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Our Archives, Ourselves:

Remembering through creative practice

the cultural archives of feminist film

programming and curating in 1980s London

Selina Robertson

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Film, Media and Cultural Studies,
Birkbeck, University of London

2023

Signed Declaration

I declare that the work presented in this thesis is my own:

Date: 2.10.2023

Abstract

The intersection between feminist film historiography, cultural memory, queer theory and the archive are primary concerns for this thesis, which explores ways of remembering through creative practice in the cultural archives of feminist film programming and curating in 1980s London.

My practice-based research has been conducted in the archive of the Rio Cinema in East London. Since 2012, [Club des Femmes](#) (CDF), the queer feminist curation collective I co-founded, has had a programming relationship with the Rio. In 2015, this eventuated a discovery of ephemera at the Rio that detailed feminist screenings from the 1980s: an archive that holds a historical memory of British feminist moving image culture, creating a genealogy from the germinal Women's Event at Edinburgh Film Festival 1972 to CDF's curatorial work today. Through the archival material documenting feminist programming in practice, I argue that programming and curation form a third, missing element in relation to understanding the formation of feminist film theory and practice.

Drawing on feminist film scholars Giuliana Bruno, Ann Cvetkovich, Annette Kuhn and B. Ruby Rich, this thesis sets out to map the spatial and affective contours of this archive's absence through feminist, queer cultural memory as a practice-based research methodology. By developing practice-based research for film history, I have initiated a new hybrid methodological approach wherein I argue that programming practice itself generates theory and historiography; that is, in the doing and thinking through practice, an elided history of feminist film programming and curating reflexively materialises. I argue there is value in documenting collective experiences of feminist film screenings because of the programming and cultural knowledge held in those encounters. I conclude that feminist programming and curating as a set of critical and affective practices continues to challenge film history and the epistemological questions and methods we use to do this work.

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Evidence of practice

This is a list of the practice elements of my thesis. These links are also embedded in the document at the points I invite the reader to look at them.

The links provide evidence of 3 bodies of work:

1. **Being Ruby Rich** – a Symposium I co-curated on 21 June 2017 at the Birkbeck Cinema. You can see a series of photographs taken by Dominic Mifsud/Birkbeck Media Library documenting this event and a Reader made for the event:
 - a. Being Ruby Rich: Film Curation as Advocacy and Activism. Photographs taken by Dominic Mifsud/Birkbeck Media Library. [photographs]. Available at: <https://tinyurl.com/brrphotos> (relates to p.112 in the thesis).
 - b. Being Ruby Rich: A Reader. Available at: <https://tinyurl.com/brrreader> (relates to p.113 in the thesis).

2. **Feminist Re-Imaginations at the Rio, 1980-2020** - a community archiving session and film screening on Saturday 22 February 2020 in the basement of the Rio. You can see the flyer for these events and a slide show of images from the Rio archive used during the community archiving session.
 - a. Feminist Re-Imaginations at the Rio, 1980-2020. ‘We Want You’ flyer. Available at: <https://tinyurl.com/riowwyflyer> (relates to p.146 in the thesis).
 - b. Feminist Re-Imaginations at the Rio, 1980-2020. Slide show. Available at: <https://tinyurl.com/rioslideshow> (relates to p.133 and p.148 in the thesis).

3. **Film script and tape/slide of Rio Women’s Cinema**. You can see the film script and final tape/slide that brings together the script and archival images.

- a. Rio Women's Cinema. Film script. Available at: <https://tinyurl.com/riofilmscriptfinal> (relates to p. 179 in the thesis).
- b. Feminist Re-Imaginations at the Rio, 1980-2020. Tape/slide. Available at: <https://tinyurl.com/riotapeslide> (relates to p.180 in the thesis).

Please note: the tape/slide has not had a full sound mix, therefore, it is best to wear earphones when watching on a laptop. The tape/slide running time is 10mins 19secs.

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- Fig 3: ‘We Want You’ flyer. Design by Sarah Wood. January 2020. Club des Femmes archive.
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Introduction

The intersection between feminist film historiography, queer theory, cultural memory and the archive are primary concerns for this PhD thesis. A practice-based investigation that uses feminist film programming and curating as a scholarly methodology to challenge what counts as film history, theory and practice in order to produce new epistemological questions and methods to do this work. A starting point for this research was a chance discovery of ephemera at the Rio Cinema, based in Dalston, east London. It was a discovery that instigated a feminist film season responding to that ephemera, which in turn prompted the initiation of my practice-based research in the Rio archive.

I begin this thesis by narrating how and why this research project started. I also offer some preliminary thoughts why feminist film programming and curating has remained on the periphery of film studies. Following this contextual grounding, I go on to present my theoretical framework to investigate the Rio archive. This theoretical framework is reflected in my feminist, queer cultural memory as a practice-based research methodology wherein I argue that a film programming practice in itself generates theory and historiography. Finally, I offer a brief account of the chapters that follow. From February 2020 – February 2023 my creative practice in the Rio archive involved the following methods of practice: a community archiving session, a film screening, writing a film script and making a tape/slide. As an antecedent and methodological blueprint for my practice-based research at the Rio, in June 2017, I co-curated ‘Being Ruby Rich’, a queer feminist film season at the Barbican Cinema and Symposium in the Birkbeck Cinema.

As a process of investigation that has re-situated feminist film programming and curating as a scholarly methodology to do cultural history, my practice-based research addressed the following questions. Why have histories of feminist film programming and curating remained on the margins of film studies. What would film history look like if we included critical, affective and activist histories of feminist film programming and curating, and how might these histories be mobilized through their affects and cultural objects as queer feminist knowledge production in the archive.

A Starting Point: ‘Bringing Greenham Home’ to the Rio

In particular, this thesis sets out to remember through creative practice the cultural archives of feminist film programming and curating in 1980s London. This research has

been primarily conducted in a community-based archive at the Rio in East London, a two-screen art deco cinema in operation since 1909. Interestingly founded by Clara Ludski, a local enterprising businesswoman who owned the original building, an auctioneer's shop and converted it into a cinema. Initially called The Kingsland Palace of Animated Pictures, Ludski established one of the earliest electric picture houses in London. Since 1979, the Rio has been operating as a non-profit charity and community cinema with the primary aim of serving Hackney's many communities. I am drawn to explore this archive, as a counter history, because of the curatorial work I do with CDF, of which I am a founder member.¹ CDF is a queer feminist film curating collective. We have been programming feminist and queer moving image at film festivals, independent cinemas and cinemathèques across the United Kingdom and Europe since 2007.

Since 2012, CDF had been programming feminist and queer film screenings and events at the Rio without any knowledge that we were in fact part of an extended feminist film history based in this place. This history dates back to 1979/80, when local women came together to programme film screenings and events in their quest to develop audiences for feminist and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) cinema. It is here, in this space, that I must admit that over 15 years ago, the Rio's general manager from 1999-2014, Charles Rubenstein had already hinted at this history in a passing comment to me. He said: 'Selina, in the 1980s there was lots of feminist activity going on in the basement; you would be interested.'

It was only in 2015, when CDF was conducting research in the Rio's archive in preparation for a season on the Greenham Common Women's Peace Camp (1981–2000) that we discovered the extent of this forgotten history.² In addition to finding hundreds of glass-mounted 35mm slides taken by the Rio Tape/Slide Newsreel Group, we discovered cabinets and boxes of ephemera consisting of flyers, posters, programmes, notes, management reports, funding applications and other miscellanea, evidencing this hidden history of feminist film programming and curating at the Rio.³ These programming links

¹ Club des Femmes was set up in 2007 by Selina Robertson and Sarah Wood. The group now includes Jenny Clarke, So Mayer, Ania Ostrowska and Alex Thiele. Available at: <https://www.clubdesfemmes.com/> (accessed 5 June 2023).

² For an example of a contemporary feminist project on the legacies of the Greenham Common Women's Peace Camp, see *Scary Little Girls* (2018), Greenham Women Everywhere. Available at: <https://scarylittlegirls.co.uk/community/heritage-and-collaboration/greenham-women-everywhere/> (accessed 26 August 2023).

³ The Rio Tape/Slide Newsreel Group was a community project in the 1980s that met in the basement of the Rio. It was instigated and set up by staff at the Rio to cover local news from an independent viewpoint and give unemployed young people a voice. The group made short left-wing newsreels, which were then

dated back to the 1972 Women's Event at the Edinburgh Film Festival and connect with CDF's curatorial practice today.

Presented with this feminist film archive in absentia, CDF began the archaeological work of recuperating a history from below of women's work in programming film and video screenings and events. This programming was a form of consciousness-raising in its own right, as women came together to confront the misogyny, homophobia and racism in the film industry and wider culture. We discovered that the materialisation of this feminist film culture was principally because in 1977, a cooperative of local people based at Centerprise bookshop decided to open Hackney's first arts centre. The Rio was to be 'a utopian creative hub', writes Andrew Woodyatt, 'that could be a safe space to champion ideas and causes, as well as a home to diverse community groups and minority voices (2020: 97). In April 1979, with a grant from the Greater London Council (GLC), the Rio re-constituted and re-opened as the Rio Centre, a community arts space and resource with a remit to involve local people and groups in the programming and operation of the cinema.⁴

In addition, the fact that women's film screenings and community events at the Rio thrived in the 1980s until the mid 1990s was a direct result of political decisions to support community arts in Hackney. This saw the Rio in receipt of both state and institutional funding from the British Film Institute (BFI), the GLC, Greater London Arts and Hackney Council. Looking closer into the archive, and after speaking with a few women who were there at the time, we discovered that this history predominantly but not exclusively, constellated around two women's groups active at the Rio from 1979/80 until the mid 1990s. The first was Rio Women's Cinema (circa 1979/80–1984/5) (RWC), a feminist film programming group focused on screening and discussing work by past and contemporary women and feminist filmmakers, including shorts and animation and

screened at the Rio as part of the regular weekly programme. Tantalisingly, the archive's audio tapes of the commentary and interviews have yet to be discovered. Between 1982 and 1988, the Rio's basement served as a dark room, laboratory and teaching space for photography and sound-recording skills.

Alongside scenes of everyday life in Hackney, the project documented some of the key protests and political events of the decade, including the women's peace camp at Greenham Common and the campaign for justice around Colin Roach. In 2020, Isola Press published *The Rio Tape/Slide Archive*, documenting Hackney's social and political histories through the lens of this archive. See, Alan Denny, Max Leonard, Tamara Stoll and Andrew Woodyatt (eds) (2020), *The Rio Tape/Slide Archive: Radical Community Photography in Hackney in the 1980s*. London: Isola Press.

⁴ Hackney's artistic, cultural and social histories are still in the process of being written. From 23 June – 9 September 2023, PEER gallery in East London hosted an exhibition tracing the artistic, cultural and social collective work that took place in Hackney between 1971 and 1986, much of which circumnavigated around Centerprise and the Rio. See 'we are a group of people composed of who we are'. Available at: <https://www.peeruk.org/we-are-a-group-of-people> (accessed 16 August 2023).

rediscovering early women's cinema. The second was the Women's Media Resource Project (circa 1982–1995/6) (WMRP). As the name suggests, the group was made up of video and sound artists, cultural producers, music engineers and community activists with a strong interest in challenging dominant media, with links to other alternative media-making projects at the Rio. Consequently, a starting point for this research was inspired by discovering the extent of this archive and by the amazement of not knowing about this feminist history of film programming and community activism at the Rio, so closely aligned with CDF.

Between 23 and 24 January 2016, CDF curated a weekend of Greenham-related screenings and events at the Rio prompted by the archive's revelations. Of which Anna Reading, one of our speakers writes

The Camp at Greenham became one of the most famous peace camps at the time. It provided a beacon and training ground for nonviolent struggle internationally throughout the 1980s, seeding other protest camps in both the UK and around the world. (2015: 148)

Drawing on Reading's situated knowledge of being at Greenham, we named the weekend 'Bringing Greenham Home', echoing and embodying *Carry Greenham Home* (Kidron and Richardson, 1983), one of the films in the programme.⁵ The title was a metaphor for what we, as a collective, had set out to facilitate through our practice as queer feminist curators. In our manifesto, CDF describe our 'mission [as] to offer a freed-up space for the re-examination of ideas through art... a much-needed open platform for more radical contextualisation and forward-looking future vision: a chance to look beyond the mainstream.'⁶ We asked ourselves, reiterating the speaker at the end of *Carry Greenham Home*: how can we access the learning at Greenham if we don't learn about Greenham? In line with our manifesto, we wanted to create a 'freed-up' space for Greenham's histories, cultural artefacts, knowledges, practices and strategies to circulate across generations.

⁵ Club des Femmes x Bringing Greenham Home. Available at: <https://www.clubdesfemmes.com/events/bringing-greenham-home/> (accessed 26 January 2022).

⁶ Club des Femmes manifesto. Available at: <https://www.clubdesfemmes.com/manifesto/> (accessed 16 February 2022).

Later, reflecting on the weekend's conversations and encounters, I came to realise that this feminist archive at the Rio was a rich repository of text-based documents. But it was more that, this film ephemera held cultural and collective memories of women's engagement with politics, ideas, art and literature shaded by feminism. Feminist film culture embodied in the material which set out to change and transform women's lives. A living history that remains potent and relevant yet, just like Greenham, it had almost disappeared without a trace. What immediately moved me was which objects remained tangible in the archive 40 years after this generation of programmers and cinema workers had brought a feminist discourse and women's moving image culture to audiences at the Rio. It also made me think about how the archive's materiality might be made visible today.

This thesis is, in effect, a practice-based endeavour as a collective, intergenerational feminist enquiry. From February 2020 - February 2023 my practice-based research used the following methods to respond to the Rio archive's materiality: a community archiving session, a film screening, writing a film script and making a tape/slide. In the doing, my aim is for contemporary and future generations of queer feminist collectives and film programmers to have access to their histories' cultural and collective memories. The thesis provides a theory, a context, a language and a shared knowledge of feminist and queer counter-cinema practices and women's cultural and collective activisms of the past to think through the present. Moreover, this thesis has also given me the opportunity to reflect on my own history and identity as a film programmer, alongside CDF's pre-history in London, as a way to conceive of my practice in the future.

As a result, this thesis considers the tensions between history, memory and the archive. I will draw out reflections on absence and loss as textual hauntings in the archive, and the ways we might use feminist curating to activate these absented histories through memory and as affect, as queer feminist reparative and re-making strategies for new knowledge in the archive. My thinking here is aligned with MayDay Rooms,⁷ a radical leftist archive in London who use the term 'collective activation' to describe a hands-on community engagement with archival holdings and historical material. It is work that exists outside of the institution and taxonomical tendencies of European collecting practices. Using the archive as a method, I will consider why histories of feminist film programming and curating remain on the periphery of film studies, while illuminating the

⁷ MayDay Rooms. Available at: <https://maydayrooms.org/activation/> (accessed 5 June 2023).

ways in which the archive might be remembered and activated through feminist curating as a scholarly methodology.

The invisible work of feminists as film programmers and curators

My interest in uncovering a cultural history of feminist work in film programming and curating has brought to light some of the issues as to why this history continues to linger on the periphery of film studies. First, film programming as a moving image practice is at its very essence a fleeting performative encounter between a programmer(s) or curator, a screening and its audience. As such, it remains an ephemeral experience; it puts pressure on conventional forms of documentation; and thus, its history has largely remained undocumented in written evidence. Instead, it is a history that lingers in people's memories, in oral history and its material artifacts left abandoned, overlooked and disregarded in the hegemonic archive. Nevertheless, traces of this history's institutional memory can be found in documentation including annual reports, box office records, attendance figures, marketing material and press reviews. However, as a queer feminist film programmer who is interested in uncovering a cultural history of women's collective work in programming and curating as new feminist knowledge in the film archive, historical details remain missing regarding who came to the screenings, the atmosphere in the cinema and the kinds of discussion engendered. This materiality of feminist film programming and curating, which centres the experiential and affective dimensions of presenting films to audiences, has largely remained unaccounted for and as such stays behind as a textual haunting in the archive.

Furthermore, film programming as an acquired skill with a particular set of practical and critical knowledges related to theatrical and non-theatrical film exhibition has historically been undervalued by the film industry and audiences, as well as in theory. It is an expertise and a profession often been perceived as invisible— even amateurish— work.⁸ Two British feminist film historians have explored such 'invisible work', as the first, Julia Knight terms it, of women in technical roles (2015: 219). The second, Melanie

⁸ To counter this, in 1997, the Independent Cinema Office (ICO) launched Cultural Cinema Exhibition, a course in practical training to gain skills and knowledge in film programming for a career in the film industry. The course's most recent edition is available at: <https://www.independentcinemaoffice.org.uk/training/cultural-cinema-exhibition-2021-online/> (accessed 10 February 2022). See also, ICO (2018a), 'What it takes to be a film programmer'. Available at: <https://www.independentcinemaoffice.org.uk/what-it-takes-to-be-a-film-programmer/> (accessed 6 August 2023). In relation to studying the history, theory and practice of film programming and curating, in 2014 Birkbeck launched an MA in Film Programming and Curating. Available at: https://www.bbk.ac.uk/study/2022/postgraduate/programmes/TMAFMCUP_C/0/film-programming-and-curating-ma (accessed 5 June 2023).

Bell focuses on production and post-production, looking at ‘below the line’ employment (the technical and craft jobs carried out by women). Bell argues how the myths of women’s work as unskilled or biologically determined have been historically pervasive due in part due to widespread discrimination in the industry, which consistently undervalues women’s work and contributions (2021: 5-6). Meanwhile, Knight looks at women’s film distribution and exhibition histories, both of which take place after a film has been completed, and how much of these histories remain invisible and hidden in administrative records. Both film historians offer scaffolding for examining cultural film exhibition through a feminist lens and why women’s work in film programming and curation is more difficult to uncover.

Moreover, as an academic discipline, the area of film studies continues to assert the work of white male film directors as a classifying principle for film scholarship (see for example Bazin, 1957 and Sarris, 1962). This model of *auterism* has historically favoured and valued male directors. It is theory constructed around a *cinophilia*, a canonicity, pedagogy and history that foregrounds the (male) *auteur* as a visionary and sole creative, while absenting women directors working within Hollywood and those working in independent documentary and avant-garde cinema. As a corrective to André Bazin and Andrew Sarris, feminist work in film criticism and spectatorship film theory has arguably had the most impact on *auterism* (see Johnston 1973: 24-31; Mulvey 1975: 6-18; Gledhill 1978: 457-493; Rich 1981: 44-50; de Lauretis: 1984; Bobo: 1995). Yet as recent as 2011, Alison Butler argued that women’s cinema ‘is not “at home” in any of the host cinematic and national discourses it inhabits’ (ibid.: 22). In 2019, writing in *Film Quarterly*, Girish Shambu made the case for a new *cinophilia* that enacts solidarity across feminist, anti-racist, decolonial, queer, disabled and working class viewing and curating practices as proceeding from related points and towards shared goals.⁹

As a result of these gendered structural and academic epistemological biases, there remains a lack of value placed on collective, community based, non-hierarchical feminist and queer ways of working. This is particularly apparent when the focus lies on

⁹ In addition to this point in May 2019, Club des Femmes was invited to deliver a workshop at the University of Birmingham with Girish Shambu, Mark Siegel, Jenny Chamarette and others entitled ‘Serge Daney and queer *cinophilia*’, which explored queer and feminist *cinophilia* in the twenty-first century. Our talk, ‘The Q with the F’ positioned queer feminist curating as an ethical queer *cinophilia*, a commitment to film curating and programming as a space for discourse and community building, knowledge and dissemination, not only spectatorship. We centred a valuing of films by women, queer people and people of colour, as a mode of activism and advocacy that foregrounded archival production and reception, curating and criticism, and theory and practice. (See Mayer and Robertson, 2020a: 76-97).

collecting and caring for archives of women's film programming and curating practices. The etymological origin of the word curating comes from the Latin verb *cūrare* for care, linking curating with care. Today, feminist cultural producers and visual arts curators use a discourse of curating as care, responsibility and community building to describe what they do as a feminised form of affective labour (Reckett, 2016: 6-30). These groups also argue that when a feminist politics of care and collective work encounters institutions with heterosexist dynamics and neoliberal labour conditions, feminist work becomes even hard to enact. Such a way of practicing however, relates to what Elke Krasny calls 'curatorial materialism'; which is an ethics of curation as a co-dependent labour practice that is physical, emotional and intellectual (2016: 103).¹⁰ Even though the historical contexts, theories and specificities of some of these debates might be felt and enacted differently by women, feminists and queer curators working across the visual arts, there is knowledge and know-how to be drawn from connecting the histories, practices and methodologies of feminist film programming and curating, with contemporary feminist and decolonial struggles around care and neoliberal labour practices and conditions within the institution. In this way, a feminist consideration of curation and programming as a labour practice, primarily undertaken by women, feminists and queer people, has the potential to challenge paradigms of film studies, such as authorship and modes of production.

A Different Presentation of History: Outline of thesis

The thesis is divided into six chapters framed around the intersections and resonances between feminist film theory and practice, queerness, cultural memory and the archive. As a feminist enterprise, a key intention is to offer a different presentation of history. Here, I draw on Rhodes' text 'Whose History' (1979/1996), which addressed the hierarchies of knowledge, patriarchal narratives, categorisation and the problems of a male-authored film history for feminists researching women's film history. Rhodes observes

Women have already realised the need to research and write their own histories; to describe themselves rather than accept descriptions, images and

¹⁰ Krasny's concept of curatorial materialism is a feminist practice of relatedness, which responds 'to the hegemonic conditions of the globalised art world context, not altering them, but creating within them material and emotional spaces of feminist and queer feminist solidarity. Curatorial materialism allows us to understand these collective practices are, in fact, new forms of co-dependent curating' (2016: 103).

fragments of ‘historical evidence’ of themselves; and to reject a history that perpetuates a mythological female occasionally glimpsed but never heard. Women are researching and conserving their own histories, creating their own sources of information. Perhaps we can change, are changing, must change the history as presented by ‘Film as Film’. (1979/1996: 196)

Rhodes’ text considers a new methodology to research, write and present women artist film histories on their own terms.¹¹ Prompted by this riposte that calls for a different way of writing history and knowledge production, I will be tracing in this thesis the contours of archive’s hauntings by charting the critical, cultural and activist histories of Laura Mulvey, Claire Johnston, B. Ruby Rich and Sheila Rowbotham. These four feminists have distinct yet interconnected narratives that traverse complex political, cultural, activist and theoretical work. While their intellectual contributions remain fundamental for the scholarship of this thesis, it has become apparent, over the course of conducting my research, that the full extent of their legacies (except Mulvey, and Rich to some extent) remain in the shadows, on the margins of history. As a result, writing this thesis as a palimpsest, a feminist archaeology of thinking in archive can come forward to respond to their ‘ruined maps’ through practice-based research. In this way, my aim is three-fold. First, to keep Mulvey, Johnston, Rich and Rowbotham’s feminist thought and legacies alive. Second, to map their histories as a way to think with, alongside and in response to the institutional, theoretical and cultural debates constellating around feminism and cinema in the 1970s and 1980s. Third, to reflect on the ways these figures might help us see the processes of historiography, the archive’s hauntings with its hierarchies, limitations and possibilities, and the methodological routes we might undertake to uncover women’s film histories from below. These four feminist thinkers appear as textual apparitions in this thesis. Using methods and methodologies inspired by Mulvey, Johnston, Rich and Rowbotham, to evoke their hauntings in the present, and by unearthing new ephemera and gathering their visual and material traces, my practice-

¹¹ Rhodes was prompted to write the text because of the experiences she and her female colleagues had encountered on the curating committee of ‘Film as Film: Formal experiment in film, 1910–1975’ at the Hayward Gallery in London. ‘Film as Film: Formal experiment in film, 1910–1975’ was an avant-garde survey exhibition that itemised key movements in contemporary experimental practice. It was held at the Hayward Gallery from May–June 1979. Yet it was this itemisation that led to controversy and a split within the avant-garde community along gender lines. The women artists/curators involved decided to withhold their work from inclusion in the exhibition because of the dominance and decisions by the male curators and of what they perceived as a masculinised modernist canon patronised by the Arts Council. (See Reynolds, 2019: 138-149)

based research maps and repairs the archive's hauntings and loss. In this way, another history of feminism, film programming and broader cultures of cinema comes into view. It is one that challenges fixed categories, ahistorical timelines and masculinist definitions of the past; and so doing it re-centres and re-imagining the cultural archives of feminist film programming and curating through a feminist, queer, cultural memory historiographical paradigm.

Chapter One presents my methodology for the thesis: a queer feminist curating practice as a scholarly methodology. I begin the chapter by inserting myself into this critical and theoretical trajectory of practice and thinking, by locating myself in the Rio archive. I then set out the key theoretical frameworks through which I map and repair the archive's hauntings and ruination. Informed by Michel Foucault and drawing on the writing of feminist film scholars Giuliana Bruno, Annette Kuhn and Ann Cvetkovich and B. Ruby Rich, I map the archive's spatial and affective contours through feminist, queer cultural memory as a practice-based research methodology. This leads me into presenting an archive of alternative history, where I lay out the sequence of events regarding my practice-based research at the Rio in more detail and the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on my practice. I finish with a question of terminology, where I expand and contextualise on the some of the key words, concepts and practices that I have used in this thesis.

Chapter Two is haunted by a 'lost' history of Laura Mulvey's film programming in the 1970s. Her programming work began at the Women's Event at Edinburgh in 1972: a historic week-long women's film season that took place as part of the Edinburgh Film Festival. This intervention laid the foundations to research and write women into film history through a feminist practice of film programming. The Women's Event reveals an indexical trace of Mulvey's collaborative and collective programming work almost forgotten, largely overshadowed by her work as a film theorist and filmmaker with Peter Wollen. In my quest to uncover this history's material underpinnings and the contexts within which this 1970s feminist practice and theory emerged, and on Mulvey's suggestion, I spent time looking in detail at the germination of women's liberation workshops and proliferation of women's film festivals, specialised seasons and events of the 1970s. Connecting Mulvey's film programming and intellectual histories as ruined and recovered maps, I am guided to situate the development of feminist film programming within its historical moment and contextualise the theoretical and cultural moment in the United Kingdom. This was surmised by Mandy Merck as 'the long 1960s' [which] 'continues and then crashes with the election of [Margaret] Thatcher in 1979'

(2021: 14). In this way, I trace the shifts, reverberations and intersections between filmmaking, criticism, film programming and audiences. My aim is to present a different framework that offers some new points of departure for feminism and cinema in the 1970s.

Claire Johnston is the ghost which stalks the pages of Chapter Three. Here, I map an account of Johnston's complex histories as a theorist, educator, filmmaker, programmer and organiser during the 1970s. Taking Johnston as my guide and responding to her physical absence as another textual haunting in the archive due to her early death, I assess how the early formations of women's counter-cinema practices were shaped by women's history and thought and its attendant collective cultural practices. Johnston's contribution to the theorisation and creative and cultural practice of 1970s film feminism, while widely regarded at the time has largely been forgotten today. She was at the epicentre of a dynamic independent film culture and community, yet her death in 1987, means questions remain about remembering her legacy in the present, one which is prone to forgetfulness. Drawing out some of her theoretical arguments around feminist polemics and practice, I illustrate how intellectual, aesthetic and cultural debates were challenged; and as a consequence, the ways in which audiences for women's political cinema were developed and generated through theory and film programming as connected critical practices. In the 1980s, these considerations about feminist theory, filmmaking and audiences saw community cinemas such as the Rio eager to work with local women's collectives to develop audiences for feminist and lesbian cinema, as well as offer space for training in oppositional media practices.

Chapter Four brings in the presence of curator and cultural theorist B. Ruby Rich, a public intellectual instrumental in theorising, shaping, documenting, disseminating a history of feminist curating and critical practice. Turning to Rich has assisted me in addressing a key question of this thesis, namely: what would film history look like if it included a history of feminist film curating and programming. By tracing Rich's curating and critical histories, which saw her spend considerable time in Edinburgh and London, I have been able to recover another history: a history of feminist film programming in the 1970s and 1980s. The chapter is framed around a thick description of the 'Being Ruby Rich: Film Curation as Advocacy and Activism' Symposium held on 21 June 2017 in partnership with CDF and Birkbeck Institute of Moving Image (BIMI) in the Birkbeck Cinema. It was staged as an example of feminist curation within the context of this thesis and as a critical interrogation of my methodology. The Symposium set out to remember

the intellectual, political and affective histories of feminist curating and programming, in dialogue with the curation and critical writing of Rich, who was also present. As a case study analysis, arriving midpoint through my research journey, the Symposium provided its own insights, textual hauntings and moments of forgetting. In this way, the event offered me a chance to review and re-view and gave me a clarity of vision about my practice-based research as I entered the Rio archive.

Chapter Five expands and orientates these textual hauntings in the archive around the feminist historian, Sheila Rowbotham. Whilst I was writing this thesis during the pandemic, Rowbotham published her memoir *Daring to Hope: My Life in the 1970s* (2021), documenting her life and work in Hackney during the 1970s. Hearing Rowbotham reflect on that formative period in her life generated a connection and a feeling of feminist solidarity, across space and time, which in turn inspired me to continue my research, as I was streetwalking using her ruined map. Her book stimulated affective encounters and fresh imaginary pathways into the Rio archive, prompting further reflection from me on whose perspective is being remembered, documented and memorialised. In naming, my creative practice ‘Feminist Re-Imaginings at the Rio 1980–2020’, I remember Rowbotham by folding her ideas and presence into my practice, specifically to explore her two-fold idea from *Dreams and Dilemmas* (1983): that feminism exists in our political imagination and collective consciousness *and* as a method of historiography and self-archiving. These ideas provide me with another discreet methodological framework to re-imagine the Rio’s feminist past in the present as a curatorial endeavour and act of queer feminist research.

Chapter Six: Lockdown Diaries turns to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on my practice-based research. I narrate my research journey as I was literally locked out of the archive because the Rio was forced to close because of the national lockdown. As a result, my practice-based research was re-orientated in a new direction. Prompted by the discovery of fresh ephemera evidencing women’s tape/slide screenings and events at the Rio in the 1980s, I reflect on my process of making a tape/slide as a feminist palimpsestic practice responding to the archive’s materiality and to imagine ‘what could have been.’

Chapter One: Queer feminist curating practice as a scholarly methodology



Fig 1: Women working in the Rio Cinema office in the 1980s. Rio Cinema archive.

Inserting myself into this critical and theoretical trajectory of practice and thinking

There is an intimate photograph in the Rio archive to which I keep returning (Fig. 1). It is an image of four women working in the Rio's office, a drafty first floor corner space that looks onto Kingsland High Street. The women appear comfortable, sitting side by side, dressed in colourful woolly jumpers. They smile; at ease in front of the camera. A warm camaraderie radiates. I sense they know the photographer.

Fast forward, I worked in the same corner office when carrying out this research. Like them, I wore a woolly jumper, because of the age and size of the Rio, it is hard to heat and so always felt cold.¹² Like them I looked out of that same curtainless window. Finding that photograph, a material artefact, was a meaningful moment that connected me with the women from the Rio's past. I wondered about their work in the cinema, their jobs, and if they programmed the films too, whilst I reflected on my own endeavours to bring their histories and work to light. Monica Dall'asta and Jane Gaines argue these

¹² In her 'Foreword' for *The Rio Tape/Slide Archive* book Zawe Ashton remembers her Hackney childhood in the 1980s, spent in the Rio's auditorium. 'We took our own blankets back then, as the heating couldn't quite be relied upon, and there was a resident cat who would come to warm your ankles if you were lucky' (2020: 13).

temporalities, in which histories of feminist practice continue in the present, ‘form [...] a constellation’, a shared thinking in the past with that present. It is method, Dall’asta and Gaines write, that allows us to locate ourselves ‘in our own historical moment. Who else *would* we find?’ (2015: 19). I will expand on this idea of forming a constellation with the past and present in Chapter Five and Six, and the unexpected direction my practice-based research took because of the pandemic in 2020, but that is for later.

This thesis seeks to reflect on these affective and spatial encounters in the archive, of remembering and forgetting and the pull of re-imagining the past with the present. I consider what methodologies might be needed to navigate the archive’s hauntings and loss and the historical amnesia. For when attention is turned to the ephemeral practices of women’s work in film programming and curating, a broader story might be told about power and knowledge in the archive, which stories are being told and who has access to tell them. In addition, the value of retrieving women’s counter-cinema cultural practices lost in and from history, and how feminist curating as practice-based research can intervene and write back into film history the contribution of women as filmmakers, film programmers and audiences. But I am getting ahead of myself.

Tracing and repairing the ‘ruined and fragmentary map’

The concept of the archive’s haunting and ruination leads me first to Guiliana Bruno’s writing in *Streetwalking on a Ruined Map: Cultural theory and the city films of Elvira Notari* (1993). Bruno uses palimpsest as a methodology to think in and with the archive’s ‘ruined and fragmentary map’ through the process and methods of archaeological work (ibid.: 3). Equally, my thesis is situated around a palimpsestic framework that does not re-tell history; rather, it re-orientates what is already there from a new perspective. This methodology acts as a two-way mirror, re-reading and re-mapping of the archive’s texts across one another through practice. Moreover, it is in the archive’s hauntings, its spatial encounters and material resonances, that I have been able to excavate absence and subjugated knowledge as a framework to document a history of feminist film culture at the Rio as it was being shaped, debated and exhibited in the spaces of the cinema.

For this is a history of feminist film programming that can be traced back to the early formation of the Women’s Liberation Movement (WLM) in the United Kingdom and the early attention paid by the WLM to the politics of representation in film, a response which led to the programming of the Women’s Event at the Edinburgh Film Festival in 1972. Moving beyond the materiality of the film object and the male authored

canon, this is a history that challenges *auteurism* and conventional notions of authorship and narratives of film history. As such, by studying a history of feminist film curation and programming as an ongoing practice of feminist cinematic collective activation, it is possible to map the ways this history's affective and critical impacts have shaped the reception and circulation of a feminist film culture and its communities. It is these feminist film exhibition histories whose politics and practices continue to circulate and resonate today which I will excavate in this practice-based research.

The challenge to piece together this 'ruined and fragmentary map' remains stark. It is an ephemeral history that has left few material traces in the archive. We might say that this is a map of hauntings: it is about invisible work, forgotten film screenings and undocumented events, fleeting conversations, lost prints, forgotten audiences, obscured biographies, obsolete screening formats and vanished places. It is a history of feminist moving image practice, that includes programming, curating, criticism and archiving that lingers as a textual absence in the archive. Yet these hauntings and silences have acted as prompts to stimulate further research to explore the contours and contexts for this elided history through the archive's materiality, namely: its ruination. Working in this way, we might therefore consider the archive's absence as an archaeology of textual loss, with its shadows, contradictions, gaps and silences, but also its epistemological and political possibilities.

As a historiographical method to explore the conscious and unconscious workings of knowledge production in the archive and its discursive functions, my use of archaeology is taken from Michel Foucault's philosophical writings in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (2002/1972). Here, Foucault understands the archive as a system of both control and enunciation. In this way, the archive becomes a subject rather than an object: a technology of memory to think critically about the absences the archive encompasses. Through a discourse of haunting, tracing and mapping, my thesis will act as a palimpsest to focus on recovering and re-imagining layers of women's material cultures in feminist film exhibition. Underpinning this enterprise is curation as a Foucauldian archaeology of the film archive.

The Rio's archive is a specific, artefactual example of this 'ruined and fragmentary map' of women's memories and experiences of working together as film programmers, media activists and organisers. By virtue of being a community, we might say the archive is ephemeral, fugitive and incomplete because it lies in opposition to institutionalised documentation and official state archiving. This approach makes space

to do reparative imaginative work that remains ethically aligned with the original commitments of these groups and the Rio, rather than with the totalising methodology of the hegemonic archive and history from above. In this way, my use of Foucauldian archaeology became literal in that I had to go underground, down into the Rio's basement, to excavate this history because there was nothing to dig up. Consequently, the 'ruined map' became an analogy for recovery in the textual archives.

Yet this narrative of women's film programming and curating is still in the process of being written. This is despite historical evidence to suggest that its political, cultural and intellectual underpinnings were already established at the beginning of the 1970s, a moment marked by the advent of the WLM.¹³ By 1978 in her lecture for the series 'Women and Literature' organised by the Oxford Women's Studies Committee entitled, 'Film, Feminism and the Avant-Garde', Laura Mulvey surmised that a 'collision' had taken place 'between feminism and film' (2009: 115). This encounter, she writes, was 'part of a wider explosive meeting between feminism and patriarchal culture' after which, she contends, 'a rough history of women in the cinema soon started to emerge' (ibid: 117). My thesis argues that in addition to the debates that emerged in theory and film practice concerning women and film, feminist film programming and curating practices were equally part of this emerging 'history of women in the cinema'. In fact, feminist exhibition practices were the third missing element in the development of feminist film theory and feminist aesthetic practices of the 1970s, which materialised from the decade's historical, socio-cultural and intellectual conjunctures.

In 1972, Mulvey, together with Claire Johnston and Lynda Myles, co-programmed the Women's Event at the Edinburgh Film Festival. With an emphasis on cinema within a broad politics of representation, a feminist counter-cinema gradually began to materialise through film screenings and events as a form of practice-based research. Collectively, the programmers instigated a feminist methodology of film programming and criticism, activist endeavours which fostered a critical space where the cultural transmission of feminist ideas could begin to take place within the spaces of cinema.

¹³ Leading up to this moment, 20th century Anglo-American women writers addressing women's rights and gender issues in theory and practice include Virginia Woolf (1998/1929), *A room of one's own*; *Three guineas*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Simone de Beauvoir (1997/1953), *The second sex*, trans. H.M. Parshley. London: Vintage Books. Betty Friedan (1965), *The feminine mystique*. London: Gollancz. Juliet Mitchell (1984/1966), *Women: The longest revolution: essays in feminism, literature and psychoanalysis*. London: Virago.

These interventions instigated new scholarship on ways of thinking about representation and images of women in male-authored cinema, as well as commencing the careful work of locating and exhibiting ‘lost’ women filmmakers in the archive. These women were lost because there was no memory of them. Looking at this ‘unspoken history of women’ in culture as Mulvey remarks, not only enabled the programmers to begin to articulate a long history of women’s cinema, but also to politicise the work they were doing (ibid.:116). By the end of the decade, these feminist cultural practices and critical strategies had laid the groundwork for a women’s political consciousness in and around film that saw feminist film programming and building feminist audiences at community cinemas like the Rio. My thesis maps the fragments of this absented history through curating as practice-based research. At the same time, I ask questions about power and knowledge in the archive and the ways in which it might be re-configured to generate counter memories as feminist epistemology. My research illustrates that by studying a cultural history of feminist film curating and programming through its theory and practice, its scholarly value might be revealed. This is because, as an epistemology, a methodological approach and a method of practice, feminist curating offers an alternative way of doing and thinking in the archive.

Reading through feminist, queer and cultural memory interventions in the archive, this thesis argues that curating as a scholarly methodology offers a critical and affective framework to restore the ‘ruined and fragmentary map.’ In so doing this work highlights and repairs the ruined map of the national and historical archive related to women’s cinema. As such, curating as a critical and affective practice offers productive ways to navigate the archive’s erasures and blind spots frequently found in ahistorical, flattened out narratives of film history. Such ways are frameworks that present counter-reading strategies and practical methods for remediating feminist film knowledge in the archive. This leads me to Ann Cvetkovich’s book, *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, sexuality, and lesbian public cultures* (2003) which presents queer strategies that make it possible to take an expansive and situated approach to documenting community archives and the affective political encounters they leverage as a form of cultural historiography. Using Cvetkovich’s consideration of the affective weight of archives, which she names as ‘an archive of feelings’, my thesis writes new scholarship on curating as a methodology for doing cultural film history, whilst attending to the archive’s feelings and material encounters (2003: 7). Revising Michel Foucault’s archaeological reading on the archive and the discursive aspect of memory, Cvetkovich constellates queerness and technologies

of memory as affective political knowledge in the archive. She reads this against universalising and disembodiment assumptions usually associated with memory studies and the archive. Her formulation has offered me a way forward to rethink and to use queer as a methodological intervention into the 1990s turn to situated memory work in film and cultural studies. (See Kuhn, 1992: 233–243; Stacey, 1994; Brunow, 2017: 97-110). In this regard, I bring a queer reading of cultural memory studies to bear on the very act of film curation but also my positionality as a queer feminist film programmer.

This intellectual pathway leads me to consider curation and spectatorship. I suggest there are three different subjects of attention to explore in a horizontal relationship. The archive itself, the methodology for exploring the archive, and the traces of experience to be found and activated in the archive. First, the archive/s: meaning the historical record, the general film archive and the Rio specific archive that is largely textual. This archive does not comprise wholly of moving image materials. I also encounter two entwined subjects and themes: a history of feminist film spectatorship and feminist film programming and curating. Second, feminist film curation as a methodology of practice-based research is the way I am approaching the archive and feminist film spectatorship. Third, historically feminist spectators and audiences have become programmers and curators due to having to select against the mainstream. It is the traces of their experiences that I am looking for in the archive to argue the case for an accessible, collective and collaborative curating practice that gives rise to an activated and relative community-based archive. I have composited a methodology that approaches all three fields of study, because historically feminist film scholarship has been focused on the stubborn connective tissue between the *auteur* and spectator. While this provides this account of an active, critical, ‘oppositional’ spectator, who is politicised by viewing and views politically (see hooks: 1992), this way of thinking has not been connected theoretically to archival and curatorial scholarly practices.

I turn now to Annette Kuhn’s ethnohistory and cultural memory theory, which bridges a gap between Mulvey (1975: 6-18), Mary Ann Doane (1982: 74-88) and Jackie Stacey (1994) and other feminist theories of spectatorship such as Cvetkovich and others writing on feminist archival practices. In this way, my thesis is designed to piece together the ‘ruined and fragmentary map’ of queer feminist film theory by relinking spectatorship and archival scholarship with a theory and practice of feminist film programming and curating. The reason for this map’s ruination is because there have been very few ways to trace this history. Firstly, this is due to its invisibility and ephemerality. Next there have

been few ways to theorise this history because affect and ephemera have historically been devalued and spectatorship not recognized and theorised as a curatorial practice. In fact, it is the contours of Kuhn's writing, from *Women's Pictures* (1992) to her ethnohistory and cultural memory theory in *An Everyday Magic: cinema and cultural memory* (2002), that define a key terrain for my thesis. This is how feminist film scholarship leads into and reshapes cultural memory work.

Simply put, these queer, feminist, cultural memory and practice-based research interventions in the archive present fresh ways of thinking about what counts as history and what counts as practice, along with the methods and strategies we might use to excavate this history's absence. My approach offers generative exchanges that re-centre and re-situate a theory and practice of feminist film curation and programming. It critically throws light on material archives and the audience as an essential part of reclaiming feminist film history.

An archive of alternative history

Tracing these feminist programming and curating histories of practice, my practice-based research was initially planned as a four-month curatorial project at the Rio from February and May 2020. Leading up to this, I had been conducting in person and online interviews with women who were either working at the Rio, collective members of RWC and the WMRP, or embedded within the feminist film movement of the 1970s and 1980s. I contacted 25 people. After meeting a selection of the people in person, I interviewed seven women about their experiences of feminism and film in the 1970s and 1980s. Our conversation focused on how the women looked back at their experiences of working in film exhibition, what brought them to the groups, how they worked collectively, the specificities of programming and the collective labour of shaping and building audiences for feminist cinema. In addition, I interviewed Laura Mulvey and Jan Worth about their memories and experiences of cinefeminism and avant-garde film culture in the 1970s. As one of my participants Zoë Redman wrote to me after we had met

Remembering as an act of honoring those days of female resistance and resilience. Probably this was the groundwork that has helped me continue being resistance and resilient. (2020)¹⁴

¹⁴ Email correspondence with Zoë Redman. 30 September 2020.

Equally, by remembering them, I wanted to pay tribute to their work as programmers, curators and community activists, to bear witness and listen to their stories of ‘resistance and resilient’ in their own words. Drawing on Kuhn’s ethnohistory methodology and cinema memory theory, Cvetkovich’s experiments in oral history, ethnography and community activist work and Margaret Dickinson’s (1999) oral history on British oppositional film culture in the 1970s and 1980s, I was interested to record the women’s memories, to claim that their work as feminist programmers and cinema workers mattered, and that their experiences when documented remain historically significant, holding resonances for today. I used a life history model to gather information, where the emphasis lay on open-ended questions, to let my participants tell their stories in their own words. I decided to use participants as a terminology rather than narrators or contributors, because I have folded aspects of the interviews into my practice-based research. Due to several factors to do with my thesis timeline and my participants availability, I interviewed seven women (see Appendix D-J).

Bringing my participants back to the Rio, my project was to be a public facing cultural memory practice of feminist film historiography, responding to the liberatory potential of archive’s hauntings and gaps, with its contours of memories and experiences as feminist knowledge in the archive. Reflecting on Rhodes’ persistent question about ‘Whose History?’, in the process of archiving, my intention was to create a collective and cultural memory of feminist curating and programming at the Rio. The project comprised of four community archiving sessions and connected film screenings. I invited my participants involved in those activities to return to the Rio to share their memories. My intervention set out to create a discursive space between the present and the past, between memory and the archive, where histories of feminist film programming and curation, their material traces and audiences could be re-imagined and re-centered as a vital part of reclaiming feminist film history.

March 2020; Covid and the national lockdown. The Rio was ordered to close. I was only able to facilitate the first of my four sessions. As a result, this thesis in itself has become a ‘ruined map’ due to the impact of the pandemic. The research remains haunted by unrealised film screenings and community archiving sessions, and by the avoidable deaths and illness caused by the Government’s incompetence and extra burden on women workers and carers. Eventually, due to the welfare of my participants and audience members, I decided to abandon the rest of the project. Literally I was locked out of the archive. I was compelled to question my methods of practice, methodologies and

the research had to shift. As a queer feminist researcher and curator, I knew I had to keep going and to keep re-making, without erasing what had been lost but marking its place in some way. The impact of the pandemic re-orientated my practice-based research in fresh, affective and stimulating ways. I made a film.

A question of terminology

In this section, I will expand on the terminology that I use throughout this thesis. Taking my lead from Claire Hemmings (2011), I use historical terms where necessary, but I also look at ways of expanding and contextualizing those terms to be inclusive and in keeping with contemporary moving image practice, while recognizing continuities.

Women's movement and/or the WLM or women's liberation

In this thesis I talk about the **women's movement and/or the WLM or women's liberation** with an understanding that this was a political and social struggle that coalesced around a loose organisation of women working collectively in Western Europe and North America (although not exclusively), to assert women's socio-political, economic and cultural freedoms and equalities (for a historical overview, see Coote and Campbell, 1987: 9-31). As Sheila Rowbotham states, 'The existence of women's liberation constituted a tremendous impetus to rethink society, the economy, culture and politics' (2013: 9). The 1970s is also described as an era of 'second-wave' feminism. However, as this thesis aims to generate a different model of thinking about women's film histories since the 1970s, I prefer not to use that term, because, as Claire Hemmings argues, it has a tendency to ahistoricise and flatten out certain narratives, epistemologies, subjectivities, reading and knowledge practices that structure political thought and action, including those by lesbian, queer women and women of colour (2011: 3-4).

'Second-wave' feminism Hemmings writes, belongs to a dominant co-opted grammar of Western feminist storytelling, which accounts for the development of feminist history, politics and theory as a narrative of progress, loss, rupture and loss as one wave of feminism gives way to another.¹⁵ Such as the 'second-wave' narrative gave way to a 'third-wave' in the 1990s.¹⁶ As such, and what I am most interested in excavating are the women's movement 'ghostly matters' as a different sort of knowledge production;

¹⁵ In addition, Leshu Torchin argues this progress, loss and return narrative fits succinctly into the purpose of a contemporary neo-liberal post-feminist success story, which 'suggest[s that] gains had been achieved and that empowerment could be found in the marketplace' (2015: 141).

