

# **MATRIARCHAL CINEMA**

## **PARATEXT, PRACTICE AND THE LABOUR OF DESIRE**

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## **DECLARATION**

This dissertation is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration except where specifically indicated in the text. It has not been previously submitted, in part or whole, to any university or institution for any degree, diploma, or other qualification.

In accordance with Lancaster University guidelines, this thesis does not exceed 80,000 words, and it contains less than 150 figures.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

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# **MATRIARCHAL CINEMA**

## **PARATEXT, PRACTICE AND THE LABOUR OF DESIRE**

### **ABSTRACT**

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There is a problem of inequality at the heart of the film industry, resulting from the lack of women working in the creative roles of director, writer and cinematographer. It is a problem that limits cinematic expression and the range and kind of stories that are told. Feminist scholarship has gathered evidence of women's presence and contribution since cinema's earliest days. Adopting a cultural studies approach to the workings of film theory, it is possible to ask new questions of the established discursive regimes and their particular characterisation of cinema. Of these, the discourse of the auteur maintains a consistent power which this thesis argues has contributed forcefully to maintaining a real absence in terms of women's employment. Women directors' performances in the cinematic paratext has feminist potential, when examined in-depth, to counter these regimes and to make a strong intervention. Applying Luce Irigaray's work on *parler femme* as a theoretical framework enables a new approach to an intransigent issue.

The focus for the chosen case studies is to consider how successful women directors can re-articulate a performance of the film auteur with their social experience as women. How women auteurs speak about their biographies, their labour and consider questions of female desire in the paratext offers new possibilities for reconceiving women's cinema. Ultimately, a new genealogy of practice may be possible through their "cultural motherhood" and their expression of a form of cultural

leadership that can be called “matriarchal”. This thesis presents this provocation as a means of questioning the discursive regimes hitherto. It contends that modern women auteurs’ performance in paratext can contribute to new symbolic systems of exchange amongst women as part of challenging the status quo.

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## **INTRODUCTION: A Cinema for women and by women.**

This thesis is an intervention into the study of women's cinema, building on the decades of work by feminist scholars which has focussed on women as representations, as audiences and as filmmakers. It moves away from the textual marker to consider the potential of the acts of enunciation of women filmmakers in paratext. When women directors discuss their work, there is feminist potential. In particular, the possibility of sustaining inheritances from one generation to the next, via the power of individual testimony of the artistic practice and process, has yet to be fully explored. It is this thesis' contention that women's talk about their filmic practice can contribute a new formulation of cinematic inheritance, via practice. This will be established through the filmmaker's act of enunciation, as a performance, in paratext.

### **Speaking with Authority - The Figure of the Auteur.**

In order to focus on the voice of the filmmaker, it is necessary to turn away from the text to the paratext, the spaces around the film itself. The paratext is a concept adapted from literary studies and draws on the term invented by Gérard Genette (1991, 1997). It has been used by film scholars to refer to material, such as interviews and DVD commentaries (Grant, 2008). The paratextual auteur is an established site for film study (Grant, 2008; Verhoeven, 2009), particularly in relation to the commercial possibilities it contains through the production of modern DVD commentaries. However, the paratext as a site of political agency for the female auteur is underexplored. Genette's original concept described a space which acted as a 'threshold' (1991, p.261) to written texts, which was fluid: 'itself without rigorous

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limits, either towards the interior (the text) or towards the exterior (the discourse of the world on the text)' (1991, p.261). As subgroups of the paratext, Genette identified the 'peritext' and the 'epitext'. The peritext was material closely linked to the texts, with Genette suggesting as examples 'the title or the preface' or the 'interstices of the text, like the titles of chapters or certain notes' (1991, p.263). The epitext constituted author-generated 'interviews, conversations and confidences' (1991, p. 267). Genette contended that the epitext functioned as a 'fringe' or 'border' which was 'always the bearer of authorial commentary either more or less legitimated by the author' and operated as 'a zone not just of transition, but of transaction' (1991, p.261).

Genette's idea of 'transaction' is an important one, together with his idea of control exercised by the author. Its potential for film analysis has already been recognised, and his principles have been applied to paratexts such as DVD commentaries, magazine and newspaper interviews in which filmmakers offer hermeneutic explanations of their texts (Grant, 2008; Cook, 2015). However, this transactional space also has underexplored political possibilities for feminist analysis, in the speaking platform it offers the cultural figure of the female film author.

Ever since the work of the critics of *la nouvelle vague* ("the new wave") in the 1950s in France, speaking as an author in cinema means occupying a particular discursive identity termed the 'auteur'. François Truffaut and the French New Wave critics, who coined the term, introduced it as part of their argument for the filmmaker as a site of unified artistic identity: one who, according to Alexandre Astruc, exercised a stylistic control through wielding 'la caméra-stylo' ('the camera as pen') which could 'become a means of writing just as flexible and subtle as written

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language' (Astruc, 1968). Truffaut confirmed the importance of originality in 1954 by identifying auteurs as filmmakers who 'often write their dialogue and some of them themselves invent the stories they direct' (Truffaut, 1976, p.233). Writing in the French journal *Cahiers du cinéma*, Truffaut's immediate aim was to disturb what he perceived as a film practice in French cinema which privileged the script rather than the activity of filmmaking itself. The emphasis on adapting from literature, as a more legitimate artistic practice, was rejected by Truffaut who argued that an adaptation was 'of value only when written by a *man of the cinema*' [original emphasis] (1976, p. 229). Identifying a singular figure - 'a man of the cinema' was part of his polemical argument for film's specific character as an artistic medium, arguing for the filmmaker as an identifiable site constructed as a source for a film's aesthetic style. However, this argument was the beginning of the creation of a public image - the auteur - for the film director (as separated from the writer or other collaborators) and, already in Truffaut's words above, was male not female. As scholar Geneviève Sellier stated, the French New Wave critics' intervention ensured that film direction became 'no longer the apprenticeship of technique, but the expression of solitary genius' (2008, p.40). From the start, as Sellier indicated, the concept of the auteur demonstrated its roots in nineteenth-century, literary-based Romanticism even as it apparently represented a movement away from literary culture. This Romantic sensibility survived into Andrew Sarris's reconception of Truffaut's original idea into 'auteur theory' in 1962. Sarris proposed a paradigm which is still visible in popular writing on film, arguing that the work of an auteur must demonstrate a quality of:

interior meaning [...] extrapolated from the tension between a director's personality and his material. [...] Truffaut has called it the temperature of the

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director on set [...] Dare I come out and say what I think it to be is an élan of the soul? (2008, p.43).

According to Sarris, whilst the outer roles of the director could be designated as ‘technician’ and ‘stylist’, it is the ‘interior meaning’ that creates the core identity of the ‘auteur’ (2008, p.43).

If the French New Wave critics employed this language for their immediate polemical needs, there is evidence that it has, decades later, become its own orthodoxy and a potent site of cultural discourse and imagination; this is despite theoretical shifts, such as those caused by the poststructuralist turn in literary and cultural discourse which saw the figure of the author destabilised in literary and cultural analysis (Barthes, 1977). Even modern film theoretical and philosophical study, which propose new methodologies, remain organised along the lines of authorship. David Gerstner and Janet Staiger’s observation that ‘every scholar (even those who subscribe to the “death of authorship”) speaks of going to a Robert Altman film’ (2003, p. xi) captures the abiding value of the figure of the film author; valuable for the critic, the academic, the filmmaker operating in a commercial industry and for audiences.

The French New Wave critics became filmmakers themselves and thus embodied the role they had described. Alain Renais’ *Hiroshima mon amour* (1958, France), François Truffaut’s *Les quatre cents coups* (1958, France) and Marcel Camus’ *Orfeu negro* (1958, France) were successful at the 1959 Cannes Film Festival. A new cinema had arrived, one which, in critic and director Jean-Luc Godard’s words, created a ‘new relationship between fiction and reality’ and a ‘nostalgia for a cinema that no longer exists’ (1968, p.315). It was a cinema made by cinephiles, men already immersed in film, which turned on innovation and iconoclasm in relation to film form.

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Godard, the creator of *À bout de souffle* (1960, France), has remained most powerfully the figure who symbolises this post-war, youthful wave whose collective agency moved film into philosophical realms. Several decades later, Michael Witt would describe his use of the camera as ‘a scientific “scope” through which to penetrate the surface of reality’ (1994, p.36). Witt’s words are important as they ascribe a particular agency to the director through the cinematic mechanism, the ability of certain directors to explore the existential realities of life. In 2010, Kent Jones echoes this belief on the release of Godard’s *Film Socialisme* (2010, UK):

Godard has been returning to zero for a long time now, film by film, idea by idea, and moment by moment, with blackouts, repetitions, shock cuts, and insertions of phantom effects into his soundtracks. [...] Peter Handke once observed that there are instants in Godard’s cinema which have the clarifying effect of a blade slicing through the curtain of reality (Jones, 2010, p. 61).

This almost shamanistic role for the auteur-director, based on a technical “mastery” of the cinematic medium, has maintained a persuasive hold on popular criticism and academic writing on film. Alison Smith described the separate, distinguishable power of the public persona in relation to Godard who, ‘remains a star, although for some time he was a hidden one’ retaining the aura of being ‘quelqu’un’ – someone’ (Smith, 2007, pp.148-9).

With the dominance of male directors in traditional cinema histories, theoretical writing on film and popular film journalism, the word auteur can be considered as a gendered term. Therefore, this thesis explores the potential of paratextual spaces for women to reclaim a performance of the auteur *outside* of the film text which can redefine and redirect authorial mythologies in the future. This identity in public discourse has meant meeting certain criteria in speech content, style of address and

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public persona. Scholarship which has examined this paratextual identity (Verhoeven, 2009; Grant, 2008; Corrigan, 1990) has extended the discussion of authorial agency beyond the focus on textual markers.

This analysis moves away from the authorial figure as a hermeneutic model and, instead, values the paratext as a performative space. This focus acknowledges that the dominance of authorship in popular and academic imagination is a problematic one, given the collaborative nature of film as a practice. However, despite the evidence of film credit sequences, detailing multiple collaborations on any film, the concept of the auteur has allowed film scholars to create an identifiable site of agency in film production and to analyse it as concentrated into one biographical figure. As a film appears to be authored or written with '*la caméra-stylo*' (Astruc, 1968), the perceived stylistic devices or thematic preoccupations have become the dominant currency to identify a body of work and to evaluate its significance. The perception of a biographical figure behind each text enables a reading of the collection of traits found in their films to emanate from a controlling consciousness and for the identification of an "artistic voice". Moreover, by concentrating artistic agency into this one persona, film studies can explore inheritances from one generation of filmmakers by studying individual visionaries. Hitchcock, for example, as one of Truffaut's original examples of 'a man of the cinema' (1976, p.229) and an auteur, has attracted around two hundred non-fiction studies of his life and his work, according to dedicated databases on the subject (for example, *The Hitchcock Zone*, 2018). As the industry has developed, and those histories have been written, scholarly work is preoccupied almost exclusively with men, perpetuating the dominance of male auteurs in the film canon.

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The case studies for this thesis have been chosen from women who can be considered auteurs, within the definition given above. This is because their work is subject to discussion for its technical artistry and for its coherent vision (Truffaut, 1976; Sarris, 2008). All of the women chosen are technically adept: and artistically-trained. Potter studied fine art, Varda a trained photographer whilst Jane Campion attended film school in Sydney, Australia. All three write their scenarios. Thus, there is no question that they can function within the requirements of the established discourses of the auteur.

They have been frequent interviewees for popular film journals such as *Sight & Sound*, *Cineaste* or *Film Comment*. They have attracted academic studies of their work. Jane Campion has been the subject of two studies (Polan, 2001; Verhoeven, 2009), a book of interviews (Wright Wexman, 2009) and a collection of interviews and analysis (Ciment, 2014); Agnès Varda has had three book-length studies published (Smith, 1998; Benézét, 2014; Conway, 2015) and Sally Potter has been the subject of two studies (Fowler, C., 2009; Mayer, 2009). These are relatively few, when considered next to male auteurs, even though they have been chosen because of their longevity and the strength and depth of their film production over decades. However, their status means that they have the opportunity to talk about their practice extensively, and most importantly for this thesis, through the medium and direct address of the paratext.

### **Authorial Agency in the Paratext**

Treating the role of authorship as a space for performative agency by the woman filmmaker enables the political, feminist possibilities of this role to become apparent;

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women filmmakers can utilise their agency in this public space to create a feminist intervention. Therefore, it is questions of authorial agency outside of the text and the possibilities inherent in the *persona* of the paratextual auteur, which are most relevant. It is important to understand how this persona has two functions, by employing the terms author and auteur. In this thesis, author and authorship refers to the labour of film direction, including writing and directing, which the French New Wave critics centred discursively onto the figure of the film director. By comparison, the term auteur, has evolved through popular and academic criticism to encapsulate the more commercial, public role in which the director appears as a personality to promote his or her work. With decades of writing on authorship and the auteur available since the 1950s, and the rise of the educated, cineastic filmmaker (Pye & Myles, 1979), directors can be perceived as having the agency to mobilise these discourses for themselves. In a contextual, public discursive space, they can build their individual and idiosyncratic portrait of the film artist.

Film historian Timothy Corrigan's work on this is relevant because of his insight that filmmakers could 'strategically embrace' identities in paratext, as are part of a commercial 'agency' which nevertheless 'culturally and socially monitors spectatorial identification and critical reception' (1990, p. 48). Corrigan demonstrated that the proliferation of publicity materials to accompany a film's release, which often concentrate on the director as the voice of the project, contribute to building a powerful persona. Corrigan argued that these 'mechanisms' are:

as important to communication in film culture today as the so-called textual statement of a movie itself [...] the commercial drama of a movie's source can say as much today as the drama of the movie and the dispositions of its viewers (1990, p.53).

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The 'commercial drama of a movie's source' reimagines the paratextual space into the one in which the filmmaker is the subject of their own story. Corrigan emphasised the filmmaker's agency in building this narrative. Writing on the German director, Alexander Kluge, Corrigan identified how Kluge acknowledged his active role in creating this persona, weaving: 'not one but many stories' (Kluge quoted in Corrigan, 1990, p. 55). This, in Corrigan's view, meant Kluge actively generated a 'speaker whose agency is regularly being fractured' (1990, p.56). Corrigan concluded that the film director, in general, could 'engage and disperse his or her own organising *agency as auteur*' [my emphasis] (1990, p.118).

Creating a framework for paratextual performance using the work of Genette and Corrigan enables a productive analysis of how female subjectivity can be performed in this space. Kluge's notion agency to create 'many stories' (quoted in Corrigan, 1990, p.55) needs to be explored further, since it contains an assumption that the director is able to construct a persona at will. For women filmmakers, the focus is on how far a performance of a female subjectivity articulated with their authority as director, is possible and how far a female director can mobilise this discursive space and demonstrate its feminist potential.

### **The Modern Paratext**

It is important to understand, firstly, how the paratext is a complex site for agency, even for male directors, in order to recognise how far it can offer political potential as a discursive space for women.

Pam Cook, in writing on the television mini-series *Mildred Pierce* (2011), set out how Genette's literary theory could be applied to external material around film

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and television. She noted how ‘key personnel, lead actors, studio logos and other information on front and end credits, trailers and adverts’ were part of the peritexts, or material closely associated with the film which could act as a conduit for creative personnel to suggest a ‘preferred reading’ (2015). In addition, ‘epitexts’ (Genette, 1991, 1997) could comprise ‘interviews with directors, producers, designers, stars and others, reviews and discussions in various media, promotional materials, DVD extras and commentaries and, we might add, scholarly appraisal’ (Cook, 2015).

Cook’s suggestion was that ‘Genette’s attention to trans-textual operations’, meaning the relationship between text and paratext (peritext and/or epitext), could allow the film scholar to become ‘more circumspect and self-reflexive’ in responding to information that appeared transparently ‘true’ in making a hermeneutic reading of the film text (Cook, 2015). For the purposes of these readings, the film director’s statements about the intentions of the piece, its inspirations and methods of working are of greatest interest.

To illustrate this, it is useful to look at how one form of epitext, the broadsheet newspaper interview, functions for a modern male auteur. And to consider it within the framework of both Corrigan (1990) and the French New Wave critics. Catherine Shoard’s interview with Paul Thomas Anderson for his latest film, *Phantom Thread* (2017, USA) is a recent example of “auteur-driven” journalism. The interview in the British newspaper *The Guardian* (2018) contains critical assumptions which can be traced back to both Sarris and Truffaut.

Anderson discusses the inspiration for his latest film, a story about an obsessive relationship between a 1950s fashion designer and his muse, by alluding to

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biographical detail and his own wife's loving care towards him during a minor illness. This is contextualised by Shoard as the work of an auteur by its consistency with his other films and as the singular vision of 'a man of the cinema' (Truffaut, 1976, p.229): 'Anderson hatched a plan: a movie about the tenderness of the invalid and the power of the nurse' which becomes, in his film, 'another' story in the Anderson oeuvre about a 'charismatic obsessive' (2018). During the interview, the talk turns to his relationship with 'friend and mentor' director Jonathan Demme, directly citing Anderson as his inheritor, as well as citing other influences: 'Altman, Scorsese, Coppola, Truffaut and – since *Phantom Thread* – Hitchcock' (Shoard, 2018). On Demme's death during production, Anderson offers his experience of being 'thrown into the icy-cold waters of mortality and sadness' (Shoard, 2018), characterising the loss of a father figure to the younger cineaste. In addition, Shoard provides different biographical material in a pen portrait of the idiosyncratic individual: 'Online and in the flesh, he's as straightforward as his films are grandiose; as accommodating as his films are ambitious' resembling, in his dress-sense 'an upmarket jumble sale on legs' (Shoard, 2018). Nevertheless, Shoard reaffirms his auteur status through the comment that his films, *There will be Blood* (Paul Thomas Anderson, 2007, USA) and *The Master* ((Paul Thomas Anderson, 2012, USA), are accepted as two 'masterpieces' of the century so far (Shoard, 2018).

Whilst Shoard's article does not delve deeply into technical proficiency, something that would be more appropriate in film journals and academic writing on Anderson, it does draw on the mystique of the personality of the director, his biography as inspiration, his control of the artistic process and his inheritances from other "masters" in the film canon. Written by an established female critic, it

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demonstrates the institutionalisation of these tropes of the auteur persona in current writing. Agency, in this contemporary example, is negotiated between the director and the individual critic's inherited concept of what constitutes a cinematic auteur.

For the male auteur, this becomes an interplay between his textual preoccupations, such as the 'charismatic obsessive' (Shoard, 2018) and his biography; or, as Sarris described it, the 'interior meaning [...] extrapolated from the tension between a director's personality and his material' (2008, p.43).

. In the interview, Anderson is variously split between biography (his illness and his children), his artistic preoccupations, his views on contemporary politics (the election of Donald Trump as America's president) and his intergenerational inheritance from Demme. For Anderson, as a male auteur, an intergenerational inheritance can be presumed, into which his singular voice may be accommodated. In fact, applying Corrigan's model (1990), he may need feel a need to assert his idiosyncratic, artistic mastery and vision to distinguish himself in the directorial marketplace. In summary, speaking as an auteur carries with it a sense of authority, encapsulated in the gendered term "mastery", and is a layered performance, identifiable as the product of the director's voice as it appears inside and outside the text. However, that authority or agency, as implied by the interaction between Anderson and Shoard, is a negotiated exchange taking place in a public space.

Questions of agency in the paratext are very different for the female auteur than for the male auteur. There is a political urgency to these questions since women who are considered cinematic auteurs are still very rare. Less the lone, Romantic visionary or 'solitary genius' (Sellier, 2008, p.40), she has a quality of "aloneness", of being one

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of the few women to be enabled to speak in public in this particular discursive space. In addition, it is possible to discern a different relationship to that discursive space itself. This often becomes a balance between speaking in the paratext and “being spoken” by the contextual discourses provided by popular journalism and academic scholarship, which often make direct reference to the director's gender.

In order to be described as an auteur, a woman filmmaker has to have produced a body of work in which she has developed a textual voice which represents both stylistic traits and thematic preoccupations. Therefore, at this stage, the case studies still need to be drawn from a relatively small number of women who have built and sustained careers that are long enough to accede to the sobriquet ‘auteur’ in public discourse (film journals and academic writing) and who have been active in producing paratextual materials. Importantly, the chosen case studies represent a form of genealogy from the 1950s up to contemporary cinema. Agnès Varda, began working as part of the French New Wave, alongside men such as Godard and Resnais. Kathryn Bigelow, Jane Campion and Sally Potter all began their filmmaking careers in the late 1970s. All four of these women have sustained their filmmaking, albeit for some with substantial gaps, and have produced a variety of paratextual materials. The focus for this study is less on the peritexts conducted through a third party, such as magazine and newspaper interviews (Cook, 2015) and more on epitexts which are self-penned or self-generated, such as diaries or DVD commentaries and production featurettes. This is since these contain overt reflections on filmmaking practice and a form of direct address to the audience. Through these, it is possible to explore more fully the idea of female agency in the paratext .

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Turning the focus from the film text and the questions which have preoccupied the feminist study of women filmmakers and focussing instead on the paratext, with its discussion of the filmmaking process, enables a potential new focus on women's avowed *practice* of cinema. To do this, the literature review will examine existing ideas about the nature of women's cinema and Luce Irigaray's concept of *parler femme* as a means of understanding this specific paratextual performance. Firstly, however, it is important to establish the context in which an intervention regarding women filmmakers is still necessary.

### **The Lack of Female Auteurs – Industry Context**

Feminist quantitative analysis has demonstrated how difficult it is for women to gain entry to the film industry, let alone build their own oeuvre for study. Martha Lauzen at the Center for the Study of Women in Television and Film at San Diego State University has tracked the presence of women in various roles in Hollywood since 1998. Her 'Celluloid Ceiling Report' has reviewed the top two-hundred and fifty grossing Hollywood films annually since 1998. It showed that, in 2017, women comprised 11% of directors and 4% of cinematographers (Lauzen, 2018). In 1998, the percentages were 9% and 4% respectively, demonstrating a fundamental lack of change (Lauzen, 2018). A similar initiative has recently been launched, an AHRC-funded project in the United Kingdom has reported its initial findings, stating that in 2015, 7% of British films in production were directed by women and 7% employed a woman cinematographer (Cobb, Williams & Wreyford, 2016).

Alongside this quantitative analysis, there is evidence of women's lack of professional stability (Kit, 2015). Phyllida Lloyd's *Mamma Mia* (2008, USA/UK/

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Germany) was the most successful female-directed film in the UK in its year of release and garnered \$610 million worldwide (Box Office Mojo, 2018). However, its 2018 sequel has been written and directed by a male filmmaker, despite its female-centric cast and its themes of motherhood and female friendship. In a similar way, Catherine Hardwicke did not return to direct any more of the *Twilight* franchise, despite the first film's profitability (Catherine Hardwicke, 2008, USA). Hardwicke and Lloyd's agency in these decisions is obscure and no firm conclusions can be drawn; however, it does highlight that Patty Jenkins' invitation to direct the sequel to her successful blockbuster release, *Wonder Woman* (2017, USA) is genuinely newsworthy (Mendelson, 2017). In the same year, in front of the camera, female protagonists in Hollywood films fell by 5%, down to 24%, according to Lauzen and her colleagues, suggesting there is still a lack of genuine change: 'The numbers do not yet reflect claims of a tectonic or massive shift in the film industry' (Lauzen quoted in Nordine, 2018).

Adding to the sense of emergency above, feminist critic and archivist So Mayer has recently indicated how the production, distribution and exhibition of women's films across decades is, in fact, 'losing ground': 'For one thing: look at the date on many of the films being restored and re-released. Apart from Arzner's films, they are all post-WWII, and many are from the 1980s and 1990s' and, controversially, 'in several cases there's no news on DVD releases'. There is a 'cycle of erasure' which may necessitate further 'rediscovery and restoration' (Mayer, 2016a) with current films and filmmakers.

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Thus, quantitative measurement indicates that the presence of women filmmakers, such as the case studies in this thesis, has not translated into substantial numbers of women populating key creative roles in film – as directors, cinematographers or writers. The history of women’s cinema in the twentieth century has been a history of moments rather than of permanent change. Barbara Streisand’s announcement that ‘the time has come’, in handing Kathryn Bigelow the first Best Director Oscar awarded to a woman, quickly began to look hollow (Dargis, 2010; Chaney, 2012) and eight years later even more so. Women are still a rarity as directors on large mainstream films, which suggests more intransigent resistances across the industry. Therefore, continued feminist analysis, both quantitative and qualitative, is still valid; the latter addressing issues of culture and discourse in the film industry and its effects (Francke, 2013).

Current vital qualitative work, outside the scope of this thesis, has investigated the cultural privileging of certain kinds of genres over others, which results in the devaluing of women’s authorship in forms such as romantic comedy (see Radner, 2011; Jermyn, 2017). Recent feminist critical response has also sought to challenge approaches to gender and genre (Harrod & Paszkiewicz, 2018), including the established notion that women’s representations are adequately theorised as subversive or ‘counter-cinema’ (Johnston, 1973, p.27). The question of language used in feminist study will be important in relation to the ideas of women’s cinema proposed and how these can be developed through considering the woman filmmaker in the paratext.

Questions are emerging concerning an author and auteur’s agency and the

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inability of women to sustain visibility in terms of numbers and forms of inheritance in the film industry. Where Anderson could appeal to his relationship with Demme, there is no equivalent for female filmmakers. For feminist analysis, therefore, modern film culture consistently represents a contradiction and compromise, progress and failure. This is both in terms of women characters onscreen and the presence of a woman director and other creatives. Kathryn Bigelow's Oscar win for her war film, *The Hurt Locker* (Kathryn Bigelow, 2008, USA), demonstrated the complex forces that arguably sustain the status quo. Bigelow's success has not proved to be a harbinger of substantial and sustained change for women, and remains compromised as it is an isolated example, by a woman working in a male-orientated genre.

The sense of this isolation, of women as perpetual pioneers in the film industry, is evidenced by a recent editorial in film journal *Sight & Sound*, written by its resident editor, Nick James. Introducing a special issue on women's filmmaking, a selection of one hundred important women filmmakers entitled 'The Female Gaze', he reviewed his own approach to film genealogy as follows:

while Denis and Martel are among my favourite active filmmakers, I realise that I've never properly tried to think through the works of either of them in the way I have with Haneke and Tarkovsky [...] Tarkovsky made seven features; Denis has made a dozen. Can you imagine a programme curated to underscore the influence of Denis on ten films directed by men? (James, 2015).

From an established male critic, this passing mea culpa affirms a more intransigent issue: that women directors are excluded from the narratives of the history and development of cinema, even where they are present and working. Decades of film feminist scholarship have uncovered women directors who have worked throughout cinema's history, such as Dorothy Arzner (Johnston, 1975; Mayne, 1995) Ida Lupino

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(Kuhn, 1995), Alice Guy Blaché (McMahan, 2003; Simon & Gaines, 2009) and Lois Weber (Stamp, 2015). Further work outside the scope of this thesis, has uncovered women working in other roles behind the camera (Ball & Bell, 2016). In the case of film pioneer, Alice Guy Blaché, who began making films in the 1890s, many of her actual films have disappeared. The story of her career was recovered through feminist scholarship and, yet, she remains a shadowy figure in wider film histories. This is against the dominance of those, such as Griffith, Vertov or Meliès, for example, as the apparent fathers of film language (see Musser, 1994).

Turning from quantitative evidence, this thesis adopts a qualitative approach to the paratext to understand how the perpetuation of these public discourses, such as those evidenced by Shoard's article (2018) and James's editorial (2015), can be countered by the discourse adopted by women filmmakers speaking of their own film practice. Therefore, the dissemination of this recovery of women filmmakers outside of the feminist film community still remains limited, often contextualised by special editions (such as the one issued by *Sight & Sound* above) and, thus, perpetuating a discourse of women filmmakers as unusual, marginal or separate. As B. Ruby Rich stated: 'how does one formulate an understanding of a structure that insists on our absence even in the face of our presence?' (quoted in Citron et al, 1978, p.87). Her question, posed in 1978, could be referring to James's 2015 editorial as an example of the silencing discursive and psychical structures in play; four decades later, these structures still continue to manufacture and sustain the exclusion of women from inheritance and genealogy.

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B. Ruby Rich indicates the importance of feminist scholarship. Asserting a presence, in the face of perpetual discourses of absence or silence, has been a key objective of feminist scholarship since the 1970s. Part of this work has been to conceive what a woman's or women's cinema would constitute, institutionally and discursively. This thesis will consider what a new constitution of a women's cinema may be, based on the performance in paratext. First, therefore, it is necessary to consider previous feminist scholarship to understand how that term has evolved to date.

### **Women's Practice - A New Women's Cinema**

This following section of the literature review considers why a female filmmaker's performance in paratext has political potential. This will be by returning to several preoccupations of feminist film study which recur because they are important. Feminist scholarship has looked to counter conventional cinema's silencing of female subjectivity, especially the absence of female desire in cinematic representation. It has brought forward ideas a "woman's" or a "women's" cinema as the answer. The key question is whether the direct address of the female filmmaker in paratext can help to create a further intervention into this perceived silence and absence of female subjectivity and desire, by contributing to a new notion of a women's cinema.

### **Feminist Film Scholarship and Women's Authorship**

Ideas of a women's or a woman's cinema emerged from a feminist, psychoanalytical critique of mainstream cinema from the 1970s onwards. Mainstream cinema, according to this scholarship, constituted a patriarchal system of language

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which had to be challenged and replaced. Ideas of a women's cinema emerged as a response and an act of resistance.

The terms 'woman' and 'women' will appear across this thesis in various theoretical contexts. For the purposes of this part of the literature review, the term woman is important as it was employed by feminist, psychoanalytical film scholars to critique the patterns of representation, construction and spectatorship which were perceived as essentially patriarchal. These scholars employed the term to denote a symbolic signifier which functioned in patriarchal systems of language as an object of exchange. This can be understood through the influential work of Claire Johnston (1973) and Laura Mulvey (1975), who identified from different psychoanalytical perspectives that 'woman' was visible onscreen but this figure was an empty signifier as far as any kind of feminine subjectivity was concerned. Both scholars used Christian Metz's theories regarding the operation of the cinematic mechanism, his conception of its primary and secondary levels of identification (1977). Drawing on Metz, they argued that cinema assumed a male spectator and they contended that the figure of woman onscreen was constructed to satisfy male patterns of desire and looking. For Johnston, the representation of woman onscreen was a 'pseudo-centre' (1973, p.26), an empty vessel by which male castration anxiety could be alleviated through the specular form. She illustrated this through the androgynous figure of Marlene Dietrich in *The Blue Angel* (Josef von Sternberg, 1930, Germany), arguing that the female star represented a less threatening 'non-male' presence onscreen whilst 'woman as woman is largely absent' (1973, p.26). In Mulvey's subsequent analysis, woman was onscreen but only as a passive object, satisfying male patterns of spectatorship and, through her fetishised beauty, assuaging male

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castration anxieties through the exaggerated spectacle of her glamourised body (Mulvey, 1975). Mulvey adopted a polemical strategy (according to Merck, 2007) to argue how women functioned as an object of exchange within the specular economy of a cinema that was, by default, patriarchal. Thus, these scholars' psychoanalytical approach, combined with their analysis of the enunciative structures of film, demonstrated how female desire was not simply silent or absent but was silenced or absented by the mechanism of the cinema.

In the following decade, feminist scholarship expanded both the examination of film from a psychoanalytical perspective, to ascertain the patterns of identification, and explore the enunciative structures of cinema. Feminist scholars found that the idea of silencing provided the right metaphor to explore women's subjectivity in cinema; Annette Kuhn, for example, argued that female desire, as part of female subjectivity, manifested as 'the unspoken, or the unspeakable, in a text – its repressions' and that these were related to what Kuhn termed 'the feminine' (1994, p.104). Repressions included 'aspects of sexuality' and the 'discourse of the woman' (1994, p.104). Kuhn argued that Dorothy Arzner's *Christopher Strong* (1933) represented the way that conventional narrative represented a struggle since it 'does begin to articulate, even if it finally represses, the "feminine voice"' (1982, p.94-5). This indicated that female desire was *silenced* by the enunciative structures of the text, not voluntarily silent. Teresa de Lauretis similarly argued that the movement of film narrative negated expressions of women's desire. The typical narrative was inscribed by a particular kind of drive and movement onto the female character onscreen: 'the itinerary of the female's journey, mapped from the very start on the territory of her own body [...] is

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guided by a compass point [...] to the fulfilment of his desire' (de Lauretis, 1984, p. 133).

For de Lauretis, these enunciative structures within film were simply another example of the patriarchal 'discursive and representational structures' (1984, p.165) which sustained women in a position of non-subjectivity in forms which represented heterosexual desire. The narrative impetus of any film was towards realising *his* desire, in which woman's role was as object and not subject (1984, p.133).

Thus, these feminist analysts established an interaction between desire and the enunciative structures of the film through psychoanalysis as a discursive framework. This notion of desire would be subject to a number of re-imaginings via this scholarship. One film form apparently already responsive to questions of female desire was the so-called 'woman's film', a sub-genre of the melodrama which flourished in 1940s Hollywood. This was a critically-constituted sub-genre, which Christine Gledhill demonstrated could be productive for feminist study because of the way its rhetoric employed pathos (1987, p.46) to represent the limits of conventional society. What has been repressed through society's structures was indicated through melodrama's excesses in mise-en-scene and music. Mulvey indicated that melodrama functioned to lay bare the contradictions in women's everyday experience rather the recovery of something repressed: 'ideological contradiction is the overt mainspring and specific content of melodrama, not a hidden, unconscious thread to be picked up only by special critical processes' (1987, p.75). The woman's film, therefore, was constituted of contradiction and suffering. However, Mary Ann Doane argued, using a psychoanalytical perspective, that this apparent access to subjectivity was

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compromised. Examining the enunciative structures of the woman's film text, such as camera movement, revealed a silencing or absencing of female subjectivity. Alfred Hitchcock's *Rebecca* (1940, USA), for example, featured Maxim de Winter's (Laurence Olivier) re-enactment of his wife, Rebecca's, death. Doane argued that 'just as the tracking subjective shot guarantees that the story of the woman literally culminates as the image of the man, the construction of the dialogue allows Maxim to appropriate Rebecca's I' (1987, p.174). She concluded that: 'the woman's film does not provide us with an access to a pure and authentic female subjectivity, much as we might like it to do' (1987, p.4). In fact, the sub-genre's feminine subjectivity was: 'stylised [...]. The genre returns us to the familiar scenarios of waiting, giving, sacrificing, and mourning ennobled and made acceptable by the very fact of their narrativisation' (1987, p.180). Woman, in the woman's film, was spoken over both literally within the enunciative structures and through a repeated, naturalised narrative which emphasised other narrative outcomes than the fulfilment of her desire. In Doane's words, mass culture was focussed on 'respeaking' enculturated forms of desires (1987, p.180). Thus, all of these theorists established what may be termed specular, narrative and generic "economies", an appropriate term since it recognises how an idea of 'woman' had become a symbolic object as part of a patriarchal system of exchange.

These same theorists looked to find an answer through various notions of a women's cinema from their differing perspectives; however conceived, this institution, practice or shared language would answer the silencing of female subjectivity through addressing and liberating forms of female desire. Mulvey's answer was a rejection of mainstream cinema in favour of an avant-garde form, one

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which would disrupt the language of conventional cinema and would work towards a self-reflexive cinematic language of 'passionate detachment' (1975, p.14). Johnston's idea was for a 'women's cinema' in which 'our collective fantasies must be released'; a cinema which 'must embody the working through of desire' (1973, p.30). Thus, she associated women's film authorship naturally and directly with women's expression of desire and as part of a 'collective endeavour of a women's cinema' (Johnston, 1975, p. 30). Importantly, de Lauretis and Doane emphasised women's cinema as a means of responding to the 'respeaking' of women's desires through mass culture (Doane, 1987, p.180). De Lauretis argued that the 'contradiction' of female desire in 'women as social subject' (1984, p.49) could be worked through to counteract their subjugation in the 'field of cultural desire' (1984, p.49). Both theorists remained focussed on the text, stating that it was necessary to move away from 'normative narratives' (de Lauretis, 1984, p.180) and for Doane, the answer was to find a 'means of making these gestures and poses [of the woman's film] fantastic, literally incredible' (1987, p.180).

This thesis adopts their acknowledgement of female desire as a key marker of female subjectivity and engages in the continuing search to find a definition of women's cinema which can represent a more sustained 'feminine voice' (Kuhn, 1994, p.95). This means, as suggested by the analysis above, working at the site of a contradiction between theoretical approaches which tend towards essentialist notions - female, femininity and desire - and the need to remain connected to women's social realities, their inequalities and to understand women as social subjects (as de Lauretis (1984) and Doane (1987) indicated).

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Firstly, the limitations of theoretical and methodological approaches positively indicate the importance of moving into new areas for research such as the paratext. Psychoanalytical literature established how important the expression of desire was to women's subjectivity and women's cinema. However, as these interventions evolved, they met a methodological problem. The influence of the poststructuralist turn in literary theory meant a move away from examining the author of the text, a particular problem for feminist scholarship at this time. Poststructuralism heralded the 'death' of the author as an interpretative paradigm in literary studies and a reorientation towards 'readerly' rather than 'writerly' texts (Barthes, 1977). Shifting from an idea of the author as the originating consciousness meant that texts could be, according to Roland Barthes, examined 'without history, biography, psychology' (1977, p.148). Poststructuralism, therefore, engendered a text-centred, ahistorical interest in the enunciative structures of film texts.

Benveniste considered spoken forms of language at the base of theorising enunciation more generally. He argued that, in the appropriation of language into an act of enunciation, the speaker always carries an awareness of an addressee, in his words the 'relation I-you' (Benveniste, 2014, p.143). This relationship is 'real or imagined, individual or collective' (Benveniste, 2014, p.144). This is relevant to women filmmakers who, in their public acts of enunciation in the paratext, imply a certain audience or context for themselves. This may lead them, for example, to make choices to speak in different identities, such as auteur or woman. Benveniste made a link between the act of enunciation and the constitution of subjectivity: 'It is in and through language that man constitutes himself as a subject' (1971, p.224)'. Benveniste provides a way of thinking through the components of this act of speaking (1971), by

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his distinction between the statement, the '*énoncé*' (the statement) and the '*énonciation*' (the act of speaking). It is the form of '*discours*', the adoption of a first or second person narrator position, rather than '*histoire*', an impersonal third party mode (1971, p.108). Applying Benveniste's linguistic model, it is possible to recognise how these women filmmakers speak from a constructed persona and towards an implied audience.

Focussing on '*discours*' rather than '*histoire*' (Benveniste, 1971) moves this analysis away from the questions that arose, for feminist scholarship, with the advent of poststructuralism in film analysis. This theoretical approach articulated subjectivity with the language of the films and the author became the 'auteur-construct' (Wollen, 1972, p.167) an effect of the text only, identified via 'unconscious patternings of desire' (1972, p.167-8). For feminist scholarship, therefore, work on theorising female agency was destabilised before it had been fully established (Mayne, 1990).

The erosion of the importance of the biographical figure of the author weighted the textual marker as the most important element in film analysis. This drove the development of feminist scholarship, which examined the patterns of enunciation in the text, attributing to them evidence of femininity and construing them as markers of female authorship. This produced a number of problematic effects, due to the separation of the text and authorial agency, such as the privileging of silence or irony as textual markers for identifying women's films. In arguing for female authorship, many feminist approaches found female expression in patterns of silence, irony or rupture in language forms. This is not an untenable but a problematic position when

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considered in relation to authorship because of the assumptions that are being made about a female language and its articulation with an originating figure.

For example, Sue Thornham described how Dorothy Arzner had effectively become a set of ‘discursive disjunctures’ for Claire Johnston in the 1970s (2012, p. 27); in Thornham's view, this arose out of Johnston’s political need to establish a ‘woman’s discourse’ functioning to ‘dislocate and subvert’ and to ‘triumph over non-existence’ (Johnston in Thornham, 2012, p.27). Reading the use of irony and rupture in this way asserts that agency in women’s authorship is discoverable mainly in a pattern of marginal action and of the language of interruption.

A greater danger is how the metaphor of silence, which had been used polemically by Johnston and Mulvey in their first critiques, grew in feminist scholarship to characterise women’s desire in cinema. Where analysis of enunciation dominated, feminist film scholarship evolved a persistent association of the language of silence as *representative* of women’s cinema. E. Ann Kaplan noted, as long ago as 1983, that interpreting the silence of filmmaker Marguerite Duras’s female characters as expressive of their social exclusion seemed ‘at best a temporary, and desperate, strategy, a defense against domination, a holding operation, rather than a politics that looks towards women’s finding a viable place for themselves in culture’ (1983, p.103). In fact, this interpretation of silence perpetuated ‘patriarchal myths’ which ‘function to position women as silent, absent and marginal’ (1983, p.34). In a similar vein, de Lauretis’s study of desire in Nicolas Roeg’s *Bad Timing* (1980, Italy) argued that ‘if “nowhere” and “now” are the place and time of feminine desire, they can only be

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stated as negativity, as borders; this is what the film finally says, and it is the most it can “say” (1984, p.99).

This is especially true where this metaphor has developed outside of its originating psychoanalytical, theoretical context, following the theory’s abandonment by conventional film studies (Rodowick, 1994; Bordwell & Carroll, 1996) and even feminist scholars suggest that psychoanalysis might be exhausted as a theoretical approach (Kuhn, 2004). In this kind of analysis, social stereotypes are used to examine film representations (Radner and Stringer, 2011; Mayer, 2016b) or to discuss cinematic language as detached from psychoanalytical patterns of identification (for example, Artt 2013, Brooks, 2014). Moreover, this has occurred in academic journals that had, previously, foregrounded the function of the apparatus and identification as part of their feminist work.

This thesis contends that these approaches are in danger of reasserting the very patriarchal notions of repression that Johnston and Mulvey challenged. Turning to the woman filmmaker in paratext is posed as a challenge to these retrograde steps in scholarship. What is required is maintaining, as some scholars have done, a determination to link the idea of a female language of desire to a ‘viable place [...] in culture’ (Kaplan, 1983, p.103) via a socially-situated analysis. The performance of the paratextual persona, as adopted by the filmmaker, can be that of a socially-situated subject who may craft a narrative of her own desire as part of the ‘many stories’ (Kluge quoted in Corrigan, 1990, p.55) that are possible in paratext; this is the potential of the woman who has a story to tell to contextualise the cinematic acts of enunciation she has created. The female filmmaker in paratext is a crucial

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representation of the originating consciousness of female desire. By moving outside of the text, to the paratext, it is possible to bring to life a subject who is the hero of her own narrative; a socially-situated woman, who has the possibility of using that space of 'transaction' (Genette, 1991) to tell something of an individual desire and subjectivity that could have, as Johnston hoped for, meaning for the 'collective endeavour of a women's cinema' (Johnston, 1975, p. 30). The elements of this performance which construct the biographical author are key to creating a socially-situated figure in paratext; therefore, the next section considers this in more depth.

### **Return of the Biographical Author**

Feminist scholars recognised that the poststructuralist turn had removed an important site for political intervention, in the figure of the biographical female author as a socially-situated individual. In Judith Mayne's words, the person could not be ignored, since 'no matter how tenuous, fractured, or complicated, there is a connection between the writer's gender, her personhood, and her texts' (Mayne, 1990, p.90). Judith Mayne's own return to a more biographical approach to Dorothy Arzner was driven by unanswered questions of desire, to discover Arzner's 'particular or distinctive inflection to the representation of female desire' (1990, p.100). However, confined to a textually-determined approach it risked being, as Thornham said of Claire Johnston's work on Arzner, a reductive analysis of the director as a set of 'discursive disjunctures' (2012, p.27).

In the paratext, there are different possibilities arising from the act of enunciation by the female filmmaker. Through both their content ('*énoncé*' - Benveniste, 1971) and the act of speaking ('*énonciation*' - Benveniste, 1971) the

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female auteur can mobilise her biography to counter the movement away from social realities towards essentialist interpretations of silence and rupture; instead, their biographies - and the way they produce a performance of them - introduce the complexities of women working in their particular cultures and institutional environments, negotiating the languages they have been given.

The introduction of the filmmaker's own life story follows a well-established pattern in feminist scholarship generally, which has always recognised personal stories of women - when published - as containing political resonance (Heilbrun 1989; Beizer, 2009). Mobilising women's biography is important because it articulates a different form of *social* experience to men's. Feminist scholar Carolyn Heilbrun contended new stories needed to be told about women's lives, ones turning away from the 'individual erotic and familial plot', a comment which recalls typical 'woman's film' narratives, to the finding of 'female narratives' where 'women exchange stories, where they read and talk collectively of ambitions, and possibilities, and accomplishments' (1989, p.46).

The importance of women's real lives permeated the film analysis of the 1970s and 1980s; in 1982, Annette Kuhn asserted that there was a 'radical potential of simply putting "real" women and their lives on the cinema screen' (1994, p.148). It was, Kuhn, who, quoting Julia Lesage, argued for, the power of 'the ordinary details of women's lives, their thoughts – told directly by the protagonists to the camera – and their frustrated but sometimes successful attempt to enter and deal with the public world of work and power' (Lesage in Kuhn, 1994, p.148).

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If the biographical were so important to feminist scholarship, it has been underexplored in relation to the figure of the biographical female filmmaker. Kuhn's conception of a woman's cinema was for 'films that were not just *about* women, ordinary working women, housewives, mothers, but were also *by* women' [original emphasis] (1994, p.ix). Thus, an intervention this thesis can make is to move into considering the paratext as a particular kind of autobiography. Speaking of their lives as women filmmakers can function as a radical reimagining of women's lives, one which articulates the ordinary and the quotidian with the act of artistic agency. As individual auteurs, they will speak with individuality as women *and* as auteurs; however, its feminist potential will be considered as part of collective action, towards Johnston's idea of releasing 'collective fantasies' (1975, p.30).

The ordinariness of these women, therefore, is an important feminist element as it interacts with their unique position as women artists. Heilbrun identified the power of the artistic biography, characterising George Sand's influence on her literary circle as a lost narrative: 'what is most important, the story of her life has not become an available narrative for women to use in making fictions of their lives' (1989, p.38). This directly references the possibilities of real women's lives, lived fully *within* the terms of the social symbolic, as inheritance models for future artists. Similarly, literary theorist Nancy Miller, stated that 'it matters' that the novels of the Brontë sisters was the 'writing of female anger, desire, and selfhood' which 'issued from a female pen' (Miller quoted in Thornham, 2012, p.28). This supported Thornham's objective, via her own psychoanalytical analysis, to consider how an artistic biography could be rendered onscreen, within the text, through the role of a female-orientated screen surrogate; this included characters of women who write and create such as Sybylla

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Melvyn (Judy Davis) in Gillian Armstrong's *My Brilliant Career* (1979, Australia). Working in the paratext situates this narrative where women are, in reality, bringing together their lives and their artistic labour.

As it is socially-situated, the authorial figure is, in Catherine Grant's words: 'the most accessible point at which the text is tied to its own social and historical outside' (2001, p.121). Grant, responding to the poststructuralist turn and its impact on feminist studies of agency, pointed to the limitations of studying agency through 'textual energies' and 'preoccupations' (2001, p.121-122). Moreover, text-based 'conceptual frameworks' engaged only with the 'most manifest' of the 'actions actually performed by their women directors' or 'the more obvious forms of social and cultural constraints on them' (2001, p.122). Her work is particularly relevant here in the focus on the 'actions' of women directors, as they are *socially-situated* individuals, experiencing particular 'cultural constraints'. Grant, as other feminist scholars, saw the political importance of the female filmmaker; however, she went further in conceiving of a new methodology which would aim towards a 'much more complex understanding of the mediations between agent and cultural product, enabling the earlier text/author impasses to be broken down' (2001, p.122).

