TV<br>Pilot                      |                        |

|                               |     |       |                       |   |                |                 |
|-------------------------------|-----|-------|-----------------------|---|----------------|-----------------|
| Hewitson, Jude & Annette Yore | NSW | 81-82 | 1,078<br>Prod Grant   | Cafe Copf                                     |                |                 |
| Williams, Heather             | WA  | 81-82 | 3,824<br>Prod Grant   | Just Friends                                  | Drama          | C               |
| Eccleston, Sally              | NSW | 81-82 | 2,655<br>Prod Grant   | The Sender of Dreams                          | Drama          | Double head     |
|                               |     | 82-83 | 250<br>Prod Grant     | (Avoiding the Issue)                          | Video trans.   | Revoked Oct. 84 |
| Duncan, Annie & Anna Kannava  | VIC | 81-82 | 1,170<br>Prod Grant   | (Walking the Tightrope)<br>Tightrope Water    | Exp            | C<br>1984       |
| Haselgrove, Marg              | SA  | 81-82 | 5,000<br>Prod Inv.    | (Quilting-<br>Communications<br>Technology)   | Doc.           | C<br>1985       |
|                               |     | 82-83 | 5,425<br>Prod Inv.    | (Something Out of<br>Nothing)<br><br>Patterns |                |                 |
| Grace, Helen & Glenys Rowe    | NSW | 81-82 | 10,000<br>Prod Inv.   | Serious Undertakings                          | Essay          | C<br>1983       |
| Grace, Helen & Erika Addis    |     | 82-83 | 9,457<br>Prod Inv.    |   |                |                 |
| Horin, Ros                    | NSW | 81-82 | 9,528<br>Prod Inv.    | Tissue  | Drama<br>Video | C<br>1983       |
|                               |     | 82-83 | 2,000<br>Prod Inv.    |   |                |                 |
| Cranswick, Christine          | NSW | 81-82 | 4,000<br>Post Prod.   | Awake and Aware                               | Doc            | C<br>1981       |
| Batterham, Genni              | NSW | 82-83 | 4,000<br>Script Inv.  | Alone Together                                | Drama          |                 |
| Baranay, Inez                 | NSW | 82-83 | 4,100<br>Script Inv.  | Between Careers                               | Drama          |                 |
| Hodgman, Helen                | NSW | 82-83 | 3,100<br>Script Inv.  | Blue Skies                                    |                |                 |
|                               |     | 83-84 | 3,800<br>Script Grant |   |                |                 |

|  |           |                |   |  |           |                 |
|--|-----------|----------------|---|--|-----------|-----------------|
| Butt, Louise & Debra Beattie & Clare Stapleton | QLD       | 82-83          | 1,600<br>Script Inv.                        | The Brisbane Film                                  |           |                 |
| Peck, Nancy                                    | VIC       | 82-83          | 1,500<br>Script Inv.                        | The Fitness Fashion                                |           |                 |
| Wilkinson, Elaine                              | NSW       | 82-83          | 1,500<br>Script Inv.                        | In Retrospect                                      |           |                 |
| Kestin, Ziyne, & Nuria Vidal & Amelia Flores   | NSW       | 82-83          | 4,000<br>Script Inv.                        | Jasemin  |           |                 |
| Jobbins, Sheridan                              | NSW       | 82-83<br>84-85 | 1,000<br>Script Inv.<br>20,000<br>Prod Inv. | Machinations                                       |           |                 |
| Lethlean, Margot                               | NSW       | 82-83          | 2,500<br>Script Inv.                        | See How They Run                                   |           |                 |
| Wright, Andree & Stewart Young                 | ACT & NSW | 82-83<br>83-84 | 2,300<br>Script Inv.<br>19,924<br>Prod Inv. | (Women in Australian Film)<br>Don't Call Me Girlie | Doc       | C<br>1985       |
| Gallagher, Chris                               | NSW       | 82-83          | 2,500<br>Script Inv.                        | The Women's Movement at Sydney University          |           |                 |
| Stapleton, Claire                              | QLD       | 82-83          | 2,000<br>Prod Grant                         | Jessie & Megan                                     |           |                 |
| Phillips, Josephine & Judith Fox               | NSW       | 82-83<br>83-84 | 20,000<br>Prod Inv.<br>3,900<br>Prod Inv.   | (Anna) Small Changes                               | Drama     | C<br>1984       |
| Jolliffe, Ann                                  | NSW       | 82-83          | 10,000<br>Prod Inv.                         | Mrs Bottle Burps                                   | Animation | Revoked<br>84-5 |
| Hamilton-Metcalf, Rohesia                      | NSW       | 82-83<br>83-84 | 9,000<br>Prod Inv.<br>3,900<br>Prod Inv.    | (Settle For Less) Keep Moving                      | Exp.      | C<br>1984       |
| Bradhurst, Jane                                | ACT       | 83-84          | 3,000<br>Script Grant                       | Document of Our Day                                |           |                 |

|                                  |     |       |                          |   |               |                        |
|----------------------------------|-----|-------|--------------------------|---|---------------|------------------------|
| Wynn, Sabina & Digby Duncab      | NSW | 83-84 | 3,400<br>Script<br>Grant | Family Skeletons                          |               |                        |
| Ramsay, Lois                     | NSW | 83-84 | 1,500<br>Script<br>Grant | Good Girls                                |               |                        |
| Nash, Margot & Sava Pinney       | NSW | 83-84 | 3,300<br>Script<br>Grant | I's Eyes                                  |               |                        |
| Bishop, Barbara & Jan Hainsworth | VIC | 83-84 | 5,250<br>Script<br>Grant | Jacki                                     |               |                        |
| Ingleton, Sally                  | VIC | 83-84 | 2,000<br>Script<br>Grant | (Many Hands Make Light Work)              | Docu<br>drama | C<br>1984              |
|                                  |     | 84-85 | 7,600<br>Prod Grant      | Punching Keys                             |               |                        |
| Callaghan, Anne                  | VIC | 83-84 | 2,000<br>Script<br>Grant | Mother                                    | Doc<br>Video  | C<br>1988              |
|                                  |     | 84-85 | 10,000<br>Prod Inv       |   |               |                        |
| Grace, Helen                     | NSW | 83-84 | 4,000<br>Script<br>Grant | Once There Was                            |               |                        |
| McHenry, Jai & Lizz Talbot       | VIC | 83-84 | 4,350<br>Script<br>Grant | Out of the Blue<br>(is Anybody Listening) |               | Revoked<br>750<br>84-5 |
| Kingsland, Deborah               | NSW | 83-84 | 3,250<br>Script<br>Grant | Peril                                     |               | Revoked<br>700<br>84-5 |
| Phillips, Tish                   | WA  | 83-84 | 4,100<br>Script<br>Grant | Seven Magnificent<br>Australians          |               |                        |
|                                  |     | 86-87 | 10,000<br>Prod Inv.      | Irene                                     |               |                        |
| Williams, Lynne                  | VIC | 83-84 | 4,500<br>Script<br>Grant | The Seventh Hour                          |               |                        |
| Medlin, Margie & Jasmine Hirst   | NSW | 83-84 | 4,150<br>Script<br>Grant | Tech Girls                                |               |                        |
| Turner, Ann                      | VIC | 83-84 | 4,000<br>Script Inv.     | Jagged's Cut                              |               |                        |