¹⁶ Feminist writer Rebecca Walker is considered to be one of the founders of 'third-wave' feminism after coining the term in a 1992 article for *Ms. Magazine*, 'Becoming the third wave': 86-87.

namely that which continue to haunt contemporary feminist thought and critical practice, that which never entirely goes away (Gordon 2008). This includes feminist polemical concerns with woman as spectacle (Mulvey 1975: 6-18), the politics of women's image (Kuhn, 1994), the theory and practice of lesbian separatism (Jill Johnston, 1973), and the lesbian feminist 'sex wars' of the 1980s.¹⁷ These 'ghostly matters' in the archive refuse to be consigned the past. As Gordon writes, 'ghosts are characteristically attached to the events, things, and places that produce them in the first place; by nature they are haunting reminders of lingering trouble' (2008: xix). It is these hauntings CDF experiences in our curatorial practice when we show films about the women's peace camp at Greenham Common. An example of this can be drawn from 'Bringing Greenham Home' when Sasha Roseneil came to the Rio to speak about her experiences of living at the camp and the Greenham politics she encountered. She challenged the idea of the camp as a 'second wave' site and the singular narrative that this imbues. Instead, she spoke about Greenham as a queer feminist space (see Roseneil's academic study *Common Women, Uncommon Practices: The Queer Feminisms of Greenham* [2000: 1-12]). When Roseneil spoke about the many Greenhams which existed in the lives of Greenham women and those of her network, and diversity of the women (including trans and queer women) who were there, her assertion was vehemently challenged by members of the audience; other voices who continue to feel a sense of ownership over Greenham's history due to media misrepresentation at the time and subsequent historical neglect and erasure. This encounter, together with Roseneil's writing, has informed CDF's queer feminist curation of Greenham's histories, which is discursive and open to re-evaluation and new contexts.¹⁸ Moreover, these encounters illustrate, that it is important to contextualise and

¹⁷ For sex positive lesbian feminism, see Gayle S. Rubin (1993/1984), *Thinking Sex: Notes for a radical theory of the politics of sexuality*. In: *Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, edited by Henry Abelove, Michele Aina Barale and David M. Halperin, pp. 3-44. London: Routledge. Samois (1981), *Coming To Power: Writings and graphics on lesbian S/M*. New York: Alyson Books. For the feminist anti-pornography position, see Catherine A. MacKinnon (1979), *Sexual Harassment of Working Women: A case of sex discrimination*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press. Ellen Willis (1992/1981), *Lust Horizons: Is the Women's Movement Pro-Sex?* In: *No More Nice Girls: Countercultural Essays*, pp: 3-14. Hanover and London: Wesleyan University Press. Andrea Dworkin (1981), *Pornography: Men Possessing Women*. London: Women's Press.

Feminist filmmakers have begun to re-contextualise 1970s and 1980s feminist polemical thought for contemporary audiences. Pratibha Parma revisits Andrea Dworkin in *My Name is Andrea* (2022), and Nina Menkes recuperates Mulvey's theory on gender and spectatorship in *Brainwashed: Sex-Camera-Power* (2022).

¹⁸ In February 2023, Club des Femmes will be presenting a Greenham related moving image programme at Tate Britain, in conjunction with 'Women in Revolt!: Art, Activism and the Women's movement in the UK 1970-1990'. Available at: <https://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-britain/women-in-revolt> (accessed 18 August 2023).

clarify what I mean by women, feminist, queer and how they sit together. This is why, taking my lead from Hemmings, I am using historical terms for the movement and its participants (women and feminists) and looking at how, as queer feminist curators, CDF expands and contextualises those terms to be inclusive, while recognising historical continuities at the same time. By challenging some of the fixed discourses of the period as a feminist intervention into methods of historical inquiry, this thesis expands the notion of the archive to include its affective textures and locate women, lesbians, queer people and women of colour as a strategy for telling feminist film history in a feminist way.

Within the historical context of the WLM's foregrounding of gender politics, as already noted, I acknowledge the work of Simone de Beauvoir, who analysed the social construction of gender in *The Second Sex* (1949), as well as Judith Butler's questioning of the sex/gender category from a queer perspective in *Gender Trouble* (1990). In doing so, I sometimes use 'women' when referring to women's cinema, women's film histories, women's counter-cinema practices of film programming and curating. I also use 'feminism' in the context of the cinema, which gestures towards a development in the 1970s of a feminist film theory and practice by feminist film scholars, artists, filmmakers and programmers. These were critical and creative endeavours that led to an engagement with cinema and with images of women in the social and symbolic terrain. In *Women's Pictures: feminism and cinema*, Kuhn defined 1970s feminism broadly as

A set of political practices founded in analyses of the social/historical position of women subordinated, oppressed or exploited either within dominant modes of production (such as capitalism) and /or by the social relations of patriarchy or male domination. (1994: 4)

The multiplicities of these ideas concerning the politics of representation, experiences of oppression, women's exploitation in image and (in)visibilities of women's place in a film history and culture created and classified by men was taken up by feminist film critics, artists, filmmakers and programmers. Collectively, they explored the critical, artistic and cultural terrains of feminism, politics and the moving image: a theory and practice which included a feminist practice of film programming and curating as well.

Queer, queering feminist archives and archival practices

In addition to Ann Cvetkovich's interpretation of queerness and technologies of memory, I draw on Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's sense of the word **queer**, in relation to historiography, as a 'recurrent, eddying, *troublant* discourse' (1994: xii). Sedgwick defines queer as an oppositional, counter stance that contests heterosexual and homosexual normativity. When using queer in relation to archives and archival practices, Sedgwick's reparative reading strategy embraces multiplicity as an 'open mesh of possibilities' that finds 'gaps, overlaps, dissonances, and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning' (ibid.: 9). In keeping with this notion, **queering feminist archives and archival practices** unsettles the hegemonic and homonormative archive. This way of thinking instigates a cultural and political intervention and restitution against the protocols and orthodoxy of historiography. The queer methodology of feminist film historiography I adopt in this research centres counter and unorthodox methods, foregrounding idiosyncratic, fugitive and ephemeral archives and their attendant counter-archival possibilities.¹⁹

Film programming and curating, screening strategies, counter-cinema practices, cultural and moving image practices

Throughout this thesis, I use film **programming and curating** interchangeably, as well as **screening strategies** and **counter-cinema practices**, along with **cultural and moving image practices**. These multiple definitions prompt the question about practice: what was it then and what does it mean today? Moreover, what is a film curator or a film programmer? and is that how the women documented in this thesis understood themselves? During the 1970s and 1980s, in the era of women's film festivals, screenings and events, women worked collectively to research, write, programme, present and debate an emerging feminist counter-cinema with newly constituted feminist audiences. At that time, women might not have considered themselves film programmers, because this work has historically been a gendered, masculinist signifier belonging to the critical traditions and cinema and festival exhibition practices of *cinophilia*. An example includes film archivist and programmer Henri Langlois (1914–1977), co-founder of the Cinémathèque

¹⁹ In addition, my use of queer as an archival practice also comes through José Esteban Muñoz's concept of 'cruising utopia' as an imagined space outside heteronormativity that presents queer and queerness as a critique of the present and a future-orientated, utopian model of being and doing in the world (2009: 18).

française and of the International Federation of Film Archives (FIAF) in 1938.²⁰ In addition to this point, the 1972 Women's Event at Edinburgh happened at a historic moment when major international film festivals saw the arrival of the male artistic festival director. Following protests that disrupted the Cannes Film Festival in 1968, this festival along with Berlin and Venice changed their selection procedures. They moved away from working with cultural embassies and national institutions to appoint instead artistic curators/directors as the arbiter of artistic quality and taste (de Valck 2007: 25-29).

Referring to my point about the importance of language, over the course of this research and in interviews with my participants, I discovered that many did not describe themselves as programmers or curators. Rather they spoke about being cinema or film and video workers, which I have committed to acknowledging in this research. Feminist programming and curating as opposed to feminist programming and curating now each present differences and resonances. The currents of women's collective work presented in different spaces, times and places continue to circulate in resuscitative and problematic ways. However, for ease of reference, my understanding of film programming and curating derives from Laura U. Marks theorisation. Film programming Marks writes, is 'an objective form of selection, less concerned with the individual personalities of the programmers and orientated towards reflecting the state of the field' (2004: 36).²¹ Film curating Marks argues, is a dialectic encounter between ideas and audiences, drawing on the concept that ethical curating creates a space for filmmakers, programmers and audiences to be dialogue with one another, an exchange that involves 'discourses of beauty, love and emotion' (ibid.: 37).

While a theoretical history of feminist film programming and curating is still in the process of being written, there are similarities and differences between women's film programming from the past and feminist curating practices that we might recognise today. But in this thesis, I will keep both terms connected and interchangeable for historical and theoretical reasons. This leads me towards sharing an understanding of programming in the cinema with curator Stephanie Schulte Strathaus, who argues the case for making

²⁰ As recently as 2017, writing in *Film Quarterly*, Judith Mayne pointed to the Cinémathèque Française's 'misogyny and lesbophobia' in the contextualisation of their major retrospective of Dorothy Arzner films. Available at: <https://filmquarterly.org/2017/07/12/scandale-dorothy-arzner-in-paris/> (accessed 5 June 2023).

²¹ Peter Bosma borrows the term film curator from the art world, galleries and museums to describe a 'more sophisticated level of cinematic knowledge than simply programming specific screenings' (2015: 6). Yet with this analysis comes the idea of curation as a matter of taste and aesthetics, which is a problem when taste becomes a fixed, male-authored, value driven orthodoxy.

curating visible within the structure of programming. It is a practice, she writes that signals ‘the curator’s signature...[which] connects past and present, different countries, societies, genres, and/or aesthetic forms’ (2004: 4). Correspondingly, CDF’s curating, whereby we position our practice as a critical and activist tool of archiving and discourse remains allied with B. Ruby Rich’s socially informed film curation and criticism from 2017, which she has defined as an ethical relationship between filmmaking, curating and the circular of movements of film exhibition (see later analysis of Rich’s curating theory and practice in Chapter Four).

Experimental, avant-garde

Throughout this inquiry, I primarily use the term **experimental** but sometimes **avant-garde** (both were used interchangeably by theoreticians, filmmakers and programmers at the time) to describe feminist counter cinema practices of the 1970s. Historically, though the term avant-garde has been allied with political and military revolution, its use in arts and politics dates back to the 1920s [O’Pray 1996: 3]. In the 1970s, avant-garde was used to connect filmmaking within an academic context rather than filmmaking as a counter-cultural oppositional practice. In 1978, Mulvey turned to the avant-garde to consider the matters of feminism and political aesthetics. Moreover, in the 1980s, experimentalism as a feminist counter practice was taken up by women filmmakers of the London Film-makers Co-op (LFMC). As Jean Matthee attests in 2015 in a roundtable discussion for *Moving Image Review and Art Journal*.

We thought that counter-practice (including film) would change the world incarnating new subjectivities, bodies, sexualities, symptomologies, and the transformation of the unconscious, and this would create the conditions for us to affirm new logics for our worlds with transformed social relations.
(ibid.: 178)

From these ontological and epistemological perspectives, feminist experimentalism and experimentation encompassed new ways of thinking, existing and creating in the world. It offered a possibility to transform women’s social, psychic and creative lives, and it is from these reading positions that my thinking is embedded.

Moving image

When I use **moving image**, I am referring to film, video, tape/slide, expanded cinema, installation and digital technologies. In addition, as noted, I bring in film programming and curating which I centre as a key aspect of moving image exhibition practice. This connects back to CDF's 'Bringing Greenham Home', which drew on the aesthetic and political formations that informed feminist moving image made at and about Greenham. While Greenham women and artist filmmakers Annabel Nicolson and Anne Robinson were shooting on Super8, Tina Keane, Beeban Kidron and Amanda Richardson used video. Meanwhile, Keane and Lis Rhodes' work screened in galleries and cinemas. Kidron and Richardson's was passed around and viewed on VHS tapes at women's groups and community centres. Rhodes and Joanna Davis would later make work together about Greenham Common for Channel 4.²² As Jackie Hatfield argues

There is a wealth of [female] artists who have discussed their work in political terms, and defined the philosophical, theoretical and historical arenas of their practice outside any prevailing ideologies. Technological innovation post-film has enabled experiment with languages of representation, notation and forms, and initiated a need to interrogate gaps in historical knowledge; and challenge canons of thought. (2006: xiv)

Drawing on Hatfield's ideas which links to the feminist artistic practices of Greenham with its exhibition histories, we can map the diversity of women's moving image practice across various forms and technologies, histories that continue to challenge linear narratives of avant-garde film history. How women artists and collectives made work out of necessity and urgency, often shifting across roles from political spectator to film programmer, to artist and filmmaker working film and video practice. Although much of this work was supported and exhibited institutionally, many women artists and filmmakers of this period have not been remembered and as such continue to be written out of history.²³

²² Lis Rhodes and Joanna Davis' *Hang on a Minute* from 1983, was a series of 13 one-minute films commissioned by Channel 4.

²³ Jackie Hatfield (2003) cites the experimental narrative and performative work of Gill Eatherly, Marilyn Halford, Rita Keegan, Pratibha Parma. Significant for this research, she includes work by Zoë Redman and Marion Urch, founder members of the WMRP.

Cinema, and non-cinematic screening spaces

Finally, I focus on work that takes place in the **cinema** primarily but will also discuss **non-cinematic screening spaces** such as galleries and community spaces. This is not to exclude digital curation, but to recognise that it was not available in the 1970s and 1980s. I will be using Kuhn's definition of cinema 'in its broadest sense to embrace the various aspects of the institutions historically surrounding the production, distribution and exhibition of films of different types', Kuhn concludes that 'this definition takes in the actual products of the institutions – the films themselves – and, very importantly, the conditions and character of the production and reception of films' (1994: 3-4). Following this, I use the words *film* and *cinema* in the fullest extent and will specify media and spaces where relevant.

Chapter Two: Why has it taken the world nearly 50 years to catch up with Laura Mulvey?

Writing for *Sight & Sound* in 2022 on *Jeanne Dielman, 23 quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles* (Chantal Akerman, 1975), Laura Mulvey asserts that she programmed the film whilst expanding on the contexts in which she programmed it. ‘It’s rise to the top,’ she declares, of the 2022 *Sight & Sound* greatest film of all time critics poll, ‘is a triumph for women’s cinema’ (2022).¹ In this way, Mulvey’s declares her curating practice as part of the braid of her work as a film theorist and filmmaker. Given that her text ‘Narrative and Visual Pleasure’ is one of the most-cited articles in Humanities, why has it taken so long for Mulvey’s vision of a feminist counter-cinema to have as widespread an effect as her insights into mainstream narrative cinema? Why, then, as this chapter’s title asks, has it taken the world nearly 50 years to catch up with Laura Mulvey?

This chapter argues that Mulvey, as a political spectator, researcher and film programmer, shaped and crafted programmes and contexts that drew on the radical milieu in which she was immersed, to translate the work for larger audiences. Yet how are we to evaluate Mulvey’s contribution as a film programmer when that history has to be pieced together from an absented archive. ‘Women’s film history,’ Mulvey writes, ‘has never formed a coherent chronology [the point being that] women’s contribution to culture has always been dispersed and fragmentary’ (2019: xxi). This lack of coherence, of what Lis Rhodes calls in her text ‘Whose History?’, history’s ‘crumpled heap’, a methodology to consider feminist film histories being written and produced over and across generations (1996: 196). In so doing we might consider a history of feminist film programming and curating and its effects surfacing in an uneven, non-linear time, hence the value of archival research, ethnographic and oral history methodologies to deal with historical amnesia. This is not to conserve or create new fixed timelines, instead to understand the multiple ripple effects of the ‘ruined map’.

¹ For the first time in 70 years, the *Sight & Sound* greatest film of all time critics poll has been topped by a film directed by a woman. Mulvey’s (2022) reflections on the film’s feminist and avant-garde historical contexts and the significance of its re-circulation today can be read in, ‘The greatest film of all time: *Jeanne Dielman, 23 quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles*’ in *Sight & Sound*. Available at: <https://www.bfi.org.uk/sight-and-sound/features/greatest-film-all-time-jeanne-dielman-23-quai-du-commerce-1080-bruxelles> (accessed 13 May 23).

Curators and Programmers in the Archives

As this thesis argues, film scholarship has failed to account for curation and programming as a critical practice due to its perceived invisibility and ephemeral qualities, which have been hard to document and undervalued in film studies. This chapter will focus on Mulvey's 'lost' history as a feminist film programmer. Looking at feminist film curation and programming allows me to account for the rapid changes in feminist film theory, practice and audiences between 1972 and 1979, pivoting around the highly theoretical 'Psychoanalysis and Cinema event' at the 1976 Edinburgh Film Festival. I will end this chapter by discussing the 'split' at Edinburgh's 1979 Feminism and Cinema event and how that debate impacted the writing of feminist film history and the way that film programming disappeared from feminist film scholarship, but at the same time also retreated into the academy. As a result of these debates over theory, practice and audiences, the link between filmmaking, theory and film viewing as consciousness-raising activities was lost with the institutionalisation of feminist film theory. Yet the historical memory of these connections dispersed, remembered discreetly by smaller women's film programming groups and film festivals across the country.

Mulvey's film programming began at The Women's Event at the Edinburgh Film Festival in August 1972. When I had the opportunity to interview her in 2017, she impressed that The Women's Event was a 'tabula rasa', a moment that saw a convergence between the burgeoning theoretical questions of psychoanalysis, semiotics and Marxism, fusing with the radical left, cinema and the politics of the women's movement.² This critical, practical and activist convergence prompted theoretical questions about women's consciousness, representation, spectatorship and film, which in turn opened a space for a women's counter-cinema practice of film programming and curating to take shape.

To understand this historical moment—one in which the filmmaking avant-garde, film critics and theorists were in direct conversation as women's counter-cinematic practices were being enacted—I found it useful to re-visit Edinburgh Film Festival's 2016 edition and their 70th anniversary film programmes and events. Of particular interest, was a cultural memory screening event hosted by Edinburgh's Black Box experimental programmer, Kim Knowles. Delving into the festival's archives and oral histories with Mulvey and Lynda Myles (the then festival director), Knowles re-staged a 40th anniversary screening of Lizzie Borden's film *Re-*

² Interview with Laura Mulvey, 31 January 2017. (See Appendix F).

Grouping (1976) in the presence of Mulvey and Borden.³ As an example of my methodology in action and a comparative project that helped shape and inspire this thesis' practice-based research, Knowles' curatorial proposition set about 'open[ing] up a space for dialogue and reflection... not to repeat the event, but honour it in some way' (interview with Mayer, 2017: 15). Knowles' curation revealed an indexical trace of Edinburgh's feminist counter-cinema practices and, more specifically, Mulvey's film viewing and programming, which has largely been overshadowed by her theoretical writing and avant-garde film practice. Knowles' curation as a scholarly methodological practice of feminist curation, weaved the festival's theoretical and avant-garde film histories in with feminist counter-cinema practices. In this way, Mulvey's film programming was folded back in with her theoretical work and film practice, an intervention that reveals and repairs the formal archive of a (previously) funded film festival's 'ruined and fragmentary map', it does so by re-centring women's counter-cinema practices through Mulvey's absented film programming.

Knowles asserts that The Women's Event was one of 'the landmark events of the period' (2017: 299). Her research on 'assessing the role played by the [Edinburgh] film festival in the history of avant-garde film theory and practice' involved interviewing Myles, Edinburgh's creative director from 1973-1980 (ibid.: 301).⁴ The first of its kind in the United Kingdom and Europe, The Women's Event was week-long festival focused solely on screening historic and contemporary work by women filmmakers.⁵ Fostered by the organisers and supporters of the festival and galvanised by the consciousness raising of the women's movement, the programmers Mulvey, Claire Johnston and Myles selected every film made by a woman they could find in the film archive.⁶ Myles recalls

³ For a feminist reflection of the screening, see So Mayer (2016b, 22 July), Re-Grouping Again: Lizzie Borden's "diabolical hour" comes around. *Sight & Sound*. Available at: <https://www2.bfi.org.uk/news-opinion/sight-sound-magazine/comment/festivals/regrouping-lizzie-borden-edinburgh-2016-revival> (accessed 9 June 2022).

⁴ Knowles cites the 1975 Brecht and Cinema event, the 1976 Psychoanalysis and the Cinema event and the International Forum on Avant-Garde Film where *Re-Grouping* was presented as landmark events of the period (2017: 299).

⁵ In North America and Canada, 1972 also marked the first New York International Festival of Women's Films, followed in 1973 by Toronto Women and Film Festival. For a timeline of events, publications, select films and women's film festivals see Mary Ann Doane, Patricia Mellencamp, Linda Williams (1984), *Feminist Film Criticism: An Introduction*. In: *Re-Vision: Essays in feminist film criticism*, edited by Mary Ann Doane, Patricia Mellencamp, Linda Williams, pp. 3-4. The American Film Institute: University Publications of America, Inc.

⁶ Katharina Kamleitner's unpublished PhD on The Women's Event sheds new light on the fact that some films were screened at such short notice that they were not included in the festival's final print material. Due to inconsistencies in the archive, it remains unclear whether many additional titles such as Jacqueline Audry's comedy *In Six Easy Lessons* (1958) or Yoko Ono's protest film *Freedom* (1970) were actually presented at the festival (2020: 192-5).

In 1972 it was very much a common cause with a lot of mutual support and a shared desire both to celebrate the female directors of the past and to create the conditions in which they could flourish in the future. (2017: 302).

Until that moment, women filmmakers had been ignored and erased across the entire film landscape. Women's existence in cinema could only be found in acting and barely acknowledged as spectators.⁷ Organised in response to this vast absence of women's film history, the programmers set out to recover and reclaim a history of women's cinema. In so doing, these three women created a space to imagine, explore and debate what a women's cinema might look like. By making visible this lack of women's film history through the consciousness raising tools of film programming, criticism and viewing, the programmers set out to dismantle the patriarchal canonisation of film history.

Mirroring Edinburgh's wider inclusive programming policy, The Women's Event was as broad and comprehensive as possible. Approximately 31 films were programmed over a week. 'Questions about women and film and representation were very much on the agenda', as Mulvey remembers the political impetus behind the event (2017).⁸ A key area of struggle and change constellated around the politics of representation, which critiqued women's oppression in 'the society of the spectacle' (as set out by Guy Debord in 1967) through the workings of language, image and ideology. Mulvey again

It is easy to forget that the early feminist critique of Hollywood cinema was the direct legacy of the Women's Liberation Movement's revolt against sexually exploitative images such as adverts and Miss World [...] Questions of cinema, initially at least, were above all questions of politics. (2015: 21)

These political programming strategies and consciousness raising initiatives connected audiences with new ways of thinking, watching and writing about the women's oppression in male-authored cinema and women's causal female objectification in cinema. The programmers set out the task at hand

⁷ In 1973, Marjorie Rosen wrote *Popcorn Venus*, one of the first published books on women in film written from a feminist perspective. Others soon followed, including in 1974, Molly Haskell, *From Reverence to Rape: The Treatment of Women in the Movies* and Joan Mellen, *Women and Their Sexuality in the New Film*. For an analysis of *Popcorn Venus*, see E. Ann Kaplan (1974), *Popcorn Venus: Analyzing the fantasy*. *Jump Cut*, 3: 21-22.

⁸ Interview with Laura Mulvey, 31 January 2017. (See Appendix F).

The whole nature of cinema must be put into question. The dynamics of looking at film must be altered. Women must question the relationship between looker and looked at, spectator and spectacle, exhibitionist and voyeur [...] What would a women's cinema be like? First, it is obvious that the image of women on the screen would be changed (1972).⁹

Women's oppression was seen as not only being enacted through social structures but also through the ideology of cinema itself. Feminist theorists and practitioners began to develop a politics of representation by analysing how meaning is produced in cinema by turning to the dominant film culture, namely: classic Hollywood cinema. At the same time, artists, filmmakers and collectives looked at the possibilities of documentary filmmaking for women's liberation as well as experimenting with aesthetics to alter cinematic modes of representation. The programming and discussion at The Women's Event created the public context for audiences to critically watch films together; to learn by doing, to become active, political spectators, film programmers and critics themselves. Through listening to emergent critical, social and cultural debates orbiting around women's liberation and cinema, the consciousness raising of the movement bolstered this political approach to programming, which set in motion the emergence of a new feminist film theory and practice in dialogue with cinema audiences.

As such, the film programmers helped shape the conditions for writing of a new feminist film scholarship on images of women in male-authored cinema, as well as offering stimulus for historical research on a previously lost histories of women filmmakers. Mulvey remembers her time spent in the BFI library and the painstaking work needed required

I would just to go to the BFI Library in Dean Street and try to find as many films made by women as possible [...] At this point there was no sense of discrimination because films by women were so few and far between. We just wanted them to be programmed together and seen as films made by women without pre-figuring or pre-imaging what it would mean, or what kinds of films we would actually programme in the end. So, it was the work of archaeology to begin with. (2017)

⁹ The Women's Event, Edinburgh Film Festival (1972). From Laura Mulvey's personal archive. (See Appendix A).

Mulvey's reflections on her work as archaeology remains a potent metaphor. The sentiment chimes with this thesis' use of film curation as a Foucauldian archaeological methodology (2002/1972) to excavate the absence of women's material cinema cultures in the film archive. Her archaeological intention (shared by this thesis) offers a clearing of the ground (of sorts): a feminist research project that sets out to restore women's contributions to film history and cinema cultures more broadly.

In the spirit of women's liberation, the film programming focused on retrieving and re-writing herstory back into film history. Speaking to film colleagues and spending time in libraries and film archives enabled the programmers to uncover their own women's history in Hollywood. One of Mulvey's most significant discoveries was a film negative of Dorothy Arzner's film *Dance, Girl, Dance* (1940).¹⁰ It seems no small coincidence that the impact of discovering, viewing and programming *Dance, Girl, Dance* piqued Mulvey's interest in theoretical issues concerning gender and spectatorship. The same could be applied to her subsequent inquiry into woman as spectacle and the erotics of the gaze. The same year as The Women's Event, Mulvey wrote an article entitled, 'You don't know what is happening do you, Mr Jones'. Published in 1973 for *Spare Rib*, Mulvey considered Sigmund Freud's study of the male psyche through an analysis of an exhibition of Allan Jones' sculptures at the Tooth & Sons and Marlborough galleries (2009: 6-13).¹¹ Building on this work, Mulvey went on to develop her ideas (in her words) on 'women's to-be-looked-at-ness' in Hollywood cinema, a conceptual pathway, which culminated in her seminal text, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', published in *Screen* in 1975. Yet what remains missing from Mulvey's trajectory at this moment is a corresponding analysis and connection with her writing to her practice of film programming *Dance, Girl, Dance* at The Women's Event. By re-joining Mulvey's theory of gender and spectatorship with her film programming history with *Dance, Girl, Dance*, I suggest we might be able to link a history of feminist spectatorship theory with a history of feminist film programming and curating as intersecting scholarly practices.¹²

Although there are traces to be found in the historical archive that account for *Dance, Girl, Dance*'s presentation at Edinburgh, the nuances and specificities of the film's exhibition

¹⁰ As an openly lesbian director, 'the "great exception"', as Judith Mayne has argued, Arzner was 'the only woman director who had a large body of work to her credit, and whose career spanned three decades of Hollywood history' (1993:1).

¹¹ 'Fears, Fantasies and the Male Unconscious or 'You Don't Know What is Happening, Do You, Mr Jones?' can be accessed in Mulvey (2009), *Visual and Other Pleasures*, pp. 6-13.

¹² I am grateful to So Mayer for developing the idea of re-connecting Mulvey's spectatorship theory with her film programming and cultural experiences of spectating in the cinema.

histories are still to be written. The question remains where and how to look for evidence. There are clues to be found in a *Spare Rib* review of The Women's Event, written by the London Women's Film Group.¹³ Of particular interest is their account of the atmosphere in the cinema when audiences first encountered *Dance, Girl, Dance*.

Some of the films were so amazing the cinema audience were left laughing and cheering, especially after a scene in which a night-club dancer turns on her drunken, hissing spectators and denounces them at length as pathetic voyeurs. (1972: 34)

The text draws a vivid image of audiences, and of that ephemeral practice, film viewing, at the moment of pleasure and excitement. The audience's responses can be read in marked contrast with the emerging feminist work on the film, which claimed *Dance, Girl, Dance* for feminist film theory and canonised particular feminist readings.¹⁴ A bifurcation which led to the subsequent 'split' in the feminist film movement between theory, practice and audiences. (Later in this chapter, I will revisit these debates that culminated in 1979 at the Edinburgh Film Festival.)

The *Dance, Girl, Dance* nightclub scene in question is one of the most potent cinematic moments for 1970s feminist film theory, as well as Arzner's filmography. Cook writes of it as having 'the force of a pregnant moment' (1975: 10). It happens when Judy O'Brien (Maureen O'Hara) publicly expresses her contempt at the exploitation and abuse of being looked at as an actress. Cook argues that [O'Brien] 'finally turns on her audience in fury and in her long speech fixes them in relation to her critical look' (ibid.). Recounting the pleasure of the audiences present, the *Spare Rib* article points to why Arzner's work was brought to the attention of

¹³ The London Women's Film Group was a feminist film collective formed in January 1972 in response to a notice in the Women's Liberation Newsletter. The group formed for two reasons: to disseminate Women's Liberation ideas, and for women to learn the skills denied them in the film industry. Founder members of the group included Esther Ronay and Claire Johnston. Ronay went on to become a founder member of RWC. For a personal account of the formation and key moments in the evolution of the group, see Barbara Evans (2016), *Rising Up: A memoir of the London Women's Film Group, 1972-1977. Feminist Media Histories*, 2(2): 107-121.

¹⁴ See Claire Johnston (ed) (1975). *The Work of Dorothy Arzner: Towards a Feminist Cinema*. London: British Film Institute. Pam Cook (1975), *Approaching the Work of Dorothy Arzner*. In: *The Work of Dorothy Arzner: Towards Feminist Cinema*, edited by Claire Johnston, pp. 9-18. London: British Film Institute. Claire Johnston (1988), *Dorothy Arzner: critical strategies*. In: *Feminism and film theory*, edited by Constance Penley, pp. 36-45. London: Routledge. Judith Mayne (1994), *Directed by Dorothy Arzner*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

feminist theorists in the 1970s, because her films were considered important for their criticism of Hollywood filmmaking ‘from within’. Cook continues, ‘The place of the audience *in* the film and the audience *of* the film is disturbed, creating a break between them and the ideology of woman as spectacle, object of their desire (ibid.). Her textual analysis brings to the fore the processes that links women’s active, political spectatorship as a feminist curating practice. Historically denied opportunities to see themselves on screen, women’s audiences had to become in situ feminist film programmers, to purposively select against the white patriarchal film canon. Mulvey’s work (and others) in the film archive to find neglected historical material, piecing a narrative of women’s film history together through programming, criticism and discussion illustrates my point that in 1972, contextualisation was a key strategy of feminist curation as a form of research and consciousness-raising.

The Ruined and Fragmentary Map

Even though there is documentation held in Edinburgh’s film archive, I have also had to piece together this history from ephemera and people’s memories from elsewhere. This is because historically, film festivals are fleeting, existing in the moment and have often maintained fewer archives than other institutions. As such, the status of the evidence remains fragile and incomplete: a situation that prompts me to reflect on the ways in which the passage of time might have changed people’s memories and access to remembering that history. Working with such materiality creates a precarious predicament, presenting ongoing methodological and epistemological issues about sources and ‘facts’ and what ways to look for evidence.¹⁵ My analysis of the ‘Being Ruby Rich’: Film Curation as Activism and Advocacy’ Symposium (see Chapter 3) draws attention to how certain memories, people, events, practices and narratives of history are remembered and remediated to suit the context of the present moment. When reconstructing histories of feminist film programming and curating through practice-based research, personal and collective memories often only emerge when live events or oral history is being conducted. On another day, a different set of responses might be forthcoming. When I asked Mulvey about her memories of the 1979 Feminism and Film conference, it became apparent that she had difficulty in recalling specific details. It transpired that this was due to the fractious nature of the event: a situation, Mulvey disclosed, that was difficult for her. ‘This

¹⁵ Jackie Stacey’s methodology, combining theories of spectatorship within feminist film criticism with work on gender and audiences from a cultural studies perspective has acted as touchpoint. Stacey (1994), *Star Gazing: Hollywood Cinema and Female Spectatorship*. London and New York: Routledge.

happens so much in any kind of political movement’, she said. Adding, that ‘1972 had this wonderful spirit of utopianism [...] by the time 1979 came along there seemed to be lots of different warring groups’ (2017).

As I try to re-construct a programming narrative of The Women’s Event, my own archival research has proved methodologically and empirically challenging for the reasons already outlined. To reiterate, a methodological predicament that remains a central concern of this thesis is specifically, what methods of analysis might be used to capture the ephemerality of feminist screening practices? The historical material that I have been able to access has been generated by talking and listening to Mulvey. As a way to gain a wider understanding of The Women’s Event legacy today, there remains a need, as Knowles argues, to keep excavating more memories so that we might gain a relatable and collective appreciation of the feminist and avant-garde histories of that time.¹⁶ As such, the archive’s gaps and absences, only remembered in the act of recovery, continues to put pressure on the feminist present. These fissures ask questions of the archive about where that knowledge might come from if the ephemerality of film programming and curating, as a spatial and temporal practice, remains undocumented.

During our conversation, Mulvey shared her personal archive of The Women’s Event, which suggests there was an early recognition that what she was doing was significant and hence that there was a need to keep a record of it. Yet as the ‘Being Ruby Rich: Film Curation as Activism and Advocacy’ Symposium has exposed, memory is unpredictable, subjective and context specific. Mulvey’s memories are a case in point. Her recollections prompted me to consider Mulvey herself as a living archive, as Marita Sturken calls it, ‘a technology of memory’ (1997:9). How Mulvey’s memory is embodied, carried in the body as a witness, a vehicle for remembrance ‘for the production of cultural memory’ is at issue here (ibid.). Her reflections speak to the materiality of feminist theory and practice in the 1970s and her memories offer rich source material when considering Edinburgh’s 1972 historical, political, critical and practical underpinnings.

By 1979, ideological debates over the role of theory, practice and audiences became a lightning rod and moment of impassioned debate for the feminist film movement. The Feminist and Film conference brought together theorists, historians, programmers, distributors, exhibitors, critics, practitioners and audiences to debate and assess the decade’s feminist film

¹⁶ In Spring 2022, Edinburgh Film Festival issued an open call for curators to respond to the 2022 festival theme signalling the 50th anniversary of the 1972 Women’s Film Festival. ‘Reframing the Gaze: Experiments in Women’s Filmmaking, 1972 to Now’ marked that germinal moment, as well as taking inspiration from a broader landscape of the festival during the 1970s, particularly in its attention to feminist film theory and avant-garde filmmaking.

and video making practices and developments in film theory.¹⁷ The programmers presented new work by Sally Potter's *Thriller* (1979), Michelle Citron's *Daughter Rite* (1978), Sue Clayton and Jonathan Curling's *Song of the Shirt* (1979) and Jan Worth's *Taking A Part* (1979). Writing in *Time Out*, Mandy Merck and Helen Mackintosh offered this summary

Neither the varying theoretical perspectives nor the films themselves went undisputed. Indeed 'heterogeneity' became the watch word of the week, as successive arguments over the place of "theory and practice", formal experiment and accessibility, filmmaking, film watching, and film criticism were enthusiastically (if not vehemently) aired. (1979: 22–23)

I will elaborate on the cultural and theoretical significance of Edinburgh in the 1970s later in this chapter. I will also reflect on its impact, in the 1980s, on community cinemas such as the Rio and the proliferation of activist feminist film programming and curating at independent cinemas more broadly.

On the status of the evidence, there is an artefact from 1972 that remains intriguing because it has vanished. A film about The Women's Event was commissioned by BBC2 for a late-night cultural television programme. This was produced by some of the women who attended the festival, including members of the London Women's Film Group. Mulvey and Johnston were interviewed explaining the purpose and context of the festival by way of introducing a selection of film clips. The film, which stands as a valuable piece of visual evidence about the festival's programming ethos as well as potentially capturing images from the event's discussions and networking events, has since been lost. It is a case study of how Mulvey brought filmmaking and curating together within two major institutions: the Edinburgh film festival and the BBC. Yet both institutions have neglected this important document. What we do know about it comes from oral history and as previously mentioned, Katharine Kamleitner's unpublished PhD. If we cannot reconstruct the film, what does its absence tell us about Mulvey's reputation as a film programmer, and how do we evaluate Mulvey's contribution to feminism as a film programmer when aspects of that history remains partial and material traces of it remain lost.

¹⁷ For a contextual account of 1970s feminist film and video practice and collective cultural activisms, see Lucy Reynolds (2017), 'Whose History?' Feminist Advocacy and Experimental Film and Video. In: *Other Cinemas: Politics, culture and experimental film in the 1970s*, edited by Sue Clayton and Laura Mulvey, pp. 138-149. London and New York: I.B. Tauris.

In the 1970s, when women's film festivals first appeared, they were experienced by audiences in the moment. As such, these cultural activities were rooted in a particular time, place, space and socio-political and historical context. Preserving an archive for the future was neither considered of urgent and necessary. This begs the question: what kinds of knowledge continues to be missing from women's film programming and curating, and what new methodologies and methods are needed to uncover film histories from absence. The 'ruined and fragmentary map' lingers as an imaginary object and textual marker that points to the often consciously erased indexical account of feminist film programming and curating in the cultural history of cinema. This is an absented history of traces that have all but disappeared. This is because there have been few ways to document the loss due to the ephemerality of the practice, and few ways to theorise the practice because affect and ephemera have historically been disregarded and undervalued. Yet, as I shall illustrate—and as my tape-slide film later reveals—the 'ruined and fragmentary map' offers creative stimulus as a reparative strategy and critical framework to speculate on the archive's feelings and counter-histories.

I turn to Jan Worth, as a case study of a filmmaker programmed by Mulvey at the 1979 Feminist and Film Conference, and her film *Taking A Part* now almost impossible to access. Unlike Potter and Mulvey, Worth has not been widely remembered in the canon of feminist avant-garde cinema that germinated in the 1970s. A situation which calls attention to the politics of women's film distribution and exhibition and the cultural importance for the project of film feminism to keep historical women's political cinema in circulation today. This remains a concern for Worth, and for programmers, curators and audiences, as *Taking A Part* and her next film *Doll's Eye* (1982) have not been seen in the cinema for several decades. As with much historical women's cinema, I first had to read about *Taking A Part* in a book before I was able to see the film. In *Chick Flicks: theories and memories of the feminist film movement*, B. Ruby Rich includes Worth's film in her account of Edinburgh 1979 (1998: 164). My memory of reading about the film was triggered by accident when I came across a poster for *Doll's Eye* whilst spending time in the Rio's archive. This unexpected discovery prompted me to do further research. Although I recognised Worth's name, what exactly did I know about the film? Reading the copy, I discovered that it was about the lives of three women in the context of Thatcher's Britain, but why had I not seen the film in the cinema? As I took the poster out of its tube and felt its thick matt paper, I noticed it had remained in excellent condition: a time capsule from the past, untouched and undisturbed for decades. My Foucauldian archaeological dig in the archive meant that I needed to (metaphorically) go into the crypt. Finding the poster was like opening the vault to re-imagine the film's premiere at the Rio in 1983. I wondered

what the Rio's feminist audiences thought of the film. What debates and conversations did the screening engender.¹⁸ I decided to try and find Worth online and ask her for an interview. Now working as a script consultant, writer and filmmaker, her memories of 1979 chime with documented accounts on the conference's 'split' between *cinema vérité*/grassroots documentary and avant-garde/feminist film theory film. Her reflections offer an account of what happened at and to the festival over the decade

What I remember about Edinburgh that year was the apparent division between the film makers and the academics, the supposed 'purveyors of meaning', that was being enacted at that time. After *Taking A Part* had been accepted at the festival, I was then summoned to meet a panel of female academics that were there to present the film. Their intention was to 'properly' theorise both its form and content in preparation for the festival event. The assumption was that I, the filmmaker, had somehow, maybe intuitively, created this piece of work, without conscious thought. For this piece of work to be understood, and in some ways legitimized, then others of a different profession were needed to do that work. This played out at the festival itself, both practically in terms who was invited and some cases who was paid to attend and who spoke on the various panels. I think it was the time when the place of film studies in universities was struggling to be recognized and many female academics were working in insecure jobs and looking for legitimacy. It was also a struggle for control of the narrative – which continues to this day.¹⁹

What I find striking about Worth's account is that it frankly speaks to the 'split' that constellated around theory, practice and audience accessibility. It also offers insight into the selection committee's rigorous approach to programming. In the context of festival programming today, such a method might seem opaque, almost archaic. Yet there is a materiality of knowledge and programming know-how to be gained from listening to Worth's memories. As her account presents a different context to just what was at stake at end of the 1970s for those feminist theorists who were beginning to be recognised and supported by academia. What was gained

¹⁸ In 1983 *The Other Cinema* premiered *Doll's Eye* at the Rio. Worth and viewers had to wait until 2020 for *Doll's Eye* to receive its DVD and Blu-ray release by the BFI, although this was not a theatrical release, nor a release in its own right. The film was added as an 'extra' to accompany Tony Richardson's film *Mademoiselle* (1966). Unlike *Mademoiselle*, *Doll's Eye* had no newly commissioned audio-commentary or writing; rather, Worth was invited to reflect on her own film and the context in which it was made. Available at: <https://shop.bfi.org.uk/pre-order-mademoiselle-blu-ray.html> (accessed 20 March 2022).

¹⁹ Email correspondence with Jan Worth, 9 October 2011.

and what was lost within the orthodoxy and rigour of this theoretically informed academic programming, as well legitimised within feminist film theory as a discourse. Worth's memories reveal an awkward positionality within that matrix, and I am left wondering if I had not found that poster at the Rio and did not follow the trail and find Worth and speak with her, would my opinion of this high theoretical moment of film programming at Edinburgh remain almost utopian.

What Worth reveals in her feelings of alienation, is what Cvetkovich calls 'an archive of feelings' (2003: 7). What comes through in Worth's words is trauma as an affective experience, which Cvetkovich argues 'can be unspeakable and unrepresentable and because it is marked by forgetting and dissociation, it often seems to leave behind no records at all' (ibid.). Not only does Worth's trauma convey a repository of feelings not expressed, but it also reveals the practices of neglect and forgetting, namely: the production and reception of her work subsequently. For example, her way of thinking about her film practice not being aligned with the academic programming agenda at Edinburgh. Worth has disappeared from view, she has not been championed by critics and film programmers in the same way as Potter (see Fowler, 2009; Mayer, 2009). Film programming can also silence and erase. Filmmakers can be overlooked and marginalised in citation practices and programming involved in the canonisation of film history. In the struggle for reputation and legitimacy, as Worth's account reveals, certain filmmakers and filmmaking practices became assigned to the crypt. Worth's statement shades Mulvey's understanding of film programming as a generative, collective critical practice. It also shows the affective collateral experience for filmmakers caught up in the crossfire of the festival's programming ethos in the 1970s, which as Knowles' interview with Myles identified, was driven by theory and critical discourse (2017: 299–306).

Returning to Mulvey's activities as a film programmer in the 1970s which continues to press upon the present, these practices remain a 'lost' history. As is the braid of her scholarly link which actively dialogued with her filmmaking and theoretical scholarship. I argue that Mulvey's film programming, consciously and unconsciously shaped her way of thinking as a theorist, spectator, activist and practitioner, as she made the transition to working in academia in the 1980s at the London College of Printing and early 1990s, where she was appointed Lecturer in English and American studies at the University of East Anglia. Moreover, her collaboration with Wollen did shift her focus towards theorising (post structuralism and

semiotics) and the making of feminist avant-garde film.²⁰ Yet her interest in film programming, political experiments and cultures of radical cinema more broadly continued when she became involved with The Other Cinema and efforts to get the cinema's distribution and exhibition activities off the ground.²¹ The question remains, what was the collateral when Mulvey moved into academia. Where is this archive of Mulvey's programming at film festivals during the 1970s, and her work on the management committee with The Other Cinema. It is an absented archive that remains shared in the memories and experiences of those who were there. Still, in the recovery of Mulvey, other histories of Mulvey's contemporaries, for instance writer and filmmaker Sue Clayton, are still in the process of being recuperated and re-written (see Clayton, 2017: 18-21).

Influences and contexts: 1970s political landscape, women's liberation workshops and moving image practice

To further understand the intersections and resonances between feminist history, theory, filmmaking and practice, this section will offer an overview of the material and political underpinnings shaping Mulvey's way of thinking and practice at the time. This is to situate the development of feminist film programming and curating in history and contextualise the theoretical and socio-cultural moment in the 1970s. Within these historical markers, in the doing, I propose a feminist re-reading of the past, narrated in the light of the present. This section presents a different history responding to the archive's absences, contradictions and gaps: the unexpected pathways I have been led down, with their reverberations and affective encounters.

The mobilisation of WLM in the United Kingdom, with its growing sense of collective strength saw itself as part of a general mood of socio-political unrest and working-class struggle across western Europe and the United States. Initiated by the Paris student revolts of May 1968 that saw cultural and political transformations rise out of, and further impact on global protests

²⁰ For a contemporary assessment of Mulvey and Wollen's theory writing and filmmaking practice, see Oliver Fuke (ed) (2023), *The Films of Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen: Scripts, Working Documents, Interpretation*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing. Also, Nicolas Helm-Grovas (2018), *Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen: Theory and Practice, Aesthetics and Politics, 1963-1983*, unpublished PhD., Royal Holloway: University of London.

²¹ A key distribution and exhibition institution of the 1970s, The Other Cinema was one of three political distributors, the others being Politkino and Liberation Films. Set up as a trust and a management council in 1970, The Other Cinema had input from key people involved in the era's independent film culture, including Mulvey. The Other Cinema took two key British feminist avant-garde films into distribution, *Riddles of the Sphinx* (1977) and *Doll's Eye* (1982). Also of note, Charles Rubenstein, the Rio general manager (1991-2014), came to work at the Rio from The Other Cinema. For a personal account of The Other Cinema's history and political aims, see Nick Hart-Williams (2017), *Memories of The Other Cinema*. In: *Other Cinemas: Politics, Culture and Experimental Film in the 1970s*, edited by Sue Clayton and Laura Mulvey, pp. 273-279. London and New York: I.B. Tauris.

on the left, women's liberation joined other political and civil rights movements including the Black liberation movement,²² the gay liberation movement²³ and class struggle in opposition to the grand narratives²⁴ of Western philosophy.²⁵ Women's political movements had been campaigning for legislative change and equality since the female suffrage movement from the mid 19th century through to the early part of the 20th century. In the 1970s, women's liberation, combined with the urgency of the task ahead, concentrated the minds of political women impacted by the struggle for civil rights and the global student protests against United States' military involvement in Vietnam. These cultural, social and political uprisings had ongoing reverberations as women and other minority groups began to re-shape how they were thinking about themselves as political and social subjects.

By the end of the 1960s, British socialist feminists began to understand their oppression under patriarchy as part of a global fight against late capitalism and legacy of Empire and imperialism. Women became conscious the deeper levels of oppression in culture and society: a more systemic structuring of gendered oppression that functioned to position women as other, within patriarchal discourses and the political left (Rowbotham, 1973).²⁶ Political women began to question long-held patriarchal belief systems that kept women in repressive structural and psychic condition. Of the 'woman question' initially addressed in *New Left Review* by Juliet Mitchell in 1966, she wrote, 'Women: The Longest Revolution'. In which Mitchell confronts

²² The modern Black Liberation movement began in 1955 in Alabama, where Rosa Parks refused to move to the back of a segregated bus. The movement was composed of the Black Panther Party, founded in 1966. The organisation's programme was one of war against the United States government. For a contemporary assessment of the Black Panther movement, see Joshua Bloom and Waldo E. Martin Jr. (2016), *Black against empire: The history and the politics of the Black Panther Party*. Berkeley: University of California Press. The British Black Panthers were formed in 1968 by the Nigerian playwright Obi E. Egbuna. For a Black feminist insight into Black women's activism and agency in British 20th century history, see Beverley Bryan, Stella Dadzie and Suzanne Scafe (1985), *Heart of the race: Black women's lives in Britain*. London: Verso.