This study, being located in these women's narratives of their practice, enables a new consideration of desire as it is related to the filmmaker and their labour. It imagines a new addition to the 'mediations of agent and cultural product' (2001, p. 122) all of which are most visible through the way in which these filmmakers discuss their own films and their practice of cinematic authorship. Staying within the realm of the textual marker for analysis means having to presuppose a direct relationship of the

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figure of the women filmmaker with the language of the text. Taking up the narrative spoken by women filmmakers in paratext enables the aforementioned more ‘complex understanding’ of the mediation of authorial agency in relation to the texts they produce.

In arguing for the political potential of the paratext, it is important to recognise what happens in the mediation ‘between agent and cultural product’ (2001, p.122) in specific contexts; in Toril Moi’s words, where women have engaged in ‘a *defensive* speech act’ (2008, p.265) [original emphasis] of asserting that ‘I am not a *woman* writer’ [my emphasis] it is necessary to ‘search for the provocation’ (2008, p.265). Where the biographical woman writer – or filmmaker – asserts her difference from her textual material and denies the relationship of her biological sex to the cultural production in which she has agency, feminist analysis meets a political problem.

Luce Irigaray’s theoretical and philosophical writing is the most effective way to bring together the themes above and to explore the conscious political choice to assert “I *am* a woman writer” or, in Irigaray’s words, I ‘speak (as) woman’ (1985b) in the paratext. Focussing on the speaking woman filmmaker in paratext counters the political dangers of relying on a metaphor of silence or absence as a form of women’s *expression* in the textual marker. Importantly, Irigaray challenges the established discourses, such as psychoanalysis, in their efficacy as a language of women’s subjectivity. She argued that Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan’s theories situated women as silent through their focus on the development of male psychical identity. In effect, therefore, Irigaray believed that the only discourses available which, to date,

had considered human subject formation had silenced the possibility of women's desire. She expressed this polemically: ‘

If we enter into desire by becoming objects of the desire of/for the father what do we know about our identity and our desires? Nothing. That manifests itself in somatic pain, in screams and demands, and they are quite justified’ (Irigaray, 1991, p.52).

The question of how a woman filmmaker can articulate her own desire or ‘collective fantasies’ (Johnston, 1973, p.30) in paratext, as part of building a new women's cinema, is best considered through Irigaray's notion of *parler femme*. As discussed below, this can act as an interpretative paradigm for women filmmakers as agents of desire in the paratext.

### **Speaking in the Paratext: Luce Irigaray and *parler femme***

The paratext is a place which provides a space to explore feminist concerns regarding authorship allied to women's subjectivity, especially as it is manifested through expressions of desire. Thus, this thesis is concerned with women's right to speak publicly, and so the origins of that silence, as revealed through the psychoanalytical theory of Irigaray, are directly relevant. To understand the seat of this repression through Irigaray's work enables this thesis to move from critique to considering feminist possibilities because Irigaray's writing itself moves from critique to alternative paradigms for women's public enunciation. And since this thesis moves away from the textual marker, Irigaray's idea of *parler femme* becomes relevant because it is so directly concerned with the action of women's voices and what can happen when women speak and speak to each other.

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Irigaray's *parler femme* was an intervention to see patterns of language and discourse from a different philosophical and psychoanalytical perspective, to establish new positions from which women can speak. It is not a single idea, but an evolving concept arising out of Irigaray's critique of fundamental omissions in the psychoanalytical theory of Freud and Lacan: these include both the failure to fully conceive of feminine sexuality and of the female sex as having its own 'specificity' (Irigaray, 1985b, p.69). Irigaray also argued that it failed to conceptualise the mother-daughter relationship as part of the psychoanalytical narratives of subjectivity formation. In respect of the former omission, Irigaray critiqued Freud's story of the Oedipus Complex as negating the subjectivity of women by the way that it assumes a similar trajectory in girls' development to boys. In Irigaray's words, women's subjectivity is elided: 'THE LITTLE GIRL IS THEREFORE A LITTLE MAN [...] A little man with a smaller penis. A disadvantaged little man' (1985a, p.26). Her strength of feeling, visible in her use of capitals, galvanised Irigaray to move from critique to a series of determinedly utopian possibilities. These are directly relevant to the case studies since they provide a politically powerful interpretative framework for their performances in paratext.

Irigaray has argued that women's position is complicated by their lack of access to language, except through recourse to "'masculine" systems of representation' which 'disappropriate her from her relation to herself and to other women' (1985b, p.85). Relevant is Irigaray's distinction that: 'speaking (as) woman is not speaking of woman. It is not a matter of producing a discourse of which woman would be the object, or the subject' (1985b, p.135). Writing at the time of the women's liberation movement, she argued that it was only in 'these places' which are 'of women among

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themselves' that 'something of a speaking (as) woman is heard' (1985b, p.135). Irigaray contended that 'women do not dare to speak (as) woman outside the context of non-integration' (1985b, p.135). However, the acts of enunciation by women directors in public take place within a social space discursively dominated by men. These acts may, therefore, enable Irigaray's hope that '[S]peaking (as) woman would, among other things, permit women to speak *to* men' ((1985b, p.136). This last comment directly recalls Kaplan's idea of a 'viable place [...] in culture' (1983, p. 103).

*Parler femme* is a concept by which Irigaray reimagines subjectivity formation through the action of language; it denotes forms of discourse between women through which feminine subjectivity could be formed in and of itself, rather than as a negative mirror image of the male psychical story, as perpetuated by conventional psychoanalytical discourses. Its accepted translation is to 'speak (as) woman'. In her early essay, 'Questions' (1985b), Irigaray began her search for what she termed 'langage', meaning a system of language, which women could adopt. Irigaray, in 'Questions' makes a distinction between speaking 'of woman' from 'speaking (as) woman' (1985b, p.135). The former may produce 'a discourse of which the woman would be the object, or the subject' (1985b, p.135). Within the established context, Irigaray argued, that 'every discussion *about* the question of woman [...] to speak *of* or *about* woman may always boil down to [...] a recuperation of the feminine within a logic that maintains it in repression, censorship, nonrecognition' [original emphasis] (1985b, p.78). The alteration from plural, women, to the singular, woman, indicates a movement from a plurality of voices to a symbolic system of speech in which women are repressed and kept as an object of exchange.

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Catherine Porter and Carolyn Burke, in their translator's notes for this first use of the term, claimed it as a strategy to 'disrupt or alter the syntax of discursive logic' and to 'express the plurality and mutuality of feminine difference and mime the relations of "self-affection"' (Irigaray, 1985b, p.222). This encapsulates, for this thesis' purpose, the role of *parler femme* in disturbing current discourses, in expressing the variation in women's individual experiences and the importance of relationships, particularly that of mother and daughter, as part of subjectivity formation. It is a movable concept, in Porter and Burke's words, not so much a 'definitive method' as 'an experimental process or a discovery of the possible connections between female sexuality and writing' (Irigaray, 1985b, p.222).

Irigaray's notion was built on the idea that women cannot find themselves in the discourses constituted in the dominant social order in which masculine economies of exchange have become the norm and naturalised. This constitutes an important question for this thesis, whether public acts of enunciation can point towards an exchange which could be 'speaking (as) woman' which could disrupt naturalised patterns of engagement. This directly contravenes the notions of silence, recognising that women have been "silenced" in the social system as it stands.

To 'speak (as) woman' (Irigaray, 1985b, p.135) needs to invoke a new, culturally-constructed speaking exchange, in a differently-constructed system of language, through which women understand their own subjectivity from a position outside of patriarchal repression. To understand the nature of that repressive symbolic order, it is necessary to consider Lacan's theories, briefly, especially in the light of

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feminist critiques of psychoanalysis (Mitchell, 1974; Felman, 1981; Rose, 1986; Grosz, 1990).

Lacan conceived of a relationship between three spaces – the imaginary, the real and the symbolic – which govern human, psychical experience through language. For the purposes of this thesis, it is the relationship between the imaginary and the symbolic that is most relevant; the way in which woman is repressed from one system (the symbolic) to be consigned to the other (the imaginary). Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis interpreted the Lacanian idea of the symbolic further as a series of structures of language ‘whose discrete elements operate as signifiers (linguistic model)’; and that this series ‘belong’ in a relationship, described as ‘the symbolic order’ (1973, p.440). This can be summarised as a system of ‘customs, institutions, laws, mores, norms, practices, rituals, rules, traditions [...] of cultures and societies (with these things being entwined in various ways with language)’ (*Stamford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, 2013).

In Lacan’s development of his theories of subjectivity formation, the acquisition of psychical identity is interlaced with language; most importantly, he argued that the individual’s entry *into* language and into the social, symbolic order is sexed (for example, Lacan, 2001, p.72). As Elizabeth Grosz stated in her feminist critique, ‘the sexuality about which the analysand talks is in fact the sexuality or desire manifested by and hidden in language’ (1990, p.59). Thus, Grosz identifies how the subject in Lacan’s theories enters into sexuality through language, as part of their entry into the symbolic order. This symbolic order is associated with ‘the name of the father’ which, in Lacan’s words, since ‘the dawn of history’ has ‘identified his person with the figure

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of the law' (2001, p.74). The male subject takes up his place in this system, compensated for his loss of the relationship with the mother's body (in the imaginary, pre-language phase of individual development) with a place as a 'subject in culture' (Grosz, 1990, p.71). Moving into the symbolic is different for females: 'positioned as castrated, passive' they can only be 'an object of desire for men rather than a subject who desires' (Grosz, 1990, pp.71-2).

This recalls the feminist analysis above regarding the film's enunciative structures. Irigaray offers a counter position to Lacan, although not by disputing Lacan's theoretical ideas but, instead, arguing that this *was* women's experience of subjectivity in the symbolic order, that they entered into a symbolic sphere in which there was no language, no system of signifiers, to form their own specific cultural subjectivity and were 'led to submit, to follow the dictates issued univocally by the sexual desire, discourse, and law of man' (Irigaray, 1985a, p.49). Thus, Irigaray looks to formulate analysis around systems of language and of interaction. Any critique should be:

conscious of the form, the forms, of our discourse [...] to reveal who is speaking, to whom, about what, with what means [...] Beneath what is being said, it is possible to discover the subject, the subject's economy, potential energy, relations with the other and with the world. The subject may be masked, bogged down, buried, covered up, paralysed, or may be engendered, generated, may become, and grow through speech (1993a, p. 176).

This encapsulates how Irigaray's theories are focussed on acts of enunciation, the act of speaking as much as what is being said. Irigaray's concept of *parler femme* turns from criticism to address how women's relationships in culture could be constituted, based on the possibility of a speaking exchange directly between them. Irigaray's psychoanalytical training (at Lacan's Ecole Freudienne) led her to return to the

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mother-daughter dyad, in her view neglected by psychoanalysis. What is so important about Irigaray's work is this recognition that it is the erosion of the role of the mother from the discourses of psychoanalysis itself that needs addressing. It is this form of psychological silence, the silence of the mother in patriarchal systems, that is relevant to this project.

Irigaray was early among feminist psychoanalytic theorists to place the recovery of the relationship between mother and daughter at the core of her work, especially at the centre of 'speaking (as) woman' (1985b, p.135). Using Derridean methods of deconstruction of psychoanalytical discourses she aimed 'to show the repressed and hidden underside of metaphysical constructions, what they conceal and yet depend on for their existence' (Whitford, 1991, p.7). According to Margaret Whitford, Irigaray uncovered 'the unacknowledged mother' (1991, p.7). This recognition inspired Irigaray's contention that 'our society and our culture operate on the basis of an original matricide' (1993b, p.11). Moreover, 'social order, our culture, psychoanalysis itself, are all insistent that the mother must remain silent, outlawed' (1993b, p.14). For Irigaray, 'one thing that has been singularly neglected, barely touched on, in the theory of the unconscious; *the relation of woman to the mother and the relation of women among themselves*' [original emphasis] (1985b, p. 124). In Irigaray's view, Freud and Lacan had failed to theorise this and had consigned these relations to a form of oblivion, to which Irigaray gave the name '*déréliction*'. Whitford, in introducing Irigaray's works into English, explained that this word as 'much stronger in French than in English'; it 'connotes for example the state of being abandoned by God, or, in mythology, the state of an Ariadne, abandoned on Naxos, left without hope, without

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help, without refuge. Women are abandoned outside the symbolic order; they lack mediation in the symbolic' (1991, pp. 77-8).

Irigaray argued directly with the discourse that had placed women in a state of '*déréliction*' resulting from Freud's influential premise. He stated that women identify with their mothers in the pre-Oedipal stage in 'affectionate attachment' and adopt her as a 'model'; however, the entry into the Oedipus Complex created an impetus by which the young girl 'seeks to get rid of her mother and take her place with her father' (2005, p.431). Irigaray described how the symbolic order rested on the 'murder' of the mother, or more significantly, the 'maternal function' which 'underlies the social order as well as the order of desire'; however, 'it is always restricted to the dimension of need' (1993b, p.10-11) and the relationship to the mother 'remains in the shadow of our culture, it is night and hell' or the 'dark continent par excellence' (1993b, p.10). This is an important repurposing of Freud's language, following his description of adult female sexuality as a "'dark continent" for psychology', emanating from women's "'inferior" self-regard through their 'lack of a sexual organ that is equal in value to the male one'(Freud, 2005, p.32). Irigaray argued that it is not the 'riddle of femininity' , as Freud reiterated, (2005, p.415) that is at issue. Instead, it the acts of enunciation by such as Freud or by Lacan themselves in constructing psychoanalytical theory that has consigned femininity and feminine relations to this place of darkness in psychoanalytical cultural discourse. By that action, they are silenced and made absent.

For the purpose of this thesis, the '*déréliction*' of the relationship between the mother and daughter can be challenged by a reconstitution through acts of

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enunciation, of ‘speaking (as) woman’ (Irigaray, 1985b, p.135) in the public sphere. Irigaray’s recognition that no language had been assigned to the mother-daughter relationship may help to establish a framework to interpret women’s modern public communication. Irigaray contends that daughters can recover their own subjectivity only by recuperating their relationship with their mothers. Therefore, it is through acts of enunciation, of finding modes of speaking exchange, that this relationship can be imagined even within the structures of the symbolic order:

We are talking about the woman who gives birth to a daughter, who brings up a daughter. How can the relationship between these two women be articulated? Here [...] is one place where the need for another “syntax”, another “grammar” of culture is crucial (1985b, p.143).

Irigaray’s conception of another “syntax” and “grammar” of culture’ foreshadows her concept of ‘systems of exchange’ (Irigaray, 1993d, p.75). In both concepts, she is arguing for ‘customs, institutions, laws, mores, norms, practices, rituals’ (*Stamford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, 2013) directly mirroring Lacan’s symbolic order. However, this time these will be in the service of women’s subjectivity.

Women’s talk in public, within the paratext, has potential to be part of a new set of ‘rites’ and new ‘systems of exchange’ (1993d, p.75) between women, ones in which they can establish a new “syntax” and “grammar” (Irigaray, 1985b, p.143). *Parler femme* enables this thesis to identify these exchanges as a political intervention, a way of countering woman as object in the cinema. Irigaray’s early theorising echoes Johnston and Mulvey’s characterisation of the male-orientated culture of desire in the film industry, when Irigaray states that ‘*the economy of exchange – of desire – is man’s business*’ [original emphasis] because ‘the exchange takes place between masculine subjects’ (Irigaray, 1985b, p.177). She argued that culture is ‘based upon

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the exchange of women' (1985b, p.170), in which the woman functions as a commodity. Women support the economy between men, as an object of value (in Marxist terms containing both 'use' and 'exchange' value (Marx, 1990) which puts men 'in touch with each other, in relations among themselves, women only fulfil this role by relinquishing their right to speech' (Irigaray, 1985b, p.190). In Irigaray's view, women's response should be 'socialising in a different way the relation to nature, matter, the body, language, and desire' (1985b, p.191).

Recovering the mother-daughter relationship, therefore, was at the heart of Irigaray's concept of *parler femme*. She conceived of new 'systems of exchange' (1993d, p.75) of which the acts of enunciation of these women filmmakers can be part. Irigaray and the other feminist scholars provide a framework for considering the possibilities inherent in fantasising the mother-daughter relationship in public culture. These are considered in more detail below.

### **Maternal Function, Fantasy and Systems of Exchange**

The mother-daughter dynamic, as Irigaray envisaged it, is part of a woman's key to her own subjectivity. Irigaray stated that: '[I]nnerness, self-intimacy' can for a woman 'be established or re-established only through the mother-daughter, daughter-mother relationship' which 'woman re-plays for herself. Herself with herself, in advance of any procreation'. It becomes a recovery that as a child and adult: 'she becomes capable of respecting herself in her childhood and in her maternal creative function. This is one of the most difficult gestures in our culture' (1993c, p.68). Elsewhere, she argues how this relationship, the 'enveloping between mother and daughter, daughter and mother, among women' (1993c, p.69) should resist a 'loss of

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self' but can establish a 'love of the same' which is so essential for identity formation (1993c, p.69). In Irigaray's words, for an 'ethics of the passions: *no love of other without love of same*' (1993c, p.104) [original emphasis].

Imagining new forms of desire for the mother-daughter relationship has been part of feminist scholars' work on cinema and desire, which has often considered how the relationship can be fantasised onscreen. Elizabeth Cowie's work on fantasy is important because she identified its dynamic value. She built on Laplanche and Pontalis' psychoanalytical work on the origins of sexuality (their assertion of a relationship between primary and secondary fantasy structures), proposing the 'mise-en-scene of desire' (1997, p.135), in which the spectator would have multiple and varied sexual identities to take up and to move between, fluidly. As Caroline Bainbridge later argued, there is an active and dynamic role for fantasy, which 'acts as a channel through which desire is able to make itself manifest' (2008, p.78).

Bainbridge built on Mayne's analysis that fantasy is more important for what it can do, rather than the content of the fantasies per se (Mayne, 1993, p.86). She argued that fantasy can be used as a 'structuring mechanism [...] to interrogate the socio-symbolic discourses that unquestioningly reinforce the matrix of their assumptions about the nature of desire and subjectivity' (Bainbridge, 2008, p.79). This is a crucial insight for this thesis and the performance of women filmmakers in paratext. It suggests that publicly-enacted fantasies can construct new narrative possibilities for women, including those concerning the mother-daughter relationship. These can disturb the regimes established through the existing symbolic order and, through these

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acts of enunciation, discover the female subject which may be ‘masked, bogged down, buried, covered up, paralysed’ (Irigaray, 1993a, p. 176).

What fantasies may be mobilised by the women filmmakers in paratext will be a focus of the case study analysis. It is only through these feminist scholars’ characterisation of the workings of fantasy that it is possible to interpret its function in the paratext. Kaja Silverman brought the pre-Oedipal relationship of mother to daughter into film analysis, directly exploring a concept allied to Irigaray’s idea of the mother’s ‘*déréliction*’ (Whitford, 1991, pp. 77-8) directly in relation to voice in films made by women. Silverman characterised the ‘maternal fantasmatic’ (1988), the imagery of the relationship of mother and child in the pre-symbolic space, looking specifically at how a desire for the mother may have been repressed in the symbolic:

Once we have recognised that unconscious desire is far from monolithic – that it is divided between at least two very different fantasmatic scenes – then it becomes possible to think of all sorts of discursive and relational strategies for activating the fantasmatic scene which corresponds to maternal desire, one which the symbolic does its best to cordon off and render inactive by denying it representational support (Silverman, 1988, p. 124).

For Silverman, in an analysis which echoes Irigaray’s preoccupations, it is important to explore where women’s film authorship can activate new forms of desire; to ‘situate the daughter’s passion for the mother within the symbolic’ and ‘to make it possible to speak for the first time about a genuinely oppositional desire – to speak about desire which challenges dominance from within representation and meaning’ (1988, p.124).

Bainbridge considered this further through Irigaray’s writing. She asserted how fantasising the maternal relation could explore a more fully-realised female subjectivity, through the ‘potential of fantasy’ (2008, p.81). Films which represent the

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fantasy of the lost mother, such as Carine Adler's *Under the Skin* (1997) explore the creation of female subjectivity based directly on the 'love for one's sex' (2008, p.81).

As Elizabeth Cowie argued, the power of the 'mise-en-scene of desire' was that it laid fantasy out in the public space of cinema (1997). The power of the story of the woman filmmaker in the paratext provides new material for the consideration of the action of fantasy and desire. Bainbridge explored how the functioning of fantasy in cinematic narrative might explore the recovery the mother-daughter relationship, towards expressing *parler femme* directly through film language (Bainbridge, 2008). Her analysis explored the 'closely woven relation between the imaginary and the maternal relation and between the maternal relation and a notion of feminine desire and subjectivity' (2008, p.98).

The question draws a different emphasis in relation to the voice of the filmmakers opposed to elements of the text and, therefore, draws on different aspects of Irigaray's work. Women filmmakers may mobilise positions that make them the subjects in exchange, and by which they may offer a different kind of discourse as discussed below. Women directors in paratext are socially-situated. They may face, as Irigaray argued, censorship: Irigaray noted that 'if, as a woman, who is also in public, you have the audacity to say something about your desire, the result is scandal and repression. You are disturbing the peace, disrupting the order of discourse' (1985b, p. 145).

### ***Parler Femme* - Enunciation and Genealogy**

Considering how these narratives of fantasy through the acts of enunciation might function socially is aided by Irigaray's work on *parler femme*. Irigaray has

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established the possibility of creating new ‘rites’ and ‘systems of exchange’ (1993d, p. 75) looking for a ‘currency of exchange, or else a nonmarket economy’ (1993d, p.79). She makes suggestions about how the intergenerational relationship can be symbolised, all as part of a speaking exchange between women. It is in acts of enunciation, in exchange, that mothers and daughters can create ‘subjective relations’ (1993e, p.41). Irigaray offers alternative forms of symbolic exchange, such as: ‘attractive images [...] of the mother-daughter couple’ and for ‘mothers-daughters to find or make objects they can exchange between themselves’ (1993e, p.42). In ‘verbal exchanges’, she suggests a modifier should be added to the subject, creating ‘I-woman (je-femme) talks to you-woman (tu-femme)’ (1993e, pp.43-4). The addition of the feminine modifier acknowledges precisely the dilemma women encounter in patriarchal society; in Irigaray’s words, to ‘obtain a subjective status equivalent to that of men, women must therefore gain recognition for their difference’ (1993e, p.41). A system of language in which women build ‘subjective relations between mothers and daughters (1993e, p.41) is Irigaray’s aim. This is effected through the power of talk. In Irigaray’s philosophy, ‘a symbolism has to be created among women if love among them is to take place. Right now, in fact, such a love is possible only among women who are able to talk to each other’ (1993c, p.104).

How far the female filmmaker’s performance in paratext can be seen, metaphorically, as a performance of artistic “motherhood” which can be incorporated into film inheritance, is one possibility to explore through the case studies. *Parler femme* can help this thesis find a basis for establishing a genealogy of women working in the film industry, through their talk about their practice, their lives and their fantasies. Their talk may challenge some orthodoxies of film theory discourse, which

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through its focus on '*la caméra-stylo*' (Astruc, 1968) has evolved into, in Irigaray's words, a discourse of 'technocratic imperialism' (1993e, p. 176). Its consistent focus on the workings of the cinematic, mechanistic tools reduces the importance of 'human values' (1993e, p. 176) in filmmaking. There may be possibilities, in the acts of enunciation, to formulate a new language which instead emphasises these 'human values' (1993e, p. 176).

Alongside this, Irigaray argued for a 'new ethics of sexual difference' (1993e, p. 177) which could move towards social equality and equality of language, directly through the incorporation of 'all the autobiographical narratives of today that have not been transposed into novels, short stories, legends, theories' (1993e, p.177). She saw the power of the 'autobiographical I' to be transformed into a 'different cultural I' through publication to contribute to this 'new ethics of sexual difference' (1993e, p. 177). In this way, she emphasised the importance of testimonial. As cultural figures, female directors can bring the 'autobiographical I' into speaking as a 'different cultural I' (1993e, p.177), being a movement from the individual life story to a public discourse. The expression, publicly, of the 'maternal creative function' (Irigaray, 1993c, p.68) suggests an enunciative exchange to contribute to building a genealogy from one generation to another and one which respects a 'new ethics' as it enacts women's social and psychical experiences fully in a public space.

If the paratextual statements of these women filmmakers can be transformed into a speaking exchange which can have cultural value, how far this can constitute a form of 'maternal function' (1993b, p.10-11) in the social symbolic has wider, social

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possibilities. Irigaray provides a paradigm for thinking of creativity, of production, of being sited beyond biological motherhood:

[Women] need to discover and declare that we are always mothers just by being women. We bring many things into the world apart from children, we give birth to many other things apart from children: love, desire, language, art, social things, political things, religious things, but this kind of creativity has been forbidden to us for centuries (1993b, p.18).

It is a means for understanding an idea of women as “cultural mothers” outside of the restrictive confines of biological motherhood and to consider how the ‘systems of exchange’ between women can give life to these objects (1993d, p.75). This is a discursive exchange through acts of enunciation focussed on, ‘love, desire, language, art, social things, political things, religious things’ (1993b, p.18). Crucially, it can function in this way because Irigaray has disarticulated this role from the biological state of motherhood and allied it with a wider concept of creativity.

This is significant for this thesis because it enables a new way of thinking about women’s practice in cinema. Talking about their own practice and creativity can become part of a system which women have lacked; a ‘social system that reflects their values’ through public ‘symbolic exchanges’ (1993d, p.81) which has for obscure reasons (in Irigaray’s view) been ‘repressed and censored’ (1993d, p.82). Irigaray asserts, as part of her argument here, that when ‘a woman shares her knowledge and experience with a larger female public, this is a contribution to women’s liberation’ (1993d, p.82). It is part, therefore, of an operation of ‘speaking (as) woman’ (1985b, p.135).

The implications of this become clear by returning to the opening of this thesis and the patriarchal genealogy that exists in film studies, where a director such as Paul

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Thomas Anderson can assume a return to previous generations of directors as “cultural fathers” in describing practice and process. In creating a story of practice, one which is available to be exchanged between women and communicated between generations, the possibility of a more sustained genealogy of women within cinema can be established; moreover, one which does not have to rely on textual markers to recover a women’s cinema.

It also moves women into the position of subject rather than object of discourse. Filmmaker Sally Potter, in her essay film *Thriller* (1979, UK), asked: ‘What if I had been the hero?’, a question that feminist scholar Thornham reiterated in 2012, indicating that this question of subjectivity has remained consistently at the centre of feminist research into creativity. Being ‘the hero’ in paratext may be one answer to this persistent conundrum. Women filmmakers in paratext offer a unique opportunity to study women and desire, in relation to their autobiography, not least because they are authors of desire through fantasy. Women filmmakers, within the context of the paratext, can be their own subject in a narrative of desire (adapting de Lauretis, 1984, p.133). Women talking in paratext, given the status of the auteur in film analysis as an idiosyncratic persona, provides a positively contradictory position, individualistic and yet a model for the collective.

### **The Modern Paratext**

Finally, the literature review needs to consider how the modern paratext can function as a site for this performance. The woman director has an opportunity to create a unique object for intergenerational exchange, through the presence of the

identifiable biographical auteur in this public space and the layered performances of the ‘many stories’ (Kluge quoted in Corrigan, 1990, p.55).

The testimony of women as cultural labourers can bring into play a new history of cinema, one based around their practice. It might create a different context for reading films other than the dominant, auteur-led forms of film criticism and film theory. Contemporary women filmmakers do not know the history into which they accede; furthermore, modern women filmmakers, those who have been working in the second half of the twentieth century, still face challenges in relation to the preservation and distribution of their work (see Mayer, 2016a). Inheriting practice from one generation to the next may be part of breaking the vacuum created by this silence into which women come, where they begin by not knowing their own history.

As a strategic position in which they can mobilise a performance, the paratext has been underexplored for its feminist political value. The auteur is a site more occupied by men than by women through the interaction of institutional exclusion (Lauzen, 2018) and public, popular discourses (James, 2015; Shoard, 2018).

As this study is concerned with women’s practice and their talk about that practice, there is no need to make a distinction between their work in film and in television. Three of the four featured filmmakers have worked in television at some point in their careers, albeit only briefly in Bigelow’s case; Potter is the only one to work solely in film. It is worth noting that their status in television culture is based on their status as film auteurs (Willmore, 2013). Television offers, increasingly, the funding and artistic freedom once only associated with cinema. HBO, for example, offers an institutional space for filmmakers of both genders in which ‘the writer-

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producer functions as a protector, guarantor and organiser of quality in the post-network, post-1996 television age' (Akass & McCabe, 2007, p.9) such that Steven Soderbergh's *The Knick* (2014-15, USA) was described by online film publication *Indiewire* as creating 'auteur TV, squared' (Adams, 2015). Similarly, Campion's television series, *Top of the Lake* (2013) was described as '*Jane Campion's* deep, dark and dreamlike mystery' [my emphasis] (Hanna, 2013), accentuating the importance of her auteurship, and Campion's Berlinale press conference questions focussed on her assessment of the artistic possibilities in her newly-adopted medium (Knecht, 2013). British film journal, *Sight & Sound*, now routinely carries reviews of television series directed by well-known film directors. Therefore, television has accrued credibility, both from a rise in production values, from greater capital investment and from the figure of the film auteur.

Looking at the modern paratext involves considering how the voice functions in cinematic space, especially the female voice. Silverman's 1988 analysis revolved around questions of space; in film, Silverman identified the restriction of women's voices to their onscreen, embodied presence as compared to the male voice, or voiceover, which can occupy the more disembodied spaces around the film. 'At its most crudely dichotomous, Hollywood pits the disembodied male voice against the synchronised female voice' (Silverman, 1988, p.39). The idea, that the voice of women is not heard in offscreen space, has been taken up by feminist scholars (Sjöberg, 2006). Doane engaged with cinema as a series of spaces, recognising the 'material heterogeneity of the cinema' (1980, p.40) is revealed in the slippage that can occur between the three 'types of spaces in play' being the 'space of the diegesis', the 'visible space of the screen' and the 'acoustical space of the theater' (1980, p.39). In

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this paradigm, the ‘voice-off’, contained outside of the frame but within the diegesis, underlines this ‘heterogeneity’ generating an ‘uncanny’ effect for the spectator (1980, p.40). In examining the use of voiceover, Doane argued that it speaks with ‘a certain authority’ and ‘without mediation to the audience [...] establishing a complicity between itself and the spectator’ (1980, p.42). This idea, of the interplay of space, enhances the thesis’ methodological approach to modern paratextual epitexts, such as DVD commentaries.

Here, Corrigan’s idea is of the ‘commercial drama of the movie’s source’ (1990, p.55) can be brought together with Barbara Klinger’s idea that the DVD commentary commands a ‘rhetoric of intimacy (i.e. “secrets” of the cinema) and mastery (i.e., technological expertise and media knowledge)’ enhancing a ‘sense of owning a personalized product’ (2006, quoted in Grant, 2008, p.132). Grant assigns the DVD commentary a ‘documentary’ quality, as it is “re-directed” or literally re-performed’ (2008, p.133). Drawing on all of these, the potential for *parler femme* emerges, in the political use these women filmmakers can make in performing their biography within this ‘documentary’ space, which also generates a ‘rhetoric of intimacy’ (Klinger, 2006, quoted in Grant, 2008, p.132). Consuming a DVD extra by any one of these filmmakers involves knowing their cultural place, especially as an auteur. However, a further intimate power exists in the ‘whispered or confessional quality to the recordings, encouraged perhaps by the silencing or lowering of volume of the film’s actual soundtrack’ (Grant, 2008, p.110). The voice itself in this particular epitext may have a political potential if employed with feminist agency by the filmmaker herself.

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Varda, Campion and Potter are allowed a unique access to making such a commentary, placing them on an equal footing with male “masters” of film. This is bound up with gendered practices in film consumption with, in Klinger’s words, the ‘domination of male tastes in this market’ of purchasing and consuming DVDs (Klinger, 2008, p.48). However, if, as Bainbridge contended, the act of enunciation of women is crucial in terms of forming female cultural spaces, then there is something also “at stake” for women authors in the choices they make - are able to make - within these additional channels of communication.

### **Conclusion**

This thesis will examine the female filmmaker as a public, cultural figure at the intersection of text and context, in paratext. It will become clear that the paratextual auteur may mobilise stories of her labour and her life that demonstrate her speaking ‘of woman’. A question to raise through the case studies is how far this may be interpreted as an act of *parler femme* or ‘speaking (as) woman’ (Irigaray, 1985b, p. 135). Moreover, how it has value towards a ‘viable place for themselves in culture’ (Kaplan, 1983, p.103). From Kaplan, this thesis defines ‘public culture’ as being the spaces of cinema, the texts and contexts, in which these women can be designated as speaking to a wider, public audience.

As revealed by the literature review, the figure of the auteur is one negotiated through a dynamic interaction in public culture, at the ‘complex conjunction of text, institution and author’ (Grant, 2001, p.122). How these women filmmakers can use the opportunity of direct address, of using the mode of ‘I-you’ (Benveniste, 2014) or,

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more pertinently, 'I-woman' to 'you-woman' (Irigaray, 1993e, pp.43 -4) in this space will be a crucial part of this investigation.

The title of this thesis is intended as a provocation, to situate their acts of enunciation as part of "matriarchal practice" - thus, a "matriarchal cinema" - and the term contributed speculatively for the purposes of making a feminist intervention. The case study analysis will interrogate the women directors' forms of address and cinematic practice to ascertain how far a "matriarchal cinema" is discoverable.

By using the term "matriarchal", this thesis invokes literature that interrogates women's relationship to the symbolic order. The term refers to the idea of social and familial systems which place women at the centre of organisational power, encapsulated by Johann Jacob Bachofen's idea of 'Mother-Right' and his argument that an ancient matriarchal order in society was superseded by patriarchal systems (1967). Irigaray directly references Bachofen's notion (1993e, p.16) and her work contributes to this thesis' working definition, through her argument that women have been excluded from the workings of the symbolic order and her arguments to place the mother-daughter relationship back at the centre of the workings of systems of representation as discussed above.

Adrienne Rich's *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*, echoes much of Irigaray's notion concerning the exclusion of the mother and provides a complementary analysis of women's experience of mothering as opposed to the 'patriarchal institution of motherhood', which functions to support existing economies. The latter increases the oppression of women, which, in Rich's terms is a means of 'lashing us to our bodies' (1986, p.13). (See also, Irigaray, 1993d, p.84).

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Rich emphasises how it also signifies a loss of power and that the ‘idea of power has, for most women, been inextricably linked with maleness’ (1986, p.70). Both analyses are relevantly concerned with the return of social power for women, by thinking through motherhood. Both Irigaray and Rich accentuate the creative function of women through motherhood. Whilst Rich allies it to the biological state, women being not ‘merely a producer’ but also a ‘transformer’ (1986, p.101), Irigaray widens the notion to the way which women are ‘always mothers’ (Irigaray, 1993b, p.18). In both analyses, creativity is claimed as more naturally articulated with women’s experience but which has been lost to the repression within the patriarchal systems, of which cinema as an institution is one example. If women are arguably forced to make choices in patriarchy, which are between ‘motherhood or individuation, motherhood or creativity’ (Rich, 1986, p. 160), then these women filmmakers’ relationship to motherhood, as articulated in paratext, may have political potential.

Therefore, from the literature of feminist film scholarship, this thesis has formulated a methodology to examine the content and form of these paratexts, namely the way in which these women articulate aspects of biography, of desire and of labour. The interaction of these elements may contribute towards naming a cinema or cinema practice to sustain a matrilineage. This naming is proposed as an intervention to counter a perpetual problem which situates women as missing or silenced in cinema. Whilst centred around motherhood as a metaphor, this thesis is concerned to counter enculturated ideas of women as more ‘nurturing’, compassionate or ‘loyal’ (Pramaggiore & Wallis, 2005, pp. 321-2) in their professional dealings, recognising how this enculturation may impact on women’s progress in the film

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industry. By using the term, “matriarchal cinema”, the intention is to challenge that stereotype directly.

The articulation of biography is also important in engaging with the movement between the terms: woman and women. “Woman” for Irigarayan analysis means a speaking position in culture which can have positive, interventionist feminist potential; this differs from the woman who was exchanged as an object in specular economies (Johnston, 1973; Mulvey, 1975). For the purposes of this thesis, it is important to keep hold of an idea of a socially-situated “women”, of whom the paratextual female auteur is a representative. This need is underpinned by de Lauretis’ idea of a ‘women’s cinema’ (1984) and is a key part of the agential energy of the female author (Grant, 2001).

Audiences, whilst a crucial component of the interpretative framework in film studies, is excluded for the purposes of this analysis. Within a context that will focus on the construction of a persona, how this persona is read depends on questions of audience identities (gender, class and race, for example). It requires a depth of study not possible within the constraints of one thesis. Therefore, the greater focus will be on the interaction of these women’s public speech and the discursive context in which it is enacted.

Before introducing the main case studies, the second chapter will present the status quo, with a brief case study of the public persona of Hollywood director, Kathryn Bigelow and her apparent auteurist strategy of refusing to speak ‘(as) woman’ (Irigaray, 1985b, p.135).

**KATHRYN BIGELOW: ‘I like to be strong, I just like it’.**



**FIGURE 1: BIGELOW THE AUTEUR OF MASCULINE STRENGTH: *POINT BREAK* (1991).  
© LARGO ENTERTAINMENT.**

Kathryn Bigelow is a key female filmmaker, having won an Oscar both for best director and best picture, the only woman to have done so. She is not included in this thesis because of her acts of *parler femme* in paratext; instead, Bigelow - or the persona that appears in paratext (Corrigan, 1990) - demonstrates what happens when a woman filmmaker apparently fails to or chooses not to ‘speak (as) woman’ (Irigaray, 1985b, p.135) because of the social, cultural and institutional constraints that appear to prevail alongside her own choices in agency.

Bigelow represents the need to distinguish between the working woman director and the cultural discursive figure. Analysing the persona who has emerged as ‘Bigelow’, represents the difficulty of speaking from a sexed position in public

discourse. It has arguably drawn Bigelow, herself, into the ‘*defensive* speech act’ (Moi, 2008, p.265) [original emphasis] undertaken by women in public roles; in this case, a series of statements which assert “I am not a woman director” (to adapt Moi’s phrase). Her unique situation – as a woman in Hollywood who has directed male-orientated action films, such as *Point Break* (Kathryn Bigelow, 1991, USA) – complicates a reading of her relationship to *parler femme*. However, given the focus on practice rather than textual analysis, making action films would not exclude Bigelow from being able to make a political intervention in the paratext.

Bigelow, in fact, occupies a contradictory position. Her ‘strange visibility’ (Tasker, 1999, p.13) has meant she has attracted academic scholarship on her work since the late 1980s, which has situated her both as an ‘auteur’, within the specific terms established by film studies, and has focussed on her femininity (Tasker, 1999; Lane, 2000; Jermyn and Redmond, eds., 2003). Bigelow represents the dichotomy of attempting to build her own public persona, itself gendered towards masculine attributes, and yet being constantly positioned as a woman director by popular and academic discourses. The relevance of this to this thesis’ argument is explored below.

### **Bigelow – Speaking in Paratext**

Bigelow, over more than forty years, has generally worked to relatively small budgets and has often been regarded as an independent director (Lane, 2000; Lauzen, 2011). However, she has largely worked in Hollywood-style, popular cinema genres with largely male protagonists. Her box office reflects her generally marginal position, with her largest budget in 2002 for *K-19: The Widowmaker*, was \$100 million which

reaped only \$35, 168 million at the USA box office (Internet Movie Database, no date). Her Oscar film, *The Hurt Locker*, has a low budget of \$15 million, and only recouped \$17, 018 million in the USA (Internet Movie Database, no date). Therefore, her films have not necessarily been large commercial successes. The materials in relation to Bigelow are limited because her films do not, generally, carry DVD commentaries. One recorded lecture, which is overlaid on the opening scenes of her futuristic drama *Strange Days* (Kathryn Bigelow, 1995, USA), features Bigelow describing the technical innovations necessary to shoot the first sequence of this film. Consisting of a robbery, it is shot using the subjective perspective of one of the robbers as they drive up to a restaurant and run through the kitchens and dining areas and are chased onto the roof by the police. As the film begins in medias res, the second scene reveals that this is a film shot as a virtual reality commodity, sold illegally to otherwise law-abiding citizens who wish to explore criminal activities or other subjectivities than their own. Bigelow describes the processes involved in shooting, from the strict choreography of the film crew to building a new camera which could fit in the hand:

No existing camera was going to give me [...] would replicate that incredible mobility the human eye has [...] that very fragile, flexible mobility that the human eye has [...] So, we had to build a camera [...] We built a camera that could literally fit in the palm of your hand. It weighed eight pounds, it was thirty-five millimetre, with interchangeable lenses, prime lenses, and we outfitted it with a kind of modified Steadicam rig. Which enabled you, to give you the kind of fluidity of Steadicam. But I didn't want a kind of Steadicam attitude, meaning I didn't want it feel kind of graceful and floaty (*Strange Days* Director's Commentary, 2001).

This fifty-minute talk, Bigelow's passion for invention and meticulous attention to detail, on visual and sound in relation to one action sequence, are exceptional. She speaks throughout with a command of her understanding of the technology and a deep

knowledge of the equipment. She describes making this ‘seamless experience’ which was completed after two years in planning.

This one example is given for Bigelow to contextualise the case studies and their acts of enunciation in the paratext. Bigelow, as the conventional industry model, stays within the technical discourses of the auteur, exploring how technical innovation with ‘la caméra-stylo’ (Astruc, 1968) led to an intense and visceral cinema experience for her spectator.

### **Bigelow – The female auteur**

Evidence exists which suggests that Bigelow intended to ‘strategically embrace’ (Corrigan, 1990, p.48) aspects of her autobiography to craft ‘not one but many stories’ (Kluge quoted in Corrigan, 1990, p.55). Bigelow often mobilises aspects of her background which position her within the established discourses of the auteur, as developed by scholars and popular commentators, following Truffaut and the critics of the French New Wave. Her background in fine art has enabled her to build an authorial signature as someone who studied under avant-garde artists such as Robert Rauschenberg in New York. It added to her ‘strange visibility’ (Tasker, 1999) as a woman who moved to make action films of a particularly visceral and kinetic kind in the mainstream, masculine-dominated world of Hollywood.

Literary agent Nancy Nigrosh recently recalled Bigelow’s approach to managing the narrative of the auteur. According to Nigrosh, Bigelow’s deliberate agency in establishing the terms for discussing her authorship style with producers implies that a ‘strange visibility’ was exactly what Bigelow was seeking early on. In presenting her

## Chapter Two: Kathryn Bigelow

Columbia University graduate film, *The Set-Up* (Kathryn Bigelow, 1978) Nigrosh suggests that Bigelow employed her gender in building a story for her persona:

As I'd intended, they were stunned by the film's staged, but genuinely intense street fight. Kathryn also had the advantage of impressive social skills and focused intensity on her goal to become an important film director. Though she understood to get the opportunity to direct she'd have to write the script first, she was brilliant at delivering the respectfully polished assertion that she'd mastered genres until now exclusively monopolized by male directors. (Nigrosh, 2015).

As the subject of her own narrative in the paratext, the 'commercial drama of the movie's source' (Corrigan, 1990, p.55), Bigelow has spoken of herself as the 'delivery system' (Brockes, 2013), an imagining of the auteur persona that dehumanises Bigelow and associates herself directly with the cinematic mechanism itself. In a more comprehensive denial of sexed identity, she described herself as a filmic 'delivery system' (Gross, 2012; Brockes, 2013) for journalist Mark Boal's script on *Zero Dark Thirty* (Kathryn Bigelow, 2012, USA). It could be described as a discourse of 'technocratic imperialism' (Irigaray, 1993e, p.176).

Bigelow demonstrates agency and awareness in the persona she has built over decades, one in which she consciously employed her artistic biography and, arguably, her femininity. As Janet Staiger analysed, in relation to Gloria Swanson, Hollywood's has a history in marginalising women who wish to gain artistic control (Staiger, 2013). Her statements in paratext introduce an array of avant-garde masters, artists, theoreticians and filmmakers. Bigelow has talked of being tutored by cultural theorists and significant artists, such as Susan Sontag, Sylvère Lotringer, Richard Serra and Robert Rauschenberg (Hamburg, 1989; Turan, 1989). She describes poststructuralist Peter Wollen's tutoring as particularly influential: '[U]ntil I met him I was just looking at light reflected on a screen. After that it was more like a window' (Bigelow in

Hamburg, 1989, p.86). She also has referred to a conversation with Andy Warhol where ‘Andy was saying that there’s something way more populist about film than art — that art’s very elitist, so you’re excluding a large audience’ (Bigelow quoted in Winter, 2013). She cites Warhol’s *Vinyl* (1965, USA) as an influence on her first film, *The Loveless* (Kathryn Bigelow & Eric Red, 1981, USA), an expressionistic narrative about bikers in the 1950s (Smith, 1995, p. 50) and, in the same interview, references Kenneth Anger’s *Scorpio Rising* (1963, USA) and artist Ad Reinhardt (Smith, 1995, p. 50). It is possible to detect a pattern in her interviews which blends references to art film, such as Anger’s, together with allusions to her ‘love of B movies’ (Natale, 2002, p.75), meaning popular cinema based on genres such as Westerns or horror films. Bigelow has spoken of the impact of teaching popular cinema at the California Institute for the Arts for a term: ‘It took all my semiotic Lacanian deconstructivist saturation and torqued it. I realised there is a more muscular approach to film-making that I found very inspiring’ (Bigelow in Anthony, 2012). As a performative statement, this blends erudite allusion with physical attributes, aligning herself more with ‘a kind of viscosity’ she finds in Western filmmaker Sam Peckinpah (Bigelow, 2000).

Weaving a narrative of high art and B movies, is the ‘many stories’ (Kluge quoted in Corrigan, 1990, p.55) created for popular consumption. The success of this strategy is demonstrated by the times it recurs in the interviewees’ own questions and commentary (for example, Peary, 1990; Salisbury, 1991; Bigelow, 2009). Reviews and interviews carry titles regularly such as: ‘Dark by Design’ (Hamburg 1989), ‘Momentum and Design’ (Smith 1995), ‘Her Underwater Canvas’ (Natale, 2002) and ‘The Art of Darkness’ for her *Time* magazine cover for *Zero Dark Thirty* (2012). Her ‘strange visibility’ (Tasker, 1999, p.13) arguably gave her films more complexity



FIGURE 2: BIGELOW ON THE COVER OF *TIME* MAGAZINE (2013). © *TIME*/WARNER.

discursively as ‘*the* female action director in Hollywood’ (1999, p.13). Whilst her films have attracted reviews that foreground their artistry, they arguably avoid challenging the status quo, being based on conventional modes of male as opposed to female bonding and filming of visceral strength (Figure 1).

Bigelow's performative strategy appears also to include the pursuit of a more conventionally masculine image; this provides a very useful position for an ambitious female director to occupy in Hollywood. Hers has been an essentialist, but essentially masculine, paratextual discourse which, viewed as a body, has consistently identified Bigelow as unwilling to perceive herself as part of a filmic sisterhood. In an interview regarding diving in Fiji, Bigelow asserted: 'I like to be strong. I just like it' (Bigelow in Diamond, 2002) and continued by suggesting that a lack of 'tenacity' accounts for other women's failure to persist in filmmaking. 'It takes everything you've got [...] Women may just not be able to wait it out' (Bigelow in Diamond, 2002). This is coupled with her appearance in publicity shots, usually dressed in either masculine tailoring or gender-neutral clothing (Figure 2) echoes Adrienne Rich's notion 'idea of power has, for most women, been inextricably linked with maleness' (1986, p.70).

### **Bigelow - Being Spoken as Auteur**

Bigelow's position is an interesting one, in her apparent accretion to a masculinist discourse as it relates to embodied experience. This appears to work to identify herself with her protagonists and, working in the male-orientated genre of action, to avoid marginalisation in the film industry. She has always accentuated traits of individuality and strength, especially those relating to herself artistically.