|                                       |     |                                 |  |   |                    |               |
|---------------------------------------|-----|---------------------------------|--|---|--------------------|---------------|
| Spinner, Suzanne                      | VIC | 83-84                           | 4,000<br>Script Inv.   | Tea and Pictures With<br>Thea and Maggie  |                    | C             |
| The Hot Bagels<br>& Eve Ash           | VIC | 83-84                           | 3,500<br>Prod Grant  | Bagels Are OK   |                    |               |
| Murray, Julia &<br>Andrea Phillip     | VIC | 83-84<br><br>84-85              | 3,000<br>Prod Grant<br><br>7,280<br>Prod Inv.                            | Beating Time  |                    |               |
| Millard, Kathy                        | SA  | 83-84<br><br>84-85<br><br>86-87 | 3,750<br>Prod Grant<br><br>20,000<br>Prod Inv.<br><br>5,633<br>Prod Inv. | (A Comrade Good and<br>True)<br><br>(A Comrade ... Travels<br>With Jean Devanney)<br><br>Point of Departure | Drama              | C<br><br>1987 |
| Shannon, Jean                         | SA  | 83-84                           | 4,643<br>Prod Grant  | (Conference -) Women,<br>Aid and Development  | Doc<br>Video       | C<br>1984     |
| Green, Natalie                        | VIC | 83-84                           | 1,000<br>Prod Grant  | Free Climbing   |                    |               |
| West, Penne                           | WA  | 83-84                           | 4,880<br>Prod Grant  | The Wooden Forest   | Animation          | C<br>1984     |
| Robbins, Penny                        | VIC | 83-84                           | 9,700<br>Prod Inv.   | (Anna Stewart Memorial<br>Fortnight)<br><br>Changing Places - A<br>Memorial to Anna Stewart                 | Doc<br><br>Video   | C<br><br>1984 |
| Mueller, Kathy                        | VIC | 83-84                           | 5,000<br>Prod Inv.   | Every Day, Every Night  | Drama<br>Swinburne | C<br>1983     |
| Wilkins,<br>Madelon                   | WA  | 83-84                           | 13,750<br>Prod Inv.  | (In The Pink)<br><br>Taking A Look  | Drama              | C<br><br>1985 |
| Handfield, Esta<br>& Ingrid Hillman   | VIC | 83-84                           | 7,500<br>Prod Inv.   | Moon Riders   |                    |               |
| L'Huede,<br>Patricia & Mark<br>McLeod | NSW | 83-84                           | 6,500<br>Prod Inv.   | Rapunzel in Suburbia  | Doc                | C<br><br>1985 |

|   |     |                |  |  |                      |           |
|---|-----|----------------|--|--|----------------------|-----------|
| Connolly, Sharon & Trevor Graham                    | VIC | 83-84          | 15,000<br>Prod Inv.                      | Red Matildas   | Doc                  | C<br>1985 |
| Coote, Gilly  | NSW | 83-84          | 25,000<br>Prod Inv.                      | A Singular Woman   | Doc                  | C<br>1985 |
| Williams, Heather                                   | WA  | 83-84<br>84-85 | 11,440<br>Prod Inv.<br>700<br>Prod Inv.  | Tokyo Rose North   | Doc                  | 1987      |
| Hill-Harrison, Kerstine                             | WA  | 83-84          | 8,400<br>Prod Inv.                       | Tu   |                      |           |
| Williamson, Liz & Francesca Da Rimini & Ann Sharley | SA  | 84-85          | 3,200<br>Script Inv.                     | Bitter Surrender   |                      | C         |
| Kordyl, Penny                                       | WA  | 84-85          | 4,000<br>Sript Inv.                      | Nuclear Disarmament  |                      |           |
| Zusters, Laura                                      | NSW | 84-85          | 5,500<br>Prod Grant                      | Playtime   |                      |           |
| East, Kippy & Gill Sellar                           | WA  | 84-85          | 7,373<br>Prod Grant                      | Spot The Lesbian   |                      |           |
| Bourke, Anne  | VIC | 84-85<br>84-85 | 1,500<br>Prod Inv.<br>4,000<br>Prod Inv. | (As Our Mothers Grow Old)<br>I Keep Remembering Ita -Portraits of Ageing | Doc.<br>Video        | C<br>1986 |
| West, Penny   | WA  | 84-85          | 3,000<br>Prod Inv                        | Celeste  |                      | C         |
| Bennett, Marsha                                     | VIC | 84-85          | 8,446<br>Prod Inv.                       | Deja Vu  |                      |           |
| Wynn, Sabina & Louise Cox                           | NSW | 84-85          | 7,000<br>Prod Inv.                       | Down There   | Doc<br>Film<br>Aust. | C<br>1985 |
| Clutterbuck, Harriet & Mary Moody                   | NSW | 84-85          | 11,000<br>Prod Inv.                      | Labour of Love   | Doc                  | C<br>1987 |



|   |     |       |                             |                               |      |           |
|---|-----|-------|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|------|-----------|
| Mafi-Williams,<br>Lorraine & Tom<br>Cowan | NSW | 84-85 | 6,000<br>Prod Inv.          | The Legend of Leo and<br>Leva |      | C         |
| Baker, Dale &<br>Lyn Rainforest           | ACT | 84-85 | 2,000<br>Prod Inv.          | Love, Death and Toni          |      |           |
|   |     | 84-85 | 2,500<br>Prod Inv.          |                               |      |           |
| Leahy, Gillian                            | NSW | 84-85 | 14,000<br>Prod Inv          | My Life Without Steve         | 35mm | C<br>1986 |
| Schwarz,<br>Monique                       | VIC | 84-85 | 4,500<br>Prod Inv.          | (Shadow Play)                 | 35mm | C         |
| & Ann Darrouzet                           |     | 86-87 | 40,000<br>Prod Inv.         | (Shadow Play)<br>Pieta        |      | 1987      |
| Fitzsimmons,<br>Trish & Mitzi<br>Goldman  | NSW | 84-85 | 5,000<br>Prod Inv.          | Snakes and Ladders            | Doc  | 1987      |
|   |     | 84-85 | 25,000<br>Prod Inv.         |                               |      |           |
| Manson, Di                                | NSW | 84-85 | 10,000<br>Prod Inv.         | Stand Up and Be Counted       |      |           |
| Moffat, Tracey                            | NSW | 85-86 | 3,000<br>Script Inv.        | Nice Coloured Girls           | Exp  | C<br>1987 |
|   |     | 86-87 | Prod Inv.<br>25,840         |                               |      |           |
| Howlett,<br>Deborah                       | WA  | 85-86 | 12,800<br>Proj Devt<br>Inv. | A Little Life                 |      | C<br>1988 |
| Dare, Zana                                | VIC | 85-86 | 3,000<br>Proj Devt<br>Inv.  | Radio Burn                    |      |           |
|   |     | 86-87 | 5,966<br>Prod Inv.          | Washington Wives              |      |           |
| Hirst, Jasmine &<br>Margie Medlin         | NSW | 85-86 | 5,000<br>Proj Devt<br>Inv.  | With Inertia                  |      | C<br>1987 |
|   |     | 85-86 | 15,000<br>Prod Inv.         |                               |      |           |

|                                 |     |       |                            |                                   |               |                |
|---------------------------------|-----|-------|----------------------------|-----------------------------------|---------------|----------------|
| Nash, Margot                    | NSW | 85-86 | 3,500<br>Proj Devt<br>Inv. | (Worlds_A-Part)<br>Shadow Panic   |               | C<br>1989      |
| Castle, Kim &<br>Louise Collins | NSW | 85-86 | 9,600<br>Prod Grant        | Flight To India                   |               | Double<br>Head |
| Grimshaw, Faye                  | NSW | 85-86 | 6,000<br>Prod Grant        | Soap                              | Anima<br>tion | C              |
| West, Penne                     | WA  | 85-86 | 1,190<br>Prod Inv.         | Apparitions<br>(see Celeste?)     | Anima<br>tion | C<br>1985      |
| Thompson,<br>Wendy              | NSW | 85-86 | 40,312<br>Prod Inv.        | Damsels Be Damned                 | Drama         | C<br>1987      |
| Bennett, Merilee                | VIC | 85-86 | 23,330<br>Prod Inv.        | (Good Clean Fun)<br>A Song of Air |               | C<br>1987      |
| Maslin, Sue &<br>Sue hardisty   | VIC | 86-87 | 71,300<br>Prod Inv.        | Thanks Girls and Goodbye          | Doc           | C<br>1988      |
| Scott, Jill                     | NSW | 86-87 | 30,000<br>Prod Inv.        | Wishful Thinking                  | Exp.<br>Video | C<br>1988      |

## APPENDIX C (iii) WOMEN'S FILM FUND OTHER INITIATIVES 1980 - 86

## 1980-81:

1981 Moving Pictures exhibition:

|                                    |                          |
|------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Rivka Hartman                      | <i>Consolation Prize</i> |
| Clytie Jessop                      | <i>Flamingo Park</i>     |
| Susan Lambert & Sarah Gibson       | <i>Age Before Beauty</i> |
| Rosalind Gillespie,                | <i>Climbers</i>          |
| Genni Batterham & Barbara Chobocky | <i>Pins and Needles</i>  |

Tour of all Australian capital cities: estimated 7,000 attendances.