²³ The modern gay liberation movement began as a response to a police raid on the Stonewall Inn in New York City, June 1969. The riots that erupted marked a shift in gay and lesbian political activism in the United States and in Europe. In the 1970s, gay liberation sprung from that moment of rage and activism. In 1971, the Gay Liberation Front was founded in London. For the London context, see Gillian Murphy (2023), *The Gay Liberation Front*. Available at: <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/lsehistory/2023/04/25/the-gay-liberation-front/> (accessed 13 August 2023).

²⁴ Grand narratives, or metanarratives, were terms introduced by post-modernist writer Jean-François Lyotard (1984) in the 1970s to critique the dominant narratives of modern foundationalist epistemologies and Marxist socio-economic narratives, including Western Enlightenment and the belief in the mark of progress as a linear trajectory of history. This collapse in the belief in the teleological truth of history and grand narratives paved the way for a postmodern shift, with deconstructive thinking that included new feminist social theories, which sought to develop fresh analysis on language, gender, sexual difference, embodiment, power and political resistance.

²⁵ 1968 events in France had a profound impact on British film culture, which became politicised through French critics and filmmakers and as a result of the influential film journal, *Cahiers du cinéma*. The role of French film discourse in events related to May 1968 is covered in detail by Sylvia Harvey (1978), *May '68 and Film Culture*. London: BFI Publishing.

²⁶ In their analysis of the struggles of 1960s socialist feminism, Anna Coote and Beatrix Campbell argue that the gender inequality found in left politics at that time provided 'an excellent breeding ground' for feminism to thrive as ... 'men led the marches and made the speeches and expected their female comrades to lick envelopes and listen' (1987: 5).

the problem of women's absence 'in the practices and in the theories' of socialism (1984: 17). Drawing attention to the failure of Marxist discourse to resolve the problems of women's condition through theory, she argues that this disjuncture led to the rise of the women's movement.

The problem of the subordination of women and the need for liberation was recognized by all the great socialist thinkers in the nineteenth century. It is part of the classical heritage of the revolutionary movement. Yet today, the problem has become a subsidiary, if not an invisible element in the preoccupations of socialists. Perhaps no other major issue has been so forgotten. (ibid.:19)

By situating gender as a category of analysis, Mitchell advocated for a new women's consciousness, transformed by a socialist analysis of women's oppression.²⁷ Using psychoanalysis to understand women's oppression and liberation, her scholarship contributed to an emerging body of knowledge embedded within the practices and ideology of the women's movement (see Mitchell, 1975). Political women began the intellectual and cultural work of re-centring women's voices and experiences in history. Rooted in this social, political and cultural moment of women's liberation, feminist politics, theory and practice converged.

For many women, participation in the WLM was about direct action and transforming all aspects of daily life through new ways of thinking and being. 'It was this knowledge of radical politics', write Anna Coote and Beatrix Campbell, 'combined with a sense of exclusion from it, which led many women to feminism' (1987: 7). Socialist women witnessed their structural and lived oppression in relation to materialism and power, which, they argued, led to a constraint in women's economic potential, as well as their sexual exploitation and historical invisibility. Hilary Wainwright (2013: 28) recalls how her participation in the WLM not only made her conscious of the ways in which subservience was reproduced through inaction and passivity, but also how she could develop with other women a collective power to transform each other's lives and circumstances.

Moreover, at the same time, Mulvey has written how feminism introduced her to psychoanalytic theory, 'which transformed but also, in retrospect, preserved [her] *cinophilia*, channelling [her] devotion towards ideas and words and giving it a political edge' (2009: xv).

²⁷ Mitchell expands these ideas more fully in 1971, see *Woman's Estate*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Applied to multiple dimensions, this new way of thinking and existing transformed the cultural, economic and theoretical ways women connected with each other as well as men. Consciousness-raising meetings, friendship circles, film workshops, collective work, reading groups and political gatherings: these shared learning spaces and activities were where women's liberation ideas were discussed, practiced and collectively formed.

London in the 1970s sheltered a significant number of intellectual, political, cultural and social meeting points between consciousness-raising groups, workshops, direct action and creative and collective practice. The East End, historically a place of political radicalism, saw these convergences manifest to significant effect in Hackney, as local residents Sheila Rowbotham (2021) and Ian Sinclair (2009) have recalled. This expansion of politics saw the interweaving of women's lives and collective activism with art, politics and cultural production. Local networking was enacted through community bookshops, theatre and printshops, film and video groups and feminist book publishing.²⁸ Mulvey remembers the WLM 'brought with it a new approach to political organisation that was based on small groups...closely connected to their communities, a rejection of leadership and an insistence on women's non-hierarchical, collective voice of protest' (2015: 156). These places of support were where new knowledges, strategies, practices and activism came into being and could be shared, enacted and disseminated. As Amy Tobin contends, these spaces and structures connected

...women and groups through mail correspondence, newsletters, conferences, workshops, seminars and exhibitions. In both small- and large-scale gatherings women got together to talk and think, making themselves accessible to one another in a public sphere otherwise dominated by conventional images of women and the voices of men. (2016: 120)

Identified here is the idea that women were working with across new media and resources to make visible the ideas and central concepts of the WLM.

²⁸ In 1975, the Lenthall Road Workshop was initiated by three women as a community screen printing and photography project in Hackney. See, *Women on Screens: Printmaking, photography and community activism at Lenthall Road Workshop 1970s-1990s*. 14 May – 31 August 2019. Hackney Museum. Available at: <https://hackney-museum.hackney.gov.uk/objects-stories/past-exhibitions/> (accessed 15 September 2023). Sheba Feminist Publishers was a Dalston based feminist collective founded in 1981 by six women with media backgrounds. Sue O'Sullivan joined the collective in 1986. For her memories of that time, see O'Sullivan (2023), *Love of Sheba*. Available at: <https://howl-uk.org/love-of-sheba/> (accessed 15 September 2023).

In London, as Mulvey recalls in 2019, women needed to join a local group to engage with women's liberation politics.²⁹ An umbrella organisation of the movement was the London Women's Liberation Workshop (LWLW). Initially formed in 1969, by the end of the 1970s, the LWLW numbered more than 300 groups and organisations.³⁰ The History Group, a reading and study group, existed under the aegis of the LWLW, with members including Mary Kelly, Sally Alexander, Rosalind Delmar, Juliet Mitchell, Elizabeth Cowie as well as Mulvey.³¹ Some of members in November 1970, took part in the public protest against the Miss World competition at the Royal Albert Hall, which marked the first action of civil disobedience by the WLM.³² Following this, The History Group wrote, 'The Spectacle is Vulnerable: Miss World, 1970', a first-hand account of the protest published in *Shrew*, the LWLW's newsletter. Drawing on Louis Althusser's (1969) theories of ideology and representation and what Mulvey would later call, the vulnerability of the spectacle (Mulvey 2009: 3), this collectively written article drew a direct line between images of women and ideology as a system of representation. A few years later in 1972 Claire Johnston took the idea further to link violence against women as 'spectacle' with the violence enacted against them in everyday lives. In this way, Mulvey and Johnston started to challenge and analyse how oppression was inscribed in and through language, image and ideology. (I return to these theoretical points regarding Johnston in the next chapter).

When I spoke with Mulvey in 2017, she impressed upon me how the programming at The Women's Event was archaeological. She compared their work to the recovery and reparation work undertaken by the feminist publishing house Virago.³³ Both were collective endeavours

²⁹ Laura Mulvey. Email to author, 24 September 2019.

³⁰ As a loose network of mainly women-only groups, the LWLW was mostly locally-based, with some members connecting with other left campaigning groups. In its first year, the group began to publish *Shrew*, a newsletter which was sent to different women's groups and circulated at workshops to edit and disseminate as the movement's number grew and issues widened. See Eve Setch (2002), *The Face of Metropolitan Feminism: The London Women's Liberation Workshop 1969-1979. Twentieth Century British History*.13(2): 171-190.

³¹ Julieth Mitchell and Rosalind Delmar set up The History Group, following the National Women's Liberation Movement Conference in 1970. Following her initial involvement, Sally Alexander went on to form the Pimlico Group and stopped attending meetings of the History Group in 1971. The Family Studies Group that followed The History Group included Parveen Adams and Elizabeth Cowie who went onto establish the feminist journal *m/f*. (Reynolds, 2017: 148).

³² Women infiltrated the venue and disrupted the competition by throwing stink bombs and bags of flour towards the stage. Calling attention to the objectification of women's bodies within culture and society, the women wrote the slogan, 'We're not beautiful, we're not ugly, we're angry'. This action was not a protest against the contestants, but the ideology behind the contest itself, the activists explained in Coote and Campbell (1987:15-16).

³³ Founded in 1973 by Carmen Callil, Virago (initially called Spare Rib Books) aimed to publish contemporary women's literature. Later in 1978 the feminist publishing company introduced the Virago Modern Classics, as a way to celebrate women's writing as well as to establish a canon of women's writing which would redefine what we understand by the 'classic'. Through private and public practices of women reading, thinking, writing and working together, collectives like Virago converged to shape a women's centred intellectual and creative

where feminists had to invent new cultural practices to activate and imagine women's history and liberation differently. The early 1970s was a period notes Mandy Merck, in which 'feminist theoretical inquiry was largely conducted in reading groups, conferences, occasional extramural classes, and a variety of women's and Left publications' (2007: 3). 'Nothing was institutionally available', remembers Griselda Pollock. 'We were making it up as we went along' (2015: 15).³⁴ Along with this, collectively *Virago*, *Shrew*, *Spare Rib*, the *Feminist Review* and *Red Rag* took on the political work of disseminating the ideas and practices of women's liberation to an increased wider readership. The fields of women's studies and feminist film studies were nascent inside of academia; for example in 1978 Elizabeth Cowie, Parveen Adams and Rosalind Coward co-founded feminist journal *m/f* which moved away from a materialist analysis towards a focus on gender as a cultural category.³⁵ As previously noted, these networks and activities of collectives, reading groups, political organising and protest provided vital spaces where feminist pedagogy and epistemology began to be produced.

Returning to Tobin's observation about networks and infrastructures, the History Group met regularly in the intimacies of each other's homes across London; a detail which offers a sense of the domestic, private realm shaping this grassroots movement which was in the process of becoming. Their meetings functioned as intellectual and political spaces to read and discuss the sources of women's oppression and liberation. Reading Freud, Frederick Engels, Karl Marx and Claude Lévi-Strauss alongside de Beauvoir and women's liberation literature, the group explored the ways that feminist thought could offer a radical approach to ideas to transform society, literature, art and politics. Of which Delmar recalls

The mix of intellectual work and activism was typical of the Group – we were as likely to read and discuss Lévi-Strauss and Engels as “The Redstockings Manifesto” – and we also debated bread and butter questions like ‘who does the housework and why?’ Some women were hostile towards us because of our perceived intellectualism but many women on the left felt excluded from theoretical debate and were hungry for such discussions. (2005)³⁶

community in which the sharing of new knowledge and life experiences were encouraged as a form of restitution and strategy of action. See *Virago Press archive*. Available at: <https://collections.reading.ac.uk/special-collections/collections/virago-press-archive/> (accessed 25 May 2023).

³⁴ In 1981, Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock wrote a germinal feminist critique of art history, see *Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

³⁵ See *m/f* digitised archive. Available at: <https://www.mffeministjournal.co.uk/> (accessed 30 May 2023).

³⁶ For a more complete account of the era that includes Delmar, Mary Kelly, Laura Mulvey and other voices as well as intergenerational and intersectional responses, see Kelly (2015, 26 March), 'A secret agreement: An era

Identified here by Delmar, is the sheer diversity of literature beyond what I initially had read myself. Reading was in conjunction with action and protest in the public sphere while at the same time juggling the demands of childcare and the domestic, revealing the hidden pressures on women's time which was often not their own.

Actions and campaigns outside the group, such as the Miss World protest, strike action for equal pay and the organisation of community childcare informed discussion within the group. These connections between theory, experience and activism were consciousness-raising activities that transformed women's lives and thought. These new ways of thinking and being together through self-organised groups, as previously noted, had a significant impact on women's creative practice and community organising. Much of this work was aligned with other workshops and film organisations engaged with the processes and strategies for women's liberation and the political left.³⁷ Such groups and collectives set about presenting and distributing their own films and videos, exploring every aspects of their lives by oppositional approaches to the media, often by addressing political, historical and social subjects in their work.³⁸ Mulvey recalls the intersection of feminism, socialism and Marxist analysis that influenced and offered a context for women's groups and their cultural practices to flourish.

Feminism understood the cultural and political to be intrinsically inseparable, for instance 'the personal' and 'the political' were interlinked and, in commodity capitalism, patriarchal culture and economic exploitation were indivisible, oppressive to women in both everyday life and through the circulation of sexualised images of women in the media and entertainment market. (2015: 157)

defined by the events of 1968'. This is part of a repository of documents and curated conversation. In: *On the Passage of a Few People Through a Rather Brief Period of Time*. [Online document]. Tate.

³⁷ In the 1960s, a radical re-thinking of socialism by the New Left resulted in socialist and Marxist theories informing many aspects of social and cultural investigations. These, in turn, shaped a new critical space for theory and practice. Male-authored intellectual leadership was provided and widely recognised as coming through *New Left Review*, which supported writers such as E.P. Thompson, Stuart Hall and Raymond Williams. Socialist feminists such as Mitchell and Rowbotham were committed to thinking through a class and feminist lens.

³⁸ Margaret Dickinson argues that these workshops began with a few like-minded people coming together based on shared objectives and an engagement with a collaborative and co-operative ethos. They were 'small enterprises,' she notes, 'concerned simultaneously with production, distribution and exhibition of films' (1999: 41).

The feminist film movement of the 1970s set out to bring these realities to the screen through film programming and discussion, while at the same time writing new theory on women's symbolic and social filmic representations.

Issues pertaining to women's liberation were reflected in activist documentaries made by film and video collectives, access workshops and co-operatives. For instance, Liberation Films, one of the first collectives established, addressed issues of gender and representation through production, exhibition and distributing political films.³⁹ A selection of these women's liberation documentaries, for example *A Woman's Place* (1971) by Liberation Films (including founder member Sue Crockford who was also a member of the Belsize Lane Women's Group) went on to be programmed at the 1972 Women's Event in Edinburgh. The documentary captured the first National Women's Liberation Conference in 1970 and the first Women's Liberation march that took place in London in 1971. The London Women's Film Group festival report for *Spare Rib* provides insight into how the film was received by its first audience.

Much of 'A WOMAN'S PLACE', a documentary about the Movement in this country was filmed by men. It includes some very unsympathetic interviewing, confuses the issues of the women's movement but it does highlight the difference of approach between men and women filmmakers. (1972: 34)

The critical tone of the report signals the urgent debates that audiences were having about women's liberation, the role of women's filmmaking practice and the politics of representation. These were issues that the London Women's Film Group and other political film groups to which they called attention and agitated against to create change.⁴⁰ While researching these interconnecting histories, I came across a link to watch *A Woman's Place* online. To my surprise, I saw Esther Ronay's name appear in the closing credits, as the film's assistant editor. Towards the end of the 1970s, Ronay became closely associated with the Rio, serving on the management committee as well as a founding member of the RWC. Her name links The

³⁹ Liberation Films was founded in 1968 under the name Angry Arts. 'They saw the screening of films,' writes Ed Webb Ingall, 'as a means to open up a discussion, developing points of interest, identifying areas of concern that would help bring about social change' (2017: 131).

⁴⁰ Another group whose history remains connected to The Women's Event was The Tufnell Park Women's Liberation Workshop. Their film, *Women Are You Satisfied with Your Life* (1971), was presented at the festival. Moreover, the Sheffield Film Co-op, formed in 1973, was equally inspired by the political aspirations of the WLM. Margaret Dickinson (1999) has written extensively on these oppositional film histories and cultures of the 1960s and 1970s. Her oral history work on the Sheffield Film Co-op, Liberation Films and Black Audio Collective has acted as a touchpoint for my oral history work and crucial to my understanding of a more complete picture of collective, oppositional filmmaking practices in the 1970s.

Women's Event, the London Women's Film Group with the women's liberation workshops in London and the feminist screening practices at the Rio. Of this discovery, I am reminded of Carolyn Steedman writes about the archive; the archive is about 'longing and appropriation... it is a place where a whole world, a social order, may be imagined by the recurrence of a name in a register, through a scrap of paper, or some other little piece of flotsam' (2001: 81). Although I was unable to interview Ronay for this thesis, her presence in the archive has left a paper trail of prompts and diversions. This in turn has helped me map histories, places, peoples and practices I might have otherwise missed.

Drawing down the lessons from the above, what emerges is the making visible of what had been invisible, which in turn translated into women's screening practices, including CDF. As Sue Clayon and Mulvey note the crosscurrents between women's liberation, feminist political theory and women's creative practice marked a cultural shift that prompted 'a search for a new way of articulating issues around language, class, gender and power' (2017: 4). An intervention they write, that 'put so many creative and intellectual forces into play' (ibid.). Yet when considering how to approach excavating and archiving the creative and intellectual histories of 1970s feminist film programming and curating through practice-based research, the evidence remains compelling. This is because these histories linger through oral history and ephemera. This, in turn, impacts what methods to use when addressing these different historical levels. What has survived is canonicity, male-authored films, *auteurism*, publications and journals. What remains on the periphery is theorising of feminist programming and curating, and film programming as practice know-how. As already noted, the question remains about knowing where to look for evidence and how to consider what kinds of historical knowledges and its status lie within the archive. What we can say is that feminist film programming and curating were shaped by emergent ideas and struggle coming from the intersecting discourses of women's liberation, gay liberation and civil rights globally circulating post 1968.

In addition, the impact of semiotics, Marxist and psychoanalytic turns of the 1970s—ideas that called attention to the ways in which women were represented, both symbolically and socially—were equally significant. Women's bodies became a locus of ideological and material oppression. Patriarchal culture was theoretically and actively contested for its capitalist, exploitative and erotic investment in the circulation of women's images. These new lines of enquiry focused on feminist critique of Hollywood cinema paralleled with an emergent feminist film theory, practice and audience. Women's liberation was a political, ideological and social struggle asking theoretical questions.

In conjunction with women's liberation activism and theorising, as well as the development of a 'counter-cinema', this significant moment was marked by the first English translations of contemporary French thinkers, including Barthes,⁴¹ Foucault,⁴² Althusser⁴³ and Jacques Lacan.⁴⁴ These new translations (which, as previously noted were read by The History Group) helped shape the formation of intellectual alliances between feminist film theory and practice to emerge. For as Leshu Torchin argues, in the 1970s, feminism, film studies and activism were historically enmeshed (2015: 141).

Seminal Writings Informing and Doing Practice-Based Research

Mulvey urges us to take a closer look at 'how ideas are formulated in relation to *when*', namely: 'the material underpinnings' of history and the context within which theory is written (2009: 170). To gain a wider understanding of the decade's material underpinnings and appreciate how feminist theories of thought came to shape 1970s and 1980s feminist moving image practice, this section identifies some of the key literature behind feminist thinking, which has subsequently come to shape and inform CDF's curatorial practice. In this section, I focus briefly on a few significant figures in Western feminist thought who wrote foundational women's liberation texts. I do so to underpin the thinking from the period, to understand how feminism has evolved and its legacies that continue to preoccupy the present, albeit in imperfect, messy and complex ways. I should also add that, while assembling this literature review, I came across some surprising connections between CDF, the Rio and the writers in focus. Encounters which to me felt like an affective, embodied meeting with the feminist past.

To begin, a key figure in women's liberation political theory was Shulamith Firestone. In 1970, she published *The Dialectic of Sex: The case for feminist revolution*, where she re-read Engels, Marx, Freud and de Beauvoir to put forward a socialist analysis of the deep rootedness

⁴¹ Roland Barthes (1915-1980) was a French essayist and social and literary critic who explored social theory, anthropology and semiotics, and the science of symbols structuring the ideologies of society. His work impacted the intellectual movements of structuralism and post-structuralism.

⁴² Michel Foucault (1926-1984) was a French historian and philosopher associated with the structuralist and post-structuralist movements. His work has impacted a wide range of disciplines within the humanities and social science disciplines. In this thesis, I use Foucault's (2002/1972) historiographical methodology to explore the conscious and unconscious workings of power and knowledge production in the archive and its discursive functions, see *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith. New York and London: Routledge.

⁴³ Louis Althusser (1918-1980) was a French philosopher who gained international recognition in the 1960s for his work on fusing Marxism with structuralism to define ideology.

⁴⁴ Jacques Lacan (1901-1981) was a French psychoanalyst. His teachings and writing explore the cultural signification of Freud's discovery of the unconscious.

of women's oppression.⁴⁵ Emboldened by her activist work with the New York Redstockings, Firestone offered women a vision for a theoretical path to women's liberation. Doing the feminist work of making visible the invisible, Firestone's major contribution to feminist thought had a direct impact on strengthening and galvanising the collective anger and urgency of women's liberation and its attendant creative and cultural practices. 'In a long feminist tradition ranging from the writings of Mary Wollstonecraft to Valerie Solanas to Donna Haraway', Merck writes, [The Dialectic of Sex...] 'is a *manifesto* – a fierce, funny, and outrageous exhortation to political change' (2010: 2). Firestone's interest in gender, sex roles, reproduction, technology and ecology movements continue to inspire and confront queer, feminist and trans-scholars, practitioners and artists, including CDF. A bestseller on publication, the cornerstone of Firestone's point about feminist revolution is not merely to abolish the inequalities and exploitation in relation to gender, the point is to abolish the idea of gender altogether.

...the end goal of feminist revolution must be ... not just the elimination of male privilege but of the sex distinction itself: genital difference between human beings would no longer matter culturally. (2015: 11)

In 2015, Verso approached CDF to mark the republishing of *The Dialectic of Sex*. Through a film screening and discussion at the Horse Hospital in London, we reassessed the impact of Firestone's theoretical and activist legacies on contemporary trans- feminist politics and the climate movement. This event was one of several curatorial propositions in which CDF revisited the political, social and cultural histories of 1970s women's liberation. By studying this decade, whilst under no illusion that we could revisit a coherent past, CDF's practice has connected to a re-staging, revisitation and recontextualisation of 1970s feminist thought and counter-cinema practices, thereby offering fresh ways of experiencing, analysing and archiving the more ephemeral work of women's liberation.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Unlike Firestone's contemporaries Gloria Steinem and Susan Brownmiller, who continued both their professional and political lives, Firestone's life was marked by institutionalisation and illness. As a result, her legacy remains contested (see Faludi, 2013). For a reconsideration of Firestone's relevance for contemporary feminisms, see Mandy Merck & Stella Stanford (eds) (2010), *Further Adventures of The Dialectic of Sex: critical essays on Shulamith Firestone*. London: Palgrave MacMillan.

⁴⁶ See Club des Femmes presents The Dialectic of Sex: The case for feminist revolution revisited. Available at: <https://www.clubdesfemmes.com/events/the-dialectic-of-sex-the-case-for-feminist-revolution-revisited/> (accessed 9 August 2023).

Another influential text of 1970s women's liberation political theory was Germaine Greer's book *The Female Eunuch* (1971).⁴⁷ Greer's writing equipped women with the critical and linguistic tools to make sense of their powerlessness under patriarchy. Additionally, she brought a certain pugnaciousness and humour to the women's movement that gained traction through more mainstream channels, particularly appealing to a younger generation of women stimulated by her libertarian stance on female sexuality and (erotic) desire. Writing in 2014, Rosie Boycott said of *The Female Eunuch* that it 'was not a political book: rather it was a breathless call to women to take on the world, to become adventurers.'⁴⁸ There is a tantalising connection between Greer and the Rio archive. Greer, Diana Trilling, Jacqueline Ceballos and Jill Johnston were captured on film debating the topic, 'Dialogue on Women's Liberation' with Norman Mailer in Chris Hegedus and D.A. Pennebaker's documentary *Town Bloody Hall* (1971). Released into British cinemas in 1979, the documentary was programmed a year later as part of the Rio's first gay and lesbian film season marking Gay Pride Week. Intriguingly, the Rio copy states the reason for the film's inclusion was because of the appearance of lesbian writer Jill Johnston over Greer's sparring performance with Mailer. I am left wondering what audiences thought of Johnston and Greer's on-screen firebrand performances and their radical feminist politics that galvanised the women's movement forward, and how to manage their transmisogynistic legacies today? Kyla Wazana Tompkins asks how we can return to thinking about 1970s women's liberation politics with something more than dismissal, nostalgia or defensiveness (2019: 149). Greer's impact on feminist political theory was profound at the time, as she merged feminist thought with popular culture. As a libertarian she has subsequently gone on to change her mind about several feminist issues, such as motherhood, pornography and promiscuity, and in particular her interventions into the terrain of transgender issues, to my mind at least, are misguided and exclusionary.⁴⁹ The reputational collateral caused by her latest polemic interventions are starting to cast a shadow over her earlier intervention. As a result, we are in danger of losing the significance of *The Female Eunuch*, which emboldened women to

⁴⁷ Drawing on Wollstonecraft, Engels and Frederick Nietzsche, among others, Greer integrates analysis on class and capitalism to argue for a women's rights not only to exist but to fight against patriarchal power in the private and public sphere. Her ideas can be linked back to the women's movement of the 1960s and the libertarian belief in the inherently disruptive effects of celebrating sex and sexuality in culture.

⁴⁸ Rosie Boycott (2014, 26 January), 'What Germaine Greer and *The Female Eunuch* means to me.' *The Guardian*. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/jan/26/germaine-greer-female-eunuch-feminists-influence> (accessed 2 May 2023).

⁴⁹ Greer's views on transgender issues began in 1999 in her book *The Whole Woman*. Later she began to publish her opinions in the mainstream media, for instance her 20 August 2009 article in *The Guardian*, 'Caster Semenya Sex Row: what makes a Woman?' Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2009/aug/20/germaine-greer-caster-semenya> (accessed 2 June 2023).

engage with feminism and the movement's politics. Greer made feminism accessible and by doing so her polemics laid the foundations for women to explore wider social, cultural and artistic considerations.

A further significant touchstone text for lesbian practitioners, writers and artists, has been *Sexual Politics* (1970) by Kate Millett. Here, Millett sets out a lesbian feminist theory of patriarchy. Her theoretical position is that patriarchal power remains ubiquitous, a fundamental part of heterosexual relationships because of the indoctrination of male power. Her theory is a bold polemical synthesis of literacy, social and historical images of masculinity. Her analysis into the way sexist ideologies work in literature created a space at the time of its publication for feminist and lesbian literary criticism to materialise. Her political stance, that a woman's personal and sexual life was equally political, became one of the fundamental premises of women's liberation politics, theory and practice (also see Lorde, *Uses of the Erotic*, 2017). A year later, Millett's translated her theory into practice in *Three Lives* (1971), a *cinema-verité* conscious-raising documentary. *Three Lives* was included in The Women's Event at Edinburgh, where audiences had the chance to debate Millett's new political theory realised through a women's collective filmmaking practice. 'There was a heady excitement to these films,' Mulvey writes. 'For the first time ever, films were being made exclusively for women, about women and feminist politics, for other women' (2009: 121). In 1973, Claire Johnston brought the film to the National Film Theatre (NFT) in London, as part of her season of women's cinema organised to accompany her pamphlet *Notes on Women's Cinema* (1973), a foundational feminist text that set out a new theory and practice of women's counter-cinema (I will expand on the topic of Johnston's theory and practice in the next chapter). To close this point, with the growth of the women's liberation movement in the early 1970s, Millet turned to collective filmmaking to move from theory to action through film practice, while using the radical potential of experimental film to challenge patriarchal norms. Women's film festivals provided a platform to be seen and for the cultural transmission of contemporary feminist thought.

Many of these ideas that filmmakers, artists, theorists and practitioners explored during this time were also being advanced by continental feminist theorists, who shifting thinking about the symbolic and social structures of sexual difference. This theorising put forward a new feminine subject position and philosophy, known as *écriture féminine* (women's writing). Dialoguing with the fields of psychoanalysis, linguistics and feminism, these theories concerning the potential of women's creative power galvanised filmmakers, artists and practitioners to explore new registers in their own work, which in turn offered renewed contexts in dissemination and exhibition. Focusing on the way language, as the dominant form of social

organisation and progress had an inherent masculinist bias (which by its very definition alienated women who use and speak it), the writings of Julia Kristeva (1980),⁵⁰ Hélène Cixous (1975),⁵¹ Luce Irigaray (1985)⁵² and Monique Wittig (1969)⁵³ interrogated women's relationship to power, language and meaning, recognising the differences between the sexes. This body of knowledge known as 'sexual difference' articulated a new theory that delivered a significant intervention into the academy. This was an embodied a way of thinking that impacted both Mulvey and Johnston's theory and practice. The theory instigated a new epistemology for artists, practitioners and scholars to explore gendered subjectivities and female consciousness through multiple feminist reading position; viewpoints that challenged dichotomies to conceive of women's subjectivity, sexuality and sexual difference differently. This foundational theory circulated in the 1970s and 1980s, as feminist discourse developed to engage deeper with the affects of patriarchy on language and representation in culture.

In 'Film, Feminism and the Avant-Garde' Mulvey (1978) argued for the affinity of feminism and avant-garde, which drew on the theorisation by Kristeva (1976) and others of modernist writing as a privilege site of 'the feminine' (2009: 126). In the 1980s and 1990s, Kristeva, Irigaray and others regularly came to London to present their ideas and new writing, encounters which impacted artist filmmakers like Nina Danino and Sarah Pucill who were thinking through these critical debates in their experimental practice. Pucill (2015: 166) whose moving image practice is informed by psychoanalysis, feminist and queer theory has spoken of the impact of encountering the French feminist intellectuals at the ICA in the 1990s. The publication and dissemination of these key feminist texts at this time provided a theoretical

⁵⁰ Julia Kristeva (1941-) is a Bulgarian-born French psychoanalyst, critic, novelist, and educator, best known for her writings in structuralist linguistics, psychoanalysis, semiotics and philosophical feminism. Kristeva suggested the phallogocentric category of 'Woman' is problematic for feminist epistemology, for 'that which is not represented, that which is unspoken, that which is left out of meanings and ideologies', is a patriarchal investment that needs to be challenged (1980: 137-8). Identifying a relationship between gender and linguistics, she argued for a feminine relationship with language and women's bodies that would remain open and heterogeneous, as opposed to a single fixed closed meaning. Intended as a direct challenge to a masculine linear Western discourse, she proposed a way of thinking differently, by addressing a key feminist question: what is the difference between genders and thus the politics of women's writing?

⁵¹ Hélène Cixous (1937-) is an Algerian writer, poet, literary critic and philosopher who co-authored the term *écriture féminine*, a method and practice that addresses an ongoing concern with the effects of difference, exclusion, identity and the overcoming of Western logocentrism. See Cixous (1976), *The Laugh of the Medusa*, trans. Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen. *Signs*, 1(4): 875-893.

⁵² Luce Irigaray (1930-) is a Belgian-born French feminist philosopher, linguist, psychoanalyst and cultural theorist. Irigaray writes of '*parler femme*' or 'speaking (as woman)', as subject position and political practice, which she suggests can disrupt patriarchal symbolic and social language (1985: 136). For artists, practitioners and intellectuals engaged in feminist political aesthetics, her text *This Sex Which is Not One* (1985) examines the durational and multiple ways that women can speak to each other outside a masculine, linear language.

⁵³ Monique Wittig (1935-2003) was a French lesbian writer and theorist who explored the intersections of gender, lesbian sexuality, language and the literary form. Her book *Les guérillères*, published in 1969, animates a lesbian society that invites all women to join the fight against the language and bodies of men.

impetus for women's moving image practice, and that work's exhibition context and viewing activities. Yet the academisation of this body of writing and the canonisation of 1970s avant-garde and feminist experimental film practices has consequently impacted historicising feminist film programming and curating practices.

Spectatorship

When trying to evaluate Mulvey's contribution to feminism and women's cinema as a film programmer, one place that we can look is her writings on film and in particular 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' (1975), which centred on female spectatorship over women's filmmaking. Writing in 1978 for *Jump Cut*, B. Ruby Rich assessed her influence as follows: 'The connection between practice and theory in feminist cinema is so assumed that its origin and development are frequently taken for granted' (1978).

The contribution of Mulvey's theoretical text on gender and spectatorship to the field of feminist film studies has been acknowledged, including by Rich, as setting 'in motion [a] sea change of realignment' (1998: 2). As previously noted, Mulvey had already started to explore ideas of women's liberation and visual culture in the early 1970s as a critic and writer for publications, including *Spare Rib*. Initially written in 1973 and published in *Screen* in 1975, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' took feminist film theory into a new direction. For the first time, Mulvey connected women's liberation politics, Althusserian theory, psychoanalytic film theory and *auteurism*, to introduce a feminist theory of spectatorship. Framed by a feminist psychoanalytic approach to cinema signification through a notion of scopophilia, voyeurism and narcissism, Mulvey re-framed the debate on spectatorship to critique classical Hollywood cinema and inserting gender into the equation for the first time.

Disentangling the ways in which narrative and visual techniques in cinema make voyeurism into an exclusively male domain, Mulvey analysed how women become the object of the gaze and desire: a sexual spectacle. She argued that these 'pleasures' comprise three levels of the cinematic gaze with the camera, the character and spectator; and that these gazes, in turn, objectify the female character and translate her into an erotic object. In classical cinema, Mulvey argued, voyeurism connotes woman as 'to-be-looked-at-ness'... 'she holds the look and plays to and signifies male desire' (2009/1975: 19). This theory provided a theoretical corrective to the figure of woman as an eroticised spectacle at that time and, crucially, opened a discussion of woman as 'a subject of inquiry' in film theory (1996: 215). This new way of thinking analysed Hollywood cinema to be fundamentally structured as patriarchal and inaugurated a distinctive Anglo-American body of writing that advanced new feminist film

theory.⁵⁴ In 2009, Annette Kuhn wrote that Mulvey's text was 'undoubtedly the most prolifically cited and widely reprinted article *Screen* has ever published' (2009: 4). More recently, Catherine Grant (re)turned the reader's gaze to connect 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' with Mulvey and Wollen's film *Riddles of the Sphinx* (1977), arguing the film and text 'invites the viewer to take part in a questioning that continues in the present', a practice that promotes 'learning through close reading, listening, and discussing... that is key to feminist theorising and practice across the decades' (2019b: 69).

Yet, by the late 1970s debates emerged about the value of psychoanalytic film theory as an effective analytical tool for the feminist film movement, of which participants took issue, in 'Women and Film: A discussion of feminist aesthetics' published in *New German Critique* (1978: 83-107). Moreover, theorists such as Rich (2009: 72-73), Julia Lesage (1978),⁵⁵ Judith Mayne (1993),⁵⁶ Christine Gledhill (1978)⁵⁷ and Annette Kuhn (1994: 185) began to broaden the discussion about spectatorship and audiences. Mulvey's writing prompted those working in the field of feminism, film studies and visual culture, to consider new forms of critical pleasures, which in turn presented a renewed focus on theoretical, aesthetic and feminist counter-cinematic practices and endeavours. The impact of Mulvey's spectatorship theory on 1970s feminist and avant-garde film practices can be seen in her turn to making a series of films with Wollen from 1974-1983, a joint undertaking drawing together their intellectual interests which link feminism, avant-garde film-making and theoretical writings.⁵⁸ Mulvey writes

⁵⁴ Similar lines of enquiry include the work of Mary Ann Doane (1982), who interrogates psychoanalytic identification in terms of female spectatorship, masquerade and the women's film of the 1940s.

⁵⁵ Julia Lesage is a founding member of *Jump Cut: A review of contemporary media*, established in 1974. In 'The Political Aesthetics of the Feminist Documentary Film' Lesage (1978) argues that the development of feminist documentary filmmaking in the United States was informed by women's testimonial exchanges taking place in consciousness-raising groups and that was used as an invaluable tool for ensuring that feminist films would be exhibited and distributed to as wide an audience as possible. Moreover, in a roundtable 'Women and Film: Discussion of feminist aesthetics,' Lesage takes British feminist film theorists to task for their deployment of Lacanian psychoanalysis, which she argues was destructive in fixing women 'in a childlike position that patriarchy has wanted to see them in' (1978: 3). For Lesage the Lacan analysis establishes 'a discourse which is totally male' (ibid.).

⁵⁶ Judith Mayne (1948-) is a feminist film scholar whose research area covers French cinema, feminist film studies and spectatorship theory. In 1993, Mayne wrote *Cinema and Spectatorship*, one of the first books to focus entirely on the history and role of the spectator in contemporary film studies. Her work on Dorothy Arzner (1993) presents a theoretical reading of Arzner as lesbian authorship (see Chapter Three).

⁵⁷ Christine Gledhill (1943-) is a feminist film historian and theorist who has written widely on feminist film criticism, British cinema, melodrama and genre studies. She is a co-founding member of Women's Film and Television History Network UK/Ireland (WFTHN). Drawing on newly emergent cultural studies, Gledhill took issue with the way in which critiques of realism advanced psychoanalytically defined notions of spectatorship and suggests that the process overlooks 'the audience as it is constituted outside the text in different sets of social relations such as class, race, etc'. See Gledhill (1978), *Recent Developments in Feminist Criticism. Quarterly Review of Film Studies*, 3(4): 473.

⁵⁸ In addition to this, there is a connection between Peter Wollen and the Rio, in that Robert Rider and Ramsay Cameron, who programmed the cinema in the 1980s, studied semiotics under Wollen at Essex University in the late 1970s. Ramsay Cameron email with author. 9 December 2019.

Each of the films we made in the 1970s responded to and extended the problems I was trying to pose in my writing. In the films, theory and politics could be juxtaposed with narrative and visual poetics, reaching out beyond the limits of the written word and its precision to something that had not yet found a precise means of verbal articulation. (2009: xxix)

What becomes apparent for me as Mulvey working her theory through the doing of her filmmaking practice is the elision of her film programming. An unconscious act no doubt, but this a moment when her film programming becomes ghostly matter.

During this period, Mulvey's avant-garde filmmaking practice, theorising and theories of spectatorship come together and responded to this key period in the history of ideas when critical reflection on the representation of women and the female subjectivity was gaining a new visibility. Moreover, Maggie Humm comments how striking 'Mulvey's turn to theory' spoke to the cultural moment when *The Other Cinema* (who distributed *Riddles of the Sphinx*) started screening the film in a variety of theatrical and non-theatrical spaces, including women-only audiences and at the British Sociological Association Conference, where Kuhn, Rowbotham and Stuart Hall were in attendance (1997: 19-20).⁵⁹ These instances offer contextual material evidence to the expansive and discursive possibilities that Mulvey's theory of spectatorship offered at this time.

'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' has secured film spectatorship at the heart of film theory. I would further add that Mulvey's understanding of spectatorship also comes from her undocumented and elided experiences as a film programmer. In other words, what my intervention reveals, is by remembering this haunting of Mulvey as a film programmer and curator, as a specialised, self-reflective spectator who is also understanding, contextualising and responding to other spectators' understanding of film, another history emerges. What is revealed is not the ahistorical, generalised and universalised 'audience', a positionality which has been used against Mulvey, but instead through her film programming and curating work, specific groups of actual people in the cinema start to come into view.

Mulvey reflected on her theory (and I would insert her programming here too) as 'suggesting an alternative and self-conscious spectatorship' (2011: 128). To put this into

⁵⁹ In *Daring to Hope*, Sheila Rowbotham remembers being invited by Mulvey to the premier of *Riddles of the Sphinx* at *The Other Cinema*. 'Though I was not familiar with film theory informing *Riddles of the Sphinx*', she writes, 'I intuitively understood its interrogatory theme – a mother's loss and a search for identity' (2021: 234).

context, the film audience has been a preoccupation for leftist film theorists since early cinema, including Sergei Eisenstein's thinking about shock and montage theory (1977) and the Frankfurt School on cinema as an opiate (see Adorno & Horkheimer 2010). These ideas of spectatorship were revived in the late 1960s by French theorists looking for a post-Marxian understanding of mass entertainment (see Baudry, 1970; Metz, 1982). In her theoretical work, Mulvey responds directly to these universalist theories of absorption into the narrative. How she comes to this idea is almost through the osmosis of collectively watching films in the cinema and through her film programming endeavours. It is for this reason that memories collected from being in the cinema, is one of the methodological tools in my project, because I am collecting histories, not just from film programmers and curators but also from cinema audiences.

Film programming as Critical Practice

Although Mulvey's theory of spectatorship continues to be extensively historicised and used, I argue that a parallel history of Mulvey's activities as a film programmer and activist during this period, including her attendance and participation in specialised women's and avant-garde film festivals and symposia, are concurrent activities that linger on the periphery of her film scholarship. Lucy Reynolds writes how these 'screenings and discussions of a more public nature ... played a significant role in advocating new visibility for contemporary, as well as, historical [women's] film practices' (2107: 145). Adding to this perspective, I would advance that epiphanies gleaned from conversations as well as unformed ideas scribbled in note books are also the seeds what would later translate into feminist film theory and practice.

A wider encounter with Mulvey's scholarship during the 1970s must be accounted for, hence I re-centre her film programming work as part of a critical, collective and cultural effort to produce and shape a new feminist counter-cinema culture. There is a cultural archive of 1970s women's film festivals, screenings, discussions and cinema going cultures largely unaccounted for—even de-valued—because, as previously noted, historically there has been an invisibility attached to great deal of women's labour in the film industry, specifically in film exhibition and distribution. It is also hard to document ephemerality, namely the materiality of cinema experiences and their affects. Yet, these ephemeral traces linger as material absences in the archive: a situation that raises questions about accessing a history reliant on memory, reminiscence and forgetting. Speaking as a next generation feminist scholar, Tobin picked up on this methodological issue at the 'Being Ruby Rich: Film Curation as Activism and

Advocacy' Symposium, when she asked how we might access the material histories of 1970s film feminism, namely: the memories and experiences of those women who were there. (See Chapter Four, for a full analysis of the 'Being Ruby Rich: Film curation as archiving and activism' Symposium).

In terms of piecing together Mulvey's film programming history, after The Women's Event in 1972, she was invited to join the programming committee for the Independent Film-makers Association's (IFA) 'First Festival of British Independent Cinema,' which took place at Bristol's Arnolfini gallery in 1975.⁶⁰ Mulvey's specialised programming saw the festival offer a platform for the ongoing development of feminist experimental filmmaking, film theory and its audiences. Searching through the festival's archive, I discovered a wide-ranging programme. The festival screened feminist films alongside avant-garde and experimental work, from Super 8mm to 35mm. This was a loose, open approach to programming that reminded me of Edinburgh's programming in the 1970s. These new ways of programming developed radical experimental film and cine-cultures that cross-pollinated different forms, approaches and traditions.

An extract from the festival literature sets out the direction of programming: 'The festival has a polemic function. Its main characteristic is the combination of different combinations of independent film – the avant-garde on the one side, the overtly political film on the other, plus a lot in the middle' (Dickinson, 1999: 137). Of note was to discover, under Mulvey's instigation, the festival's decision to position women's experimental and avant-garde filmmaking at the core of the main programme, as opposed to being singled out as a sidebar event which happened at Edinburgh in 1972. Opening with *The Amazing Equal Pay Show* (The London Women's Film Group, 1974), the festival presented feminist avant-garde films that would enter a new feminist film canon, including *Penthesilia: Queen of the Amazons* (Mulvey and Wollen, 1974) and *Nightcleaners* (The Berwick Street Collective, 1975). Haunting the festival's archive is a cultural memory of how audiences responded to these feminist experimentations in filmmaking, and who was there.⁶¹ (see Chapter Five, and my analysis of 'Feminist Re-Imagings at the Rio, 1980-2020', which aligns with this way of thinking.)

⁶⁰ The Independent Film-makers Association formed in 1975, primarily set up as a platform for debate, to connect theory and oppositional filmmaking practices with audiences.

⁶¹ From 9-11 October 2015, Bristol Radical Film Festival organised a partial re-staging of the First Festival of British Independent Cinema at the Arnolfini Gallery. Derek Jarman's early short films were included in the programme as a record of Jarman's presence at the festival in 1975. See, Bristol Radical Film Festival 2015. Available at: <https://arnolfini.org.uk/whatson/festival-pass-bristol-radical-film-festival-2015/> (accessed 16 September 2023).

In 1978, Mulvey built on her theory of gender and spectatorship and her experiences of film programming to write 'Film, Feminism and the Avant-Garde'. Here, she addresses the question of feminist aesthetics, arguing the case for a new feminist counter-cinema: a theory and practice that draws on 'an objective alliance' (2009: 116) between feminist film theory and practice with the radical avant-garde. During the period, Mulvey's theory and practice established a conjunction between the avant-garde film movement, political aesthetics and feminist praxis in the 1970s. In 1997, Humm surmised, 'much film theory of the past twenty years revisits, challenges and builds on Mulvey's ideas' (1997: 25). Twenty-five years later, Mulvey's thinking went on to influence CDF's formation, because at that time, we felt that a connection between queer and feminist experimental filmmaking as a space for ideas to be explored in the cinema had been lost. Influenced by Mulvey, 'our programming,' notes Sarah Wood, 'was a move away from questions of defining a single canon or authorship and towards an understanding of what women have brought to the screen in terms of politics, thought and aesthetics' (2017).⁶² Reparative work on Mulvey's film programming history, recovers and re-connects her engagement with women's liberation politics, film practice, theory writing with her programming and viewing practices. Such recovery illustrates the point that Mulvey's programming, *cinophilia* and activism played an essential role in her theoretical, creative and political preoccupations at that time.

Afterthoughts and Afterlives

As previously noted, the subsequent intellectual afterlife and academisation of 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' has been well documented.⁶³ On 21 April 2015, to mark the text's 40th anniversary, *Screen* and the Faculty of Modern and Medieval Languages at the University of Cambridge organised an event at BFI Southbank to 'meditate on the continued resonance and relevance of Mulvey's seminal article' (Phillips, 2016: 471). The event, staged as a spectacle of feminist theoretical film history as a public practice of remembering, went on to act as a pointer and significant moment in my research journey. It led to my decision to use feminist curating as a scholarly methodology to piece together a history of feminist film programming and curating in the 1980s. The experience of *being* there, in the audience, was significant as I

⁶² So Mayer, Selina Robertson and Sarah Wood (2017), Club des Femmes' decade of queer feminist film programming. Available at: <https://www.independentcinemaoffice.org.uk/club-des-femmes-decade-of-queer-feminist-film-programming/> (accessed 16 May 2023).

⁶³ In 1989, *Camera Obscura* presented The Spectatrix, an entire issue devoted to exploring the ramifications of Mulvey's text. The issue included over fifty responses and the journal chose Mulvey's text as the inaugural moment of feminist psychoanalytic theories of spectatorship. See Janet Bergstrom and Mary Ann Doane (eds) (1989), The Spectatrix. *Camera Obscura: Feminism, Culture, and Media Studies*, 20-21: 5-378.

reflected on the processes of history and historical representation, what and who gets remembered, what gets forgotten, by whom and how. Later, I reflected on the reparative potential of re-thinking the past through practice. Specifically, I considered how cultural memory as a methodology of practice can show and repair the archive's 'ruined and fragmentary map', bringing to the fore the different stories and affects, people, contexts, experiences, connections and knowledges.