As far as Bigelow can be ascribed agency in creating this persona, any feminist critique of her position must be mitigated in the light of the way in which she has borne journalistic fervour about her appearance. It demonstrates how, working in an industry which has had imbalances in its treatment of women throughout its history (Lauzen, 2018), Bigelow has apparently adopted a strategy to attempt to avoid

marginalisation or discrimination. Her disavowal of her femininity makes sense, therefore, but her positioning does not seem to protect her from being placed back into a relationship with her femininity. As a prism through which to read her texts in popular criticism, her visibility as a beautiful woman crafting male-oriented action films was always identified as crucial. It was potentially a factor to ‘increase her circulation as a star and serve to enhance her reputation as a notable director, possibly even an auteur’ (Lane, 2000, p.104).

Thus, despite Bigelow’s strategies, her appearance figures consistently in coverage. To one interviewer, she is ‘tall, willowy, and in her mid-thirties’ and ‘speaks in a surprisingly soft, girlish voice’ (Hamburg, 1989, p.85). John Powers in *Vogue* (1995) discovered at their meeting that she is: ‘tall and dark, swathed in black leather and endowed with an icy, daunting beauty’ looking like ‘the world’s “highest-paid dominatrix”’ (Powers in Lane, 2000, p. 103). By 2009, given her age, her beauty receives greater attention: Bigelow ‘at 57, has the regal beauty and presence of a Hepburn’ (Yabroff, 2009). By 2010, a greater irony has emerged since reviews seem to repeat this fascination as they feign to critique it:

Bigelow could even be described as a perfect example of what has become known (in sexist movie critic lingo) as “the Hawksian woman”, that’s to say, the self-reliant, insolent type, capable of running with the boys. In the publicity photos from early in her career, Bigelow, with her long flowing hair, even looks a little like Hawks’ favourite actress of all, Lauren Bacall in *Big Sleep* days (Macnab, 2010).

Despite Bigelow’s refusal to accept the modifier ‘woman’ (Moi, 2008), these kinds of journalistic portraits mean that she remains defined by her gender in public discourse. Bigelow’s own agency leans towards a more masculine persona; however, it results in creating an ambivalent space for herself. Bigelow has ended up in, to use Martha

Lauzen's phrase, a 'no-(Wo)man's land', from Lauzen's perspective attempting to build her own version of a 'girl wonder' myth by using the building blocks typically employed by men seeking 'boy wonder status' (2011, p.151).

Bigelow's authorial persona has drawn sharp criticism from feminist commentators (for example, Nochimson, 2010). By contrast, Deborah Jermyn, in writing on Bigelow's 'woman's film', *The Weight of Water* (Kathryn Bigelow, 2000, USA/France), reflected the contradictory position that she may inhabit. Jermyn recognised that:

[C]ertainly, to expect some kind of simple correlation between women directors and "positive" female characterisation or politics is in itself arguably a reductive process which risks underestimating the vast array of individual and institutional influences brought to bear in the film-making process, and in Hollywood in particular (2003, p.139).

Jermyn's insight distinguishes the text from the context and recognises that there is a dynamic relationship for women at the centre. Bigelow's agency may be limited by the 'complex conjunction of text, institution and author' (Grant, 2001, p.122), especially working at the margins of Hollywood cinema.

Turning to women's enunciation in the paratext, as this thesis will do, gives a new possibility. It may be more relevant for feminist analysis to consider how Bigelow could, if willing, separate herself as a filmmaker in her practice from her film texts. This could allow her to speak '(as) woman' (Irigaray, 1985b, p.135) about her practice, if she chose, whilst pursuing conventionally masculine genres. However, her situation demonstrates the compromised territory women occupy and the way in which their acts of enunciation may be shaped by contextual influences as much as their own agency. It may be possible, through the consideration of the main case

## Chapter Two: Kathryn Bigelow

studies, to reassess Bigelow's de-gendered auteur performance as a bankrupt strategy for a woman director. To do this, this thesis turns to work that precedes Bigelow by several decades, which demonstrates a different political potential in its attention to practice and motherhood in the work of Agnès Varda.

**AGNES VARDA: I am unique, okay, but I represent all women**



**FIGURE 3: AUTEUR AS GRAND-MATRIARCH? VARDA AND HER ‘UMBILICAL CORD’.**  
*LES PLAGES D’AGNÈS* (2008). © CINÉ TAMARIS.

The literature review has established the political possibilities of women’s talk, in relation to biography and desire. The analysis of Bigelow in the previous chapter has demonstrated what may happen where a woman filmmaker adopts, or is provoked into adopting, the position of asserting ‘I am not a woman writer’ (Moi, 2008, p.265) in her paratextual communication. Bigelow within the ‘complex conjunction of text, institution and author’ (Grant, 2001, p.122) has either chosen or been driven to adopt a neutral position in ‘no-(Wo)man’s land’ (Lauzen, 2011, p.151). This is the result of denying the relevance of her gender to her work. The acts of enunciation of Agnès Varda turn this thesis towards an agency in the paratext, one which indicates the

### Chapter Three: Agnès Varda

political possibilities of articulating biography, labour and desire. Varda, in her work, also demonstrates the potential of being read as ‘speaking (as) woman’ (Irigaray, 1985b, p.135) in current public culture.

Predating Bigelow and the other case studies featured here by at least two decades, Varda provides a model through her experimentation in the documentary and essay film forms. These constitute a form of the paratext, *avant la lettre*; therefore, despite Varda’s body of work in fiction film, it is these works that are the focus in this chapter. In addition, because of the longevity of her career she has moved from the essay film in the 1950s through to the digital paratext now and employed the same tactics of onscreen performance in both forms.

Varda, working since the 1950s, gained increased public recognition through her self-portrait documentary *Les plages d’Agnès* in 2008 (Agnès Varda, France), since it introduced her work to new generations and allowed her to fashion a public identity as an auteur. Her potential to be part of an intergenerational exchange is particularly noticeable now, a decade later, in the period leading up to her ninetieth birthday. She has been subject of a retrospective at the British Film Institute and has appeared on the cover of the June 2018 issue of its magazine, *Sight & Sound*. In many ways, it is as if she has finally grown into the sobriquet awarded her in the 1970s as the ‘grandmother of the French New Wave’ (Levitin, 1974). This phrase acknowledges the artistic style of her first film, *La Pointe Courte* (Agnès Varda, 1955, France), released ahead of the movement which was subsequently discursively conceived of as the French New Wave. This was a film movement which both pointed ‘to the all-important role of the director/author and, in the films’ aesthetics, ‘juxtaposed sound and image in new ways

and foregrounded the role of editing and camerawork' (Greene, 2007, p.9). With critical hindsight, it is possible to recognise how the title of grandmother situated her film as anticipating the movement only, even though she could be argued as its initiator. However, it is possible that Levitin's retrospective title avoided disturbing the accepted histories already written of the male-dominated narrative of the French New Wave.

Her critical success, and her position as an artist and avant-garde filmmaker, means that she is relatively marginal in relation to commercial release. *Les plages d'Agnès* is one of her more widely-distributed films, for which no budget is available, but which earned a gross of \$0.240 million in the USA (Internet Movie Database, no date). Her most recent documentary, *Visages Villages* [*Faces, Places*] (Agnès Varda & JR, 2017, France), with artist JR, has earned more at \$0.954 million, perhaps aided by her Oscar nomination for the film.

The literature review established the importance of genealogy in Irigaray's idea of *parler femme* and of the reconstitution of the relationship between mother and daughter. Irigaray stated: 'Each of us has a female family tree: we have a mother, a maternal grandmother and great-grandmothers, we have daughters' (1993b, p.19) as part of her recognition of a need to concentrate on matrilineal inheritances. As part of her recovery of women's relationships to each other, through acts of enunciation that can constitute *parler femme*, Varda's essay films show a consistent articulation onscreen of her life as a woman, in the most conventional terms as a wife, mother and grandmother, with the life of a cultural labourer, filmmaker and artist. It is possible to

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ascribe a clear authorial agency in this practice to Varda because of her self-conscious adoption of this practice in her performances onscreen in her films.

Varda's importance to this thesis, therefore, arises out of her willingness, from her early career, to place herself onscreen self-reflexively in her essay films. Through her career, she has evolved this practice from the essay film to the written and, latterly, to the digital paratext. This produces an effect of layering of her voice through the different spaces of cinema that Doane categorised, including 'voice-off' and 'voiceover' (1980, p.130). The key question here is the opportunity it affords to mobilise a performance of female subjectivity which can contribute to the intergenerational exchange of *parler femme*. Towards this, her bodily performance onscreen, the presence of her voiceover and her mobilisation of her biography, enable a powerful construction of herself as author (film labourer) and as a public auteur. Neither of these positions are innately feminine; however, their potential for *parler femme* within the paratext offer unique feminist political capital.

Varda came to greater recognition with her documentary films *Les glaneurs et la glaneuse* [*The Gleaners and I*] (Agnès Varda, 2000, France), *Les glaneurs et la glaneuse – deux ans après* [*The Gleaners and I - two years on*] (Agnès Varda, 2002, France) and *Les plages d'Agnès*, the latter film being made in her eightieth year. These films have fixed her physical image into the cultural imagination as that of a grandmother. This kind of literal embodiment, of an imagined place at the head of a matrilineal inheritance, is deliberately played and performed by Varda. In *Les plages d'Agnès*, the eighty-year-old filmmaker appears walking backwards across the beach to introduce a metaphorical journey back through her own films *and* her biography:

‘Je joue le rôle d’une petite vieille, rondouillarde et bavarde, qui raconte sa vie’ [‘I am playing the role of a little old lady, pleasantly plump and talkative, who is telling the story of her life’]. Varda is consciously also indicating her role as director. The success of these later documentaries has given Varda an identity; however, this agency and performative practice began decades earlier in her essay films when she was a young woman and artist. Considering Varda’s work throughout her career, focussing on her essay films onwards and the variety of paratexts, both written and spoken, enables this thesis to begin to engage with Irigaray’s question: what might be the difference when we speak ‘of’ woman or ‘about’ women, as compared to ‘speaking (as) woman’? (1985b, p.135).



**FIGURE 4: WOMEN SPEAKING AMONG WOMEN: *RÉPONSE DE FEMMES* (1975).**

Varda, herself, is actively and publicly committed to feminist politics. The importance she places on the relationships to women is visible in her support of campaigns and in her films. (For example, Varda was a signatory to the 1971 ‘*Le*

### Chapter Three: Agnès Varda

*manifeste des 343 salopes* ('Manifesto of the 343 Sluts'), orchestrated by Simone de Beauvoir, in which public figures signed to say they had had an abortion (whether true or not) as a protest against France's ban on abortions).

This chapter's subtitle: 'I am unique, but I am all women', is a scripted line from Varda's short, essay film *Réponse de femmes: Notre corps, notre sexe* [*Women Reply: Our Body, Our Sexuality*] (Agnès Varda, 1975, France) about the variety of choices women can make in their lives, structured as a conversation between different women (Figure 4). It is worth considering first as it demonstrates Varda's feminist commitment, at a time when activism was vibrant in France and the U.K.. This film also functions as a dramatisation of *parler femme* onscreen; women exchange testimony where they can 'gain recognition for their difference' as between themselves (Irigaray, 1993e, p.41). The film self-consciously moves through a debate about desire, their relationships to men, and through the relationships to each other. In a format of a stylised exchange it moves between the individual and the collective and encompasses all forms of feminine experience; for example, these are women with children, women who are pregnant and women who do not want to procreate.

Varda could be said to enact a literal interpretation of *parler femme* in this film, which directly recalls Irigaray's 'Questions' in which she began to ask what could constitute femininity, outside of male definitions or male constructions in the symbolic order. Many of Varda's questions and statements, voiced by her group of women together, mirror those of Irigaray. For example, 'Even though it's hard to find my own self in a man's world/No, No! I am not a man without head or tail' (*Réponse de femmes*). In answer to a male voice in the voiceover, which claims: 'A woman who

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has not known motherhood is not a woman’, one woman directly addresses the camera: ‘Come off it. Is a man who has not known fatherhood less of a man?’ Another woman asks: ‘How do we be women outside of masculine opinion?’ (*Réponse de femmes*). This is a dramatic rendition of Irigaray’s questions, such as: ‘[H]ow can they “put” these questions so that they will not be once more “repressed”, “censored”? But also how can they already speak (as) women?’ (Irigaray, 1985b, p.119). Noting Irigaray’s use of the plural, women, this film directly mirrors her notion of the importance of their plurality and of their talking together. Varda’s participants also consider women as objects within ‘*the economy of exchange – of desire*’ which is ‘*man’s business*’ [original emphasis] (Irigaray, 1985b, p.176) and of the rights of women over their own bodies. Thus, Varda’s film shows embodied women onscreen stating literal challenges which mimic Irigaray’s challenges to an economy of exchange that renders women as objects. Since ‘women only fulfil this role by relinquishing their right to speech’ ((Irigaray, 1985b, p.190). Varda’s staged group conversation between women is, in Irigarayan terms, a place ‘of women among themselves’ where Irigaray’s ‘something of a speaking (as) woman is heard’ (1985a, p. 135). This is through the sharing of experiences, of humour and of the multiplicity of their desires. These include wanting or not wanting to be mothers, to be able to be in a relationship to their own bodies which is not sexualised, for which purpose several of them appear naked onscreen.

It demonstrates women, in the confidence of the feminist movement which existed in Europe at the time, of calling for ‘a subjective status equivalent to that of men’ in order to ‘gain recognition for their difference’ (Irigaray, 1993e, p.41) through their statements on camera. It demonstrates Varda’s wish to voice ideas about



FIGURE 5: SILENT MEN: *RÉPONSE DE FEMMES* (1975). © CINÉ TAMARIS.

womanhood, utilising a multiple cast to illustrate this. It is an exercise representing women talking amongst themselves, of themselves, distinctly represented as separate from men.

It also represents an aspect of Varda's idiosyncratic and unique voice, in her enjoyment of bathetic humour. Taking this intellectual discussion, Varda imprints this with her own auteurist enjoyment of bathos, featuring a cutaway to an image of the men, appearing stilted and uninspiring as a group compared to the movement and interaction between the women (Figure 5).

In addition, Varda's work itself can be read as contributing to *parler femme* in her creation of a potential Irigarayan artefact (1993e, p.42). This is one which can be exchanged between women, can be returned to even now, as part of understanding the feminist struggle, past and present. It is a participant who states: 'I am unique, ok, but

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I represent all women'; yet, whilst all her participants speak, these are Varda's words which are being voiced, credited as '*texte et realisation*' at the film's close. Thus, the idea of uniqueness and multiplicity is rendered powerfully through the representation of women as they 'talk to one another' directly through the individual voice of the auteur.

Moreover, in her commitment to feminist politics and her representation of herself and other women onscreen, she articulates this with an act of *parler femme* at the same time as she functions as an auteur. Arguably, no-one more than Varda, who worked alongside French New Wave filmmakers, such as Jean-Luc Godard and Alain Resnais, and who married Jacques Demy, could be credited as understanding what it means, in practice, to function as an auteur within film culture.

*Réponse de femmes* presents Varda carrying the title board, with her authorship literally inscribed upon it (Figure 6). This image encapsulates her wider preoccupation and consistent representation of herself as the artist-labourer on-screen. Here, she appears alongside the other women, but it is significant that she distinguishes herself in her role as film labourer. Varda throughout her career is always conscious of performing the auteur. Employing the framework of *parler femme* will enable an understanding of its importance for feminist disturbance of the status quo in the film industry. Starting to consider Varda in this way, from the perspective of practice rather than text, enables a reassessment of the conventional critical scrutiny. It is possible to argue that popular criticism, for example, often misinterprets Varda's adoption of the personal and the domestic imagery as modesty and self-effacement (Varda, 2001; Guest, 2009). However, a much more complicated realisation of filmmaking



**FIGURE 6: VARDA AS AUTHOR AND AUTEUR: *RÉPONSE DE FEMMES* (1975). © CINÉ TAMARIS.**

authorship is taking place which foregrounds her labour, including her intellectual labour, and her status as an auteur. This is deliberately articulated with a desire to embrace and witness other forms of human experience.

Using Irigaray, this thesis asks ‘who speaks, to whom, about what with what means’ (1993a, p. 176). Applied to Varda, it will reveal a complex relationship at the ‘conjunction of text, institution and author’ (Grant, 2001, p.122) that are at play in her direct address: a retention of the performance of the auteur, alongside performances of filmic labour together with the witnessing of others’ experience.

Thus, this performance is relevant for *parler femme* because of the blend of elements of biography and work/labour it demonstrates. Its relationship to desire and fantasy needs to be explored. It has been the case, through the action of the symbolic order as exemplified through film journalism in this thesis, to position women,

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motherhood, filmmaking labour and sexuality variously as culturally dissonant states. Early on in post-war cinema, it is arguable that Varda countered this, most strongly through her own appearances onscreen. Whilst she presents women onscreen, thus speaking of or among women, the main question is how far Varda is able to speak (as) woman. Varda offers one individual representation of a woman's labour, which is a building block in women's collective knowledge and understanding of their matrilineal inheritance. Exchanging, and discussing, her films are part of the action of *parler femme* within her contemporary time frame.

Varda can attempt this complex performance intertwining her biography, her life as a woman and her life as an artist because of the possibilities inherent in the essay film. Before looking at the work in more detail, it is important to reflect on why the essay form can be regarded as similar to the paratext, especially in its layered and self-reflexive style. The 'essaie' was a literary form existing in France for centuries, which became an important film genre through the authorship of Varda, Chris Marker and Jean-Luc Godard from the early days of the French New Wave. As its name suggests, it functions through a dialectical structure that allows the layering of audiovisual material, including still images and voiceover, alongside the moving image. Timothy Corrigan wrote of these filmmakers that they 'revitalised' the essay film in the 1950s and used its 'exploratory energy' in their work (2011, p. 67). In Jacques Rivette's words: 'the indefatigable eye of the camera invariably assumes the role of the pencil, a temporal sketch is perpetuated before our eyes' (Rivette quoted in Corrigan, 2011). The essay form is less conventional, more situated in art forms of cinema. As defined by David Bordwell, these are films in which 'the author becomes a formal competent, the overriding intelligence organizing the film for our comprehension' (Bordwell,

1979, p.58). As such, it mimics the paratext in its performance of the biographical figure and the use of direct address; therefore, these are films which can incorporate forms of performance by the filmmaker. This exposes a number of possibilities for *parler femme*, not least the potential in the voice of the female filmmaker.

The analysis, therefore, already demands attention to two different areas as indicated by *Réponse de femmes* above: this is the content of her essay films, where Varda explores questions of female subjectivity - of biography, labour and desire and places herself within the conversation onscreen. This is a speaking 'of' and 'among' women, creating a cinematic space in which 'something of a speaking (as) woman is heard' (1985a, p.135). In addition, the films are artefacts, adapting the meaning given by Irigaray (1993e, p.42), forming part of an alternative system of exchange between women, where 'I-woman (je-femme) talks to you-woman (tu-femme)' (1993e, pp.43-4).

Therefore, in order to explore it fully, it is necessary to consider her work both from the aspect of the content of her films - of images of mothers, grandmothers and daughters as they may become part of 'systems of exchange' amongst women (Irigaray, 1993d, p.75); and as Varda's work can be interpreted as a series of artefacts which represent Irigaray's idea of 'attractive images [...] of the mother-daughter couple' or 'objects they can exchange between themselves' (1993e, p.42). There is also the question of how her films may constitute, through the layering of enunciative structures in her essay films and, latterly, in the digital paratext, an act of enunciation to contribute to *parler femme*. This is through Varda's own persona and speaking practice which can rearrange those same 'systems of exchange' (Irigaray, 1993d, p.75)

between women. Therefore, her appearances in the films are important in the way Varda constantly combines her identities – biographical and artistic – in her self-reflexive consideration of her work as an artist. Varda is ‘speaking of woman’ in a position of either the ‘object, or the subject’ (Irigaray, 1985b, p.135); however, it may be possible to demonstrate where her acts of enunciation move to be interpreted as ‘speaking (as) woman’ (1985b, p.135). By bringing herself onscreen and representing her relationship with other women, she establishes a performance of ‘*the relation of woman to the mother and the relation of women among themselves*’ [original emphasis] (1985b, p.124). In addition, she is engaged in the creation of cultural artefacts, the films themselves, which may show her adopting ‘another “syntax”, another “grammar” of culture’ which is, in Irigaray’s view, ‘crucial’ (Irigaray, 1985b, p.143) to the formation of *parler femme*. Varda’s characterisation of herself as an auteur, the kind of film labourer she represents herself as being, will indicate how far this is can be read as ‘speaking (as) woman’ (1985b, p.135).

Thus, the following analysis will consider her self-reflexive form of filmmaking and the movement of Varda’s imagining from, in Irigaray’s words, an ‘autobiographical I’ into a ‘different cultural I’ (1993a, p.177) for its significance to ‘speaking (as) woman’ (1985b, p.135). The cultural value of this lies in establishing inheritances and the way in which these films can be exchanged as artefacts as part of a practice of *parler femme*.

### **Varda: Life and Times**

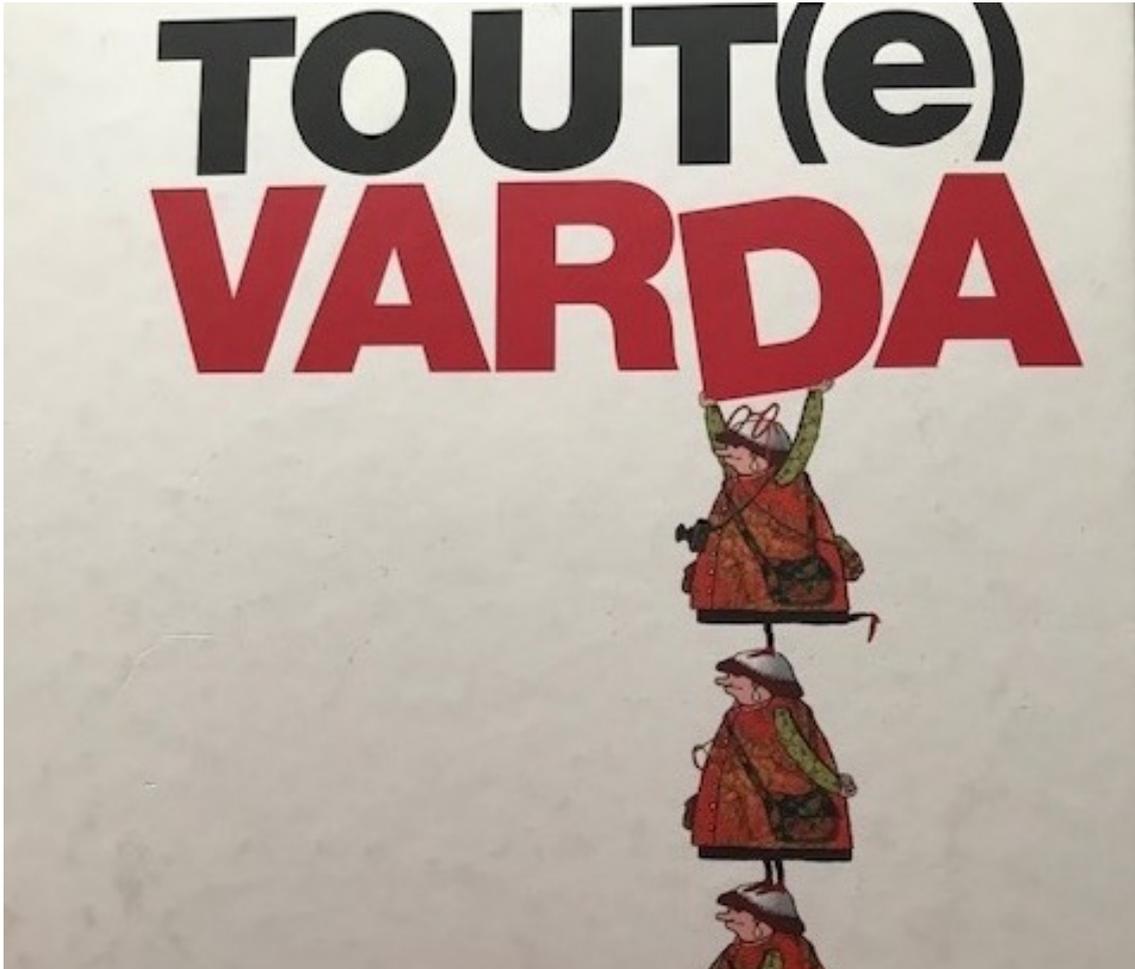
From her base in Rue Daguerre, Varda has acted as producer of her own work, from her very first film, forming her own company called Ciné Tamaris in 1955 to

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produce *La Pointe Courte*. The company is still in operation today and manages production and archival work, both for her films and those of French New Wave director, Jacques Demy. Varda and Demy were married for twenty-eight years until his death (from AIDS) in 1990. Over her sixty-plus years as an artist and filmmaker, Varda has produced ten feature-length fiction films which include the influential *Cléo de 5 à 7* (Agnès Varda, 1962, France) and *Sans toit ni loi* (Agnès Varda, 1985, France); five feature-length documentaries, including those which have introduced Varda to a wider audience in *Les glaneurs et la glaneuse* and the retrospective of her work called *Les plages d'Agnès*. Varda was associated with 'The Left Bank' of the French New Wave (a term coined by Roud, 1962) comprising Varda, Alain Resnais and Chris Marker. The greater part of her work is in short films, encompassing fiction, documentary and essay films. and most recently, she has moved into producing art installations.

She made her home in Rue Daguerre in advance of her relationship with Demy in the 1950s, a studio and accommodation in a state of disrepair which she renovated substantially, a process she re-enacts in *Les plages d'Agnès* (2008). She often features this home of more than six decades directly in her essay films, documentaries and in her written and digital paratexts.

Thus, due to the longevity of her career, Varda has been able to add in further layers to the self-reflexive form she began working in. The availability of these additional materials is suited to Varda's practice and her consistent preoccupation with recycling images and text throughout her films in relation to themes of time and memory. In terms of paratextual material, Varda produced a written paratext, *Varda par Agnès*,



**FIGURE 7: THE COVER TO THE BOXSET OF *TOUT(E) VARDA* (2011). © CINÉ TAMARIS**

published in 1994. Modern digital forms have allowed Varda's intellectual interests greater development, alongside which she has been able to expand her articulation of her work with her personal life. The significance of this for *parler femme* and building a women's cinema out of a genealogy of practice lies partly in the possibilities of moving from the 'autobiographical I' to a 'different cultural I' (1993a, p.177). *Varda par Agnès* blends aspects of Varda's biography with her artistic inspirations. Most recently, her archive was consolidated by the release in 2011 of a DVD boxset, *Tout(e) Varda* (Figure 7). The title is a linguistic play on a dual idea of 'everything by Varda' and 'all of Varda', an appropriate acknowledgement of the way her artistic production

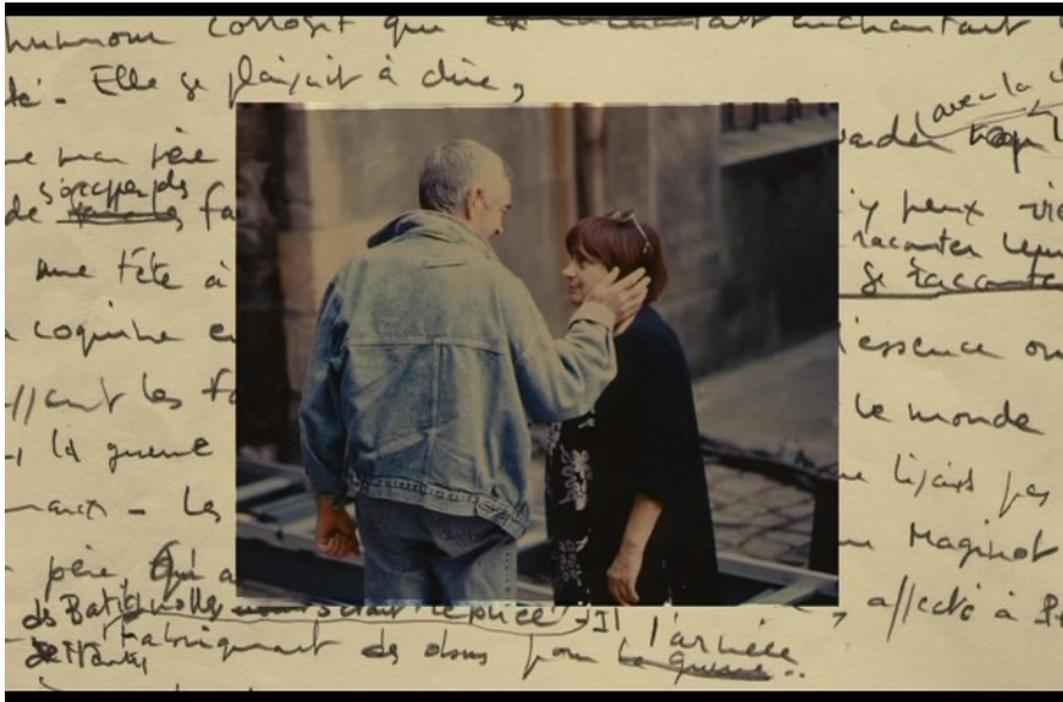


FIGURE 8: VARDA'S SCRIPTING FOR *JACQUOT DE NANTES* (1991). FROM *VARDA PAR AGNÈS* (1994). © CAHIERS DU CINEMA/CINÉ TAMARIS.

constantly intertwines with personal revelation. A collection of all of her films, each disc contains features such as an introduction by Varda, '*présente par Agnès*' and '*les boni*' or 'extras' to accompany each text. The Varda who appears in the modern DVD paratext, introducing many of her films in the collection *Tout(e) Varda*, is an extension of the Varda who has appeared throughout her essay films since the 1950s. These sequences often comprise a repeated *mise-en-scène*, staged in the courtyard of her home in Rue Daguerre. In being welcomed into Varda's studio, we are also in her home. The additional commentary provided via the digital paratext shows a further extension of Varda's performance at the intersection of labour and biography within her cultural context.

### **Varda – Mobilising Biography, Labour and Desire**

Varda represents herself, on film, as auteur, as wife, mother and grandmother. She is a starting point for considering the mobilisation of biography, labour and desire

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because of the way in which she brings together these three elements within her essay films. She defines her life by her role as wife – to the aforementioned French New Wave director, Jacques Demy – and as mother and grandmother. In French culture, she offers a conventional portrait of domestic values whilst occupying a position akin to royalty through her association with Demy, demonstrated through frequent appearances on French television (see Murray, 2015). Varda does not present an unsettling challenge to the conventional values of heterosexual domestic love and mothering through her biographical narrative. Her mobilisation of desire and biography are patterned along very traditional lines. As Edgar Morin characterised the appeal of film stars, in the star system, that they combined elements of the ‘ordinary and extraordinary’ (2005); so, Varda undertakes, as agent, a blending of both ordinary and extraordinary in her life. This combination is familiar in French culture (Murray, 2015) and this feted, artistic couple featured frequently on French television arts programmes (for example, *Jacques Demy et Agnès Varda à propos de leur couple, de leurs films: Démons et merveilles du cinéma*, 1964). Their sojourn in America in the late 1960s, when Demy was being courted by the Hollywood studios, moved them into another world of stars and celebrity. They appeared in *Vogue* and Varda’s paratexts are filled with references to celebrities that they knew, including Jim Morrison (Murray, 2015).

Thus, being part of a prominent artistic couple meant that Varda represented herself in her domestic space as a place which *naturally* articulated artistic life with the quotidian. A number of television programmes show Varda and Demy discussing their life artistic at Rue Daguerre. Varda is interviewed whilst reshooting parts of *Les*

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*créatures* with Michel Piccoli at the same time as Demy is working next door with Michel Legrand on a musical score.

Varda has fashioned material from her own life from the beginning of her career. She has defined herself through Demy and performs his centrality to her life repeatedly utilising an affecting ‘rhetoric of intimacy’ (Klinger, 2006, quoted in Grant, 2008, p.132) in all forms of her expression. In her paratext, *Varda par Agnès*, she includes anecdotes about their initial meeting, their arguments and the difficulty of managing Demy’s success and its impact on the family unit. A story is told about returning to a hotel room for a dress and jewellery, left behind after the Cannes festival showing of Demy’s *Les parapluies de Cherbourg* [*The Umbrellas of Cherbourg*] (Jacques Demy, 1964, France). The jewellery had been given to her by her mother, its importance reflected in its appearance in Varda’s films (for example, *Uncle Yanco* (Agnès Varda, 1967, France) . It is found still in the wardrobe: ‘I sit on the bed. We laugh like children who have avoided being grounded for something really stupid’ (1994, p.218). The book, like much of her essay work to be discussed, contains the conflation of time, of recording what has passed. Demy has died by the time of its publication. Her remembrance of the moments in their relationship are vivid, told in the present tense or often reconstructed as simple poetry; here, as elsewhere, biographical reminiscence is performed with the same artistry and poeticism as her fictional filmmaking work. Applying Heilbrun’s notion that women’s lives become ‘most important’ as ‘an available narrative for women to use in making fictions of their lives’ (1989, p.38) explains why Varda’s approach to biographical narrative makes a significant contribution to *parler femme*. Varda has moved her ‘biographical I’ into a ‘different cultural I’ (Irigaray, 1993a, p.177). by turning it into an artistic

performance and, in *Varda par Agnès*, demonstrating the way life intertwines with labour (Figure 8-9).



**FIGURE 9: WORKING ONSET WITH DEMY FOR *JACQUOT DE NANTES* (1991). FROM *VARDA PAR AGNÈS* (1994). © CAHIERS DU CINEMA/CINÉ TAMARIS.**

She demonstrates an act of *parler femme* in moving this outwards to ‘all women’, in artistic works such as her art installation *Les veuves de Noirmoitier* (2006). She returns to the seaside town where Demy and Varda stayed regularly and which was part of their home. Beaches, such as Noirmoitier, form a consistent part of Varda’s visual imagery in her films. In this piece, she records the stories of several, ordinary local women about the deaths of their husbands or stories about them when they were alive. Varda is seen onscreen silent. For Varda, who loves language and whose voice pervades all her texts, there are no words. It is an image she has repeated through several of her films, as a means of memorialising her own grief for Demy.

### **Varda – An Idiosyncratic and Unique Voice**

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Varda's employment of silence above demonstrates her agency and understanding in how she employs her voice. Before looking at her practice in more depth, it is important to consider the nature of Varda's voice. Voice, here, means the rhetorical devices used across her films and paratexts, including her written paratext *Varda par Agnès*, which create a very specific mode of address. It is so uniquely and recognisably 'Varda' that it could be considered part of a constructed 'rhetoric of intimacy' (Klinger, 2006, quoted in Grant, 2008, p.132). Throughout all of her texts, there is a consistency of her voice, whether it is in written form, 'voiceover' or 'voice-off' (Doane, 1980, p.130). This includes the way in which Varda portrays a fascination with poetic form, in terms of rhythm and rhyme, allied with bathetic humour.

Varda's voice in relation to cinematic spaces is discussed in relation to specific films later in the chapter. In terms of her rhetorical strategies, it is useful to begin with her written paratext. Her introduction to *Varda par Agnès* includes a certain tone, establishing a whimsical relationship of play with her audience: '*Est-ce là un PRÉAMBULE?/une invitation alors à déambuler avec moi/ça et là*' ['Is this a PREAMBLE/an invitation to stroll about with me/here and there'] (1994, p.6). Knowing Varda's voice, from its presence in her essay films and on television, infuses her writing here with its intimate address. She situates herself as making a personal invitation into her biographical world, one which does not demand great seriousness. Her written introduction is echoed in her five-part television series for ARTE, *Agnès de ci, de là Varda* (Agnès Varda, 2011, France) [*Agnès here, Varda there*] in which each episode begins with a sequence dedicated to a tree in her courtyard. Leaving, as it needs to be pruned, it has completely grown back by the time she has completed her televisual odyssey:

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J'ai commencé une série de voyages, filmant de-ci de-là des visages, et des mots, des musées, des fleuves et des oeuvres [...] filmant dans chaque ville des fragments, des instants, des personnes. L'arbre renaissait J'allais et je venais, et je faisais avec Jean-Baptiste le montage des images et des sons récoltés [...] Un feuillet de feuilles, en quelque sorte (*Agnès de ci, de là Varda*, 2011).

I embarked on a series of trips, filming here and there, faces and words, museums rivers and art. Filming in every town [...] to capture fragments, moments, people. The tree was coming back to life. I came and went Jean Baptise and I edited images and sounds I'd gathered. [...] This series shoots and leaves, so to speak (*Agnès de ci, de là Varda*, 2011).

The french language version here encapsulates the movement in her writing and her pleasure in the rhythm and rhyme of poetry directly as a means of recalibrating the quotidian details of life into the realms of the symbolic. Intertwined with this is Varda's persistent enjoyment of bathos as humour and the use of double meanings. The final line captures both the idiosyncratic poetic voice and the love of humorous symbolism in language, in the way a television series' shooting is equated with the growth of her tree at home.

Bathos pervades her biographical remembrances of Demy, such as their first sexual experience. Occurring whilst at a film festival, it is told with a sense of the absurd which is very recognisable from her writing across films and paratexts. Written in a poetic form, Varda reminisces: '*et après une promenade/au bord de la Loire, que/nous nous connûmes bibliquement*' ['and after a walk, next to the Loire, we made love']; yet, the town cannot not be remembered with 'nommées sublimes' ['to be called sublime'] because of 'd'un maire de droite/particulièrement retrograde, anti-feminist et censeur' ['a right-wing mayor, particularly old -fashioned, anti-feminist and censoring'] (1994, p.17).

Thus, the consistency of this enunciative voice, the '*discours*' (Benveniste, 1971), creates an identity across all forms of her work. Moreover, it aids the articulation of her biographical and artistic life more convincingly. Hearing the same rhetorical voice, intimate, humorous and poetic, across all texts challenges the distinctions of public and private in a woman's life.

The idiosyncratic nature of her voice functions to mobilise biography and artistic labour together. This is a life of a woman, which has been lived in filmmaking. Her appearances onscreen, to show herself as part of 'all women' are important in bringing together the situation of the artist as an ordinary woman, a representation of 'ambitions, and possibilities, and accomplishments' (Heilbrun, 1989, p.46) in everyday life. The next section will consider how Varda mobilises *images* of the artist and the woman, in her essay films and in paratext, as part of this articulation of labour and personal biography.

### **Rhetoric of Images – Cinematic Labour**

Film academic Kelley Conway commented on Varda's performance as director in *Les plages d'Agnès*, describing where she 'authoritatively instructs people on where to place various objects on the beach' (2010, p.127). For Conway, this results in an image of Varda 'looking out at the sea while sitting in a director's chair labelled with her name, thus confirming the theme already established, "Agnès Varda at work"' (Conway, 2010, p.127).

Conway accentuated Varda's labour here and that Varda herself comments in the sequence that her team are entering into her fantasies and reveries. The essay films as a body reveals the limitations of critical approaches that have focussed on the older



**FIGURE 10: RECORDING HER WORK AS PHOTOGRAPHER. FROM *VARDA PAR AGNÈS* (1994). © CAHIERS DU CINEMA/CINÉ TAMARIS.**

Varda onscreen (Rosello, 2001; Beugnet, 2006; Conway, 2010; Ince, 2016). Varda has always performed her labour onscreen and in accompanying paratexts, thus enacting it in the public domain. What is important across these texts is the consistency of her vision and of her rhetoric in relation to creating this image of labour. Importantly, it is one which articulates the image of the artist with the image of the woman – wife,

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mother and grandmother – as she advances through those stages in her life. The movement from ‘autobiographical I’ to a ‘different cultural I’ (Irigaray, 1993a, p.177) is vibrantly visible in Varda’s work in the paratext. In addition, throughout, she returns to fantasies and reveries as a means of understanding women’s biography.

What Varda does is important in relation to forging new genealogies for women’s cinema through practice. The presence of Varda onscreen in the role of filmmaker was established from her earliest films. In Varda’s essay films, cinematic labour, alongside the labour of motherhood, is shown to be work that can be readily associated with home.

Thus, Varda begins this thesis not only as the earliest filmmaker, but also as the filmmaker who has intertwined the stages of her own life with her labour through a self-reflexive form of filmmaking. Onscreen, she has moved from daughter to grandmother at the same time as she has moved from young woman photographer to old woman artist. Her representation of her practice of cinema may contribute to an Irigarayan *parler femme*.

Varda has kept a record of herself as a working woman and filmmaker from the start of her career. Her 1994 written paratext, *Varda par Agnès* contains a number of images of the young woman artist in her home and at work, with accompanying text to describe the process of moving away from her teachers to undertake a journey alone ‘*un voyage en solitaire*’ (Varda, 1994, p.25) before she was twenty years old. Figure 10 accompanied this narrative, illustrating the young artist and photographer at work (1994, p.25). *Varda par Agnès* also includes an image of her working with the filmmaker Alain Resnais on editing *La Pointe Courte* (Figure 12). Unlike film set

promotional images, Varda's pictures strongly suggest her agency in recording her



**FIGURE 11: VARDA AT WORK. *ULYSSE* (1983). © CINÉ TAMARIS.**

labour because she has organised someone else to take the picture, including in situations where Varda appears to be working alone, as photographer or editor.

Varda's bathetic humour surrounds her representations here of her labour as they did her personal life. In *Varda par Agnès*, she describes *Resnais Monteur* ('Resnais the Editor'), as he assisted her with the editing of *La Pointe Courte*. She reports the conversation held following Resnais' initial assessment of the footage: 'I've seen enough, but I don't know if I can work on this film'. Varda is sent away to annotate the footage ready for the edit. The next part is reported as a little theatrical scenario between the two:

I've finished what you told me to do.

You have marked up ten thousand feet of film. You're crazy! Good! I'll come and edit your film, but on certain conditions. Salary split evenly, as agreed. But



**FIGURE 12: VARDA WORKING WITH RESNAIS. *VARDA PAR AGNÈS* (1994).  
© CAHIERS DU CINEMA/CINÉ TAMARIS.**

you'll have to pay me something for my lunch every day and I don't work past six o'clock.

Resnais was with me for a fortnight. He arrived on a bicycle, with bicycle clips around his trousers. He was on time (1994, p. 46).

Varda, who applies self-deprecating humour through these materials, extends it to her representations of the filmmakers of the French New Wave such as Resnais. She accentuates his ordinariness and the everyday labour - 'He was on time'. Similarly, in relation to Godard, the 'quelqu'un' or 'someone' of the French New Wave (Smith, 2007, pp.149), Varda recalls a visit by him, in which he drops a bottle of wine in attempting to greet her mother.

In film media, she is able to introduce her labour using the layered textual style of the essay film, juxtaposing still and moving images (as in *Ulysse* (Agnès Varda,

1983, France) (Figure 11) in which artistic process as part of her memory of events in 1954 from her perspective in 1982). In stylistic terms, the transition from essay film to paratextual material is seamless, allowing Varda to mine her artistic archive further and to add more dialectical material through the digital paratext. In *Tout(e) Varda* (2011) most of the films are accompanied by additional materials, ‘boni’, as well as introductions. This enables Varda to retell her story. Varda, as evident from her early films and through her paratexts, loves to perform. In particular, she revels in adopting different fantasies of herself, as woman and artist. The evolution of this in her work is important for this analysis of its potential for *parler femme*. She has appeared as the storyteller, carried off by balloons, (*Quelques femmes bulles*, Agnès Varda, 1978, France), as an old lady moving up the beach using a walking aid (*Les plages d’Agnès*), a lone woman posed next to painted cardinals (*Varda par Agnès*), a gleaner carrying corn (*Les glaneurs et la glaneuse*) or a human-sized potato (*Varda, Potatutopia*, 2003).



FIGURE 13: VARDA PLAYS HERSELF AS A YOUNG WOMAN. *VARDA PAR AGNÈS* (1994). © CAHIERS DU CINEMA/CINÉ TAMARIS.

The digital paratext, *Daguerre-Plage* [*Daguerre-Beach*] (Agnès Varda, 2011, France), which accompanies *Les plages d'Agnès* as part of the *Tout(e) Varda* collection, is one such restating which appears as a deceptive piece of ephemera. Varda's technique of playfulness leads to substantive effect in relation to Irigaray's notion of the movement from the 'autobiographical I' to a 'different cultural I' (1993a, p.177). Varda again plays herself as an old woman, knitting amongst the children on the beach created on Rue Daguerre, a whimsical metaphor for the importance of beaches to Varda's inspiration and the kind of old lady she has never been or ever will be. Varda, the director, deceptively announces her intention to play in this sand, juxtaposing herself (as the eighty-year-old) beside the excited and active children. Similarly, for *Tout(e) Varda*, she revisits *La Pointe Courte* and re-enacts writing the screenplay at Rue Daguerre when she was a young woman (*Agnès présente le film et*



FIGURE 14: DOMESTIC LABOUR AS FILM LABOUR IN VARDA'S COURTYARD. *TOUT(E) VARDA* (2011). © CINÉ TAMARIS.



**FIGURE 15: VARDA WITH NURITH AVIV. *VARDA PAR AGNÈS* (1994). © CAHIERS DU CINEMA/CINÉ TAMARIS.**

*dialogue avec Mathieu Almaric*, 2011). It is another example of Varda's enjoyment of imagining herself in various life stages and fantasy versions of herself (Figure 13).

She introduces various of her films from her courtyard, using the device of a washing line to present the associated film posters (Figure 14). As the images move, Varda is revealed behind them in her domestic theatre. Here, again, is a unique association which is powerful for *parler femme* because it accentuates the normality of artistic production, juxtaposed next to domesticity.

Thus, Varda's artistic life is characterised, in her paratexts, as an extension of her domestic arrangements. This is a function of the appearance of Rue Daguerre, where both artistic and domestic life can take place side-by-side with the commercial. Ciné Tamaris, her production company set up in 1955 with what appears to be a very

commercial presence is based on Rue Daguerre, with (until recently) a shopfront on the road. Her staff appear in several films and paratexts, including *Les plages d'Agnès*. Varda continues her self-reflexive revelation of the labour of filmmaking through these staged reconstructions of her own working and of her various collaborators. In fact, before considering family and motherhood as a subject in her essay films, this thesis will consider its function in her practice. Building surrogate families is part of the strength of Varda's individual artistic process and, part of her public act of enunciation, as she stages it in reconstructions in paratext.

### **Speaking of Practice - Collaborations as Family**

The focus in this section is on the way in which Varda brings her collaborations onto the screen as part of a representation of her artistic practice, and to consider their value in relation to *parler femme*.

Varda features a number of key collaborators onscreen and in paratext. These include her daughter, Rosalie Varda-Boursellier, who appears in Varda's films (*L'une chante, l'autre pas* (Agnès Varda, 1977, France); *Les plages d'Agnès*) and in paratext. She has become a producer on the films and works on the film archive with her mother. In addition, Varda's regular collaborators include cinematographer Nurith Aviv (Figure 15), who shot *Daguerréotypes* (Agnès Varda, 1976, France) and *Documenteur* (Agnès Varda, 1981, USA/France), Sabine Mamou, her editor in Los Angeles; the actor, Jane Birkin, with whom she collaborated on *Jane B. par Agnès V* (Agnès Varda, 1988, France) and *Kung Fu Master [Le petit amour]* (Agnès Varda, 1988, France) and non-actor, Marthe Janias.

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Rosalie Varda, has worked in films as a set designer, and overseen with her mother the remastering of Jacques Demy's films and the preservation of Varda's own. Varda's latest film, *Visages Villages* [*Faces Places*] (2017) was executive-produced by her daughter. There is a legacy that has been built, by the preservation of materials, that Varda is clearly determined to see survive and handed on to the following generations. In *Les plages d'Agnès* she introduces her daughter Rosalie twice – once as family member and also as artistic assistant alongside her art director, Christophe Vallaux (who created the iconic image of the old lady seen on the boxset cover). Rosalie is also the 'girl, beautiful and generous, who imagines that everyone else is like that' (Varda, 1994, p.29). She is the child who 'abused tissue paper squares' to grow up into a costume designer for the opera, delighted with the 'burst of colour at every spectacle' (Varda, 1994, p.29). Varda's recording of her private world at the time over these decades creates the dual presence of Rosalie, the small child and daughter, contemporaneously with the adult creative collaborator.