Special Grants

|  |   |        |
|--|---|--------|
| Susan Lambert & Sarah Gibson (NSW)             | Grant to produce booklet for film <i>Age Before Beauty</i>                | 2,170  |
| Reel Women Promotion & Distribution Activities | Grant to develop local comprehensive distribution operation in Melbourne. | 10,000 |
| Jenny Harding (VIC)                            | Training Assistance to work as technical assistant at Open Channel        | 5,200  |
| Australian Film and Television School (NSW)    | Grant to Research & Survey Unit to research 'Women in Film Industry'      | 3,500  |
| Australian Film Institute (VIC)                | Grant for 'Moving Pictures' opening night                                 | 125    |

## 1981-82

Joint Survey with AFTVS of women involved in film production in Australia.

Co-ordination of establishment of first national association of professional women in the film and television industries. (WFT).

## 1981 -82

Women In Film Directory Investment in Publication of Women in Film Directory: \$12,000. (REVOKED in 1982-3)

## 1982-83

|   |  |        |
|---|--|--------|
| Australian Screen Studies (VIC)                   | Grant For Monograph                                      | 3,000  |
| Independent Women's Filmmaking in Australia (VIC) | <i>(Don't Shoot Darling!)</i> Investment for publication | 13,350 |
| NSW Women & Arts Festival (NSW)                   | Grant For Festival (Program)                             | 5,750  |

|   |                                  |       |
|---|----------------------------------|-------|
| Women in Australian Film Production (NSW) | Grant For Research Project       | 1,000 |
| Women in Film & Television (NSW)          | Grant for part-time Co-ordinator | 4,000 |
| Women in Film & Television (VIC)          | Grant for part-time Co-ordinator | 4,000 |

**1983-84**

Publication of results of survey into Women in filmmaking.

Women's history archival project with financial support from the Office of the Status of Women.

Establishment of Women's Film Unit at Film Australia under Community Employment Program. Nine programs and 41 Women. Budget \$400,000.

|   |  |       |
|---|--|-------|
| Women's Editing Room Collective                       | Margot Nash (NSW) & The Women's Editing Room Collective  | 4,000 |
| Research Project- Women in Australian Film Production | Joint WFF/AFTVS project. Additional expenses for editing | 165   |

**1984-85**

Catalogue of completed films: 29 titles in active distribution.

|  |  |        |
|--|--|--------|
| Australian Women's Archival Project                      | Allocation to WFF from Office of the Status of Women | 37,391 |
| Women's International Film Forum: Nairobi - Travel Grant | Jenni Stott (NSW)                                    | 1,000  |

**1985-86**

Review of WFF in consultation with women filmmakers and administrators throughout Australia.

44 Completed programs since 1975 in distribution.

ABC presales offers to *Shadow Panic*, *Point of Departure*, *Snakes and Ladders*.

*Pack of Women* developed for television through WFF completed as ABC co-production for broadcast late 1986.

No Frills Fund set up in 1984-5 on a pilot basis.

|                                  |   |       |
|----------------------------------|---|-------|
| Women in Film & Television (NSW) | Grant to produce Women's Network Register | 3,500 |
|----------------------------------|---|-------|

|   |   |        |
|---|---|--------|
| WFF Policy Review   | Grant for tape transcriptions                         | 131    |
| South Pacific Film Festival                               | Grant to conduct workshops during festival            | 1,500  |
| Brisbane Community Arts Centre                            | Grant to Conduct workshops and screenings             | 1,000  |
| National Film and Sound Archive                           | Investment in restoration of <i>The Woman Suffers</i> | 10,000 |
| 1986-87   |   |        |
| Publication of <i>Don't Shoot Darling!</i>                |   |        |
| Seminar   | Australian Screen Directors Association               | 470    |
| Training Attachment                                       | Josephine Murphy (SA)                                 | 2,400  |
| Travel Grant  | Briann Kearney (NSW)                                  | 300    |
| Women Filmmakers Directory                                | Foxtrot Tango (NSW)                                   | 400    |
| Women in Australian Film, Video and Television Production | Marion Marsh & Chris Pip (NSW)                        | 1,000  |

## APPENDIX D MOST RENTED WOMEN'S FILMS FOR 1981

## Sydney Filmmakers Co-operative

Source: *Filmnews*, October 1981: 6.

(In order of popularity)

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <i>Size 10</i> , 1978                       | Sarah Gibson, Susan Lambert. 17 min. Col.  |
| <i>Behind Closed Doors</i> 1980             | Sarah Gibson, Susan Lambert. 6 1/2 min. Col.                                       |
| <i>Age Before Beauty</i> 1980               | Sarah Gibson, Susan Lambert. 18 min. Col.  |
| <i>Give Trees a Chance</i> 1980             | Jeni Kendall. 46 min. Col.   |
| <i>It's Just a Compliment, Luv</i> 1981     | Mandy King. 25 min. Col.   |
| <i>Dust to Dust</i> 1980                    | Sabina Wynn (In collaboration with Worker's Health Centre, Lidcombe). 27 min. Col. |
| <i>The Selling of the Female Image</i> 1977 | Carole Kostanich. 9 min. Col.  |
| <i>Come On</i> 1978                         | Beth McRae, Joanne Horsburgh. 8 1/2 min. b&w.                                      |
| <i>My Survival as an Aboriginal</i> 1979    | Essie Coffey, Martha Ansara.<br>50 min. Col.                                       |
| <i>We Aim to Please</i> 1977                | Margot Nash, Robin Laurie. 13 min. Col.  |
| <i>It Hurts Like Hell</i> 1980              | Sabina Wynn. 30 min. Col (U-matic).  |
| <i>Invisible Women</i> 1979                 | Sabina Wynn. 19 min. Col.  |
| <i>Bread and Dripping</i> 1982              | Wimminsfilms Collective. 20 min. Col.  |
| <i>Keep it Down to a Shout</i> 1978         | Dasha Ross. 17 min. Col.   |
| <i>Daughter Rite</i> 1979                   | Michele Citron USA. 53 min. Col.   |
| <i>Pins and Needles</i> 1980                | Barbara Chobocky, Genni and Kim Batterham.<br>38 min. Col.                         |
| <i>Just Me and My Little Girlie</i> 1977    | Linda Blagg. 14 min. b&w.  |

---

## REFERENCES

---

### Interviews with the Author: (See Appendix A).

Quotes from Interview transcripts are signalled in the text by italicised surnames.

- Ansara, Martha* (1992a) Sydney: 23 March.  
\_\_\_\_\_ (1992b) Sydney: 21 April.
- Appelton, Gil* (1992) Sydney: 2 April.
- Blonski, Annette* (1991) Melbourne: 26 August.
- Connolly, Sharon and Grieve, Anna* (1992) Sydney: 21 April.
- Fiske, Pat* (1993) Melbourne: 8 April.
- Gibson, Sarah* (1992) Sydney: 13 April.
- Glow, Hilary and Bell, Jo* (1991) Melbourne: 15 May.
- Grace, Helen* (1992) Sydney: 2 July.
- Grieve, Anna* (see Connolly and Grieve 1992, above).
- Kaufman, Tina* (1992) Sydney: 10 July.
- Kostanich, Carole* (1992) Sydney: 16 April.
- Lambert, Susan* (1992) Sydney: 11 November.
- Leahy, Gillian* (1992a) Sydney: 16 April.  
\_\_\_\_\_ (1992b) Sydney: 3 July.
- McMurchy, Megan* (1992) Sydney: 28 April.
- McRae, Beth* (1992) Melbourne: 9 February.
- Molloy, Vicki* (1992) Melbourne: 11 February.
- Nash, Margot* (1992a) Sydney: 1 July.  
\_\_\_\_\_ (1992b) Sydney: 8 July.
- Oliver, Margot* (1992a) Sydney: 26 April.  
\_\_\_\_\_ (1992b) Sydney: 27 April.
- Robbins, Penny* (1992) Melbourne: 27 July.
- Thornley, Jeni* (1992a) Sydney: 30 March.  
\_\_\_\_\_ (1992b) Sydney: 13 November.