'Visual Pleasure at 40: Laura Mulvey in discussion' took the form of a panel discussion in the presence of Mulvey in conversation with filmmakers Joanna Hogg and Isaac Julien, together with film scholars Mandy Merck, Tamar Garb, John David Rhodes and Emma Wilson. The sold-out event took place in NFT1, with the panellists seated in a row either side of Mulvey. The mediation of memory (Kuhn, 2002: 9), as well as the heightened optics of the moment felt significant. Each panellist remembered their initial encounter with Mulvey's writing, and their subsequent creative and intellectual journeys with the theory. Some remembered their first encounter at art and film school, while others remarked on the text's significance as a piece of feminist polemic writing, even a manifesto. In her response, Mulvey remembered the text as ephemeral and historical, rooted in the urgency of women's liberation and wider socio-cultural politics of the time. My memory of the discussion remains with the significance of Mulvey's presence in NFT1, a living presence who embodies her critical thinking. This in turn activates her passion for cinema. Mulvey's sentiments that her text not only lived as an 'iconic object' (in Mulvey's words) in transnational and intergenerational intellectual, artistic and practical localities. But she was also struck by the ways in which the theory and its afterthoughts had lingered in the consciousness, experiences and practices of the panel and audiences present. Her comments drew attention to this thesis' key arguments. That rethinking the past through cultural memory as a scholarly method of practice offers a generative, embodied relationship to animating the archive. This in turn activates and accounts for a history of women's film programming and curating in absentia. In this way, feminist film histories that are fleeting, complicated or incomplete might be folded back as a technology for recovery in the textual archives.

Curating as a scholarly methodology opens epistemological questions about the role and place of practice in the research process. It illustrates the point that activating history, theory and memory through a curating practice allows for a materiality of women's counter-cinematic practices as a new knowledge in the archive to unfold. In effect, an encounter in which past, present and future coexist, such as the 'Visual Pleasure at 40: Laura Mulvey in discussion'

offers the possibility for renewed insights to emerge to explore how we might reckon with the past, and how feminist film history might be remembered, re-told and produced differently.⁶⁴

Writing for *Camera Obscura's* 30th anniversary dossier 'An Archive for the Future' Yvonne Rainer signals Mulvey's legacy offered a '*cri de coeur* that was echoed in protest on both sides of the Atlantic' (2006: 168). Recalling 'how even if media makers did not know it, Mulvey's text had already 'changed the air that we breathed' offering a stimulus for collective action as a matter of political urgency for contemporary feminist politics (ibid: 169). As a result, feminist theorists, filmmakers, artists and practitioners were propelled to create new actions, alliances and strategies across theory and practice. A situation which caused a paradigm shift, not only for feminist film studies, but also because the theory gradually assimilated into popular culture as 'an iconic object' (to use Mulvey's words again). This predicament has led to the eclipsing of Mulvey's film practice *and* film programming and curating endeavours. 'Male gaze' theory, as it came to be known, has since become a cultural shorthand for discussion around gender and media. In the process, the specificities of the text's historical contexts—its material and theoretical underpinnings—often get flattened out and misconstrued for the purposes of a post-feminist media, de-constructive late capitalist market, which neutralises its radical potential.⁶⁵

As an addendum, the theoretical questions that Mulvey had yet to address in her text in relation to gender, race and sexuality became some of the most potent terrains for scholarly investigation.⁶⁶ For instance, in 1992, issues of spectatorship and race were subsequently theorised by bell hooks.⁶⁷ Moreover, questions of gay and lesbian sexuality and spectatorship went on to be theorised by Richard Dyer⁶⁸ and Jackie Stacey.⁶⁹

⁶⁴ In 2015, *Screen* published 'Visual Pleasure at 40' Dossier, 56 (4): 479-481. As a visual document of the BFI event, I consulted 'Visual Pleasure at 40: Laura Mulvey in discussion' (Extract). Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IWAJdj3cPvA> (accessed 14 June 2019).

⁶⁵ An example of this is when Mulvey's 'male gaze' theory was taken out of its historical context and included as a post-feminist cultural reference in an episode of *Parks And Recreation* (2009-2015) NBC. Open 4 Business Production, Deedle-Dee Productions, Fremulon, 3 Arts Entertainment, Universal Television.

⁶⁶ In 'Afterthoughts' written in 1981, Mulvey revisits Freud to conclude that the fluctuations that women make between masculine and feminine identifications, which she calls 'trans-sex', offer the possibility and prescience of more fluid gender identities. Even so, Mulvey compellingly suggests the female spectator remains 'restless in [her] transvestite clothes' (2009: 35-40).

⁶⁷ In her essay 'The Oppositional Gaze' hooks confronts Mulvey's text and white feminist film criticism. Black women write little about spectatorship because, as hooks argues, they are not included in the cultural critique. A Black woman's oppositional gaze comes not from psychoanalysis or semiotics, but from 'the capacity of black women to construct ourselves as subjects in daily life' (1992: 127).

⁶⁸ Richard Dyer (1987) argues that gay viewers share different pleasures when gazing at the male hero.

⁶⁹ In 1987, in a *Screen* article titled, 'Desperately Seeking Difference', Jackie Stacey theorises the homosexual pleasures of female spectatorship. Also see Stacey (1994), *Star Gazing: Hollywood Cinema and Female Spectatorship*. London and New York: Routledge.

A Feminist Integrated Practice: Filmmaking-Exhibition-Criticism-Distribution-Audiences⁷⁰

A key aspect that emerges from researching 1970s feminist film histories is the continual focus and re-focus on semiotics, psychoanalytic theory, which has subsequently become the prevailing narrative. However, as this thesis argues, feminist film theory, film programming practices, collective politics and audiences emerged at the same time, working in conjunction with one another, in a far more dialectical process. Institutional frameworks and organisations provided the foundations for a fertile, social and political environment to emerge, within which a space was created for a feminist integrated practice to flourish.

To offer some wider institutional context, during the 1970s, building on the increased funding for the arts at the time (a policy initiated by the Labour government of the 1960s), there was an expansion of art schools and incorporation of film into the teaching curricula. Concurrently, the BFI's Education Department began organising seminars, screenings, symposia and study schools in addition to funding the film journal, *Screen*, and the Society for Education in Film and Television (SEFT),⁷¹ (see Chapter Three for a more detailed discussion of these institutional contexts). These were pedagogic interventions creating discursive and social spaces for different communities to come together. Then in 1974, BFI Production Board began funding experimental narrative feature films, which included supporting the development and production of key feminist avant-garde films of the era including *Riddles of the Sphinx* (Mulvey 1977), *Song of the Shirt* (Clayton and Jonathan Curling, 1979), *Maeve* (Pat Murphy, 1981), *Doll's Eye* (Worth, 1983) and *The Gold Diggers* (Sally Potter, 1983). *The Gold Diggers* went on to be named by Kaja Silverman (1998: 178-86), Patricia Mellencamp (1995: 159-69) and B. Ruby Rich (1998: 326-36) as the future of feminist cinema. Yet in 1993, 10 years after the film's initial theatrical release—after touring extensively with the film and because of such negative reviews, which threatened to end her career—Potter decided to withdraw the film from

⁷⁰ In her article 'In the Name of Feminist Film Criticism' from 1978-79, Rich writes that 'in the particular history of the cinematic field that "feminist" came to designate, [it was] a field in which filmmaking-exhibition-criticism-distribution-audience have always been considered inextricably connected' (1998: 63).

⁷¹ Founded in 1950 as a grant-in-aid body of the BFI, the Society for Education in Film and Television (SEFT) published the film journal *Screen*. Working closely with the BFI's Education Department, SEFT represented film teachers at all levels of the education system in the United Kingdom.

circulation.⁷² Mulvey disclosed that this decision brought the political ambitions of 1970s feminist counter-cinema to an end.⁷³

As previously mentioned, the films listed above were subsequently included in film seasons and events at Edinburgh, the NFT and elsewhere. These programming endeavours brought international and British feminist and avant-garde filmmakers together in conversation for the first time. For instance, in 1973, David Curtis and Simon Field programmed the second ‘Festival of Independent Avant-garde Film’ at the NFT. When re-considering the value of recuperating a history of film programming in order to understand how film history is made, Mulvey’s memories of the festival captures the meaning of the moment

A big impact on me was Simon Field and Dave Curtis’ Festival of Independent Avant Garde Film’ ... That was where I saw *Hotel Monterey* [Chantal Akerman, 1973], *Lives of Performers* [Yvonne Rainer, 1973] and I associate with this time or whether this was at the event, the VALIE EXPORT film *Invisible Adversaries* [1977] ... That was the first time I had seen a body of films made by women that were feature films that added up to enough work for you to feel that there was a women’s movement. (2019)⁷⁴

The two-week season presented a new wave of women’s avant-garde cinema including work by Annabel Nicholson and Joyce Wieland. Watching and thinking about these films in and outside the cinema was significant for Mulvey. She cites them even as being on her mind when developing her ideas for ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’. Noting how this new feminist counter-cinema was inventing ‘an alternative aesthetics of cinema’; the bold and imaginative work quickly distinguished itself from formally similar films by male avant-garde filmmakers, because, she adds, the films were specifically rooted in a conscious feminist sensibility with a committed social and political purpose (2009: xvii).⁷⁵ Mulvey’s contemporary reflections help

⁷² *The Gold Diggers* was re-released on DVD and Blu Ray by the BFI in 2009. Available at: <https://www2.bfi.org.uk/blu-rays-dvds/gold-diggers> (accessed 13 February 2023).

⁷³ Interview with Laura Mulvey, 24 September 2017 (See Appendix F). For an analysis of why *The Gold Diggers* closed the intellectual and creative projects of 1970s film feminism, in particular its exhibition and critical reception, see So Mayer (2009), *The Cinema of Sally Potter: A politics of love*, pp. 61-62. London: Wallflower Press.

⁷⁴ Interview with Laura Mulvey, 31 January 2017. (See Appendix F).

⁷⁵ Connected to this in 1978 *Camera Obscura* came to the London Film-makers’ Co-op to present a programme of women’s cinema titled, ‘Feminism, Fiction and the Avant-Garde’. The season included work by Chantal Akerman and Marguerite Duras. For an analysis of this feminist event, see Reynolds (2019), Introduction: Raising Voices. In: *Women Artists, Feminism and the Moving Image*, p.1-2. London: Bloomsbury Academic.

map this historical moment when a consciousness of feminist politics and the practices of filmmaking, programming, criticism, viewing and audiences began to emerge.

Additionally, the distribution and exhibition of historical and contemporary films by women filmmakers and feminist collectives offered shared and discursive experiences within the movement, which lent itself to the materialisation and circulation of a new feminist film culture. Women's film and videomaking practices came to be defined by their political and pedagogical commitment to an integrated social practice where production, exhibition, distribution and audiences became inextricably linked. This cross fertilisation developed audiences for women's political cinema and feminist discourse. Of which Hilary Thompson writes

[An integrated practice] begins from the notion of a continuous (and continuing) process of production, distribution, exhibition and education (the production of meaning), which is inextricable for the role and place of 'audience in the cinema'. The division between film and viewer is eroded and film and audience are mutually responsible for the production of meaning. (1981: 9)

Highlighted here is a definition of integrated practice which includes spectatorship and exhibition, practices which often allude this definition, as well as historical specificity. These exhibition, cinema audience and spectatorship histories continue to haunt this era of feminist film theory and practice, neglected in the literature from that time.⁷⁶

As a continuation, the IFA's 'First Festival of British Independent Cinema', at which Mulvey programmed, was a key festival initiative in developing audiences (see Dickinson, 1999: 133). Central to IFA's ethos was the call for production, exhibition and distribution to become firmly integrated as a social practice. The women's movement, as previously noted, was embedded in 1970s independent film culture. From the beginning, feminists played a central role in the IFA, after campaigning successfully to action a quota in the constitution for 50 per cent of women to be present on all committees (ibid.: 53). Another key IFA strategy was a 'third circuit', where filmmakers set about creating new models for film exhibition. This materialised in working with independent cinemas and guest programming films and events at the ICA and various arts centres, co-operatives and academic spaces. Specialist distributors,

⁷⁶ Charlotte Brunsdon was one of the first to offer a feminist analysis of feminist exhibition and distribution strategies and practices, see Brunsdon (1986), Distribution and exhibition. *Films for Women*, pp. 179-185. London: British Film Institute.

such as The Other Cinema, Liberation Films, Circles and COW, worked with Artificial Eye (the succession to Politkino) to politically engage audiences through distribution and exhibition strategies and practices. Of which Clayton and Mulvey remember

This was not just a commitment to a new kind of economy; it was also a means of using film to generate political debate or other relevant kinds of discussion, following the practice of Octavio Getino and Fernando Solanas's screening of *The Hour of the Furnaces*. (2017: 12)

The point being here is how the liberation politics of feminism intersected with the liberation politics of Third Cinema, not only as theory but shared strategies of practice where filmmaking and films were expected to have the effect of changing the world.

At the same time, women's screenings, symposia and discussion forums became areas of cultural intervention within the IFA's 'third circuit' network. Feminist programmers, cinema workers and community organisers did the 'invisible' work of bringing women's political filmmaking and feminist films to newly visible audiences. As a result, these activities offered sources of shared collective experiences that led to an emerging feminist film culture and canonicity of feminist counter-cinema. In her article for BFI Production's 1979\80 catalogue, 'The New Social Function of Cinema,' Felicity Oppé reflects on the pressing debates and issues arising out of women's distribution and exhibition practices rooted in the women's movement. Oppé explores what a new social and political function of cinema might mean within a feminist context, observing that 'the crucial shift ... is the move from a campaign-orientated function for film to an increasing analysis of the medium itself with regard to the way in which women in particular are represented' (1981: 136). Oppé ends by raising the question of reciprocity, how audiences might critically engage with feminist filmmaking, distribution and exhibition. In other words, how a women's and/or feminist audience might be defined, and how these audiences might be developed through not just showing films in theatrical and non-theatrical spaces, but in the ways feminist audiences might be built and shaped, pointing to the conditions 'which actually inform production, exhibition and distribution' (ibid.: 138). The realisation of feminist film festivals, seasons and workshops are, Oppé argues, determining this new feminist film culture and building new audiences. She names 'the Dalston's Rio Women's Programming Collective' together with sister groups in Norwich, Manchester, the East Midlands Women's Film Group and Four Corners as being part of a national network of feminist programming

groups and screening practices at the vanguard of this cultural invention in film exhibition (ibid.: 136).

A few years later, as already noted, as well as others, Kuhn posed the question of cinema audiences, how meanings in feminist counter-cinema might be ‘constructed not only through the internal operations of texts, but also in their relations of production and reception (1994: 172). Out of these theoretical debates, renewed frameworks and politicised exhibition and distribution strategies, feminist theory and practice began to shift and be re-shaped. Correspondingly, feminist film programming and curating offered critical spaces where women’s counter-cinema cultures, a multiplicity of discourse and solidarities could thrive. In London, these feminist film programming practices continued apace into the 1980s, finding political allyships with cinemas such as the Rio and the NFT and other spaces such as the London Film-makers’ Co-op, London Video Arts, Four Corners and ICA, among others.⁷⁷

Film Programming and Audiences at Edinburgh in the 1970s

Kay Armatage argues that, in the 1970s, Edinburgh was at ‘the epicentre of the intellectual world’ (2009: 94). The festival’s programming, symposia and publishing outputs in conjunction with *Screen* positioned avant-garde practice and theory at its core. I would add that the theory and film practice was equally energised by the festival’s programming vision on and off screen. Writing in *Sight & Sound* for the Winter 1976/77 issue, Jonathan Rosenbaum finds a ‘warmth or complicity’ in Edinburgh’s 1976 audiences (2021).⁷⁸ ‘What seems so striking about these films,’ he remarks, ‘is the audience rapport they create, a communal experience that one would be hard to find at screenings of commercial films. These are films devoted to feeding myriad forms of alienation,’ he concludes, ‘not promoting mutual forms of discovery’ (ibid.).

Yet, I would argue that when it came to feminists researching and programming women’s film histories, it was these public and socialised ‘mutual forms of discovery’ that were the cultural and political building blocks which would allow for a feminist film culture to emerge; *Dance, Girl, Dance* is a case in point. Even though Mulvey’s theory advocated for ‘a new language of desire’ to ‘free the look of the camera into its materiality in time and space

⁷⁷ The ICA presented two significant feminist art exhibitions in 1980: *Women’s Images of Men* and *About Time*. A series of screenings were programmed to accompany the exhibitions, including ‘Women’s Own’, curated by Felicity Sparrow, Deborah Lowenberg and Chris Rodley. Available at: https://www.luxonline.org.uk/histories/1980-1989/about_time.html (accessed 6 August 2023).

⁷⁸ Jonathan Rosenbaum (2021), *Regrouping: Reflections on the Edinburgh Festival 1976*. Available at: <https://jonathanrosenbaum.net/2021/11/regrouping-reflections-on-the-edinburgh-festival-1976/> (accessed 14 February 2023).

and the look of audience into dialectics, passionate detachment' (2009: 27), I contend that the film spectating and programming that Mulvey and others were undertaking at this time was also about pleasure and passion as well as critical intervention. This was programming work as contextual work, which produced collective, experiential engagements with film for audiences in and outside the cinema. To re-iterate, Mulvey's programming during the 1970s, especially the Women's Event in 1972, has been eclipsed not only by her theoretical writing but also by her film practice with Wollen. Yet as this thesis argues, Mulvey's engagement with feminism and film materialised out of the Edinburgh Film Festival's political and intellectual conjunctures, which fostered her film programming, filmmaking and theory writing.

In 1973, Lynda Myles took over the festival directorship of Edinburgh from Murray Grigor, taking the festival in a different direction. By the mid-1970s, the festival had become focused on film screenings, seminars and symposia informed by *Screen's* (post 1971) Anglo-French film theory and the new developments in the fields of semiotics, structuralism and psychoanalysis.⁷⁹ This was a decision partly influenced by the English publication by Stephen Heath of Christian Metz's 1973 work on semiotics and the cinema, as well Mulvey's 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', as well as Wollen's writing on 'The Two Avant-gardes' first published in 1975 in *Screen International* (1996: 133-143).⁸⁰ Correspondingly, the festival's programming rehabilitated the reputation of Hollywood directors, including Sam Fuller in 1969, Douglas Sirk in 1972 (see Mulvey's writing on Sirk and Melodrama, 2009/1977: 41-46). Frank Tashlin in 1973 and Raoul Walsh in 1974. In addition, a new wave of American filmmakers was presented for the first time to audiences, including Martin Scorsese and Brian de Palma, together with political films distributed by Politkino, including Black Power cinema and militant films from Vietnam, Cuba and Latin America. The festival's film seasons, screenings and publications were definitive for Edinburgh and by the mid-1970s, as previously noted, a series of events and conferences took place, where psychoanalytic film theory and cinema were publicly debated.

A striking detail of Edinburgh's theoretical ambition and commitment to developing a theory of British film culture can be found in Armatage's recollections on the International Forum on Avant-Garde Film and the Cinema and Psychoanalysis Event in 1976, where feminist film experiments *Jeanne Dielman, 23, quai du commerce, 1080 Bruxelles* (1975), *Kristina*

⁷⁹ This shift in the festival's policy and the rationale for the changes can be found in the Introduction to the Edinburgh Film Festival '76 *Magazine* (Dickinson, 1999: 138-140).

⁸⁰ *The Two Avant-Gardes* was centred on the relationship between the two distinct traditions of avant-garde film. Edinburgh fostered this emergent theoretical avant-garde model and experimental film culture in the 1970s, which saw Marxist psychoanalytic film theory and radical, counter-film practice converge.

Talking Pictures (Rainer, 1976) and *Re-Grouping* (Lizzie Borden, 1976) were programmed and discussed with the filmmakers. Armatage notes this was ‘the only festival sidebar I know to send out an advanced reading list’ (2009: 95). As previously mentioned, Knowles’ restaging of *Re-Grouping* at Edinburgh in 2016 with Borden and Mulvey in attendance, recovered and reclarified Mulvey’s engagement with avant-garde filmmaking, women’s counter-cinema practices and high theory. Also, because *Re-Grouping*, as a film about a women’s liberation reading group that falls out over theory versus practice (but really over lesbianism), prefigures the story of Edinburgh’s Feminism and Film Event in 1979 quite uncannily (see Rich, 1998: 156-168). As noted, the Feminism and Film Event introduced new work by Citron, Potter, Worth and Clayton and Curling. However, the ‘split’ over the role of theory, practice and accessibility for audiences meant that the conference, as a reflection of the decade’s feminist film theory and practice, ended with little consensus. These points of division subsequently impacted the writing of feminist film history and the way that film programming became disconnected from feminist film scholarship and subsequently lost, and the connection severed. Nonetheless, the organisers, programmers, critics, filmmakers and audiences (who had come from Europe, United States, Australia and elsewhere) left with a collective impetus to challenge, disseminate and expand the strategies and methodologies of feminist film theory and practice into the next decade.

As already noted, a limited archive of these first women’s film festivals, symposia and events continues to survive. Re-considering Edinburgh’s festival director and programmer Myles’ contribution to the festival, Knowles maintains, ‘Amongst all [film] history’s ‘great’ men, there are women [film programmers] who were doing pioneering work, sensitive and inclusive, and I don’t think that has been acknowledged enough’ (interviewed by So Mayer, 2017: 15). Knowles’ archival research and curatorial practice acts on a continuum of feminist practice that includes re-stagings, re-screenings, oral history work and archival activations. Interventions that continue the work of attending to and repairing a history of feminist film programming, festival organising and criticism which fostered and shaped a dynamic women’s film and video culture. These histories, theoretical contexts and developments that constellated around Edinburgh in the 1970s had substantial repercussions in the afterlife of cine-feminism and the feminist screening practices and strategies in the 1980s. The programming, publications and public debates provided feminists with the methodologies, strategies and practical tools to continue the collective and cultural project of researching, exhibiting and debating historical and contemporary women’s and feminist filmmaking in the cinema. In Chapter Five, I will

expand this issue and address the 1980s decade of politically driven feminist programming and media practices at the Rio.

Looking back, I continue to take inspiration from Circles' founder members Felicity Sparrow and Lis Rhodes inaugural film programme from 1983, entitled 'Her Image Fades as Her Voice Rises', comprising of the first four films acquired for their collection. An eight-page accompanying booklet was produced, outlining the programme's themes and connections. It is here that Sparrow and Rhodes' write about 'shift[ing] the facts' of film history through feminist film distribution and exhibition.⁸¹ The point I am making is that, by shining a light on Mulvey's elided history of feminist film programming in the 1970s, we might be able to recover a cultural memory of feminist film exhibition practices, spectatorship and audiences as a counter archive of feminist theory and practice in the 1970s and 1980s. In the subsequent chapters, I will focus on how feminist film programmers and curators worked collectively, not only to intervene in canon formation, but their programming and curating also acted as a form of critical history writing. Correspondingly, this enquiry is a feminist project of researching and re-writing women back into film history through the theory and practice of film programming and curation. By mapping these breaks, ruptures, shifts and convergences in feminist history, politics, theory and practice, we might begin to envisage how feminist film programming was always part of feminist counter-cinema practices in the 1970s and, as such, have always been part of film history.

Concluding remarks

In this chapter, I have traversed Mulvey's ghost as a film programmer, and her film programming as a 'ruined and fragmentary map' in the archive. This is a methodology that offers some points of departure for 1970s feminism and film, bringing to the fore Mulvey's vision of a feminist counter-cinema. I have addressed how certain practices (film programming, memory and affects) have remained hidden and why and how Mulvey's theory (polemics and print) and its iconic status went on to bury other knowledges. I have done this by situating feminist film programming in the contexts of its time, in dialogue with the politics, the activism, the theory and practice, and the historical moment. My archaeological approach (mirroring

⁸¹ 'Her Image Fades as Her Voice Rises' was the first of several pioneering film touring programmes Circles ran in early 1980s that gestated from the cultural and political debates of the 1970s (see Brunson, 1986: 195-201). For further reading on the tour, see Julia Knight and Peter Thomas (2011), *Promotion, Selection and Engaging Audiences: Circles, Film and Video Umbrella*, London Video Access and London Film-Makers' Co-op. In: *Reaching Audiences: distribution and promotion of alternative moving image*, pp. 152-156. Bristol: Intellect.

Mulvey's work in the BFI library when conducting researching on the Women's Event) sets out to foreground how feminist filmmaking and theory, together with film programming and audiences, have always been part of film history. Mulvey's film programming lingers as a textual haunting in the archive. Her film programming and curating endeavours as a reading position has instigated a set of investigations about feminist ways of remembering and producing a different women's film history through curating as a practice-based scholarly methodology.

Chapter Three: In Memorium: Reassessing the legacy of Claire Johnston

As I navigate the complex film histories of the 1970s to draw out some of the key debates that enlivened those years, I have found it useful to map an account of Claire Johnston's feminist film histories as another haunting in the archive. Johnston's intervention saw her merge new modes of theoretical inquiry with feminist pedagogy and creative and cultural practice, which included the advocacy and pleasures of programming and contextualising this work. Taking Johnston as my guide, I want to map the breaks, ruptures and reverberations in the 1970s between the politics of women's cinema, and its theoretical ideas, filmmaking and counter-cinema practices.

Johnston's contribution to the theorisation and practice of 1970s film feminism is regarded as a seminal text in feminist theory (Penley, 1988: 4). Johnston's essay 'Women's Cinema as Counter-Cinema', first published in *Notes on Women's Cinema* in 1973 has become a key text in teaching feminist media studies today and reprinted in numerous anthologies.¹ Yet because of her early death in 1987, at the age of 47 years old, questions remain about how and what we remember of Johnston today, and what got lost along the way. In particular, what should we make of her Marxist feminist politics, her academic writing, cultural activism and film programming: namely her political and social engagements with and contributions to feminist film theory and practice in the 1970s. Whereas some of Johnston's contemporaries have had the opportunity to continue to write, publish and re-think their theoretical and creative contributions and attend to their legacy, Johnston's early death means that her legacy has remained subject to others. This has in turn led to an opprobrium (Rich 1998: 72-73), neglect and silence. The socio-historical and theoretical underpinnings that led to Johnston's (often collaborative) critical writing, cultural activism and film programming have largely been forgotten by a young generation of feminist media scholars and filmmakers, until 2018 and Rachel Fabian's reconsideration of Johnston's work in *Feminist Media Histories*. Where the film programming work of Laura Mulvey has acted as a textual haunting in the archive, Johnston's physical absence and entire body of work lingers as a potent haunting in the archive.

¹ I am grateful to Rachel Fabian and her 2018 article 'Reconsidering the Work of Claire Johnston', in *Feminist Media Histories*, 4(3): 244-273. Her research prompted me to look further into the impact of Johnston's theory and media practices on feminist film programming in the 1980s. A chronological list of key reprintings of Johnston's text 'Women's Cinema as Counter-Cinema' can be found in Fabian's article, which I am listing here for reference. Bill Nicols (ed) (1976), *Movies and Methods*. pp. 208-17. Berkeley: University of California. Patricia Erens (ed) (1979), *Sexual Stratagems: The World of Women in Film*, pp. 133-143. New York: Horizon. Sue Thornham (ed) (1999), *Feminist Film Theory: A Reader*. pp. 31-40. New York: New York University Press. E. Ann Kaplan (ed) (2000) *Feminism and Film*. pp. 22-33. Oxford: Oxford University Press, Barry Keith Grant (ed) (2008), *Auteurs and Authorship: A Film Reader*. pp. 119-26. Malden, MA: Blackwell.

‘What if’, and ‘what might’ have happened if Johnston had continued to theorise, educate, organise, programme and communicate women’s counter-cinema. Such matters of memory and legacy ask questions of the archive, of the ‘ruined and fragmentary map’ with its hauntings, ruptures, amnesia and erasure. It is a position that points to the politics of remembering and misremembering ‘lost’ cinefeminists like Johnston. Those feminists no longer with us, whose radical and polemic writings might be seen as out of date by contemporary feminists, and so ‘left behind’ as Claire Hemmings (2011: 5) argues in her analysis of feminism’s narrative of first, second and third ‘waves’. What might have been if Johnston had continued to put cinefeminism to work, to research, publish, programme and teach women’s counter cinema politics. What knowledge is there to be gained from remembering the full potential of Johnston’s theory and practice today in relation to feminist film historiography and transmitting that history through a feminist curating practice.

In this chapter, I will look at Johnston’s theoretical shift in thinking in terms of the theory, practice and audience debate that circulated so vehemently amongst cinefeminists over the 1970s. Across the decade Johnston’s multiple activities as a feminist film theorist, film programmer, filmmaker and media activist situated her at the very epicentre of a dynamic radical film culture. This was a network of filmmakers, collectives, practitioners, festivals, cinemas, institutions and theorists, which had, writes Margaret Dickinson, ‘a spontaneous and heterogeneous quality’ (1999: 48). Johnston was the center of these debates that enlivened those years. The relation of theory to practice; the role of the audience; agitating for change within the film industry; the use of psychoanalysis and semiotics in feminist film theory; feminist versus women’s cinema. By re-claiming and re-connecting the entirety of Johnston’s history that includes her film festival programming as history writing in itself, *and* her theory writing, film criticism and cultural activism, I will change the story. By shifting the narrative, we can include other voices, stories and experiences. Finally, I will reflect on the ways feminist film historiography can urge us to confront anew the power structures of established practices and the institution, for in the words of Lesley Stern, remembering Johnston, allows and challenges us ‘to speak feminism’ (1988: 122). In other words, Johnston’s many histories compel us to ‘not flee the political arena’ (Castro, 2022: 44). This task becomes more urgent in an era when, as Teresa Castro has argued, ‘neo-liberal feminism has come to dominate our political and cultural landscape...since academicization and marketization now go together’ (ibid.).

I have found that reading about and writing on Johnston’s history to be emotionally demanding. The reason being that the work deals with a history that is charged with affect,

shock, orthodoxy, gossip, infighting and the often difficult work of speaking feminism and living a feminist life.² Yet by recuperating Johnston and responding to her absence as a haunting in the archive, we can re-connect how and why her theorising, pedagogy and media practices started to reshape film history. Drawing out some of the key arguments of the decade concerning feminist polemics and practice, I will illustrate how intellectual, aesthetic and cultural debates were challenged; and as a consequence, the ways that audiences for women's counter-cinema materialised through an activist practice of feminist film programming and theorising.

Moreover, as already noted, by reading this history as a 'ruined and fragmentary map,' we can see how feminist film history has never followed a coherent, linear chronology. Rather, women's contribution to cinema remains circular, cyclical, often fragmentary, ephemeral, diffused and at times. This is, as Terry Castle (1995) argues, to work with the apparitional.³ This suggests that feminist film programming and curating as a material 'object' in the archive has always been part of a film history, despite its ephemerality and invisibility. And in a feminist, palimpsest sense, this history's absence can be made visible through what is already there, by re-tracing, re-mapping and re-writing its texts in the archive. Simply put, certain feminist histories, theories and practices at particular moments come to the fore and then for various reasons, as Michel Foucault (2002) writes about the power and knowledge of the archive, fall away.

Following Johnston's death, Stern remembered her friend and mentor in a special feature for *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media*. On Johnston's body of writing, Stern evokes the affective power, the shock and excitement of Johnston's scholarship, remembering it as 'scandalously unBritish [and] unashamedly intellectual, passionate and concerned with the political' (1988: 115-116). By bringing Johnston back, through memory and affect as a feminist methodology, focusing on the people and polemics who were embedded within the era's radical film culture, a distinct materiality of 1970s cine-feminism comes to the fore. Returning, and looking again, at Johnston allows me to explore what the archive might reveal about the marginalisation of feminist film programming and curating, even within feminist film history, despite its impact, as noted, on 1980s feminist film

² Sara Ahmed (2017), *Living A Feminist Life*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.

³ I am referring to Terry Castle's use of the 'apparitional' as a theory and activist tool. For to do feminist and lesbian film historiography is to work in many ways with the apparitional. See Castle (1995), *The Apparitional Lesbian: female homosexuality and modern culture*. New York: Columbia University Press.

programming groups at the Rio and elsewhere. Revisiting Johnston's now also reveals what the archive reveals about the gaps, hauntings and blind spots in feminist film scholarship today.

As with many public intellectuals, filmmakers and practitioners of the period, following the protests of May 1968, there was a shared sense of common purpose in British radical and experimental film circles. There was a view that political, aesthetic, economic and social struggles were allied and interconnected. Johnston's multiple histories offer a case in point. Her campaigning work saw her involvement with SEFT and the IFA, where film critics and independent filmmakers came together to lobby the BFI and union heads of the Association of Cinematograph and Television Technicians (ACTT).⁴

Johnston was also a founder member of the feminist film collective the London Women's Film Group, established to disseminate the ideas of the women's movement through filmmaking and campaigning for equal rights regarding women's work and pay within the film industry. By changing the production conditions, specifically how and by whom stories were told, the London Women's Film Group believed new forms of representation would be possible. In addition to making films with the group, Johnston used her position in the collective, alongside Women in Media, to campaign for the film industry to confront and redress the exclusion of women. As part of this campaign, film feminists lobbied and delivered filmmaking workshops to push the union heads of ACTT to prioritise women's demands in terms of working conditions and pay. This activism led to ACTT forming the Committee on Equality which published, a report in 1975, entitled 'Patterns of Discrimination against Women in the Film and Television Industries.'⁵ Johnston positioned her organisational work as part of a new wave of feminist media campaigning and cultural production. Political and activist undertakings that acted as a two-way mirror, which in turn energised her public speaking, programming and theory writing; consciousness-raising practices and strategies that set out to engage audiences as active participants in an emergent politicised women's counter-cinema. By re-connecting Johnston's community building work with her collective filmmaking, theory writing and work as a film programmer within the socio-political and institutional milieus in which she was working, a context for feminist film programming begins to surface. In this way, a different perspective on the film past can be mapped, a history that folds in film programming

⁴ For a detailed overview of this encounter, see Margaret Dickinson (ed) (1999), *Rogue Reels: oppositional film in Britain: 1945-1990*, pp. 48-50. London: BFI publishing.

⁵ Melanie Bell argues the report made visible the largely invisible labour of cinema and television that is carried out by women (2021: 181). In addition, see *Doing Women's Film and TV History III: Structures of Feeling* conference, 18–20 May 2016. Available at: <https://womensfilmandtelevisionhistory.wordpress.com/wfthn-conference-2016/> (accessed 7 March 2023).

with the theory writing as critical and activist practices, which in turn offers new contexts for understanding feminist film programming and media practices at the Rio in the 1980s.

Circling back to Johnston's discursive outputs, she was appointed to the board of *Screen* in 1972. This journal was key to the emergence of film studies as an academic discipline as well as shaping feminist film scholarship through its methodologies of semiotics, Marxism and psychoanalytic film theory. *Screen* was, in turn, influenced by the French film journal, *Cahiers du cinéma*, which had developed a highly politicised film criticism within the context of post-1968 politics and emergent debates predicated on Marxist and *auteur* theory.⁶ Disseminating the new British film theory to readers became part of a wider project from the journal to transform film theory and practice. In the 1970s, part of this remit found *Screen* collaborating with people and film festivals, to produce publications, conferences and symposia. As noted, much of this work constellated around the Edinburgh in the 1970s (Dickinson, 1999: 44). A year before Johnston's appointment, *Screen* selected a new board. This included, among others, Peter Wollen and Sylvia Harvey: key intellectuals associated with an emergent British oppositional film movement and theory.⁷ In this way, *Screen* became embedded within an oppositional film culture, providing a platform for debate and constituting a community through which this developing body of theory disseminated. Soon after, the appointment of Johnston and film theorist Paul Willemen onto the *Screen* board found a new association being formed with Edinburgh's critical publications and festival screening policy, resulting in, among other interventions, the instigation of the Women's Event in 1972.

A regular contributor to *Screen*, Johnston published on a variety of topics, including some of key political films of the 1970s. She worked both on Hollywood cinema (Tashlin, Walsh, Jacques Torneur and Arzner), on Bertolt Brecht and independent cinema. These choices echoed her theoretical interests and engagement with feminist history and politics, as well as women's creativity and cinema cultures more broadly. For instance, Johnston and Willemen (1974a) interviewed Mulvey and Wollen about their first film *Penthesilea, Queen of the Amazons*. The interview explores Mulvey and Wollen's intellectual motivations behind the making of the film, as well its experiments in film language. The four-way conversation also

⁶ *Cahiers du cinéma* (*Notebooks on Cinema*) is a French film journal founded in 1951 by André Bazin and others. The journal established the basic tenants of film criticism and film theory, espousing *la politique des auteurs* (*auteur* theory), rescuing Hollywood's old 'masters' including Howard Hawks, Douglas Sirk and Alfred Hitchcock from the margins of film history (see Bazin, 2009/1957). After May 1968, the journal committed wholeheartedly to Marxist, psychoanalytic and structuralist film theory (Hillier, 1985; 1992).

⁷ Published in 1969, Wollen's (2013) *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema* set in motion a series of reverberations that ran through British film culture in its attempt to formulate and articulate a theory of authorship and a mode of reading that considered recent developments in the fields of semiotics and structuralism.

offers insight into Johnston's engagement with women's history and politics, and the connections and differences between women's suffrage and liberation movements in the United States and United Kingdom.⁸ As Lucy Reynolds has argued, 'looking back to past experiences of oppression not only enabled women to articulate their history, but also to politicise their own work (2017: 140). Johnston's political organising was informed by this earlier generation of political activists and filmmakers whose perspectives she included in her cultural and writing work.

I have discovered that during this time in the 1970s, much of Johnston's thinking could be found in her writing for small pamphlets, as well as interviews and advocacies for certain films and filmmakers, which I will turn to next. Written in an era before feminist film studies entered the academy Johnston's texts were conjured as 'Notes' or 'Some Thesis': almost blank words that illustrated Johnston's writing process, namely: the working through of language, of ideas that had yet to be pinned down. These texts were produced, Laleen Jayamanne remarks, 'for very specific film occasions such as National Film Theatre screenings etc. ... though they have subsequently been read largely within academic film studies courses' (1988: 126). Johnston's text, 'Women's Cinema as Counter-Cinema' (1973), was first published in the form of 'Notes' to accompany her 1973 film season at the NFT. These 'Notes' became crucial to feminist film theory's development, yet the text's subsequent scholarly canonisation has meant that the writing's association with its film programming and socio-historical contexts often gets lost, which in turn has reduced Johnston's legacy to a handful of theoretical concerns (a point I will return to later). On reflection, Johnston's scope of writing and festival film programming from the early 1970s act as another haunting for the material limitations of engaging with the archives of 1970s women's liberation activism, feminist film theory and counter-cinema practices. Much of which I would argue remains forgotten and 'lost' to the historical archive.

Johnston was embedded within 1970s radical film culture. Her interest in psychoanalytic film theory to address feminist questions of representation, memory and identity led her to explore issues regarding cultural difference, particularly in relation to cinema and politics in Ireland. Her theorising of women's counter-cinema and its potential to be socially and political transformative saw her develop a keen concern and advocacy for Irish feminist political cinema. Her writing levelled criticism at English feminists for failing to understand the nuances of women's political struggle within the context of Northern Ireland. These ideas and considerations can be found in her text on Irish filmmaker Pat Murphy's film *Maeve* (1981)

⁸ Claire Johnston and Paul Willemen (1974a), *Penthesilea, Queen of the Amazons*. *Screen*, 15(3): 120-134.

which was published in *Screen* in 1981, evidence that shows how alive Johnston's work was to the politics of Irish women's filmmaking and political cultures more broadly.

Johnston's advocacy and critical support impacted Murphy's work reaching and connecting with feminist audiences at the time. In 1981, *Maeve* opened the Edinburgh Film Festival, and the BFI acted as the film's distributor. Murphy has a connection with the Rio as well. Murphy's next film *Anne Devlin* (1984) was programmed by the WMRP in conjunction with the London Irish Women's Centre.⁹ Yet what remains missing are the memories and experiences of programming and watching Murphy's work, how the films were contextualised and received by Rio audiences (many of whom would have been young Irish women, like Murphy, who migrated to Hackney in the period).¹⁰ This gap in the archive argues the case for feminist film curation as a scholarly methodology to bring a granularity to feminist film exhibition history in the cultural archive. Acting as a counter to flattened out film narratives, numerous *auteur* driven list-making discourses and marketable 'rediscoveries', attending to these contexts and specificities of women's film programming and feminist screening histories, offers a deeper insight into the work of feminist film scholars and activists like Johnston. Not only in terms of how Johnston, and others, have shaped the reception and circulation of particular films through their programming and criticism, but these specificities also reveal in the doing of this work: how feminist film history is bound with the activist work of its programmers and attendant audiences.

As a postscript, and circling back to CDF's curatorial work, Johnston's writing on *Maeve* became a touchstone for our curation too. Recognising that Murphy was in danger of being forgotten by a generation of feminist audiences, CDF, in conjunction with the ICO, re-screened *Maeve* at the Rio in 2018, with Murphy in attendance. Murphy's London Irish connection with the Rio and Hackney more broadly became an essential part of re-claiming and reviving *Maeve's* feminist film exhibition histories with contemporary audiences.¹¹ Then in 2022, knowing that more work needed to be done to recover and keep London Irish feminist film histories present, CDF presented a new digital restoration of *Maeve* at the Rio. On this occasion

⁹ According to the WMRP 1986/7 Annual Report, on Sunday 18 May 1986, *Anne Devlin* was programmed with *Strip Searching in Armagh* (1986) by the Derry Film and Video Workshop.

¹⁰ Michelle Deignan's documentary *Breaking Ground* (2013) tells the story of the London Irish Women's Centre, a Hackney-based radical organisation founded to support generations of Irish women living in London. In the 1980s, the London Irish Women's Centre and the WMRP connected through political, cultural and creative links, as well as sharing management committee members.

¹¹ *Maeve* was included in *Revolt, She Said: Women and Film after '68*, a 2018 national film tour curated by Club des Femmes and the ICO. When Murphy came to the Rio on 17 August 2018, she verified that *Maeve* played at the Rio. Available at: <https://www.independentcinemaoffice.org.uk/films/maeve/> (accessed 6 August 2023).

we collaborated with Hackney-based Irish filmmaker Christine Molloy who spoke about seeing herself in the character of Maeve. Molloy's remark that she is 'so utterly grateful [...] that this miracle of a film exists' connected with the legacy of Johnston's film criticism and advocacy for the film 41 years prior (2022).¹² This points to the ways, as Ann Cvetkovich writes, political history as affective history, a perspective that offers insight into how history is felt and shaped by events on a personal and collective level (2003: 167)

In addition to Johnston's writing for *Screen*, we might turn to a surprising detail in the braid of her scholarship; namely her interest in the American director Frank Tashlin (1913–1972), who influenced New Wave filmmakers and critics, particularly Jean-Luc Godard. In 1973, a year after Tashlin's death, the same year that 'Notes on Women's Cinema' was published, Johnston and Willemen co-edited *Frank Tashlin*, in conjunction with a season of the director's films at Edinburgh. 'This collection of essays' writes Johnston and Willemen 'constitute[...] part of a wider movement aimed at challenging prevailing critical assumptions about the cinema' (1973b: 5). Of the critical effort of the book, Jayamane writes, 'is to locate the modernity of Tashlin's cinematic strategies and those of Jerry Lewis as performer in relation to contemporary theoretical thought on culture' (1988: 124). Admittedly, finding this unusual squared shaped paperback book in the library took me by surprise, but then did my discovery of Johnston's passion for Tashlin. The book had been well read yet remained remarkably well preserved. I felt the need to make reference to its publication, because the book's existence also challenges 'prevailing critical assumptions' about the locus of Johnston's feminist theoretical inquiries with the focus continuing to remain on her women's counter-cinema theory. Of which Rachel Fabian writes

Tracing Johnston's more expansive engagements with women's counter-cinematic practices challenges assumptions that 1970s feminist film theory was strictly concerned with destroying identificatory pleasure via avant-garde filmmaking strategies (2018: 246).

¹² In January 2022, Irish Film London in partnership with Birds Eye View presented *Maeve* at the Rio, with a panel discussion that included Irish filmmaker Christine Molloy and me. Available at: <https://www.birds-eye-view.co.uk/event/maeve-panel-discussion/> (accessed 31 March 2022). To mark the screening and DVD/ BluRay release of the film, Club des Femmes commissioned a new piece of writing by Molloy. Available at: <https://www.clubdesfemmes.com/culture-club/culture-club-watching-maeve-by-pat-murphy-john-davies-and-robert-smith/> (accessed 31 March 2022).

Argued for here is a study of Johnson's critical work, which reveals not only her *cinophilia* but also other lines of critical inquiry, now forgotten. By bringing attention to her lesser known but equally interesting writing and film programming, speaks to her interest in taking Hollywood cinema 'as a fiction' seriously, to 'the vagaries of entertainment [and] all the contributions of cinematic pleasure' as Stern remarks (1988: 116).

Moreover, as a film critic, Johnston wrote for a variety of specialist, scholarly and mainstream publications, including *Framework*, *Sight & Sound*, *Jump Cut* and *Spare Rib*. Writing for the latter in October 1975, her germinal essay on *Nightcleaners* (1975) (a film which addresses a campaign to unionise women who cleaned office buildings in London), claimed it as 'is the most important political film ever to have been made in this country' (1999: 150). My research in the Rio's archive reveals its audiences would have been familiar with the above publications. I came across a flyer dated 5 February 1983, with details of an auction of film memorabilia to support fundraising for the cinema, and that copies of *Cahiers du cinéma* and *Screen* were given away as prizes. A revelation that prompted me to include this discovery in my tape/slide 'Feminist Re-Imaginations at the Rio 1980-2020' (see Chapter Six).

Culture versus semiotics

The feminist work of theoretical and archival recuperation that led to a re-centring of women's cinema as a counter-practice of historiography and a tool of consciousness-raising was only possible because of making visible what had previously been invisible. Johnston was one of the first theorists to ask how a women's cinema might be thought of outside patriarchy. Theoretically resistant to the new wave of women's liberation documentaries, which she saw as lacking in criticality, and placing herself in opposition to the British realist tradition of documentary filmmaking which dominated the critical landscape, Johnston turned her analysis to the myth of 'Woman' as a subject of inquiry in Hollywood cinema. In one of the defining feminist publications of the 1970s, 'Notes on Women's Cinema', she stated, 'it has been at the level of the image that the violence of sexism and capitalism [has] been experienced' (1973: 1). The publication's unflinching red revolutionary cover marks out the challenge ahead, in bold lettering with the following statement: 'The image of women in the cinema has been an image created by men. The emergent women's cinema has begun the transformation of that image. These notes explore ideas and strategies developed in women's cinema' (ibid).

'Notes on Women's Cinema' was the first anthology of feminist film theory published by *Screen*. As the editor, Johnston included new feminist film criticism by Naome Gilbert,

Barbara Halpern Martineau and an interview with Argentinian-born French filmmaker Nelly Kaplan, in dialogue with Johnston's text 'Women's Cinema as Counter-Cinema'. In the text, Johnston deploys Louis Althusser's definition of ideology as an analysis of patriarchal ideology.¹³ 'Within a sexist ideology and male dominated cinema,' Johnston writes, 'woman is presented as what she represents for man (1973: 26). Despite the 'enormous emphasis placed on woman as spectacle in the cinema, 'woman', she concludes, 'is largely absent' (ibid.).

In addition, Johnston uses Roland Barthes (1973) and his notion of the 'myth' to investigate the myth of 'Woman' in Hollywood cinema, to theoretically argue that 'Woman' has been fixed in a sign of Other, as a spectacle, an enigma and perpetual mystery. Johnston's theory, which proposed a fundamental shift from an understanding of cinema as reflecting reality to a view of cinema as constructing a patriarchal ideological view of reality, became crucial to the development of feminist film theory and practice in the 1970s.