In the DVD bonus film for *Daguerréotypes, Rue Daguerre en 2005* (Agnès Varda, 2011, France), Varda similarly layers the past and present of the essay film, which featured her shopkeeper neighbours on her street. In 2005, she examines the inhabitants then and now, accentuating her personal deep connection to the area. Aviv joins Varda on the voiceover, reviewing their work on *Daguerréotypes*. Together, they generate a performance of their collaboration on the soundtrack with affectionate interactions, discussing that they were small enough to hide in the shops together to film.

Varda: Nurith and I agreed: the camera had to be like a calm, patient person that wouldn't move a lot, looking right and left, observing attentively. [...] I see you



**FIGURE 16: VARDA OVERSEES THE EDITING IN HER APRON. *DAGUERRE-PLAGE* (2011). © CINÉ TAMARIS.**

standing with your hand-held camera following without moving, well ... just moving your body slightly, filming the continuity of the work.

Aviv: This is a sequence I find interesting and unusual. It's pure choreography. Going in and going out. The choreography of a couple like a little dance. [...] It's tremendous to show that in one shot.

Varda: You're the queen of sequence shots (*Rue Daguerre en 2005*, 2011).

Alongside this praise, there is friendly critique of long-term collaborators, as Varda teases Aviv watching a shot: 'I'd wish you'd tilt down to the buttons' (*Rue Daguerre en 2005*, 2011). This may seem quotidian, but it contributes directly to 'systems of exchange' (Irigaray, 1993d, p.75) between women, through their speaking of expertise and, not least, their understanding of the camera as expressing 'human values' as opposed to being an object of 'technocratic imperialism' (1993e, p. 176).

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A similar conversation takes place in the paratext *Daguerre-Plage*, (which accompanies *Les plages d'Agnès*). A friend and neighbour, Bastide, appears and, in an apparently impromptu move, they sit down in the street to have a conversation. As the conversation evolves it becomes a discussion about her practice, about her thematic preoccupation with time. Varda discusses her work with Bastide, who uses the word 'art'; she recoils at this, stating she would rather people would discuss her 'work' ['travail'] or 'your films' ['vos films']. This segues into an imagined sequence in which a tracking shot moves up the street following a man carrying a stack of film reels to Varda's front door, where she stands posed in a domestic activity. She follows him across the road to the production company site. Inside, a young man edits across several screens with images of an old film (*Daguerréotypes*). Varda watches over his work, still dressed, symbolically, in her apron (Figure 16). Varda's voiceover commentary anchors this animated relationship between life and art: 'what matters to me. My private life and the cinema. Not private ... My personal life and the cinema'.

Slowly, the relationship between Varda and Bastide is revealed. He was her archivist who spent five years organising the 'chaos' of documents in which she lived. This included categorising and archiving Demy's papers which, Varda comments, was an 'admirable' act since she could not, in her own grief, touch them. At the end of his tenure, when he was 'let out' of the tiny room filled with 'newspapers, books, magazines, papers, photos, posters', it was 'tidy'. This dialogue itself illustrates the warm relationship and collaboration between the two; Varda recalls how Bastide our 'beloved archivist' ['*documentalist chéri*'] has 'flown the coop' to become a university researcher. The conversation segues again to his research area of French silent film, and Varda notes the power of the film image, even in one shot, the way in which 'I

remember the way they made me feel' (*Daguerre-Plage*, 2011). In another typical Varda juxtaposition, the film moves to a montage of vox pops in Rue Daguerre about memorable images from Varda's film *Daguerréotypes*, in which Madame Chardon Bleu is mentioned most often as memorable.

Already in this apparently simple piece of ephemera, there are a number of aspects which are relevant for *parler femme*. Varda has indicated how she may appear to be a little old lady, but she is also a formidable cineaste. Neither one is rejected in favour of the other, they are expressions of '*tout(e) Varda*' - the whole of Varda - and she indicates that they can exist harmoniously. There is a further development regarding artistic practice, one which could be seen to celebrate 'human values' as opposed to 'technocratic imperialism' (Irigaray, 1993e, p. 176). in the represented relationship between Bastide and Varda. Not least, in their evident mutual respect and affection, which Varda has made part of a performance to camera. These DVD '*boni*' or extras are significantly different to others produced alongside films, where marketing materials foreground technology or celebrate temporary relationships between colleagues, speaking of the film production experience as being part of a family. Varda's paratextual representations demonstrate the insincerity of those materials. Her artistic production is literally situated in her own home and the relationships she brings onscreen are long-standing, familial ones.

A significant collaboration is with non-professional Marthe Janias, who appears as an old lady with Sandrine Bonnaire in *Sans toit ni loi* and in Varda's essay film, *7p., cuis., s. de b., ... à saisir* (Agnès Varda, 1984, France). She is honoured by the creation of a short film as DVD extra, *Histoire de la vieille dame* [*Story of the Old Lady*]

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(Agnès Varda, 2011, France) remastered for digital release as it has turned mouldy through long storage. It is included on the boxset in ‘tribute’ to the ‘charming Marthe’ (*Histoire de la vieille dame*) and her contribution to Varda’s work. Janias appears talking with Varda onscreen, in between takes, and is included on the voiceover. Reflecting on playing a wealthy widow in *Sans toit ni loi*, she reveals she spent her whole life in service: ‘Then all of a sudden, I’m the boss. It makes me laugh’ (*Histoire de la vieille dame*). Varda, in the act of directing her, laughs with her. Marthe’s laughter finds its way into the feature film, where the old lady shares a joke with Sandrine Bonnaire’s vagabond. Varda reveals a wider purpose of this in her commentary: ‘In the laughter which unites this rich old lady and this poor girl their social classes cease to exist. It is also a change for Marthe, through laughter, to get a kind of revenge on her life of labour’ (*Histoire de la vieille dame*). Thus, Varda’s agency has celebrated Janias’s labour, on the film and in life, and turned it into a piece of cinema, an artefact for exchange.

This political value, revealed by using Irigaray and *parler femme* to interpret Varda’s practice moves analysis away from stereotypical notions of the nurturing female director as a sign of a ‘feminine’ practice of cinema. Instead, it is visible through all the paratexts accompanying her films, that Varda values her interactions with others in creating art: it is performed through her walks through the streets with the sons of a local man, Pierrot, and projections of him in *La Pointe Courte* (in *Les plages d’Agnès*); it is present in her visits to people who responded to *Les glaneurs et la glaneuse* in 2002, to create a sequel, *Les glaneurs et la glaneuse - deux ans après*; or in a short film of her producer Cecilia Rose, engaged in acrobatics whilst explaining financing agreements for *Les plages d’Agnès* (*Trapézistes et Voltigeurs*,

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Agnès Varda, 2011, France). In her imagery, Varda has emphasised the power of ‘human values’ over the ‘technocratic imperialism’ (Irigaray, 1993a, p. 176). This analysis of practice indicates a number of possibilities that may contribute to her act of *parler femme* as a woman filmmaker. Varda chooses, in representing these collaborations, to foreground the relationships that she maintains, that feed her artistic imagination. These are part, in Heilbrun’s words, of her story of ‘ambitions, and possibilities, and accomplishments’ (1989, p.46).

What these examples, once collected, indicate is a clear artistic practice, illuminated further by Varda’s own description of her cinema as the ‘cinema of the author as witness’ (Varda, 1975, p.46). In 1975, interviewed about her film *Daguerréotypes*, she described it as ‘a film of witness, a historical film, one to comprehend a particular circumstance at a moment in history [...] it is a film of witness of a certain way of life, in a certain year, in a certain neighbourhood’ (Varda, 1975, p.45). As part of her documentarian’s interest in others, she aimed to refract the story-telling function in her films outwards to her participants, commenting that: ‘Perhaps I am making a cinema of the author as witness [*cinéma d’auteur-témoin*’]. Varda continued: ‘I think that I am making the cinema of an auteur, but I recoil a little in the face of the word “auteur”, in case it gives too limited a meaning’ (Varda, 1975, p.46).

The idea of the cinematic author as a witness is an important part of Varda’s potential value to *parler femme*, promoted through her work in the essay film and, subsequently, in paratext, including representations of the mother-daughter dyad. These are considered in more depth through the essay films below.

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Consistently, as discussed above, through her essay texts and in her paratexts, she has been a witness to her life and her life as an artist, articulating personal life and relationships with artistic creativity. Turning to the films and paratexts in more depth, the following analysis examines how biography is fused with elements of fantasy and with the performance of artistic labour. It will demonstrate how her self-reflexive enunciative strategies in filmmaking extend Varda further as a model for *parler femme* in her articulation of cinematic labour, fantasy and motherhood.

### **Cinematic Labour and Motherhood**

Turning to the essay films enables an analysis of Varda as a model for *parler femme* in the paratext because these films explore women's experience directly in relation to fantasy and artistic labour. Motherhood is a topic that Varda presents throughout her films, through stories and reminiscences similar to those about Demy. However, for the purposes of this analysis, the focus is on the imagery of motherhood within her essay films, and how it informs a fantasy of motherhood which has currency as part of *parler femme* and as part of a new definition of the 'collective fantasies' which might be released (Johnston, 1975, p.30) through cinema texts. This is relevant to the study of women filmmakers in the paratext because of the availability of direct address and of the relationship between image and sound which is perpetuated through these artefacts. These enable the documentary aspects, as identified by feminist scholarship in relation to a 'women's cinema', where women address the camera and tell their life stories, as part of the recovery of a wider lost history. Allied to Varda's idiosyncratic voice and her creation of fantasy, her films can

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contribute to 'new systems of exchange' (Irigaray 1993d, p.75) and public acts of enunciation for women.

In the image that opens this chapter (Figure 3), in her documentary *Les plages d'Agnès*, Varda holds the electricity cable she used to film *Daguerréotypes*. She discusses the making of that film; as a new mother, that she was reluctant to leave her baby, Mathieu. This project kept her near home, and she dragged the large electrical cable along the street for each day's filming on Rue Daguerre. On hearing this story, one listener commented: 'Uh-oh. You didn't want to cut the umbilical cord' (*Les plages d'Agnès*, 2008). It is a significant metaphor that Varda, the grandmother of the New Wave, is pictured holding the cinematic apparatus as an umbilical cord rather than as a piece of apparatus that is part of the cinematic mechanism. She, effectively, interrupts the discourses which celebrate 'technocratic imperialism' over 'human values' (Irigaray, 1993a, p. 176) and produces a new imagining, of a woman capable of managing technical equipment naturally as part of her life.

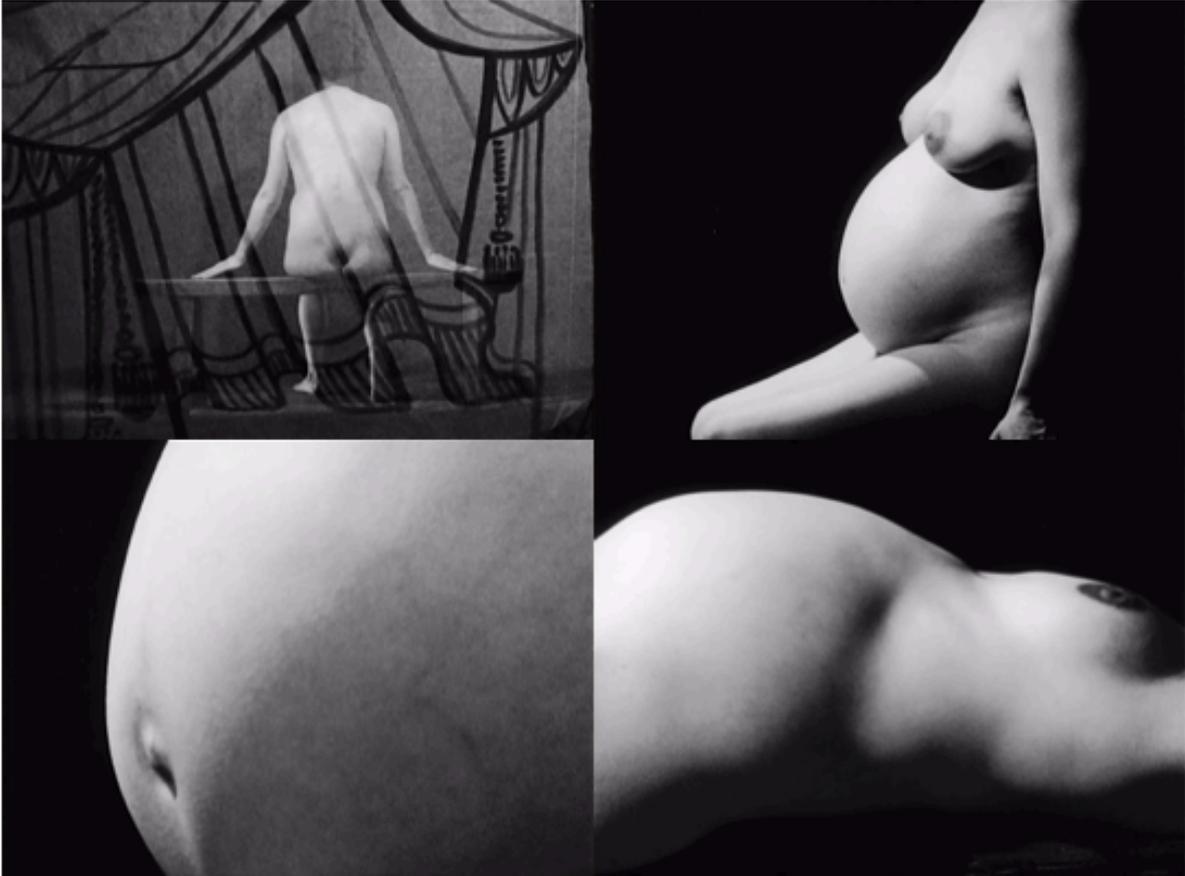
Varda's films have always had a relationship to where she is personally, which has, for example, determined where and how she makes her films, including her time in Los Angeles with Demy (*Mur Murs* (1981, France/USA); *Documenteur*). For the purposes of this thesis, it is useful to focus on where Varda presents aspects of motherhood and aspects of the domestic arena, and utilises them as a means of 'speaking of woman' and, possibly, of 'speaking (as) woman' (Irigaray, 1985b, p.135). Two films, *L'opéra-Mouffe* (Agnès Varda, 1958, France) and *Ulysse* present material focussed on motherhood which, through the layering of the essay film itself and in

Varda's subsequent paratextual material, opens up possibilities to explore the layering of the biography, the artist and fantasies of motherhood.

***L'opéra-Mouffe (1958)***

*L'opéra-Mouffe*, which followed *La Pointe Courte*, was a surrealist fantasy, made in an essayistic style, based in Rue Mouffetard near her home in Rue Daguerre. It is formed of still and filmed images of local people, intertwined with a short sequences of a fictional love affair. The short film is overlaid with musical refrains, leitmotifs composed by Georges Delerue, to accompany the action. In this first essay film, Varda already exploits the dialectical functioning of the form to place herself as author amidst a genealogy of women's experience. The film is introduced by a slide, which announces its literal provenance: '*Opera Mouffe* is a notebook filmed around Rue Mouffetard, Paris by a pregnant woman in 1958'. Varda appears next, filmed from behind and then in profile to reveal her pregnant body (Figure 17).

The film is clearly 'speaking of woman' (Irigaray, 1985b, p.135) because of the way it symbolises different stages in women's lives. Time folds in upon itself, with the juxtaposition of images of pregnant women and the haunted, elderly faces. It reflects Varda's own preoccupation with the idea that time can be experienced subjectively, which she expressed elsewhere as: 'that time we feel, we can *see* the time in a very subjective manner' (Varda, 2001, p.24). Collaborator Delerue's jaunty, almost comedic, score becomes increasingly dissonant and atonal as the film progresses, to express the text's essential and Modernist sense of disassociation between the characters and their alienation.



**FIGURE 17: AUTHOR AS MOTHER. *L'OPERA-MOUFFE* (1958). © CINÉ TAMARIS.**

This is illustrated by the last section, ‘Anxiety’, when a pregnant female moves slowly along a street, mimicking the slow movement of the old ladies seen previously. The enunciative strategies of the film represent the stages of life as though they were interlaced or overlapping. In Varda’s imagination, old men and women are remembered as babies whilst young women carry the prospect of old age already in their slow-moving, pregnant bodies.

Delphine Benézét’s study of Varda resisted a biographical interpretation of this film and noted that the figure of the pregnant woman is shot to keep her identity hidden. For Benézét, Varda ‘makes clear that the film is going to present a collection of willingly enigmatic and ambiguous images rather than straight-forward

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representations' (2014, pp.11-12). This is in keeping with Benézét's viewpoint and auteurist study of Varda as 'eclectic' for which 'adopting a specific terminology' is 'problematic'. Instead, her stated approach to 'offer a new outlook' on her 'eclectic and unorthodox installations, documentary and fiction work' (2014, p.5).

However, examining Varda's work as a body, she demonstrates far greater purpose and agency in her use of imagery and sound in this film and throughout her work. Consigning it to eclecticism fails to recognise her artistic vision and control. Varda has commented that: 'I make fragmented portraits [*portraits brisés*], ones which are broken [*qui sont cassés*]' as in a broken mirror because that interests me, because I feel that people are a little in pieces' (quoted in Barnet, 2011, p.110). Through this witnessing she looking through this fragments to a kind of 'freedom' ((quoted in Barnet, 2011, p.110). This accentuates the philosophical nature of her inquiry, which also involves witnessing of herself. This film is the beginning of a repeated set of images of herself, in role. The opening montage circulates around the geography of the pregnant woman's body. In retrospect, and with Varda's subsequent public profile, it is possible to identify the naked figure facing away from the camera in the first shot as Varda herself. This is an early example of the 'unique' woman playing at being 'all women' (*Réponse de femmes*, 1975). Her pregnancy, at the time of shooting the film, reoccurs as part of the context for the film's production. In an interview in 1975, she contrasted her situation as a pregnant woman, happy, with the situation of those she could see around herself in Rue Mouffetard. *L'opéra-Mouffe*:

tells of how one can be at the same time pregnant, full of joy, happy, and at the same time to be aware that life is misery and old age, which is everywhere present around Rue Mouffetard. That contradiction interested me more since it was highlighted to me (Varda, 1975, p.45).

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Varda returns to this idea in the digital paratext accompanying *L'opéra-Mouffe* in the boxset. In this introduction, she highlights this same contradiction between her own situation and that of those she saw on the street: 'I felt tenderness towards them, especially the elderly. I imagined them as babies, when their mothers kissed their tummies'. Varda herself speaks of this giving rise to 'fantasies', the 'imagined world of pregnancy' in the surrealist style of the imagery (*Tout(e) Varda*). She notes, at the end of her introduction, that the film was shown at the Experimental Festival at the Grand Exposition in Brussels in 1958. She concludes: 'The following month, May, I gave birth to my daughter Rosalie' (*Tout(e) Varda*). In the simplicity of this sentence it may be easy to miss the complexity of the juxtaposition it presents. Varda has articulated her life and her artistic work together in this short piece to camera and intertwined her artistic inspiration with her pregnancy. Varda has glossed the film with an overt hermeneutic interpretation for the audience; however, she has also made a statement with feminist potential. She has, in the film and in paratext, identified pregnancy and motherhood as a place worthy of fantasy. In surrealist imagery, though, it is not the pleasure but the fears. It is the anxieties of what may happen which are translated into fantasy, arising out of the vulnerability that her distended belly makes her experience. The most significant image, therefore, may be the film's surrealist juxtaposition of the pregnant belly onscreen which becomes a melon in the market, sliced through for sale.

Varda contextualises the film with her own impending motherhood. It is a political statement and, in its style, its surrealist fantasy of motherhood encapsulates the brutal, emotional realities of pregnancy, ageing and mortality as associated states. This is another form of bathos in Varda's work, one which is allied to a melancholic

philosophy about time and one which attends to the documentary realities of women's lives.

Rhetorically, in her paratextual introduction, the launch of *L'opéra-Mouffe* into the outside world is paralleled with the birth of Rosalie. As she talks, Varda the old woman is positioned in front of the photographic images she took of the old, poor people in Rue Mouffetard. The ageing woman filmmaker sits before images of women in their third age and remembers the artistic work as intertwined with the memory of becoming a mother. It enables Varda, in the 'complex conjunction' (Grant, 2001, p. 122) of the paratext and the film, to reflect her philosophical concern with time that folds in upon itself or 'that time we feel, we can *see* the time in a very subjective manner' (Varda, 2001, p.24).

In this early film, therefore, Varda already reflects on the genealogy of ordinary women's experience, through the relationship of pregnancy directly to old age. She places herself at its centre, not only as 'unique' but also as a representation of 'all women'. Thus, she intertwines her autobiography with a meditation on the movement of time in people's lives. In terms of examining this relationship of the 'autobiographical I' and a 'different cultural I' (Irigaray, 1993a, p.177), her 1983 film *Ulysse* is a significant text in her oeuvre. It demonstrates Varda considering questions of authorship alongside questions of motherhood, brought into a dynamic association by the structure of the essay film.

*Ulysse* is an exploration into the making of one of her photographs (Figure 18) in 1954 in a French seaside resort (St. Aubin-sur-Mer). Varda had gone there with her neighbour Bienvenida and Bienvenida's child, six-year-old Ulysse, as well as with two



**FIGURE 18: TIME, MEMORY AND REPRESENTATION - PHOTOGRAPHY. *ULYSSE* (1983). © CINÉ TAMARIS.**

artist friends who acted as her models during the stay. Varda, nearly thirty years later, uses the relationship of different forms (photograph to film) to consider how the past intrudes into the present by the re-presentation of the old photograph to its protagonists by its author.

Varda recalls, in her artistic biography *Varda par Agnès* (1994), that the inspiration came from the photograph's presence on the door of her attic studio for twenty years. Varda states, 'It was clearly important to me, but why?' and the film is structured as a series of quests, some personal and others aesthetic or philosophical. She visits and questions the photograph's models as part of, apparently, an artistic odyssey of her own; she contextualises it using her own biography and the contemporaneous historical events; she examines the difference between the photograph itself and a painting of it made by Ulysse (Figure 19) asking children of



**FIGURE 19: TIME, MEMORY AND REPRESENTATION - PAINTING. *ULYSSE* (1983).  
© CINÉ TAMARIS.**

the age he was then to comment; and, with typical humour, she presents the photograph to a live goat which attempts to eat it.

The function of the photograph in *Ulysse* is as an artefact that sends Varda on a journey to understand the making of the photograph and to revisit the people involved in it. In this example, Varda intertwines the voice of the woman and the artist. In remembering with them, Varda explores how the action of memory is very subjective (Varda, 2001). At one level, Varda decides to tether it to a question of authorial competence. Overlying the images is a voiceover provided by the filmmaker, giving her the apparent authority in telling the story. However, the film narrative, through the structure of the essay film, employing the instability of the ‘temporal sketch’ (Rivette quoted in Corrigan, 2011), Varda is able to allow complementary narratives to emerge. In his office at *Elle* magazine, Fouli Elia (the male model in the photograph)

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humorously enters the filmmaker's game by stripping again for the interview. He remembers only impressions of the photograph, finally commenting: 'I don't remember that person there... I don't want to remember... But what do I know... Now I am 100,000 years old, I begin to understand'.

The aesthetics of the 'temporal sketch' (Rivette quoted in Corrigan, 2011) mimics feeling that the filmmaker is 'beginning to understand'. Varda emphasises this, when her voiceover responds, as if in dialogue, with Elia, she too being '50,000 years old' is just starting to comprehend 'a little' but the motivation of the young artist-photographer, twenty-eight years old at the time, is now mysterious to her herself. The 'rhetoric of intimacy' ((Klinger, 2006, quoted in Grant, 2008, p.132) in this voiceover introduces the fragility and uncertainty of authorial perspective.



**FIGURE 20: ADULT ULYSSE AND BIENVENIDA. *ULYSSE* (1983). © CINÉ TAMARIS.**

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A test emerges as to who has control over memory. The authority of the voiceover at the beginning of *Ulysse*, where Varda puts her photograph into various historical contexts and considers its qualities as a piece of art, follows a pattern expected in an essay film. It is authoritative and detached, giving information about the social and cultural context. However, this objectivity gives way to personal reminiscence, and more affectively, a staged battle between the auteur – and source of the non-diegetic voiceover – and her subject.

In a crucial sequence (cut into two separate scenes) she meets and questions Ulysse about his memory of her photograph (Figure 20). The filmmaker is met with blank resistance and an inability – or perhaps a refusal – to recall the circumstances of the photograph, despite the evidence of the painting he did for Varda. As Ulysse reiterates his denials he tells Varda: ‘To each their own story, after all. Even if it’s strange, between reality and fiction’.

Bienvenida’s appearance in the setting, behind her son, challenges the apparent spontaneity of the interview. The mother’s appearance signals this is a staged, dramatic moment. The offscreen remonstrations of the filmmaker are countered by the adult man. Ulysse’s denial is absolute and uncompromising and undermines the authority of the filmmaker, whose voice has shifted from a non-diegetic voiceover to a voice off-camera in the diegetic space. There is clear agency from Varda in the movement from ‘voiceover’ to ‘voice-off’ (Doane, 1980, p.130). First with Elia, but now more comprehensively with Ulysse, she is using the enunciative structures to question her right to tell this story. The voice becomes, as Adrian Martin described in relation to Godard’s work, ‘displaced’ and ‘decentred’ (Martin, 2010). In Ulysse’s



**FIGURE 21: VARDA AND ‘FAVOURITE CHILD’ ULYSSE. *ULYSSE* (1983).  
© CINÉ TAMARIS.**

refusal, it is a participant’s voice which has seized authorial control and become, ‘a voice which legislates or pontificates, which closes down meaning’ (Martin, 2010).

Varda has played upon the instability of the ‘temporal sketch’ (Rivette, cited in Corrigan, 2011) that is the essay film using her physical voice. An alternative narration begins to emerge directly through the film’s juxtapositions and the interaction of its images, diegetic conversation and non-diegetic voiceover (Doane, 1980, p.130). Varda’s authority appears to be undermined. Varda, the author, has apparently attempted to follow one enquiry whilst her film has been diverted in another direction, and becomes two stories pertaining to Ulysse and his mother and to Ulysse and Varda.

The history in relation to Varda is concerning her youthful attachment to Ulysse represented in the film by her photographs of them together and her statement that he

was her 'favourite child' (Figure 21). Ulysse's rejection of Varda's right to tell the story is also a rejection of her own personal deep affection for him as a child, visible in the photographs. The image of Varda and Ulysse together presents Varda's appreciation of the child's natural, spontaneous affection. It allows the audience to comprehend, directly through the film's juxtapositions, that the loss of this affection personally to the filmmaker, because it is unshared (even actively denied) by the adult Ulysse, is devastating.

Varda makes this biographical detail available without overdetermining it with an explanation in voiceover. Her pain appears through the still image onscreen, and her statement that he is 'my favourite child, not really my child' as it follows her encounter with the adult Ulysse. Her return to the story in *Varda par Agnès* ostensibly talks about the relationship between artist and model but still lays bare this sense of loss: 'I found myself facing an adult, polite and considerate, but one who would not enter into my game. He did not like me. Perhaps he had never liked me. Now again, I cannot arrive at an answer to this enigma' (1994, p.136).

Towards the end of the film, Bienvenida weeps silently at the memory of that visit as her own recovered trauma. She recalls from that time, not Varda's photograph of Ulysse or of mother and son, posed artistically in the sun. Another story hidden within the enunciative structures of the film, underneath Varda's exhibition of these photographs at the beginning, is Ulysse's illness and the strong possibility he would never walk again. Bienvenida's story is of her fear and pain at her son's illness.

Two stories of motherhood have been hidden in the layers of this essay film. Irigaray's concept of 'the unacknowledged mother' (Whitford, 1991, p.7) is very

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relevant here, and her contention that, within the symbolic order as discursively established, the ‘mother must remain silent, outlawed’ (Irigaray, 1993b, p.14). Varda’s layered film brings out a story and a fantasy of motherhood as it is enacted by two women, Bienvenida and Varda herself. Varda’s story of motherhood is an imagined fantasy of motherhood, but nonetheless genuine. Through her journey through memories, as a woman who is ‘50,000 years old’, she has encountered her own pain of loss but her grief is a silent one, running beneath the historical images of her with Ulysse and the resistant interview with the adult man, until it is revealed in voiceover by her statement that he was ‘my favourite child’.

Mothers and surrogate mothers are bound together in a narrative made by a woman who, by 1982, was a biological mother herself. The story itself is, therefore, as much as an exchange between Varda and Bienvenida, indicated by the fact that the filmmaker dedicates the film to her at the beginning. This is a story about a woman’s love for her son and another’s woman’s surrogate love for the same boy. Thus, what begins as a film about a photograph and its historical and social context ends as a film about motherhood in relation to the operation of time and memory. Moreover, it is an example of forming a contribution to the ‘collective fantasies’ (Johnston, 1975, p.30) that might constitute a women’s cinema, being a fantasy of motherhood. This is a significant act by a woman author, using the state of motherhood as a means to consider philosophical questions about our workings of time and reminiscence.

The work is also an act of *parler femme* in the way in which Varda has recovered motherhood into the structure of the narrative, in its ‘*énonciation*’, as well as its ‘*énoncé*’ (Benveniste, 1971), by what is spoken through the juxtaposition of the

images of the subliminal narrative of maternal grief. It speaks, in Irigarayan terms, about ‘*the relation of woman to the mother and the relation of women among themselves*’ [original emphasis] (Irigaray, 1985b, p.124). It reflects on the ‘relation of the woman to the mother’ through the figure of Varda herself, and directly the relationship of ‘women among themselves’ through her relationship to Bienvenida (Irigaray, 1985b, p.124). It can also function as an artefact for exchange, between ‘I-woman (je-femme) and you-woman (tu-femme)’ (Irigaray, 1993e, p.41), in the “gift” that is given from Varda to Bienvenida, and also in the film’s ability to become a subject for discussion in social discourse. In her use of still and moving image, together with sound,

Here, it is possible to recognise the articulation of the artist with the woman, her active employment of her own biography in formulating the narrative and also her weaving of a fantasy of the relationship of herself to Ulysse and to Bienvenida. In this, there is a contribution to new forms of ‘collective fantasies’ (Johnston, 1975, p.30) as realised through cinema.

### **Varda – The Unique Artist and All Women**

Considering Varda’s essay films, in relation to the paratexts, looks for ways in which her practice and her film representations provide a model for an act of enunciation that is *parler femme*. This can be most effectively considered through the way in which the films represent imagined fantasies of womanhood, which she offers with humour but also with a philosophical intent. This is where the multi-layered possibilities of the ‘exploratory energy’ of the essay film (Corrigan, 2011, p. 67) and a dynamic relationship between her speech and that of others in the films demonstrates

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the possibilities where women speak together. This is the formulation of a story of extraordinary artistic practice as it is part of one woman's ordinary biography, which Varda has already demonstrated is powerful when aligned with domestic imagery.

The chapter began with a recognisable representation of feminist articulation in *Réponse de femmes*, setting out a staged encounter between women, a 'speaking-among-women' in which a 'speaking (as) woman may dare to express itself' (Irigaray, 1985b, p.135). These different women, with multiple voices, express to the camera directly what women's experience and women's desires consist of. Varda's essay films may use direct-to-camera forms of witnessing of real women's lives, recognisable as feminist filmmaking (Kuhn, 1994; Thornham, 2012; Mayer 2016b). However, it is Varda's ability to introduce fantasy which offers further possibilities for *parler femme*.

Across her films, Varda stages intergenerational encounters between women which are persistently infused with this element of imagining and with a repeated focus on time, memory and loss. As revealed, this may be actual loss, imagined grief or the feeling of being 'full of joy, happy, and [...] aware that life is misery and old age' (Varda, 1975, p. 45). Varda's repeatedly evokes fantasy-infused representations of 'all women' and demonstrates her ability to engage in 'speaking-among-women' (Irigaray, 1985b, p.135).

Several films engage with the conflation of the ages of women, demonstrating different aspects to this emotional and philosophical inquiry. It is significant that it is an inquiry that is made through women's biography and experiences. These include *Elsa la rose* (Agnès Varda, 1966, France), *Daguerréotypes* and her films with a non-professional actor, Marthe Janias. Of relevance here, is how these images move into



**FIGURE 22: MADAME CHARDON BLEU IN *DAGUERRÉOTYPES* (1976).  
© CINÉ TAMARIS.**

paratext and also become part of Varda's representation of herself as an artist in old age. They are a particular mobilisation of her notion of the '*cinéma d'auteur-témoin*' (Varda, 1975, p.46) which may have potential for *parler femme*.

In *Daguerréotypes*, Varda encounters Madame 'Chardon Bleu' (Mrs. Blue Thistle) named by Varda after the haberdasher's shop she and her husband own. Varda and Nurith Aviv, through the camerawork and voiceover, construct an affecting fantasy around this woman. Existing as a bird-like creature within her own shop, Varda's voiceover anchors her melancholic air and sadness, describing her as having the 'meekness of a captive'. She states that her work on the whole film began because this woman who 'fascinates me more than the shop'. The sequence featuring Madame Chardon Bleu includes a scene where Rosalie, Varda's daughter, enters to buy some jasmine water. Clearly staged, it is still an affective sequence: Rosalie's polite

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questions about the perfumes and the elderly woman's gaze outside onto the wintry street, bring together these two stages of women's lives similar to *L'opéra-Mouffe*.

Whilst Rosalie talks to the shopkeeper, Aviv and Varda's camera expresses Varda's fascination with this old lady by the way constantly drifts left away from the centre of the action as if drawn towards Madame as she is lost in her own world, melancholic and separate. In *Rue Daguerre en 2005*, Varda utilises the intimacy of the voiceover to affirm her own emotional connection with this woman: 'I often think of Madame Chardon Bleu. [...] There was a genuine affection between us'. Watching the film, she continues: 'Her desire to be elsewhere makes her dreamy and veiled, her anxious captive look. I think she is unforgettable (Varda, 2005). She remarks on letters she received, two with money to buy Madame Chardon Bleu some flowers, evidence of the operation of her '*cinéma d'auteur-témoin*' (Varda, 1975, p.46)

From an auteurist perspective, this shows Varda's preoccupation with the melancholy of old age (Varda, 1975, p.45). It is also possible to consider these images through the idea of fantasy, to see how Varda has created an affective fantasy of old age's melancholy and sadness, embodied onscreen through Madame Chardon Bleu's wistful and uncomprehending gaze out of the shop (Figure 22) and her wanderings outside, without a sense of where she wishes to go. The evidence of public response indicates how this touches people's own experience, fears or anxieties. It is a 'speaking of women' (Irigaray, 1985b, p.135) which has become an artefact of exchange between her audience and Varda directly, through the letters and communication.



**FIGURE 23: MARTHE JANIAS IN *7p., cuis., s. de b., ... À SAISIR* (1984). © CINÉ TAMARIS.**

In Marthe Janias, Varda finds a collaborator who enters willingly into her fantasies, who brings an alternative imagining of old age, with irrepressible laughter and humour in her performances. She appears first in *7p., cuis., s. de b., ... à saisir* (1984), a surreal fantasy about the unravelling of the patriarchal family which Varda filmed, taking advantage of an art exhibition in a historical building in Avignon (Varda, 1994, p.156). The deserted Hospice Saint Louis formed an ideal location for a family melodrama and fantasy, where a young girl rebels against the Victorian-style restrictions of her father. Into this narrative, Varda inserts a number of surrealist sequences, melancholic reflections of the ghosts of the building. Janias is posed as an art exhibit which comprises a shower of feathers. In contrast with the filming of her own skin in a later film, Varda infuses the image onscreen with surrealist beauty

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(Figure 23). It is a radical act by Varda to show an old lady's body onscreen and convincingly stage it as an object of beauty and pleasure to its owner.

All of these portraits, including those from *L'opéra-Mouffe*, stand in relation to Varda's portrait of herself when she reaches old age. She has commented that to imagine oneself old is like 'a dirty joke' ['une sale blague' - *Les plages d'Agnès*]. Yet, in the spirit of her 'cinéma d'auteur-témoin' (Varda, 1975, p.46), Varda includes herself as ordinary but again translates the 'autobiographical I' into a 'different cultural I' (Irigaray, 1993a, p.177).

Varda's detached observational humour, as demonstrated in *L'opéra-Mouffe* regarding the old women in the market, is turned upon herself as part of the act of a 'cinema of author as witness' in *Les glaneurs et la glaneuse*. Varda (the artist) films herself in extreme close-up to examine her ageing skin. She has returned from travelling abroad and empties out her suitcase. She holds a postcard of a Rembrandt self-portrait, painted in old age, and appears spontaneously to move the camera upwards from this to film her own hand and arm. The texture and surface of her skin, in the flat digital image, is juxtaposed with the image of the stain she has noticed on her ceiling. Whereas she has enjoyed the imperfection of the plasterwork (superimposing still pictures of artworks it reminds her of) her skin evinces more a sense of its difference for Varda as the cinematographer –its separateness from herself. She comments: 'J'ai l'impression que je suis une bête. C'est pire. Je suis une bête que je ne le connais pas' ['I appear to myself as an animal. Worse than that. An animal that I don't recognise']. This is important testimony since Varda, whilst she plays with the idea of shapes in the plasterwork as an artist, evaluates herself as an

ageing woman on-camera. It is present, more humorously, in her periodically, two-tone hair colouring as seen in Figure 14. Her agency in this is crucial. *Les glaneurs et la glaneuse* explores the questions of what is valued and kept by society and what is thrown away. Varda is, as Mireille Rosello noted, recovering the aspects of human society that are usually disregarded and discarded (2001; see also Wilson, 2005).



**FIGURE 24: THE MEMORY OF BEAUTY AND YOUTH IN *ELSA LA ROSE* (1966). © CINÉ TAMARIS.**

It is important that Varda stands equally with other women. Her act of speaking directly about her horror at herself is relevant to *parler femme*. It is biographical testimony, transformed into an artwork, which is an available voice in public discourse, an experience to contribute to new ‘systems of exchange’ (Irigaray, 1993e, p.75). Returning to a short essay text will demonstrate further how this representation

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of women's old age experiences is significant for *parler femme*. Her film *Elsa la rose* foreshadows Varda's later witnessing of her own ageing process because it examines the situation of the woman as part of an artistic couple, a situation obviously resonant with Varda given her marriage to Demy. As a younger woman artist, Varda still muses directly on the different situations for women and men as public, creative individuals. This is especially as the couple has aged.

Intended as one of two films, the other to be made by Demy but never realised, it is a portrait of the Surrealist poet Louis Aragon and his wife and muse, Elsa Triolet, as an older couple. In Varda's hands, something emerges about loss as it is particularly constituted for women. In her paratext, titled '*présenté par Agnès*', which accompanies this film for the release of *Tout(e) Varda*, Varda comments on her 'fascination' with Elsa, because she 'bravely accepted her dual status', both as the real woman and also as the 'dream', the Elsa, 'mythical and adored'. Elsa appears in close-up and comments, with wry humour, on the disappointment she represents for those admirers of her husband's poetry: 'As I cannot satisfy this need for beauty and youth that the readers have, I feel guilty, and it makes me unhappy' (Figure 24).

Triolet expresses a similar horror that permeated *L'opéra-Mouffe* but also a similar pragmatic and bathetic humour. However, in the film's end credits, Elsa is listed as '*racontée par Aragon*' – as told by Aragon – even whilst she has featured on the non-diegetic voiceover alongside him and in the images of them debating and working together (Figure 25). Aragon's voice brings the story to a close but with an irony that he does so by pointing towards a new – and unarticulated – one; of Elsa Triolet, herself the author of seventeen books: 'No longer she who I imagine, but one



**FIGURE 25: TRIOLET AND ARAGON DISCUSS HER WRITING PROOFS. *ELSA LA ROSE* (1966). © CINÉ TAMARIS.**

who imagines, who gives life to dreams'. (In Varda's poetic written voice: 'Non plus seulement c'elle que j' imagine, mass c'elle qu' imagine, qui a donnée vie à les rêves). Aragon's voiceover concludes, that it is a story for another day and that for now, the 'happy ever after' fairy-tale of a happy marriage must suffice. This is the film's conclusion, an example of the journey ending on a note of 'his desire' not hers (de Lauretis, 1984, p. 133). This is followed by a male actor (Michel Piccoli) reading Aragon's poem about Elsa, as the elderly couple walk off through forest into sunlit fields.

Paying attention to the sonic layers of the text indicates that Varda's purposeful control of the dialectic here and the layers of diegetic sound, both 'voice-off' and 'voiceover' (Doane, 1980, p.130) are fully utilised. Elsa, who has told her own story for much of the film is overwritten by her public image. Her writing remains in a

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private world, it is elided from this story and left for ‘another day’ (*Elsa la rose*). Elsa has literally been spoken over or spoken about by the male voices. In this piece, Varda encounters the idea of fantasy self-reflexively and directly in relation to women’s agency in authorship. Elsa represents the difference between speaking and being spoken in the control of fantasy, in the ability to be, in Aragon’s voiceover: ‘one who imagines’ and ‘who gives life to dreams’ (*Elsa la rose*). In this fantasy, Varda clearly indicates that part of Elsa’s misery in old age is to be left only with her role of being the object desired - now no longer desired - rather than the subject with desire. As part of Varda’s style of enunciation, already discussed in films like *Ulysse*, the story of Triolet’s authorship is hidden within the dialectical structures of the text; she appears only as the old woman, commenting on her own appearance.

There is a question of whether these portraits move from being ‘speaking of woman’ into a form of ‘speaking (as) woman’ (Irigaray, 1985b, p.135). These portraits of other women, alongside those of Varda herself, represent women’s experiences. Irigaray’s concept of *parler femme* was translated to mean the action to ‘disrupt or alter the syntax of discursive logic’ and to ‘express the plurality and mutuality of feminine difference and mime the relations of “self-affection”’ (Irigaray, 1985b, p. 222). In expressing these stories and fantasies of old age, from being a young woman to an old woman, Varda is interrupting the conventional ‘discursive logic’, not least in the way in which her “playful” manner disturbs the melancholy and misery of old age. She does not refute those emotional states as part of its experience. Varda brings these stories of women, to other women, as new artefacts. In them, there is a weaving of melancholy, of great beauty, of play and of grief in poetic form, visually and sonically. It can be exchanged among women as intergenerational knowledge, as a means to

encourage 'woman-to-woman relationship of reciprocity with our mothers' (Whitford, 1991, p.50).

Therefore, Varda presents images of genealogies of women, of which she situates herself as a part. In these proliferating stories, between women from different generations, there is the promise of the recovery of "self-affection" (Irigaray, 1985b, p.122) or 'love of the same' (1993c, p.69) through a genealogy of experience and collaboration. When Varda turns the camera on herself, in *Les glaneurs et la glaneuse*, this is merely an extension of these explorations throughout her career. Her concept of the '*cinéma d'auteur-témoin*' ['cinema of the author as witness'] (Varda, 1975, p.46) is now focussed on herself and creates a productive interplay between 'La Varda' (the authorial voice) and 'Agnès' (the ordinary woman).

Varda combines a commitment to intellectual enquiry, one which is shared by her fellow essayists Jean-Luc Godard and Chris Marker, with a deliberate articulation of this with female biography and experience. The contrast between film and photography, between the moving and the fixed and these different forms of Varda's voice. Through these, Varda presents a conjunction of past and present, absence and presence that are encapsulated in photography itself. Time constantly folds in on itself in Varda's work, a preoccupation for this artist from the beginning of her career rather than just in her third age. Genealogy is brought to life through relationships between women and in the way her films bring participants in contact with themselves as they were, or as they could be. This includes herself, through both a playful adoption of roles and an uncompromising exploration of her own griefs. What is emerging through Varda's work, as a model for other paratexts, is its commitment to seeing

women's lives as 'another "syntax", another "grammar" of culture' (Irigaray, 1985, p. 143) through which to ask these existential questions about the movement of time, the fragility of love and who has the right to remember and to narrate those experiences.

As Varda's wider philosophical and intellectual exploration of time and memory is directly refracted through women's experience it seems misleading or reductive to discuss her in terms of empathy (Guest, 2009). So Mayer's analysis of Varda's films can be 'the work of love, a bringing-together of different times and space so that images, ideas and people can cross the frame. Love is not (just) what's depicted on screen, but the frame itself' (2016b, p.186). This feminist interpretation, however, within the current constraints in public discourse lays the work of the filmmaker open to misinterpretation. These are not uniquely feminine capacities and neither, as Varda demonstrates, are the domestic lives of women incompatible with intellectual inquiry.

So far, this chapter has focussed on Varda's acts of enunciation within her essay texts and paratexts, where she has intertwined an image of authorial labour and female subjectivity. In the final section, this thesis will consider how she has played the role of auteur, in public, and its implications for *parler femme*.

### **Varda - The Female Auteur**

Varda is in the unique position of having worked very closely with the male filmmakers and critics of the French New Wave. She is considered to have anticipated the new cinematic language, and is known as the 'grandmother of the new wave' (Levitin, 1974). Georges Sadoul described this film as "genuinely the first film



**FIGURE 26: MATERIALS FROM *TOUTE VARDA* (2011). © CINÉ TAMARIS.**

of the French Nouvelle Vague'" (1965, p.196), a claim supported latterly by Genette Vincendeau (2008).

It is, arguably, her accessible persona onscreen in the later documentaries which has coloured popular review and accentuated one aspect of the relationship between artist and woman. Chris Darke's characterisation of Varda in the early 2000s – despite his long association and extensive writing on her work – defined Varda by her gender even as he placed her alongside her fellow essayists:

If Godard and Marker are the New Wave contemporaries she most resembles in their shared hunger for formal exploration, she also differs from them in significant ways. Less Olympian than Godard and far less retiring than Marker, Varda bustles forth as both approachable and direct in her work – confident, amusing, with just a touch of melancholy (2008, p.23).

The sense of the filmmaker "bustling" is an unhelpfully deceptive as well as a gendered notion attached to Varda, being an adverb more associated with women than men. Varda, even in France, has never gained the aura of Godard, the 'quelqu'un – someone' in scholar Alison Smith's description of his celebrity (2007, p.149). Smith

comments, anecdotally, that her students did not recognise Varda's name at all (2007, p.149).

The performance, of a very specific persona, has been a central part of Varda's evolution as a filmmaker. In later years, through the success of her full-length documentary films, she has become strongly associated with her appearance in old age. *Les plages d'Agnès* cemented a friendly image of the old lady even as Varda indicated that it is a performance at the very start of that film – 'I *play* the role of a little old lady, plump and talkative, who is telling stories about her life' [my emphasis] (*Les plages d'Agnès*). This image has taken hold in the popular consciousness and provided Varda with useful, branding material: a cartoon version of the 'little old lady' appears on the boxset box as well as in the accompanying materials inside, showing Varda with her very recognisable two-tone hair and rotund figure (Figure 26).

As discussed, Varda's work demonstrates a preoccupation with genealogy, both familial and artistic. The same is true of her construction of herself as an auteur. She remains, throughout her career, very conscious of being part of a genealogy of artists and her essay texts and paratexts demonstrate her consideration of the function of art and the artist and of herself as part of a history of practice. Varda studied Art History and Photography at École des Beaux-Arts in Paris. In a not dissimilar way to Bigelow, Varda repeatedly situates herself as part of an artistic community. In *Les plages d'Agnès*, she is filmed carrying a hand-held camera around a flea market where she discovers old film information cards about her and Demy and their films. She explores the dichotomy of the public and private, stating that before they were 'cardboard cut-outs, they were flesh and blood human beings'. A painted plate from Belgium is held



FIGURE 27: 'JE NE VOIS PAS LA [FEMME] CACHÉE DANS LA FORÊT' (1929). RENÉ MAGRITTE.

up for inspection, about which Varda comments that, as it comes from Liège, she will buy it as a gift for the filmmakers, the Dardennes brothers, 'her brothers in cinema' [my emphasis].