## Books, Articles, Catalogues and Archival Sources

- Addis, Erika and Grace, Helen (1983) "Fragments. Undertakings".  
 Interviewed by Anna Grieve. *Filmnews* August/September: 10; 15.
- AFC (Australian Film Commission) File: PT 5092/1: *Roundabout*.
- AFC (Australian Film Commission) File: PT 5092/2: *Roundabout*.
- Alexander, Sandra (1977) "The Women's Film Fund". *Filmnews* March: 1; 5.
- Alexander, Sandra (1978) "'Womenwaves': Directions in Film and Video". *Hecate* IV(2) February: 113-119.
- Alexander, Sandra (1979a) "Women's Film Fund". In Barbara Alysen (ed) (1979) *A Catalogue of Independent Women's Films*. Sydney: Sydney Women's Film Group: 72
- Alexander, Sandra (1979b) *Stop Organising, Be Creative*. North Ryde: Australian Film and Television School.
- Alysen, Barbara (1977) "Journey Among Women". *Filmnews* September: 10; 12.
- Alysen, Barbara (1978) "Womenwaves". *Cinema Papers* April/June: 328-329.
- Alysen, Barbara. (ed) (1979a) *A Catalogue of Independent Women's Films*. Sydney: Sydney Women's Film Group.
- Alysen, Barbara (1979b) "Australian Women Filmmakers: Part 4. Jeni Thornley and Martha Ansara". *Cinema Papers* September/October: 497-499.
- Andrew, Dudley (1990) *Andre Bazin*. New York: Columbia University Press. (First published 1978. London: Oxford University Press)
- Ansara, Martha (1977) "Definitions Count. What Do We Want of Women's Films?" *Filmnews* December: 8-9.
- Ansara, Martha and Sarah Gibson, Carole Kostanich, Susan Lambert, Beth McRae, Margot Oliver, Jeni Thornley (1978) "Women Propose: a new feminist cinema". Supplement. *Filmnews* December: 7-14. (Includes Feminist Film Workers Program of Films: 8)
- Ansara, Martha (1979) "Theory and Practice discussion weekend: Women Film Workers Meet". *Filmnews* January: 7-10.
- Ansara, Martha (1984a) "Apparatchik in search of a base?". *Filmnews* March: 1.
- Ansara, Martha (1984b) Letter to the Editor. *Filmnews* April: 2.
- Ansara, Martha. (1987) In "Personal Statements". In Annette Blonski, Barbara Creed and Freda Freiberg (eds) (1987) *Don't Shoot Darling! Women's Independent Filmmaking in Australia*. Richmond, Victoria: Greenhouse Publications: 180-181.



- Ansara, Martha (1988) "Jeni Thornley Interviews Martha Ansara: The Price of Happiness". *Filmnews* February: 8-9.
- Appelton, Gil (1977) "Whither the Women's Film Fund?" *Filmnews* December: 13.
- Appelton, Gill and Molloy, Vicki (1982) "Women's Film Fund". Interviewed by Tina Kaufman. *Filmnews* October: 12-13.
- Bennett, Marsha (1978) "Womenwaves Revisited: Impression or Nipple Ripples". *Filmnews* February: 7.
- Berger, John (1972) *Ways of Seeing*. Harmondsworth, England: Penguin.
- Bergstrom, Janet and Doane, Mary Ann (eds) (1989) Special issue on "The Spectatrix". *Camera Obscura* 20/21.
- Berman, Morris (1981) *The Re-Enchantment of the World*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press.
- Berman, Morris (1989) *Coming To Our Senses: Body and Spirit in the Hidden History of the West*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Berry, Chris (ed) (1993) "Looks a Little Queer To Me: A Seminar on Queer Theory and Queer Cinema" (With Chris Berry, Felicity Collins and Barbara Creed). *Metro Magazine* 95 (Spring): 38-40.
- Berryman, Ken (1985a) *Allowing Young Filmmakers to Spread Their Wings: The Educational Role of the Experimental Film and Television Fund*. M.Ed. thesis, School of Education, LaTrobe University.
- Berryman, Ken (1985b) *Experimental Film and Television Fund 1970-1978: Completed Productions and Grant Recipients*. Melbourne: Australian Film Commission.
- Bertrand, Ina and Collins, Diane.(1981) *Government and Film in Australia*. Sydney: Currency Press.
- Blonski, Annette (ed) (1988) *Australian Women's Film and Video*. Catalogue. Melbourne: Australian Film Institute.
- Blonski, Annette and Lethlean, Margot (1987) "High Hopes: The Victorian Women's Film Unit". In Annette Blonski, Barbara Creed and Freda Freiberg (eds) (1987) *Don't Shoot Darling! Women's Independent Filmmaking in Australia*. Richmond, Victoria: Greenhouse Publications: 168-174.
- Blonski, Annette, and Barbara Creed, Freda Freiberg (eds) (1987) *Don't Shoot Darling! Women's Independent Filmmaking in Australia*. Richmond, Victoria: Greenhouse Publications.
- Boehringer, Kathe and Penny Davies, Peter Kemp (1984) "In an OnGuarded moment". *Filmnews* March : 10-11

- Bordwell, David (1985) *Narration in the Fiction Film*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Bordwell, David (1989) *Making Meaning: Inference and Rhetoric in the Interpretation of Cinema*. Cambridge, Massachusetts & London: Harvard University Press.
- Brett, Judith (1992) *Robert Menzies' Forgotten People*. Melbourne: Macmillan.
- Brooks, Peter (1987) *The Shifting Point: Theatre, Film, Opera. 1946-1987*. New York: Harper and Row.
- Brunsdon, Charlotte (ed) (1986) *Films For Women*. London: British Film Institute.
- Bunbury, Stephanie (1987) "Everything is not Roses: The Press and Women's Independent film". In Annette Blonski, Barbara Creed and Freda Freiberg (eds) (1987) *Don't Shoot Darling! Women's Independent Filmmaking in Australia*. Richmond, Victoria: Greenhouse Publications: 230-249.
- Burchill, Louise (1981) "Feminist Film: What's in a Name?" *Filmnews* September: 11; 15.
- Cameron, Ken (1978) "Maidens - First Person Singular". *Filmnews* July: 12.
- Campioni, Mia (1994) "Borderlines/Bodylines: Mothers in Modernity". *Agenda* 38 (September): 18-23.
- Campioni, Mia and Gross, Elizabeth (1983) "Love's Labours Lost: Marxism and Feminism". In Judith Allen and Paul Patton (eds) (1983) *Beyond Marxism? Interventions After Marx*. Leichhardt, Sydney: Intervention Publications: 113-141.
- Cixous, Hélène. (1981) "The Laugh of the Medusa.".. In Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron (eds) (1981) *New French Feminisms*. Brighton, Sussex: Harvester Press: 245-264. (Trans. Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen and published in *Signs* 1(4) 1976)
- Cixous, Hélène and Clément, Catherine (1986) *The Newly Born Woman*. (Trans. Betsy Wing). Minneapolis and Oxford: University of Minnesota Press. (First published 1975)
- Clarke, Jocelyn (1975) "Life as a Lesbian". In Jan Mercer (ed) *The Other Half: Women in Australian Society*. Melbourne: Penguin: 333 - 345.
- Collins, Felicity (1983a) "Following the AFI". *Filmnews* April/May: 4-7; 18.
- Collins, Felicity (1983b) "Reading Against the Grain: Independent Feminist Filmmaking and the Black Hole". *Filmnews* November/December :12-13.
- Collins, Felicity (1984) "We Aim To Please". *Filmnews* July: 12-14; 16-17.
- Collins, Felicity (1987a) "A (Sad) Song of the Body". *Screen* 28 (1): 78-89.