Germinating alongside the semiotic, Marxist and psychoanalytic turns of the 1970s, 'Notes on Women's Cinema' developed out of and through the film programming and discussions that took place at The Women's Event in 1972. Patricia White (2006: 145) writes that this specific festival context is often forgotten by feminist film scholarship. Johnston's film programming and theorising set up new frameworks and positionalities for theorists, filmmakers and programmers engaged with looking at, making, analysing and presenting films to feminist audiences. Johnston's theory 'provided a vocabulary,' writes Mulvey, 'and a set of concepts that could enable a first articulation of the place of sexuality in women's liberation' (2015: 21). Drawing on Johnston's theoretical framework, programmers, critics and audiences began the work of recovering and re-conceptualising a history of women's creativity in cinema. Advancing a genealogy of feminist philosophical work undertaken to re-conceptualise knowledge, a longstanding endeavour that had previously been carried out by writers as far apart as Mary Wollstonecraft¹⁴ and Simone de Beauvoir,¹⁵ Johnston allied herself with the

¹³ Ideology is defined as 'a system of representations: "images, myths, ideas or concepts", a 'profoundly unconscious system which 'represent[s] itself as once transparent, "natural" and universal to the viewer' (Johnston, 1988: 38).

¹⁴ Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-97) wrote *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* in 1792, making the case for women's political rights in the English language. Linking the socio-cultural construction of femininity with the conditions of women's oppression and consequential exclusion from the public sphere, whilst drawing on a particular interface of personal and political events, she focused attention on women's subjugation in relation to dominant power structures and the revolutionary potential of that idea. See Chapter Five for Wollstonecraft's connection with Rowbotham and the locality of Hackney in the 1970s.

¹⁵ Simone de Beauvoir (1908-1986) wrote *The Second Sex* in 1949, a foundational feminist analysis regarding the social construction of gender that challenged the notion of why Woman is defined as 'Other'. Drawn from her experience of gender discrimination as a philosophy student at the Sorbonne, de Beauvoir combined this experience with an existentialist analysis of how patriarchal knowledge and culture instituted gender hierarchies, fixing women into a subordinate, constructed and mythologised role as 'Other'. Her writing questioned where

post-1968 critics of *Cahiers du cinéma*, arguing for films to be read through a Marxist ideological framework as well as studying modes of entertainment, desire and fantasy for the potential intervention of women's counter-cinema, which she found in the films of Arzner and Kaplan. In this way Johnston laid the foundations and concepts for a politically engaged critique of contemporary feminist thought, as such her ideas were taken up by film feminists of the 1970s.

Returning to The Women's Event's, the programmers knew what was at stake for feminist film history and theory when they included *Dance, Girl, Dance* in the festival. A key film of the feminist film movement, presenting and discussing the film led to Johnston and Pam Cook's theorising of Arzner's filmmaking as a prescription for a new women's counter-cinema. In 1975 they set down their ideas in a pamphlet entitled, *The Work of Dorothy Arzner: Towards a feminist cinema*. Arzner was one of the few women working as a director in the Hollywood studio system of the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s. Johnston and Cook argued Arzner had produced a substantial body of work which had been ignored by male film historians and theorists. Building on their textual analysis of *The Revolt of Mamie Stover* (1956), Johnston and Cook deployed the same semiotic, psychoanalytic reading to activate a feminist re-reading of Arzner's work. They proposed that Arzner's films be read as a self-critical text which exposes the invisible workings of a patriarchal ideology within Hollywood cinema.¹⁶ Just as Wollstonecraft, de Beauvoir and, later, Firestone and Greer had done, Johnston and Cook confronted the patriarchal organisation of traditional knowledge and, in so doing, offered a new understanding of the ubiquity of patriarchy ideology in film, with the recognition that women's oppression was tied to her sex and sexuality. Johnston and Cook read Arzner's films as working against patriarchal ideology through strategies of play, irony, disruption and contradiction. 'The woman in Arzner's films,' writes Johnston, 'determines her own identity through

women get the ideas of what they can be from, asking how they use them and how can they work against them. De Beauvoir's interpretation of feminism performed a seismic role in transforming ideas about the social and cultural construction of gender when read through Marxist and psychoanalytic theory, arguing that gender was not a matter of biology but history. *The Second Sex* signalled a foundational feminist text of the late twentieth century. Four years after the original French publication in 1953, the book was translated into English for the first time by H. M. Parshley. As a result, de Beauvoir's ideas began to reach a wider readership. For feminist film theorists such as Mulvey and Johnston, reading de Beauvoir opened a pathway to ask critical questions about the constraints of social gender constructions. (See de Beauvoir, 1949/1997).

¹⁶ In *The Revolt of Mamie Stover*, Johnston and Cook offer a Lacanian reading in which they examine the operations of patriarchal ideology and myths of representation in process in the film, which despite the presence of a strong female protagonist, constructs her 'as a signifier in a circuit of exchange where the values of exchange have been fixed by/in a patriarchal culture' (1988: 26). They analysis how Mamie/Jane Russell is compelled to be the object of desire in order to be the subject of desire. Yet Mamie/Russell remains a source of anxiety within the text, which threatens the film's narrative and ideological coherence. They conclude that 'a study of 'woman' within Walsh's oeuvre, in particular, reveals "woman" as the locus of a dilemma for the patriarchal human order, as a locus of contradictions' (ibid.: 35).

transgression and desire in a search for an independent existence beyond and outside the discourse of the male' (1975: 4). In effect, a feminist reading of Arzner's films can rupture the ideological coherence of the classical Hollywood text. While unable to radically change dominant patriarchal structures, according to Johnston and Cook, Arzner 'open[ed] up an idea of contradiction in the text [...] as a process of re-writing', and in this way the director contributed to 'the development of a feminist counter-cinema' (ibid.: 7-8).

This new scholarship set the tone for future critical readings and theoretical receptions of Arzner's films, which in turn impacted on how feminist programmers presented and discussed the director's work with audiences. Consequently, *Dance, Girl, Dance* became central to the development of Anglo-American feminist film theory, film history and counter-cinema practices. As noted in Chapter Two, the London Women's Film Group wrote about the experience of watching *Dance, Girl, Dance* at The Women's Event for *Spare Rib*, commenting that 'cinema audiences were left laughing and cheering' (1972: 34). These rare accounts of audience's viewing pleasures also belong to Johnston programming the film. To illustrate the point, Johnston and Cook presented their theoretical work on Arzner with a programme of her films at one of the first women's film festival's in Copenhagen in 1976: International Kvinde Film Festival/International Women's Film Festival.¹⁷ These examples draw attention to the value of remembering Johnston's programming at this time, and how this aspect of her practice gets written out of history, even within feminist film history, because of the canonisation of 'Notes on Women's Cinema' within feminist film scholarship and film studies, which compresses her other cultural and creative activities.

Searching through the Rio's archive, I found a flyer for a 1984 screening of *Dance, Girl, Dance*, programmed by the RWC in a double bill with *Calamity Jane* (1953). The RWC copy reads

DANCE GIRL DANCE has Maureen O'Hara as one of three dancers struggling for a break, and the scene where she stops halfway through her act to deliver a biting and triumphant speech against the attitudes of her male spectators is one of the starting points of any analysis of a feminist strain within the general film product of Hollywood.¹⁸

¹⁷ See Moira Sullivan (2017), Dorothy Arzner returns to Paris at Créteil Films de Femmes. Available at: <https://agnesfilms.com/female-filmmakers/dorothy-arzner-returns-to-paris-at-creteil-films-de-femmes/> (accessed 17 April 2020).

¹⁸ Rio Women's Cinema flyer. 25 October 1984. [document]. Rio Cinema archive.

The copy illustrates the use of Johnston and Cook's textual analysis to critically frame the film from a feminist perspective for Rio audiences. One year later, the WMRP started to programme screenings and events at the Rio, naming their inaugural programme 'Spectacles of Patriarchy (or Your Father's Glasses),' a decision which did not connect with audiences. WMRP member Vicky Grut recalled the programme title was a word play on Annette Kuhn's concept of feminism, 'as a pair of spectacles... through which we can look at films' (1994: 68).¹⁹ She told me

[Spectacles of Patriarchy] was the first [screening] we did, [and it] was the sort of thing we stopped doing. We spent hours thinking about it, but who came to that. It was such an in-joke. I think that we had to leave a lot of that behind. (2019) ²⁰

As Grut's account attests this shift in programming from the RWC's more theoretically informed programming, concerning an examination of images of women, to the WMRP's more audience focused programming, less theoretically driven, more accessible and potentially effective for delivering audiences for feminist cinema, mirrors the contested debates about theory, practice and cinema audiences that manifested in heated arguments at Edinburgh in 1979. Moreover, Grut's account reflects Johnston's significant shift in theoretical thinking from her first draft of film theory, which she published, following the debates at Edinburgh in 1979, in an article for *Screen*: 'The Subject of Feminist Film Theory/Practice' (1980).²¹

Returning to 1973 and the programming of 'Women's Cinema as Counter Cinema,' Johnston's concept of counter-cinema included the problems she saw in women's liberation documentary filmmaking, particularly regarding *cinema vérité* and documentary (as realism) films and videos, coming directly out of the women's movement. Her position stimulated discussion regarding the role and value of women's documentary filmmaking in portraying women's lived experiences as tools of consciousness-raising. In her text, Johnston highlights

¹⁹ Here Kuhn was paraphrasing Ann E. Kaplan (1976), Aspects of British feminist film theory. *Jump Cut*, 12/13: 52-5.

²⁰ Interview with Vicky Grut. 3 February 2019. (See Appendix D).

²¹ In addition to this, Grut's account mirrors the feminist debate concerning the spectator and the audience as a social group. In 1982 Kuhn argued that 'the distinction between spectator and audience has potentially far-reaching political consequences for independent cinema. The 'other' character of much independent work may render it unpalatable at first sight. At the same time... if the future of social practice of cinema depends upon the construction of new audiences for certain kinds of films, the reactions of certain audiences, particularly as these reactions depart from whatever spectator/text relations may be privileged by films' textual operations, need to be negotiated' (1994: 185).

Three Lives (1971) by Kate Millett as an example of a film that ‘largely depict images of women talking to camera about their experiences’ (1973a: 29). As a radical strategy, Johnston suggests the film is inadequate since ‘it is not enough to discuss the oppression of women within the text of the film; the language of the cinema/the depiction of reality must also be interrogated, so that a break in ideology and text is effected’ (ibid.: 29). Responding to this, as noted in Chapter Two, Christine Gledhill and Julia Lesage offered counter arguments to Johnston’s critique of realism, focusing instead on the cultural and social importance of documentary for the spread of the women’s movement in the United States and the United Kingdom. In May 1980, these considerations and debates were addressed by feminist programmers at the Rio, when they organised the cinema’s first Festival of Women’s Films. In a forum entitled ‘Women’s Cinema Workshop (women only)’, topics for discussion included: what is the relationship between feminist film and the women’s movement; how has feminist film developed over the last 10 years; what is a feminist audience.²²

By the mid 1970s, debates about culture versus semiotics split the solidarity of the *Screen* editorial board, and the feminist film movement. In 1976, Gledhill along with three other *Screen* board members resigned over disagreements about the journal’s shift to Marxist, semiotic and psychoanalytic film theory. Their views were expressed in an article ‘Psychoanalysis and film’, which was principally about *Screen*’s treatment of psychoanalysis, and its inaccessibility for *Screen* reader and teachers. Yet their deeper concerns were about how a difference of opinion was discouraged, as ‘controversial intellectual choices [were being] made to appear unproblematic,’ including the place ‘women have in these psychoanalytic accounts’ a consequence, they wrote, that presented writing ‘full of ambiguities and uncertainties’ (1976: 121-127).

These issues were personally and professionally felt, and subsequently four *Screen* editorial board members, including Gledhill resigned.²³ Yet a few years prior to these ruptures, the crosscurrents between women’s liberation politics, women’s filmmaking, film programming, theory and audiences coalesced at the BFI National Film Theatre (NFT). In 1973, Johnston took a refined programme of The Women’s Event to London, where she programmed, in conjunction with ‘Notes on Women’s Cinema’, the NFT first season of women’s cinema. Comprising over 50 films by women directors, Johnston wrote how her film programming would ‘make a contribution towards building a women’s cinema (not simply

²² A Festival of Rio Women’s Cinema (1980). [document]. Rio Cinema archive. (See Appendix B).

²³ Edward Buscombe, Christine Gledhill, Alan Lovell and, Christopher Williams (1976), Statement: why we have resigned from the board of *Screen*. *Screen*, 17(2): 106-109.

women's films in a man's cinema)' (1973a: 2). In an interview for the *London Times*, Johnston disclosed that she intended 'to build up a women's cinema by showing that it has a history and giving it some kind of historical perspective' (1972).²⁴ Framed around three strands, the NFT season focused on Hollywood films including those directed by Arzner, Ida Lupino and Lois Weber; 1960s European art films directed by Agn s Varda, Kaplan and Nadine Trintignant; and British and US women's liberation documentaries including work by Millett, Julia Reichert and Midge Mackenzie. In addition to the Anglo/European/American focused strands, women filmmakers from France/Guadeloupe, Hong Kong and Japan were woven into the season, including work by Sarah Maldoror, Shu Shuen and Nobuko Shibuya respectively.

The political aspiration of Johnston's critical and programming scholarship remains prescient for film historiography, because by re-connecting these feminist counter-cinema histories it is possible to understand the context in which feminist film programming emerged as a contextual and interventionist strategy, as well as to see how it was done. Also, by excavating feminist film programming and curating histories, we can map how programming as a critical practice shaped the reception and circulation of feminist work on and off screen. In this way, we might recognise the different way feminist film history can be written and seen. These material histories of a 1970s feminist counter cinema practices still haunt us today. This is because they have largely been overlooked, not only in film history but also by feminist film scholarship. As film scholar Jane Gaines contends

The ongoing work of 'doing women's film history' via conferences, research and publication is important in many ways, one of the most daring and challenging of which is the way contemporary scholarship points out what feminism forgot or overlooked—to emphasize what we had overlooked, not just what film industry official histories neglected. (2016: 26)

This neglect remains tangible. It has led to a vast majority of women's counter-cinema practices remaining out of sight, either caught up in protracted contracts, buried within national film archives, yet these films continue to linger long in people's memories. In fact, a great majority of historical women's cinema is rarely seen in the cinema today. Feminist programmers and curators continue to confront issues of the archive's blind spots and erasures,

²⁴ Claire Johnston is quoted in Geoffrey Wansell (1972) *Cinema Women: making films to destroy a man-made image*. *London Times*. 2 April: 10. (See Fabian, 2018: 272).

through feminist, queer, decolonial strategies and counter-archival practices. Also, there are complexities of rights and contracts, on top of obsolete screening formats often too difficult to project. This is an ongoing reminder that points to the sometimes difficult and complicated circumstances under which a great majority of historical women's film and video work was produced.²⁵

To re-iterate my argument, the programming impulse behind the women's screenings and events in the early 1970s helped Johnston formulate ideas to write a new theory of women's counter-cinema that semiotically addressed woman as a textual sign. This, she argued, theoretically absented women because of Hollywood's sexist and capitalist processes. Equally, feminist film programming as a way of thinking differently in the archive, offered a discursive and activist tool to write and re-imagine a history of women's cinema in the spaces of cinema. In this way, by programming and discussing work by women directors on which she had written, Johnston instigated a methodology to write a feminist film history through the tool of film programming. Through this theoretical and activist framework, Johnston created a discursive space for feminist audiences to reflect and engage with historical and contemporary women's cinema. A socio-cultural space where women's lives, identities and desires were reflected on screen and discussed with an audience.

It is noteworthy to add that although Johnston took a rigorous Althusserian positionality in her theory writing, utilising it as a feminist analysis of patriarchal ideology in Hollywood cinema, her skills as film programmer as well as her campaigning and community organising saw these pedagogical and cultural activities continually underpinned by political, collective and emancipatory considerations. This meant that she continued to advocate for a broad range of women's moving image practice as well as connecting that work with feminist audiences. These interventions can be found in her programming of women's liberation documentaries, as well as films by women that offered a counter-cinema to the mainstream, through *cinéma vérité*, fiction, experimentation, exploitation and autobiographical techniques. The films she selected for the NFT season explored new cinematic languages that was capturing a shared experience of the women's movement as it was coming into being.

²⁵ A case in point is Négritude filmmaker and political activist Sarah Maldoror. In April 2020, Maldoror passed away following complications due to the coronavirus. In May 2020, *Another Gaze* curated an online event titled 'The Many Legacies of Sarah Maldoror (1929-2020)', which included screenings of three of her films. For global feminist audiences, including myself, this was the first opportunity to watch Maldoror's work and discuss her legacy framed within a feminist perspective. Available at: <https://www.anothergaze.com/another-gaze-presents-legacies-sarah-maldoror-1929-2020-12-may-2020/> (accessed 23 June 2023).

In addition, strengthened by the campaigning work she undertook with the London Women's Film Group and the IFA and determined to overturn institutional discriminatory practices of film historians, archivists, programmers and critics who ignored and erased women filmmakers from narratives of film history, Johnston organised a Forum and Open Screening of Women's Film, in order to involve more women in the ideas of women's liberation, and take up feminist filmmaking practices and collective strategies to combat discrimination in the film industry. There was also an opportunity for women to present their work for discussion. Spending time in the archive and recuperating Johnston's endeavours as an activist and film programmer remains valuable. Charlotte Brunsdon notes this was a history 'of political struggle in which there [were] a whole range of interventions by women *as* women in the distribution and exhibition of films (1986: 179). Tracing Johnston's film programming history and re-connecting that history with her theorising and campaigning and community work, we can see how film programming of this era was politically instrumental by its very nature. Johnston's commitment to platforming contemporary women filmmakers demonstrates her openness and critical engagement as a feminist and a film programmer, as well as her commitment to fostering new forms of moving image practice and women's counter-cinema cultures and communities more broadly. These links between Johnston's theory, practice and activism, Fabian argues, draw attention to her 'broader cultural activism,' which she writes, 'offers a more complex understanding of 1970s "cinefeminism's" investments in feminist film history and the politics of women's cinema as both theory and practice' (2018: 245). 'Notes on Women's Cinema' was published in conjunction with Johnston's film programming and cultural activist work at the NFT. A more nuanced contextualisation of Johnston as a polemicist, theorist, filmmaker, activist and film programmer remains vital to understand the complexities, ruptures and debates of 1970s feminist film history, which continues to remain obscured by an overarching theoretical narrative of the decade.

In 1979, Johnson co-organised the Feminism and Cinema Event at Edinburgh, with Mulvey, Myles and Angela Martin. The films presented are remembered today as part of a new canonisation of feminist theoretical filmmaking. Yet as B. Ruby Rich (1998: 164-165) writes, the event left many questions unanswered about what a women's cinema or feminist counter cinema should look like and what it could be: a question that was first raised by the programmers of the 1972 Women's Event. Conspicuous by their absence were the inclusion of women's liberation documentaries so vital to the early days the women's movement and the political and emancipatory impulses of the women's film festivals. By the end of the 1970s, film studies had entered the academy, offering feminist film scholars like Johnston new yet

tentative institutional support and professional careers. Yet as Lesley Stern reflects, this was a predicament which became difficult to manage for activists and scholars like Johnston

The institutionalisation of theoretical practice for feminism, under the sign of cinema, has involved the occupation of an impossible space (a science fiction landscape)—at one marginal and authoritarian. (1988: 119)

The academic pressure to define feminist film theory as a clear disciplinary field of study, in conjunction with the institutionalisation of a discourse that had started on the periphery of academia, conscripted feminist film theory into the academy. And with that Stern writes, feminism ‘ha[d] its casualties, and fft (feminist film theory) more casualties’ (ibid: 120). While film programming disappeared from feminist film history, the connection was lost across filmmaking, writing, programming and viewing as connected consciousness-raising activities. Yet as Mary Ann Doane, Patricia Mellencamp and Linda Williams note, ‘Many of the political aspirations of the women’s movement [have] form[ed] an integral part of the very structure of feminist work in and on film’ (1984: 5). In the 1980s, these aspirations were taken up by women’s programming groups at the Rio and across the regions including the Norwich Women’s Film Weekend (1979-1989).²⁶

Always wanting to shift the discourse forward to devise strategies for social transformation—and responding to the issues voiced by Rich at the Feminism and Cinema Event about the limits of textual analysis for women’s liberation (as I previously noted), Johnston reflected on these debates in ‘The Subject of Feminist Film Theory/Practice.’ Here she signposts a direction of travel for the feminist film movement through the theorisation of practice, signalling ways of ‘locat[ing] feminist politics within a conception of film as a social practice, on the dialectic of making and viewing and on film as a process rather than object’ (1980: 27). Johnston argues that feminist film theory is primarily ‘a dialectical discursive activity, embedded in the real, and always exceeded and transformed by practice—a constant dialectic with the aim of breaking of exchange for *use*’ (ibid.: 28). While the focus on textual analysis was vital at the time for framing cinema as a site of ideological struggle for the developing women’s movement, ‘theoretical work,’ she argues, ‘on the relationship between

²⁶ The Norwich Women’s Film Festival was a two-day annual event that ran for 10 years at Cinema City in Norwich, organised to ‘promote and encourage women filmmakers and present the audience with films dealing with women’s issues’ (1979). Available at: <https://norwichwomensfilmweekend.wordpress.com/norwich-womens-film-weekend-1979-89/> (accessed 23 June 2022).

text and subject and the historical subject is now more important' (ibid.). The text is a considered revision of thinking regarding Johnston's investment in Marxist, psychoanalytical and semiotic film theory. Yet her position that theory should be continually tested and informed by cultural practices returns attention to 'Notes on Women's Cinema,' and her programming work, which establishes a dialectic relationship between her theory, practice and audiences. Johnston's commitment to connect theories of the cinematic apparatus to its potential to debate what a women's counter-cinema might be, while at the same time politically engaging feminist filmmakers and audiences in women's liberation, marked a creative and dynamic tension in her work, a tension that has been buried within the historical record.

My argument is that this initial period of 1970s cine-feminism saw an explosive moment in the coming together of theory writing, women's liberation politics and moving image practices, and that this encounter constituted the beginnings of feminist film programming and curating as a tool of research, contextualisation and discourse. Yet, as Rich writes, by the end of the decade, the canonisation of feminist film theory and its adoption by film studies into the academy, shifted the focus away from cine-feminism as 'a sphere of action' to an 'area of study' (1998: 65). This legacy has resulted in the canonisation of certain key texts of feminist theory and films, which has subsequently had the impact of eclipsing other narratives of the 1970s, including those belonging to feminist work in film programming and curating. As the circulation of feminist film theory and filmmaking became more pronounced, other histories and practices got flattened and forgotten. Often, histories of feminist film programming and curating were left on the periphery, as a mere citation or ignored completely. Their hauntings reveal the feminist film past remains full of untapped possibilities.

In 1979 Lis Rhodes wrote film histories come in many forms. Her 'crumpled heap' metaphor from 'Whose History?' suggests, as Lucy Reynolds argues, 'a discursive model of history, a new framework where different voices overlap, confront, converse, to form a choral configuration of simultaneous histories rather than a neat chain of cause and effect' (2017: 144). Likewise, different histories and counter narratives can be found in the memories of women's collective work in film programming. This is possible if a more widespread narrative of 1970s and 1980s feminist film history can be written.

In 1983, when she came to the United Kingdom present her film *Serious Undertakings* (1983) at the Tyneside Cinema in Newcastle and London Film Festival, Australian filmmaker Helen Grace stayed with Johnston in London. Reading Grace's account of her time spent with Johnston offers a different insight into Johnston as a person. It was an account that I found myself ruminating on, long after I had finished reading it. Grace recalls her host as 'a

marvellous raconteur,' and the many hours of conversation spent together full of 'gossip [and] stories, [and] the gory details of personal and political battles over the previous decade' as Johnston presented an account of 'British screen theory and its proper names which never appeared in the pages of *Screen...*' along with the 'wrong turns and mistakes which feminism had made as well as a continued passionate commitment to the ideals which had generated so much of the energy of the last decade' (1988: 128-9). This was Johnston's ability to 'speak feminism,' encompassing her passion for women's liberation and the cinema, her intellectual rigour, her writing, her activist film programming and collective cultural work that continued to agitate for change. Linked together, Johnston's history is part of the archaeology of the feminist film archive that reveals another layer of knowledge and texture to the history, one which has too often been covered and thus forgotten.

This chapter is brief because Johnston's life was cut short. Yet its brevity, I hope, brings forward a sense of the discursive which haunts this thesis. This is about a women's film history that exists in traces and fragments, notes in the margin, as texts and para-texts.

Concluding remarks

Chapter Three has been about reclaiming and re-connecting Johnston's multiple histories back together, while attending to the different registers of knowledge and the contexts in which they came about. The archive is a space that challenges memory. Yet it can also be the foundation from which history is written. While feminist principles of care and responsibility mean that, as queer feminists, the task at hand is to keep re-making 'the ruined and fragmentary map,' and to keep attending to the gaps and absences, without erasing what has been lost. To recuperate a history that is discrete and fragmented is to work with absence, unknowability and conjecture. It is a situation that complicates feminist film history and renders it messy. Hence the need, as Hemmings asserts, to keep reflecting on and re-thinking feminist historiography as resistance to dominant narratives. Moreover, as we reclaim Johnston's history from the complexities of the 'crumpled heap,' we are also learning about another history of programming, which in turn can help us better understand how feminist film programming as a critical and activist practice instigated and fostered a vibrant and shifting feminist film culture of the era. It is to B. Ruby Rich that I will turn to next, a feminist film scholar and activist who was instrumental in theorising, documenting, shaping and disseminating this history and practice of feminist curating as a tool of activism and advocacy.

Chapter Four: Sweating History: Working with B. Ruby Rich, curator, critic and film activist

I learned so very much from the panellists and from the younger generation of scholars and students assembled in the Birkbeck screening room, steaming on one of the hottest days in history, that I'd like the chance to put it to use ... The Barbican-Birkbeck week stands as a reminder of the power of criticism and scholarship when launched into the world.

B. Ruby Rich in *Film Quarterly* (2017a)

B. Ruby Rich's observations on the 'Being Ruby Rich: Film curation as advocacy and activism' Symposium communicates the affective charge in the Birkbeck Cinema, amplified by the unexpected and intense heat of the day. Her words also speak of the ways in which feminist film curation as a scholarly methodology 'can be put to use' (Rich: 2017a) in the world, and to repair 'the ruined and fragmentary map' (Bruno, 1993: 3) of feminist film history. In so doing, feminist film curation recasts 'the ruined map' of the historical archive that continues to neglect the impact of women on film history. The Symposium was organised to recover and re-imagine the archive's potential to enunciate a counter and collective memory of the feminist film past for its futurity. It facilitated a concentrated engagement towards sharing, learning and rewriting feminist and LGBTQ+ moving image histories together. It led me to reconsider how to analyse and archive the Symposium's affects, specifically the materiality of memory and the issue of forgetting and my own misrememberings on the day, in order to produce new knowledge as cultural memory. Furthermore, the event created space for intersectional conversations about and different perspectives to flow on feminism, the materiality of history, and of memory, queerness, politics, theory and collective practice.

Addressing the archive's ruination and the restorative act of coming together, the Symposium set about piecing together the archival residues of feminist film programming and curation. It sought to recover an elided history of women's work in film exhibition that Rich herself was so fundamental in theorising, documenting, shaping and disseminating in the 1970s and 1980s. In *Chick Flicks* Rich reflects on her memories of the era while at the same time posing a key question for this thesis: 'What was uncovered in the world of feminism and film in the seventies, and what was buried?' (1998: 5). The Symposium and this practice-based research have gone some way towards responding to Rich. Both reflect on how we might

collectively remember that productive period of cultural rehabilitation for women, to consider how we might change film history by changing what counts as film history. But also, to contemplate what counts as film practice. In effect, Rich's reflections illustrate the value of feminist, cultural memory and queerness as methodological approaches to do historiographical practice-based research that attends to the archive's erasures, gaps and blinds spots. Her ruminations further recognise the different registers of knowledge and the historical contexts within which they occur. These strategies and methodologies offered resuscitative possibilities to do feminist film history affectively and politically.

I have taken Mulvey and Johnston as guides in the feminist film archive to map a materiality of this history. In that same spirit, this chapter turns to Rich's history as a festival programmer, film critic and cultural theorist to help address some key epistemological questions of this research: what would film history look like if it included a cultural history of feminist film programming and curating; and how might this history be remembered through its affects and cultural objects? This chapter sets out to respond to these questions. I do so by tracing Rich's trajectory as a festival programmer, curator, feminist and queer film theorist and chronicler of social trends on and off screen, and whose scholarship shaped US and UK feminist film histories. Forty years prior, at the invitation of Mulvey, Rich attended Edinburgh in the 1970s, and subsequently became instrumental in the theorisation of and advocacy for feminist and avant-garde film of the 1970s and 1980s. Yet, as CDF discovered when we began planning to bring Rich to London for 'Being Ruby Rich,' her cultural and intellectual contributions outside academia and wider film culture presented historical amnesia. For, her impact on feminist and queer film history and culture at large is barely known by politically engaged curators and journalists today.¹

Rich's considerations and reflections on what counts as knowledge, and the ways it can be learned and disseminated, is taken as a line of enquiry in this chapter. This is where I return to Ann Cvetkovich's queer reading of the archive as a methodology centring on 'an archive of feelings', [as] an exploration of cultural texts as repositories of feelings and emotions' (2003: 7). In so doing, this chapter attends to the material encounters and affective dimensions of women's collective, affective and critical practice in film exhibition, as embodied evidence in the archive. Drawing out a discourse of counter-memory as feminist knowledge in the archive,

¹ For a comprehensive assessment of Rich's criticism and curation, as well as select writing on Rich's work, see Film Studies for Free/Catherine Grant (2017), Richly Resourceful! On B. Ruby Rich's work, plus a Round Up of Recent Open Access Screen Studies Items. Available at: <https://filmstudiesforfree.blogspot.com/2017/06/richly-resourceful-on-bruby-richs-work.html> (accessed 24 July 2023).

I re-draw a cultural map that traces the ways in which Rich's work as a programmer, critic and activist speaks to a broader account of feminist cultural film history. By linking a practice of feminist film programming and curating to historical references and theoretical discussions, it becomes possible to place feminist methods of film programming and curating within a wider context, which in turn offers a different reading of this period in film history than previously known.

Throughout this chapter, drawing on feminist theory and methodologies, I will justify how and why I am taking a practice-based research methodological approach, while at the same time reflecting on my practice and the relationship between practice and research as a different way of coming to knowledge. I begin with a thick description of the Symposium held on 21 June 2017, in partnership with CDF and Birkbeck Institute of Moving Image (BIMI), in the Birkbeck Cinema.² The Symposium illustrates this thesis' central proposal for feminist film curating as a methodological approach for doing cultural history, as it attends and responds to the critical, ethical and practical challenges of working with a 'ruined map' of feminist film programming and curating. As an illustration of my research's methodological approaches, and as an example of CDF's practice that positions queer feminist curating as a tool of discourse and archiving, the Symposium set out ways of remembering and disseminating the critical, affective and socio-political histories of feminist film curating and programming. In addition, the day demonstrated the scholarly value of foregrounding practice in relation to feminist and social theories, as outlined in Chapter Two and Three, in dialogue with Rich's curating and critical scholarship. Moreover, as a case study analysis, arriving midpoint through my research journey, it offered me the chance to reflect, review and look ahead, in what Sophie Hope describes as the 'making, doing and testing things out' of research (2016: 166). The Symposium provided an opportunity for a question-and-answer session with the research material so far and, crucially, afforded me the chance to reflect on my research questions and any methodological issues that emerged because of the practice.

Cinefeminism

In the early 1970s, Rich's engagement with women's liberation fed into her work as a film festival programmer, critic and cultural chronicler of the era. Her ability to articulate and shape new understandings of feminism and later 'new queer cinema' fostered transnational dialogues

² The Birkbeck Cinema is a venue and research forum that acts as a focal point for the interdisciplinary approaches to moving image practice within the School of Arts and across the humanities at Birkbeck, which includes BIMI and my own department Film Media and Cultural Studies, as well as that of the MA in Film Programming and Curating. Available at: <http://blogs.bbk.ac.uk/bimi/> (accessed 30 March 2023).

and debates between US women's liberation film feminists and their UK counterparts. Rich named this meeting point between feminism, theory, filmmaking and film programming as 'cinefeminism'

...a term that was sometimes used to describe the broad field of feminism and film that began in the seventies with the flourishing of film festivals and the simultaneous invention of theoretical approaches to classic Hollywood representations of women, eventually expanding to other films as well. (1998: 1)

Rich's definition lays out a way of thinking combining new feminist theory, practice and activism.

Beginning as a movement propelled by the political gains of women's liberation, cinefeminism initiated an activist practice of research, film programming, criticism and audience building. It was a discipline that developed into an intellectual and political activity where women's cinema, images of women and feminist film culture began to be debated, shaped and imagined. Taking Rich as my guide, I trace the contours and layers of this history of cinefeminism which was embedded within the feminist film movement of the 1970s and 1980s. By mapping a materiality of that history, we can account for how women's cinema and filmmakers were contextually programmed, presented and received by feminist audiences eager to see themselves on screen whilst at the same time engaging with a developing women's film history and culture in formation. Correspondingly, by tracing Rich's curating and critical histories as a textual marker in the archive, it is possible to explore the resuscitative ways in which filmmakers, artists, critics, curators and audiences have historically and continue to constellate feminist knowledge, experiences and perspectives from the past with the present. As noted by Monica Dall'asta and Jane Gaines, this 'forming a constellation' (2015: 19) approach offers feminist programmers, curators and media activists access to their histories, while simultaneously engaging with the cine-feminists work in the present. Furthermore, by thinking materially and practising across difference, we might avoid the repetition of certain errors, whilst at the same offering a context and politics to keep remaking, queering and rewriting the projects of feminist film historiography.

About the Being Ruby Rich: Film Curation as Advocacy and Activism Symposium



Fig 2: *Being Ruby Rich: Film Curation as Activism and Advocacy Symposium*. 21 June 2017.

Image courtesy of Birkbeck, University of London/Dominic Mifsud.

The Symposium brought together the theoretical underpinnings and the socio-historical contexts for feminist film programming and curating as previously mapped in Chapter Two and Three. The discussions, exchanges, memories and debates generated on the day effectively speak back to these previous chapters in conjunction with history, memory, theory, practice and the archive.³ The Symposium took place on Wednesday 21 June 2017 (Fig 2) at the Birkbeck Cinema. The aim was to offer practitioners, scholars, filmmakers, critics and students an opportunity to revisit and re-situate the convergence between women's liberation, feminist film theory, film programming and curating, NQC and audiences within Rich's concept of socially engaged film programming and criticism. The Symposium marked the launch of a four-day celebration at the Barbican titled 'Being Ruby Rich', which was part of the Barbican's 2017 cross-arts 'Focus on Film' programme. The film season was funded by Film Hub London and the Barbican. Centre.⁴ 'Being Ruby Rich' marked the return of Rich to London after many

³ For the Symposium's schedule, see Club des Femmes (2017e), Club des Femmes x Being Ruby Rich: Film curation as advocacy and activism. Available at: <https://www.clubdesfemmes.com/events/being-ruby-rich-film-curation-as-advocacy-and-activism/> (accessed 23 September 2023).

⁴ The Barbican (2017d) celebration took the form of a curatorial collaboration between Rich and Club des Femmes, in a season of screenings, provocations and panels dedicated to Rich's 40-year career as a curator,

years. As a mark of the interdisciplinary focus, our funding partners reflected the Symposium's cross-disciplinary and interdisciplinary approach to moving image practice: BIMI, Birkbeck Institute for the Humanities (BiH),⁵ Birkbeck Gender and Sexuality (BiGS)⁶ and Birkbeck Interdisciplinary Research in Media and Culture (BIRMAC).⁷

In the presence of Rich, we set out to remember the theory, histories and practices of feminist film curating and criticism. This was a curatorial undertaking that re-invigorated the archive. It opened a space for dialogue and reflection for contemporary audiences to gain new insights and knowledge about the past. As Rich's curating and critical scholarship had already spanned several decades, we chose to divide the Symposium into three sessions corresponding to the three key movements with which Rich is most closely associated in her role as a critic, curator, funder and Professor of Social Documentary at the University of California, Santa Cruz.⁸ This configuration facilitated a valuable exploration of the inter-related ethics and political aesthetics of each movement in the presence of Rich, as well as invited scholars, filmmakers, practitioners and PhD students who could speak to and intervene in those histories. The movements were thus identified: 1970s and 1980s, with feminist cinema; 1990s and 2000s, with transnational New Queer Cinema (NQC); and twenty-first century, with social documentary.

Rich beginnings

The dynamism and discourse circumnavigating around 1970s women's film festivals was where Rich developed her skills and acumen at documenting and contributing to an emerging feminist film movement. Later, these formative cultural experiences compelled her to consider the ways in which she had come to knowledge, namely: how her intellectual, emotional and political life had been shaped through the experiences of the women's movement, of which she writes

cultural theorist, critic and activist. Available at: <https://www.clubdesfemmes.com/events/being-ruby-rich-x-barbican/> (accessed 11 August 2023).

⁵ Birkbeck Institute for the Humanities. Available at: <https://www.bbk.ac.uk/research/centres/institute-for-the-humanities> (accessed 12 June 2023).

⁶ The Symposium acted as a pre-conference event for the Feminist Emergency - International Conference (22–24 June 2017) and was hosted by BiH, in collaboration with BiGS, the Birkbeck Institute for Social Research, BIMI and the British Comparative Literature Association. Rich was invited to speak at the conference on the topic of 'Curation, Criticism and Film Activism'. Available at: <http://www.bbk.ac.uk/events-calendar/feminist-emergency> (accessed 12 June 2023).

⁷ BIRMAC's support provided a rigorous interdisciplinary space and context for critical reflection between scholars and practitioners at the Symposium. The BIRMAC website no longer holds the archive for the Being Ruby Rich Symposium. Available at: <http://www7.bbk.ac.uk/birmac/> (accessed 22 March 2023).

⁸ In 2020, Rich became Professor Emerita at the Social Documentation Program and Film + Digital Media Department, UC Santa Cruz, University of California. Available at: https://film.ucsc.edu/faculty/b_ruby_rich (accessed 20 April 2023).

Lives, friendships and quarrels all inform the development of intellectual thought, despite the way in which intellectual histories tend to obscure such connections... Autobiography has an intrinsic connection to history, just as anecdote does to analysis. All of our lives count: it's all history, if only we remember. (1998: 3)

Always conscious of keeping women's lives, feminism and film culture connected and active, Rich signals how women's experiences are often ignored by patriarchal narratives of history, their practices neglected by cultural resistance and erasure.

Rich's appearance at the Symposium prompted observations and memories of her long-standing transatlantic relationship with British film culture and friendship with Laura Mulvey, which began in 1976 when she and Peter Wollen first invited Rich to Edinburgh to contribute to their programming and critical work on avant-garde cinema and psychoanalytical film theory. This collaboration continued with Rich's writing for *Sight & Sound*, for which she authored the landmark article, 'New Queer Cinema', in 1992.⁹ This queer cultural moment coincided with Rich delivering at keynote speech at the ICA Symposium on 'New Queer Cinema' in 1993. Following this, in 1997 the ICA invited her back to London to curate the fourth Biennale of Independent Film and Video. Rich took the opportunity to draw national and international attention to a new wave of moving image work from British-based queer and feminist artists and filmmakers.¹⁰ Twenty years later, the Birkbeck Symposium brought Rich's curating and critical scholarship back into the contemporary moment. It was in effect a way to re-think the narratives of feminist and queer cinema, by reflecting on Rich's past in dialogue with feminist, queer, independent and transnational cinema. By reassessing the scope of Rich's curating and critical work in connection with Edinburgh and London's counter-cinema and queer film cultures and beyond, an appraisal of her queer and feminist scholarship to film histories on and off screen can be brought to the fore.

Memories of Edinburgh's feminist film histories continue to linger in the imagined communities of future generations of readers and audiences who absorbed Rich's

⁹ Originally published in 1992 for the *Village Voice* and then republished in *Sight & Sound*, Rich's article 'New Queer Cinema' was re-published in 2017b by *Sight & Sound* to coincide with Rich's return to London. Available at: <https://www2.bfi.org.uk/news-opinion/sight-sound-magazine/features/new-queer-cinema-b-ruby-rich> (accessed 31 March 2023).

¹⁰ For a re-appraisal of Rich's ICA Biennale curation, see the author's article published in *Another Gaze* (2017) 'Girls Rule, And Rule, And Rule': Revisiting ICA Biennale of Independent Film and Video 1997, 'The Raw And The Cooked', Curated by B. Ruby Rich. Available at: <https://www.anothergaze.com/girls-rule-and-rule-and-rule-revisiting-ica-biennale-of-independent-film-and-video-1997-the-raw-and-the-cooked-curated-by-b-ruby-rich/> (accessed 10 June 2023).

definitional account of that decade. This is remembered in *Chick Flicks*, particularly the section, 'The Fury That Was Edinburgh' (1998: 156–168). 'Rich romps through the personalities, discussions, hierarchies, sexual divisions, and theoretical splits,' writes Kay Armatage, who also attended Edinburgh in 1979 (2009: 96).

During the Symposium, Rich remembered out the Transatlantic debates and disputes of 1970s cine-feminism as a form of dispatch. Her chronicle of the decade continues to shape the history and discursive ways that the era is remembered. Rich's writing reported on the facts, figures and exhibition histories of the festival; significantly she brought a crucial material dimension to that time. In so doing, she gives space and value for the remembrance of past experiences which she considers as noteworthy as scholarly discourses on cinema and film history. As I have argued elsewhere, 1972 was a pivotal moment for the instigation of feminist film programming and criticism as a methodology of feminist film history writing, launching, as it did, a new way of thinking, writing and exhibiting women's counter-cinema. It was the beginning of a feminist practice of film programming as a form of activism and archiving, as a retort to the film canon that valued and supported patriarchal film histories and a masculinist, *auteur*-focused filmmaking and criticism. As my research illustrates, this feminist practice of film programming and curating as a tool of activism, archiving and discourse had a direct impact on emerging feminist programming groups like the RWC and the WMRP in the 1980s. It is these histories and ways of practice that I will investigate in further detail in Chapter Five.

As a cultural theorist and critic, Rich wrote a new terminology and advocated for the feminist film movement, 'New Queer Cinema' and its attendant audiences. As a public intellectual, programmer, organiser, funder and chronicler, Rich asserts that each role goes alongside the other. She has been a programmer, curator and critic on the festival circuit since the 1970s.¹¹ Her historical and contemporary importance in bearing witness and to building the cultural projects of film feminisms and New Queer Cinemas continues to impress upon the present moment.

The curatorial concept: Socially informed film curating

Re-centring the film programmer and curator as advocate and activist, pivoting away from the personality of the curator as author, gatekeeper and taste maker (and therefore a person who

¹¹ Rich's work as a film programmer began in 1974 programming the Chicago Films by Women Festival, following the germinal 1972 Women's Event at Edinburgh. She has served on numerous international festival juries since. She was international curator for the 2002 Toronto International Film Festival and is a member of the advisory board for the Provincetown Film Festival and, previously, the Sundance Film Festival.

often remains immune from critique), we framed the Symposium around Rich's socially informed film curating, which she clarified in the Symposium as an ethical relationship between filmmaking, curating and the circular movements of film exhibition. To set Rich's curating and critical theory in historical context, in 1978 Rich participated in roundtable discussion titled 'A Discussion of Feminist Aesthetics' for *New German Critique*. When asked why film as a medium had brought her to feminism, she said

My involvement with film has always been as a programmer, staging film events, and only later as a writer. I worked for five years at the Film Center of the Art Institute, where I maintained an allegiance to film over the many other art forms practiced there precisely because of the possibilities film offered for social process ... I have since organized other events and done some writing on avant-garde film, but always my involvement has been in some way cooperative, public, socialized. The combination of film and feminism is a fortuitous one which was probably not inevitable at first—but now I have no choice. (1978: 83)

Following her consciousness-raising experiences of programming women's film festivals and screenings, Rich advocated for cinefeminism to be a collective, experiential and political engagement before a theoretical category, deeming it to be a 'sphere of action rather than an area of study' (1998: 65). These modalities and movements of production and reception, curating and criticism, theory and practice, and of culture and cinema all effect the course of film history, and the Symposium explored these processes and debates while centring Rich's engagement with the practice and study of film programming and curating as activism and advocacy.

Our curatorial premise was to frame these complex politically engaged movements and explore how they had specifically integrated and foregrounded film programming and curating as a key aspect of moving image practice. The implications for my practice-based research were significant, the Symposium offered fertile ground for considering and reflecting on the ways that feminist curating—as an ethical, affective and discursive practice—can intervene in thinking about feminist film history, memory, theory and the archive. I will expand on these ideas in Chapter Five, when I turn to evaluating my own practice responding to the Rio's archive in 'Feminist Re-Imaginations at the Rio 1980–2020.'

Documenting, describing and reflecting

While analysing and reflecting on the Symposium, and retracing the events of that day, the value of cultural memory as a methodology to negotiate the Symposium's archive came into sharp focus. For, it quickly became apparent that there was an absence of material traces from the day. Such a deficit of documentation and tangible evidence drew attention to an ethics of care needed to look after the Symposium's partial archive and the consequences for a potential future loss, neglect and ahistoricity. A series of photographs of the first session, however does exist of the first session taken by Dominic Mifsud from Birkbeck's Media Services, which can be accessed here: <https://tinyurl.com/brrphotos>. Reflecting on those images now, it is apparent that although they act as proof, in so much as they are visual trace that the Symposium took place, they also hold something disquieting because of their ephemerality. They are images that offer a 'recorded moment in stillness,' write Annette Kuhn and Kirsten Emiko McAllister that 'capture and offer up for contemplation a trace of something lost, lending it a ghostly quality' (2006: 1). It is a haunting that lingers because the photographs evidence a record and an absence, a situation that adds to the archive's precarity, with its gaps and silences, as the entire day was not documented.

Moreover, the images point to the institution of Birkbeck, University of London through which the photographs were produced, ordered and will be stored for future generations. Ethical questions arise as to what forms of collective remembering will the photographs engender or erase when the Symposium participants and audiences are not able to offer reflections or context. Moreover, in what ways do the photographs recover or further repress subjugated narratives and other voices in feminist and queer film histories? Yet apart from these images, there was no audio or video recording as there was no budget to facilitate this extra documentation. As an addendum, the funding we received for the Symposium was less than we originally expected. As such decisions had to be made about the priorities of the day. As a result, I am conscious of the gaps and silences remaining in the archive, with the late morning and afternoon sessions remaining undocumented.

The vulnerability of the Symposium's archive also draws attention to the fleetingness of the event and ethnography as a methodology to analyse and understand the Symposium as a live, social experience. When it comes to researching and understanding film festival cultures, and taking anthropologist Clifford Geertz's concept of 'thick description', curator and anthropologist Toby Lee notes 'being there' in person, going into the field and doing participant observation helps 'understand how [a] festival is actually experienced, on the ground, in real

time' (2016: 135).¹² Lee argues the case for 'being there' and bearing witness to embodied and testimonial encounters being relayed, as opposed to experiencing the event at a later stage through reading text-based accounts or on social media. Correspondingly, having been at the Birkbeck Symposium is to have encountered something unique because of its distinctiveness and ephemerality. This points me to consider the Symposium's spatial, temporal and affective registers, modalities which offer critical interventions to uncover and activate new queer and feminist histories in the archive. For it is this live, social experiential element that continues, in a post pandemic, social media era, to live on in the memories of those who were there. Most memorably, I would suggest, with the panellists and audiences who decided to stay in the Birkbeck Cinema until the very end, despite the intense heat.