Varda anticipated, if not began, the French New Wave and, yet, she has until recently remained an obscure presence. In *Les plages d'Agnès* (2008), Varda recasts René Magritte's photomontage of the French Surrealist painters from the 1920s: '*Je ne vois pas la [femme] cachée dans la forêt*' ['I do not see the woman hidden in the



**FIGURE 28: ‘LA VARDA’ – AT THE CENTRE OF *LA NOUVELLE VAGUE. LES PLAGES D’AGNÈS* (2008). © CINÉ TAMARIS.**

forest’] (1929) in which the image of a naked female lies in the centre of photographs of French surrealists, all with eyes closed (Figure 27). In Varda’s version (Figure 28), her face is at the centre of a similar montage, surrounded by the male auteurs of the French New Wave cinema, all with their eyes open. Chris Marker, her friend and New Wave compatriot, asks her about that history in voiceover: ‘And [what about] you, La Varda?’ This is the image which, as playful as it appears, can be interpreted as being used with a purposeful recognition of the need to reinforce her authorship and associations. As the woman, in Magritte’s photomontage, is symbolic ‘woman’, a ‘pseudo-centre’ (Johnston, 1973, p.26) in that image, so Varda playfully suggests she is hidden at the centre of the new wave. With her eyes closed, and her fingers to her lips, she implies her need to remain silent, or be silenced, about her presence. However, the image, as Kelley Conway suggested in relation to the opening of the

film (2010, p.127), acts in a directly opposite way, working to assert her presence at the centre.

Varda's dual status, of being a woman whilst being a cultural labourer, can result in a misrecognition of her strong control and agency. It is clear that Varda works to situate herself in the established genealogy, to be part of the history of the French New Wave. This can also be seen as informing the images of herself at work with Resnais or Demy, creating evidence of her existence in that history. Varda, therefore, appears to have always known the need for her own agency in cultivating her auteur status.

## **Conclusion**

Varda represents many possibilities for *parler femme* within her work and her public persona. In the agential act of telling 'not one but many stories' (Kluge quoted in Corrigan, 1990, p.55), Varda fragments her identities in relation to the different roles she plays in public and private. What is consistently of note, from the perspective of voice and the maternal in Varda, is the intertwining of her performances as artist and as woman. In her work, she presents a contribution to a genealogy of women's lives onscreen.

Considering, finally, the possibility of an act of enunciation which is linked to desire and labour, Varda's representation of her labour onscreen and in written paratext brings forward a conventional model. Across all of her texts, she intertwines 'love, desire, language, art, social things, political things, religious things' taking back 'this maternal creative dimension that is our birthright as women' (Irigaray, 1993b, p. 18). Varda occupies what might be described as a conventional position in relation to Irigaray's philosophy and her characterisation of the mother-daughter dyad. Varda

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shows how this ‘maternal creative dimension’ might be realised in a woman’s life which is lived within well-established norms of western society. The images in her films show a conventional world of husband, children and domestic life existing naturally alongside a woman’s labour in film and art. The image of the woman with the umbilical cord, the artist editing in her apron or her weaving of reminiscences of family into artistic work, demonstrate a woman who sees creativity as her ‘birthright’ as Irigaray described (1993b, p.18), and directly associates it with her role as a mother and grandmother.

In this context, her emphasis on the domestic is not a limitation or a constraint. In fact, it is the means by which her artistic biography is defined, a way in which she weaves new desires through the action of surrealist fantasy, directly through her interaction with other women. Her images of women and their speaking exchanges on film about shared experiences such as of motherhood, as evidenced by *Ulysse*. It generates a system of language: ‘a symbolism [...] created among women’ and presents a means by which women ‘are able to talk to each other’ (Irigaray, 1993c, p. 104). There is potential here to move from talking ‘of’ and ‘about’ women through the form self-reflexive essay film. A close analysis of two films, *L’opéra-Mouffe* and *Ulysse*, demonstrates how the juxtapositions in the text, the relationship of voice to imagery, can create an act of *parler femme* through the characterisation of women’s relationships to each other. Varda has also constructed an artefact which represents the nature of motherhood, articulating it with philosophical questions of time and memory.

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Importantly, this system has only been possible because of her presence throughout and her infusion of her own biography into the essay film. Her presence is created by her voiceover or her appearance onscreen, which effects a centre for all these narratives. Through her mobilising of voice and the spaces of cinema, Varda's body of work constitutes a woman dreaming about aspects of herself - and others - as a woman with determined agency.

What also emerges when reading Varda through Irigaray is that these representations are steps towards a different symbolic system, one which can 'establish (or re-establish) a social system that reflects their [i.e. women's] values, their fertility' (Irigaray, 1993d, p. 81). Varda finds a way to create objects for symbolic exchange between women. Her essay films contain the 'attractive images [...] of the mother-daughter couple' and show a practice where 'mothers-daughters [...] find or make objects they can exchange between themselves' (Irigaray, 1993e, p.42).

Varda's representation of her own practice, in Irigarayan terms, can 'give girls a valid representation of their genealogy, an essential condition for the constitution of their identity' (1993e, p.42). Several questions and possibilities, therefore, are generated concerning the validity of a maternal metaphor applied to the practice of these women filmmakers. Varda's work, for example, proposes a matrilineage in her collaborations with other women and mothers.

Considering Varda alongside women working in more mainstream cinematic institutions highlights that she can achieve this articulation of a complicated auteur persona because the nature of the essay film, which can incorporate layers of material, such as still photographs alongside moving image, voiceover and intertitles. Her

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situation, working outside of narrative cinema and in art cinema or documentary, means that she is able to bring her persona and her voice directly into her texts. The way in which she builds the portrait of the woman artist throughout her career, in what is an underexplored consideration of the woman as artist, is crucial as a model to the provocation of matriarchal cinema in this thesis. It demonstrates a woman who articulates her private with her artistic life as a means to develop a philosophical exploration of questions of time and memory in a woman's life. This can contribute to a new system of symbolic exchange, not least through the repeated representation of aspects of 'love, desire, language, art, social things, political things, religious things' taking back 'this maternal creative dimension that is our birthright as women' (Irigaray, 1993b, p.18). In building this body of work, she has sustained a practice of cinema which locates her at the centre of a familial structure, both privately and professionally. In her essay work, she brings this onto the screen in a whimsical performance, which nevertheless always shows her in a position of leadership. In terms of the 'complex conjunction of text, institution and author' (Grant, 2001, p.122), Varda demonstrates within the art cinema form how biography, labour and a form of fantasy can be reconstituted towards a cinema of women's inheritances and woman at the centre of social labour.

**SALLY POTTER: To make a film you have to follow me**



**FIGURE 29: LABOUR AND LOVE. *THE TANGO LESSON* (1997).  
© ADVENTURE PICTURES.**

Sally Potter's cinema introduces the questions of female subjectivity, of labour and desire as 'systems of exchange' (Irigaray, 1993d, p.75) quite overtly. Her film, *The Tango Lesson* (Sally Potter, 1997, UK), already functions in some ways as a filmic paratext because of its self-reflexive narrative, in which Potter cast herself in the central role and explores the relationship of passion and labour which are required to make a film, through the character of filmmaker, "Sally". Potter enables this thesis to consider how, moving on from Varda and a conventional portrait of the auteur, a woman filmmaker can ask these questions in relation to fictional film language and in films which explore the ordinary nature of women's lives, through the use of melodrama and elements of the 'woman's film' (Gledhill, 1987).

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Potter's cinema, like Varda's, already clearly and consistently speaks 'of woman'. (Irigaray, 1985b, p.135). Arising out of the avant-garde film community in London in the 1970s, Potter's early, experimental films directly asked a feminist question, similar to that of de Lauretis (1984), about subjectivity. In *Thriller* (1979), narrator Colette Lafont examines the role of Mimi (Rose English) the doomed female lead of Giacomo Puccini's *La Boheme*, and asks 'What if I had been the hero?', echoing de Lauretis' analysis that the figure of woman was inscribed on a journey 'to the fulfilment of his desire' rather than hers (de Lauretis, 1984, p.133).

Potter's filmmaking, in its experimental early form and in the self-reflexive texts such as *The Tango Lesson* (Figure 29) positions her close to Varda's essay film practice. She has remained in arthouse cinema, institutionally, working with very small budgets from her own production company in London, Adventure Pictures. There is little budgetary information available. *Orlando* (Sally Potter, 1992, UK/Russia), which brought her recognition, was financed for \$4 million and recouped \$5.29 million in the USA. *Ginger and Rosa* recouped just over one million, which is similar to her other films, *The Tango Lesson* and *The Man who Cried* (Sally Potter, 2000, UK/France/USA). However, Potter bridges film form across to more mainstream genre and aesthetic style similar to Jane Campion's filmmaking. Therefore, to explore the possibilities of Potter's paratexts is to situate them as an extension of her filmmaking, as with Varda, and recognise that these women have decided to engage overtly with the status of creativity as part of the dialectic content of their work. This thesis has been consistently concerned with what it is to be creative as a woman, through aspects of their biography and expressions of desire and fantasy

which are unique to them as filmmakers. Translating and passing on these stories, more widely into culture, is a crucial part of the action of *parler femme*.

Potter has recorded only one DVD commentary, to accompany her film *Ginger and Rosa* (2013), although her other films have some limited DVD extra materials, including a documentary about the funding and making of *Orlando* (1992), and an examination of two scenes and their development on the shoot for *Yes* (Sally Potter, 2004, UK). There are many written interviews with this filmmaker; however, the key paratext for Potter is her own, recently-published guide to filmmaking *Naked Cinema. Working with Actors* (2014). The book explores the practice of film direction and, in the second part, examines the director-actor relationship through a series of in-depth interviews between Potter and her actors. This is an important book; its commissioning and publication indicate Potter's status, as an auteur, and she is enabled by it to speak about her practice in public. Before considering the paratext further, it is important to understand the breadth of Potter's technical experience and expertise and why her contribution to *parler femme* has a different relationship to performance than Varda's or Bigelow's.

### **Potter – Life and Times**

Potter's artistic life began early. She started making films on a camera loaned by her uncle at fourteen. Potter was born in London in 1949. She grew up in a family she describes as 'atheist, anarchist outsiders' (Potter quoted in Fowler, C., 2009, p.127) where creativity and imagination were encouraged. She describes it as 'intellectually liberating' but a 'context of extreme freedom' that 'can also produce anxiety and emotional confusion' (Potter quoted in Fowler, C., 2009, p.110). She joined the

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London Film-makers' Co-op and her short film, *Jerk* (Sally Potter, 1969, UK), played in several festivals. All of her early films experiment with physical movement onscreen, utilising film form to complement and explore the workings of the body in dance and movement. How Potter sees cinema is influenced by her personal experience of performance, studying dance at The Place (London). In completing her polymath education, she completed a foundation year at St Martin's School of Art and trained in music, which 'had always been a part of my life' (Potter quoted in Fowler, C., 2009, p.112).

Working at the London Filmmakers Co-op and its sister organisation, Arts Lab, exposed Potter to avant-garde forms of cinema production and exhibition, which 'critiqued the illusionism of mainstream cinema' (Fowler, W., 2009, p.50). Potter incorporated these influences, visible in her early shorts such as *Play* (Sally Potter, 1970, UK) and *hors d'oeuvres* (Sally Potter, 1971, UK) and in her first features, including *Thriller* and *The Gold Diggers* (Sally Potter, 1983, UK). However, Potter was always focussed on the human body and performance, indicated by her programme notes for a 1980 ICA exhibition. Potter 'commented on the complex needs to address the body and engage with the audience even elements of narrative' (cited in Fowler, W., 2009, p.50). She eschewed the purely linguistic and structuralist theoretical approaches favoured by the Arts Lab and still speaks, decades later of her fascination with the human form: 'my efforts always involved looking at people. I wanted to see the human face, the human body, illuminate the frame' (Potter, 2014, p.xii).

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In 1974, she formed an avant-garde dance troupe, Limited Dance Company, with Jacky Lansley, who would appear in her films *The Gold Diggers* and *The London Story* (1986). Potter's own history as a dancer, musician and choreographer have been written about elsewhere (Fowler, 2009; Mayer, 2009). As this chapter will explore, it fashioned both her identity as a writer-director and her practice of cinema. After a decade of devising, choreographing and performing dance pieces she joined the all-female Feminist Improvising Group (FIG), a music ensemble with whom she toured Europe as 'musical anarchists and political renegades' (Potter, 2014, p.xiv). In Potter's own words, FIG aimed to collapse specious distinctions between audience and performer:

Both the specialness ascribed to individual performers and the performer/audience divide itself are seen as unhealthy symptoms of a class divided society, the performer taking an honorary position of power. The strategy then becomes to break down the divide and emphasize participation as a way of saying anyone can do it (quoted in Smith, 2004, p.236).

FIG's performances (Figure 30) took on representing, bodily, the actions of women's lives as a feminist challenge to the 'class-divided society' mentioned above. Performers would sweep the stage floor during live shows and domestic objects were used in the musical improvisations which, according to Lindsay Cooper, would transform 'the sounds of women's work into a work of women's sounds' (quoted in Smith, 2004, p.235). Thus, they made art out of women's labour. Free-form jazz was used to communicate 'absolute anarchy' (according to founding member Maggie Nichols):

The people were shocked, because they felt the power that was emerging from the women. We did not do that on purpose. We didn't even realize ourselves what was happening. We improvised, but we improvised our own lives and our biographies (quoted in Smith, 2004, p.233).



**FIGURE 30. POTTER (RIGHT) WITH FEMINIST IMPROVISING GROUP IN 1981. STILL FROM *NAKED CINEMA, WORKING WITH ACTORS*. © FABER & FABER.**

Finding a means to bring their own biography on-stage was an instinctive act of enunciation and expression, a means of articulating a feminist performance of the hidden lives of women and making art from these ‘sounds of women’s work’ (Cooper quoted in Smith, 2004, p.235). Drawing on the work so far in this thesis, it is evident that Potter has been committed to *parler femme* in her artistic practice, from her dance and music performances to her filmmaking. Like Varda, she understands women’s subjectivity in a relationship to female biography and as it written on women’s bodies.

‘I learned by doing and by watching, by dancing and by singing, by reading and by editing’ (Potter quoted in Fowler, C. 2009, p.111). Potter’s filmmaking expresses her experience and love of performance, dance and music. However, she announced her intention to be a filmmaker at fourteen ((Potter quoted in Fowler, C. 2009, p.111).

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Potter still acknowledges that ‘by and large film-making, my first love, has been where I have continued to work’ (Potter, 2014, p.xvi).

Potter has shown she understands the complex difficulties of inheritance for women in film. In interviews, she recognises the contradictory position for women filmmakers in terms of genealogy. On the one hand, she acknowledges her wish to own influences from male directors in history:

I mean my identifications historically are with Hitchcock, Godard, Tati and other great male mentors [...]. In cinematic history most of the filming has been done by men. I think of myself as a director and want that sense of collegueship, of history and tradition (Potter, 2009, p.24).

Potter discussed this exclusion further by exploring her difficulty with adopting the alternative label, of “female” or “feminist”, and acknowledged her own relationship to being ‘not a woman filmmaker’ to adapt Toril Moi’s formulation (2008). She:

dreamed of the day when somebody would just describe me as a filmmaker and not as a female filmmaker or a feminist filmmaker or attach a label that meant that I was still an outsider’ (quoted in Fowler, C. 2009, p.120).

This recalls Bigelow’s dilemma and sense of contradiction, which has led that mainstream filmmaker in ‘no-(Wo)-man’s land’ (Lauzen, 2011, p.151). Potter similarly encapsulates, therefore, the contradictory motion for women filmmakers in public discourse that is at the heart of this thesis. For her, it is a frustration with being placed constantly at the margins of cinema because of her gender and her subject matter. Answering Pam Cook’s question, in 1984, about whether she saw herself making ‘women’s cinema’, Potter noted that: ‘even if I didn’t see myself as producing women’s cinema, other people would see me that way. Anyway, I’d want to occupy the position with pride’ (Potter, 2009, p.24). Therefore, unlike Bigelow, Potter avows herself as a feminist, characterising it ‘as a body of ideas about female experience and

as an explanation for why I and my friends felt the way we did about ourselves and our place in the world - the politics of relationships' (quoted in Fowler, C., 2009, p. 112-3). However, as elsewhere, Potter indicates that she rejects the label by 'some women' who call themselves 'feminist artists' since she felt 'to call one's work anything -ist was a massive mistake' (quoted in Fowler, C., 2009, p.113). In relation to finding 'colleagueship', she concludes that: 'It gets dangerous to say that because you're a woman you haven't got a cultural history. That's not true, that history is ours too' (Potter, 2009, p.24).

Potter's acknowledgement is pertinent to this thesis, even as she goes on to call upon the history of cinema to be 'androgynous' (Potter, 2009, p.24) not wanting to distinguish between male and female inheritances because she has experienced the limits of that in public discourse. It is part of the work of these case studies to consider how far it is possible to resolve that contradiction between 'speaking (as) woman' (Irigaray, 1985b, p.135) and having access to an inheritance. Potter's instinct to refute femininity where it leaves her as an 'outsider' (Fowler, C., 2009, p.120) is very important in considering the case study material further. As Potter's position in public discourse echoes that of Bigelow's, it affirms one of this thesis' contention, that the texts themselves could be separated from the practice, and the latter could contribute more effectively to the inheritance of authorship for women within cinema. Potter's own personal ethics and her practice is feminist, evidenced by her all-female crew on *The Gold Diggers*, which still remains without replication in UK cinema for a feature film over thirty years later. Given her clear commitment to a feminist practice, this chapter will show how Potter mobilises her biography in relation to her artistic work and its particular feminist potential for *parler femme*.

In terms of fantasy and desire, Potter's oeuvre has been committed to a journey of recovering her desire in the narrative structure (adapting de Lauretis, 1984, p.133). *Thriller* explored the problems of nineteenth-century opera's 'bourgeois, romantic assumptions' (Fowler, C., 2009, p.39) and the possibilities of disturbing that narrative point of view. Using Colette's voice in voiceover, as well as her presence onscreen, Potter disturbed the regimes that Doane had described (1987) which ensured that the enunciative structures of film preserved the male perspective on desire, represented by the narrative drive contained towards Rudolfo's grief at Mimi's death. Colette's question 'What if I had been the hero' asks what happens when women have agency in telling their own stories.

Her fiction film, *The Tango Lesson*, addresses this question again directly acts and as a model for a performance, by Potter, of a textual persona, establishing an interplay between the woman embodied onscreen and the woman in charge behind the camera. Like Varda, who has the right to tell the story - in this case a fictional story of desire and fantasy through music and dance performance - is a central question of the narrative.

### **The Tango Lesson - The Textual Paratext**

In terms of physical performance onscreen, Potter's fictional character in *The Tango Lesson*, "Sally", sits in a more tangential relationship to Potter than the filmmaker "La Varda" does in relation to the woman, Agnès. However, they share an objective of enquiry. The resonances between the fictional Sally and her author are deliberate in order to explore the labour of filmmaking alongside the work of desire through the medium of physical performance. Like Varda, Potter's mining of



**FIGURE 31-33: THE FANTASY OF ROMANCE. *THE TANGO LESSON* (1997). © ADVENTURE PICTURES.**

autobiography turns the 'autobiographical I' into a 'different cultural I' (Irigaray,

1993a, p.177). As previously discussed, Irigaray's notion refers to the refashioning of an individual life story into a narrative which can resonate more widely in public discourse and with a wider audience. In this instance, Potter articulates the struggle of being both a woman and artist via the filter of popular genre, including musical and melodrama. The latter, in its purest sense, is the melding of music, 'melos' with drama (Gledhill, 1987). Onscreen, "Sally" appears to be writing a script for a film called *Rage* (the title of a later Potter-directed feature (2009, UK)). Instead, unable to find a way of breaking the blank page in front of her, she escapes her London flat and moves backwards and forwards from England to Paris, for tango lessons with Pablo (played by professional dancer, Pablo Véron) who she has seen performing the tango onstage. She follows this new passion to Buenos Aires, working with different teachers and dancing at night with local men in the Argentinian milongas. A passionate and turbulent relationship with Pablo develops, staged through a number of 'lessons', as Sally learns from him and he learns from her - about their culture, their personalities, their desires as well as their skills. Pablo wishes to be in a film and he wishes Sally to make him a star. As they discuss this possibility, the filmmaker onscreen tells him that the power balance will have to change and that 'to make a film, you have to follow me'. When he asks when it will happen, the onscreen Sally tells him 'when someone believes in me as I believe in you' and that the only course of action is to 'do it anyway'. This is precisely what is achieved by the end of *The Tango Lesson* - when a film about love, desire and filmmaking has been made - anyway.

The relationship, of onscreen Sally to Potter, the originating filmmaker, creates an important *mise-en-abyme* effect in relation to the articulation of the fantasy of a heterosexual romance which is situated at the centre of the film's narrative. Potter

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employs recognisable romance tropes and the tropes of the musical genre. For example, as Sally dances with a local man for the first time in the Buenos Aires milonga (Figure 31-33), the camera tracks the intensity of her expression and his face as it is angled towards her, in other words, towards a representation of *her* immediate desire, not his. The camera dollies around the couple, moving outwards to capture the intense physical intimacy of their bodies and moves into big close up to focus on their mutual gaze. In all parts of the sequence, his body is turned towards hers. It is a performance of desire recognisable from conventional romantic films. However, in the narrative in which Sally has sought out these places and actively opened herself to this desire, it is a story in which the female is the hero, seeking to fulfil her desire through the physical expression of dance.

This narrative is extended by action of drawing back through the *mise-en-abyme* towards the director behind the camera, the one who demands that others ‘follow me’ and who is orchestrating the action, the camerawork, the lighting. She is controlling the creation of fantasy, both as screen surrogate and as an authorial presence indicated by that screen surrogate. In this ‘mise-en-scene of desire’ (Cowie, 1997, p.135), the sexual identities may be conventional, heterosexual ones but the ‘journey of *her* desire’ (adapting de Lauretis’ phrase, 1984, p.133) is doubly-articulated by her bodily presence onscreen (including her filmed look of desire at her dancing partner) and by our knowledge of her presence behind the camera. If, as Irigaray stated, ‘*the economy of exchange – of desire – is man’s business*’ [original emphasis] (1985b, p.176) because ‘the exchange takes place between masculine subjects’ (1985b, p.176) then Potter’s filmic exploration of authorship counters that directly. As a heterosexual romance with recognisable genre tropes, it may be a ‘respeaking form of enculturated

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desires' (Doane, 1987, p.180); however, via Potter's self-reflexive choices in filmmaking, including the visible presence of the woman director onscreen, there is a disturbance to the regular regimes of male-orientated spectatorship.

Thus, Potter answers one version of the question 'what if I had been the hero' in a way that is important for *parler femme* because Potter focusses her acts of enunciation here on emphasising the labour involved in bringing individual and 'collective fantasies' (Johnston, 1973, p.30) to life. Hers is a cinema which does literally 'embody the *working through* of desire' [my emphasis] (Johnston, 1973, p.30) onscreen. It establishes, relevant to paratext and *parler femme*, a statement about controlling fantasy, about expressing a fantasy, as a woman author, through a narrative.

Therefore, the bodily presence of the filmmaker reinforces ideas relating to *parler femme* through the physical labour of dance. In an act of bathos, constructing fantasy is shown to be demoralising and exhausting. In one scene, Sally and Pablo



FIGURE 34: THE LABOUR OF DESIRE. *THE TANGO LESSON* (1997).  
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rehearse a particular move repeatedly. After each iteration, Pablo critiques Sally's movement, telling her to 'do less' and to 'follow him'. Frustrated and distraught, she sinks to her knees and weeps but returns to the labour. The repeated move acknowledges the work of performance, its lack of glamour and its lack of romance (Figure 34), juxtaposed with the fantasy of romance represented elsewhere in the film (Figure 31-33).



**FIGURE 35: COMPOSITION AND CONNECTION. *THE TANGO LESSON* (1997).  
© ADVENTURE PICTURES.**

Increasingly, even as Sally takes the lead in terms of directing the action, the power struggles continue in the romantic relationship. When this falters, Sally meets Pablo at a church and they imitate the struggle of Jacob with the angels in a large painting on the wall (Figure 35). It is a balanced composition which expresses their intense connection, passion and impossibility of resolution of opposing desires. Pablo

opens his arms, however Sally physically directs their action, the placement of their hands and legs.

Thus, *The Tango Lesson* is a work which overtly considers the ‘complex conjunction of text, institution and author’ (Grant, 2001, p.122) and articulates that exploration with a passionate, sexual relationship. The key here is the way in which the labour of each is intermingled one with the other – love and filmmaking – in exploring the struggle of desire that takes place in both. In associating love and work, Potter represents a particular kind of filmmaking, one which directly mobilises her role in creating that fantasy. As a public woman, Potter has performed onscreen in as a woman expressing her desires.

Towards the end of film, Sally dances a tango in an empty studio with her three teachers, moving apparently effortlessly between them across the floor. It is a perfectly-imagined heterosexual fantasy, recalling elements of the Hollywood musicals of the studio era; it is a sequence in which a woman moves lightly between the arms of three attractive men in a flawless routine. The following section considers how Potter further expresses these relationships - of love, labour, fantasy and biography - in her performance within the paratext.

### ***Naked Cinema. Working with Actors - Mobilising Biography, Labour and Desire***

Potter has always made her labour available and engaged publicly about her work as a filmmaker. The SP-ARK archive online (*Sally Potter website*, no date) has been in several years of development as a research resource for academic use, made up of pre-production and production materials (Figure 36). It was gathered to aid



**FIGURE 36: THE INTERACTIVE IMAGE BROWSING SYSTEM ON THE SP-ARK WEBSITE.  
© ADVENTURE PICTURES**

academic research into understanding the film production process and is sympathetic to feminist historical methodologies that seek to include other labourers alongside the director (for example, Ball & Bell, 2014-16). Sarah Atkinson, who led the feasibility study, wrote online that: ‘the materials will create an interactive audiovisual ecology of the film production process, capturing all of the individual crew members’ contributions to the creation of the film through personal testimony’ (Atkinson, 2012). Currently, the physical materials enable semiotic analysis of different pre-production materials that tend to support author study, but is still a relatively unique insight into a filmmaker’s and filmmaking practice.

With the focus on *parler femme*, this thesis turns to Potter’s acts of enunciation elsewhere, in DVD extras including production featurettes and to her recent written

## Chapter Four: Sally Potter

paratext, *Naked Cinema. Working with Actors*. The book is structured in two parts: the first is made up of Potter's reflections of the process of directing and her own experiences; this is divided into three sections entitled 'Preparation', 'The Shoot' and 'Post-Production'. The second part of the book consists of in-depth interviews with actors from her films, including Simon Abkarian, Joan Allen, Elle Fanning, Annette Bening and Steve Buscemi.

Moving from her fictional appearance, the paratext demonstrates how she mobilises her inheritances and her biography as part of creating her auteur persona. In the previous chapter, Varda's act of *parler femme* was effected by intertwining her biography with her practice as an artist through her essay films into her paratexts, expressed through the layering of materials from her life, both past and present. Via *The Tango Lesson*, Potter has interpolated her biography and her work as an artist into a fiction film; in that example, she examined practices and processes of writing and directing a film self-reflexively through tropes of the melodrama. In *Naked Cinema. Working with Actors*, these aspects are significantly developed in this paratextual performance. Potter writes as an experienced filmmaker – and as an auteur – for newer entrants to the profession. She describes her 'autobiographical back-story' as 'the ragbag mixture of the autodidact' (2014, p.xvi), accentuating the elements of her experience where she was self-taught. It announces an intention to demystify what makes a filmmaker and, like Varda, much of what follows is practical, pragmatic advice for working on a film set. The book answers some of the questions of *parler femme* through its discussion of emotional labour in the process of filmmaking and its attempts to characterise the creative act through a series of images and metaphors. Potter's interviews with her female actors can potentially contribute to *parler femme*

in their quality of speaking of an interaction between ‘I-woman (je-femme) and you-woman (tu-femme)’, even possibly an interaction equivalent to building ‘subjective relations between mothers and daughters’ (Irigaray, 1993e, p.41). The following analysis will explore how Potter’s paratext may contribute to the formation of a ‘symbolism’, through talk, as it can be ‘created among women if love among them is to take place’ (Irigaray, 1993c, p.104).

This idea is directly relevant as love, and the symbolism of love, feature very strongly throughout Potter’s book. Potter situates her own inspiration and love of actors and performance as an inherited trait. Potter makes a direct feminist intervention through this book by focussing on how inspiration has moved through generations of women in her family, especially in their passion for performance. Potter introduces it as ‘revealing my own hand; some parts of the story that led me to become a director’ (2014, p.ix). Her revelation can be described as a ‘rhetoric of intimacy’ (Klinger, 2006, quoted in Grant, 2008, p.132), drawing the reader into the narrative through the personal and emotional revelation that Potter manages here.

If, as Irigaray stated: ‘Each of us has a female family tree: we have a mother, a maternal grandmother and great-grandmothers, we have daughters’ (1993b, p.19) then Potter’s choice, to begin with her grandmother, is a significant speaking act. It situates her in a matrilineal line. Known in the family as Hunny (Figure 37), her grandmother is introduced as someone who ‘grew up loving actors and acting’ (Potter, 2014, p.ix). She had studied singing and worked in revue ‘before becoming a more “serious” actress (she used the term proudly)’ (2014, p.ix).. As a young girl, Potter ‘played with



**FIGURE 37: POTTER'S GRANDMOTHER, BEATRICE FOX. *NAKED CINEMA WORKING WITH ACTORS*. © FABER & FABER**

the black metal box of greasepaints' and was 'entranced' by the 'gleam in her eye when she recounted camaraderie, the thrill of stage fright' (2014, p.x).

In a familiar story for women's lives at that time, Hunny gave up her professional life when she had her first child, Potter's mother. Her grandmother's biography became a typical one of domesticity and family, having married one of the 'beau' at the stage door. Yet, within the private space, Hunny was 'an entertainer all her life' and she occupied a stage 'limited to the home, where she shone: laughing,

telling stories, creating domestic beauty, but above all caring for others' (Potter, 2014, p.x).

This inheritance passed through her own mother, whose opportunities to sing professionally were curtailed after she became a mother to Sally and her brother, Nic, whilst still in her teens and 'was only able to study professionally when she reached her thirties' (2014, p.xi). Potter describes her mother's commitment as an amateur, her description resonating with the 'love' her mother gave to this pursuit:

She became a devoted music teacher and continued singing, passionately, in amateur opera troupes. Nic and I were often in the heartbreakingly sparse audience, witnessing the love and vigour, the energy and desire that amateurs demonstrate, doggedly, in pursuit of excellence (Potter, 2014, p.ix).

Her grandmother and mother could be, in Virginia Woolf's imagination, 'women who are not here tonight, for they are washing up the dishes and putting the children to bed' (2002, p.131). Potter characterises this life in a way that emphasises the creativity repressed by those women, indicating that, as daughter and granddaughter, she saw that passion. Her public act of enunciation, of speaking of her mother's desire and her grandmother's influence, is a feminist recovery of the mother into the symbolic realm; an act of 'audacity to say something' not only 'about your desire' (Irigaray, 1985b, p. 145), but an inheritance of that desire from the 'silent, outlawed' mother (Irigaray, 1993b, p.14). Potter's language is celebratory and unashamedly passionate in this dynamic act: her grandmother 'served, with a sense of duty and out of love, but for me she was a queen. I wished I had seen her on the stage. I would have led a standing ovation. Hunny, my hunny!' (Potter, 2014, p.x).

As it is written, this ending exhortation is a key statement in Potter's paratext, not only in its content but in its expression of emotion. It contains a sense of longing, of joy, of

loss and arguably of desire. Here, in the paratext, Potter is making the source of her inspiration a matter of public record. Her exclamation performs that love and desire, re-enacting it. This moves it into an act of enunciation which constitutes *parler femme*, 'speaking (as) woman' (Irigaray 1985b, p.135), because it *enacts* a form of exchange between women. It performs her discovery of desire inherited from her grandmother and mother, a desire which she will perpetuate through her labour.

At this point, Potter's reminiscences, therefore, move from the 'autobiographical I' into a 'different cultural I' (Irigaray, 1993a, p.177) by the way in which she tells of a certain kind of passion which these women felt in their performance, something available to the young Potter which has become part of the way in which she conceives of her own creativity. Talking of Hunny, Potter was fascinated: 'the look in her eye that suggested she had touched something mysterious and essential: a sense of purpose, a wicked irreverence for what was considered proper in pursuit of what she felt to be true' (2014, p.x).

Potter pays tribute to her father's love and influence too, speaking of the 'circuit of energy' (2014, p.xi) he could create as a speaker. However, *Naked Cinema. Working with Actors* and Potter's interviews are contextualised by her introduction of the women of her family and of the symbolic representation of intergenerational love and desire in performance labour. It is possible to relate Potter's act of enunciation here to Irigaray's call for the relationship with the mother to be articulated, asking for 'another "syntax", another "grammar" of culture' (1985, p.143). Potter, by describing her inheritance through the matrilineal line, is constructing a new grammar of conversation, and especially in her exhortation 'Hunny, my hunny' (2014, p.x) she is



**FIGURE 38: LABOUR MASQUERADING AS PLEASURE. THE LIBERTANGO IN *THE TANGO LESSON* (1997). © ADVENTURE PICTURES.**

giving voice to the desire felt by the daughter for the women that have preceded her. Rather than left in silence, the mother's role in symbolic culture is being identified and foregrounded.

### ***Naked Cinema. Working with Actors - Potter and Direction***

*Naked Cinema. Working with Actors* presents a key scene from *The Tango Lesson* which contains a focus on debunking its apparent romance. Potter, in a similar performance to Varda, describes the labour needed to produce the effortless flow of the three-partner fantasy dance scene (Figure 38):

The sequence most often played on YouTube, and often imitated – ‘Libertango’: a tango for three men and a woman (me) – needed to look joyful but was physically agonising to shoot as my feet were so blistered. Tempers were frayed, the atmosphere was thick with hostility and exhaustion ... But we were all prepared to struggle, painfully, for a result that might communicate some of the

deeper joys of dancing together. And I think it does look joyful (Potter, 2014, p. 96).

An 'atmosphere thick with hostility and exhaustion' exemplifies Potter's exploration of the position of leadership as a film director. Her analysis moves between considering pragmatic questions and relaying quotidian experiences on the film set to a more mystical and spiritual meditation of the collaboration and relationships that are created. The 'something mysterious and essential' she remembers from *Hunny* is something that Potter regards as at the core of filmmaking (Potter, 2014, p.x).

In this book, Potter identifies filmmaking as dominated by the process between director and actor and, therefore, there is an emphasis on the emotional labour which is performed between them. She represents this relationship through the minutiae of everyday activities onset. Removing obstacles from performance can be a question of attending to small details: 'you might say, "let's spend some time just talking about your hair"'. The look of relief, if you've hit the right note, can be extraordinary. Indeed, it may be a detail that turns out to be the key' (2014, p.54). Elsewhere, she comments on taking the time to watch Cate Blanchett and Johnny Depp in costume preparation (for *The Man Who Cried*) as: 'like watching them walk through a mirror into the film' (2014, p.51). Where there is tension, then 'you need to use your skills to help the actor relax – a process of trial and error. It may be a question of verbal reassurance, or a light touch, even a fleeting shoulder massage' (2014, p.82). In terms of direction, it can 'feel like running, with the burning intensity of a sprint' (2014, p. 86). In a reminder of the realities of independent filmmaking, she comments that her shoots have concertinaed from ten to five weeks (2014, p.86).

## Chapter Four: Sally Potter

What emerges is the portrait of the woman artist in the quotidian of filmic labour. Potter constantly returns to the need for consistent attentiveness and listening within this relationship. She describes the emotion on first meeting as a ‘non-analytical clarity’ felt with the right actor when ‘something starts to flutter in that part of my body’ (2014, p.10). As further examples of her ‘rhetoric of intimacy’ (Klinger, 2006, quoted in Grant, 2008, p.132), Potter discusses the importance of admitting to failures (2014, p.13), she considers fear (2014, p.102), intimacy (2014, p.114) and self-doubt (2014, p.117). She describes how friendships are formed, often in the slow process of establishing finance which become ‘part of the feeling of the finished film’ (2014, p.20). Practice is represented, therefore, as a process of a series of relationships. The portrait that emerges effects, like Varda, a shift away from the ‘technocratic imperialism’ (Irigaray, 1993a, p.176) that was in evidence in Bigelow’s paratextual performance, apparently built on the traditional discourse of auteur theory. Potter has taken the opportunity to speak in a different voice and insist, instead, on ‘human values’ (Irigaray, 1993a, p. 176). Thus, from an Irigarayan perspective, the possibility of ‘another “syntax”, another “grammar” of culture’ (1985, p.143) is made viable in relation to filmmaking.

Potter explores how directing, the labour of authorship, is already a performance. She argues that direction involves being able to interpret instincts as they arise whilst always being highly conscious of your own role and role-play. The director must be aware of the ‘subtext of anxiety’ (2014, p.91) which underlies their own acting and to battle against being ‘preoccupied with playing’ the role of director rather than attending to the actors’ performances (2014, p.91). Potter draws a picture of the ‘respectful attention and playful alertness’ (2014, p.189) that is required. She

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characterises it as a relationship of intimacy between the director and the actor but that the director will always maintain an observational role. She employs a variety of descriptors to characterise this: using one's intelligence to make the actor feel 'held' (2014, p.37) and overtly claims 'precision' to be a 'passionate' state and not a 'cold concept but a fierce one: the protection of a vision' (2014, p.71).

Potter uses Laura Mulvey's term of 'passionate detachment' (1975, p.14) for a woman's cinema, not surprising given Potter's emergence in the 1970s and her awareness of this theory and of Mulvey (Mayer, 2009, p.5). Potter reimagines it as the need for a:

quality of "passionate detachment" in yourself; entirely and intensely engaged, but also striving for objectivity about what is important at any given moment (2014, p.85).

Here, though, Potter has adapted Mulvey's theoretical term to apply it to forms of practice in cinema. She has fashioned, out of the language of second-wave feminist film scholarship, a mode for practice; a way in which the film director has to be fully-committed to feeling the desire - the passion- in a form which enables the project to be made. This form of passionate detachment is illustrated by an example from *Yes* with actors Simon Akbarian and Joan Allen. Following the 2003 UK-US-led invasion of Iraq, their rehearsal of a story of a love affair between an American doctor and a Middle-Eastern man was an emotional one where all three wept (Figure 39). The script itself highlights the political tensions underlying the romance:

He:       You hear our children's screams but feel no loss

Because they are not yours.

She:       That isn't fair.

The things they've done have not been in my name.

(Potter, 2005, p.54).

However, Potter describes maintaining a distance: 'a part of me was always watching and noting: is this helping or hindering them in their process?' (2014, p.45). This is the



**FIGURE 39: WORKING ON SCENE 54. DVD EXTRAS FOR YES (2005).  
© ADVENTURE PICTURES.**

work of leadership, which Potter feels maintains a respect for the actors who 'need to know that you are using your intelligence at all times and not just indulging your own needs' (2014, p.45). She, as a director, has to maintain a quality of 'quiet ferocity' (2014, p.95) to defend the work for all of them. The featurette shows a very emotional Potter, crying openly with her actors at the political events (the invasion of Iraq), which are overshadowing their preparations for an East-West love story. There is mutual exchange and physical affection demonstrated frequently during the conversations, which continues into the filming of the sequence.

## Chapter Four: Sally Potter

Potter, therefore, never forgets her responsibility to the larger work, the film. She states this overtly: ‘You really are the only one who can do this: it is your job to completely envision it, continually adapting and refining the imaginary, completed film in your head as it comes together, piece by piece’ (2014, p.84). This has also caused her to ‘look back in some amazement at my capacity for ruthlessness in pursuit of a clear vision’ (2014, p.96).

This element of her practice, her ruthlessness, is evident from her earlier films, such as *Orlando*, which is accompanied by two documentaries about the making of the film. This was at a time when such DVD extras were still relatively rare and tells the story of financing struggles, multiple journeys to obscure parts of Russia shortly after Glasnost and the daily life on-set (*Orlando goes to Russia*, Christopher



**FIGURE 40: POTTER: ‘IT DOESN’T STOP ME FROM DOING WHAT I HAVE TO DO’. *ORLANDO* DVD EXTRAS (1992). © ADVENTURE PICTURES.**

Shepherd, 2003, UK). What is important is the consistency demonstrated in this documentary with what Potter would write in 2014. Interviewed for the second

documentary, whilst filming in Khiva, Uzbekistan (*Orlando in Uzbekistan*, Robert Macnaughton, 2003, UK), Potter speaks about the constraints on artistic production, ‘of struggling with time and how to accept imperfection without compromise’ (*Orlando in Uzbekistan*, 2003). She also comments on the management of a film crew on a low budget (Figure 40): ‘Sure, I feel it, I see it, I hear the mutterings, I hear Jean-Louis stomping off, I hear the whispered conversations behind me. But I have to ignore them. As best I can’ (*Orlando in Uzbekistan*, 2003).

And she indicates her own emotion:

No, it affects me but it doesn’t stop me continuing to hold out for what I know what has to be done. It’s just that I don’t feel very relaxed while I’m doing it. Because I’m aware of this tension around. But it doesn’t stop me from doing what I have to do (*Orlando in Uzbekistan*, 2003).

Potter, demonstrating her consistency in the role, echoes these sentiments in her writing over a decade later. Discussing actors’ fears that may emerge, Potter comments that ‘[y]ou have to act unafraid and show yourself willing to go to the limits with them, remaining implacable in the face of their feelings, which may include anger with you for pushing them. This is not always easy’ (2014, p.104).

Thus, Potter identifies the role of the director as a performance the moment of arrival onset and explores its difficulties as an act of leadership. Potter debates issues of leadership overtly as ‘a problematic concept for me to embrace from a political point of view’ (2014, p.84). She talks of the ‘confusion’ between ‘democratic or collective social and political processes’ and ‘the necessity of an individual voice and leadership in a film’ (2014, p.84). She acknowledges what she describes as a common anxiety of performing in front of crew and actors (Figure 41). In a rare



**FIGURE 41: ‘FEAR (YOUR OWN AND THE ACTORS)’ *NAKED CINEMA. WORKING WITH ACTORS* (2014). © FABER & FABER.**

acknowledgement of the director’s own self-reflexive assessment, Potter states that ‘[L]ooking at “making of” footage can be very telling. I have found, for example, that when I’m concentrating I can be frowning ferociously, which could easily be misinterpreted’ (2014, p.92). She indicates the public nature of the work of a director, compared to the situation of solitary writing: ‘The tone you set in the human relationships – with your facial expression and way of behaving – is an important part of the work’ (2014, p.92). Hunny is recalled in this moment: ‘just act the way you want to be, and you will eventually become it. This was a wonderful piece of advice’ (2014, p.93). Potter asserts that it is clearly not the job of direction to demonstrate ‘niceness’ but rather ‘quiet ferocity in the pursuit of excellence (2014, p. 95). It cannot be the ‘needy desire to be loved’ (2014, p.96) that is important, but the resultant work.

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*Naked Cinema. Working with Actors* turns this ruthlessness onto the director herself. For example, Potter describes the self-reflexivity required to see where problems have been created by the script: ‘it is in your interests to identify the problem at the earliest opportunity, when there is still time to fix it. I now relish these awkward moments of realisation’ (2014, p.61). It involves returning to your own script ‘quietly and ruthlessly saying [...] to yourself’ that ‘what worked on paper does not translate into performance onscreen’ (2014, p.67). This becomes a quest for ‘adaptability, flexibility and responsibility’ where you are ‘in the ring, fighting for your film, which has become your life’ (2014, p.69). Sometimes, Potter describes how it is important to ‘say no. Not for its own sake, or as a demonstration of power, but to show you are strong enough to protect the film and all the actors’ and crew’s work in it’ (2014, p.89).

This paratext, therefore, holds another type of the ‘sounds of women’s work’ (Cooper quoted in Smith, 2004, p.235). This is the sound of managing and driving emotion, coupled with sustaining intellectual clarity and mental determination. Potter’s intricate descriptions of how emotion functions in the persona of the director have liberatory potential because it indicates how there are other paradigms, than those conventionally accepted hitherto, with which to discuss the practice of authorship and to build a portrait of the auteur. A question is emerging through this analysis about whether siting their work in these forms of emotional labour can allow women directors to move beyond being spoken to effective acts of public enunciation. The question remains whether the idea of a “nurturing” woman director holds too great a sway in the imagination of popular journalism, and even academic discourse.



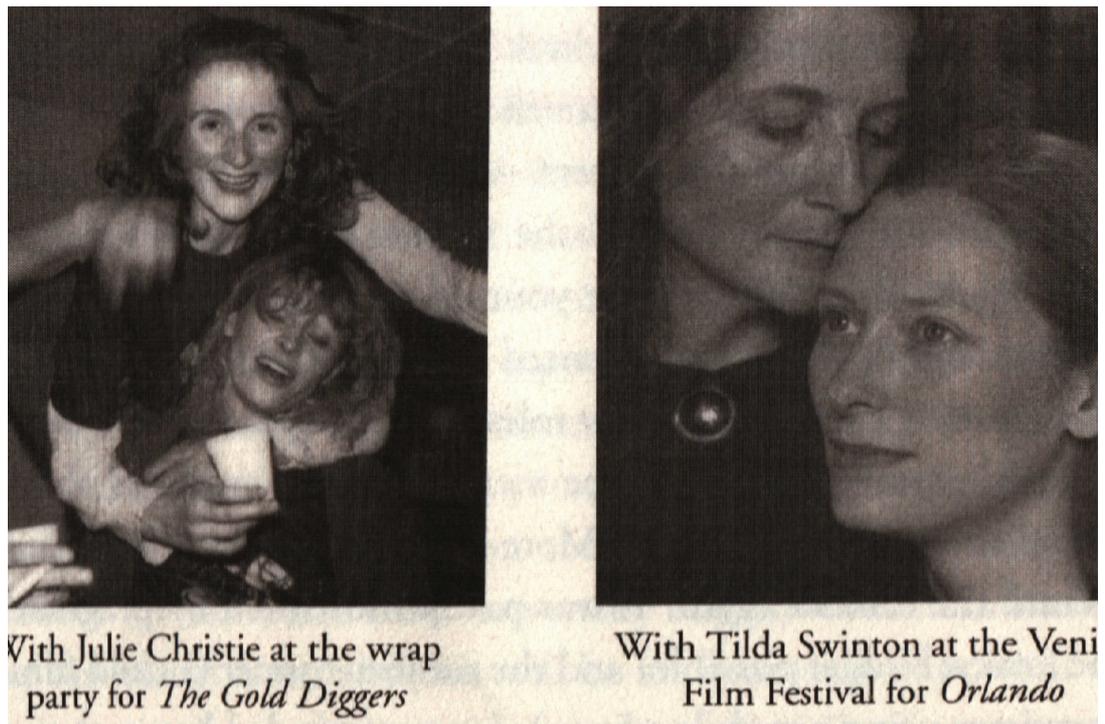
**FIGURE 42: POTTER (RIGHT) MEETING THE LOCAL MAYOR IN UZBEKISTAN. *ORLANDO* DVD EXTRAS (1992). © ADVENTURE PICTURES.**

This section of Potter's paratext demonstrates potential as an act of *parler femme*. There is nothing innately feminine in the way she characterises the work of the director. As demonstrated on the *Orlando* DVD, this is often dominated by pragmatic meetings regarding finance and resources (Figure 42). Often, her expression tends to generalities rather than specifics. This is particularly the case with her 'barefoot film-making manifesto' which closes the first part of her book where she exhorts her reader to 'be an anorak - keep your sense of wonder and enthusiasm (cynicism will kill your joy and motivation)' (2014, p.139).