- Collins, Felicity (1987b) "Women and Film: the Next Step". *Cinema Papers* May: 26-27.
- Collins, Felicity (1987c) "End of the Road For Feminism?" Review of Blonski et al (eds) (1987) *Don't Shoot Darling!*. *Filmnews* October: 10.
- Collins, Felicity (1988) "Should a Feminist Knit?: Narcissistic Narratives and the Other Woman". *Flesh. Intervention* 21/22: 48-53.
- Coward, Rosalind (1992) *Our Treacherous Hearts. Why Women Let Men Get Their Way*. London and Boston: Faber and Faber.
- Creed, Barbara (1987a) "Feminist Film Theory: Reading the Text". In Annette Blonski, Barbara Creed and Freda Freiberg (eds) (1987) *Don't Shoot Darling! Women's Independent Filmmaking in Australia*. Richmond, Victoria: Greenhouse Publications: 280-313.
- Creed, Barbara (1987b) "The Post-Modern Blues or *My Life Without Steve*". In Annette Blonski, Barbara Creed and Freda Freiberg (eds) (1987) *Don't Shoot Darling! Women's Independent Filmmaking in Australia*. Richmond, Victoria: Greenhouse Publications: 350-357.
- Creed, Barbara (1989) "Medusa in the Land of Oz: The Female Spectator in Australia". *Camera Obscura* 20/21: 53-67.
- Creed, Barbara (1993) "Lesbain Independent Cinema and Queer Theory". *Artlink* 13(1): 11-12.
- Cruthers, John and Kesteven, James (1982) "Cheques and Balances: The Present Operation of the Creative Development Fund". *Filmnews* November/December: 9-12.
- Cunningham, Stuart (1992) *Framing Culture: Criticism and Policy in Australia*. Sydney: Allen and Unwin.
- Curthoys, Ann (1988) *For and Against Feminism: A personal journey into feminist theory and history*. Sydney: Allen and Unwin.
- Curthoys, Ann and Dermody, Susan (1987) "For Love or Money: a Work of Loving". In Annette Blonski, Barbara Creed and Freda Freiberg (eds) (1987) *Don't Shoot Darling! Women's Independent Filmmaking in Australia*. Richmond, Victoria: Greenhouse Publications: 343-357.
- Davies, Penny (1984a) UBU: History and Rhetoric". Unpublished paper. Sydney.
- Davies, Penny (1984b) "History of UBU continued:". *Filmnews* August/September: 8-9.
- Dermody, Susan (1977) "Journey Among Women". *Cinema Papers* 14 (October): 173-174.

- Dermody, Susan (1988) "Not Necessarily a Lead Dress: Thinking Beyond 'Redress' in Women's Films". In Megan McMurchy and Jennifer Stott (eds) (1988) *Signs of Independents: Ten Years of the Creative Development Branch*. Sydney: Australian Film Commission: 11-15.
- Dermody, Susan and Jacka, Elizabeth (1987) *The Screening of Australia: Anatomy of a Film Industry*. Vol. 1. Sydney: Currency Press.
- Dermody, Susan and Jacka, Elizabeth (1988) *The Screening of Australia: Anatomy of a National Cinema*. Vol. 2. Sydney: Currency Press.
- Dermody, Susan and Jacka, Elizabeth (eds) (1988) *The Imaginary Industry: Australian Film in the Late '80s*. North Ryde: Australian Film, Television and Radio School.
- "Developments re Women's Film Fund".(1978) *Filmnews* June: 5.
- Dinnerstein, Dorothy (1976) *The Mermaid and the Minotaur*. New York: Harper and Row. (Republished in 1987 as *The Rocking of the Cradle and the Ruling of the World*. London: The Women's Press).
- Diprose, Rosalyn and Ferrell, Robyn (eds) (1991) *Cartographies: Post Structuralism and the Mapping of Bodies and Spaces*. North Sydney: Allen and Unwin.
- Duggan, Lisa (1992) "Making it Perfectly Queer". *Socialist Review* 22(1): 11-31.
- Duncan, Digby and Sarah Gibson, Susan Lambert (1984) Interviewed by Tina Kaufman and Peter Kemp. *Filmnews* March: 11.
- Dyer, Richard (1990) *Now You See It: Studies on Gay and Lesbian Film*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Eisenstein, Hester (1991) *Gender Shock : Practising Feminism on Two Continents*. Sydney: Allen and Unwin.
- Elsaesser,Thomas (1992) "Rivette and the End of Cinema". *Sight and Sound* April: 20-23.
- Feminist Film Workers (1979) *Discussion Papers* No. 1.
- "Film Fund Squeeze". (1985) *Filmnews* June: 1.
- Films From the Women's Film Fund* (1984) Catalogue. North Sydney: Women's Film Fund of the Australian Film Commission.
- Firestone, Shulamith (1970) *The Dialectic of Sex* London: Paladin.
- Fiske, Pat and Martha Kay (1975) "Women, Feminism and Film".Interview with Martha Kay [Ansara] and Jane Oehr. *Refractory Girl* 8: 22-31.
- Fiske, Pat (1985) "Rocking the Foundations". Interviewed by Gillian Leahy. *Filmnews* November: 12-13.

- For Love or Money: A Study Guide*. (1983) Australian Feature Films in the Classroom. Carlton South: A.T.O.M. (Australian Teachers of Media)
- Foss, Paul and Morris, Meaghan (eds) (1978) *Language, Sexuality & Subversion*. Darlington, Sydney: "Working Papers" Collection, Feral Publications.
- Franzway, Suzanne and Dianne Court, R.W. Connell (1989) *Staking A Claim: Feminism, Bureaucracy and the State*. Sydney: Allen & Unwin.
- Fraser, Liliias (1988) "Getting Women on the Move". Interviewed by Jeni Thornley. *Filmnews* July: 12-13.
- Fraser, Virginia (1979) "Brain Drain to Sydney". *Filmnews* September: 7.
- Freadman, Anne (1991) "The Battle for Bataille keeps well away from feminism". *Australian Book Review* 135 (October): 15-18.
- Freeman, Nicolette (1987) "Great Expectations: The Sydney Women's Film Unit". In Annette Blonski, Barbara Creed and Freda Freiberg (eds) (1987) *Don't Shoot Darling! Women's Independent Filmmaking in Australia*. Richmond, Victoria: Greenhouse Publications: 153-167.
- Freiberg, Freda (1982/3) "The Post-Partum Document: Maternal Archaeology". *Lip* 7: 60-62.
- Fuss, Diana (ed) (1991) *Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories*. New York: Routledge.
- The Gang of Three, Gill, Bev and Lis (1979) "Just Another Women's Season: Filmmakers March Season". *Filmnews* March: 1.
- Gatens, Moira (1983) "A Critique of the Sex/Gender Division". In Judith Allen and Paul Patton (eds) (1983) *Beyond Marxism? Interventions After Marx*. Leichhardt, Sydney: Intervention Publications: 143-160.
- Gentile, Mary (1985) *Film Feminisms: Theory and Practice*. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press.
- Gibbs, Anna and Di Kellett, Tricia Ni Ivor, Sally Semens, Marg Welsh (1979) "Maidens: amazonian odyssey and/or challenge to participation?". *Scarlet Woman* 8: 20-22.
- Gibson, Ross (1987) "Land Slides". *Filmnews* May: 7.
- Gibson, Ross (1987/88) "What Do I Know? Chris Marker and the Essayist Mode of Cinema". *Filmviews* 134: 26-30.
- Gibson, Ross (1988) "Brave? New? Worldly?". In Megan McMurchy and Jennifer Stott (eds) (1988) *Signs of Independents: Ten Years of the Creative Development Fund*. Sydney: Australian Film Commission: 19-21.

- Gibson, Sarah and Lambert, Susan (1978) "Dilemmas of Two Socialist Feminist Filmmakers". *Scarlet Woman* 7: 26 -30.
- Gibson, Sarah and Lambert, Susan (1980) Interviewed by Jeni Thornley. *Filmnews* December: 9-10.
- Gilroy, Kate (1994) "Essaying Two Lovers' Discourses". *Continuum* 7(2): 222-237.
- "Going to Sainsbury". (1989) Editorial. *Filmnews* August: 3.
- Grace, Helen (1981) "Violation: A Suitable Case For Treatment". *Filmnews* October: 11
- Grace, Helen (1982) "The Public Wants Features! - the (Creative?) Underdevelopment of Australian Independent Film Since the 1960s". *Filmnews* November/December: 6-8.
- Grace, Helen and Addis, Erika (1984) "Serious Undertakings: Release Script". *Framework* 24: 128-141.
- Grace, Helen (1988) "The Mysteries of Manhood". *Flesh. Intervention* 21/22: 75-83.
- Grace, Helen and Thornley, Jeni (1981) "28th Sydney Film Festival Program". *Filmnews* July: 3-4.
- Grant, Bruce (ed) (1986) *The Whitlam Phenomenon*. Fabian Papers. Fitzroy, Victoria: McPhee Gribble (in association with Penguin).
- Greenland, Hall (1986a) "Who Shot the Co-op?". *Filmnews* February/March: 1; 3.
- Greenland, Hall (1986b) "After the Co-op: the AFI or 'The Cohen?'". *Filmnews* May: 5-6.
- Greer, Germaine (1971) *The Female Eunuch*. London: Paladin. (First published 1970)
- Greer, Germaine (1972) ABC Radio Interview. Quoted in *Australia Since the War*. Episode 10. ABC. Open Learning Unit: 1994.
- Grieve, Anna (1987) "Big Mother, Little Sister: The Women's Film Fund". In Annette Blonski, Barbara Creed and Freda Freiberg (eds) (1987) *Don't Shoot Darling! Women's Independent Filmmaking in Australia*. Richmond, Victoria: Greenhouse Publications: 69-83.
- Grosz, Elizabeth (1994) *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism*. ..Sydney: Allen and Unwin.
- Gulliver, Penny (1978) "The Magic Moment Never Comes....". *Filmnews* December: 12-13.
- Harvey, Sylvia (1978) *May '68 and Film Culture*. London: British Film Institute.
- Haskell, Molly (1974) *From Reverence to Rape: The Treatment of Women in the Movies*. New York: Holt Rhinehart and Winston.
- Hennessey, Rosemary (1993) "Queer Theory: A Review of the *differences* Special Issue and Wittig's *The Straight Mind*". *Signs* 18(4): 964-973.