The thick description below, as an ethnographic and qualitative research method which provides a reflective and contextual understanding to the event, elucidates my theoretical use of Michel Foucault, Cvetkovich, Giuliana Bruno and Kuhn as queer and feminist approaches to film historiography and cultural memory. I focus my thick description on the Symposium's first two sessions. Within a slightly chaotic environment, working with an incomplete, fragmented archive and an air conditioning crisis, this analysis of and deep thinking about Symposium has been drawn from various sources, assembled from my personal recollections, hastily written notes, as well as anecdotes and memories from those who attended.

In addition to this material, I have been able to refer to the 'Being Ruby Rich' project evaluation document which was produced for our funders Film Hub London. This document comprised of our reflections on the project's activities, achievements and outcomes, a selection of panellist and audience responses, as well as our specially commissioned *Being Ruby Rich: A Reader* (2017b) accessed here: <https://tinyurl.com/brrreader> These diverse forms of written and visual evidence draw attention to the ethical dilemmas one is faced with when responding to an overlooked archive that is context-dependent, ephemeral and fugitive. It is an archive of memory that is exposed to the unreliability of memory, but also prompted and altered by reminiscing, misremembering and mythologising.

¹² Clifford Geertz's articulation of his concept of 'thick description' outlines the contours of ethnography as a methodology (1973: 6).

Analysis

Thick description

As my CDF's collaborators So Mayer and Jenny Clarke ran a pop-up book table and information desk outside the Cinema, I unexpectedly became the public face of our collective at the last minute, which meant that I had to be fully present and attend to the practical issues at hand. I had responsibilities and was juggling various roles: meeting speakers, giving introductions and offering a response as a PhD candidate after the first panel; keeping an eye on timings and the scheduling; overseeing the screening material; helping with the technology, as well as the contributors' lunch and hospitality needs. Not only that, but I had to appease panellists and audiences, who voiced increasing concerns about the rising temperature in the cinema. I was distracted. It soon became apparent that the air conditioning had broken down, on one of the hottest days of the year. This unforeseen situation, a heating crisis that could not have been anticipated was an on-site and live situation, where I was preoccupied and taken away from taking field notes on the Symposium. I know I was distracted. I remember not listening. As I was attending to the heating crisis, navigating the panellists' arrivals and departures, and dealing with the lights and projection. I often was not 'not being' there; I was not present in the moment. Having to take care of the practicalities of running the Symposium led to another kind of loss and haunting: my forgetting and misremembering.

The material conditions of the day were unforgettable. As the Symposium progressed, the Cinema turned into a sauna. It became a metaphor perhaps for what was needed on that day: together we needed to get to work: to dig, to sweat the past; to let off steam, to let go and to break open the sediments of feminist film history with its established narratives, accepted paradigms and canonicity. As we shed layers of clothes (quite literally), collectively we excavated unseen histories and recovered other stories, memories and experiences too. A lasting remembrance of the conditions in the Cinema continues to shape how the day is remembered through its affective register. Such reflections bring back Kuhn's theory on cinema memory as cultural memory, how the topography and layout of a cinema, its physical and built environment condition embodied memory work, and that these experiences shape collective memory (2002: 17). By the end of the day, it became a matter of endurance for everyone involved. Yet it was equally transformative; and at the same time, as I revisit the photographs and other documentation, it remains hard to theorise the feelings with which some of us were left. These memories, experiences and emotions construct the archive's feeling as an embodied and affective transmission of the archive's ephemerality. Yet this situatedness illustrates a

central methodological challenge and one of the interventions of this research, which asks how to capture through the ‘liveness’ of curating, the materiality of the ephemeral moment.

Analysis of Session 1: Before the beginning: feminist formations in the 1970s

Circling back to Chapter Two, and Laura Mulvey’s articulation of the 1972 Women’s Event as a ‘tabula rasa’ moment, the Symposium’s first session reflected on the determination of that archaeological work undertaken by the cinefeminists of the 1970s. It was a research project so urgent that the festival literature was printed with ‘a serious error.’ Mulvey later disclosed, that ‘of the 3 Hollywood directors mentioned, Jean Yarbrough is actually a man. I was amused to discover this ... too late to correct,’ she told me.¹³ The residues of those cinefeminist histories were untangled and collectively remembered through the programming and critical work of Rich in dialogue with Mulvey and Claire Johnston. In a session titled ‘Feminist formations in the 1970s’, with a panel that comprised of Mulvey, Dr Amy Tobin,¹⁴ Professor Lynne Segal¹⁵ and chaired by Helen de Witt,¹⁶ we began with a screening of Michelle Citron’s *Daughter Rite* (1978). The screening, in turn, acted as feminist recovery work in itself, In that we discovered that the film was not available to be screened in the United Kingdom. However, through Rich, we were able to source permission and screening material from Citron directly. Since its presentation at the Edinburgh 1979 Feminism and Cinema event, *Daughter Rite* has rarely been seen in the cinema. Therefore the film remains largely unknown to film programmers, curators and audiences today. It was also my first time seeing the film, having read about it as ‘opening up a major new direction for feminist filmmaking’ in Rich and Linda Williams’ co-authored piece titled: ‘The Right of Re-Vision: Michelle Citron’s *Daughter Rite* (1979/81), published in *Chick Flicks* (1998: 219).

Rich’s memories of the women’s movement audiences at Edinburgh and their reactions to watching *Daughter Rite* correspond with her writing on the film, of which she notes ‘women

¹³ Email with Laura Mulvey and the author. 22 May 2023.

¹⁴ Dr Amy Tobin is Associate Professor in the History of Art Curator, Contemporary Programmes, Kettles Yard. She is Director of Studies in History of Art at Newnham College, University of Cambridge. Her PhD, completed in 2016, ‘Working Together, Working Apart: Feminism art and collaboration in Britain and North America, 1970–1981’, informed our decision to invite her onto the panel.

¹⁵ Professor Lynne Segal is Anniversary Professor of Psychology and Gender Studies at Birkbeck, University of London. Her teaching and research interests concern dilemmas in feminist thought and practice and shifting understandings of gender and sexuality. *Making Trouble: Life and politics* (2007) chronicles Segal’s personal and political account of living through the women’s liberation movement of the 1960s and 1970s.

¹⁶ Helen De Witt is Associate Lecturer in the Film, Media and Cultural Studies Department, School of Arts at Birkbeck. She worked as Acquisitions/Project Development Coordinator at Cinenova in the early 1990s. de Witt has extensive theoretical and practical knowledge of 1970s, 1980s and 1990s British feminist moving image practices, exhibition and distribution histories.

were wild with excitement over [the film's] demonstrated integration of feminist analysis into highly sophisticated cinematic form' (1998: 164). Speaking to that moment, which saw a convergence between the political aspirations of feminist filmmaking, programming and criticism as feminist film scholarship, Rich spoke about *Daughter Rite* as the cinematic materialisation of that moment. Her introductory remarks were revealing. She shared insights about women's film festivals as consciousness-raising tools, in dialogue with a theorisation of 'images of woman' in male-authored cinema. She impressed upon us her passion for cinema that coalesced with her encounter with liberatory power of the women's movement. Reflecting on how and why certain events she experienced ended up being momentous for her own career, she recalled meeting the lesbian poet and writer, Adrienne Rich, in 1978 and how that encounter prompted her to write.¹⁷ Rich's anecdote about handing Adrienne Rich a manuscript copy of her 'Naming' piece, still in draft form, was particularly vivid. It evokes B. Ruby Rich's point about what counts as history, in consideration of anecdote and autobiography and the value, she writes of 'disparate narratives that could explain a great deal about historical process and about how individual lives intersect with historical movements, both subjectively and materially' (1998: 6). By bringing into view these personal and political histories of cinefeminism, we might then begin to understand how certain pieces of writing came to be published, how myths began to be made (in the meeting of these two women, this encounter of minds) and how certain films and filmmakers come into circulation at particular moments. These narratives add to the ongoing projects of feminist and lesbian film historiography, particularly when we consider the experiential, social and affective ways film programmers and critics have shaped feminist and cinema discourse and cultural movements, by connecting with audiences.

This experience of meeting (Adrienne) Rich proved to be wholly productive for (B. Ruby) Rich. Going forward she went on to write, programme and publicly present her thoughts on bridging the gap between feminist and lesbian film theory, filmmaking, cinema audiences and the preoccupations of the communities within which she was living.¹⁸ Rich's reflections speak directly to my account in Chapter Two and Three, where I attempt to come to terms with what happened in the 1970s, apropos the contradictions and dilemmas, as well as the breaks

¹⁷ Adrienne Rich (1929-2012) was an American poet, essayist and a public intellectual who explored issues of feminism, identity, lesbian sexuality and politics. Her poetry of the 1970s and 1980s served as central texts for the women's liberation movement. Rich's book (1986) *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence: Selected Prose, 1966-1978*; first published in 1979, contains one of Rich's most celebrated essays, 'When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision', in which Rich clarifies the need for female self-definition.

¹⁸ For instance in March 1981, Rich collaborated with Edith Becker, Michelle Citron and Julia Lesage to write Lesbians and film, *Jump Cut: A Review of Contemporary Media*, 24-25: 17-21.

and shifts using my own methodologies to navigate how history, theory, filmmaking, programming and women's liberation politics converged. Moreover, as I later return, Rich's account speaks to the ways in which other histories were buried. Whilst it reveals the ways in which new canon of feminist theory and practice emerged, as feminist theory moved into the academy and film programming as a critical practice disappeared from feminist history and scholarship. The impact of this was twofold. While on the one hand a circular link between filmmaking, criticism, film programming and film viewing as connecting consciousness-raising activities was broken, on the other hand other eventful and noteworthy histories were forgotten or overlooked in the process.

As the youngest member of the panel, Tobin concurred with these questions of whose histories are included and what remains buried. This spoke to the fact, Tobin said, that 1970s feminist film history continues to be remembered as a narrative of Marxist, semiotic and psychoanalytical film theory and later, post-structuralism, rather its material and affective resonances. These intergenerational conversations of feminists talking together were spatial encounters where knowledge was shared, stories and memories recalled, and different perspectives exchanged. These crosscurrents draw attention to the value of feminist curation as a methodology for doing cultural history, in which feminist film histories are retraced and re-written. It calls attention to the performance of memory within the context of the day, and how this process yields a palimpsestic practice of tracing, remapping, re-writing and reinterpreting feminist film history.

On the panel, Mulvey talked through her involvement within the women's movement in London: an experience that preceded her involvement in the theorising and making of films. Her re-remembering of past times illustrates how, and in what way, history is recalled and how thinking and subjectivity come alive through practice. Mulvey remembered how she came to consciousness as a member of a women's study group known as the History Group. She recalled reading Simone de Beauvoir, Karl Marx and Sigmund Freud with the group. Freud, in particular, had a very immediate influence. As she recalls the psychoanalyst offered a vocabulary and a way of thinking about gender and sexuality that they had always needed (see Freud, 1965). These collective experiences and the political environment catalysed a new way of thinking that set in motion the History Group's search for a new feminist theory. It was a framework, she reminded, that led her to write 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' (1975), in which she introduced psychoanalysis (Freud, Jacques Lacan) as a theoretical tool for feminism. Mulvey spoke about a momentum building across the arts, which included feminist and independent film festivals and seasons, symposia, writing, journals and debate. Through

this cultural moment came *Riddles of the Sphinx* (1977). The film saw the theoretical ideas of ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’ and her engagement with women’s liberation concerns—childcare, relationships, divorce, work, unionisation, lesbianism and female sexuality—explored through a feminist avant-garde film practice.

Speaking to her book, *Making Trouble: Life and Politics* (2007), Segal recalled the 1960s as being ‘no place for women.’ Moving from Sydney to London in 1970, Segal reflected on the 1970s as a decade of women’s liberation and cultural renaissance, marked by the arrival of women organising for themselves, with meetings, protests and campaigns, as well as the setting up of women-only collectives such as *Spare Rib* and *Virago*. Both Segal and Mulvey’s recollections call attention to the materiality of memory. The way in which memory is prompted, collectively made and shaped, through the act of bearing witness, ‘being there’ in that moment. Marita Sturken (1997) argues these ‘technologies of memory’ have the capacity to create new ways of thinking about memory as a cultural text and how it can function in cultural production. A feminist curating practice can help make sense of the archive’s memories, by leaving the gaps, contradictions and fissures intact. In the process, we can bear witness to a subjectivity at play. In effect, we can see the performance of memory.

Moreover, for audience members too young to have been present, or even know of the specificities of these histories, this bearing witness what Alison Landsberg calls prosthetic memories, namely an embodied, affective memory which someone has not experienced first-hand (2004: 9). What this means is, in the case of the Symposium is that by evoking these experiences of unlived events, new transgenerational memories are created through which histories of 1970s cinefeminism can be folded in with the present moment.¹⁹ For the main demographic attending the Symposium (ranging from 25–55-years-old), the specificities of cinefeminist histories have often been difficult to decipher and chronicle through the function of the hegemonic archive. As such, the specificities of the histories have largely remained unaccounted for in the literature from the era. Yet the archive, when read through queer, feminist and cultural memory methodologies, can be re-imagined as evidence of alternative modes of feminist and queer collective knowledge production. This is what Cvetkovich names—borrowing from Raymond Williams (1977)—as ‘structures of affect’ and an archive

¹⁹ Alison Landsberg’s concept of ‘prosthetic memory’ theorises the political potential of the production and dissemination of memories through mass media, theorising how this enables people to experience those memories as if they are their own, even though they are events through which they did not live. Landsberg’s theory offers the condition of ethical thinking, in helping people to feel connected to each other whilst recognising difference (2004: 9).

that ‘constitute[s] cultural experiences and serve[s] as a foundation for public cultures (2002: 11).

As I have previously argued, narratives of dominant history have the tendency to categorise and fix certain kinds of historicity about theory, canons, people and key events, to the detriment of other histories on the periphery. Excavating counter memories as counter archives challenges this linearity, as they bring marginalised voices and experiences as counter discourse to the fore. These are archives of feelings from below that comprise practices of remembering, forgetting, reminiscing and mythologising. What played out within the panel discussion was how stories of the past are told and passed on is in effect the way the archive functions, especially when the hegemonic archive and institutionalised narratives of history have ignored so much of it. This became evident, when de Witt suggested that feminist film programming and curation itself is a third ‘missing element’ in the development of a 1970s feminist theory and film practice: a critical practice that materialised out of this socio-historical and intellectual conjuncture. This question directly responded to one of my research questions: what would film history look like if it included a cultural history of feminist film curating and programming? Following this, what does it mean for feminist film historiography when other histories of practice, cultural production, bodies, sexualities, ethnicities and experiences continue to be overlooked.

De Witt returned the discussion to Mulvey’s film programming history and the curatorial intervention of the 1972 Women’s Event. Mulvey spoke about the ‘tabula rasa’ moment that instigated a feminist cultural and critical project of challenging the male dominated canon by finding and inserting women back into film history. Her recollections of 1972 speak back to this socio-historical and theoretical moment in my research: a time when women’s liberation consciousness, film programming, theory writing and the movement’s audiences converged. Alongside that, Mulvey’s testimony corroborates and challenges accounts about Edinburgh 1972 and 1979, because she might have remembered something different on another day (as my 2017 interview with Mulvey attests; see Appendix F). The function of cultural memory, Aleida Assman (2011) argues, comes through these processes of remembering, which also include shades of forgetting. She writes how the gaps and silences created by forgetting are as much of a vital component to remembering, providing shapes and contours for the research process. As I write this in 2023, I am more than conscious that my own forgetting and remembering, written from notes on the day, is layered into this texture.

Picking up on the theme of ‘Whose history?’, the ‘Feminist Formations’ discussion turned to questions of what 1970s film feminism left out. What histories did feminist film

scholarship fail to see or bury? As noted in my methodology chapter, my theoretical ways of engaging with fugitive, absented archives rely on a palimpsestic process of mapping, tracing and re-writing over and against reductive received narratives. The exclusion of names, subjectivities, practices and certain histories continue to serve as a point of friction and a challenge to a 'ruined map' of feminist film history. This issue was raised by Rich, as she confirmed 'race was a blind spot' in the 1970s, as women's political cinema lacked a diversity from the start. The discussion turned to the early 1980s when Black and lesbian film and video began to be seen and discussed in the cinema through the work of Julie Dash,²⁰ Barbara Hammer²¹ and Trinh T. Minh-ha.²² Concurrently, these filmmakers were accompanied by a proliferation of new critical film theory advanced by women of colour, including bell hooks,²³ together with lesbian film scholarship authored by Teresa de Lauretis²⁴ and Judith Mayne.²⁵ These new cinematic subjectivities, representations and critical reading strategies were circulating in cinema of the 1980s and beyond, diversifying and expanding feminist film culture. Films by Dash, Hammer and Minh-ha were programmed and discussed by feminist audiences at the Rio and nearby. For instance, in 1984, a series of workshops were held at Four Corners in East London to address issues of women's difference in spectatorship, and the reductive range of representations of Black women by white filmmakers and the film industry at large.²⁶ These debates were interrogated through a Black feminist lens at screenings and

²⁰ Julie Dash (1952–) is an American filmmaker and writer. *Illusions* (1982) was acquired by Circles for distribution. *Daughters of the Dust* (1991) was the first film by an African American woman to receive a general theatrical release in the United States.

²¹ Barbara Hammer (1939–2019) was an American lesbian artist, filmmaker, writer and political activist. She was a pioneer of lesbian feminist experimental filmmaking. A selection of her films from the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s were acquired for distribution by Circles.

²² Trinh T. Minh-ha (1952–) is a Vietnamese writer, theorist, composer and filmmaker. Her impact on the fields of feminism and postcolonial studies through her writing and moving image practice continues to be extensive. Cinenova distributed her work in the 1980s and 1990s.

²³ bell hooks (1952– 2021) was an American author, professor, feminist and social activist. She coined the term, the 'oppositional gaze', to describe an active type of critical 'oppositional' spectator who is politicised by the act of viewing politically (1992: 115-131).

²⁴ Teresa de Lauretis (1938–) is an academic and critical theorist who has shifted feminist debate about desiring female subjectivity towards new theories on representation, subjectivity and desire, which she formulates as a theoretical model of perverse desire that opens out 'the psychic and social modalities of lesbian sexuality' (1994: xiii).

²⁵ Judith Mayne (1948–) is a feminist lesbian film theorist whose writing on Dorothy Arzner is influential because of her idea of 'lesbian irony', referring to a juxtaposition of lesbian desire with a cinematic apparatus that was simultaneously colluding and oppositional. Mayne defined this in-between space for lesbian authorship in cinema as an embodiment of the lesbian position being complicit with and resistant to patriarchal fictions (1990: 15).

²⁶ Notes and strategies from these workshops were written by Martina Attille and Maureen Blackwood for an article titled 'Black Women and Representation' in Charlotte Brunsdon (ed) (1986) *Films for Women*, pp. 202-208. London: BFI Publishing.

events at the Rio in collaboration with Sankofa Film and Video Collective and Black Audio Film Collective.²⁷

Counter-archives, ephemeral histories, the weight of film theory and what gets written out of history. These were the issues to which Segal turned when recalling another ‘thorny nettle’ of the 1970s, namely the cultural debates surrounding the politics of women’s bodies, eroticism and the representation of sex and sexuality on screen. It was an ‘unsafe time for women to express their sexuality,’ Segal recalled. She cites as an example Carolee Schneemann’s *Fuses* (1967), a film which reclaimed and redefined the language of film pornography, by centring the notion of the erotic in Schneemann’s depiction of herself making love with her partner James Tierney. Of which Alison Butler writes

Schneemann’s utopian advocacy of female heterosexual pleasure post-dated interest in the writings of Wilhelm Reich and pre-dated the reinterpretations of female sexuality promulgated by Luce Irigaray and other French theorists, whilst she was twenty years ahead of queer cinema in her positive appropriation of sexual iconography. (2002: 71)

What Butler identified here is how the film emerged at a shifting moment that marked the end of 1960s libertarianism, the advent of 1970s structuralist materialist filmmaking and the emergence of radical feminist audiences.

Fuses ignited theoretical and cultural debates between factions of the women’s movement and the avant-garde establishment. A situation that led Schneemann’s film hardly being screened and hardly seen in the cinema. Within the feminist movement, these cultural debates splintered into the sex positive and anti-pornography culture wars of the 1980s.²⁸ Schneemann’s attempt to make an erotic film that was not pornographic remained difficult for radical feminists at the time. As they believed authoring one’s own erotic fantasy and image did not change the structural problems of women and girl’s pervasive sexualisation and

²⁷ For a recent appraisal of John Akomfrah and Black Audio Collective’s history of collaboration with the Rio, as well as the Rio’s past and present connections with Black film culture and audiences, see Sula Douglas-Folkes (2022), *The Films of John Akomfrah. We Are Parable*. Available at: <https://www.weareparable.com/john-akomfrah> (accessed 26 June 2023).

²⁸ As previously noted, in 1981 Andrea Dworkin laid out her anti-pornography position in which she argued that pornography not only constitutes violence against women, it constitutes the main conduit for such violence of which rape is the prime example. Feminists’ most single task, she argues, is to deal with pornography. Lynne Segal (1987) offered an analysis of the sex wars from an anti-censorship perspective. One year later, B. Ruby Rich wrote a cultural and political assessment on the sex and sexuality debates of the 1980s (1998: 350-375).

exploitation in late capitalism. Rich's account in *Chick Flicks* of presenting *Fuses* in the 1970s to a hostile mixed audience at the Chicago Institute remains a vivid illustration of just what was at stake for both Rich (the programmer) and Schneemann (the artist). Schneemann took to locking herself into the projection booth with the male projectionist, her film and bottle of vodka, recalls Rich (1998: 21-22). Berating the 'ensorious puritanism of the film audience', Rich asks, 'is there any way to convey the sense of risk and courage that accompanied those early screenings, back when scarcely any films by women had been seen, received, or apprehended as such?' (ibid.).

As these debates intensified into the 1990s, the dynamics of lesbian feminist cinematic sexuality came to be fiercely contested in the films of Lizzie Borden, Barbara Hammer, Yvonne Rainer, Cheryl Dunye and Sheila McLaughlin among others. Yet the specificities of these theoretical conflicts and ideological disputes are often misremembered due to a lack of historical contextualisation. This is also because of the infighting and struggles over what dominant versions of the past persist and who is able or willing to tell the story. The Rebel Dykes History project offers a contemporary trans-feminist reflection of that era, albeit from a London perspective.²⁹ These discussions draw attention to the operations of memory and history, as described by Foucault (2002/1972), and the mechanisms of the archive as a site knowledge production. They also highlight the 'entangled' nature of history and memory; for as Sturken argues, 'memory objects and narratives move from the realm of cultural memory to that of history and back' and the way in which 'cultural memory and history [are] entangled rather than oppositional' (1997: 5). Yet, as my research reveals and advancing Foucault and the discursive aspects of memory and the archive, a new critical and reparative space for material thinking comes forward. Remediated and re-performed through feminist curation as a scholarly methodology, counter memory as new knowledge production in the archive can be collectively re-imagined and shared.

Analysis of Session 2: Renewing Queer Cinema: Travelling with 'Homo Pomo'

The second session of the day addressed questions of disorderly narratives, counter strategies of queer resistance and expanding the historical archive to tackle cultural erasure, gaps in existing archives, heteronormative film histories and homophobic pedagogy. The discussion turned to exploring these issues through the impact and legacy of Rich's 'New Queer Cinema' article, published in *Sight & Sound* in 1992, and then re-published online in 2017b to mark her

²⁹ Rebel Dykes History Project. Available at: <https://www.rebeldykeshistoryproject.com/> (accessed 13 June 2023).

return to London. Rich's article accounted for an assortment of Anglophone filmmakers, including Gus van Sant,³⁰ Derek Jarman,³¹ Isaac Julien³² and Sally Potter³³ who were making films that mixed activist politics with aesthetics, reminiscent, she suggested, of 1970s feminist film practices. Titled 'Renewing Queer Cinema: Travelling with 'Homo Pomo,' the panel included Professor Dagmar Brunow,³⁴ Campbell X,³⁵ and Isaac Julien, chaired by Dr Michele Aaron.³⁶

A screening of work by filmmakers that Rich had championed as a curator and critic, included Sadie Benning³⁷ and Julien, along with (more recently) Lucretia Martel³⁸ and Apichatpong Weerasekthakul³⁹ began the session. It felt like a significant moment. Not only to have the opportunity to re-visit the films in the presence of Rich, but also to hear the panellists and audience responses to the films within the context of 'New Queer Cinema' and the contemporary moment. This spoke once again to the importance of the social experience, and of 'being there' together in an overheated Birkbeck cinema to listen to these first-hand accounts of the past and present, as opposed to secondary text-based ones. The session also illuminated the significance of queering feminist curation as a scholarly methodology to embrace the idiosyncrasies, disorderliness and transience of the queer archive. How archives of affects,

³⁰ Gus van Sant (1952 –) is an American writer and director who Rich identified as part of the New Queer Cinema movement, in particular his 1991 film *My Own Private Idaho*.

³¹ Derek Jarman (1942–1994) was an English film director, diarist, artist, author and gardener. Jarman was an attendee on Sundance Film Festival's inaugural queer film panel 'Barbed-Wire Kisses: Contemporary Lesbian and Gay Cinema' in 1992. The panel was moderated by Rich and comprised of queer filmmakers only. The discussion set the cinematic and cultural debate for the New Queer Cinema movement.

³² Isaac Julien (1960–) is a filmmaker and installation artist. Rich identified Julien as being part of New Queer Cinema. He was a panellist on the 'Barbed Wire' Sundance panel in 1992. Rich has supported, programmed and written on Julien's practice throughout his career (See Rich, 2013: 315)

³³ Sally Potter (1949–) is an English filmmaker, writer and artist. Rich met Potter at Edinburgh in 1979. She has programmed, written on and championed Potter's work throughout her career (See Rich, 1998: 223-26).

³⁴ Professor Dagmar Brunow teaches Film Studies at Linnaeus University, Sweden. She is a film programmer at the International Queer Film Festival Hamburg. Brunow met Rich in 2014 at a conference in Hamburg, where Rich gave a keynote on 25 years of New Queer Cinema.

³⁵ Campbell X is a writer, director and activist who started making films, funded by Channel 4, in the 1990s. In 2020, Campbell's film *Stud Life* (2012) was listed by Ashley Clark as one of the top 10 Black British features films ever made. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2020/jun/19/from-pressure-to-the-last-tree-10-of-the-best-black-british-films> (accessed 15 June 2023).

³⁶ Professor Michele Aaron is a Reader in Film & Television Studies, University of Warwick. In 2004, Aaron edited *New Queer Cinema: A Critical Reader*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

³⁷ Sadie Benning (1973–) is an American visual artist and filmmaker who began making videos when they were 15 years old, using a Fisher Price Pixelvision toy camera. Benning was a member of the 'Barbed Wire' 1992 Sundance panel. Rich included Benning's experimental video practice as part of the advent of New Queer Cinema. (Rich, 2013: 310).

³⁸ Lucretia Martel (1966–) is a filmmaker and writer from Argentina. Rich has programmed and written on Martel's work since the director's debut feature *La Ciénaga* (2001). Rich considers Martel to be part of a new generation of non-Euro-Western filmmakers who have expanded and challenged new queer moving image formations in the 21st century (Rich, 2013: 177-182).

³⁹ Apichatpong Weerasekthakul is an artist and filmmaker from Thailand. Rich included his work in the next generation of New Queer Cinema non-Euro-Western filmmakers (Rich, 2013: 88-91).

memories, sexualities, experiences were activated in conversations with others. This happened through the accidents and synchronicities of cultural memory. Recalling the 1970s cine-feminists who intervened in the patriarchal film canon by writing and making a new feminist one, Julien pointed to the tactics and strategies of queer cinema and historiography that took inspiration from women's liberation. He evoked the era's queer politics of resistance, militancy and defiance, as well as the political act of giving voice, as he connected 1970s feminist theory and practice with Black histories of moving image practice. These counter strategies, Julien explained saw the first generation of New Queer Cinema filmmakers re-write their own film histories through a new language of Black and queer moving image practice. Building on Julien's remarks, the discussion turned to queering interventions and approaches, as the panel debated what constitutes a queer methodology. The panellists' contemplations corresponded with my own reading of 'queer' informed by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's understanding of the term as a practice and action. The dynamics, she argues, produce 'a continuing moment, movement, motive—a recurrent, eddying, *troublant*' discourse (1994: xii). Similarly, a queer methodology was articulated as troubling and transgressive, counter(intuitive) and disturbing to form and content: an intervention into the operations of history and traditional notions of the archive and archival practices.

Taking inspiration from Rich, whose writing folds memory, autobiography and experience with history and theory, Campbell X stressed the role of memory as a queer methodology. He spoke to the value of oral history, of listening and the non-linear, affective ways of thinking that help us to articulate histories of sexualities, communities and identities suppressed. Audience members also talked about the significance of gossip as memory work in itself: a way of remembering, acknowledging and keeping clandestine histories, feelings and practices out of the institution, and in the community as queer knowledge production. The discussion expanded on queerness as an unorthodox or unconventional strategy for recalling the past, such as the ways LGBTQ+ cultural histories are experienced and felt through the archive's affects and ephemerality as sensory knowledge. The panel also considered the ways in which the intimacies of queer archives, with its desires, longings, verities and pleasures constitute affective knowledge as political knowledge, strategies that act as resistance to the hegemonic archive.

After the event, in relation to the above point, I returned in my research to Cvetkovich's writing on *The Public Feelings* project she co-developed in the early 2000s, in which she configures emotions as both a subject of analysis and as a methodological tool. *The Public Feelings* project built on feminist theory of the 1980s that continued (despite its antagonisms

towards essentialisms) to centre the personal voice. Cvetkovich writes how the project ‘builds on the[se] lessons and strategies in an effort to bring emotional sensibilities to bear on intellectual projects and to continue to think about how these projects can further political ones as well’ (2012: 9). I was prompted to remember Cvetkovich while re-reading my field notes. It led me reconsider how to analyse and archive the Symposium’s affects, its materiality of memory to produce knowledge as cultural memory. ‘The [queer] archive of feelings is both material and immaterial,’ writes Cvetkovich, ‘at once incorporating objects that might not ordinarily be considered archival, and at the same time, resisting documentation because sex and feelings are too personal or ephemeral to leave records’ (2002: 244).

Returning to the panel; prompted by the discussion, Brunow pointed to the importance of a transtemporal dialogue within memory work needed to keep queer historical knowledge alive. She emphasised the role of the curator as a memory agent working in opposition to canon formation and heteronormative historiography. Drawing on her work as a film curator and academic, Brunow emphasised how a curator carries an ethical responsibility to keep LGBTQ archives, lineages and histories in circulation. Her remark is awakened in this research’s ethics of feminist activism in curating. Within my own research I am setting out to piece together material and immaterial histories of feminist film programming and curation. This is because of film scholarship’s failure to account for curation and programming as a critical and affective practice in the archive.

Analysis of the evaluation forms

Turning to the Symposium’s evaluation forms, which offered valuable material evidence of the Symposium’s audience experience. ‘Excellent panels and speakers gathered’ one audience member wrote, it is ‘rare to have them together.’ While another, said it was ‘very insightful, seeing films I hadn’t seen before and couldn’t have seen, and hearing from some of the best academics’ (CDF evaluation report for Film London, 2017a). These comments from the audience confirmed the value and role of curating and the cinematic collective experience as methods of analysis, because they highlight how curation activates the archive through a critical and affective exchange. It brings a granularity, context and liveness to feminist film history that might have otherwise been hard to decipher. This curatorial work as a scholarly methodology shows how feminist film programming and curating have always been part of film history. Because it is a practice that has attended to the multiple shifts in history, theory, subjectivity, memories and experiences. This in turn allows for new repositories of knowledge to emerge in and through the processes of the practice. In short, it offers a way to research,

write, advocate and transmit feminist film histories differently. Discursive cultural memory events like the Symposium offer a modality for hidden histories and counter archives to be recovered, re-written and remediated, articulated in the feedback. The Symposium allowed for a generative relationship between scholars, practitioners and audiences to unfold. However, as my thesis illustrates, this needs to be done in tandem with archival research and curation as a scholarly methodology for doing cultural theory, where histories can be re-written and identities re-shaped through dialogue and discussion.

Analysis of lunchtime curating workshop

Through her curation, criticism and activism Rich (1998: 63) has continued to shape discourses across theory/practice, aesthetics/meaning, process/representation with audiences. The curator and programmer occupies a unique role as a champion, caretaker, advocate and activist for and on behalf of feminist interventions in and around cinema. This was explored in a lunchtime curating workshop that took the form of a discussion for MA and PhD curating and programming students, to ask practical and theoretical questions of the panel: Rich, along with Professor Ian Christie,⁴⁰ Professor Catherine Grant⁴¹ and chaired by Dr Janet McCabe.⁴²

A key question was raised by an audience member early on: whether film curation might always be performed as advocacy. Answering, Rich set out her position on the ethics of film curating, which she described as a relationship between filmmaking, curating and the circular movements of film exhibition. A practice, she maintained, that concerns a deep engagement with audience pleasure. A curator and film programmer, she said, is one who fills in the gaps of history, by presenting new ways of looking at and making overlooked work visible. Identified here is Rich's practice of socially and politically informed curation and critical scholarship which remains a key practice-based research methodology for this thesis. Itself, an act of feminist film curation.

As the workshop ended, I returned to thinking once again about the possibilities and limits of the archive, the blind spots and fissures thrown up over the course of the day. I

⁴⁰ Ian Christie is Professor of Film & Media History in the Department of Film, Media and Cultural Studies, School of Arts, Birkbeck, University of London. Christie has researched, written, programmed and worked in and on the British film industry since the 1970s.

⁴¹ Professor Catherine Grant is an independent scholar and video maker. Until 2020, Grant was Professor of Digital Media and Screen Studies at Birkbeck, University of London. She has since been appointed as Visiting Research Fellow in the School of Arts (2020–2023). She is the author of the Open Access scholarly website Film Studies for Free. In June 2017, Grant created 'Richly Resourceful!' on B. Ruby Rich's work. Available at: <https://filmstudiesforfree.blogspot.com/2017/06/richly-resourceful-on-bruby-richs-work.html> (accessed 24 July 2023).

⁴² Dr Janet McCabe is Reader in Television and Film Studies, Department of Film, Media and Cultural Studies, School of Arts, Birkbeck, University of London.

considered how the archive continues to hold authority and power, and how navigating the archive through queer, feminist and cultural memory methodologies goes some way towards ameliorating these hierarchies and history's forgetfulness. Moreover, I thought once more about context and place and the grounding of work in a space. How the archive shifts and changes through the tensions and constraints of practice-based research when conducted within an institutional framework, with a finite amount of labour, time and funding available.

Final reflections: In conversation

In the late afternoon, following Session 3: 'Social Change on Screen: Screening Social Documentary,' the Symposium concluded with a conversation between Rich and McCabe. Rich made a remark that vividly spoke to her cultural odyssey in shaping and mentoring filmmakers and movements of feminist and new queer cinemas. It was an avocation, she said, ignited in the late 1960s. As a film programmer, she asked, 'where are you going [to be] if you are not in the cinema?' It was a comment that prompted me to reflect on my own work as a film programmer and my co-curating with CDF. Her observation triggered a memory of when I first started programming cinemas at the BFI in the mid 1990s and being told by my manager that I needed to *watch everything*. How my own film viewing, and cinematic pleasures would lead into my career as a film programmer. Yet as I discovered then, and today, there continues to be vast sways of women's political cinema unseen on screen. For example, one of the frustrations of our Barbican season was not being able access *Sambizanga* (1972) by Sarah Maldoror, because it only existed as a single archive print which we were not able to project because of its fragility. Prompted by Rich's comments, I reflected on feminist film histories written by activist curators and programmers who have continued to be voices of advocacy for the archiving, restoration and digitisation of political films by women, queer people and other marginalised groups, especially from the Global South. In so doing a fuller film history can be achieved.

Lastly, I reflected on the feminist project of re-writing feminist film histories through intergenerational dialogues that constellate around women's cinema cultures and feminist screening practices. This is collective activist cultural work that continues to inspire me. It reminds me to put feminist film programming 'to use', as a tool of activism, knowledge production and community building.

It was then that I considered Rich herself as a living archive, a technology of memory. How this research has emerged from a commitment to accessing different kinds of archives and documenting overlooked feminist and queer film histories, by finding people, methods and

methodologies for thinking, writing and producing feminist film histories together. These observations recognise that a person can also be a receptacle of history's memory, performing and embodying that role: a conduit who mediates in the production of cultural memory. It also identifies how caring for an object can also be caring for a subject too. In that person who cares also becomes a vehicle for the performance of collective memory. Rich's memories of shaping feminist and queer cultural film histories are carried through her body. In this regard Diana Taylor (2003) frames performance as a different kind of archive, a repertoire that includes oral history, embodied memory and shared experience. One that is attuned to embodiment and collective memories, which then speaks to the materiality of memory (*ibid.*: 3). Accordingly, Rich becomes the archive when the hegemonic archive is deemed patriarchal, heteronormative and capitalist.

Rich's comments about being in the cinema also drew attention to the importance of grounding work in the physical space with a social function, where intergenerational collective conversation becomes the exchange of knowledge, and where histories are repaired, facts are shifted and the story changes. It also points to an ethics of feminist curating that takes time to 'close listen' to filmmakers, ideas and audiences, as a way to care for and respond to the archive and the crises of the present moment. The Symposium was a way to pass down feminist film histories and strategies of activism, as community building and intersectional, intergenerational feminist and queer knowledge production. Correspondingly, Rich's mix of curatorial know-how and her political alertness, together with a critical apprehension, has presented a body of scholarship that has defended and kept films, filmmakers and audiences in dialogue with the cultural debates and disputes that would have otherwise been ignored by the hegemonic archive and a mainstream feminism.

Yet as the conversations were building, I was conscious of new mythologies being to be made visible. No less of Rich herself, as we gathered to discuss, watch films and consider how to be Ruby Rich. For CDF, the 'Being Ruby Rich' project was a significant curatorial achievement. Yet rather than a straightforward piece of scholarly research into a historical moment, this curatorial project emerged, as Catherine Grant (2011: 269) describes, an act of fandom (2019). Conscious of my blurred roles between being a film programmer, researcher and a fan of 1970s and 1980s film feminism. A new positionality for me is awakened in what Grant has identified, in the idea of embracing my multiple identities which thrive as an affective attachment to my fan objects; in this case, feminist film history and Rich herself. Taking fandom as an additional methodology to reflect on the psychic and political pull of the feminist past with the present, I revel in my passionate and sometimes irrational attachment to

excavating what remains missing from 1970s and 1980s feminist film histories. Awakened here is my subjective and emotionally driven engagement with my fan objects which has offered the opportunity to collaborate with Rich herself. Through this framework, fresh connections and methods that encompass affect, desire, politics and identity can be re-circulated and used as noteworthy scholarship to do women's film history.

Lastly, as fans/collaborators/curators we embraced a more horizontal, reciprocal connection with Rich. A situation in hindsight where we were able to disrupt the usual hierarchies and power dynamics that often get enacted in capitalist systems and neo-liberal agendas. In effect, the Symposium's curation as an act of fandom in itself, created an affective and scholarly space for the archive to be collectively remembered and re-imagined. It was a forum that allowed for the materiality and immateriality of feminist and queer film histories to be shared by the people who lived through the 1970s and 1980s, stimulated by new generations of audiences invested in learning about that time and histories of feminist and queer moments often forgotten.

Methodological challenges

The very act of remembering in the archive, although it may constitute opposition and an intervention against forgetting, also prompts another act of forgetting, according to Sigmund Freud's theory of repression (1977).⁴³ On reflection, a key methodological challenge persists: what remains at stake when layers of institutional and community-based feminist and queer cultures and film histories are personally and collectively remembered and remediated? Kuhn sees these processes as discursive practices of 'memory work' (2002: 186) and writes how this 'is a conscious and purposeful staging of memory' (ibid.). In other words, what is remembered is not taken as truth; but, as Kuhn sees it, 'material for interpretation, to be interrogated, mined for its meanings and possibilities' (ibid.). Looking back, I have reflected on what and who has been left behind. What did the Symposium recover, and whose stories remain buried. Put another way, it is this very instability of memory that offers an unstable and dynamic relationship with the past. The Symposium presented a dialogue between the individual and the social, the subjective and the objective, and what is remembered and what remains forgotten. A situation, as the Symposium exposed, that presents its own methodological problems and epistemological questions.

⁴³ Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) argued that memories of every experience are stored in the unconscious and that, although some remain repressed, they are always present. His contribution to memory studies has been key in exposing the fallibility of memory, in its dual function of remembering and forgetting. See Freud (1977), *Five Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*. New York: Norton.

Turning a spotlight on the materiality and specificities of feminist film history can act as cultural resistance towards ahistoricity, canonicity and linearity that are often built around historical studies. When excavating a feminist film history in absentia such as this, framing feminist, queer and cultural memory as methodologies through a curating practice shapes different ways of knowing and feeling in the archive. Essentially, my research presents a counter history as a Foucauldian archaeology of the film archive that positions the importance of affective history as political history, explored through cultural means. The Symposium was an opportunity to explore some of these methodological questions, particularly in terms of how to attend to gaps in the archive through their textual absence, in the practice of thought and action as a form of practice-based research. Moreover, the Symposium revealed that a queer and feminist ethics of curating as critical, affective and activist tools offers space for intersectional and intergenerational memory work to be done. It is an approach that remains vigilant to the ways that memory varies by locality and shaped by institutional practices, how new mythologies can be drawn and an understanding of the archive as an instrument of power and knowledge with its blind spots and fissures. This involves taking responsibility to ‘close listen’ to the discursive ways a more expansive film history might be excavated and written within the context of the Symposium. It was an encounter where methodological and research questions, as well as my ambition for this research’s feminist and queer epistemological possibilities converge.

A feminist curating practice that builds on the impact of Cvetkovich’s affective political reading and use of oral history attends to these issues of absented archives and their cultural and political potentials. Additionally, as mentioned in my methodology chapter, this research draws on Laura U. Marks’ idea that film curating performs a dialectic encounter between ideas, films, filmmakers and audiences, offering space to the ‘in-between-ness’ of the practice (2004: 37). In other words, curation is not only about how films, filmmakers, ideas, themes and audiences are placed in dialogue with each other, but also how these elements are positioned in time, space and context. By that I mean there are different encounters, ethical responsibilities and limitations that arise from an academic Symposium, as opposed to a community-based environment such as the Rio. Indeed, it was significant when in 2015 an institution such as the BFI marked the 40th anniversary of the publication of ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’ (see my reflections on that encounter in Chapter Two). Reflecting on that event and the Symposium’s curatorial intentions, prompted a question of what happens when counter-hegemonic histories, figures and practices are institutionally recognised. Feminist and queer ethics of care maintain a consciousness about ‘close listening’ to these elided histories and their

affective encounters in the archive, as well as to the different registers of knowledge and the historical contexts where they came about. In this way, as the Symposium illustrated, cultural memory is best carried out, not just through archival scholarship but through the very act of practising curation as a scholarly methodology.

Concluding remarks

As I reflect on what insights emerged through the practice, there were several key points that I took away from the day. First, I was interested in the performance of memory as an unstable positionality; how the past is remembered within a dynamic of remembering and forgetting, and why we are now remembering these feminist film histories at this juncture. The discursive processes of memory undermine the authority of the archive, allowing for the messiness of history to come to the fore and be re-imagined in the light of the present. In this regard, the Symposium presented a dynamic and at times, unpredictable, unstable and fragile encounter with history, memory and the archive. It was a reunion of sorts; materially speaking of people, theory, history, practices and activism, evidencing the way that culture is produced, making the argument for the research value of reconstructing history through a feminist curating practice.

It seems to me that both Mulvey and Segal's tactics of recalling the past were not apolitical in their remembering, but highly selective. There was a sense of them thinking about what would be interesting to remember now, within the context of the Symposium and who was there on the day. Their memories were subjective and performed. Although they were conscious of what would be significant to remember for the production of new stories about their past in this present moment. This involved a process of editing, filtering and selecting. When I interviewed Mulvey in 2017, she told me about the difficulty she had in remembering the details of Edinburgh in 1979 because of the conflicts that ensued about theory, practice and audiences. Yet the Women's Event in 1972, even though it was seven years earlier, was much clearer in her mind. Moreover, it was marked how Rich's remembering and engagement shifted over the course of the day, as the conversations questioned, tested and examined her work. By the end, it was evident that she had experienced something unique, enthusing that 'it is a wondrous experience to have one's work appreciated and engaged with to this extent, and I confess to a lasting humility and transient stupefaction in the wake of it all' (2017).

Secondly, I also reflected on the strategies of recalling the past and the distinctive ways of collecting counter-cultural histories, through confessions, stories and gossip, as well as re-screenings and collective activism, where knowledge comes from shared remembering and forgetting, queer and feminist methodological interventions that alter the hegemonic archive.

The map as an archaeology of knowledge is after all still a map. There remain gaps, absences, limits, detours and dead ends. Yet the Symposium prompted productive Transatlantic dialogues and debates where new feminist histories and practices could flourish.

Thirdly, the issue of forgetting and the unreliability of memory, in terms of my own misremembering details of the day, namely, the responses and conversations that were conducted. As much as was possible I remember retaining specific points that were relevant for my research. I can see this from my field notes, where others remembered differently. If I had known at the time that I was going to use the Symposium as a case study analysis for my thesis, would I have remembered the day differently? The implications of trying to remember more came into sharp focus, as my duties involved presenting as well as troubleshooting and managing the Symposium as a live situation. This clashed with being able to sit down and reflect on the practice.

These considerations call attention to the ways in which feminist curating as a scholarly methodology holds space for unremembered histories, messy stories, fugitive archives and disorderly narratives that encompass the accidents, synchronicities and liveness of practice. In this way, the archive becomes a living and live entity, with gaps, contradictions and fissures pushing the research in new directions through practice and adding new layers of historicity.

Finally, when it came to writing an account of the Symposium, the difficulty I had in remembering the day points to the value of recognising memories as narratives, or ‘memory stories’ as Kuhn theorised, calling attention the specific nature of time within this context. ‘Time is rarely continuous or sequential in memory-stories,’ she writes, ‘[they] are often narrated as a montage of vignettes, anecdotes, fragments, “snapshots”, flashes’ (2002: 11). This reflects on how one person’s memories can inform and prompt another person; how conversations take particular forms, leading to certain positionalities and subjectivities; and how questions from the audience take the discussion in different directions entirely. Hence, there is a value in practice-based research and oral history when considering how to access archival residues, as well as when thinking about the generative relationship between curating, archives and audiences. This approach should not be taken to create new linear timelines and fixed narratives, but so that we can understand history’s ‘crumpled heap’ to produce new knowledges and a different way of writing history. These thoughts lead me into the next chapter where I will reflect on my creative practice responding to the Rio’s feminist archive in absentia, as a subjective re-imagining of the past within the present.

Chapter Five: Feminist Re-Imaginations at the Rio, 1980-2020

From February to May 2020, ‘Feminist Re-Imaginations at the Rio, 1980-2020’ was a four-month curatorial project at the Rio comprised of community archiving sessions, film re-screenings and events. I invited my participants who were collective members of RWC and the WMRP or connected to the women’s screenings at the Rio in the 1980s to return to the cinema to explore the archive’s ephemera together. I used these community archiving and programming practice methods to document and record their memories and experiences of that time. I presented a ‘Feminist Re-Imaginations at the Rio, 1980-2020’ slideshow in the community archiving session, and you can view it here: <https://tinyurl.com/rioslideshow> The project was cancelled in March 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic as the Rio was forced to shut. Out of necessity my practice reorientated, and I made a tape/slide.