However, there is evidence of an exchange which would have value in a system of *parler femme*. This is the public act of enunciation of a woman filmmaker who has the power to publish such a paratext. As a woman, her access to this speaking position is still rare and, therefore, important. The writing moves between pragmatic statement,

conjecture and emotional revelation. Potter has undertaken a process of demystification by concentrating on the labour that is required to produce a film, which act of enunciation is strengthened by her use of second person address in the first section. In giving this direct advice, it is often the emotional labour which takes precedence rather than technical labour. She has drawn a portrait of the *kind* of person it is necessary to be in order to sustain a filmmaking practice, one who takes responsibility, does not blame others, who learns from admitted failures and mistakes. This is a role which requires an ability to listen and support from a place of distanced observation.

In *Naked Cinema Working with Actors*, Potter also shifts the terms of discussing filmmaking by moving it outside established economies. Potter often refers to the ‘gift economy’ of making cinema, which she states is the ‘real economy of a creative collaboration’ (2014, p.22). It is one in which, as part of the collaboration, ‘each gives to the other what they can, and willingly’ (2014, p.22). Potter, later, roots this gift for each individual in their labour as well as external encouragement. However, it is for each individual to take responsibility for that: ‘What right have you not to honour this gift?’ (2014, p.26). Exchanging a gift within filmmaking moves away from the kinds of economies that Irigaray described as being fundamental to the patriarchal system and, instead, moves towards a ‘currency of exchange, or else a nonmarket economy’ (Irigaray, 1993d, p.79). Potter’s is an important intervention into the patriarchal economy of desire which is ‘*man’s business*’ (1985b, p.176) [original emphasis] where a woman has imagined her own system - through experience - of the exchange of labour as a form of gift. It is both prosaic hard work and an experience that is ‘mysterious and sacred’ (2014, p.26). Potter is representing filmmaking as a



**FIGURE 43: 'FALLING IN WORK'. IMAGES FROM *NAKED CINEMA. WORKING WITH ACTORS* (2014). © FABER & FABER.**

different transaction outside of a monetary economy (as Irigaray projected was needed for women's reinvention) which can trade in people's talent.

As an overt assertion about the link between labour and desire, Potter describes the process of working together on a film as 'falling in work' (2014, p.105). This is reinforced by the images she chooses for the book (Figure 43). She states:

The relationship between actor and director can also become intimate and intense; it can resemble that of a painter and his or her muse, the complexity of a close friendship, or the volatility of lovers. In the brief delineated frame of time and space that is the journey of the making of a film, it can become extraordinarily passionate (2014, p.105).

Throughout the book, Potter's voice is cast with this same 'rhetoric of intimacy' (Klinger, 2006, quoted in Grant, 2008, p.132) which is supported by her choice of images (for example, Figure 43). In the agency of the paratext, and the unusual opportunity to discuss her work, Potter repeatedly includes these images

which demonstrate that filmmaking as a practice is a process of relationships which can be dynamic, loving relationships.

***Naked Cinema. Working with Actors - Interviews***

Examining the interviews allows a more detailed narrative of Potter's practice of cinema to emerge. The interviews, generally, demonstrate the same movement between the practical and the mystical which characterised the first part of the book in their revelation of the process of collaboration that takes place between actor and director. These interviews are a way of testing her earlier assertions about the intimacy of the director-actor relationship and her claim that filmmaking is an experience of 'falling in work' (2014, p.105). The book is an instruction manual that has already renounced discussions on lens focal lengths or choices in sound editing. Instead, and despite her extensive training in aesthetics and clear engagement with film design, Potter chooses to weave her narrative around the building blocks of relationships. In this way, it is an artistic statement with radical potential.

From an Irigarayan perspective, Potter's act of enunciation gives rise to a range of possibilities. It is not the case that Potter cannot discuss the aesthetic choices of her films, it is that - in a public act of enunciation - she chooses not to focus on this aspect of her work. What is of interest to this thesis is where Potter chooses to continue the matrilineal line. Not, as with Varda, through a biological relationship but through a creative relationship with other women. If, as Irigaray emphasises, it is important to look for 'who speaks, to whom, about what with what means' (1993a, p. 176), then Potter's interviews present an opportunity to observe a rare and new dynamic between women collaborators, working within the creative industry. The interviews are

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constructed via orchestrated questions, arising out of by Potter's own writing and reflection in the first part of the book. The format mimics the style adopted by Irigaray in 'Questions' (1985b) and enables this thesis to bring Irigaray's work and Potter's conversations into a relationship, to produce an example of the 'productive readings' of the French philosopher's work that Whitford suggested 'are the dynamic ones' (1991, p.50).

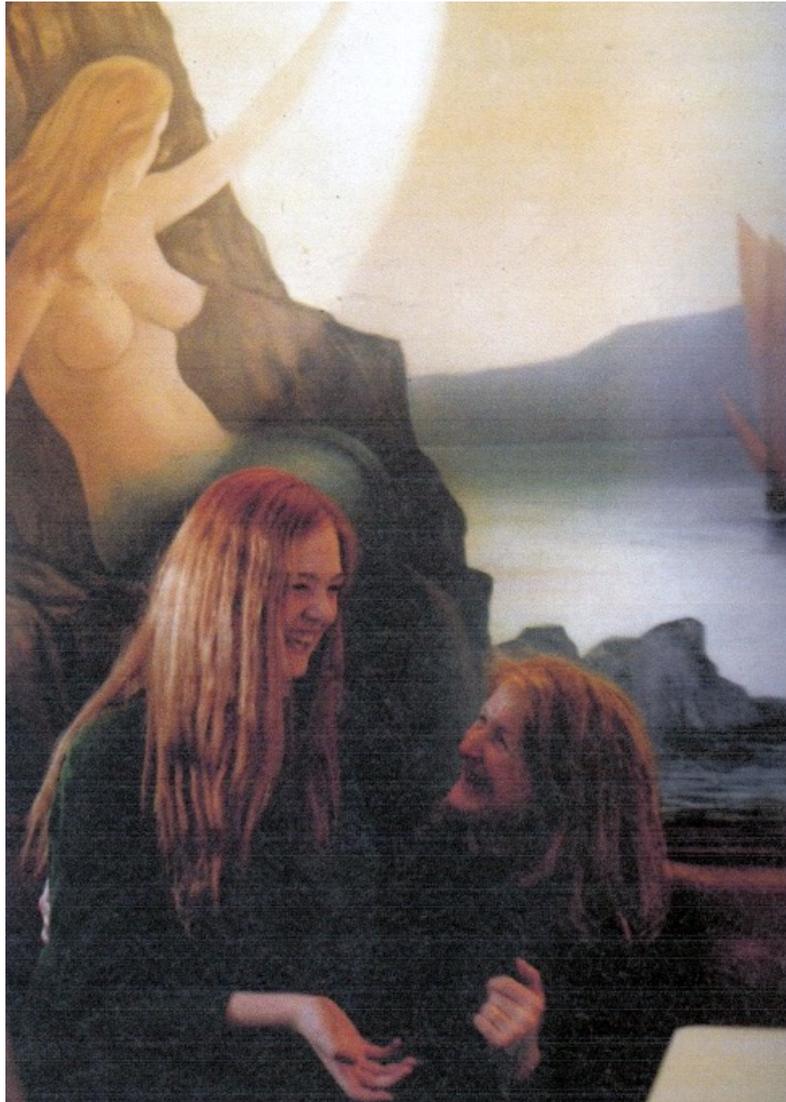
What is most striking about the interviews is that through a set of similar and formulaic questions a complete variety of relationships emerge that have been built with different performers over time. Potter demonstrates a close working bond with all of her actors, both male and female, which is visible in the images of the book as well as her interviews. This thesis will focus on the interviews with female actors because of the political urgency established by the literature review. This analysis seeks to ask in what ways the interview interaction itself contributes to *parler femme* as well as the content; in other words, their acts of enunciation may contribute to a system of 'speaking (as) woman' at the same time as speaking 'of' and 'about' women (Irigaray, 1985b, p.135). Potter's interviews are detailed exchanges; they generally run to twenty pages in the book. They demonstrate the potential power of women speaking in the public arena; women talking to other women about creative production, without the filter of, in Irigaray's words, the 'technocratic imperialism' (Irigaray, 1993a, p. 176) that has become the discourse of the auteur. Often, instead, with 'human values' (Irigaray, 1993a, p. 176) of laughter and mutual affection. These conversations, therefore, demonstrate the possibilities for a new genealogy of practice through their dynamic - their form - as well as their content.

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In addition, there are also a variety of interviewees across the generations. Potter talks to women of her own generation, such as Joan Allen and Julie Christie, and she interviews young women entering the film industry, such as Lily Cole, Elle Fanning and Alice Englert. The book, as published, is an act of intergenerational communication because it demonstrates each woman's interaction with Potter on an entirely personal and creative basis.

It is the multiplicity and difference, as revealed between all of the women, which demonstrates another aspect of *parler femme*. Joan Allen's interview is imbued with her personal consciousness of vulnerability as an actor; Annette Bening's demonstrates her deep engagement with the process of making films and of sharing the collaboration; Julie Christie demonstrates much of the same love of the process as Bening but with an emphasis on the script and the intellectual exercise of filming. There is a marked divide between these interviews and those of the younger women. The latter conversations show a different desire to understand their process in an interaction with their director, to discover their identity through the work they are doing. Their interviews demonstrate these young women looking for '[I]nnerness, self-intimacy', in Irigarayan terms, to create a relationship 'with herself in advance of any procreation' (1993c, p.68).

In variant ways, Lily Cole, Elle Fanning and Alice Englert are all searching for their own identity through understanding the creative process with another woman. In the interaction with Lily Cole, Potter's dynamic question format allows space for certain expectations to be rejected. Questioning the model turned actor about the



**FIGURE 44: POTTER AND ELLE FANNING ON-SET. *NAKED CINEMA. WORKING WITH ACTORS.* © FABER & FABER.**

pressure on women concerning their appearance, the director receives an apparently unexpected response:

Potter: Let's talk about the pressures around appearance for female actors. Are you able to approach that with the same neutrality?

Cole: What do you mean?

Potter: The pressure to look a certain way.

Cole: Um...

Potter: That question seems to tire you.

Cole: [laughs] I don't really think about it too much.

Potter: OK. That's fine.

(Potter, 2014, p.267).

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Potter allows a space for Cole to reject certain lines of questioning and allow her exploration of ‘the relationship with myself and deconstructing or exploring that - it’s such a gift to be able to do that as a job’ (2014, p.272).

Fanning, who has been appearing on film since she was three years old and has developed from a child actor, reflects in depth on the nature of film acting and her identity and her relationships with the director (Figure 44). Film affects her personally since the experience of making *Ginger and Rosa*: ‘I had never been that open before. [...] I guess it just made me grow up’ (quoted in 2014, p.325). She identifies how important the process of filming is in itself, such that seeing the film on release contains ‘a little bit a feeling of loss, because you miss what you felt like before’ (quoted in 2014, p.330). This idea of loss has been prompted intuitively by Potter who reflects that in her commentary on the conversation: ‘I tried to keep the interview more “objective” at first, but then surrendered to the impulse to take it in a more personal, direct way’ (2014, p.314). The conversation progresses with a consistent feeling of this mutual empathy. Towards its conclusion, there is an expression of their regard for each other:

Potter: The relationship between actor and director - this is difficult to talk about because we’ve just been working together. But maybe that’s OK. [EF laughs]. What was it like [both laugh].

Fanning: [Elle laughs - they hug] I think with you it was ... [sighs] we’re both girls so we could relate in that way. And I felt I could talk to you about anything, even not to do with the film. I felt like I could really trust you. I could talk about anything that was going on in my life (Potter, 2014, p.333).

This moves into *parler femme* by the exchange between the two women, an intergenerational mirroring of their passion in the work; it is, in Potter’s terms, a demonstration of the ‘falling in work’ (2014, p.105) that she described earlier, given

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that the interview takes place shortly after *Ginger and Rosa* was completed. There is an equality of status in the exchange, a ‘verbal exchange’ of ‘I-woman (je-femme)’ talking to ‘you-woman (tu-femme)’ (Irigaray, 1993e, p.44) which is mutually liberating. This is particularly present in the laughter which is exchanged between the two of them together with their physical affection. Laughter, to mirror each other’s feelings, is present in all of Potter’s interviews here. In relation to the female interviewees, it is another important aspect of *parler femme* because of its power, as Irigaray described, to create that space for a new “syntax” and “grammar” of culture’ (Irigaray, 1993d, p.75).

With Alice Englert, who played opposite Fanning, there are similar emotions of love which are expressed differently. Englert, director Jane Campion’s daughter, has grown up around filmmaking although the nature of Campion’s films is part of a shared joke between Englert and Potter. Englert comments that: ‘I was *never* allowed on the set of *In the Cut* (Jane Campion, 2003, UK/Australia/USA)’ [original emphasis] (quoted in Potter, 2014, p.299). However, ‘I saw a lot of pre-production and post-production. I love the whole process, because I was so exposed to that. I got really obsessed with the *weight* of the scene’ [original emphasis] (quoted in 2014, p.300). Englert does not elaborate on this and Potter reflects back empathically:

Potter: In your experience so far, do you like to work with the director on that inner world - the space between the words - if you can?

Englert: Yeah, yeah, yeah. I think that spaces say as much as the words so, I really love working with people who have the time and respect for that (Potter, 2014, p.303).

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The conversation moves on, with Englert's unguarded quality, to a consideration of her own identity outside of a film, recognising that she cannot inhabit her own person 'with that same relaxation' as with a character:

Englert: I'm struggling with that, but I find that film and story and narrative teaches me more and more about how to be a human. [...] There's a truth in acting [...] I love that clarity, but I'm still confused if it's my own being.

Potter: Whatever that 'own being' is. Maybe acting teaches one about the construction of the everyday self but perhaps with a better writer? [both chuckle] (2014, p.305).

There is, certainly, an echo of therapeutic discourses here in Potter's reflecting back, empathically, of Englert's statements. Englert, unlike Cole, interacts in the conversation as a work in progress in terms of her identity, willing to discuss her negotiation of body image online and in public and her discovery of her sensitivity as a strength. In this exchange, a talking 'of' and 'about' women, but also as 'speaking (as) woman' (Irigaray, 1985a, p.135) emerges. Between Englert's honest vulnerability and Potter's maternal and open discourse, there is an exchange of a formation of identity intergenerationally between two women. Englert is moving into '[I]nnerness, self-intimacy' (1993c, p.68) through this exchange, talking spontaneously as indicated by her frequent, enthusiastic responses, such as 'Yeah', to Potter's proposals. Her comments demonstrate a childlike uncertainty blended with a mature understanding of film as a business, perhaps due to her parentage. Describing working on blockbusters, Englert equates to having to 'meet the parents' when 'film is the love of your life' (quoted in Potter, 2014, p.312). Englert, unlike Fanning, is also very pragmatic about the end of a shoot, able to be 'intimate' and then to separate quickly (quoted in Potter, 2014, p.309).

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There is evidence in all of these interviews of Irigaray's notion of 'a woman-to-woman relationship of reciprocity with our mothers' (1991, p.50) of a liberatory mutual exchange, in Potter's seeking to learn from her actors through the structure of questions as much as they learn from her.

The same variation in thinking and personality is visible in Potter's interviews with more experienced and older actors. With Annette Bening and Joan Allen there is an exchange about process and intuition which echoes much of what has been discussed with the younger actors, but demonstrates greater experience and understanding of what works for their own subjectivity; in other words, a more settled sense of their own identity in their work. Bening is able to articulate her feelings about the process, such that there is a confidence and certainty in her answers. Responding to Potter's question about the first meeting with the director, Bening states the quality she seeks is: 'Oh ... I guess passion, that's the most important thing. [...] I guess it's some kind of intuitive connection that I want to feel, because I tend to throw myself in. It's like falling in love, right? You can't decide to fall in love' (quoted in Potter, 2014, p.200). Potter reflects back that she calls it 'falling in work', which Bening enjoys.

Bening alludes to the nature of filmmaking and the dominance of the auteur: "It's enjoyable to throw yourself behind someone and say, 'OK, what's your vision?' (quoted in Potter, 2014, p.199). She also indicates that she does not need a director to articulate a fully-realised concept on first sight: 'that's not really the issue then it's just meeting them and feeling there's a connection' (quoted in Potter, 2014, p..200).

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Bening dominates the exchange because she is able to answer comprehensively, considering the visceral nature of acting (Potter, 2014, p.212) and the pleasure in the process of collaboration: ‘Then it’s an enjoyable sort of dance, a really wonderful symbiotic conflagration of people working together’ (2014, p.216). She brings her experience of Milos Forman and Mike Nichols, which intrigues Potter. There is a rhythm inherent and apparent in their conversation, by the way in which they move each other’s questions or comments onwards:

Potter: So the script is the architecture of the unsaid. How aware are you of the camera and the lens while you’re shooting?

Bening: I’ve grown to love and appreciate the experience of working in front of the camera and you’re calling this ‘Naked...?’

Potter: Naked Cinema.

Bening: Well with the camera you are aware of the nakedness of your experience. The fact you are naked

(2014, p.215).

Bening is the only female interviewee who frequently situates her work practice in her role as a biological mother, which produces contrapuntal forces for her. Only Joan Allen, at the time of writing the book, had children as well; all the other women, including Potter, are childless. Bening relates her love of work to them and recognises how work and home life pull in different directions. “I get so involved and excited about it that it makes no sense, it’s like a love affair, like *crazy*, irrational. God! And of course in my life I can’t always work that way, because I’ve got children (quoted in Potter, 2014, p.201).

Bening’s commentary is reminiscent of Varda’s, who created a visual metaphor for how her practice stayed near home using the ‘umbilical cord’ to film (*Les plages*

*d'Agnès*) and interweaves motherhood with film labour. However, Potter's interaction refuses the maternal theme in Bening's answers, turning towards the idea of 'falling in love' by stating 'I sometimes call it "falling in work"' (2014, p.201).



**FIGURE 45 POTTER AND ALLEN PREPARING SCENE 54 ON *YES* (2005). © ADVENTURE PICTURES.**

Joan Allen, an actor with a similar longevity to Bening, has an entirely different approach and interaction, and is very honest about her own vulnerabilities with Potter. In the featurette 'Finding Scene 54', the intimacy of the Potter's relationship with Allen, shooting a critical and emotional scene, is visible (Figure 45).

Allen describes the importance of working with 'the director who makes you feel completely loved. Then you feel you can do anything' (2014, p.185). Allen is drawn to the dynamic relationship between actor and director, and describes being in the throes of returning to Chicago to work with someone she 'loves', commenting:

‘She’s very much like you: wildly creative. I want to work and be with her every day - regardless of how it turns out’ (2014, p.187).

Allen is able to reflect on the ageing process, particularly for women, with Potter. They discuss the older women’s position in the industry and the compromises she had to make to bring artist Georgia O’Keefe’s life onscreen. She displays a vulnerability and a willingness to explore that: ‘And I guess maybe at this age I’m a little more comfortable, because life has thrown so many strange and difficult things in my direction in the past few years, that I can say, “Let’s give it a whirl”’ (2014, p.187). Their collaboration on *Yes* has obviously been very professionally and emotionally satisfying:

Everything about it. You, Simon, the poetry [the film script was written by Potter in blank verse], the character that you were allowing me to play, a sexuality that I hadn’t been given the opportunity to explore. I don’t usually get that attached (2014, p.195).

Bening’s and Allen’s language throughout their interviews characterise filming in relation to love and passion constantly. The idea of love resurfaces in relation to a Canadian shoot in the interview with Julie Christie (appearing to refer to a Sarah Polley-directed film, *Away from Her* (2006, Canada) where Christie states:

Christie: I was so aware of their skill and that comforted me. This particular crew were particularly kind, as Canadians are renowned to be, and I felt them to be with me. Very caring. And I think that makes a difference because it fills you with love (Potter, 2014, p.246).

However, by comparison with Allen, Christie’s answers contain intellectual reflection on the processes and demonstrates a person who observes themselves acting whilst in the moment. Christie explores some of the more metaphysical aspects of the

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camera, arguing that it can ‘create thought’ (quoted in Potter, 2014, p.240). She explains this in quite practical terms:

Christie: [...] put in the right place [...] you can have something which is ugly and boring in a close-up and loses the magic it needed, that it would have had in a wide shot.

Potter: And when you are filming are you aware of the different lenses?

Christie: No. [laughs]

(2014, p. 240-241).

Christie is more certain about what she wants and needs and more brusque in describing the relationship:

Christie: I don’t think “quicker” is a good direction.

Potter: What would be a better way for a director to communicate, if they need the scene to speed up?

Christie: I don’t know because that’s the director’s job. But I get it in the end because I know jolly well what he’s saying, however indirectly it is expressed.

(2014,p.249).

Christina Hendricks reflects on the lens more specifically in relation to ideals of female beauty because, as Potter acknowledges directly, ‘even on my small computer screen the quality of light reflected on her skin was dazzling’ (2014, p.336). Hendricks discusses this, revealing her individuality in an unexpected way. In answer to a question about cinematography, she states: ‘I don’t know jack about that. [...] If there’s a scene that’s intimate, maybe a love scene, I’ll ask the make-up artist to keep an eye on me. I’ll say, “Let me know if I’m doing something weird with my leg”’ (quoted in Potter, 2014, p. 346). Like Christie’s brusque approach, Hendricks also speaks as an ordinary woman about the mechanics of creating fantasy, with a

quality of bathos that makes artistic production ordinary and unfussy, just as Varda and Potter do.

Throughout, Potter contextualises the interviews with their circumstances and brings the interaction to life. With Hendricks, she describes how ‘dancing with her at our wrap party in a pub in East London was joyous’ (2014, p.336) or Annette Bening’s face is ‘illuminated only by the flashing billboards on Sunset Boulevard’ (2014,p.199).

Potter’s choice to engage in dynamic conversations with her actors throughout the book, preferring to adopt this interactive mode of communication rather than focus on instructions or advice throughout, is part of its contribution to *parler femme*.

### **Naked Cinema. Working with Actors - The Rhetoric of Images**

As with the other case studies, the choice of images to accompany this self-penned paratext are revealing. Their rhetoric is key evidence to the act of *parler femme* which is arguably taking place. Potter’s paratext began with her own familial inheritance of performance, and moves towards her creative inheritance, represented by her relationships with a new generation of young female performers. It is in its biographical honesty and the evidence of the images that Potter’s book echoes Varda’s paratext, *Varda par Agnès* through a particular kind of ‘rhetoric of intimacy’ (Klinger, 2006, quoted in Grant, 2008, p.132) created by the images that Potter has chosen to include. Like Varda, images from her personal life are juxtaposed with images from her work, indicating how the two sides of each creative woman are articulated together. She includes a number of images from her avant-garde dance years, which support her focus on performance as central to her film practice. The majority of

Potter's images, however, do show her in the act of directing, with a range of expressions, all portraying intensity and focus.

The images immediately act as a testimony, for *parler femme*, of the unusual sight of a woman director as she organises and leads a film production with authority. This is demonstrated through her physical stance and gesture in the photographs. It also further reveals her relationship to her performers. Potter has referenced the idea of intimacy and how useful it is to direct whilst holding the camera as it 'teaches you both about how the camera "reads" performance and also how vital the presence of the camera-operator is for the actor' (2014, p.32). Her accompanying photographs illustrate this relationship on *Rage*, her experimental film set in the fashion industry, where Potter was the camera operator (for budgetary as much as artistic reasons). The rhetoric of these two images (Figure 46) illustrates exactly that intimacy and is key in relation to questions of desire. The bottom image shows Cole as she would appear to a cinema audience. Even in the black and white photograph, the sheen on her skin and the waves of her hair create an impression of ethereal beauty. Alongside this is an image of Potter taking this photograph in preparation for their filming together. The physical body language is striking, each mirroring the other in laying on the carpet in what appears to be a relaxed interaction between the two. The juxtaposition self-reflexively explores the image of fantasy, of physical beauty, because we see the labour that produced it. However, in keeping with the quality of her interview interactions, there is another form of desire revealed in these images in the intense gaze held between Potter and Cole, and the result of their connection. These images, therefore, consistently support Potter's statements that there has to be a parallel action

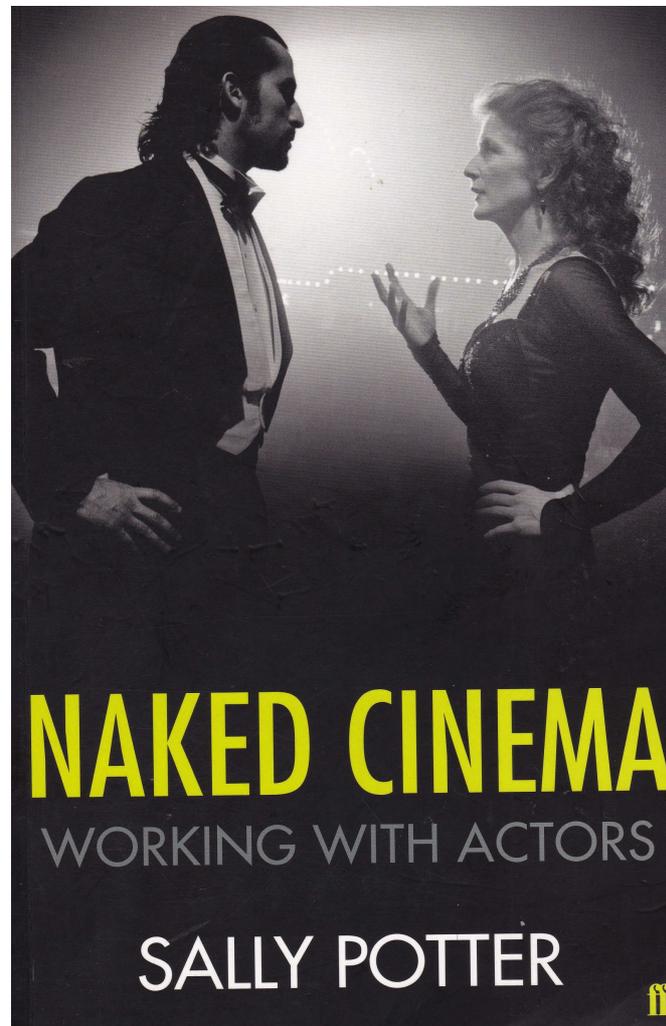


**FIGURE 46: POTTER AND LILY COLE ON *RAGE*. *NAKED CINEMA. WORKING WITH ACTORS* (2014). © FABER & FABER.**

of intelligence and emotion, as a director, which has made the actor feel ‘held’ (2014, p.37) and produced such an intimate gaze into the camera.

The resulting image, where model Cole’s face dominates the frame, generates the intimacy between her and the film spectator. Potter’s comments anchor this, speaking

of cinema as ‘ultimately an intimate medium’ which ‘must invite each member of the audience into a private relationship with what’s happening on the screen’ (2014, p.32).



**FIGURE 47: THE COVER OF *NAKED CINEMA. WORKING WITH ACTORS* (2014). © FABER & FABER.**

The front cover of *Naked Cinema. Working with Actors* (Figure 47) carries a parallel image of Potter and Véron to images appearing in the text of *The Tango Lesson* itself. It is striking for a combination of her appearance, in a close-fitting tango dress, necklace and long flowing hair. Verón’s chest is puffed out, a stereotypical masculine pose, whilst Potter appears slight and feminine beside him. However, the picture is perfectly balanced in its composition and it is Potter who clearly is



**FIGURE 48: BACK COVER OF *NAKED CINEMA. WORKING WITH ACTORS* (2014).  
© FABER & FABER.**

commanding the discourse, her hand mid-gesture for emphasis in the scene where they perform the tango in public for the first time. Within the narrative, this is a sequence in which Sally is humiliated and the personal relationship is seriously fractured. With his hands on his hips, Véron appears consonant with his onscreen persona - Pablo - apparently tolerating Potter's power over him, even if it is not entirely comfortable. He appears to be as struggling with the idea that: '[T]o make a film you have to follow me' (*The Tango Lesson*). It also mirrors the image from the film itself, where both Pablo and Sally stand apart from each other, in the crisis of labour and artistic disagreement (Figure 34). Both these images show a perfect balance of opposition, in terms of gender as well as will and desire. The resonances of this mirroring have implications, therefore, for *parler femme*. In choosing an image which recalls the dynamic of the relationship in the film, but which clearly shows

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Potter in command of the exchange of thought and labour, Potter has asserted her power publicly on the front cover of her book.

The back cover (Figure 48) shows Potter mid-direction with her two young protagonists of *Ginger and Rosa*, leaning intimately over them with her hands on their shoulders. Here is the continuation of the matrilineal line through a next generation of performers. Between them and Potter there is clear signification of the kind of intimacy that Potter has consistently described. In addition, there is a representation of the Irigarayan idea of 'love of the same' (1993c, p.69). This may be provocatively extended given that Irigaray referenced: 'the enveloping between mother and daughter, daughter and mother, among women' (1993c, p.69). It suggests a way in which this paratext can form part of a 'currency of exchange, or else a nonmarket economy' (1993d, p.79) between women because it contains an image which demonstrates the intergenerational exchange involved in working creatively together. This is also visible in the book's colour plate of Potter with Fanning; behind them a mural shows a young, naked woman with long, flowing red hair. The connotation of an inheritance is clear here also. Again, both women are laughing, sharing an intimate and relaxed moment as part of the labour of the shoot (Figure 44). The image with Fanning is notable for the way it plays with familial resemblances, both women with red hair echoed in the portrait behind them. This accentuates a feeling of mutual sympathy in their collaboration and discovery. However, this image moves the connotations of this into the realm of fantasy, by the way in which it captures an imagined inheritance between these women, identified as fictional because of the association with the painted portrait that rises up behind them. Potter and Fanning become part of an imagined, artistic history and genealogy together; recalling how

Varda placed herself and others inside the history of art, Thus, these women filmmakers explore how imagery can move the real woman artist into a fantasy genealogy.

There is a narrative evident in the book's images, from that on the front cover onwards, where Potter alternately reveals something of herself and her biography, at the same time as she reinforces the commanding image of woman director. Starting with her inclusion of her family portrait of Hunny and of her own early performances, she is also literally illustrating a matrilineal genealogy, which moves from her personal into her professional life. She positions herself as part of a genealogy, firstly, as a daughter in her biographical family and, secondly, in a different kind of biography, performs a cultural realisation of the maternal, as a filmmaker contributing towards a continuing cultural inheritance. This is especially anchored by the photographs that include the younger women, such as Cole, Fanning and Englert, which appear to answer Irigaray's call for 'attractive images [...] of the mother-daughter couple' and for 'mothers-daughters to find or make objects they can exchange between themselves' (1993e, p.42). How far the idea of the filmmaker as a form of mother is useful in formulating an idea of a sustained genealogy is considered in the next section.

### **Maternal Inheritances and “Speaking (as) Mother”**

Potter is, publicly, a childless woman biologically. Therefore, the act of creating an inheritance cannot be through a biological matrilineal line, in the way that Varda represents in her work. Potter's unique articulation, therefore, is of a movement from the 'autobiographical I' to a 'different cultural I' (Irigaray, 1993a, p.177), which

suggests another mode of *parler femme*. Potter potentially embodies a new kind of maternal creative function, whereby women can ‘discover and declare that we are always mothers just by being women’ (1993b, p.18). Potter has arguably brought ‘love, desire, language, art’ into the world. Her paratextual statements are an act of honouring ‘this kind of creativity’ publicly which ‘has been forbidden to us for centuries’ (Irigaray, 1993b, p.18). Its radical disturbance to the current discourses, which privilege male inheritances in the story of the film industry, may help to create a new discourse for women filmmakers to discover and sustain their genealogy.

Applying this Irigarayan insight to Potter may add a new understanding of the woman artist in public, being explored in this thesis. Varda was understood, from an Irigarayan perspective, as a woman combining conventional domestic life with artistic production. Instead, Potter’s act of enunciation in the paratext creates a new association between artistic labour and biography because she consistently describes filmmaking in terms of passion, love and desire, which she speaks of inheriting directly from her mother and grandmother. Her discussion of her practice in *Naked Cinema. Working with Actors* has further feminist potential because, as well as the emotion experienced on set, it enacts that same emotion in her interviews, which perform an exchange between the women discussed above of: ‘love, desire, language, art, social things’ (Irigaray, 1993b, p.18).

Assuming Potter’s surrogate-maternal position, therefore, the interviews with the younger women give rise to a space in which women are able to ‘say goodbye to a maternal omnipotence [...] and establish a woman-to-woman relationship of reciprocity with our mothers (Irigaray, 1991, p.50). This is a part of a crucial,

emerging objective of this thesis, to contribute to the genealogy of practice. Potter's performances of the labour of filmmaking are important not because of their revelation of an innate quality of femininity, but because she clearly assumes a responsibility, as a woman in public, for perpetuating a creative inheritance.

Potter's performance in this paratext does appear to draw on the figure of the auteur, with the control of language and vision and a consciousness of the mythology and statements which work performatively, invoking Sarris's auteur who infuses the set with his own 'temperature' (2008, p.43). At the same time she demonstrates a very pragmatic, demystifying tone in relation to the labour that is undertaken on set. This echoes much of Varda's performance in her essay films and paratexts. Potter, by the writing of an instruction manual, might be regarded as establishing her auteur-brand. Yet, she has taken the opportunity through biography, to establish a matrilineal inheritance. Potter represents work as labour, as passion and, through her biographical reminiscences, as the natural provenance of women. Hunny captured Potter's imagination by 'the look in her eye that suggested she had touched something mysterious and essential: a sense of purpose, a wicked irreverence for what was considered proper in pursuit of what she felt to be true' (2014, p.x). Potter's revelation in her self-penned paratext is how she has put this into practice with her creative collaborators, namely her performers. She has a relationship of shared desire in the labour they are engaged in together, which remains mysterious at the same time as it is ordinary. Potter expresses her desire and love for filmmaking through the interviews and through the images in the book in a way which has feminist potential. She literally moves from the 'autobiographical I' into a 'different cultural I' (Irigaray, 1993a, p. 177), building some cultural value for women in the creative industries and more

widely. And, in Heilbrun's words, is bringing into the public arena her story of 'ambitions, and possibilities, and accomplishments' (1989, p.46).

Making a claim for it as a form of "speaking (as) mother" in public space is important because it allies these women filmmaker's speaking position with an metaphor of leadership. This calls upon the idea of a recovery of the mother into her position in the symbolic order; no longer 'outlawed' (1993b, p.14) but at the centre of 'systems of exchange' (1993d, p.75) in culture. As it emerges in the detail of Potter's behaviour on a film set, as part of cinema practice, women can no longer be conceived of via a cultural stereotype of nurturing. Potter has given voice to the intertwining of ruthlessness (2014, p.96) and 'precision' not as a 'cold concept but a fierce one: the protection of a vision' (2014, p.71). This is coupled with an acknowledgement of managing emotions: when the actor is at their 'maximum vulnerability' it is the director's role to 'be at your most tender, protective and confident' (2014, p.82). However, as the DVD extra for *Yes* revealed, this is never at the expense of a certain detachment, of 'not just indulging your [the director's] own needs' (2014, p.45).

Potter, therefore, creates a directorial performance, more maternal than female and more maternal than male. 'This opens up the concept of the film author and the role of leadership in practice to a different meaning, where the practice of director involves the emotional labour more associated with family life. This may be encapsulated in Potter's assertion that: '[T]he only rule I know that works under such circumstances is to take complete responsibility for the situation and not blame anybody or anything' (2014, p.104). And Potter's description of her experience – especially via anecdotes and examples – plays out the power of what may be termed

the “matriarchal” director; the woman at the social centre and in leadership, who makes demands in pursuit of her own vision.

### ***Ginger and Rosa* - DVD Commentary**

Given this strong commitment to exchange between women and the characterisation of women’s relationships, it might be expected that Potter’s DVD commentary on *Ginger and Rosa* would contain a consonant performance of *parler femme*. The woman who embodied reveries and fantasies onscreen in *The Tango Lesson*, clearly understands the relationship of labour, desire and fantasy. Her performances – embodied onscreen in a very similar way to an art cinema director such as Agnès Varda – demonstrate her belief in women’s expressive authorship, women’s right to fantasy. In *Naked Cinema. Working with Actors*, Potter situates film direction as an act of a desiring subject. In this way, it is an artistic statement with some radical potential in the way in which, as previously mentioned, she describes the process of working with actors as one of ““falling in work”” (2014, p.105) – desire and labour are intertwined.

Potter, in what has been regarded as her most widely-distributed and personal film to date, *Ginger and Rosa*, delivers a commentary on her own, which is coloured by personal detail but, in fact, remains within the well-established auteur discourse of artistic labour. The film is set in post-Second-World-War London, a family melodrama in which Fanning plays a young girl’s coming of age into political and artistic consciousness through her writing and incipient activism. Potter’s vocal performance on the DVD commentary, given the wealth of images through her book which show her leading, listening and laughing, is relatively muted and restrained. It creates an

interesting dissonance between these two paratexts, one which is useful to consider regarding the opposing tensions between being the auteur and the feminist potential of an act of *parler femme*.

As an aural commentary in voiceover, and therefore with the authority that this cinematic space commands (Doane, 1980; Silverman, 1988), her script tends to overdetermine what is visible onscreen with ‘promotable, hermeneutic facts’ (Klinger, 2006, quoted in Grant, 2008, p132) about the film. A key example, for the question of creativity and inheritance, is a scene in which Ginger begins to write, a moment of her own artistic awakening, in the middle of her parents’ domestic misery. Glossing the scene with a comment about the action, Potter states simply how the action represents ‘the cold war in the nuclear family’ (Potter, 2013). She continues with a historical fact, that there would be a three-minute warning, being something that ‘everyone was told at the time’ (Potter, 2013). The effect, placed next to her written paratext, is a contrapuntal one. Whilst there is an assumed ‘rhetoric of intimacy’ (Klinger, 2006, quoted in Grant, 2008, p.132) present in the physical voice, Potter’s lack of revelation creates a dissonance between the emotion of the melodrama onscreen and her unemotional comments. It is possible to characterise it as the voice of the ‘auteur’, as defined previously, caught up in the technicalities of film production and arguably fearful of biographical revelation. Heilbrun’s notion of women’s lives as ‘most important’ as ‘an available narrative for women to use in making fictions of their lives’ (1989, p.38) disappears in the vocal paratext.

During the course of the commentary, Potter, the singular, public auteur, becomes increasingly visible. The assertions of desire and of passion, so visible in the

written pretext and onscreen in *The Tango Lesson*, have disappeared. It appears much more consonant with Bigelow's refusal, of being 'not a *woman* writer' [my emphasis] after Toril Moi's idea that women are driven to refute the modifier - woman - in public discourse (2008, p.265).

## **Conclusion**

The 'sounds of women's work' (Cooper quoted in Smith, 2004, p.235) could be applied to the woman filmmaker's voice in paratext. Potter's choice to begin her written paratext with her biographical and professional stories, to foreground the importance of performance to her craft as a filmmaker, has feminist political significance. As discussed in the literature review, the study of filmmaking has been dominated by the discourses which foregrounded the technical over the human, the individual over the collective and collaborative action. Consistently, auteur theory has been critiqued for its failure to take account of the actual conditions of production (Kuhn, 1994; Martin, 2003; Bainbridge, 2008). Potter makes a bold, feminist statement when she resituates her practice, which is clearly borne out of experimentation, technical innovation and skill, in the importance of performance to what is seen onscreen.

Examining Potter's peritexts (Genette, 1991, p.263) together with the epitexts (Genette, 1991, p. 267) produces a dissonant reading, which express another aspect of the struggle at the core of this thesis – between 'speaking (as) woman' (Irigaray, 1985b, p.135) and "speaking (as) auteur". For Potter, the relationship of these two has created a conflict. What emerges in Potter's paratextual voice is a residual tension regarding what is expected of an auteur, the need to conform to certain accepted

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modes of discourse, as opposed to fully articulating her forms of desire through her own voice. This is already affirmed in the fictional persona present in a film such as *The Tango Lesson*, and as she speaks of filmmaking in terms of love and passion, including through her interviews with women collaborators, in *Naked Cinema. Working with Actors*. This paratextual performance of the auteur provides a comparison point to Varda and Bigelow which is useful to explore. Like Varda, there is a self-reflexive examination of the labour of authorship and, at the same time, Potter is concerned to sustain the mastery (used because it is a gendered term) of the auteur, as appears to be Bigelow's choice in speaking in public.

Despite the contradictions, Potter's positioning does not consign her to 'no-(Wo)-man's land' (Lauzen, 2011, p.151) as appears to be result in Bigelow's case. This thesis argues that this is not because Potter constructs a particular portrait of a woman artist, as Varda did. Instead, she speaks as a woman, who is able to assume a position of the desiring subject in her own narrative of filmmaking. Thus, it is her identity as a *socially-situated* woman taking on the role of leadership (in itself non-gendered) but, at the same time, committing to and foregrounding her matrilineal inheritances. Potter demonstrates a way of negotiating the contradictions for women in public discourse, which still enables her to be 'speaking (as) woman' (Irigaray, 1985b, p.135) most powerfully through her biography and her stories of women's desire. Potter's protagonists may struggle with the contradiction of women within a masculinist symbolic order. Irigaray spoke of this repression: 'if, as a woman, who is also in public, you have the audacity to say something about your desire, the result is scandal and repression. You are disturbing the peace, disrupting the order of

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discourse' (1985b, p.145). However, Potter has arguably succeeded in being a woman speaking her desire in public through the paratext, *Naked Cinema. Working with Actors*. Her statements indicate Potter's willingness to turn to emotion as a way of characterising the act of filmmaking and direction and demonstrates, for the purposes of *parler femme*, an articulation of biography, labour and desire.

**JANE CAMPION: It's my nature, I can't help myself to be outrageous sometimes.**



**FIGURE 49: JANE CAMPION AT WORK ON STORYBOARDS. SOURCE: *FROM THE BOTTOM OF THE LAKE*. (2013).**

This thesis has used the case studies to explore how three different filmmakers, Varda, Potter and Jane Campion, may be said to employ aspects of *parler femme*, albeit with a different inflection or from a different socio-cultural position. Campion's particular characteristic, visible in her films and in the paratext, is her capacity to speak of motherhood and mothers and their relationships to their daughters (Bainbridge, 2008) in a similar way to Varda. Campion has made herself very accessible, via DVD extras and commentary (Figure 49), to speak about her practice as a filmmaker. By an examination of her digital paratexts that accompany the release of her films, notably *The Piano* (1993) and *In the Cut*, there is the potential to extend

this thesis' argument regarding *parler femme*. This is because of the particular quality of the dynamic exchange between Campion and her female collaborators. These exchanges can be considered from the perspective of 'speaking (as) woman' (Irigaray, 1985b, p.135) and possibly "speaking '(as) mother".

### **Campion: Life and Times**

Campion grew up in New Zealand and attended film school in Australia, where she made some short films and met people such as Gerard Lee, who would become a writing partner for *Sweetie* (Jane Campion, 1989, Australia), her first feature, and recently wrote her television series, *Top of the Lake* (Jane Campion, 2013, Australia/UK) and *Top of the Lake : China Girl* (Jane Campion, 2017, Australia) with her. *The Piano* (Jane Campion, 1993, France/Australia), which won her an Oscar for the screenplay, had a budget of \$7 million and grossed \$40.158 million in the USA (Internet Movie Database, no date). *In the Cut* had a budget of \$12 million but only grossed \$4.445 million in the USA; however, it earned \$23.726 million worldwide (Internet Movie Database, no date). She has remained with relatively small budgets for her films and modest returns. As with Potter and Varda, her cultural and critical value far outweighs her commercial success. In 2014, she was president of the jury at the Cannes Film Festival (Child, 2014).

Campion's own family background has already been mobilised as a hermeneutic context for her films. Campion's biography is considered, here, as it has been mediated by previous scholars, who have sought to analyse how her own upbringing influenced the psychology of her films (Fox, 2011; Ciment, 2014). Fox argued that Campion's cinema is deeply influenced by her relationship with her parents, Edith and

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Richard, and her siblings, Anna and Michael. Both parents were actors, and were away travelling and performing in the children's early years. The marriage broke down and it was Edith who suffered severe psychological disturbance in later life, something that engaged both sisters in care for their mother. Fox's contention is that this marked both Anna and Jane and is visible in Campion's films. At one point, he states that Anna described a disassociation from their father. However, Jane was 'more circumspect' and 'despite insisting on her closeness to both her parents' still:

nevertheless conveys a sense to her audience of the distress she suffered [...] In her interviews and director's commentaries, she repeatedly invites viewers to make connections between her life and her art in a way that almost suggests a psychological compulsion to make known her own personal suffering – however obliquely – as part of a process whereby she is seeking liberation from them (Fox, 2011, p.40).

From the perspective of the methodology adopted here, this appears a symptomatic reading which ascribes need as a driving motivation to a woman's speech, in a public position, one which veers towards the kind of discourses within psychoanalysis that those such as Irigaray were keen to reject. This thesis has focussed on the potential where women filmmakers employ agency in the paratext. It is more interested in how women may actively mobilise aspects of their personal biography as a means of contextualising their work. Irigaray asked: 'What rites and what systems of exchange can be set up among women? Today? In the future?' (1993d, p.75) and asked for a 'currency of exchange, or else a nonmarket economy' (1993d, p.79). Here, as discussed in relation to Varda and Potter above, biographical details can become part of these 'systems of exchange' between women. However, rather than focussing on narratives of pathology and personal struggle as a means of reading the films, it is the author's agency to transform these experiences – culturally – into 'systems of

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exchange' or, even, as part of a practice whereby 'mothers-daughters' can 'find or make objects they can exchange between themselves' (1993e, p.42). Jane Campion's use of her family biography, already demonstrated to be of interest to critics like Fox above. However, rather than reading into the texts using Campion's biography, this thesis sees the feminist potential in reading her own agency in paratext. This is the way in which she mobilises her own biography and explores ideas about women as mother and daughters and questions, more widely, of women's sexuality and desire as these are allied to her film practice.

The success of *The Piano* situated Campion as a key female auteur for stories of women's desire. What is of most interest in this thesis is her willingness to take up a speaking position that supports the readability of those representations within her texts. Bainbridge (2008) and Bolton (2011) explored women-authored film texts, utilising Irigaray's theory, and argued that they contained a specific female language—a 'feminine cinematics' (Bainbridge, 2008) or a 'female consciousness' (Bolton, 2011). This thesis turns the focus towards the contextual material and argues that these women filmmakers have built a form of *parler femme* via their speaking position about practice in paratext. Campion reinforces the consonance between her texts and paratexts; in other words, between the content of her stories, which often focus on mothers and daughters and explore questions of female sexuality and her personal experiences and views. The construction of an active female spectator, as Bainbridge discussed, is part of a feminist strategy when considering women-authored films (2008, p.38). This thesis turns, instead, to the cultural weight these representations may accrue when a woman, such as Campion, speaks in public of the 'collective fantasies' (Johnston, 1973, p.30) of women as part of revealing personal biography.



**FIGURE 50: MOTHER-DAUGHTER DYAD IN *THE PIANO* (1993). © CIBY 2000.**

Together with her films texts, these public statements, from a woman in a position of cultural leadership, have political importance.