- Herd, Nick (1983) *Independent Filmmaking in Australia 1960-1980*. North Ryde: Australian Film and Television School.
- Hillman, James (1977) *Re-Visioning Psychology*. New York: Harper and Row.
- Hillman, James (1984) *Inter Views: Conversations with Laura Pozzo on Psychotherapy, Biography, Love, Soul, Dreams, Work, Imagination and the State of Culture*. New York: Harper Colophon Books. (First published 1983 by Harper and Row)
- Hodsdon, Barrett (1983) "The Avant-garde Impulse and Australian Narrative: *Palm Beach* in Context". In Albert Moran and Tom O'Regan (eds) *An Australian Film Reader*. Sydney: Currency Press: 288-295.
- Hodsdon, Barrett (1987) "Backsliding?". *Filmnews* July: 14.
- Hodsdon, Barrett (1989) "The Lost History of Australian Cinephilia". *Filmnews* December: 9-12.
- Horne, Donald (1974) *The Lucky Country*. 3rd Revised Edition. Ringwood, Victoria: Penguin Books. (First published 1964).
- Horne, Donald (1980) *Time of Hope: Australia 1966-72*. Sydney: Angus & Robertson.
- Hutton-Williams, Lynne (1981) "Moving Pictures". *Filmnews* February: 9.
- "Interim Report of the Film Committee, Australian Council for the Arts" (1969). In Albert Moran and Tom O'Regan (eds) (1985) *An Australian Film Reader*. Sydney: Currency Press: 171-174.
- "Injunction Against Me and Daphne Stands" (1977) *Filmnews* December: 1.
- Jayamanne, Laleen (1982) "*Les Rendezvous D'Anna*". *Filmnews* May: 12.
- Jayamanne, Laleen (1982/3) "The Holey Family". From Mothers' Memories Others' Memories. *Lip* 7: 42-46.
- Jayamanne, Laleen (1985) "To Render the Body Ecstatic". Interview with Anna Rodrigo. *Fade To Black*. Sydney College of the Arts Film Group.
- Jayamanne, Laleen (1993) "'Love me tender, love me true, never let me go ...': A Sri Lankan reading of Tracey Moffat's *Night Cries - A Rural Tragedy*". In Sneja Gunew and Anna Yeatman (eds) (1993) *Feminism and the Politics of Difference*. Sydney: Allen and Unwin: 73-84.
- Jennings, Karen (1993) *Sites of Difference: Cinematic representation of Aboriginality and gender*. The Moving Image 1: South Melbourne: Australian Film Institute.
- "Jobs for the Girls" (1984) Letter to the Editor. *Filmnews* March: 2.
- Johnson, Lesley (1993) *The Modern Girl: Girlhood and Growing Up*. St Leonards, NSW: Allen and Unwin.
- Johnston, Claire (1976) "Towards a Feminist Film Practice: Some Theses". *Edinburgh '76 Magazine: Psycho-analysis/Cinema/Avant-garde* 1: 50-59.

- Kaplan, E. Ann (1983) *Women and Film: Both Sides of the Camera*. London: Methuen.
- Kaufman, Tina (1986) "Big Changes At Little Filmnews". *Filmnews* September: 2.
- Kemp, Peter (1986) "Featuring the Non-Features". *Filmnews* June: 11; 18.
- Kingston, Beverley (1975) *My Wife, My Daughter and Poor Mary Ann: Women and Work in Australia*. Melbourne: Thomas Nelson.
- Kuhn, Annette (1982) *Women's Pictures: Feminism and Cinema*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Lambert, Susan and Nick Herd, Megan McMurchy and Carolyn Strachan (1980) "Co-op's AGM Decides". *Filmnews* November: 1; 15.
- Lambert, Susan and Victoria Treole, Sarah Gibson (1981a) "Australian Feminist Filmmakers and the Women's Liberation Movement". (Unpublished paper delivered to the first International Feminist Film and Video Conference, held in Amsterdam in May 1981)
- Lambert, Susan and Treole, Victoria (1981b) "International Feminist Film and Video Conference: Report". Report and Interview. *Filmnews* September: 10-11; 14.
- Lawson, Sylvia (1983) "Seriously Undertaken". *Filmnews* March: 10-11.
- Lawson, Sylvia (1984) "Serious Undertakings: Deconstructions. Demolitions". *Framework* 24: 122-127. (Reprinted in Albert Moran and Tom O'Regan (eds) (1985) *An Australian Film Reader*. Sydney: Currency Press: 327-332)
- Leahy, Gillian (1986) "Lonesome". Interviewed by Tina Kaufman and Peter Kemp. *Filmnews* October: 8; 10.
- Leahy, Gillian (1987) "My Life Without Barrett". Letter to *Filmnews* from Firenze. *Filmnews* October: 5.
- Leahy, Gillian (1994) "I'd Thought For A Long Time That I'd Make An Experimental Film About Romantic Love". Interviewed by Noel King. *Continuum* 7(2): 238-253.
- Le Guin, Ursula K. (1990) *Dancing at the Edge of the World: Thoughts on Words, Women, Places*. New York: Harper & Row. (First published 1989 Grove Press)
- Legge, Kate (1980) "The Problems of Pluralism: Women's Films and Feminist Films". *Lip: A Feminist Journal of Women in the Visual and Performing Arts* : 131-133.
- Lesage, Julia (1986) "Political Aesthetics of the Feminist Documentary Film". In Charlotte Brunsdon (ed) (1986) *Films For Women..* London: BFI. (Excerpt and update from *Quarterly Review of Film Studies* Fall 1978)



- Long, Joan and Stewart, Meg (1977) "Australian Women Filmmakers: Part 3". *Cinema Papers* (12) April: 310-313.
- Macallan, Helen (1994) *Findings from the survey of the place of the English film journal Screen (especially Screen 1971-1981) in Higher Education and Film Culture in Australia*. University of Technology, Sydney.
- Marsh, Anne (1993) *Body and Self: Performance Art in Australia 1969-92*. South Melbourne: Oxford University Press Australia.
- Martin, Adrian (1988) "No Flowers For The Cinéophile: The Fates of Cultural Populism, 1960-1988". In Paul Foss (ed) *Island in the Stream*. Leichhardt: Pluto Press Australia: 117 - 138.
- Matheson, Tanya (1987) "Women's Film Fundette?". *Filmnews* December: 3.
- Mayne, Judith (1990) *The Woman at the Keyhole: Feminism and Women's Cinema*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.
- McCalman, Janet (1993) *Journeyings: The Biography of a Middle-Class Generation 1920-1990*. Carlton, Victoria: Melbourne University Press.
- McCarthy, Jen (1994) "The Critical Reception of *Serious Undertakings* and *This Woman is Not a Car*." Unpublished paper. Magill Campus: University of South Australia.
- McMurchy, Megan and Margot Oliver, Jeni Thornley (1983) *For Love or Money: A Pictorial History of Women and Work in Australia*. Ringwood, Victoria: Penguin.
- McMurchy, Megan and McRae, Beth (1987) "Women's Film Fund: Going 1987, Going 1988, Going 1989, Gone 1990?". Interviewed by Anna Grieve and Tina Kaufman. *Filmnews* February: 7-10.
- McMurchy, Megan (1988) "Ten Years of an Open Door Fund". Interviewed by Tina Kaufman and Gillian Leahy. *Filmnews* December: 4-5.
- McMurchy, Megan and Stott, Jennifer (eds) (1988) *Signs of Independents: Ten Years of the Creative Development Branch*. Catalogue. Sydney: Australian Film Commission.
- Merewether, Charles (1977) "Me and Daphne". *Filmnews* October: 14-15.
- Merewether, Charles (1981) "Towards a Radical Film Practice, Part 1: Australian Left Film History". *Filmnews* 11(8) August: 8-10. (Reprinted in Albert Moran and Tom O'Regan (eds) (1985) *An Australian Film Reader*. Sydney: Currency Press:338-349)
- Michelson, Annette (1970) "Film and the Radical Aspiration". In P. Adams Sitney (ed) (1970) *The Film Culture Reader*. New York: Praeger: 404 - 421.