In 2016 I found a document in the Rio archive, an admissions report dated 4 November 1979 to 27 April 1980, detailing a six-month feminist film season at the Rio. Encountering this document was a way into ‘finding’/feeling Sheila Rowbotham; feminist and lesbian Hackney; and feminist film exhibition histories through the Rio archive. The document traced a genealogy of women’s liberation groups and networks that connect the feminist screening practices at the Rio with Sheila Rowbotham and her involvement with the first Women’s Liberation Conference at Ruskin College in February 1970. This research has led me to these outer edges of women’s history in Hackney and beyond, even if their underpinnings and contexts might be worn away by time. My practice-based research set out to address these gaps in history, drawing attention to the way that archives, politics, collective work and emotions are idiosyncratic yet interconnected, discreetly and collectively.¹ Ephemeral objects, Ann Cvetkovich writes, hold a certain power, ‘gesturing to [the] affective meanings that are attached to objects but not fully present in them, while also making immaterial ephemerality material’ (2017: 183). That embodied encounter with the Rio’s elided feminist film history felt charged, illustrating how a community’s loss of collective memory as historical knowledge continues to serve as a point of friction in the present moment. Community-based archives like the Rio directly address this loss of history and knowledge, a situation which points to the resuscitative role of cultural memory and affect in compensating for institutional neglect. In that moment, to touch that document almost felt revolutionary. It was as if past and present feminist film

¹ For an oral history of Hackney in the 1980s, see (2020). ‘Hackney in the early 1980s’. In: Alan Denny, Max Leonard, Tamara Stoll, Andrew Woodyatt (eds) *The Rio Tape/Slide Archive: Radical Community Photography in Hackney in the 1980s*, pp. 31-39. London: Isola Press.

histories constellated and forgotten memories of struggle, identity politics, collective activism and cultural resistance became entwined in my haptic remembering.

What remains missing, still to be uncovered, is the memory of those screenings, that is a collective and cultural memory of the film season—specifically what happened, who came and how did audiences respond to the films; I am in search of those feelings in archive. ‘Feminist Re-Imaginations at the Rio, 1980-2020’ attends to these spatial hauntings that linger in the archive, by piecing together fragments of a ‘ruined map’ of feminist collective work in film programming and curating. My practice is a Foucauldian archaeology of the film archive, a method of historical research that addresses this task of re-constructing missing histories of feminist film programming and curating, whilst at the same time recognising the persistence of the archival gaps. In effect, it is a method of practice that offers a way to feel and experience how a feminist film history gets made.

‘Feminist Re-Imaginations at the Rio, 1980-2020’ is in effect a feminist palimpsestic practice of film historiography: one that keeps feminist film programming knowledge about a feminist film programming past in the present, through the archaeological work of mining, mapping and tracing. It is a critical creative practice that interrogates absence and hauntings as textual markers in the archive, by excavating the cultural archives of feminist film programming and curating at the Rio. Moreover, as a queer feminist curator, who is invested in an affective political reading of the archive, ‘Feminist Re-Imaginations at the Rio, 1980-2020’ brings attention to how certain feminist histories and practices are remembered and certain histories and practices are forgotten yet remain present through emotions, feelings and ephemerality. As Rowbotham reminds us in *Beyond the Fragments*, ‘sisterhood could be strengthening but it could also smother individuals’ (2013:12). Memory, gossip and lived experience, as well as stories of conflict and struggle in collective work inform how history gets made.

From February to May 2020, in dialogue with the community archiving sessions, I planned a season of film screenings and events that comprised of re-screening and re-contextualising films and videos programmed by RWC and the WMRP. Paying attention to the collective and activist mechanics of keeping the archive alive and public, this was about recuperating a collective history and cultural memory of feminist programming and curating at the Rio, in the process of the doing. Drawing on CDF’s curatorial practice, I wanted to mine RWC and WRMP’s cultural archives, and map a history of feminist screening practices at the Rio through feminist curation as a scholarly methodology. In terms of making my process visible, the intention to programme the season in a non-linear date order was to challenge the

idea of a written linear approach to narrating this history. I also wanted the programme to illustrate an archaeology of memory, a framework that reflects on how I encountered the Rio archive, and to use that Foucauldian discourse to think materially, in non-linear ways, across layers of histories and archival residues, to draw out its temporal, spatial, activist and affective dimensions. Such a methodology makes the archive's loss and hauntings visible: ephemerality that I was interested to respond to as part of the practice-based research. However, the season became another haunting of 'what wasn't meant to be' because of the pandemic. I was thus only able to deliver Programme 1, which took place after the community archiving session in the afternoon of Saturday 22 February 2020.

Prompted by the materiality of the archive, I curated the season as a series of themes that were decided after I had been able to confirm the film programme. Problems related to bringing historical women's film and video back into the cinema came into sharp focus during this planning stage. This was because there was work I was unable to access due to issues with rights, contracts and available screening materials, or I was simply unable to find a record of a film or videomaker. An alternative film season continues to live in my imagination, pointing to films and videos that I would have liked to include but where the materials were too challenging, complicated or expensive to obtain. This added another layer of textual haunting of screenings unrealised and research that lives in its ambition. In a dream of what could have been. In any event, the four programmes were presented as follows:

Programme 1: The Personal is Political

Programme 2: Protest, Solidarity and Power

Programme 3: Goddesses and Demons: A Question of Lesbian Horror

Programme 4: Women's Bodies

Sheila Rowbotham as feminist companion in thought

In naming my practice at the Rio after Sheila Rowbotham, I draw attention to the affective and temporal dimensions of the archive by acknowledging her ghostly presence, someone who has acted as a 'feminist companion in thought' throughout this research.² Reading and listening to Rowbotham talk about *Daring to Hope: My life in the 1970s* (2021), her memoir that details

² 'Companion in thought' is taken from Janice Radway's Foreword written for Avery F. Gordon (2008), *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*, p. xi. London and Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press. Radway points to the way Gordon 'think[s] with, alongside, and in response' to reading work by Luisa Valenzuela and Toni Morrison in order to assist Gordon in her quest to write history from an analytical and speculative position.

her life with Hackney in the 1970s, I was motivated to bring her into this chapter because of what I discovered in the book. *Daring to Hope* was published towards the end of my research journey. Its launch signalled a welcome moment of synchronicity that offered a renewed sense of feminist solidarity and political and theoretical inspiration during months staying at home and facing a cancelled practice because of the lockdown. Listening to Rowbotham and hearing accounts of her life and activism in the 1970s prompted me to reflect how women's contribution to art, culture and politics has never formed a coherent chronology. Rather women's accounts can be found in the frayed edges of history's 'crumpled heap' (that metaphor so vividly drawn in 1979 by Lis Rhodes [1996: 196]). Rowbotham's intervention reminded me that I needed to keep reflecting on the strategies and methodologies to attend to those voices and lives silenced by the mechanisms of history, and the potential of queer cultural memory and feminist curation as a practice-based methodology to write women into history. In this way, my practice draws on Rowbotham's writing on women's liberation, specifically her idea about putting feminism to use, how we might put it to work in theory and practice. 'There are two possible interpretations [of feminism],' she writes: 'one ideal, the other historical' (1983: 17). In other words, feminism exists in our political imagination and as a method of historiography. These points present the theoretical underpinnings for 'Feminist Re-Imaginations at the Rio, 1980-2020' as a programming practice of collective intergenerational consciousness-raising and a mode of writing history.

Rowbotham has acted as an interlocutor throughout. I continue to find traces of her in the Rio's archive in real and imaginary ways. Her presence has generated a feminist consciousness and continuity across space and time. Her feminist approach to the past has provided a methodological framework to address the operations of history and a way of learning about the hidden histories of women's lives and cinema. These lines of enquiry have enabled me to think differently about how to approach writing a collective history of feminist film programming and curating in the present. In this regard, Monica Dall'Aasta and Jane Gaines name this dialogue with the feminist past and present as constellatory work that, they suggest, binds us as feminists. 'With historical others[s] on the premise' they write, 'the past is continuously created, even now, even today as we write' (2015: 23). As a result, Rowbotham's hauntings in the Rio's archive has been woven into this research's cartography and practice. Her question 'When is the personal not political?' has conversely motivated me to use this research to remember my own history and unearth CDF's pre-history in London (1983: xi).

An active member of the Islington-Hackney Women's Liberation Group, Rowbotham co-organised the inaugural Women's Liberation conference in 1970 whilst living in Hackney.

In *Daring to Hope*, Rowbotham writes that the group formed in the autumn of 1970 and initially held meetings in the bedroom of her communal house at 12 Montague Road (2021: 64). Rowbotham was involved in numerous women's liberation campaigns of the era, many of which took place in Hackney, including equal pay, child-care, migrant rights and the National Abortion Campaign as well as and the night cleaners' campaign, which held meetings in the City and Hackney in an attempt to unionise their work.³ In addition, Rowbotham conducted local history walking tours included visiting Newington Green, where her literary heroine Mary Wollstonecraft opened a boarding school for girls and started her own career as a writer.⁴

Encounters in the archive

Finding Rowbotham in the archive

I first found evidence of Rowbotham in the Rio archive a few years ago. I did so when I was in the building looking through the cinema's monthly film programmes from the late 1970s and 1980s. One afternoon, while half listening to Hans Zimmer's score for *Dunkirk* (2017), Christopher Nolan's historical war drama set in World War II. I by chance came across a single-sided white piece of paper with black typewritten ink. It appeared to be a miscellaneous document that had been folded in amongst the monthly programmes. It was an admissions report dated 4 November 1979 to 27 April 1980, detailing a six-month feminist film season at the Rio. The document revealed a collaboration with local and national feminist organisations, campaigns and women's groups, within which Rowbotham was embedded, including Hackney and Islington Socialist Feminist Group, the National Abortion Campaign, Hackney Black Women's Group and Women in Entertainment. On reflection, encountering this feminist film season from the past while listening to the Elgar-inspired patriotic film score for a contemporary mainstream war film felt charged, as Zimmer's score acted as a sonic reference point and historical political context for the film season. It was a pull from the past that left an affective resonance too. In May 1979, 6 months prior, Margaret Thatcher was elected as Prime Minister, heralding the era of Thatcherism (Wollen, 1993: 35).⁵ Holding the ephemera in my hand while reflecting on that pivotal moment in British politics and cultural life, I thought about

³ Out of this campaign came *Nightcleaners* (1975) by the Berwick Street Collective. In 2019, Rowbotham wrote a newly commissioned essay on the film. See Dan Kidner and Alex Sainsbury (2019), *Berwick Street Film Collective – Nightcleaners & '33 to '77*. London: LUX, Raven Row & Koenig Books.

⁴ In a conversation with the writer Iain Sinclair, Sheila Rowbotham recounts Julie Christie, who was living in Stoke Newington at the time, joining one of her historical walking tours (Sinclair, 2009: 296).

⁵ In 'The Last of the New Wave: Modernism in the British Films of the Thatcher Era,' Peter Wollen defines Thatcherism as 'the imposition of market criteria in every sector of society, to political authoritarianism, to the "the two nations" project of Thatcherism, and to the leading role of the City' (1993: 35).

what the election meant for Rowbotham, for women's struggle, community politics, collective organising and the filmmakers and community groups connected with the Rio.

Researching Rowbotham's Hackney, I find a history that piles upon history like sedimentation, where ghostly fragments converge and offer impetus to contemporary feminist currents and urgencies. Although I have yet to ascertain whether Rowbotham visited the Rio, she does write about attending Hackney Under Fives at Centerprise, the left wing bookshop across the road from the Rio. Stimulated by this unknowability and inspired by cultural theorist Saidiya Hartman's theory of critical fabulation, I imagine an archive of an alternative feminist history: a narrative that connects Rowbotham with the women's screenings and events at the Rio.⁶ Advancing Hartman's notion of past and present abutment, I imagine Rowbotham attending that late-night double bill screening on 11 November at the Rio, in support of the National Abortion Campaign, where she would have watched the LWFG's film, *Rapunzel Let Down Your Hair* (1978) alongside Claudia Weill's *Girlfriends* (1978): films that explore the complexities and contradictions of women's lives and relationships. We know that 94 tickets were sold. It is a detail that sheds light on the appetite for women's political cinema. Maybe Rowbotham was in the audience.

Finding/feeling feminist and lesbian Hackney in the archive

At the same time, the Rio document became a map of the women's friendship circles, collective work, political alliances and feminist and lesbian social spaces in Hackney, much of which constellated around Hackney's Women's Centre.⁷ Evidence of the political women, collectives and feminist groups connected with the Rio. Christine Wall, who lived in a lesbian squat in Broadway Market in the 1970s, writes how these women's spaces 'provided the spatial infrastructure for feminist activism' and were most often 'found in women's centres, refuges, nurseries, bookshops, art centres and workshops' in Hackney (2017: 79). Artist, filmmaker and activist Anne Robinson, a member of the WMRP and the See Red Women's Workshop, also lived in Hackney in the 1980s.⁸ When we met, Robinson recalled the summer of 1983 and moving to Hackney as a young lesbian artist.

⁶ See Saidiya Hartman (2008) *Venus in Two Acts*. *Small Axe*, 12(2): 1–14.

⁷ For a history of the Hackney Women's Centre in the 1980s, see, 'Hackney's Women's Centre and Matrix Feminist Architects'. *The Radical in History of Hackney*. Available at: <https://hackneyhistory.wordpress.com/2022/11/07/hackney-womens-centre-and-matrix-feminist-architects/> (accessed 5 August 2023).

⁸ The Red Women's Workshop was founded by three ex-art students in 1974. Working collectively until their cessation in 1990, the group made silk screened posters for the women's liberation movement and other community groups. Available at: <https://seeredwomensworkshop.wordpress.com/> (accessed 5 January 2022).

Our co-op was called April, it was a gay co-op. There were about three other co-op houses right next door to us. Two of them were lesbian houses. There were a few houses in Stoke Newington quite near to the Rio. I remember the first [co-op] meeting, because there was one in Lesbon Road. I was probably not long from Scotland, so I thought they were saying Lesbian Road. There probably should be a road in Stoke Newington called Lesbian Road but there isn't, it was Lesbon Road, so that sticks in my head.⁹

Robinson's memories recall with humour her formative (in)experiences as a young Scottish lesbian artist moving to Hackney and the queer community she found, and in which embedded herself within.¹⁰

Hackney in the 1970s and 1980s had emerged as a radical countercultural place.¹¹ This was partly due to the politicising events of the 1960s that included Vietnam and Northern Ireland, but also because of the borough's high unemployment and a widespread distrust of the police, the state and local councillors, attitudes and realities which impacted people's daily lives.¹² With grants available for community development and education projects from the Greater London Council, Greater London Arts and Hackney Council, community politics, radical bookshops, publishers and women's groups such as RWC and WMRP flourished in feminist, anti-racist spaces like the Rio, Centerprise and Chats Palace.¹³

As already noted, London in the 1970s and 1980s saw a feminist organising and collective cultural work enacted through friendship circles and women's film and video groups like RWC and WMRP. Women came together in political and creative ways through alternative infrastructures and women's networks. Rowbotham, for example, remembers how consciousness raising groups were formed 'to offer an alternative type of politics open to all

⁹ Anne Robinson interview. 7 September 2020. (See Appendix G).

¹⁰ Also, see writer, poet and activist Roz Kaveney's account of living in trans squat in Dalston in 1979. *The Radical History of Hackney*. Available at: <https://hackneyhistory.wordpress.com/2023/02/19/a-trans-commune-in-dalston-1979/> (accessed 14 April 2023).

¹¹ For a timeline of Hackney's radical histories from 1649-1999. See, 'Timeline – Hackney: Cradle for Subversives'. *The Radical History of Hackney*. Available at: <https://hackneyhistory.wordpress.com/timeline/> (accessed 5.8.2023).

¹² For a closer look at Hackney's social and political issues in the 1970s, see 'Hackney Gutter Press issues 1 and 6 (plus PDFs) 1972'. *The Radical History of Hackney*. Available at: <https://hackneyhistory.wordpress.com/2020/02/09/hackney-gutter-press-issues-1-and-6-plus-pdfs-1972/>. See also 'Hackney's People Press 1973-1985: 96 issues online'. *The Radical Hi* Available at: <https://hackneyhistory.wordpress.com/2023/05/28/hackney-peoples-press-1973-1985-96-issues-online/> (accessed 5 August 2023).

¹³ For an oral history of Centerprise and a social history of Hackney in the 1970s and 1980s, see Rosa Schling (2017), *The Lime Green Mystery: An oral history of Centerprise co-operative*. Available at: <https://www.ahackneyautobiography.org.uk/> (accessed 13 April 2023).

women' (2021: 16). Founded in 1973, East London was already home to Four Corners, an independent film workshop and cultural hub for radical arts. Moreover, Circles, the feminist film distributor, rented an office in this workshop's building and made regular use of its cinema. Writing in *Sight & Sound*, Anna Coatman notes how leftist film co-operatives and collectives emerged from this 'era [in] which grassroots movements and campaigns around feminism, gay liberation and anti-racism, squatting and underground publishing flourished' (2019). In close proximity to Four Corners and Circles, RWC and the WMRP materialised from these localised socio-political and cultural underpinnings.

Finding/feeling feminist film exhibition histories in the archive

Returning to that 1979/1980 feminist film season. Two screenings particularly caught my attention. The first is a matinee double bill dated Sunday 4 November 1979, organised in association with the Hackney and Islington Socialist Feminist Group. Seventy-two tickets were sold. The second held on Saturday 11 November 1979 was a late-night double bill benefit screening on behalf of the National Abortion Campaign.¹⁴ Ninety-four tickets were sold. Trying to reconstruct these feminist film exhibition histories compelled me to consider how I might determine the document's value as a historical artifact and a feminist film programming blueprint for now. Was this the beginning of a feminist film programming practice at the Rio. This was after all a moment when a new political consciousness was initiated by women for women and film. The season corroborates Laura Mulvey, where she recalls in 'Film, Feminism and the Avant-Garde' from 1978 (as noted in the Introduction) that a 'collision' (2009: 115-116) between women's liberation and cinema took place in the late 1970s, which, as this research argues, saw the instigation of an activist feminist film programming at the Rio.

Imagining that National Abortion Campaign screening today, it makes me wonder whether it really existed at all. Because this history of an emergent women's film culture at the Rio has almost been forgotten. Rowbotham writes that 'feminism in the first sense is utopian [...] it exists in the realm of stories and visions, not as a political movement (1983:17). My research absorbs Rowbotham's thinking that feminist history exists in our collective consciousness, in the experiences and thoughts we tell each other and pass down from one generation to the next. Moreover, if we connect Rowbotham's idea with the task of excavating

¹⁴ The National Abortion Campaign was formed in 1975, the group defended the Abortion Act 1967 against several proposed amendment bills during the 1970s and 1980s. Large demonstrations and events were organised against these bills both locally and on a national scale. The group had support from several branches of Trade Unions and from several Members of Parliament. For Rowbotham's involvement with the National Abortion Campaign in the 1970s, see Rowbotham, 2021: 178; 201; 232.

the Rio's feminist film programming and curation, we might be able to re-imagine a new archive collectively and creatively from the cultural memory of a history almost lost. My interest is in excavating a materiality of women's film exhibition practices from the past, asking how the archive's objects might be made visible to audiences today. I do so not only through film objects and documents, but also, in and out of the collective memory of those who were there, or in the case of Rowbotham, who I imagined to be there, at the time.

In the Rio's basement: an archaeological site of textual fragments

My decision to utilise the Rio's basement cinema for the community archive sessions and film screenings was principally for practical reasons that worked around the cinema's weekly schedule. The cinema remains a busy community cinema offering first run features, special events and repertory programming. We were going to be a small group needing a quiet and intimate space where my practice-based research could be conducted with little disturbance. The Rio's basement opens out into an unwieldy cavernous space with different size rooms, meandering corridors and storerooms. Buried underneath Kingsland High Street, the subterranean space was in the process of being renovated at the time of my practice. A fitting metaphor for the archaeological dig that needed to take place. Walking down the stone staircase into this crypt-like space, I felt a palpable sense of the feminist past and the ghostly things that linger as textual hauntings in the archive. The basement turned into an archaeological site of spatial and affective fragments, the task at hand was to unearth the remnants of feminist programming and curating that took place beneath the pavements of Dalston. By electing to conduct my practice-research in this location, where much of RWC and the WMRP activities took place, I wanted to explore how place as the built environment and space as a concept, as a collective topography, inform certain kinds of cinema memory making. In turn, I was focused on considering how memory and space as topography, read through Annette Kuhn (2002: 17) becomes situated and embodied. In this way community archives operate as sites of architecture, where counter histories are produced and memories spatially articulated as modes of activism and identity building. I discovered that the basement had a literal and metaphorical underground history as a meeting point for numerous Hackney-based collectives and community groups, including the Sound Kitchen (which I will come to later), the Tape/Slide Newsreel group, Black Audio Collective, among others I am still to find. In 2020, writing in *Sight & Sound* John Akomfrah, Black Audio Collective founder member, reflected on the group's affiliations with the Rio and how a cinema such as the Rio can function as a cultural institution

[In] 1982, [the Black Audio Film Collective] made contact with the Rio programmers and they were very keen to help in any way ... The Rio had a Tape/Slide community project, and one of the first pieces we made as a collective was a tape/slide piece for Theatre of Black Women [Britain's first Black women's theatre company, founded by Bernadine Evaristo, Patricia Hilaire and Paulette Randall] ... The Rio was central to our practice. It became not just a place of work but a place where you could explore how a cultural group functions and continues to work inside a community. (2020)¹⁵

Akomfrah's reflections about the Rio's role as a cultural and community space, compel me to remember my own history with the Rio. This began in the mid 1990s watching films; then, in 2010, that association deepened when CDF began hosting film screenings and events. At the time of writing this chapter, revisiting my history of cinema going in the 1990s and cultural practice in the 2000's took on new potency, because the Rio was closed due to COVID-19. I was not able to access the archive and rumours were circulating that the cinema was under threat of being bought by a larger chain due to pre-existing financial difficulties exacerbated by the pandemic. As such, I was left with anxiety because I was living under lockdown restrictions and knew this community archive—its material existence needed attention, maintenance, support structures and ongoing cultural activation.

The stone stairs that led down to the basement have been the same since the 1980s, possibly earlier. In preparation for my practice, I took a few participants down to the basement; an exercise which brought out strong emotions, as they remarked how walking down the stairs triggered memories and feelings about their time at the Rio. Their reactions demonstrated how recovering memories of places recover emotions as well. As a result of these affective encounters, I knew that by using the basement the space would take on another life. This would lead to a different way of knowing and feeling the past. In this way, the basement presented a symbolic underground, a subcultural space in which I have been mining women's film histories and the archive's sediments that continue to linger in the built environment.

¹⁵ John Akomfrah shared his memories of the Rio in the 1980s for *Sight & Sound*. See Akomfrah (2020), John Akomfrah on why the Rio in Dalston is more than a cinema. *Sight & Sound*. Available at: <https://www.bfi.org.uk/sight-and-sound/interviews/dream-palaces/john-akomfrah-rio-dalston> (accessed 24 March 2023).

Throughout the 1980s, several days of the week, the WMRP occupied the basement as a women-only space, offering media training for women in video and sound production, including The Sound Kitchen and the Video Lounge. In January 1986, writing in *Spare Rib*, Julia Dodds reported The Sound Kitchen's opening

The likes of Sade and Alison Moyet have been hailed in some quarters as the leaders of a new movement in the music industry. A movement where musicians can dictate their own terms, where they are not victims in a male dominated field. However, if you take a look at the recording industry as a whole. It immediately becomes clear that women have not made as much headway as some would like to think.... But things are now set to change. In February the first women only sound recording studio is opening. It is the result of five years hard work and campaigning by the Women's Media Resource Project. With the aid of a grant from the Greater London Council, this collective is converting the basement of the Rio Cinema in Hackney into a 16-track recording studio and video screening area. (1986)¹⁶

The WMRP, a unique resource for women in London, was part of a national network of community spaces and places including workshops, media collectives, activist groups and cinemas which offered a real prospect of creating an alternative media to the mainstream. The misogyny and sexism in the media industries compelled the WMRP to open a resource to give women access to equipment and training for careers in sound and video as founding member Katharine Meynell told me

Our motivation was a group of makers, coming from an artist angle and wanting access to equipment, equal access to things. I think training and access to jobs may have been part of it, but it was not, from my point of view and quite possibly, I am only representing my own point of view, it was about having access to equipment. But access didn't just mean to hire it or borrow it. It was being able to know how to use it, because in that era it was really hard to get somebody to tell you how to use something, without them feeling that they could humiliate you for being a woman. (2020)

¹⁶ Women's Media Resource Project Annual Report 1986/7 press clippings. [document]. Maggie Thacker archive.

With the advent of a granted-aided film and video sector, political and creative collectives such as the WMRP, Four Corners, Women in Sync, Circles, Cinema of Women, Sankofa Film and Video Collective and Aphra Workshops facilitated interconnecting networks for women to work on their own terms.¹⁷

Cinema of Women founding member Caroline Spry notes how these spaces and practices offered the possibility for women to work collectively and creatively, and to think differently, to provide ‘the opportunity to learn, to experiment and, if necessary, to fail’ (Grut, 1991:16). A significant moment in the history of the Rio and the WMRP came in November 1986, when the group received a capital grant from the BFI and Greater London Arts to open the Video Lounge. In 1987, 350 people attended a launch to mark the installation of a 32-seat screening room, equipped with two 27-inch video monitors, VHS and U-matic Playbacks, as well as 16mm and 8mm film projectors. The group took over the basement for half a week, programming what became known as the Video Lounge: a women-only film and video project. In March 1987, the WMRP was nominated by the Fawcett Society for their ‘Awards for Positive Action’, with the comment ‘we have highly commended your achievement in promoting wider opportunities for young women’ (1987).¹⁸ Then, following a 12-month planning process, the group instigated and co-organised the First National Women’s Video Festival, which took place between 5-11 October 1987. The first of its kind, the festival worked with multiple cinemas and women’s spaces across London, including the Women’s Centre in Covent Garden, the Rio, the Ritzy, Acton and Metro Screen cinemas and the Fridge nightclub in Brixton.

Holding the festival catalogue in my hand, I noticed and felt its thickness: a metaphor for the strength and diversity of women’s video-making at that time. The catalogue, even today, points to a moment in time, when the aspirations of the festival programmers, which included members of the WMRP, the funding available to deliver a festival on this scale, coincided with the desire of a community eager to see their lives reflected on screen. Yet the festival’s impact, with 16 women’s organisations represented, over 1500 people attending, to watch over 200 videos, has been forgotten. Dagmar Brunow argues that archives belonging to women’s video

¹⁷As already noted, from 1983 to 1985, Lis Rhodes was on the GLC’s Arts Committee, which gave initial funding to the WMRP, among many other women’s groups. In an interview with Jenny Lund, Rhodes remembers the committee’s remit as supporting collective work, and provid[ing] funds and support for groups working in music, film, video, writing, photography and others, rather than supporting an individual artist. Some groups were already established, such as Cinema of Women, Circles and the London Filmmakers’ Co-op. Others, particularly smaller, less formalised groups of women, requested funds to open a facility space or a workshop (Rhodes and Lund, 2015: 190).

¹⁸ Women’s Media Resource Project Annual Report 1987/8. Letter from The Fawcett Society, 5 March 1987. [document]. Maggie Thacker archive.

and film practice in the 1970s and 1980s remain important because they put forward a counter narrative to mainstream media, in that they ‘complicate the hegemonic media representation’ by creating ‘a counter public sphere’ and, as such, offer ‘an alternative view on political events’ (2011: 173). In the same way, the First National Women’s Video Festival catalogue has kept a historical memory of feminist screening practice and women’s videomaking in the 1980s. Yet issues of access, neglect and obsolete technology have haunted my archaeological work in recovering the festival’s history as a significant feminist cultural event. The festival continues to linger as an imaginary object in my mind and, unable to devote more research time on it, I have been left reflecting on this issue of material obsolescence, and what happens, as Brunow probes, when women’s video histories, practices and the tape stock are literally left to disintegrate: ‘what if this cultural memory is falling apart?’ (ibid.).

Practicing in the archive / Re-constructing a memory of Rio Women’s Cinema and the Women’s Media Resource Project

Community archiving at the Rio

Paying attention to the collective and activist mechanics of keeping the archive alive and public, I draw on the work of media archivist and preservation activist Juana Suárez. In particular, I reference the lecture Suárez gave at the 2019 Essay Film Festival, when she used such a method to reconstruct a collective memory of Colombian feminist collective Group Cine-Mujer (1978-1990s).¹⁹ In her lecture, addressing questions of the archive’s power to silence and restore, and specifically the patriarchal state archive’s failure to care for, preserve and digitise histories of women’s collective filmmaking practice, Suárez spoke about bringing members of Cine-Mujer back together to identify the group’s archive material in what she called community archiving sessions. Offering an ethical approach to dealing with a loss of history when the institutional archive is not to be trusted, these community archiving sessions began the work of reconstructing a collective memory of a feminist film collective practice in absentia. Thinking with Rowbotham’s idea about a feminist approach to the past, and motivated by Juárez’s method of archiving and preservation, I planned a series of community archiving sessions in the Rio basement to recover the cultural archives belonging to RWC and

¹⁹ Cine-Mujer was a Colombian feminist collective. Between 1978 and 2000, the group produced several short films, documentaries and videos, and acted as a distribution company for Latin American’s women’s cinema. See Essay Film Festival 2019, Session 11: ‘You’ll Never Work Alone’: Cinenova at the Essay Film Festival, celebrating the feminist film collective. Available at: <https://www.essayfilmfestival.com/session-eleven-youll-never-work-alone-cinenova-at-the-eff-celebrating-the-feminist-film-collective%EF%BB%BF/> (accessed 24 April 2021).

the WMRP. The sessions were to be a reunion, of sorts, materially speaking, to engender coming together.



Club
Des
Femmes
RIO CINEMA

Feminist Re-Imaginations at the Rio, 1980-2020

Did you come to the women's film and video screenings at the Rio, Dalston in the 1980s? Were you a member of the Rio Women's Cinema or the Women's Media Resource Project? If so, we want to hear from you!

From 22 February - 30 May 2020, we will be facilitating a series of feminist re-imaginings, re-screenings, archival activations and refections at the Rio.

Please get in touch to take part in this vital project which aims to keep feminist moving image history present and future-looking:
hello@clubdesfemmes.com

Feminist Re-Imaginations 1980-2020
Rio Cinema, 107 Kingsland High St, Dalston, London E8 2PB
Programme 1: 22 February, 2pm
Programme 2: 21 March, 2pm
Programme 3: 18 April, 2pm
Programme 4: 30 May, 2pm

For more information: riocinema.org.uk and www.clubdesfemmes.com

Fig 3: 'We Want You' flyer. Designed by Sarah Wood. January 2020. Club des Femmes archive

Sarah Wood and I collaborated on a design for our 'We Want You' flyer, that detailed information about the project (Fig 3). I left the flyers in the foyer of the Rio and surrounding locations in Dalston, as I wanted to notify local audiences who might have come to the Rio in

the 1970s and 1980s. I emailed the flyer to my participants including Vivacious, Vicky Grut, Cathy Lane, Katherine Meynell, Zoë Redman, Anne Robinson, Fiona Scott, Cherry Smyth, Maggie Thacker among others with an open invitation for them to come to any of the community archiving sessions, in order for us to explore the archive and identify the historical material together. Using the archive as a prompt, I was interested to hear my participants share their memories and reflections about their experiences of feminism in the 1980s, and collective and community work they were involved in at the Rio and elsewhere. I was intrigued to find out what remained tangible from the RWC and WMRP archives, 40 years after their beginnings. The purpose was to locate women's work in programming and curating in the archive and in film history. These sessions were as much about building a new archive together in the collective act of assembly, as well as enacting a discursive space where my research and the methodological questions concerning feminist film history, cultural memory and the archive could be addressed. Furthermore, I wanted to explore which archiving and history writing practices and methods might animate the groups' histories and affects, without pre-determining their meanings.

However, in February 2020 due of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and following an announcement from the UK Cinema Association that saw the mandatory closure of most UK cinema sites, the Rio decided to shut its doors on Wednesday 18 March.²⁰ It didn't reopen again until Friday 7 August 2020. As a result, I was only able to run one community archiving session on Saturday 22 February 2020. At the time, I did not know that this was to be the only session I was able to facilitate.

²⁰ UK Cinema Association statement on Coronavirus/COVID-19, 17 March 2020. Available at: <https://www.cinemauk.org.uk/2020/03/uk-cinema-association-statement-on-coronavirus-covid-19/> (accessed 23 March 2021).



Fig 4: *Feminist Re-Imaginings at the Rio, 1980-2020.* 22 February 2020. Club des Femmes archive.

The session took place in the Rio's basement. In preparation, I put up signage as well as leaving flyers around the building, as a prompt to lead people down to the basement (Fig 4). I exhibited the ephemera from RWC and the WMRP on two tables and projected a slideshow on screen. Click on this link to watch the slideshow: <https://tinyurl.com/rioslideshow> The slideshow presented a collage of photographs assembled from the Rio's Tape/Slide community archive, the WMRP and RWC archives, as well as photographs from Katharine Meynell's personal archive.²¹ As I was asking my participants to remember film screenings, activities and events from 40 years ago, I knew there would be issues around remembering and accuracy, and that this would lead to an unstable position between anecdotes and facts. I wanted to set the encounter up in this way because I knew I was dealing with the past mediated through, as Kuhn writes, 'memory texts, or recorded acts of remembering' (2002: 9). I did not want to pre-determine what might happen, who might find their way down to the basement, what stories might be remembered and what stories forgotten. I wanted to capture my participants' accounts as not only as data but also as memory discourse as material for analysis. I was just as interested, to paraphrase Kuhn again, in *how* people talk as I was with *what* they say about

²¹ Video artist, scholar and writer Katharine Meynell was a founder member of the Women's Media Resource Project. My interview with Meynell. (See Appendix E). See also Meynell's LUX artist. Available at: https://www.luxonline.org.uk/artists/katharine_meynell/index.html (accessed 7 July 2023)

what they did (ibid: 9). This added a layer of unpredictability and apprehension on my part, because of the investment I had in delivering the session resourcefully and not knowing whether I would be able to gather enough material to interpret.

Mindful of what happened at ‘Being Ruby Rich’ Symposium in July 2017, where, due to budget constraints, we were not able to organise a complete audio-visual document the day, I wanted to avoid this hazard. As I was not able to oversee all the practicalities of running the event, the session was documented by filmmaker Lisa Gornick, a regular CDF collaborator.²² With her assistance and the consent of my participants, I was able to keep an audio-visual record of the session. Later, this material formed a valuable document of the process, aiding my memories of the day’s proceedings, which in turn helped me critically reflect on my relationship to the research and the practice. In the process of writing this chapter during lockdown, my recollection of that day, how we congregated together in the basement, instilled feelings of nostalgia, loss and longing but also a renewed sense of urgency to complete the research because of the age of some of my participants and the impact of the pandemic on their health, with points to the archive’s renewed precarity (see Douglas Crimp’s 1989 essay: ‘Mourning and Militancy’).

As noted, I had anticipated these sessions to be accumulative, in that they would be held once a month over a four-month period: the length of my project. I had envisaged the sessions to be convivial, open and informal, the discussions with my participants would be prompted by my questions and the material on display. Together, we would consider matters of the archive, history and memory, the locality of the Rio, as a community cinema that engendered feminist collective work, and the specificities of film and video programming at that time. The aim was to create horizontal longitudinal connections, continuity and intimacies across each session, and I had anticipated that over the course of that timeframe, more participants would have been able to attend (or return again). This would be in addition to welcoming the Rio’s front of house staff down to the basement, as they had shown interest in learning more about their place of work’s LGBTQ film pasts. This longer time frame would have potentially given me a wider range of material to analyse, as well as offering the opportunity for a deeper interrogation of my own relationship to the research material. However, because of the lockdown, the rest of the project was cancelled. Therefore, what follows are my critical reflections on how the session in February unfolded and the interviews

²² Lisa Gornick is a filmmaker, artist and performer based in London. For further information, see <https://www.lisagornick.com/> (accessed 6 September 2021).

I conducted with my participants, the discussions that were generated and my thoughts on the research process.²³

Despite only being able to conduct one community archiving session, it was, on reflection, a valuable and surprising encounter that provided me with ample material to analyse. As noted, the ethnography used for this element of my practice has been informed by Kuhn's ethnohistory and cultural memory work, together with Cvetkovich's queer cultural theory, which brings together technologies of memory and archival practice. Two participants who did come to the Rio, generously shared their memories and experiences of being part of RWC and the WMRP, as well as answering my questions about the contexts and connections between feminism in the 1980s and film programming and their association with the Rio. We discussed how and why feminism had led them to do this type of collective cultural work and their reflections on that period in their younger lives. One of my participant's affection for certain female film stars remained strong, and I was interested to find out how their 'stargazing', to borrow the term from Jackie Stacey (1994), impacted their film programming decisions. Prompted by the ephemera, both participants provided rich detail and texture about the material dimensions of presenting and watching films with predominantly women-only audiences 40 years ago. In the process, their memories and stories offered unique access into the 'invisible work' of feminist programming and curating. Despite the shift from analogue to digital film exhibition in the 2000s, this was, on reflection, an approach to programming that remained remarkably similar to film programming today.

The archive's ephemera prompted memories of a charged, surprising and sometimes challenging encounter with my participants that at times was hard to navigate. As Sophie Hope writes, 'research is entwined through for/as practice and not easily separated out' (2016: 83). These dynamics drew attention to the processes of thinking, analysing and learning through practice, and the ways in which new knowledge might be discovered through and as part of the practice. There were many points during the session where I did not know what I was doing next or even have time to reflect on what I needed to do. In fact, the latter was a question that I kept returning to throughout the course of the day, as I found myself either improvising or relying (more than I had anticipated) on my colleague Lisa to keep the conversation with my participants going, while I had to attend to operational questions from the Rio's staff or welcome new people down to the basement. This situation prompted a reflection about modes of analysis, and how they come at different points and in different ways in practice-based

²³ Participant interviews. See Appendix D-J.

research as opposed to other research disciplines that foreground theory and methodology before practice. Moreover, it led me to think about how the live encounter allows those present to see, hear and listen: in effect to feel the feminist past as an affective charge, generating a space where new repositories of knowledge about feminist collective work can be spoken, written and collectively shared.

Meeting Fiona Scott

Fiona Scott was the first of my participants to arrive. She was accompanied by a female friend who lived locally and had also attended the women's screenings at the Rio in the 1980s. Both settled themselves into the front row and started to look through the ephemera. The material prompted a conversation about the different work Scott had undertaken with the Rio, which included designing flyers and monthly film programmes, as well as being a member of RWC programming group and serving on the Rio's management committee.

Scott's feminism was typical of the era, in that it was activist, cultural and political. As a member of a feminist print co-operative in Clerkenwell (which shared the same building at Cinema of Women), she was involved in Women in the Print Trades, whose film *No Set Type* (1984) was distributed by Cinema of Women. She protested at the Women's Peace camp at Greenham Common and participated in Reclaim the Night marches. She made badges for 'Rights for Women', a feminist group who, just as Rowbotham had done a decade earlier, offered guided history walks through the city, to places of interest for women's socio-political histories. What particularly caught my attention was Scott remembering how this group led tours of the Bryant and May match factory in East London, where a Match Girls Strike took place in 1888. It was a trace of women's working-class history of which I was unaware, leaving me to wonder what other women's histories might be revealed or remain buried in the basement over the course of the day. How the live encounter of practice can engender unexpected reverberations and synchronicities that offer portals to the past instilling context, knowledge production and inspiration for the future.

Scott's account of how she became involved with RWC speaks to this dense socio-political context. Already friends with Esther Ronay, Scott recalled how she and a few other women from the group would meet at Ronay's flat to research and discuss the programming for the women's screenings at the Rio. Prompted by Scott's memories of these encounters, I later went back into the archive, because I was interested to find out more about the group's process, its programming intentions and how they cultivated feminist film audiences at the Rio. I came across a flyer that helped piece together some of these connecting narratives. It

detailed a Women's Cinema Workshop at Centerprise. Dated May 1980, the women-only workshop was held in conjunction with the Rio's first women's film festival, which had been initiated and programmed by the Women's Cinema Group, a pre-cursor to RWC.

Continuing the feminist interventionist work instigated by Mulvey, Claire Johnston and Linda Myles at the 1972 Women's Event at Edinburgh, the Women's Cinema Workshop at Centerprise focused on discussing feminism, cinema and audiences as central topics for debate. Mapping a cartography of these women's film programming histories leaves 'a paperchase for the future' as Rowbotham has written (1983: 2). For they uncover a story of how these histories of practice have been written out of history, while also revealing the ways that an emergent women's cinema came to be seen and experienced by feminist audiences at the Rio. Moreover, such tracing reveals how community cinemas like the Rio provided crucial space for not only watching films but also for discussion and debate, which in turn contributed to the cultural transmission of feminist ideas.



Fig 5: Fiona Scott looking through the Rio archive. 22 February 2020. Club des Femmes archive.

Looking through the ephemera, Scott spoke about her affection for watching Hollywood's female film stars of the 1940s and 1950s on screen, remembering the pleasures of programming those films with Ronay at the Rio (Fig 5). Reminiscing about Ronay's passion for Diana Dors, Scott remembered her fondness for Katharine Hepburn, also sharing cinema memories of watching Hollywood screwball comedies of the 1940s and 1950s. In her study of women's spectatorship and Hollywood cinema, Stacey writes

For women in the 1980s, nostalgia is clearly one of the pleasures of remembering 1940s and 1950s Hollywood cinema and its stars. Remembrance is simultaneously an acknowledge of the loss of those times, and a means against guarding against their complete loss. (1994: 18)

Scott's recollections, when read through Stacey's consideration of nostalgia as a technology of memory, rather than as something inert and fixed in the past, transmits an affective and temporal dimension to feminist film archive. Listening to her talk about that time in her formative life felt palpable with meaning. Her memories spoke to a sense of collective purpose, friendship and belonging that feminist work can bring. Her anecdote about Ronay's kitchen table brought to mind Rowbotham's bedroom, and how these familial personal spaces became places that supported environments of film friendship and feminism. Though Scott's memory often faded on the details, I later found a flyer in the archive that brought her account to light, as I discovered that in March 1984 RWC had programmed *The Desk Set* (1957) (starring Katharine Hepburn) in conjunction with Lois Weber's *The Blot* (1921). These memories and stories about the bonds of film friendship, women's cultural spaces, collective work and the film programming that is enacted because of them, subsequently found their way into my tape/slide, which I will come to in Chapter Six. Scott's reminiscences offered a valuable glimpse into feminist film programming in the 1980s. As I shared my own memories and experiences of programming, Scott told me that it was Ronay who had taught her the skill, comparing it to an education, emphasising that it was a case of learning by doing. Her remarks prompted me to reflect on what counts as feminist film history and contemplate its fragmented modes of narration. It also made me consider how, in the late 1960s and 1970s, feminist historians like Rowbotham challenged the concept of 'history from below' and used a feminist methodology to write about women who were 'hidden from history' (1976). She did this by documenting the past through interviews, letters and diaries, recording forgotten areas of women's lives and their experiences of oppression, which were traditionally considered unworthy of being remembered. In the same way, we reclaimed the ephemeral aspects of women's collective work in the cinema during our conversation, each sharing memories of screenings at the Rio that were both rewarding and disappointing. For instance, the joy of bringing the full ambition of women's filmmaking to Rio audiences, as well as the frustration of presenting films to an almost empty auditoria of 400 seats. We also shared experiences of the invisible work involved in researching, programming and presenting a film season and the

effort of building and connecting with audiences for women's films that are historical, experimental or unfamiliar.

These practices of remembering, forgetting and reminiscing, how stories, memories and feelings about the past are told is the discursive way that the archive functions. As my encounter with Scott illustrates, it points to how a materiality of feminist film history can be brought into the present as a palimpsestic practice, through mapping, collecting and restoring archives that have historically been hard to document. Navigating the Rio's feminist film archive through queer, feminist and cultural memory methodologies holds space for these technologies of memory to be recognised as an exchange of feminist knowledge.

Meeting Zoë Redman



Fig 6 Zoë Redman sharing memories of the Women's Media Resource Project. Club des Femmes archive

These ways of thinking and tracing the archive lingered in the basement when another participant, Zoë Redman, arrived (Fig 6). A video and performance artist, Redman was

involved with London Video Arts and became a founder member of the WMRP.²⁴ As soon as she arrived, it quickly became apparent that Redman had not returned to the Rio for 40 years. The combination of being back in London, in the basement of the Rio, looking through the archive material and answering my questions, brought up intense emotions and memories, as Redman asked if the group was still active. Her question took me by surprise because she was one of the founder members. Then, she offered her account of the group's beginnings, which took inspiration from being at the women's peace camp at Greenham Common. Redman remembered that time as a moment of hope, how the collective protest she encountered at Greenham (where she went at weekends with Marion Urch, Katherine Meynell and Claire Gill to camp), later became the WMRP, with sound artists Zuni Luni and Cathy Lane. At the same time, she also spoke about difficult memories and emotions from that time. Redman's recollections brought the feminist past into the present in affective and political ways, drawing attention to the point that feelings and haptic accounts are not just academic terms, they are embodied, lived experiences that continue to be carried into the present. Redman's account illustrates the emotional aspects of collective work that marks its place in the archive. Her memories revealed the joy of community organising and collective cultural practices, along with the difficult – and often messy – experiences that come with them.

Bringing these accounts into the broader context, listening to the materiality of the archive draws renewed attention to the methodological interventions and new methods needed to write and practice a feminist film history in absentia. Moreover, to bear witness to my participants' life stories, is about hearing the strength and defiance that came from their dreams. 'We were hopeful, we wanted to change the world' Redman said. In 2018, WMRP founder member Meynell shared similar feelings

Talking a couple of weeks ago, Zoë reminded me of how hopeful we were, how we felt that there were radical potentials in the way we lived and worked, as artists and as mothers. I think that is reflected in the work. We believed we had the ability to change things for the better by articulating our experience and framing it in ways

²⁴ Redman widely exhibited in the 1980s with her video art, installations and performance work. In 1990, she left London with two children, to live in the south of France where she continues to develop her practice. Redman is a LUX artist. Available at: <https://lux.org.uk/artist/zoe-redman> (accessed 9 October 2022).

which questioned the status quo. I don't think we were in the slightest bit naive; it is just such different times. (2018) ²⁵

These personal testimonies bring home the revolutionary spirit of that era. Yet I was conscious of both Meynell and Redman's decision to approach telling that history through inspirational narratives of collective work. As much as there is a sense of utopia in these recollections, there lingered a haunting feeling about the group's fractious history too. Nonetheless their accounts speak directly to Rowbotham's 'daring to hope' for women's liberation in the 1970s, while refusing to forsake utopia.

Practising feminist film programming: Programme 1: The Personal is Political



Fig 7: Selina Robertson introducing Programme 1: *The Personal is Political*. 22 February 2023. Club des Femmes archive.

In the afternoon of Saturday 22 February 2020, after the community archiving session, I presented Programme 1: The Personal is Political in the Rio's basement cinema (Fig 7). This screening presented new feminist cinema that responded to the consciousness raising politics of the women's movement in Europe. In pairing *The Second Awakening of Christa Klages*

²⁵ See 'Symposium: From the Kitchen Table', with Karen Di Franco, Katharine Meynell and Kay Watson, 2 November 2018. 'From the Kitchen Table: Drew Gallery Projects 1984—90', Southwark Park Galleries. Available at: <https://southwarkparkgalleries.org/from-the-kitchen-table/> (accessed 15 November 2021).