Campion's work has always been engaged with representation of women's experience, aspects of biography and of their own fantasy lives. From her early short films, such as *A Girl's Own Story* (Jane Campion, 1986, Australia) and her first feature, *Sweetie*, Campion has placed women's relationships with each other as central to the narrative. Her films have made relevant material for analysis for Irigaray's *parler femme* because they are often situated in patriarchal societies and explore the constraints on women in a way very sympathetic to Irigaray's philosophy (Bainbridge, 2008; Ince, 2016). Her films and her most recent work for television overtly examine relationships of women between themselves, including mothers and daughters and female siblings and these are often placed centrally in the narrative. Heterosexual



**FIGURE 51: SURROGATE MOTHER-DAUGHTER DYAD IN *TOP OF THE LAKE* (2013). © SCREEN AUSTRALIA/BBC FILMS.**

romance also forms the material for much of her work; however, Campion's films explore the issues of repression and the difficulties for women in negotiating the social expectations placed upon them in sexual relationships. Her Oscar winning Gothic romance, *The Piano*, based its narrative around the protagonist, Ada (Holly Hunter), a woman sent in marriage to New Zealand from Scotland in the nineteenth century. She is a character who has either chosen or been driven into muteness by the circumstances of the social symbolic order she lives in (Figure 50). In both series of her detective drama, *Top of the Lake* and *Top of the Lake: China Girl*, Campion and her writing partner Gerard Lee, have examined directly what motherhood means in a modern context and the difficulty of women's associations in a still largely patriarchal culture. The first series is set in the fictional town of Laketop, a remote New Zealand community which is able to act, symbolically, as an unreconstructed patriarchy

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creating narrative tensions not dissimilar to those explored in her historical dramas (*The Piano* and *Bright Star* (Jane Campion, 2009, UK/Australia/France)). Thus, whilst *Top of the Lake* is a modern drama it mimics the historical settings as a means of asking questions of patriarchy, thus indicating that these ancient questions are still present, even if obscured by modern conventions. This is a consistent theme across Campion's modern dramas (including *In the Cut*) where the repression of women is often demonstrated to be still at issue socially, even as it is expressed in more complex ways in the male-female relationship in modern societies.

Campion's films, therefore, already address Irigarayan preoccupations. Bainbridge has written in depth of the relationship between Ada and Flora (Anna Paquin) in *The Piano*, which she argued foregrounded 'the highly-charged emotionality of their dyadic unity' whilst simultaneously highlighting 'the importance of their moments of betrayal and distancing' (2008, p.169). In discovering the energy of acts of enunciation within the text, Bainbridge explored how mother and daughter expressed intimacy and desire between themselves to the exclusion of the male figures in the narrative. This doubling, intimacy and complexity can be found throughout Campion's work. At the end of Series One of *Top of the Lake*, it is Robin (Elisabeth Moss) and Tui (Jacqueline Joe) who continue together in the commune, as half-sisters but with Robyn in the role of surrogate mother to Tui (Figure 51). In *Bright Star* (2009), Fanny (Abigail Cornish) lives through a tragic romance with the poet, John Keats (Ben Whishaw) but threaded through the film is the intense relationship of Fanny and her mother (Kerry Fox), in whom Campion constructs a conventional figure of the nurturing maternal presence (Figure 52).



**FIGURE 52: MOTHER-DAUGHTER DYAD IN *BRIGHT STAR* (2009). ©PATHÉ RENN PRODUCTIONS/SCREEN AUSTRALIA/BBC FILMS.**

The following analysis focusses on how far Campion's persona and her act of enunciation in paratext reflect these preoccupations within the texts, which as discussed above are found in the texts' narrative content and the cinematic aesthetics

employed to communicate them. In a parallel analysis, Campion's paratext demonstrates potential for *parler femme*, in relation to considering female desire, through *what* she says, the narrative created by her biography and experience, together with the *way* in which she speaks. In Campion's case, her own '*discours*' (Benveniste, 1971) is particularly enlivened by her inclusion of her producers on the DVD commentary, which enables a discussion about the labour of filmmaking between two women collaborators. This has great potential for the act of *parler femme* which this thesis is considering.

### **Campion – Being Spoken**

Campion's work, like the other case studies featured here, has been subject to many forms of critical assessment. Campion, like Varda, has also been the subject of a book published by *Cahiers du cinéma* (Ciment, 2014). However, rather than the self-penned *Varda par Agnès*, Campion's book contains film analysis by Michel Ciment, a French film critic for the journal *Positif*. It also features interviews between Ciment and Campion and a selection of personal writings by the director. The interviews have been translated into French and the book, as a whole, places Campion as an auteur within cinema history immediately by her inclusion in this kind of book series. In addition, it is controlled by the interpretation of Ciment, as critic, and is therefore driven by the public auteur persona of Jane Campion. This consistently revolves around the uniqueness of her image, particularly her apparent maverick and individual qualities as rehearsed in profiles previously. Ciment refers to Campion as '*la personnalité rebelle*', the 'rebel personality' who 'revolts against all forms of repression which prevent the expression of emotion or desire' (2014, p.44). Discussing

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*An Angel at my Table* (Jane Campion, 1990, Australia/New Zealand), Campion's adaptation of New Zealand novelist Janet Frame's autobiography, Ciment describes how 'like her previous films, Jane Campion is drawn to a person who is fragile and vulnerable' (Ciment, 2014, p.61). In the tradition of film journalism established in the literature review, Ciment is unable to place Campion in relation to a female genealogy and chooses, instead, to appeal to an eclectic range of male inheritances, including Stanley Kubrick, Roman Polanski and David Lynch.

For feminist film critics, Campion is an important director. Her international reputation was cemented with the release of *The Piano* in 1993. It has generated substantial critical study. These include a focus on the role of its components such as music and costume in 'revisioning' the historical costume genre (Bruzzi, 1993,1995; Attwood, 1998) as well as feminist studies regarding the silence of its protagonist (Gillett, 1995; Hoeveler,1998) or about its forms of pleasure for the female spectator (Gordon, 2002). Vivian Sobchack, in trying to understand her own personal response to the film, turned to Laura Marks' concept of haptic theory (2000) to situate her response to the film in her own body:

I want to ground my previous discussion "in the flesh". In my flesh, in fact – and its meaningful responsiveness to and comprehension of an actual film, here *The Piano*. However intellectually problematic in terms of its sexual and colonial politics, Campion's film moved me deeply, stirring my bodily sense and my sense of my body ... I was wrapped also in a body that was achingly aware of itself as a sensuous, sensitized, sensible material capacity (Sobchack, 2000).

Sobchack demonstrates the inadequacy of academic critical language and accentuates the need to find an emotional language to describe her experience of the film. Her repetition of the word 'body' is also significant, as it maps her intent and attempt to bring a 'haptic' quality into her own academic writing. This example demonstrates

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how the film has become a form of a 'currency of exchange, or else a nonmarket economy' in Irigarayan terms (1993, p.79). Such responses to the film demonstrate a shift in '*the economy of exchange – of desire*' away from being exclusively '*man's business*' (1985b, p.176) [original emphasis]. Sobchack reflects a desire of moving towards an exchange between women, beginning as it is located in her embodied self, which has the qualities of recognising that '*no love of other without love of same*' (Irigaray, 1993c, p.104) [original emphasis]. This love is 'difficult to establish among women' because 'what women provide is not symbolized as a manufactured object' (1993c, p.104). Campion's film has released a recognition in Sobchack that she wants to talk about it, not in terms of film language or the technical marks of the auteur; instead, she returns to an expression rooted in personal testimony to a bodily experience of some form of longing or desire. In the language of the film, Campion arguably 'invented words and expressions to designate realities they feel and share and for which they lack language (Irigaray, 1993a, p.42) Thus, the film becomes an 'object' to be exchanged between women (Irigaray, 1993c, p.104).

By contrast as discussed, the discourse of the auteur in public generates a particular persona within popular journalism. And Campion, as the most mainstream of the directors in this study alongside Bigelow, has a consistent persona applied to her emerging through an analysis of articles written about her over decades. These crystallise an image of the maverick and the 'unconventional' (Feinstein, 2000) director. She's 'happily unruly' according to Manohla Dargis, whose profile begins: 'Jane Campion twirls a pigtail and laughs' and mentions the director to be, at forty-three years old: 'at once disarmingly girlish and very direct' (2003, p. 2). She brought a 'radical independent vision' to Henry James's *The Portrait of a Lady* and 'met the

requirements of *her* imagination by making James's novel her own' (2003, p.2) [original emphasis]. Interviewing Campion at Cannes, French critic Jean-Pierre Bouyxou, described her as the '*rebelle anti-conformiste*' (2014).

It is worth considering how these public articulations of who Campion is, examples of how she is "being spoken", have perpetuated an image of a director who is consistently anti-establishment. This public perception of a maverick sensibility may, in fact, be an important part of Campion's ability to 'speak (as) woman' (Irigaray, 1985b, p.135) within the public sphere even as it crystallises her public persona as something outside of the mainstream.

Jane Campion's performances in paratext are an echo of her films' preoccupations with women's relationship to public space and expresses overtly the difficulty for women to articulate their creative fantasies in public. The following section examines these performances in detail to ascertain whether they constitute a performance of *parler femme*, that is both in what she says and in the form in which she says it in the paratext.

### **Campion – Speaking in Paratext**

In both *The Piano* and *In the Cut*, Campion and her female producers engage in a speaking exchange between two women, Campion with Jan Chapman (*The Piano*) and then with Laurie Parker (*In the Cut*). There is a creation of an intimate space of discussion, confession and a description of the struggles of creative labour. As discussed in the previous case studies, there are possibilities in the 'rhetoric of

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intimacy’(Klinger, 2006, quoted in Grant, 2008, p. 132) found in the DVD commentary. This case study can be distinguished since this is a speaking exchange created between two women in this space and not just by the woman auteur alone.

An analysis, for the purposes of academic study, of a fluid and fluent conversation may schematise and categorise the exchange in a false and reductive way. However, the following investigation is intended to explore moments of exchange, of examples and evidence of an act of enunciation within the paratext which can be considered for *parler femme*. This is justifiable because, as discussed throughout this thesis, creating inheritance of practice inter-generationally in the film industry is vital and the value of women’s testimony in paratext towards this cannot be underestimated. The material is still sparse. Examining Campion’s oeuvre alone, there are only two DVD commentaries available for *The Piano* and *In the Cut*. These are complemented by documentaries and featurettes accompanying other films: *The Portrait of a Lady* (Jane Campion, 1996, UK/USA), *In the Cut* and *Top of the Lake*. This constitutes the greatest body of material in paratext for any of the case studies in this thesis, except for the self-archiving represented by Varda through her essay films and written texts. It, therefore, supports the quantitative analysis (Cobb et al, 2016; Lauzen, 2018) which confirms the constraints still strongly visible in the mainstream film industry for women.

This first section concentrates on the forms of speaking which are visible in the DVD commentaries, where Campion is in control of her performance as the film auteur. Remembering that this is a space which can hold a ‘rhetoric of intimacy’ (Klinger, 2006, quoted in Grant, 2008, p.132), the political potential of the

paratext is for the female auteur to generate, rather than ‘technological expertise’ or ‘media knowledge’ (Klinger, 2006, quoted in Grant, 2008, p.132), a different kind of intimacy that has potential for *parler femme* with a female audience.

### **DVD Commentary - *The Piano***

The DVD commentary to *The Piano* was created several years after the film (as part of the release of a special edition). It recognises the iconic status of the film, and gives the commentary the advantage of hindsight. Campion is heard with her long-time producing partner Jan Chapman and their conversation moves readily between explanations of artistic decisions, of the processes of the filmmaking and key collaborations or practical difficulties. They also discuss in depth the thematic issues in the film and the very questions of women’s social and cultural role. In terms of this thesis, therefore, Campion is engaged explicitly in expressing aspects of women’s experience and subjectivity, including aspects of biography and desire, in her paratextual performance and is overtly considering her own relationship to public expression.

Campion and Chapman’s established working relationship and personal familiarity bring a relaxed dynamic to their engagement, which is marked by their humour with each other. They talk, in relation to film and production labour, about the beginnings of the film and their inspirations:

Chapman: We had much enormous passion and energy for this film [...] You and I had been talking about it for a long, long time even before you made *Sweetie* and *An Angel at my Table*, I wanted to make this film so much. And there was such clarity in the screenplay and even in the treatment when you first showed it to me. And it also reminded me of my love of Emily Brontë and the Romantics. It was sort of like something you also felt, it was kind of like an adolescent

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imagination come to life, very much about all those things you were talking about [pause]

Campion (interjecting): Love and sex? [Both laugh].

Chapman: Yeah [both laugh]. Female visions of what love is – myths of it as well.

Campion: That's right. [...] I needed two films to bring my craft up to the kind of sophistication that this film needed.

Chapman: You were really clear about that [...]

Campion: I needed to get out of my system the more absurdist, more surrealist aspects of my character [...] but I'm still kind of amazed that we had the [...] belief creating reality.

Chapman: Absolutely.

Campion: That we had that idea firmly in our minds that it was possible.

Chapman: I mean, I really had no idea where we were going to get the money from, how you actually put together the financing for a film. The two of us wandering around.

Campion: We knew we had a story to tell [...] all this had to be done in a way we hadn't seen before (Campion & Chapman, 2000).

This offers a number of possibilities for *parler femme*. There are several moments where these women exchange the desire they have felt for the project, the 'passion and energy' as Chapman describes it. Campion reinforces Chapman's statement with her assertion of the importance of 'belief creating reality' which is supported by detail elsewhere about the artefacts they sent out to various film companies in order to find financing. These included not only the scripts but also paintings and other materials: Chapman describes how, we 'put them into a little card pack ... beautiful scripts. We'd get really beside ourselves ... it really was a baptism this film for both of us, wasn't it?' (Campion & Chapman, 2000). Together, ten years after the making of the film, they express a mutual sense of wonder. Chapman comments: 'it was fantastic to be so naïve' (Campion & Chapman, 2000). This, in fact, creates a narrative of the power of that desire, including that naivety, which drives any project forward and

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maintains its vision. Chapman and Campion are willing to share their “adolescence in filmmaking”, to adapt their own words above, when there is the vision without the experience or the technical expertise. This is a very different kind of ‘rhetoric of intimacy’ than that described by Klinger where the secrets were those of the ‘mastery’ of the film medium (Klinger, 2006, quoted in Grant, 2008, p. 132). Instead, Campion’s performances, with her producers, are marked by the confessions of doubt, of vulnerability in the process, and the importance of ‘belief creating reality’.

Campion, on the DVD commentary for *The Piano*, describes the fear of screenings:

because making a film or doing a piece of work is my way of really loving other people, trying to give them my best, trying to give to them from the deepest parts of myself. And socially I might seem really casual, like I don’t really care but this is coming from a different part of myself, you know, like a soul gift. I think that’s why it’s very painful for me if people don’t like or they don’t respond, which of course happens a lot. People don’t necessarily like what you do but because I’ve got so much emotionalism, or I did have, attached to this effort to make a really lovely gift it was really crushing (Campion & Chapman, 2000).

This is a particularly bold, poetic way of speaking about the labour of filmmaking, a ‘rhetoric of intimacy’ (Klinger, 2006, quoted in Grant, 2008, p.132) which sees Campion publicly willing to express the relationship of her own desires through her labour. The description of filmmaking as a ‘soul gift’ in an important contribution to the idea of a ‘currency of exchange, or else a nonmarket economy’ in Irigarayan terms (1993, p.79).

The exchange of their own personal ‘collective fantasies’ (Johnston, 1973, p.30) together as director and producer is significant for *parler femme*. As the conversation takes place in the epitext, in the surrounding space in cinema (Doane, 1980), the

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voices overlay and interact with the film's images. As in Varda's work, the filmmaker's voice creates a bridge between the text and the audience, potentially reinforcing female spectators' affective connection with the film's exploration of romance.

In the dynamic act of talking, Campion and Chapman do assess the 'myths' of romance that the film engages with, recognising themselves that it is debateable how far the film moves beyond conventional structures of romance. Chapman comments on women who have approached her and spoken of the film as understanding the 'female psyche' and their feeling that it appears to communicate in a 'secret language' to them. This echoes the intensity of Sobchack's response noted above (2000). Campion comments on the privileging of female spectators, stating that the 'romantic mythology' it contains 'really works for women' and it is 'not well understood by men'. She describes what women 'want, what they hope, what they dream of' from love is 'an access into the male world, in a way. One of the few accesses that they have'. She characterises being 'loved by a man is to be approved by the world. To be found, to be discovered' (Campion & Chapman, 2000). This overtly relates women's romantic feelings not with the private, but with the public, sphere in an unexpected association. Campion mobilises biography and describes how her own process of 'growing up' has been based on 'rejecting that concept, that whole construct really. And discovering that, you know, you really can find yourself in some ways [...] you can find some things out by being with a man, but you can't necessarily find *yourself*'. She goes on to describe her own ambivalence in 'buying into the myth' in writing and creating *The Piano* and questions how they - Chapman and her - might be 'enrolling' their audiences in this myth. She rejects that responsibility with a personal revelation

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that she, herself, was ‘enrolled in it anyway’(Campion & Chapman, 2000). Campion’s comments encapsulate a dichotomy at the heart of the text, as the text’s author. This is the way in which the film can be read as a romantic ‘object’, an expression of sexuality and intimate love,; however, it also directly confronts abiding questions for women (as Irigaray explored) of their relations among themselves and their wish to move from speaking amongst themselves into a wider society. By this, she identifies herself as struggling with the same dilemmas, in respect of desire and sexuality, as any ordinary woman might do.

Campion speaks about desire exactly as one would expect the author of this drama of fantasy which made Sobchack ‘achingly aware’ (2000). Campion comments on the ‘asexual’ characters of Stewart’s aunt (Kerry Walker) and her daughter (Geneviève Lemon). She states that these represented:

the people that can’t imagine the impulses, in my mind anyway, that sex creates. Or a sex drive, or romantic drives creates in people [...] I always see people like this as kind of policewomen or policemen of, um, the idea of society that doesn’t really exist anywhere, nobody *is* it [...] they position themselves as sentries, commentators [...] New Zealand society is quite famous for it (Campion & Chapman, 2000).

Her tone of voice is condemnatory and dismissive; the passion of her own belief in feeling is clear. In analysing this material, it is significant that it becomes difficult to separate the commentary which relates to discussing issues of female sexuality as opposed to questions of labour and the experience on the film set. Campion constantly blends her discussion of the film with Chapman with more general statements about her belief system concerning desire and sexuality. She sees sexuality as:

such a strong part of being human, and guides you and drives you so much. When you think about the human condition, it’s all about sex or power or both,

you know. It's hardly anything that's not motivated from one of those two desires. It's very rarely but very beautiful when people are really behaving in a disinterested way. And I think that is really what love is, it's when you're not wanting somebody to do something because in a way they're pressured, or made to, or it's your will. It's arising out of them naturally (Campion & Chapman, 2000).

This is an important part of the commentaries' functioning for *parler femme*, in the way in which her position as a woman and an artist are articulated so intimately that they cannot be separated.

Campion's conversations see her considering her own relationship to desire and to fantasy in a way that mirrors her protagonist, in Ada's attempt to negotiate her own subjectivity whilst within the exchanges of patriarchal, romantic economy. Campion places herself, even as author, often in the situation of a spectator or female audience member, a different kind of 'rhetoric of intimacy' than originally conceived of in Klinger's concept (Klinger, 2006 quoted in Grant, 2008, p.132), where it functioned only as part of the marketing of the film. Campion describes how the character of Baines, for example, is an 'ideal of masculinity' because he represents 'masculine strength combined with incredible sensitivity' (Campion & Chapman, 2000). Chapman agrees that Baines 'understanding' of Ada is a 'means of being herself'. Campion answers by sharing that:

one of the dreams of women is that men are actually interested in them. And it's also my theory about sex [...] what is really essentially sexy is attention. And the sort of attention that Harvey's character, Baines, gives Ada, is in the end very winning. I think it's not only about sex, it's also about love. Attention [...] more or less equals love (Campion & Chapman, 2000).

Campion both theorises, with the authority of a cultural, creative figure and confesses her personal feelings in this statement. Returning to ideas of the 'woman's film' and melodrama, in feminist criticism (Gledhill, 1987), Campion's films overtly engage

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with the sub-genre as a means of laying bare the: 'ideological contradiction' of women's lives, not as 'a hidden, unconscious thread to be picked up only by special critical processes' (1987, p.75). Instead, the film's narratives consider women's negotiation of public and private and the 'ideological contradiction' experienced in relation to their own desire. Her confidence in intertwining these two, the intellectual with the emotional, is an act of 'speaking (as) woman' (Irigaray, 1985b, p.135) because she does it publicly and supports the representations visible in her filmic texts, where women struggle with their entry into a discourse as it is currently constituted.

This engagement with cultural debate is also visible when Campion and Chapman address a central thematic device, being Ada's silence in the film:

Campion: [I]t was a really instinctive idea [...]. How silenced women really are in our society and culture. And, in a way, Ada somehow made a choice that I admired in her, it was a poetic choice, really, that she would act out what she felt inside, that she was unheard and would be unheard. There wasn't anyway, there was, in a way, no point in speaking because the whole world was not interested in what women really think and feel. But even we grew up in the time ... I don't think it's really changed. [Both laugh].

Chapman: Changed on the surface. (Campion & Chapman, 2000).

The way in which Campion expresses her ideas here is key, because the listener experiences Campion's own hesitancy in the halting, incomplete sentences, for example, '[T]here wasn't anyway, there was, in a way, no point'. It represents the filmmaker developing her own thoughts, spontaneously in the moment, in which the spectator is contained within that same aural space. It enhances the intimacy of the revelation and its power. There is also the effect of the sense of a shared history between women, of the shared experience of "being silenced" in various ways in the

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patriarchy. Campion and Chapman are, in this way, 'unique' in their position culturally but, to adapt Varda's statement, they are also 'all women'. Their laughter about this is an important part of its rhetorical power. All of these factors enhance the effect of the paratextual statement to enter into the 'systems of exchange' (Irigaray, 1993d, p.75) between women in terms of understanding their shared culture, and acts to 'disrupt or alter the syntax of discursive logic' by the shared empathy of this revelation. By this, Campion and Chapman arguably move the paratextual statement towards something which is able to 'mime the relations of "self-affection"' (Irigaray, 1985b, p.222). Women are able to recognise themselves and a shared experience through these two women's empathic, woman-oriented performance.

There is an interplay between Campion as the originator of these images, both as writer and director of the action, with her as an ordinary woman musing with another woman on the whole question of romance in their own lived lives. In Campion's words, she has: 'dressed up in the fantasy-woman way' (Campion & Chapman, 2000). Therefore, what is also importantly recuperated as part of a public exchange between women here is the centrality of women's feelings about sexuality in their own lives. Significant is the idea of the 'adolescent imagination' (Campion & Chapman, 2000) which occurs elsewhere in these commentaries. There is a recognition that *The Piano* might provide a text for all women that return them to the site of young women's fantasising as a means for developing their own sexuality and subjectivity, of going on their own journey of desire. Gothic literature, as Chapman suggests, often provides the framework for these fantasies. Utilising their conversation above for its hermeneutic value in relation to the film text misses its Irigarayan potential.

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As part of this discussion, Campion is willing to share her own biography and her own 'adolescent imagination', creating the impression that she looks at the film both as the experienced director and as a dreaming, young woman. As she shared her belief system on romance, in the examples above, so she shares her autobiography. The 'beautiful mosses' where Ada and her daughter, Flora lie were 'so romantic to me as a New Zealand girl', they were a fantasy space in her imagination where she saw herself 'kissing my first boyfriends for the first time' (Campion & Chapman, 2000). Campion often relates the nature of the heterosexual romances in her films back to her own ideas about romance and she talks about having been a 'romantic addict', like Isabel Archer in Henry James's novel, *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881) and that she 'very seriously did a con job on myself' (Campion & Chapman, 2000).

The way in which the voice works within the cinematic space produces a different effect to, for example, a guided hermeneutic reading (Grant, 2008) or a psychological interpretation (Fox, 2011). Instead, Campion's voice, heard in the 'voice-off' portion of the cinematic space (Doane, 1980, p.130), articulates a tangential relationship between the author and their material, a recognition that this artefact is part of a developmental process of creating active fantasy, in which the narrative stands separate to its creator. In assessing her own relationship to desire and fantasy, Campion separates herself from her protagonist, frequently referring to Ada's characteristics as an expression of her own fantasy and her imagining of the greatest possibilities for women's desire onscreen. This is exemplified in the following exchange concerning Ada:

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Campion: We grew up in a time when there was a lot more attention given to the fact that women didn't have as many rights. I don't think it's really changed, you know. [She laughs].

Chapman: Yeah, it's changed on the surface but not fundamentally. [...] I remember you were very attracted to characters like that who were

Campion: rebellious, deeply...

Chapman: ... rebellious, and stubborn and strong [...]

Campion: I think I admire it. I'm sort of jealous or envious because I feel in my normal life I eat so much compromise and, in fact, compromise is the way to some sort of a life. But in a poetic sense, I find it really moving and quite deep that there are some people that don't.

Chapman: Who act their feelings in a very instinctive and direct way (Campion & Chapman, 2000).

Her separation is an important disassociation of the author with the screen surrogate, an ability to separate her own psychological biography from that of the character. In thinking of this as part of the 'complex conjunction of text, institution and author' (Grant, 2001, p.122), it demonstrates how Campion's engagement with fantasy reflects her own constant struggle, as a woman, with its possibilities and restrictions. It also reflects her consciousness of women's continued struggle with speaking in public space. Ironically, as she expresses these contradictions - importantly in a dynamic and laughter-filled conversation with Chapman - she is performing a woman speaking about desire in public. They may face, as Irigaray argued, censorship: Irigaray noted that 'if, as a woman, who is also in public, you have the audacity to say something about your desire, the result is scandal and repression. You are disturbing the peace, disrupting the order of discourse' (1985b, p.145). Campion may be disturbing the natural order, of the typical content of the auteur DVD commentary, however her disturbance of the regimes of speaking are a powerful feminist intervention. This is true, also, in the relationship as captured in the commentary

between her and Chapman. Their laughter enacts something familiar to women, of a recognition of the frustration and injustice of the status quo at the same time as it becomes a shared object between them, reinforcing their mutual regard as they speak amongst themselves. These paratextual statements, therefore, are an important act of *parler femme*, in both content and form and act as a cultural intervention through which women's desire can become more widely known.

This paratext is also a contribution to *parler femme* because Campion acknowledges the differences between individual women and their encounters with sexuality, an acknowledgement of plurality, as well as the difference between fantasy and reality. This acknowledgement of difference can be seen in an exchange near the end of the film:

Chapman: I've always loved the way at the end of the film, she takes on life, she takes on reality. She comes back from the dream, from the fantasy. She's gonna have a go at trying out romance in the real world.

Campion: Well, yeah, maybe not even romance. She's just going to live a life [Chapman: Yeah] and learn to – to speak again.

Chapman: But have a relationship, you see her with Harvey ... with Baines. [Campion: Yeah]. Maybe it's the idea, Jane, that life lived without fantasy is possible?

Jane Campion: [Sighing]...I don't think so, Jan. [Both laugh]. That's just another fantasy. [More laughter] (Campion & Chapman, 2000).

What is significant here is Campion's affirmation, publicly, of the importance of women's fantasies, not only as part of a filmic journey, but also as part of their everyday lives. This is a public articulation which is hidden in the realm of DVD extras for cineastes, but it has wider implications for women in social culture when interpreted through Irigaray's *parler femme*. If, as Irigaray asserted, '*the economy of exchange – of desire – is man's business*' (1985b, p.176) [original emphasis] because

‘the exchange takes place between masculine subjects’ (1985b, p.176) then Campion is countering that system of exchange with another idea. She is asserting women’s natural right to fantasy and its exchange, as part of a nonmarket economy of desire.

In the DVD commentary accompanying *The Piano*, Campion shows herself willing to reveal her own biography and her own emotional and psychological motivations. As a public statement, by a film author as auteur, this has strong feminist potential seen through *parler femme*.

### **DVD Commentary - *In the Cut***

*In the Cut*, whilst it is a crime thriller in a modern setting, covers much of the same territory of the negotiation of desire and fantasy as is present in *The Piano*. In answer to Chapman’s enquiry as to whether her two lead characters, Ada and Baines found love, Campion affirms this as it may be found through ‘drives like sex’ beyond which there is a ‘real compassion’ (Campion & Chapman, 2000). This is echoed in the DVD commentary accompanying *In the Cut*. With producer Laurie Parker, a similarly honest conversation is constructed around questions of sex and desire between men and women.

Based on Susannah Moore’s erotic crime novella, *In the Cut* follows the story of Frannie (Meg Ryan), an English teacher in New York city and her affair with a detective, Molloy (Mark Ruffalo) who is investigating a serial killer. The other key relationship the film is the one that Frannie has with her half-sister, Pauline (Jennifer Jason-Leigh) who becomes the killer’s third victim during the course of the narrative. Frannie and Pauline share a father who left both of their mothers and who haunts both women’s fantasy and dream life. Frannie struggles with her suspicions about Molloy

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who she believes is the man she has watched being fellated in the basement of a bar. In addition, Molloy's sexual sensitivity and personal mystery seems to suggest the murderer's romantic modus operandi, placing an engagement ring on each victim. Frannie narrowly escapes death at the hands of the real killer, Molloy's partner, Rodriguez (Nick Damici), whose romantic exterior hides a violent misogynistic killer. Frannie saves herself, shooting him with the gun she finds in Molloy's jacket she is wearing.

In commenting on the scenes of desire between Frannie and Molloy, there is a constant interplay between Campion the writer-director and Campion the woman, still musing on how the mechanics of sexual relationships can work. In a difficult scene between Frannie and Molloy, in which Frannie rejects his attempts at comfort, Campion states: 'I love in the end, y'know, people get to these pitches at times and these strong places of complete emotional desperation. And they have the compassion to look past it' (Campion & Parker, 2003). Campion again shows her distancing from her female protagonist, commenting on Frannie's unfair behaviour towards Molloy, albeit in her state of grief. Parker concurs, stating friends had told her how 'the guys who are watching they identify with the character and they feel the anxiety and making things okay' (Campion & Parker, 2003). She discusses Mark Ruffalo's performance and his emotional investment in the role. She comments on his playing of a highly-charged sexual encounter between the two main characters, Frannie and Molloy, : 'What I love about the scene, it transcends that original aggressive impulse and turns into – because he sees through it, that she needs this kind of grief-fuck; his knowing of that is the real love' (Campion & Parker, 2003). Over one scene in which Frannie confesses she fears that she wants too much from a romantic relationship,

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Campion discusses the meaning of this from the male perspective: 'It's painful, to be this man, that a lot of men think they're failing women' (Campion & Parker, 2003).

Campion speaks of male collaborators as having stereotypical feminine characteristics; this is a public act of enunciation which diverges from technocratic discourses and asserts the value of femininity in the filmmaking process. She identifies both actors' and technicians' ability to move from a very masculine persona to a feminine one: cinematographer Stuart Dryburgh on *The Piano* was a 'revelation' to Campion, having appeared to have a 'gruff persona' (Campion & Chapman, 2000); similarly, Campion notes that Dion Beebe on *In the Cut* employed 'sensitive' camerawork, especially in characterising the relationship between Frannie and Pauline; Campion notes how he has to have the 'strongest nerves' in order to produce something that is 'delicate, intimate' in filming their scene together at Pauline's flat (Campion & Parker, 2003). Harvey Keitel wanted to play the part (of Baines) so much that Jane felt 'scared', because he was rethinking personal things and 'wanting to get in touch with a much softer, deeper side of himself' (Campion & Chapman, 2000).

Campion's again shows a willingness, as she did in respect of Harvey Keitel and his character Baines in *The Piano*, to discuss her own attraction to the male characters or the male actors that she has worked with. In performing this as a woman filmmaker and an author of fantasies, Campion again demonstrates her personal frankness about how sexuality functions for her. This is an unusual and confident statement for a public woman auteur, to bring the desiring woman into her discussions. Her films feature the recurring figure of the man who is sexually proficient and understands his female partner and her needs completely. Molloy is in an inheritor of this from Baines,

and this figure will appear again in Johnno (Thomas M. Wright) in the first series of *Top of the Lake*. There is hermeneutic value in Campion's remarks on romance; however, there is another kind of affirmation at work. She is recurrently interested and 'gets on very well' with 'these really guy guys, tough guys, but as long as they have a feminine side. A lot of tough guys really do have a strong feminine element to themselves because they're very confident about their masculinity and they can afford to relax' (Campion & Parker, 2003). Returning to *The Piano*, she loves Sam Neill's 'handsomeness and diffidence and strength' (Campion & Chapman, 2000). She interrupts Parker during one sequence for the commentary on *In the Cut* to comment that Damici is 'looking so handsome, *so* good-looking' (Campion & Parker, 2003).

Campion's active performance of her own attraction to her actors and to their characterisations is part of her public expression of desire, which can be interpreted as 'disruptive' because she has had the 'audacity to say something about [her] desire' (Irigaray, 1985b, p.145) in public. Whilst, in the context of the DVD commentary, Campion's comments are not 'scandal' or subject to 'repression' (Irigaray, 1985b, p.145), they are arguably still interventionist as they are unusual.

These examples, of Campion's deep engagement with male-female sexuality, are varied. She speaks again about the constraints of romance, the constraints on women *and* men, the way in which both are positioned by what Campion perceives as society's myths, this time within a modern narrative utilising the crime genre. As an act of agency, within the confines of the DVD commentary, and its limited audience, its immediate impact is restricted. However, if cinema histories are re-conceived as

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being communicated through a director's practice, then Campion's attitudes to sexuality are part of that exchange - an inspiration - to future generations. Importantly, again, she is a woman freely expressing desires within a public space.

*In the Cut's* paratext also expands questions of desire in a different direction, based on Campion and Parker's discussion of the relationship between the two sisters in the film, Frannie and Pauline. Campion consistently foregrounds women, their relationships to each other, and their states of fantasy in her films. Inside the cinematic space of the DVD commentary, where female sociality can be exercised, Campion expands on the importance to her of representing these relationships between women. She saw herself as on an adventure with Holly Hunter in *The Piano*, as sisters; she is passionate about Meg Ryan's acting abilities, her ability to cry and show emotion. A key example of this in the text is the relationship portrayed between the half-sisters. Campion discusses the importance of the scene in which Frannie tells Pauline again – it is clearly a ritual in their relationship – about how their father met Pauline's mother. The scene is shot hand-held, the women moving from a moment of lying together on the sofa to an affectionate, slow revolving dance – lightly touching hands – as if enacting an echo of a courtly dance between a man and a woman. Campion discusses at this point the preparation made by the two actors for representing this relationship; how she as a director asked them to write down what they most feared for their sister. As we watch Ryan and Jason Leigh move onscreen, this commentary works both as an explanation of performance process but also deepens our insight into the sisterly relationship and its psychology. Campion's words and the action onscreen parallel each other in the content and their form, as an exchange between two women within a space of intimacy: Frannie and Pauline onscreen, Campion and Parker on the

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soundtrack. The director and producer discuss how Ryan as Frannie fears Jason Leigh as Pauline's impulsiveness, Pauline fears Frannie's distance. These actors have thought about each other as if they were sisters, it has created a psychic reality to their interaction which may help it to be convincing to female spectators. It may resonate with their own experience of other women and the way in which they think about the women they have in their lives. Campion underlines this association, sharing her own experiences, describing the:

love and tenderness that underpin my relationships with women; what compassion we have for each other, and the soul journey that we share. And, I guess, by association, what we would like it to be with the men in our life (Campion & Parker, 2003).

Parker agrees, citing the way in which women have 'no artifice' with each other.

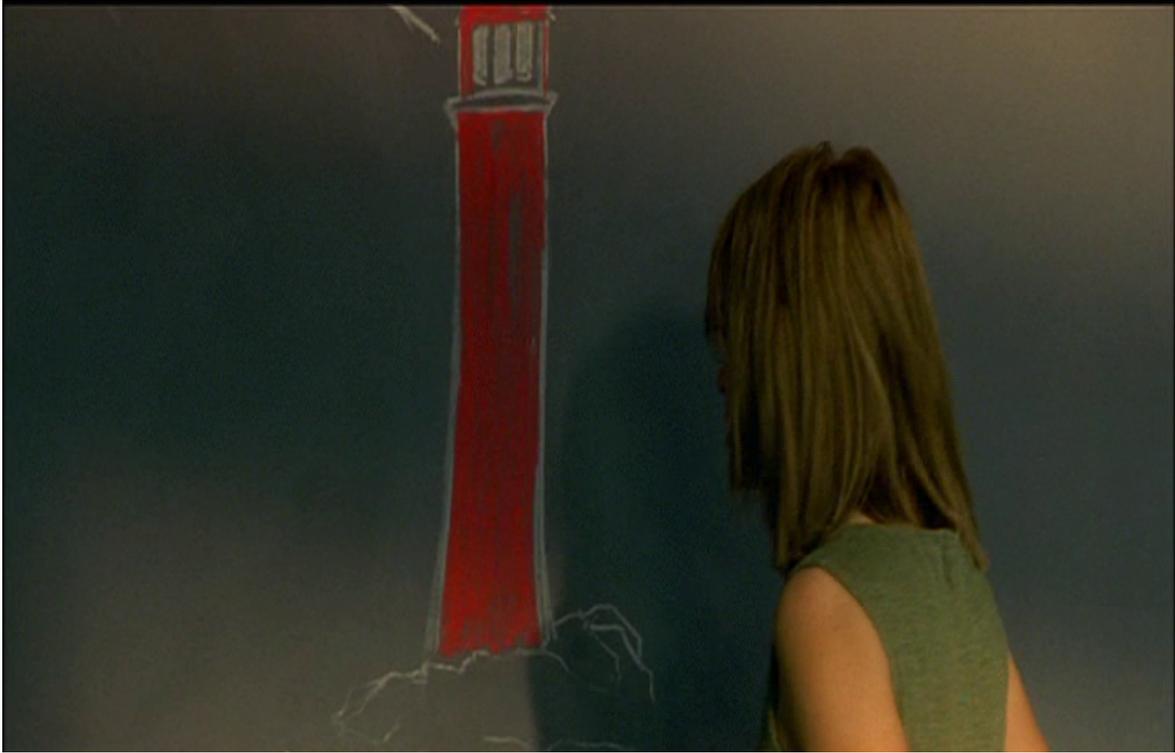
These statements mime 'the relations of "self-affection"' (Irigaray, 1985b, p. 222) between women as being enacted onscreen. The effect of Campion and Parker's voices, in discussion together, is a development of the 'rhetoric of intimacy' (Klinger, 2006, quoted in Grant, 2008, p.132f) that the digital paratextual commentary can create. The comfortable familiarity and warmth of the interaction means that there is nothing dissonant about Campion's revelation of deeply personal autobiography as part of her reflections on the film. She refers to the death of her first baby – a son – which occurred shortly after the release of *The Piano*. Campion, in reviewing the scenes of Frannie after Pauline's death, openly describes those feelings of grief; feelings where 'everything [is] coming at you, without control, you're so disturbed' and 'there's no escaping the psyche, when you go to sleep, y'know. You wake up sobbing. As she does' (Campion & Parker, 2003). This is a different kind of biographical connection made through the paratext to Campion's life, of an

articulation of ‘autobiographical’ and ‘a different cultural I’ ((Irigaray, 1993a, p.177). However, its raw and immediate form it contravenes the conventional expectations of the auteur commentary. Unlike Potter’s movement away from intimate revelation in her speaking voice, Campion shares a reflection of a painful, private experience. For a moment, the spectator is within a public space with the woman Campion, not the director-auteur.

### **Campion - Humour and Bathos**

As Varda anticipated, in her particular articulation of voice and representation in her essay films, it is the way in which these women directors debunk the myths of cinematic expression and film labour which can also contribute to the exchange of *parler femme*. This is evident throughout Campion’s work, as well. Campion similarly discusses her moments of inspiration with a bathetic humour. Her main concept for adapting *The Portrait of a Lady* came to her when she was at the hairdressers, fortunately, since it was ‘a colour job’ she had plenty of time to think about it’ (*Portrait: Jane Campion and The Portrait of a Lady*, ).

What is present in written interviews, but emerges much more forcefully in her vocal performances in DVD commentary, is Campion’s dry humour. Campion also performs – and embraces – her maverick, auteur persona. In the DVD extras for *In the Cut*, Campion comments on her chalk drawing of a lighthouse, to accompany her protagonist’s English class on Virginia Woolf’s novel, *To the Lighthouse* (Figure 53). She laughs at its obvious phallic style and comments: ‘It’s my nature. I can’t help myself to be outrageous sometimes’ (Campion & Parker, 2003).



**FIGURE 53: I CAN'T HELP IT: DRAWING THE LIGHTHOUSE. *IN THE CUT* (2003). © PATHE PRODUCTIONS/PATHÉ PICTURES INTERNATIONAL/ RED TURTLE.**

This is evident in both DVD commentaries such that the act of *parler femme* is constituted not just of what they say but also how they say it. Moments of silliness are shared with Parker, when both women join in with the song playing onscreen (from a small toy hamster): ‘I think I love you, but what am I so afraid of’. They also laugh together about the experience of encountering a flasher whilst shooting the lighthouse scene:

Campion: He came right up to me and you [...] you never stopped talking on the phone. I ran off.

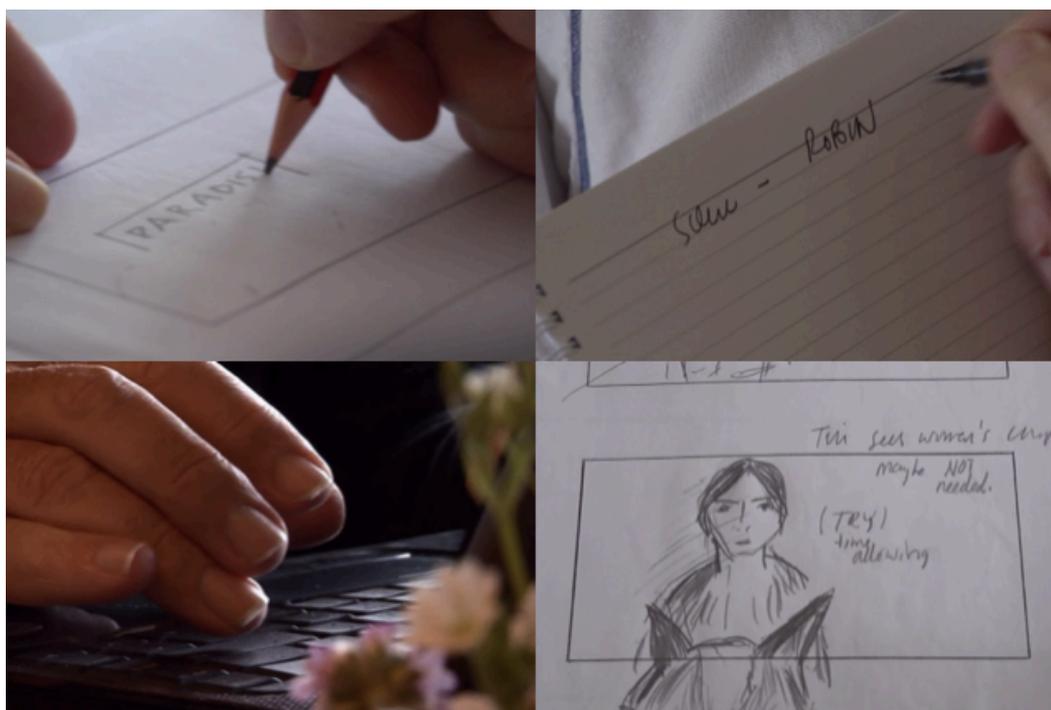
Parker: We had the finger pressed on 911... we were so scared [...] we have to be this scared in the movie (Campion & Parker, 2003).

The mood of the commentary is overall relaxed and humorous, with both director and producer giggling over the choices that had to be made on the prosthetic penis used in an early scene or Campion’s own cameo appearance in one sequence as

a drunken woman in the bar. It adds to the intimate address and the characterisation of film labour as quite ordinary and manageable in women's lives, as both Varda and Potter accentuated.

Campion's physical voice is important, as it is warm, antipodean-accented and often given to laughter. Moreover, in this 'rhetoric of intimacy' (Klinger, 2006, quoted in Grant, 2008) within the DVD extra, it is a public expression of very private modes of address. However, importantly, Campion holds a position as author and creator in relation to her text and the filmmaking process. She never accedes to an informality which negates her authorial power. This contrasts with the commentary behaviour on *Holy Smoke* (Jane Campion, 1999 Australia/USA/India) of Kate Winslet and Anna Campion (Jane's sister and co-writer on this film) who dissolve into bouts of giggles at Harvey Keitel's naked body onscreen. It is a very familiar laughter to women; however, compared to Campion's calculated humour, this is more uncontrolled, schoolgirl frivolity. This distinction suggests that Campion has an understanding of occupying a different position of leadership as the woman auteur.

Her DVD commentary also demonstrates a willingness, often through humour, to show vulnerability, for example, meeting composer Michael Nyman for *The Piano* and casting experienced actors such as Harvey Keitel. In discussing meeting Nyman, Campion states that we were 'very anxious and nervous', as he was 'for us such a famous and incredible composer' and 'we wanted everything right'. They hired a large concert hall in Sydney with a huge grand piano: 'He sat down at it for five minutes and said, "Do you think we can go shopping?" [Both laugh]'. Campion affirms that



**FIGURE 58: CLOSE-UP ON THE ARTISTIC PROCESS. FROM *THE BOTTOM OF THE LAKE* (2013). © CLARE YOUNG FILMS.**

‘people are people first rather than technicians’ (Campion & Chapman, 2000). The same anxiety pervaded their meeting with Keitel:

Campion: Exciting and a little scary for me too I was also insecure about how to direct someone like Harvey, so strong and famously strong. And for me as a director, hardly having done anything, but with a kind of a clear vision and wanting Harvey to co-operate with it [She laughs].

Chapman: [Amused tone] So, how did you achieve that.

Campion: Well, I didn’t know if I would be able to... I remember doing quite a lot of role-playing with my husband at the time, he had to play Harvey [Both laugh] before I got to ring Harvey up (Campion & Chapman, 2000).

Campion demonstrates the same sense of humour in describing being in production. She traces the narrative arc onset, where at the beginning ‘everyone’s really enthusiastic and hopeful, but halfway through they don’t think the story works, you know, and don’t think there is any story’. In response to Chapman’s wry question, and ‘what happens at the end of a shoot, Jane?’ Campion refers to ‘three quarters of the way through when they complain about the catering’ (Campion & Chapman,

2000). At the end of *The Piano*, after more studio shoots where the drama was clearer, everybody ‘loved and adored each other and didn’t want to go away and felt like it was the really unique experience of their filming careers’ (Campion & Chapman, 2000). Like Varda and like Potter, Campion demystifies the filmmaking process with pragmatic views and humour. Her approach to film labour will be considered in more depth in the next section.

### **Campion – The Labour of Filmmaking**

Campion demonstrates a clear desire to explain, in a similar way to Potter, how difficult and intimidating the act of creativity can be. In a public arena, there is a great danger that this expression of insecurity could undermine women’s position in public given that a woman director is still so rare. If Bigelow felt she had to foreground her love of strength: ‘I like to be strong. I just like it’ (Bigelow in Diamond, 2002), an expression of vulnerability and insecurity may appear a dangerous, public strategy. However, Potter has written convincingly and persuasively of the role of fear in the creative process, which women auteurs can embrace equally as men.

Similarly, as noted above, Campion has shown through her performance that the anxiety of creativity and leadership can be diffused, often through shared laughter. This is situated alongside her willingness to openly declare her emotions, thus making herself vulnerable in public discourse, by demonstrating how filmmaking is intertwined with the deepest parts of her existence.

Campion has expressed her passion for the labour of filmmaking, an important intervention as those made by the other case studies. Campion’s DVD commentaries and documentaries contain a series of snapshots of forms of labour, from the writing

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and storyboarding to working on the film set. This includes the labour of finding collaborators and convincing others of her vision, including working with actors. The idea, proposed by Chapman and Campion, of ‘belief creating reality’ is demonstrated as an essential quality of leaders. It is required from the solitary process of working on a script right through to the experience of marshalling dozens of collaborators, actors and crew, on a mainstream film set.