- Modjeska, Drusilla (1981) *Exiles At Home: Australian Women Writers 1925-1945*. Sydney: Angus and Robertson.
- Modjeska, Drusilla (1990) *Poppy*. Ringwood, Victoria: McPhee Gribble/Penguin Books.
- Moore, Catriona (1987) "Reading 'Woman': *For Love or Money* and *We Aim To Please*". In Annette Blonski, Barbara Creed and Freda Freiberg (eds) (1987) *Don't Shoot Darling! Women's Independent Filmmaking in Australia*. Richmond, Victoria: Greenhouse Publications: 358- 370.
- Moore, Catriona and Hoeben, Colleen (1987) "Serious Undertakings: An Inventory of Old Wives Tales". In Annette Blonski, Barbara Creed and Freda Freiberg (eds) (1987) *Don't Shoot Darling! Women's Independent Filmmaking in Australia*. Richmond, Victoria: Greenhouse Publications: 371-379.
- Moran, Albert and O'Regan, Tom (eds) (1985) *An Australian Film Reader*. Sydney: Currency Press.
- Moran, Albert and O'Regan, Tom (eds) (1989) *The Australian Screen*. Ringwood: Penguin Books.
- Morris, Meaghan (1975) "Feminist Film Critique". *Cinema Papers* November/December: 207-209; 286.
- Morris, Meaghan (1979a) "Hollywood Rewrites Romance". *Feminist Film Workers Discussion Papers* 1: 12-13.
- Morris, Meaghan (1979b) "The Pirate's Fiancée". In Meaghan Morris and Paul Patton (eds) *Michel Foucault: Power, Truth, Strategy*. Sydney: Feral Publications. (Reprinted in Meaghan Morris (1988) *The Pirate's Fiancée: Feminism, Reading, Postmodernism*. London and New York: Verso: 51-69)
- Morris, Meaghan (1981) "Dr Freud Loses Case". *Filmnews* October: 7.
- Morris, Meaghan (1983) "Notions of Independence". In Barbara Creed, John Davies, Freda Freiberg, David Hanan and Kim Montgomery (eds) (1981) *Papers and Forums on Independent Film and Asian Cinema*. Ryde & Carlton South: Australian Film and Television School & Australian Screen Studies Association (Victoria): 1-15.
- Morris, Meaghan (1984) "Identity Anecdotes". *Camera Obscura* 12: 41-65.
- Morris, Meaghan (1988) "Politics Now (Anxieties of a Petty-bourgeois Intellectual)". In Meaghan Morris (1988) *The Pirate's Fiancée: Feminism, Reading, Postmodernism*. London and New York: Verso: 173-186. (First published in *Intervention* 20, 1986)
- Mulvey, Laura (1975) "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema". *Screen* 16(3) : 6-18.

- Nash, Margot and Margot Oliver, Jeni Thornley (1983) "Women At Work". Interviewed by Ann Curthoys and Susan Dermody. *Filmnews* October: 8-10.
- Nash, Margot (1994) *Vacant Possession: Research, Writing and Visual Preparation for a Feature Film*. Unpublished part presentation for Master of Fine Arts. Sydney: College of Fine Arts, University of New South Wales.
- Neville, Bernie (1992) *Educating Psyche. Emotion, imagination and the unconscious in learning*. North Blackburn, Victoria: Collins Dove. (First published 1989)
- Neville, Richard (1971) *Play Power*. Frogmore, St Albans: Paladin.
- Nichols, Bill (1991) *Representing Reality*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.
- Nicholson, Joyce (1982) "Destination Uncertain". In Patricia Grimshaw and Lynne Strahan (eds) (1982) *The Half-Open Door: Sixteen Modern Australian Women Look at Professional Life and Achievement*. Sydney: Hale and Iremonger: 136-153.
- O'Connor, Peter (1990) *Understanding Jung*. Port Melbourne: Mandarin. (First published as *Understanding Jung, Understanding Yourself*. Australia: Methuen Haynes: 1985).
- Oliver, Margot (1977) "Anonymous Was A Woman". *Filmnews* December: 9.
- Orr, John (1993) *Cinema and Modernity*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.
- O'Regan, Tom (1983) "Australian Filmmaking: its Public Circulation". *Framework* 22/23 (Autumn): 31-36.
- Penley, Constance (1989) "The Avant-Garde and Its Imaginary". In Constance Penley (1989) *The Future of an Illusion. Film, Feminism, and Psychoanalysis*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota: 3-28.
- Pusey, Michael (1991) *Economic Rationalism in Canberra: A Nation Building State Changes Its Mind*. Cambridge U. K., New York, Melbourne: University of Cambridge Press.
- Reid, Elizabeth (1974) ABC Radio Interview, Current Affairs. Quoted in Australia Since the War. Episode 10. ABC: Open Learning Unit, 1994.
- Ricketson, James (1977) "Towards A Poor Cinema". *Filmnews* November: 9.
- Ricketson, James (1979) "Poor Movies, Rich Movies". *Filmnews* January:
- Rich, Adrienne (1979) *On Lies, Secrets and Silence. Selected Prose 1966 - 1978*. New York: W.W. Norton
- Rich, Adrienne (1980) "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence". *Signs* 5(4): 631- 660.

- Rich, Adrienne (1992) *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*. London: Virago. (First published USA: W.W Norton, 1976; London: Virago, 1977).
- Robertson, Toni and Thornley, Jeni (1978/9) "A dialogue between Toni Robertson, a Feminist Poster Maker, and Jeni Thornley, a Feminist Film-maker". *Lip*: 81-84.
- Robinson, Cathy and Peter Sainsbury, Sue Murray (1990/91) "Back in Commission: The AFC Report" Interview. *Filmnews* December/January: 5-9; 14-15.
- Rogers, Lesley (1987) "On Being a Political Lesbian". In Margaret Bradstock and Louise Wakeling (eds) (1987) *Words From the Same Heart*. Sydney: Hale & Iremonger: 104-115.
- Ross, Liz (1988) "Escaping the Well of Loneliness". In Verity Burgmann and Jenny Lee (eds) (1988) *Staining the Wattle*. Fitzroy, Victoria: McPhee Gribble: 100-108.
- Rowley, Hazel (1993) *Christina Stead, A Biography*. Port Melbourne, Victoria: William Heinemann Australia.
- Routt, William D. (1989) "The Fairest Child of the Motherland: Colonialism and Family in Films of the 1920s and 1930s". In Albert Moran and Tom O'Regan (eds) (1989) *The Australian Screen*. Ringwood, Victoria: Penguin: 28-52.
- Ryan, Edna and Conlon, Anne (1975) *Gentle Invaders. Australian Women at Work 1788-1974*. Melbourne. Thomas Nelson.
- Ryan, Penny and Margaret Eliot, Gil Appelton (1983) *Women in Australian Film Production*. Sydney: Women's Film Fund and Australian Film and Television School.
- Sainsbury, Peter (1989a) "Perestroika at the AFC". Edited version of Ian McPherson Memorial Lecture. *Filmnews* July: 8-10.
- Sainsbury, Peter (1989b) "When 76 into AFC Won't Go". *Filmnews* October: 8.
- Samuels, Andrew (ed) (1985) *The Father: Contemporary Jungian Perspectives*. London: Free Association Books. (1986 New York: New York University Press)
- Samuels, Andrew (1989) *The Plural Psyche: Personality, Morality and the Father*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Samuels, Andrew (1993) *The Political Psyche*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Sawer, Marian (1990) *Sisters in Suits: Women in Public Policy*. Sydney: Allen and Unwin.
- Scarles, Loma (1975) "Women's Workshop Films". *Refractory Girl* 8: 33-37.
- Sheridan, Susan (ed) (1988) *Grafts: Feminist Cultural Criticism* London: Verso.

- Sklan, Carole (1989) "Couture or Culture?" *Filmnews* May: 9-10.
- Spender, Dale (ed) (1991) *Heroines*. Ringwood: Penguin.
- Spinner, Suzanne (1987) "With Audacity, Passion and a Certain Naivety: the 1975 International Women's Film Festival". In Annette Blonski, Barbara Creed and Freda Freiberg (eds) (1987) *Don't Shoot Darling! Women's Independent Filmmaking in Australia*. Richmond, Victoria: Greenhouse Publications: 93-117.
- Stein, Arlene (1992) "Sisters and Queers: The Decentering of Lesbian Feminism". *Socialist Review* 22(1); 33-55.
- Stern, Lesley (1978) "Independent Feminist Filmmaking in Australia". *Australian Journal of Screen Theory* 5/6: 105-121. (Reprinted in Albert Moran and Tom O'Regan (eds) (1985) *An Australian Film Reader*. Sydney: Currency Press: 314-326)
- Stern, Lesley (1980) "Edinburgh Film Festival". *Filmnews* January/February: 8; 10-11.
- Stern, Lesley and Laleen Jayamanne, Helen Grace.(1988) "Remembering Claire Johnston". *Filmnews* May: 13-15. (Reprinted in *Framework* 35 (1988): 114-129)
- Stewart, Susan (1987) "Handle With Care: the media response to *Moving Pictures*". In Annette Blonski, Barbara Creed and Freda Freiberg (eds) (1987) *Don't Shoot Darling! Women's Independent Filmmaking in Australia*. Richmond, Victoria: Greenhouse Publications: 259 -266.
- Stoney, Lis (1987) "I have seen the future and it is Womenwaves: *Filmnews* and Feminist Film Journalism". In Annette Blonski, Barbara Creed and Freda Freiberg (eds) (1987) *Don't Shoot Darling! Women's Independent Filmmaking in Australia*. Richmond, Victoria: Greenhouse Publications: 250-258.
- Stott, Jennifer (1987) "Independent Feminist Filmmaking and the Sydney Filmmakers Co-operative". In Annette Blonski, Barbara Creed and Freda Freiberg (eds) (1987) *Don't Shoot Darling! Women's Independent Filmmaking in Australia*. Richmond, Victoria: Greenhouse Publications: 118-126.
- Strachan, Carolyn (1979) "Forum on Images of Women in Australian Feature Films". *Feminist Film Workers Discussion Papers* 1: 8-11.
- Summers, Anne (1975) "Where's the Women's Movement Moving To?". In Jan Mercer (ed) (1975) *The Other Half: Women in Australian Society*. Ringwood, Victoria: Penguin: 405-419.
- Summers, Anne (1994) *Damned Whores and God's Police*. Revised edn. Ringwood, Victoria: Penguin. (First published Ringwood: Penguin, 1975)
- Thoms, Albie (1976a) "Ten Years of the Sydney Filmmakers Coop: Part One". *Filmnews* April: 5-9. (Reprinted in Thoms, 1978: 346-365)

- Thoms, Albie (1976b) "Ten Years of the Sydney Filmmakers Coop: Part Two". *Filmnews* December: 16-22. (Reprinted in Thoms, 1978: 366-405)
- Thoms, Albie (1978) *Polemics For a New Cinema*. Sydney: Wild and Woolley.
- Thoms, Albie (1981) "Way Back Then". Letter to the editor. *Filmnews* September: 2.
- Thornley, Jeni (1977) "Camera Assistants Course". *Filmnews* December: 12.
- Thornley, Jeni (1978) "Sydney Filmmakers Cooperative - a Search for an Alternative Cinema". *Camera & Cine* November: 33-35.
- Thornley, Jeni (1979) "Feminist Filmmaking in Australia: the first ten years, 1969-1979". *Feminist Film Workers Discussion Papers* 1: 1-2; 4.
- Thornley, Jeni and Gibson, Sarah (1979) "Making Ends Meet - Theory and Practice". *Scarlet Woman* 9: 27-30.
- Thornley, Jeni (1980) "Age Before Beauty/Behind Closed Doors: Red Heart Pictures Presents". (Includes Interview with Sarah Gibson and Susan Lambert). *Filmnews* December: 8-10.
- Thornley, Jeni (1984) "Progress Report on Women's Film Fund: The Discussion Paper: The Women's Film Fund in the Mid 1980s". *Filmnews* November/December: 10-11; 14.
- Thornley, Jeni (1987a) "Sixteen Years of Women and Film Groups: A Personal Recollection". In Annette Blonski, Barbara Creed and Freda Freiberg (eds) (1987) *Don't Shoot Darling! Women's Independent Filmmaking in Australia*. Richmond, Victoria: Greenhouse Publications: 89-92.
- Thornley, Jeni (1987b) "A Way of Seeing". Review of Gentile (1985) *Film Feminisms*. *Filmnews* October: 10; 15.
- Turner, Graeme (1986) *National Fictions : Literature, film and the construction of Australian narrative*. Sydney, London, Boston: Allen and Unwin.
- Turner, Graeme (1989) "Art Directing History: The Period Film". In Albert Moran and Tom O'Regan (eds) (1989) *The Australian Screen*. Ringwood, Victoria: Penguin: 99-117.
- Vernant, Jean-Pierre (1991) *Mortals and Immortals. Collected Essays*. (Edited by Froma I. Zeitlin) Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- Walsh, Martin (1981) *Brechtian Aspects of Radical Cinema*. (Edited by Keith M. Griffiths) London: British Film Institute.
- Watson, Sophie (ed) (1990) *Playing the State: Australian Feminist Interventions*. Sydney: Allen and Unwin.
- Weinberg, Joan (1977) "Journey Among Women (revisited)". *Filmnews* November: 7.

- Weinberg, Joan (1978) "I Have Seen The Future And It Is Womanwave". *Filmnews* January: 6-7.
- WFF (Women's Film Fund) File: 240/I & II. *Serious Undertakings*.
- WFF (Women's Film Fund File): 275/I&II. *On Guard*
- Wilding, Michael (1976) "The Night I Took Part in a Woman's Film". *Scenic Drive*. Sydney: Wild and Woolley.
- Williams, Linda (1981) *Figures of Desire: A Theory and Analysis of Surrealist Film*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, Oxford: University of California Press.
- Wilson, Sandra (1978) "No Bed of Roses....". *Filmnews* December: 9.
- Wollen, Peter (1976) "The Two Avant-Gardes". *Edinburgh '76 Magazine: Psycho-analysis/Cinema/Avant-garde* 1: 77-85.
- "Women's Film Fund" (1976) *Filmnews* August: 3.
- "Women's Film Fund Guidelines".(1977) *Filmnews* March: 5.
- Women's Film Fund Advisory Panel (1984) "Shaping Policy". *Filmnews* July: 4
- Women's Film Fund Policy File: 76/112. (Includes Financial Statements: 1975-1980).
- Women in the Media: The Professional Participation of Women in the Audio Visual Media*. (1976) Sydney: Australian Film, Television and Radio School. (Report for UNESCO).
- "Women's Training Course Begins" (1977) *Filmnews* April: 3.
- Women Waves (1977) Special Issue on Women's Films. *Filmnews* December: 8-15. (Includes Women Waves program of films: 14-15).
- Womenvision Newsletter* 1: January 1974.
- Yeatman, Anna (1990) *Bureaucrats, Technocrats, Femocrats: Essays on the Contemporary Australian State*. Sydney: Allen and Unwin.
- Yeatman, Anna (1993) "Voice and representation in the politics of difference". In Sneja Gunew and Anna Yeatman (eds) (1993) *Feminism and the Politics of Difference*. Sydney: Allen and Unwin: 228-245.