Examining the rhetoric of the images across Jane Campion’s paratexts creates a narrative of that labour. Varda showed an attention to detail and consistently recorded her own labour throughout her career. Potter shared more private images from the film set as well as her own archives. These images and films create a unique access to the prosaic stages of women’s labour in cinema. Similarly, Campion’s willingness to take

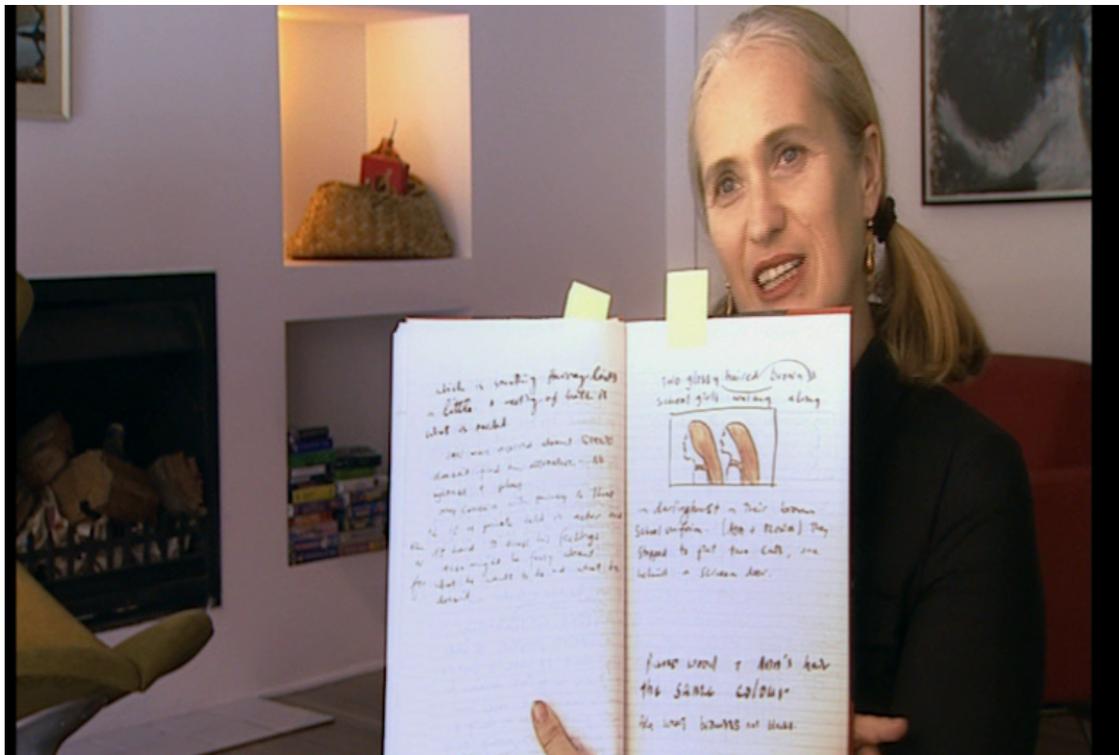


FIGURE 54: THE INITIAL IMAGE FOR ADA AND FLORA: *THE PIANO* (1993). © CIBY 2000.

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part in the additional documentaries and featurettes indicates her wish to perform the labour of the role in public and to make its true, even brutal, nature visible.

Campion is open with her creative materials. She made available storyboards and scripting for Ciment's *Cahiers du cinéma* publication. In an interview accompanying *The Piano* DVD, Campion describes the first moments of inspiration for the film, being an image of the duality of mother and daughter (Figure 54). The rough sketch made shows the spontaneity of imagination for an idea that would pass through several stages - actors and cinematography - to become something of an iconic image in women's cinema.

This next section will consider the accompanying documentaries for *The Portrait of a Lady* and for the first series of *Top of the Lake*.

The latter is made by a young filmmaker, Clare Young, and is called *From the Bottom of the Lake* (2013, Australia). There is a clear act of intergenerational *parler femme* in Campion's direct commissioning of Young's film. Young explains that her fifty-minute film, which features as a DVD extra to accompany the first series, was conceived after she met Campion and discussed her own film work with the older, more experienced director. Campion then invited Young to accompany her and, writing partner, Gerard Lee to England to make a documentary on their creative writing process. Lee wrote with Campion on her early films, including *Sweetie*, when they were also romantically involved. Their relationship, as it appears onscreen, has the ease of long-standing and mutual support. This is visible in the humour and deprecatory banter they visit on each other.



**FIGURE 55: COLLABORATING WITH GERARD LEE. *FROM THE BOTTOM OF THE LAKE* (2013). © CLARE YOUNG FILMS.**

*From the Bottom of the Lake* reveals the eclectic nature of creativity, for example in Campion's image board (Figure 56). This process has none of the cogency and coherence that auteurist interpretations will often place upon it. As a practice it demonstrates various elements of possibility and imagination, which are translated further through the collaboration of filmmaking – with cinematographer, actor and editor. Returning to *The Piano* DVD commentary, Campion confided her originating vision: 'I always felt like I *was* in a Gothic drama with the New Zealand landscape [...] it's in my psyche, being in the bush, for me, is like being in my imagination' (Campion & Chapman, 2000). On the film itself, cinematographer Stuart Dryburgh brought out the 'layering of the bush' which was never in Campion's 'fantasy'. 'I just remember them looking amazing, just what I liked because they had this underwater quality which to me represented or helped support the more



**FIGURE 56: INSPIRATION BOARD. FROM *THE BOTTOM OF THE LAKE* (2013). © CLARE YOUNG FILMS.**

unconscious aspects of the storytelling that I wanted to be involved in' (Campion & Chapman, 2000).

Her vision is, therefore, the starting point for others' artistry to build on. Her initial inspiration board for *Top of the Lake* demonstrates how this process has some quality of unconscious fantasy contained in it, through the random materials pinned in juxtaposition, including actor test shots and illustrations. Its composition parallels Robin (Elisabeth Moss)'s wall in the series itself, suggesting, in retrospect, creativity as a kind of detective activity (Figure 56).

In terms of the prosaic nature of the writing process, the image of Campion lying on a couch, dressed in sweatpants for comfort (Figure 57), emphasises how ordinary this process is and how much it relies on determination, patience, trial and



**FIGURE 57: THE LABOUR OF FILMMAKING. *FROM THE BOTTOM OF THE LAKE* (2013).  
© CLARE YOUNG FILMS.**

error. What becomes apparent is how fragile creativity is and how it relies on an ability to persist through the difficulty. This is vividly rendered in, Clare Young's film, as she repeatedly features a close-up of Campion's hand writing additions to the script, which simultaneously demonstrates the labour and feeds a sense of, in Potter's words, something 'mysterious and sacred' (2014, p.26) taking place. The spectator is witness to the difficulty of artistic creation, the meticulous attention to detail needed, in scripting and storyboarding, which Young's close-ups accentuate (Figure 58).

Elsewhere, in the friendly bickering with Lee and the repetition of practising each part, Campion's appearance - performance - in Young's film demystifies a romance that Truffaut and the other French New Wave critics sought to build as part of their polemic. The prosaic reality of this work is that it involves procrastination, self-doubt and experimentation. This includes acting out the dialogue (Figure 55). Her

artistic process, is important as a statement for *parler femme*. The ordinary circumstances and the daily struggle revealed demonstrates the importance of labour, of the determination and persistence that are required to make films.

### **Labour - and Film Leadership**

Campion recognises how, on *The Portrait of a Lady* she is:

working a seventy-five hour week [...] got a daughter now and she's just a baby, so it's a really sometimes a scary balance to have enough time with her to feel like I'm doing any kind of mothering. So that I'm doing the work well enough to satisfy myself [...] I start to panic that I'm not going to be with my baby at all (*Portrait: Jane Campion and The Portrait of a Lady*, 1996).

Campion shares the biographical detail of the strains, as a mother, of directing. Yet, her directorial style demonstrates that any stereotypical idea of feminine nurturing would be misplaced. Lee has described how Campion is a 'very gentle person, shy' and that she 'struggles to be the boss in a lot of ways but rises to the occasion'. Despite this demure characterisation, there is a different Campion who could be aware of resistance on set: In Lee's words: 'then the fight would be on to do it her way which she would always be sure of' (*From the Bottom of the Lake*). Like Potter, there a ruthless determination in pursuit of an artistic vision. On the set of *The Portrait of a Lady*, Campion remarks to Nicole Kidman and producer Monty Montgomery: 'You've got to be bold about things or you're fucked' (*Portrait: Jane Campion and The Portrait of a Lady*, 1996).

Ruffalo describes something of this quality in relation to *In the Cut* about how Campion would 'yell' at him in rehearsal regarding the character; there were 'no apologies' and that she saw his own 'brokenness' following a serious illness that she

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wanted to use for Molloy (*In the Cut: Behind the Scenes*, 2003). Campion has reflected that her role with actors is to be present and to '[p]ick them up when they fall over' (*In the Cut: Behind the Scenes*, 2003). She noted that it is only the director who sees all of the performance, describing the film set elsewhere as being conducted with a 'sense of emergency' and that places the director in an intimate place with each of those actors (*In the Cut: Behind the Scenes*, 2003).

However, this is the role of all directors. As with the other case studies, budgets and schedules rule their process. Varda presents the scene in Rue Daguerre of her company at work and the ongoing normality of dealing with film cans and with budgets. Campion describes the 'lowering of bullshit' that takes place when each day is worth \$100,000. (*Portrait: Jane Campion and The Portrait of a Lady*, 1996). A fraught and bad-tempered set is revealed by the film where, in actor Richard E. Grant's observations as an infrequent visitor, 'battle lines have been drawn' after several weeks of intense working and living together. Barbara Hershey feels neglected as one of the subsidiary players since Campion's concern has to be more totally focussed on her stars. However, Hershey still comments that Campion's style allows the actor to take chances, that she 'will allow you to go further' and there is a sense of trust that only the best work on screen will be used in the final edit. There is, similar to Potter, physical reassurance for her actors, especially her female actors; she places her hand on Nicole Kidman's back at a publicity photoshoot, she wipes Barbara Hershey's face after one particularly difficult scene, asking for dry towels for her actor. This could be described as mothering them, demonstrating practical and emotional care as she makes them do what is needed. Her role, however, is to be 'Queen of the Scene' as

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she describes it (*Portrait: Jane Campion and The Portrait of a Lady*, 1996) and this is not a normal, mothering one.

Campion, just as Potter on *Orlando*, has to preside over this ‘battlefield’ with a certain quality of leadership. In Campion’s case, from the evidence of these accompanying films, she appears to have cultivated very successfully the art of active listening without commitment. She listens and supports Holly Hunter as she struggles with a difficult and emotional take (Figure 59) during the filming of *Top of the Lake*,



**FIGURE 59: REHEARSING *TOP OF THE LAKE* (2013). *FROM THE BOTTOM OF THE LAKE* (2013). © CLARE YOUNG FILMS.**

and often appears putting her arm around her. After another more comic moment is well-delivered, she tells Hunter ‘I was wetting myself’ (*From the Bottom of the Lake*). She listens to Nicole Kidman as she reads from her copy of the Henry James novel of *The Portrait of a Lady* and discusses her motivation in playing Isabelle Archer.

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In the same vein as Potter's characterisation of mobilising intellect at all times as well as emotional awareness, her concept of 'passionate detachment' (Potter, 2014, p.85), Campion also shows her ability to maintain distance simultaneous with empathy. On the DVD commentary for *In the Cut*, she is ruthlessly honest about Ruffalo's inability to imagine himself into the moment in one scene whilst praising both actors for the way in which they were able to shoot the key moment – the only romantic kiss in the film – extremely quickly to recover the time. Meg Ryan receives praise for her ability to cry on cue in a café scene, having never produced that emotion in rehearsals, which meant Campion, in that moment: 'knew we had a film' (Campion & Parker, 2003).

Campion's style, in fact, has to have this ruthlessness. It is the active, but detached, listening of someone who has to pay attention to being on budget and on time, as well as consider artistic possibilities. Coupled with her care for her actors, Campion must draw them towards emotional states they may resist, something that Kidman comments on in voiceover for the documentary on *The Portrait of a Lady*. In an intense and darkly emotional scene between John Malkovich as Gilbert Osmond and Kidman as Archer, Campion's voice can be heard simultaneously encouraging, cajoling and driving her lead actress, but she still firmly pushes her outside the door in order to perform the scene again. (*Portrait: Jane Campion and The Portrait of a Lady*, 1996). Campion must see what may be possible in the scene, by exploring how far these emotions can be taken. The emotional ruthlessness of this is supported by make-up artist, Peter King, who likens listening to the filming to listening to neighbours' violent domestic arguments: 'hateful, and ugly and frightening' and listening to it all day long. The emotional intensity of filming has led, by half-way through the shoot, to

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the 'battlelines' being drawn between several groups within the film 'family' as Richard E. Grant comments (*Portrait: Jane Campion and The Portrait of a Lady*, 1996). Grant, who has come in and out of production to play a supporting role, cynically summarises how inappropriate the analogy of a family is: 'all that bullshit about we're just one big happy family [...] there's a slight amount of battle fatigue' (*Portrait: Jane Campion and The Portrait of a Lady*, 1996). Campion, like Potter, may be aware of this but strategically ignores it.

There is a contradiction between this and the idea of the "nurturing" woman director. In the pursuit of the creative fantasy, there is no question of avoiding emotion; this is an aspect that may point towards a characterisation of Campion's, and Potter's, cinema as "matriarchal", because of the contrapuntal combination of qualities they demonstrate to counter ideological stereotypes. Campion describes herself in directing Kidman as: 'trying to think, is there room to go further [...] what the little signs are about where she might need to go and what encouragement or support she may need from me'. The encouragement and support includes telling her to 'get out of that zone and be here for the rest of us' (*Portrait: Jane Campion and The Portrait of a Lady*, 1996). There is, as Potter described, the presence of having the strength to protect an artistic vision, having 'strength and nerve to carry out a plan not everyone can see' (Campion & Chapman, 2000), such as the underwater palette of greens and blues created in shooting in the New Zealand rainforest in *The Piano*.

What becomes significant for such women, as auteurs within the institutional definition, is their role in performing leadership and being seen to do so. This includes the ability to force people through situations in which they experience emotional

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extremes. Campion talks extensively, on *The Piano* and *In the Cut* about the relationship with the actors. Campion's intensity with her actors does not match the Potter's description, of 'falling in work' (Potter, 2014, p.105) but she understands the centrality of that relationship to the success of the film. She describes, in an echo of mothering, how an actor will tend to 'bond with the director rather than with each other' it is their 'primary connection' (Campion & Chapman, 2000). She speaks in depth about the process undertaken by actors, of a 'psychic invitation' of bringing characteristics towards themselves, that are not comfortable, quite a 'gross' invitation to get something 'new in you' (Campion & Chapman, 2000).

Whilst Campion may refer to Federico Fellini as a strong and important influence for her and her development of her filmmaking during her film school years ((Campion & Chapman, 2000), she is less engaged in the discussion of aspects of the technical design. She is closer, in this to Potter, and it sits in stark contrast to the paratextual persona of Bigelow who, as discussed earlier, stays firmly within the development of the apparatus and the frame and design of her work.

Campion's discussions about her relationships with her actors are often intertwined with her statements about creativity, with a recognition that it is within this shared 'vulnerability' that the story is created. In *From the Bottom of the Lake*), she discusses this process again:

It's like being vulnerable in public, it's quite extreme [...] but what I always [...] tell myself [...] or one of the reasons I manage it is that I am protecting the story, protecting the actors' work. [...] And I feel like it brings out the lion in me in a way [...] I find that I will speak up, I'll say what I want that I'm not there to please anybody. I've certainly been through periods earlier in my career where that was very worrying – a problem - for me. But now I've learnt just to direct my focus right to the storytelling: what's happening now and what's happening

next, what I see and what I feel. And one of the other extremely important things for me is to be relaxed enough on set that I can experience the drama that's going on in front of me (*From the Bottom of the Lake*, 2013).

This is an important performative statement, if considered for intergenerational relationships between these experienced women auteurs and women entering the profession, as it indicates the intellectual and emotional labour involved in managing the situation as a director, on set and post-production.

Campion's willingness to mobilise a performance that shares these processes of creativity and labour in such an open way, at the same time as it is intertwined with questions of female desire, has great power for a feminist intervention. As an act of *parler femme*, it is a complex interweaving of biographical material, interaction between Campion and her producers and the rhetoric of the images. There is a clear sense of performance, in other words, agency, that runs throughout. In the final section, the inheritances that Campion brings to her filmmaking, her placing herself within a matrilineal line, will be considered.

### **Matrilineal Inheritances**

In the 1990s, Campion spoke of the need for 'more female writer/directors' because it would lead to 'more interesting female parts', adding that '[U]nfortunately, because of the nature of the patriarchal society, particularly here in America, everybody tends to see things as a male story' (quoted in Young, 2003). She alludes to a different kind of genealogy through her own upbringing which helped her towards her chosen career: 'It's not really a patriarchal society in New Zealand. [...] It's more matriarchal, funnily enough. Women are tougher. They don't demur. They don't feel

that they have to appeal to a man or to be feminine or not abrasive' (quoted in Young, 2003).

Alastair Fox and Michel Ciment wrote about Campion's familial relationships as a means to understand the films hermeneutically.

Her experience of her mother's depression as a teenager placed Campion in a position of powerlessness, exemplified by her remembrance of a crucial exchange between them: 'Listen, mummy, if you truly wish to die, if you think you will be happier, then I will be with you, I will help you'. Her mother's response was more affirmative: 'I don't want to die. I don't want to die. I want to feel better'. Campion remembers this as a 'turning point' for herself" (Campion quoted in Ciment, 2014, p. 14).

In the closeness of this relationship, in which the daughter had to some extent be the parent to her depressed mother, there is evidence of a passion and intensity which might not have marked other mother-daughter relationships. This might be of interest in building an auteurist portrait of Campion; however, tracing that influence into *The Piano*, for example, in the passionate intensity of Ada and Flora's relationship, can be seen as reductive. These examples of 'reading' Jane Campion's films through biographical detail (Ciment, 2014, p.43; Fox, 2011) provide an immediate, but relatively rigid, hermeneutic conclusion; a key to understand how the personal and psychological defines the films. The same caution should be applied to tracing its political potential and cultural resonances in Campion's paratextual enunciation.

Of greater relevance here is how this personal history may contribute to aspects of *parler femme* in Campion's performance of it. Her confiding in public can

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contribute to the 'systems of exchange' (Irigaray, 1993d, p.75) which women can constitute between themselves. Campion's mobilisation of this aspect of her biography is of interest in how she speaks of her matrilineal inheritances - given these were so influential to Potter in formulating that filmmaker's creativity and approach to practice.

Campion writes, in her foreword to Janet Frame's autobiography in 2008, that she would come to be 'sadly familiar with Porirua Hospital, Ward K2, as my mother tried repeatedly to find some relief from the overwhelming terror and bleakness of her late-life depression' (2008, p.152-153). It was, however, Edith who gave her daughter a love of literature, including the nineteenth-century novels such as Henry James's *Portrait of a Lady*, which she would go on to adapt, as well as clearly influencing the setting and gothic aesthetic of *The Piano*. Her mother sent her Frame's autobiography when Campion was at film school in Australia. As important, Edith Campion was a published writer, of short stories (1977) and a novella, *The Chain* (1979). Campion dedicated *The Piano* to her mother and the poem which accompanies the second ending of the film is one by Thomas Hood, preserving Ada's aloneness and silence in the epilogue rather than her life in suburbia with Baines:

There is a silence where there is no sound  
There is a silence where no sound can be  
In the cold tomb under the deep, deep sea

It is thereby, an object of exchange itself, between the mother and daughter and of a mother's passion for literature transferred to the imagination and creativity of her daughter. Campion is conscious of this legacy and comments directly on it: 'Yeah, my



**FIGURE 60: MOTHER-DAUGHTER DISASSOCIATION. *THE AUDITION* (1989).**

mother is really the most poetic personality and, my dad too actually, both incredibly encouraging and supportive about this project' (Campion & Chapman, 2000).

These hidden biographical stories need to be told and re-told as part of the inheritances of practice. What emerges from the paratext is the possibility of a different kind of presence for Campion's mother in the story of artistic creativity. This is specifically different from interpreting Ada as a screen surrogate for Campion's mother (Ciment, 2014), as a character who refuses death after suicide attempts. In contrast, seen as part of Campion's development as a filmmaker and her practice, her mother's gifts of gothic literature, the perils of depression and the intensity of a relationship between women and poetry that Campion transforms to speak of a silence for women, are a more interesting and complex set of objects of exchange in view in the film text.

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Edith Campion appears with Jane in a short film by Anna Campion, which fictionalises the process of the mother auditioning for her daughter. In Jane Campion's film of *An Angel at my Table*, Edith appears as the English teacher, Miss Lindsay, who inspires her class with an impromptu and passionate reading from Alfred Lord Tennyson's poem, *Morte D'Arthur*. In *The Audition* (Anna Campion, 1989), Edith appears uncertain and self-doubting of her performance, unable to start in front of the camera. Jane gives unconvincing encouragement. In parallel, scenes of the women's stay together, at the mother's home in Otaki, New Zealand, reveal an unresolved set of tensions (Figure 60). Although it is a fictional film, knowing this is a mother and daughter constantly haunts the narrative. Through the rehearsal process and the audition on-camera, there are shifts in power between mother and daughter. There are potential crossovers with biography, when Edith appears to berate Jane for making her attend an empowerment workshop. In the final scene, Jane reproaches her mother as they leave the beach, bringing up old wounds:

Edith: You bully me, you bully me. I can't help finding life meaningless.

Jane: That fat negativity of yours, you're always giving it something to eat.

(*The Audition*, 1989).

Reading this in the light of the mother's depression, these lines are very discomfoting. Edith ends the film by reciting a mother's grieving speech from Sean O' Casey's *Juno and the Paycock* (1957). As constructed, it can be read as an object of exchange between mother and daughter, of forgiveness between them, of a movement towards each other. Jane responds with 'that was wonderful, mamma, what's it from?' This indicates both an emotion, it is the first time she has called her 'mamma' rather than 'mum' or, as director, the patronising 'darling' during rehearsals.

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It is a moment where she returns to a receptive, wondering child, captivated by her mother's performance and wanting to be taught. It recovers a mother-daughter dyad which reflects the imperative: the 'ethics of the passions: *no love of other without love of same*' (Irigaray, 1993c, p.104) [original emphasis].

This enables this thesis to think of tracing not just the lineage of the biographical detail, it is more important to trace the complexity of the gifts given from mother to daughter. Thus, the Irigarayan interpretation – rather than the simple auteurist use of psychology as a hermeneutic tool – reveals other possibilities. There is a complex and largely hidden genealogy of exchange, one which has translated the 'autobiographical I' of Campion's experience with her mother, to 'a different cultural I' (Irigaray, 1993a, p.177) in her creation of a film which has then become of such measurable importance to women audiences (Sobchack 2000; Bainbridge, 2008). When Campion speaks of her film as a 'soul gift' it is possible, with an Irigarayan interpretation, to relate this gift to a genealogy of women's experiences and women's desires, which is also traceable in an obscure and complex way to her relationship with her mother. This is a story that has tragedy attached to it; however, Campion's act of enunciation in the paratext, by naming her mother's gift of the Hood poem and of her poeticism more generally is reminiscent of Potter's tracing of her matrilineal inheritance in her written paratext. These women filmmakers' public articulation of their mothers' creative influence still has radical potential. In Irigarayan terms, it brings the mother 'silent, outlawed' (Irigaray, 1993b, p.14) into a position in the symbolic order. It is also expressive of a particular form of desire for the mother, one which 'challenges dominance from within representation and meaning' (Silverman, 1988, p.124). Rather than making Edith Campion a passive model for Ada, Campion's paratextual



**FIGURE 61: JANET FRAME AND HER SCREEN SURROGATES. *AN ANGEL AT MY TABLE* (1990). © HIBISCUS FILMS/NEW ZEALAND FILM COMMISSION.**

statements tell the story of how this woman actively fed her imagination and taught Campion about passion.

The image, made available by Campion to *Cahiers du cinéma* of Frame and the actors playing her at different stages in her life in *An Angel at my Table* (Figure 61), bears witness to Campion's understanding of a pleasure in wider genealogies, artistic

not biological ones, between women. The image captures, in a similar way to that of Potter with Elle Fanning on the set of *Ginger and Rosa*, the deep satisfaction and potential of forming these inheritances and associations in artistic production. These are non-biological relationships of matriarchy, ones which seem to realise Irigaray's idea that women 'need to discover and declare that we are always mothers just by being women' by giving birth to 'love, desire, language, art, social things, political things' (1993b, p.18).

### **Conclusion**

The above analysis has considered how Campion represents a female auteur speaking with desire in a number of different ways, which contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the 'complex conjunction of text, institution and author' (Grant, 2001, p.122). The evidence, from her DVD commentaries and the documentaries and featurettes, is a unique record, in the manner suggested by Heilbrun, of a woman's 'ambitions, and possibilities, and accomplishments' (1989, p. 46). It can be studied as containing aspects of *parler femme* in relation to women's creative labour and of its complex realisation of a variety of forms of speaking about desire and about biography. It has, as the analysis above contended, indicated new ways of imagining women's genealogical relationships with each other (from an Irigarayan perspective). In Campion's embracing of biographical and non-biological inheritances between women, there may be a new conception of women's cinema through practice. This is one which would be founded on an intergenerational dynamic interaction through women sharing creativity with women, regardless of the biology.

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It is also important that Campion's artistic practice- as with Varda and Potter - is often marked by an enjoyment of bathos in performance of leadership, especially as it debunks the myth of the artistic process. This is mobilised through aspects of biography and experience.

Campion, as with the other case studies, is able to speak in this way because she occupies the position of the auteur, within the discipline of film studies and within popular film journalism. Her act of enunciation becomes an important intervention because of her willingness to discuss the constraints on women's desire in the symbolic order as it still stands, her performance is consonant with what is readable onscreen. Campion's expression in paratext matches her expression within her texts, unlike Potter. The potential in the provocative position "cultural mother" or "cultural matriarch" may be found in this consistency. As women situated within the overriding discourses of the film industry, ones which favour the idea of the 'auteur' with its technocratic, arguably masculinised, language, all three case studies disturb these regimes of auteurist supremacy by speaking about collaboration and relationships.

Campion's performances in her DVD extras provide a model for creating this kind of space, one which embraces her work as a filmmaker but also considers herself as a woman speaking to other women. The distinction will be between where she speaks of women and where she speaks (as) woman. Campion's work demonstrates her preoccupation with one aspect of women's place in the symbolic order, their difficulty in reconciling their private lives of fantasy with their public lives. Her work honours women's experience of that private fantasy, in ways which have been subject to detailed and revealing feminist scholarship. Campion's voice, her laughter and the

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mutual exchange is an example of the 'need to double and play, what we are twice over, lovingly' (Irigaray, 1993c, p.105). In addition, in adopting a question format there is a consonance with an Irigarayan style of exchange, suggestive and exploratory. In reviewing Campion's DVD commentaries, it becomes clear that the voice of the female filmmaker moves between the desiring woman, the labouring filmmaker and the intellectual film auteur.

## CONCLUSION: Redefining a New Women's Cinema



FIGURE 62: PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST: JANE CAMPION (CIMENT, 2014). © *CAHIERS DU CINEMA*.

Important themes have emerged in this thesis, concerning the potential to reformulate and reimagine women's cinema through practice and to move away from a textually-determined approach to writing cinema history. The basis for these conclusions have arisen through the evidence of the paratextual performances of established auteurs such as Varda, Potter and Campion.

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By framing these interventions through an Irigarayan theoretical approach, it has been possible to recognise where they have political potential and where this potential is limited by the constraints that are placed upon it. This is because these women are speaking, in Catherine Grant's words, at the 'complex conjunction of institution, text and author' (2001, p.122).

Despite their differences, in terms of cultural and national contexts, and in terms of the cinema forms they use, there are similarities in their approach to labour. This is the basis for claiming that women's cinema can be reconceived through practice. The shared values and approaches can be characterised through the imagery of moving from Varda (Figure 16) to Potter (Figure 43) and Campion (Figure 57). What unites all of them over their decades of work is the conscious agency in relation to bringing their own labour into public discourse. They have consciously recorded their labour for publication or broadcast, in which they share an enjoyment or commitment to showing how ordinary that labour is. Varda collates photographs of herself as she works, and blends the quotidian of her life into her labour. Campion, working in a different institutional structure, enables the quotidian of the filmmaking process to be recorded in films accompanying her features. Much of their rhetorical devices work through bathos as a way of demystifying the process. Potter's written text shows working on set; however, in the more direct address of film and commentary Varda and Campion are able to infuse it constantly with an idiosyncratic humour.

### ***Parler Femme and the System of Exchanges***

Of perhaps greatest importance is the way in which these women filmmakers engage in a public exchange through their acts of *parler femme* in paratext. What

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emerges through the analysis of the case studies is that what women exchange, in this public position as a female auteur, is constrained by their historical and cultural context. It can only be formulated within the limitations of their contemporary world. However, the case studies demonstrate that the mobilisation of biography is an effective strategy since it reflects the realities of women's lives at any given moment and performs their status as socially-situated women throughout. In the work of Varda, for example, her performance of biography has enabled her to pursue a narrative of a woman - representing both the 'unique and all women' (*Réponse de femmes*, 1975) - from youth into the third age. Biography, therefore, does not compromise their representations of women's authorship; on the contrary, it can be the means by which they enter the public discourse forcefully, intertwining their lives with their labour.

Within the established context, in this case speaking as the auteur, the case study of Bigelow illustrates that the maintenance of the discourse of the auteur produces 'a recuperation of the feminine within a logic that maintains it in repression, censorship, nonrecognition' (Irigaray, 1985b, p.78) Instead, Varda, Campion and Potter choose, through the rejection of established patterns of enunciation, not to enter into those patriarchal systems of repression. All three women's paratexts demonstrate the power of women discussing their artistic practice, in collaboration and in public. For example, Potter's reconstitutes her practice of cinema by articulating a performance principle at its centre rather a practice driven by technical determinism.

What is available in all three women's acts of *parler femme* are new possibilities that can, through a representation of practice in paratext, reformulate the portrait of the artist through the articulation of their biography, labour and desire. Whilst the

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traditional image, in Figure 62, shows the contemplation required for the solitary activity of writing, all three women have chosen to accentuate that cinema is made out of forms of collaboration. Jane Campion and Sally Potter foreground the work of performance with actors as a key part of the director's role in filmmaking. This is not an innately gendered discourse, siting women as more associated with the nurturing function on the film set. In both, the evidence of their performance of this role and the way they speak about it, demonstrates the emergence of a different identity for a female auteur. This is one which reflects an articulation of leadership with the experiences that women undergo in their everyday lives, including the realities of motherhood, the experience of relationships with other women and, importantly, the pleasures associated with producing film texts. This form of leadership is, as both Potter and Campion observe, in the service of the text and their vision, for which they must be prepared to be 'ruthless'.(Potter, 2014, p.84) or 'bold' (Campion in *Portrait: Jane Campion and The Portrait of a Lady*). This is a quality which contributes to the provocation of 'matriarchal' leadership, which combines their identities as women - as mothers and daughters within a clear biographical inheritance - with their artistic labour as a natural synthesis.

The willingness of these women to produce their labour, as an object and artefact through their paratexts, is an important contribution to the 'currency of exchange, or else a nonmarket economy' (Irigaray, 1993d, p.79) that can constitute *parler femme*. It is an act which is established through their creation of these artefacts of practice. Even whilst each of their practice varies, especially in as defined by the institution they work in, they do actively mobilise a performance of their feminine subjectivity as part of their act of enunciation to 'gain recognition for their

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difference' (Irigaray, 1993e, p.41). They speak as 'I-woman (je-femme)' to 'you-woman (tu-femme)' (Irigaray, 1993e, pp.43 -4) in complete contrast to the woman who apparently must assert, I am not a *woman* filmmaker, as Bigelow did (adapted from Moi, 2008, p.265). Therefore, these are strategic acts of enunciation which bring feminine subjectivity into symbolic exchange and the language system. It is part of building new 'systems of exchange' (Irigaray, 1993d, p.75) between women, ones in which they can establish a new "syntax" and "grammar" (Irigaray, 1985b, p.143).

The consciousness they perform of legacy and of inheritance as it feeds into practice has perhaps proved nebulous to scholarship hitherto, which has focussed on the film text. Thus, the idea of women's legacy and inheritance has not been directly addressed. It is far more demonstrable via interpretations of women speaking in the paratext. Utilising Irigaray's idea of *parler femme* reveals the potential of this as a new way of thinking about women's practice. Irigaray's ideas when applied to the paratext could be revolutionary for women simply because they challenge an adherence to the redundant inheritances they are expected to participate in. Whilst drawing on male auteurs as influences is entirely valid, it is the way in which it perpetuates an exclusion of women from these lines of inheritance, which the *Sight & Sound* editorial regarding Claire Denis powerfully illustrated (James, 2015). As an act of intervention, formulating a women's cinema as separate from men's in practice is a means of disturbing the established norms. It is a way of taking a radical approach to reconstitute those discourses of the symbolic order which support the status quo.

Their performances in paratext demonstrate how cinematic labour can be articulated with women's lives. In Varda's rendition, this is to associate labour with

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the home and with children in a stereotypical representation of family and motherhood. However, it has radical potential in its articulation of domestic labour with film labour and her provocative imagery. In particular, her appearance, literally with the umbilical cord in her hands, is a radical image which demystifies film production and associates it with female experience. In relation to the established discourses of the auteur, arising from the French New Wave and as developed by Andrew Sarris, it is a provocation because it also suggests that there is no requirement to acquire the 'aura of being "quelqu'un"' – the 'someone', as Alison Smith characterised Godard's celebrity (2007, p.148-9).

To be able to speak in this way in public means to reject, in Irigaray's words, the kinds of discourses which perpetuate 'technocratic imperialism' and to maintain 'sexual difference' as a means of building 'human values', which she argued are in danger of being destroyed (1993a, p.176). The discourse of the auteur, as it has emerged from the French New Wave polemic, has created one focussed on technical innovation and created neutral forms of speech. This is evidenced by Bigelow's statement that she enabled herself as a 'delivery system' (Gross, 2012; Brockes, 2013) in making a film and it there in her recorded lecture. This is not to dismiss the intense passion demonstrated by Bigelow as a form of desire in labour. However, her approach to practice does not destabilise the discourses which exclude women and arguably maintain only small numbers of women within the industry. Centering the work in the labour that women are involved in and moving away from the discourses of the auteur and its tendency to 'technocratic imperialism' (Irigaray, 1993e, p. 176) is crucial. These performances can release women from the established cinema histories and genealogies to build a new discourse of women's inheritance in the cinema. A

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women's cinema through practice can evolve its own genealogy in their approach to labour and the way in which they characterise it in paratext. What is important is that the case studies demonstrate different nuances in how they express their relationship to cinema. Of importance, is the variety of ways in which they employ a 'rhetoric of intimacy' (Klinger, 2006, quoted in Grant, 2008, p.132) through personal revelation and humour.

A remaining question emerging is whether a history of practice, one which is considered through Irigaray's ideas of *parler femme*, could include Bigelow alongside Varda, Potter and Campion. It may be that Bigelow, as a woman who speaks from within the established structures of the patriarchal symbolic order, has to be excluded or marginalised in this analysis. This indicates there is a limit to the liberatory potential of this thesis' argument. However, there is the question of her agency in building her auteur persona. Bigelow, where she has the choice to articulate a performance of her gender with her authorship, has consistently refused to engage.

As a provocation, matriarchal leadership can be deliberately conceived of through a new language. The complex negotiations of the difficulties of the film set "family", of being in the midst of a number of competing demands from technical and acting collaborators, enables a new question to be asked. In stereotypical terms, film labour can readily be reconstituted as more of a woman's or mother's task, given how working on a film set appears largely to function as that of a disgruntled family as described by Campion and Potter. It could, therefore, be provocatively seen as labour more suited to women's experience than to men's. The qualities needed to negotiate these interactions is, as demonstrated in the case studies, matriarchal rather than

maternal in its maintenance of a position of, in Jane Campion's words, 'Queen of the scene' (*Portrait: Jane Campion and The Portrait of a Lady*).

### **Biological Motherhood and Matrilineal Inheritance**

Yet the discourse of motherhood needs to be considered carefully to avoid creating another kind of orthodoxy. Both Varda and Campion arguably mobilise established myths of motherhood in constructing their persona, as mother, in public speech. What is potentially more radical is Potter's articulation, given her status as childless. In the close description and images of artistic production, Potter's speech resonates with Johnston's idea of 'collective fantasies' (Johnston, 1973, p.30) centred in the process of 'falling in work' (Potter, 2014, p. 105) and the labour of producing narrative of desire. Potter brings her matrilineal inheritances into public discourse through the rhetoric of images and the conduct of her interviews in paratext. These indicate the formulation of a new genealogy through artistic 'motherhood', evidenced by her relationship to her female actors. There is a sustained exploration and experience of 'self-affection' (Irigaray, 1985b, p.222) between women in Potter's interviews with her female collaborators. This can be widened out to the other case studies through Varda's public owning of her production collaborations, especially with her own daughter, and in Campion's paratextual, digital performances with her producers.

Potter indicates, through even the brief exhortation of 'Hunny, my hunny' (2014, p.x), a radical allusion to the inheritance of passion in one's labour through a matrilineal line. Similarly, in many parts of Campion's work in DVD commentary there is, as in Potter's association of labour and passion, a reconfiguration of women's

relationship to their work which brings questions of desire to the fore. Significant is the way in which Campion reconstitutes her relationship to her own mother away from a biological inheritance to include her as part of her artistic inspirations, articulating a new kind of legacy.

Both these women's public statements are still a radical gesture, in line with Irigaray's argument that, in respect of the mother: 'we must give her the right to pleasure, to sexual experience, to passion, give her back the right to speak, or even to shriek and rage aloud' (Irigaray, 1993b, p.18). Therefore, what women filmmakers *say* about their desire and the way in which they articulate it with creativity and labour through the matrilineal line is radical and crucial.

### **Desire, Fantasy and The Maternal Fantasmatic**

These women occupy a position as auteurs, which means they can exist within the social-symbolic, within the patriarchal systems of language. This thesis has suggested that their radical act of enunciation can bring about the construction of the what could be termed a new biography of desire.

Invoking the psychoanalytical approach of Irigaray returns this thesis to an silence in culture. Irigaray wrote of the '*déréliction*' or exclusion of the mother from the symbolic order (Whitford, 1991, pp. 77-8), as did psychoanalytical feminist scholars of film in relation to the mother's voice (Silverman, 1988). As these women directors are older and more established in their work, there may be evidence in the case studies to argue provocatively for "speaking (as) mother" through the action of the paratext. Thinking through the role of these so-called "cultural mothers" will open up some of the wider feminist possibilities in the meaning of their acts of enunciation.

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Speaking about their lives and speaking about their own desires, as women with decades of experience as cultural labourers, means that the case studies can be argued to be cultural mothers. This could be a new public performance which (in Irigarayan terms) is a performance of the mother who can ‘bring many things into the world apart from children’ and can ‘give birth to many other things apart from children: love, desire, language, art, social things, political things, religious things’. Their performance can end the way in which ‘this kind of creativity has been forbidden to us for centuries’ (Irigaray, 1993b, p.18).

In their descriptions and performances of their labour, all three case studies could be argued to be a form of “cultural mother” who claims her ‘right to pleasure, to sexual experience, to passion’ (Irigaray, 1993b, p.18). They can be seen as performing a female role little observed in cultural representation – a mother speaking as a desiring woman – whether they are speaking of men, of other women, as daughters or sisters, or expressing their passion in relation to their labour and practice itself. Their performance, from their position of longevity, is a form of giving back to the mother-figure ‘the right to pleasure, to sexual experience, to passion’ and ‘the right to speak’ (Irigaray, 1993b, p.18). Using Irigaray as an interpretative framework, this study’s proposition is that these women move forward from speaking as ‘women among-themselves’ to ‘speaking (as) women’ (Irigaray, 1985b, p.135) when they speak as powerful and desiring women of their autobiography and their labour. Their acts of enunciation, therefore, constitute a form of releasing ‘collective fantasies’ and working through desire (Johnston, 1975, p.30) in public to contribute to a new definition of women’s cinema.

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All three women have demonstrated how they exercise their vision at the centre of a familial structure, taking account of the importance of collaboration and artistic exchange. They also situate themselves as part of a matrilineal inheritance. This varies between the case studies and demonstrates how a “matriarchal cinema” can encompass a range of expressions. In Varda’s case, there is an emphasis on herself as she plays the role of mother and grandmother as well as artist and filmmaker. However, functioning as part of her ‘cinema of the author of witness’ (Varda, 1975, p. 46) she builds a wider, social portrait of women, not least through their experience of ageing. As such, she constructs fantasies of mothers and motherhood which combines the realities of women’s lives with a surrealist, expressionistic beauty. Additionally, she accentuates the importance of women’s creative function - to be a woman who dreams (*Elsa la rose*, 1966).

Potter, situating herself in a biological matrilineage, nevertheless emphasises its artistic inspiration. It is encapsulated into her own practice, by which she forms relationships of passion through the labour itself. She constantly places herself at the centre of a familial structure. Her book, *Naked Cinema Working with Actors*, is focussed on her role at the centre of this structure and even through its images represents the inheritances and non-biological mothering that is part of the role. In many ways, this book is the strongest assertion of the idea of desire in labour, of an experiential plane in which the artistic and emotional are intertwined in ‘falling in work’ (2014, p.105). However, her performance in digital, aural paratext moves back towards the impersonal and the technocratic in a way which affirms, contrapuntally, the importance of removing emotion from an auteurist discourse.

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Campion, in many ways, may be said to be the closest to the idea at the heart of this thesis, the closest to a “matriarchal practice”. In her paratextual performances, she creates a ‘rhetoric of intimacy’ (Klinger, 2006, quoted in Grant, 2008, p. 132) through her form of address, particularly in her DVD commentaries with her two female producers. As well as writing about the mother-daughter dyad, she asserts her commitment to women’s sexuality and women’s search for desire. In Campion’s relationship with her mother is found, again, the idea of an inheritance which is built around vision and labour as well as biology. On this basis, her rhetoric can be traced back to Varda, who collaborates with her daughter, Rosalie, on her archive; thus, all these women are visibly working within systems of exchange, creating artistic inheritances through forms of the mother-daughter line.

Their practice is matriarchal in their recovery of the mother into the symbolic order and these women arguably contribute as “cultural mothers” in different ways to ‘new systems of exchange’ (Irigaray, 1993d, p.75). Their forms of practice, as they have performed them in the paratext, can contribute to *parler femme* by establishing rituals and rites exchanged by women as a gift (to quote both Potter and Campion) one which stays outside in the ‘nonmarket economy’ (Irigaray, 1993d, p.79).

Therefore, the thesis ends on a reconception of this new “women’s cinema” through practice - a “matriarchal cinema” - as a utopian, discursive notion of a collective and consolidated practice and genealogy. This discourse is one which can be employed to disturb and counter the prevailing discourses in popular and academic film writing, such as of the auteur and *his* individuality and of cinema as a history of masculine inheritances. The slippage between the terms: ‘women’s cinema’, ‘woman’s

cinema' or 'woman's film' can be interrogated anew through the paratext, especially in taking account of this representation of creativity and desire by 'women as social subject' (de Lauretis, 1984, p.49). Irigaray's notion of 'speaking (as) woman' generates a utopian idea of a collective of women; however, the function of individual biography, the possibility that 'speaking (as) woman' (1985b, p.135) can be nuanced according to circumstance and culture, allows for the concept to embrace all kinds of differently, socially-situated women for feminist, political purposes. Collective 'speaking (as) woman' ascribes a power which does not homogenise, since it emanates out of a dynamic relationship. Irigaray's theory, therefore, shifts the meaning that the psychoanalytical critics gave to the term 'woman' as part of their polemic (Johnston 1973; Mulvey 1975; Doane 1987). It liberates that meaning to become inclusive and multiple.

### **Moving the Genealogy Forward**

This thesis has been concerned with the creation of new artistic legacies. Their collaborations with younger women in the film industry are an important part of building this new genealogy. Potter demonstrates her commitment to this through her relationships with Alice Englert and Elle Fanning, for example, and her choice to end her book with an image of them working together. Campion collaborates with new filmmaker Clare Young on a DVD extra documentary of the creative process. These are agential acts which, in Irigarayan terms, demonstrate the quality of a:

woman-to-woman relationship of reciprocity with our mothers, in which they might possibly also feel themselves to be our daughters. In a word, liberate ourselves alongside our mothers (Irigaray, 1991, p.50).



**FIGURE 63: THE RHETORIC OF IMAGES: LENA DUNHAM AND AGNES VARDA. © @LENADUNHAM.**

Lena Dunham recently posted an image of her ‘pounding it out’ with Agnès Varda (Figure 63). In a subsequent interview, she explained:

I discovered the work of Agnès Varda ten years ago, with *Cléo de 5 à 7*, and I have seen all her films subsequently. I admire her because she had enough confidence about herself, in the era of Demy, Truffaut and Godard, to impose herself as a director in the middle of this group of male cinephiles. Not only did she realise some films which are amongst the most beautiful in the world, but she also experimented substantially with the film medium. She is an eccentric. What moves me in her films, notably *Les plages d’Agnès*, my favourite, is that they testify to a great mistress of the art of the cinema, as well as reflecting on her life and everything she encounters. So, when she came to Los Angeles for a retrospective of her work at LACMA (LA County Museum of Art), I couldn’t do anything else but meet her. The day in question, I knew she was spending the day at the hotel, beside the pool. I arrived with presents and I imposed myself for as long as she wanted to speak to me! She told me that she rises every morning at 5 o’ clock to write and that she always has new ideas for films or installations. It’s wonderful to see her at her age still excited by what she does. I took this photo of the two of us and it is funny because our hairstyles are quite similar. When I came home, I showed the picture to my boyfriend and I said to him: there you go, that’s what I will look like at eighty years old. (Dunham, 2015).

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This comment and image posted to her Instagram page, may be an indication of the power of the celebrity moment. However, it also demonstrates the potential of a legacy of practice from one generation to the next, of finding the work of another woman filmmaker engaged in making sense of her own biography and her own desires.

Much previous feminist analysis has focussed on these directors' work onscreen in the film text itself; however, in their associated talk about that work and practice, in interviews and DVD commentaries, it becomes possible to see women's agency in representing film authorship as a site of wider social agency. Women in public culture often experience "moments" of speaking in solidarity in public. What has emerged, through an Irigarayan lens, is the possibility of a more sustained exchange. Dunham's wish to claim Varda as a matrilineal influence may well reflect a changing aspect of culture. Women may be starting to engage with 'new systems of exchange' (Irigaray, 1993d, p.75) between themselves, ones in which they can establish a new "syntax" and "grammar" (Irigaray, 1985b, p.143). However, these "Instagram moments" can easily disappear without a conscious, feminist engagement with building new ways of speaking to each other.

The questions raised in Irigaray's critique in relation to women's expression of their desire remained unanswered through traditional academic criticism. This thesis has engaged directly with them and found the beginnings of an answer in new formulations of speaking about desire through cinematic labour. This thesis' conclusion may suggest that reducing questions of desire to forms of sexuality, either heterosexual or homosexual, may be a reductive concept of desire for the purposes of

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developing new ideas of women's cinema. Instead, considering desire as it relates to labour may indicate a new direction. As Irigaray stated:

[Women] need to discover and declare that we are always mothers just by being women. We bring many things into the world apart from children (1993b, p.18).

What becomes clear, through these case studies is that there can be a distinction between agency in text and agency in paratext, the latter being a space in which a performance with new potential can be identified. In the practice of these women, and as importantly their choices in speaking about it, there is the potential to uncover new intergenerational exchanges. Such exchanges would enable 'our collective fantasies' to be 'released'. Varda, Campion and Potter's performances signpost a new direction towards a new women's cinema, one which in its focus on women's labour can truly 'embody the *working* through of desire' (Johnston, 1973, p.30) [my emphasis]. These women filmmakers' performances contribute to the possibility of a women's cinema, a matriarchal cinema, that can sustain a genealogy of practice.

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