(1978) by Margarethe von Trotta with Leeds Animation Workshop's animated short *Give us a Smile* (1983), my intention was to revisit some of the key concerns of the movement, to explore how feminists were using film as an aesthetic and ideological tool. Resonating with Rowbotham's consciousness raising rhetoric from 1973

Sisterhood demands a new woman, a new culture, and a new way of living. The intimate oppression of women forces a redefinition of what is personal and what is political. (2015: ix)

A key slogan of the movement articulating a shared conviction that women's personal lives are rooted in a systemic patriarchal oppression and gendered inequality.²⁶ Simply put, women's lived experiences are inherently political as a result. The films address issues of women's oppression and consciousness in playful, humorous, angry and distinctive ways. With Leeds Animation Workshop's deployment of animation (with some live action elements) and von Trotta re-imagining the drama-thriller genre, both films adapt existing cinema traditions to feminist purposes.

The programme was a reprise of a WMRP screening that took place at the Rio on 28 August 1985. My screening was a shortened version of the original triple-bill programme, which included the Australian feminist heist thriller *On Guard* (1984) by Susan Lambert. *On Guard* was released in July 1984 by Cinema of Women, but I have been unable to determine why the film is no longer available to be seen in the cinema.²⁷ As I did not want to repeat the original screening and due to budget constraints, there were aspects of a more complete programme that I was unable to realise. The focus was on recuperating the screening's cultural memory, through dialogue and reflection with the intergenerational audiences present.

²⁶ The personal is political is credited as originating from the American New Left in the 1960s and used as the title of an article written by Carol Hanisch of the New York Radical Women. Hanisch's article was published in Shulamith Firestone and Anne Koedt (eds) (1970), *Notes from the Second Year: Women's Liberation: Major Writing of the radical feminists*, pp. 76-77. New York: Radical Feminism.

²⁷ See Alexander Heller-Nicolas's contemporary analysis of the film for *Senses of Cinema*, and how its distribution and exhibition in Australia remains a feminist issue. Available at: <https://www.sensesofcinema.com/2017/pioneering-australian-women/on-guard-1984/> (accessed 17 November 2021).



Fig 8: Selina Robertson and Vicky Grut. 22 February 2020. Club des Femmes archive.

Vicky Grut, one of my participants, joined me in a post screening discussion to share memories of her time with the WMRP and specifically her work as the Video Project coordinator in the group (Fig 8). When I interviewed her, Grut expressed a strong affection for Margarethe von Trotta, remembering how her films had been positively received by feminist audiences at the Rio. von Trotta was one of the few women directors from West Germany whose films played at international film festivals, in British cinemas and women's film festivals during the 1980s. Grut spoke with feeling about her admiration for the director's skill in being able to write and deliver an emotional core at the heart of her films, while also managing to fold complex ideas and drama together in powerful ways. *Christa Klages*, von Trotta's first solo directed film, was one of a handful of *New German Cinema* films that responded to the history of the Red Army Faction (also known as The Baader-Meinhof Group).²⁸ In her book 'Women and the New German Cinema', Julia Knight claims that in the 1970s, responding to the politics of the women's movement, West German women directors

²⁸ *New German Cinema* was launched as a new political and artistic film movement at the Oberhausen Short Film Festival in 1962. A manifesto was written by filmmakers Alexander Kluge, Haro Senft and Edgar Reitz with others. Expressing a dissatisfaction with contemporary commercially driven West German film production, the group advocated for an innovative vision of cinema that confronted and educated mainstream audiences. Their ambitions reflected the artistic and political stagnation of mid-20th century West Germany. Filmmakers included Rainer Werner Fassbinder, Werner Herzog, Wim Wenders, Margarethe von Trotta and Helke Sander. Fassbinder's death in 1982 effectively saw the mainstreaming of the movement into international co-productions. See Thomas Elsaesser (1989), *New German Cinema: A History*. Basingstoke: BFI/Macmillan Education.

‘began to raise awareness of the way in which women had been virtually excluded from historical discourses’ (1992: 87). Correspondingly, Knight rejects the (male biased) *auteur* approach to film studies, rather she focuses on the socio-economic and cultural politics that allowed for West German women’s political filmmaking to emerge. Given Knight’s writing on the history of the female directors of the *New German Cinema*, it is noteworthy to connect the WMRP programming with Knight’s book as feminist critical and curating endeavours that set out to rewrite the canon by inserting women back in the story of film, and film history.

As a result of the politics of the women’s movement, many films made by the female filmmakers of the New German Cinema, in particular von Trotta, were based on the lives of real women. *Christa Klages* dramatises the story of a Munich based nursery-school teacher Margit Czenki, who robbed a bank to fund a children’s day-care centre. Knight writes ‘there is a specific concern’ in the film ‘to foreground particular aspects of women’s reality that have traditionally been excluded from the public sphere’ (ibid., 87). On the film’s initial release, B. Ruby Rich wrote, ‘The film has outrageously inventive character details... [and is] attentive to the minutiae of daily life, an endorsement of emotion and intuitive ties, and an infectious humour’ (1998: 78). A review that concurs with Grut’s comments about the film’s authentic representation and curious humour, that details uncanny synchronistic experiences of women’s lives. These were distinct, memorable elements which connected with feminist programmers and audiences at the time.²⁹

My argument in Chapters Two and Three situates feminist film programming and curating in film history and theory. Circling back to this, and by linking Rich and Knight with the WMRP, it is possible to account for the link between feminist film programming and criticism in the 1980s, and the concurrence between theory, programming and audiences as connected consciousness raising activities. In their own ways, each built the reputations and visibility of feminist filmmakers and movements, not only through showing films, but also in writing, spectating and theorising. By mapping these feminist cultural film histories, new resonances and visions can be found that connects feminist film history and practice, with theory and activism. The 2020 screening of *Christa Klages* added to the feminist work of (re)-reputation building and restoration today, as the film became a discursive object of European

²⁹ After the screening, I discovered a further synchronicity in the archive that connected *Christa Klages* with the women’s photography collective the Hackney Flashers. The same production year as *Christa Klages*, the Hackney Flashers created ‘Who’s Holding the Baby?’ The Hackney Flashers project was first exhibited in 1978 at Centerprise, then toured widely to community centres and libraries across the country. The exhibition’s political resonances with *Christa Klages* are noteworthy, for exposing the lack of childcare in the borough and the impact this had on women’s lives in Hackney. Available at: <https://hackneyflashers.co.uk/slideshow-whos-holding-the-baby-1978/> (accessed 23 August 2023).

feminist art cinema and culture in the 1980s. The feminist criticism, distribution and exhibition networks that fostered women's cinema and developed feminist audiences at this time facilitated von Trotta's work to be seen in the cinema, revealing how a single film makes visible the politics of a film culture. Within this historical context, the WMRP is central to this feminist collective work that acts on a continuum, with the intent to produce feminist film history through the circular movements of making, writing, programming and viewing.

Grut's account of the specificities of women's film distribution and exhibition during that time, prompted younger audience members to hear more about how women's distribution and exhibition worked on a practical, analogue level. Questions were asked during the discussion about methods of programming, how one might find out about and book a film like *Christa Klages* to show in the cinema. Grut held up a Circles' distribution catalogue from the 1980s and explained how film programming was done. Considering one touch digital film distribution and exhibition, where information and resources seem infinite and wholly accessible online, Grut's stories and experiences of how cultural film exhibition worked were listened to by younger audiences with some astonishment. Stimulated by this topic, the mechanics of the hegemonic archive came into sharp focus as I shared my frustration at not being able to book certain films because of a lack of preservation and digitisation of historical women's cinema by certain national film archives. I reminded audiences that only a small percentage of films by women, LGBTQ, filmmakers of colour and from the Global South could be found online, and an even smaller amount had been preserved and restored for new circuits of distribution and exhibition. If a single film can make visible the politics of a film culture, we reflected on the contemporary (post Brexit) distribution and exhibition landscape for European women's arthouse films. Leading on from this, in keeping with past and present feminist advocacy off screen, I traced von Trotta's feminist film exhibition histories by connecting our screening with the WMRP and the feminist film festival Birds Eye View, who in 2011 brought two of von Trotta's films back into the cinema. Before that moment, von Trotta's filmography had lingered in relative neglect and invisibility.³⁰ Moreover, I disclosed that the reason we had been able to watch *Christa Klages* on a 2K DCP restoration was because of the advocacy and intervention of the Independent Cinema Office (where I also work) and von Trotta's distributor Studiocanal who were instrumental in bringing four new restorations

³⁰ In 2011, Birds Eye View Film Festival presented a von Trotta Filmmakers' Focus on *Rosa Luxemburg* (1986) and *Vision: From the Life of Hildegard von Bingen* (2009). Available at: <https://www.birds-eye-view.co.uk/a-birds-eye-view-programmer-gali-gold-introduces-the-2011-line-up/> (accessed 12 January 2022).

to cinema audiences in 2019.³¹ Reflecting on the ICO tour, feminist film critic Christina Newland articulated the urgency of the task at hand to keep von Trotta and her films in circulation

The truth is, few cinephiles and critics I know have seen her movies, and barring a few recent online pieces, there aren't many easy-to-access studies of her career in English. There are no recent books about her. That's why a touring season like this one is so crucial. (2019)³²

Newland's observations draw attention to how a lack of distribution and exhibition continues to be a challenge to many women filmmakers, and the value of film programming and audiences to keep women's cinema in circulation and hence available to women's film history. In keeping with von Trotta's narratives of feminist solidarity, compassion and bonding on screen, the ICO continues this past present collective and activist exhibition work with CDF and the WMRP through film programming, criticism and viewing.

Picking up on ideas of feminist solidarity work on and off screen, the conversation after the screening of *Christa Klages* led to remarks about the suggested lesbian relationship in the film, when the kindergarten teacher flees to Portugal with her school friend to live on a community run farm. The discussion turned to how lesbian representation on screen impacted lesbian lives off screen, as an older audience member reminded everyone present that in the 1980s it was still necessary 'to be in the closet'.³³ She then spoke directly to younger audiences about 1988, when Section 28 of the Local Government Act was enacted into law, banning local authorities and schools from 'promoting homosexuality'. Another audience member interjected that for lesbians who were mothers working for local councils or teaching in schools, it was a particularly difficult time because they were at risk of losing their jobs and their children being put into care. This remark prompted Grut to show a flyer detailing the WMRP's 'Clause and Effect' event in June 1988. Promoted as 'London's first Live, Pride, Video Extravanza! A celebration against censorship', the event was co-organised by the Rio,

³¹ 'The Personal is Political – The Films of Margarethe von Trotta' was a national film tour comprising four of von Trotta's most explicitly political films. The 2019 tour was programmed and distributed by the ICO. Available at: <https://www.independentcinemaoffice.org.uk/tours/margarethe-von-trotta/> (accessed 25 November 2021).

³² Christina Newland (2019) Contemporary perspectives on Margarethe von Trotta, ICO. Available at: <https://essaysaboutmargarethevontrotta.org/2019/08/19/contemporary-perspectives-on-margarethe-von-trotta-by-christina-newland/>. (accessed 12 January 2022).

³³ For a queer feminist analysis of 'the lesbian's delayed and uneasy path towards visibility', see Clara Bradbury-Rance (2021), *Lesbian Cinema after Queer Theory*, pp. 1-7. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

the WMRP and Centerprise. An Annual Report from 1988/9 details that 500 people came, and that the ‘event was a mixture of poetry, live performance (including a chat show with Kathy Acker) and videos.’ Grut shared her memories of the event and the political reasons why it was organised. ‘It was just one of those exuberant occasions’ she said, ‘where the place was full to heaving as an expression of political creativity.’ Considered here, Grut’s comments illuminate the value of foregrounding affect and ephemera as tangible frameworks to see and feel histories hard to document, stories belonging to women and queer people in struggle. Her remarks drew me to José Esteban Muñoz’s queer reading of ‘ephemera’ (2009) as an affirmation of minoritarian lives, and his argument how ephemera can be read queerly as a ‘trace, the remains, the things that are left, hanging in the air like a rumour’ (2009: 65). Yet there was, from my part at least, a tangible sense of the time that has passed since then, of the ghosts of a queer past still living in the Rio’s basement interwoven with fresh memories of deaths caused by Covid 19 pandemic. Hauntings of then and now, communities that lost so much, and of those who suffered homophobia, racism, discrimination and trauma. These are ‘tangled memories’ Marita Sturken (1997) writes, that act as a reminder of that historic moment of struggle when LGBTQ and feminist activism came together to fight Section 28 being enacted. Lastly, there was an additional, more intimate haunting felt for another young life cut short, namely the early death of Kathy Acker who was living in London at the time. Yet as Muñoz notes, these traces and remains build and shape new archives of queer activism and collective cultural practices that continue to acknowledge and mark these vanishings.

The hauntings of the archive and cinematic histories of lesbian (in)visibility on screen was probed by another audience member from Berlin, who asked about The Lesbian Archive.³⁴ Her interest was sparked by a flyer for a screening of a World War Two lesbian romance from West Germany called *November Moon* (Alexandra von Grote, 1985). A screening programmed by the WMRP in collaboration with The Lesbian Archive. Her curiosity compelled me to look further in the archive, where I found a flyer that detailed a partnership between the two groups dated October 1987 - November 1988. Finding these connections in the archive illustrates the ways in which lesbian women worked to intervene in canon formation by locating and screening films for lesbian audiences eager to see their authentic and imaginary lives reflected

³⁴ The Lesbian Archive began in London in 1984 under the name the London Lesbian Archive and later the Lesbian Archive and Information Centre. The group was funded by the GLC to develop and sustain a collection of Lesbian History and culture in the United Kingdom. The archive is currently housed in the Glasgow Women’s Library. Available at: <https://womenslibrary.org.uk/explore-the-library-and-archive/the-archive-collection/the-lesbian-archive/> (accessed 27 November 2021).

on screen. As Edith Becker, Michelle Citron, Julia Lesage and B. Ruby Rich wrote in 1981 for the 'Lesbian and film' *Jump Cut* special edition

It is impossible to underestimate the need for films to affirm all aspects of lesbian identity, given the virulent hostility against lesbians in our society. Films are required to reclaim history, offer self-definition, and create alternative visions (1981: 17-21).

The Lesbian Archive and WMRP season speak to the issues and historical debates that were orbiting lesbian cultural politics and cinema in the late 1980s, including the problem of lesbian sex scenes depicted in mainstream cinema and the concerns and visibility of older lesbians, arguably still issues that are relevant today. Writing for the queer art magazine *Square Peg*, programmer and writer Cherry Smyth argued the case for screenings to be used as a forum for critical thinking and discussion about an emerging lesbian film and video culture in Britain. Smyth urges her readers

We as lesbians often work around struggle: we fight systems: we may know the women in [television] documentar[ies]—their pain, their custody cases, their coming out and being thrown out and fired stories—they are our culture too, but we also want fiction and fantasy, role models, heroines, stars, ordinary dyke characters, fantastic lesbian mums, soap operas, plays, comedies ... etc. etc. and of course we want relationships and SEX! (1988: 24)

A historical memory of the lesbian screening practices and discussions at the Rio lingers in this ephemera, in the stories, dreams and experiences of those who were there. Our discussion recovered this barely known history of lesbian film culture in the 1980s, holding the attention of the young audiences present, who were curious to know more. Questions persisted about *November Moon*, the Lesbian Archive and the screenings at the Rio: what were the debates that followed, who came to the screening, what did audiences think, how did they feel, what was the atmosphere? A 1998 review from 'Images in the Dark: An Encyclopaedia of Lesbian and Gay Film and Video' finds the film 'a moving experience that reaches beyond the horrors of WWII as it speaks out against violence, war and the persecution of all minorities' (ibid: 363). As Clara Bradbury-Rance notes, the mid-1980s saw a new era for lesbian visibility on screen, films like *Desert Hearts* (1985) 'signalled a new optimism' leaving behind 'early figurations' of lesbianism in twentieth-century cinema with its 'persistent of framing of

lesbianism in the singular whether as pathetically doomed to loneliness or as sinisterly and even parodically seductive' (2021: 4).

Picking up on *Desert Hearts*, Grut spoke about programming the film at the Rio in the 1985, and the excitement of seeing a full auditorium of lesbian women eager to see the film on screen for the first time. In a survey carried out for Channel 4's LGBT magazine series *Out*, titled 'We've Been Framed', *Deserts Hearts* was named the most popular lesbian film with British audiences in 1992 (Stacey, 1995: 94).³⁵ Grut recalled inviting Kuhn and Mandy Merck to the screening in 1985 to discuss the significance of the film for lesbian cinema and feminist audiences. In this way, they were connecting feminist and lesbian critical and curating practices with the necessary physical spaces of cinematic activity. Picking up my earlier point of reputation building, Merck was at the screening in the capacity of a film critic: later she acted as producer for *Out on Tuesday*, the nationally networked television series aimed at lesbian and gay audiences that ran between 1989 and 1994.³⁶ By chance, Kuhn had come to the screening in February 2020. She was in the room to hear Grut share memories of the *Desert Hearts* screening. As she was with us in the basement, we asked Kuhn if she had any memories to share too. Kuhn spoke about seeing the film but not at the Rio. Her response speaks directly to my point about way that cultural memory works when practising women's film histories. As well as to Kuhn's theorisation of cinema memory, how memory work is done and staged within a certain context, with a performative nature that offers discursive forms of forgetting and misremembering. As she has argued (2002: 9-12), it is not only *what* people remember but *how* they remember that is significant, the way a story is being told.

The presentation of *Give Us a Smile* by the Leeds Animation Workshop prompted further discussion about the campaigning film and video that came out of the women's movement.³⁷ The film resonated intensely with some audience members who shared experiences of sexual violence from that time and talk about the anger they felt about the violence towards women and misogyny that continues to this day. We spoke about how the film was made by women who lived in Leeds during the 1970s and early 1980s, when a series

³⁵ For an analysis on how *Desert Hearts* was received quite differently by lesbian audiences on its release and why it was not followed up by a spate of lesbian romance film; see Jackie Stacey (1995), *If You Don't Play, You Can't Win: Desert Hearts and the Lesbian Romance Film*. In: *Immortal, Invisible: Lesbians and the Moving Image*, edited by Tamsin Wilton, pp. 92-114. London: Routledge.

³⁶ Mandy Merck is Professor Emeritus of Media Arts at Royal Holloway, University of London. Merck has worked as a journalist for *City Limits* and *Time Out*, editor of *Screen* and the series editor of Channel 4's *Out on Tuesday*.

³⁷ Leeds Animation Workshop is a women's collective set up in 1978 to produce and distribute animated films on social and educational issues. Available at: <https://www.leedsanimation.org.uk/> (accessed 24 November 2021).

of murderous sexual attacks by Peter Sutcliffe (known as the Yorkshire Ripper), led to a reaction by the police to warn women not to go out at night. Taking women's lived experiences as a starting point, the Leeds Animation Workshop made the film to counter mainstream media's inaccurate sexist reporting, as a way for women to reclaim autonomy and space that had been taken from them by fear and male violence. This account was verified by another audience member who remembered the time and the police's misogynistic attitude to reporting the case. These instances prompted the start of the Reclaim the Night marches as public actions of collective feminist resistance that involved, which Fiona Scott has shared with me, torch-lit marches and demonstrations through towns and cities. The protests highlighted that woman should be able to walk anywhere and should not be blamed or restricted because of male violence.

The specificities of misogyny and homophobia in the 1970s and 1980s was brought home to younger audiences as we watched the film together. These made clear, as Rowbotham (1983: 17) argues, how we might use feminism as a tool of activism and historiography, and thus why it is central to keep history connected with audiences, so that these histories can be brought into the present. While a feminist ethics of care and listening reflects on the methods needed to keep re-visiting, contextualising and bringing these difficult histories into the present, *Give Us a Smile's* subject of women's objectification in visual culture and the sexual harassment of girls and women came into sharp focus when I introduced the film. This was because the American film producer Harvey Weinstein was due to stand trial for sexual assault and rape a few days later.³⁸ By remembering feminist film programming and curating and the socio-political and cultural specificities of historical film screenings and events, a space opens for dialogue and reflection about how feminist politics and women's film history can be passed on through intergenerational discussion, and why histories of women's collective and cultural practice be kept connected with audiences in the present. In this way, a film screening can offer a place of encounter with the archive, where the legacies of the past are given meaningful space to impress upon the present, and where the practices of feminist cultural resistance can be used to re-shape a feminist future.

³⁸ Anon (2020), Harvey Weinstein is Found Guilty of Rape. *The New York Times*. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/02/24/nyregion/harvey-weinstein-verdict.html> (accessed 25 November 2021).

Conclusions / Reflections on my practice of community archiving and feminist programming

As my practice shifted to oral history, I reflected on Trinh T Minh-ha's (1982) idea of 'close listening' and 'speaking nearby' in relation to gestures of responsibility, respect and care. This was because my research revealed that to excavate a history of the WMRP was to acknowledge a history of intense friendship, ideological splits, activism and creative and cultural work on the margins. This is a history of lesbian separatist ideology that became so entrenched that the group fragmented, with the founder members leaving to make way for new members to join. The hauntings of the archive reveal this complex history of how the women's lived experiences had a consequential impact on the dynamics of the group and its subsequent fracture and re-formation. It is this fragmented, fractured history that impacts the way the group is remembered today. The resonances and timbres of Johnston's aura in the archive come back to haunt, as a life cut short, and of intellectual and creative roads not taken. Who gets to remember and narrate the group's story today? As such, methodological questions persist about what strategies might be used to archive a collective, when that history is fleeting, contested and still in the process of being written. When histories such as those belonging to the WMRP remain missing, contradictory and incomplete due to divergences and fallings out within the group, the emotional space that a community archiving session holds for these layers of history to be recalled and processed, presents an ethics of responsibility and care for emotions to be listened to, acknowledged and shared.

In this way, the community archiving session became the research process in itself: one that emerged out of a critical and embodied engagement with the practice, and where the limits of the archive, its fissures and power, were felt and acknowledged by all those present. Community archiving work of this nature also addresses questions about the ethics of feminist curating. Specifically, this relates to ways in which responsibility and care folds into curating work. This brings me back to Laura U. Mark's curating methodology (2004: 37) to account for these responsibilities of care and affect on the body to do the work. Given the often intensely personal-as-political nature of collective work, there were moments during my time spent with Redman when I found myself struggling to keep on track. As painful details were shared and listened to regarding buried grievances, recollections that bring to the fore difficult memories and experiences that emerged from the intensity of friendship and commitment to women's liberation politics. An ethics of queer feminist care attends to these complexities and conflicts, of the personal and the political, making visible and holding space for the ways in which friendships, intimacies, conflict, loss and hope are embodied and intertwined. An archive of

feeling writes Cvetkovich, 'holds many kinds of documents, both ephemeral and material' (2003: 286). The difficult emotions and memories shared in the community archive session revealed the ways in which a queer feminist curating practice can offer both an affective and critical framework to listen to the hauntings of the archive, as a reparative reading strategy to write women's film history differently.

Returning to the Rio's basement and an archaeology of collective memory that we were recovering that day; it was the practice that repeatedly pushed me new directions to reflect on the methodologies and methods needed to respond to the cultural objects that remained tangible in the archive after 40 years. To conclude, there are various themes that I took away from the day. Listening to the discourse of memory with its multifaceted timbres of remembering and forgetting, while bearing witness to the life stories of my participants, I reflected on the power of the archive to silence and enunciate a cultural memory of women's screening practices at the Rio. Bringing my participants' life stories together was a reminder of the value of listening to the specific contexts that shape the forms and content of feminist organising, radical struggle and cultural practice, and how their experiences, as an embodied politics of knowledge, are historically significant. At times, I felt a responsibility as a researcher/practitioner/activist to bear witness and accurately document my participants' memories and reflections in order to keep their lives present as sources of ideas and inspiration to draw from.

Considering this encounter with Kuhn's forgetting brought to life, one audience member later commented on how cultural memory theory is done: in his words, it was 'cultural memory in action'. The exchange with Kuhn brought me back to Rowbotham and her remarks on time and memory in *Dreams and Dilemmas*,

One of the curious and disturbing aspect of being a historian and a participant in a popular movement is the experience of how memory dissolves. Even as we scan the past our own beginnings slip away. Already records have been lost. (1983: 216)

It is these activities of cinema memory (the archiving workshop, screening and discussion), with its textures and timbres of re-remembering and forgetting, that expands the archive's affective registers. They bring to light knowledge about the discursive and experiential nature of memory as both private and public. In this way, cinema memory can be marked as a distinctive subtype of cultural memory, as a practice of restoration and historiographic redress for the feminist past with the present. Yet, Kuhn's forgetting was, as Avery Gordon writes, 'a

haunted reminder [] of [the] lingering trouble' with trying to re-construct a history that nobody can remember (2008: xix).

At certain points during the community archiving session I found myself reluctant to ask questions that felt too invasive. Cvetkovich's analysis of witnessing, which she evokes through Zoe Leonard's distinction between oral history as witnessing and oral history as confession, makes the case for the ways in which 'emotional investments are entangled in political ones' (2003: 194-195). In this way, the practice complicated my methodology, as I was asked to keep particular accounts off record. In the end, the oral history served as an archive of emotions not because of what was said but because of what was left unsaid or spoken about. After the film screening in the afternoon, the discussion demonstrated how memory continues to be constructed through subjectivity, feelings, anecdotes, nostalgia and speculation, highlighting the messiness of history and the absences and silences that are revealed at the moment of telling. As Rowbotham remarks, 'All insights and illuminations carry their own blind spots and the slogan, the personal is political, is no exception', adding that when documenting women's history, 'tension[s] and difference[s] remain' (1983: 218).

These counter-archives of emotion and affect as counter publics, as theorised by Cvetkovich (2003: 10), are different to the written hegemonic archive, but no less valuable to preserve. Yet there are contours of the archive's collective memory that remain unpredictable and inaccessible. For instance, the separatism of lesbian cultural activity in the 1970s and 1980s still haunts the present, a reminder that a nuanced queer feminist cultural theory of archives and archiving is needed to deal with these complex histories that continue to be erased by resistance and neglect. These absent presences signal another haunting because of how perilously close to being lost even this recent lesbian past is. It also reveals how feminist curation as cultural memory work realises scholarship through embodied and ephemeral methods that co-exist across films, participants and audiences in cinema spaces, and how each come together to do feminist film history differently.

The need for a nuanced queer feminist cultural theory of archives and archiving is also a reminder that tracing and mapping a technology of memory as feminist knowledge in the archive cannot remain a passive, one off undertaking, as these cultural histories materialise both formally and informally and changes every time. It shows that, in working with the 'crumpled heap' of women's material cultures, feminist curating acts on a past/present continuum as persistent palimpsestic, recovery work. This is especially the case when the hegemonic archive and institutions cannot be relied on to do the work of preserving the archives of feminist screenings practices, in fact, they are more likely to ignore and forget them.

Chapter Six: Lockdown Diaries: COVID-19 pandemic's impact on practice research and the trauma of not remembering

It would be remiss not to begin this section by acknowledging the significance of today's date of writing: Tuesday 23 March 2021, a calendar date that marks the one-year anniversary since the first national COVID-19 lockdown. Following an announcement from the UK Cinema Association that read, 'mindful of the latest scientific advice from the Government, the coming days will see the closure of most UK cinemas sites,' the Rio closed on 18 March 2020 only to re-open on 7 August 2020.¹ These seismic global events and national decisions impacted not only my practice-based research at the Rio, but also my bearings as a researcher working in the archive, as it was no longer possible to access the archive in the Rio and continue with my planned practice-based research. I found myself not only having to consider how I was going to reconfigure my practice because of the Rio's closure, I also had an intense feeling of a loss of coordinates with myself as a doctorate candidate. This was firstly because of my timeline to complete the thesis and the question of how to approach the situation with my practice-based research when it was too dangerous to be in the cinema together. Secondly, this moment was not only about the ramifications of a global pandemic and whether a vaccine would be found, but also the pandemic's impact on cinema cultures and the public spaces of festivals and cinemas as social spaces with a social function. Taking all this into consideration, coupled with my research and the attachment I felt delivering to my practice at the Rio as well as the concern I had for my participants' health and well-being, I found myself unsure of how to process my feelings of anxiety and loss as an affective encounter.

Within the space of a week, 'Feminist Re-Imaginations at the Rio, 1980-2020' had become a historical document, as I was forced to ask fresh questions of the archive, my methods of practice and methodologies. Literally locked out of the archive, ordered to stay at home, I reflected on what it was that I was looking for in the archive, what could I access now and how the pandemic was already reconfiguring my practice. Listening to the daily reports of the pandemic spreading, I had time to re-evaluate what new methods and methodologies I could turn to help myself, my participants and the Rio audiences re-imagine a way out of the real-life nightmare that was being enacted.

¹ UK Cinema Association statement on Coronavirus/COVID-19 (2020). Available at: <https://www.cinemauk.org.uk/2020/03/uk-cinema-association-statement-on-coronavirus-covid-19/> (accessed 23 March 2021).

As the first lockdown continued from the spring into the summer, I realised that the archive I was working in represented far more than the actual value of the material objects themselves. I could see that COVID-19 had in fact turned my research into new archive of absence, a different ‘ruined and fragmentary map’, one that continues to be haunted by the loss of my practice at the Rio, as well as by the avoidable deaths and illness caused by the government’s incompetence in responding to and managing the pandemic. So Mayer names this felt absence in the archive as an ‘archive ache’ or an ‘anarchive’ a term which they draw from Jacques Derrida’s idea of ‘*mal d’archive*’, which in itself is less about the archive and the attending practices of history than about the space left by what is gone. Mayer writes

The phantom ache of the lost limb [is a] history that can be accessed only through its absence. This *mal* is a reminder of the precarity of the survival of marginalised communities. To call it an ache names the tension of doing the work that appears to work against itself: to contain what can be found without demanding or inventing coherence; to embrace what has to be carried forward, but not uncritically. (2020:58)

Acknowledging this ‘anarchive’ with its renewed precarity and the abandonment of my practice at the Rio presented what felt like an ostensible failure. Yet this absence and the archive’s hauntings draws me back me to Giuliana Bruno’s (1993: 3) palimpsest methodology as a way of thinking in and with the archive’s ruination through the processes and methods of archaeological work.

As the contours of the archive shifted, I considered, from the isolation of my home, what I could bring forward: how was I going to re-make what was already there without erasing what had been lost? The situation presented fresh challenges but also, I recognised opportunities for collaboration to find different shapes and shades in my practice. An archaeology of knowledge slipped into an archaeology of silence that pervaded the archive’s haunting. Over the course of the previous year, I had been carefully planning ‘Feminist Re-Imaginations at the Rio, 1980-2020’. The abandonment of the project, the failure to complete the initial ambition, as well as the Rio going dark, compelled me to consider another way of thinking and working in the archive to conduct the research. In *The Queer Art of Failure*, Jack Halberstam writes that failure and loss can be understood as a way of ‘not knowing’ and this ‘may in fact offer more creative more cooperative, more surprising ways of being in the world’ (2011: 3). Halberstam’s queer reading of failure presented me with an alternative way of

thinking about ‘not knowing’ what to do with my practice. Failure, read as not a mistake but envisaged as a transformation and opportunity to do things differently, to find an alternative that embraces experimentation and new methods of practice. This discourse of failing re-orientated the ‘ruined map’ of my abandoned project, haunted by what-was-not-to-be, with an empty cinema and unrealised community archiving sessions. Moreover, the pandemic’s enforced isolation offered me weeks to reflect on the missed opportunities, of the roads not taken, the unrecorded conversations, the crumbs of history still to be found. It was a reading that offered ways of thinking about this rupture and loss, holding a space for new resonances that might arise from the archive’s affects. As the research was less about delivering a successful practice, I began to reflect how I might embrace this unplanned and unexpected predicament. The Rio remained shut as a building, but the archive continued to hold a historical memory of a feminist film culture in the 1980s. Responding to this urgency, I considered the ways in which my methodologies might offer renewed frameworks for thinking across the different materiality and discourses that had come to the fore as a result of the impact of the pandemic. In effect, the pandemic only deepened the relevancy and importance of this thesis’ framing of curating as a feminist, queer and cultural memory practice-based methodology, as a way of doing cultural film history as thinking and feeling in the archive.

As I witnessed many film festivals and cinemas decide to take their film programming online or move to hybrid versions, I also saw others cancelling their programmes entirely. One example of what could be called a ‘politics of refusal’ was Edinburgh Film Festival’s 2020 experimental film strand, Black Box. Curated by Kim Knowles, her programming draws on (as this thesis has also argued in Chapter 2 and 3) Edinburgh’s history of film programming and theorising of historical and contemporary experimental and artists’ films in the cinema. Due to the specificity and materiality of artist film’s analogue medium, and the value placed on the collective experience of viewing, Knowles decided to cancel Black Box’s 2020 programming at the festival.² As a consequence, conversations ensued online about the impact of virtual film festivals, the pleasure and urgency of gathering together and the desire to get back into the cinema.

Speaking to this issue of film’s materiality and the different experience of watching films with cinema audiences as opposed to online, B. Ruby Rich posted an editorial in *Film*

² Looking through the Edinburgh Film Festival’s archive, a record of the 2020 pandemic edition has not been documented. Available at: <https://www.eif.co.uk/archive> (accessed 21 July 2023).

Quarterly entitled, 'Zoom Out: The Melancholic Screens of 2020', where she addressed her own feelings of despondency at having to 'attend' film festivals in isolation

There was Toronto, New York, and DOK Leipzig, all waiting in my laptop, but something was wrong. I had been going to film festivals since the age of twenty-five. I love the friction of physical bodies and contradictory opinions ... for me, film viewing is enhanced by translocation, where its effects can have my full attention. In the confines of my apartment amid the distractions of the street, the news cycle, and my email, I cannot escape the world at large in quite the same way. Worse, I'm alone with my experience. (2020)³

It is noteworthy to take Rich's point about the loss of cinema going as a collective viewing experience whilst reflecting on her cinefeminist past, and the mobilisation that the women's movement enacted on and off screen the 1970s and 1980s. Thinking about what was at stake for feminist film programming and curating of the future, with the loss of the live social encounter and the shifts in viewing patters from the big to small screens, I started to imagine how women's experiences and memories of the cinema past might come alive in another way. Connected to this, what impact on the fields of feminist film and media studies was the pandemic era going to have, and how was the future of film distribution and exhibition being re-shaped with the advent the streaming platforms as industry players.

Rich's piece triggered my own memories of attending film festivals in my twenties. Yet it was not until my thirties when I began programming at BFI Flare: London LGBTQIA+ Film Festival (formerly the London Lesbian and Gay Film Festival), that I experienced the power of connection between my own interests, the films I love, and the community I am part of. Writing about his own experiences of attending Frameline: the San Francisco International LGBTQ Film Festival, Marc Seigel writes how this exchange becomes 'an embodied *and* cinematic experience', that queer film festivals manifest as 'festival[s] of encounter'... 'whether nostalgic, erotic, or informative, which combine to create a particular viewing experience' (1997: 131-136). It was these cinematic experiences that Sarah Wood and I were looking to replicate when we started CDF. In that we wanted to create a queer feminist space where we could be in the cinema together and experience presenting and discussing films that we loved

³ B. Ruby Rich (2020), Zoom Out: The Melancholic Screens of 2020. *Film Quarterly*. Available at: <https://filmquarterly.org/2020/12/10/zoom-out-the-melancholic-screens-of-2020/> (accessed 25 April 2021).



with the community of which we were part. These reminiscences of my film programming past felt tangible because of a sense of loss and time passed.

By remembering a materiality of feminist film curating and programming through their cultural objects as repository of feminist knowledge, this thesis has continued to argue that these archives of feelings need to be kept in the cinema, as a public practice of intergenerational cultural and collective memory work. When confronted with the restrictions that the pandemic placed on my practice and with the option of moving the rest of the project online, the futility of the exercise and how precarious living had become revealed itself in a very real way. In March 2020, I took the decision to postpone my practice until September 2020. Yet as the summer months progressed and lockdown restrictions were only partially lifted, I realised that my focus on completing the practice in its current iteration was irresponsible. I decided to cancel the rest of the practice, as the health and wellbeing of my participants, the Rio staff and audiences remained paramount. An ethics of care as a feminist methodology for practice came into sharper focus. I could not in good conscience ask my participants, some of whom were recovering from COVID-19 or in a vulnerable category due to their age, to join me in the Rio's 28-seat basement cinema to participate in my research. The archive's vulnerable status added another layer of anxiety, as the Rio's economic situation became even more acute when the cinema's executive director Oliver Meek furloughed the majority of the staff and applied for rescue funding from the BFI's Culture Recovery Fund.⁴

Turning to Tape/Slide: object materiality in the archive

⁴ The Culture Recovery Fund for Independent Cinemas in England was administrated by the BFI on behalf of the Department of Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, as part the United Kingdom's cultural recovery package for cultural, arts and heritage institutions. Available at: <https://www.bfi.org.uk/get-funding-support/culture-recovery-fund-independent-cinemas> (accessed 25 April 2021).

- Publicity - 7:51.

1)  

6:30. Tape-Slides- 'They told me' 9 mins. by Jean Fresen.
'UNTITLED' 4 mins by Jean Fresen

6:45. INVITATION TO MARILYN 6 19 mins by Jacqui Duckworth Kerr

7:00. ~~THE SIREN~~ CATHERINE ET LA SIRENE. 4 mins Super 8mm Yvonne Thoenne

7:05? TABLE TALK 10 mins 16mm double head. Emma Beck

7:20 DO THE TOP? 3 mins. U-Matic by ELECTRIC GIRLS

7:25. STRANGE LANGUAGE MUSIC TAPE. 11 mins U-Matic Yvonne
Kate Nowacek and Alka Williams.

7:40 LIBERTY, EQUALITY... MATERNITY? 32 mins U-Matic by
Biased Tapes

8:15. FEPTARD NIVES 25 mins U-Matic Bethnal Green Women's
Group

8:45. AGAINST THE CURRENT. # U-Matic 15 mins. Jane Harris

* 9:00. A QUESTION OF SILENCE. .

Fig 9: Notes on women's programming at the Rio in the 1980s. Found in the Rio Cinema Archive. See Appendix K.

The impact of the pandemic on my practice reshaped the research in new and surprising ways. These considerations and changes highlighted a renewed need to think through the practice with a feminist, queer and cultural memory methodology, to address the archive's materiality and heightened precarity. Over the summer, I found myself obsessively checking: what did I know, what did I have access to and what ghosts remained in the basement? Looking through the digitised material, I discovered new synergies and lines of enquiry that I had previously overlooked because my focus had been on the programming and community archiving. I was drawn to one of the most intangible pieces of ephemera: a faded handwritten note that appeared to be a programme planning document (Fig 9). No name was attached, yet I recognised some of the names listed. The note detailed a draft of a screening of women's audio-visual media practices, which included tape/slide, music tape cassette, super 8mm, 16mm, U-matic tape and

35mm. Re-discovering this document, whilst under lockdown, missing my friends and the sociality of cinema, I imagined attending that screening.

At the same time, I was corresponding with former Rio worker Nicola Stephenson, about a tape/slide she had made about the Rio titled ‘All That Is Solid...Dissolves Into Air’, whilst she was studying at Central St Martins in 1989.⁵ Choosing Julee Cruise’s ‘Mysteries of Love’ for the soundtrack, Stephenson told me that she envisaged the Rio as a ‘structure that housed and played out a fleeting and ever changing interior of images, emotions and dream-like memories’.⁶ Stephenson’s imagery was compelling, as was the experience of watching her tape/slide. The Rio was closed, yet I was taken back into the building in the 1980s, the era of my research. Annette Kuhn writes that cinemas, as physical spaces – ‘as *places* embody [...] qualities of liminality and heterogeneity: they are very much part of the built environment, and yet they conjoin the mundanity and materiality of bricks and mortar with the worlds of fantasy and imagination’ (2002: 141). I recognised the Rio leopard skin carpet, the battered 35mm film cans, the original box office, the auditorium and the most evocative, the cinema’s Grade II listed 1915 plasterwork, hidden in the Rio’s original dome roof, a remnant from Clara Ludski’s Kingsland Palace of Animated Pictures.

Captivated by this ghostly encounter with the Rio’s past, I became absorbed in researching tape/slide’s history. Primarily associated with an expanded cinema practice of the 1970s and 1980s, tape/slide was a cheap and accessible approach to the use of image and sound. Comprised of a series of projected 35mm photographic slides with a synchronised audiotape soundtrack, it was sometimes called a narrative with stills. An adaptable expanded cinema technology, the medium was taken up by women artists to formally explore the materiality of their practice and personal experiences. Circles founder member, artist film and video-maker Tina Keane and London Filmmakers Co-op artist filmmaker Nina Danino were early adopters of the technology. In 1980, tape/slide by Keane, Judith Higginbotham and others were included in ‘About Time: Video, Performance and Installation by 21 Artists’, a major feminist art exhibition curated by Cate Elwes and Rose Garrard at the ICA.⁷ As Mayer and Robertson have argued, during this time, women artists and filmmakers working in expanded cinema and single

⁵ Stephenson confirmed that her tape/slide title was taken from Marshall Berman’s 1983 book, *All That is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity*. London: Verso.

⁶ Email correspondence with the author and Nicola Stephenson. 8 May 2023.

⁷ For analysis on the impacts and legacies of ‘About Time’ on feminist art practice, discourse and connections between women artists, see Amy Tobin (2015), *Moving pictures: Intersections between art, film and feminism in the 1970s*. *Moving Image Review and Art Journal*, 4(1-2): 118-135. See also, ‘About Time: Video, Performance and Installation by Women Artists, ICA, London and Arnolfini, Bristol. Available at: https://www.luxonline.org.uk/histories/1980-1989/about_time.html (accessed 6 August 2023).

screen were part a decade of radical experimentation in moving image practice that resulted in a ‘new and embodied film language for a new feminist cinema in formation’ (2017: 224).⁸ Circles, in addition to distributing film and video, also acquired and presented audio recordings, performance documentation, and tape/slide as part of their catalogue.⁹

Three names on the Rio document stand out, Jacqui Duckworth, Tina Keane and Jean Fraser, lesbian artists who worked in tape/slide and explored boundaries across other media. In the 1980s and 1990s, their practice was part of the development of a diversity of feminist and lesbian experimental art practice that explored new lesbian subjectivities. All three lived in Hackney and belonged to a community of artists, filmmakers and collectives connected with the Rio. Including, as already noted, Black Audio Collective, who were also producing and exhibiting their own tape/slide projects.¹⁰ In 2017, CDF paid tribute to Jacqui Duckworth at the Rio as a pioneer of a new lesbian film aesthetic.¹¹ Finding Jean Fraser’s name was interesting too as Duckworth’s film *A Prayer before Birth* (1991) features as a photo-essay in ‘Stolen Glances: Lesbians Take Photographs’ (1991), a germinal exhibition curated by Jean Fraser and Tessa Boffin. Duckworth’s inclusion in the exhibition evidences her participation in the photo-theory debates of the 1970s and a new lesbian aesthetic in 1980s and 1990s London.¹²

When I contacted Fraser about her tape/slide and memories of the Rio, she told me a story which was unexpected

I went to many different events at the Rio, and of course no end of films, but what springs to mind was during the uprisings in 1981 being in the Rio, which was

⁸ In 2016, to mark LUX’s 50th anniversary, ‘From Reel to Real: Women, Feminism and the London Filmmakers Co-operative’ was presented at Tate Modern, in association with LUX and curated by Maud Jacquin. For a review of the event, see So Mayer and Selina Robertson (2017b), ‘Joined together there is power, sister: Re-viewing feminist work from the London Filmmakers’ Co-operative’. *Aniki*, 4(1): 222–229.

⁹ During this time, interconnected feminist networks and spaces across London, such as the ICA, the Rio, Four Corners and the London Filmmakers’ Co-op became focal points for collective and collaborative feminist artist film practices and activist curating and programming to emerge. Connected to this, Lucy Reynolds (2009) has written about the significant participation of women filmmakers and their practices at the London Filmmakers’ Co-op in the early 1970s, excavating the work of Annabel Nicholson, Gill Eatherley and Lis Rhodes.

¹⁰ Black Audio Collective first tape/slide pieces were titled *Expeditions One: Signs of Empire* and *Expedition Two: Images of Nationality* (1982–1984). In 2007, the works were re-staged at FACT, Liverpool in the retrospective exhibition, ‘The Ghosts of Songs: The Film Art of the Black Audio Film Collective 1982–1998’. See Kodwo Ofori Eshun and Anjalika Sagar (eds) (2007), *The Ghosts of Songs: The Film Art of The Black Audio Film Collective 1982-1998*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press/Foundation for Art and Creative Technology.

¹¹ See Club des Femmes (2017c), Club des Femmes x Felicity Sparrow x Fringe! Queer Film and Arts Fest: An invitation to Jacqui D. Available at: <https://www.clubdesfemmes.com/portfolio-item/cdf-felicity-sparrow-x-fringe-queer-film-festival-2017/> (accessed 29 December 2021).

¹² For a contemporary feminist reading of Jacqui Duckworth’s film practice, and how her work is situated within the political aesthetics of 1980s inclusive queer feminisms, see Lucy Howie (2017), *Watching A Prayer Before Birth* by Jacqui Duckworth. Available at: <https://www.clubdesfemmes.com/culture-club/culture-club-watching-a-prayer-before-birth-by-jacqui-duckworth/> (accessed 22 July 2023).

functioning as a community shelter, and along with others crammed into the foyer, watching the disturbance safely from inside. (2022)¹³

It was interesting that Fraser chose to remember the uprisings of 1981, when the Rio found itself on the front line due to its location on the corner of Sandringham Road and Kingsland High Street. This was a key moment in the cinema's history when the Rio turned into a shelter and a first aid and legal centre. I had previously come across this story in an article, former Rio worker Sean Cubitt wrote in 1983/4, titled 'The Rio – Independence in Dalston.'¹⁴ Cubitt's text offers a historical response to Fraser's remarks which speaks to the political role the Rio played in Hackney at the time as a cultural institution. Cubitt writes,

Two years later [after the uprisings] the Rio hosted a day of discussion on Channel 4. As the conference ended, a demonstration demanding a public inquest for Colin Roach was passing by. Delegates, many of them regulars at the Rio, raced for their cameras, their sound crews and their notebooks. It is that tension between the terms of 'community' and 'cinema', between the screen and the street, between the textual and lived cultures, which frames the dialectic in which the Rio's practice occurs. (1983/4a)¹⁵

Fraser and Cubitt's observations elucidate the intersections in the 1980s between community activism, local politics, film programming and audiences. Where independent cinemas like the Rio were at the epicentre of a politicised film culture. In a post pandemic era and new age of monopolies by online streamers, where cinemas continue to struggle to bring audiences back, listening to these stories about the value of connection between the community and that community's local cinema remains on point. As questions continue to be asked about the role of the cinema today, not only as a socio-cultural space with a socio-cultural function, but how cinemas can respond to the crises of the present.

As the pandemic months passed, reading Saidiya Hartman's *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments* (2019), I reflected on the archive's residues, and the ghosts in the Rio basement

¹³ Email correspondences with the author and Jean Fraser. 7 February 2022 and 23 August 2023.

¹⁴ Both accounts speak to past and recent scholarship on 1970s and 1980s political experimentations in film. See Laura Mulvey and Sue Clayton (eds) (2017), *Other Cinemas: Politics, Culture and Experimental Film in the 1970s*. London: IB Tauris; and Lester B. Friedman (ed) (1993), *Fires Were Started: British Cinema and Thatcherism*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

¹⁵ Sean Cubitt (1983/4a), The Rio – Independence in Dalston. [document]. Rio Cinema archive.

that continued to linger: whose voices, practices, histories are being heard and whose continue to be silenced? Re-reading Michel Foucault's 'The Lives in Infamous Men' (1977/2003) and drawing on Hartman's speculative fiction, I turned to re-imagining the Rio feminist archive, 'to tell an imperfect story', as Hartman writes, 'to amplify the possibility of its telling', to reconstruct 'what could have been' (2008: 11). These re-imaginings were further sparked during long telephone calls with Sarah Wood, as we discussed separation, what that meant for our friendship and for cinema during lockdown and the global pandemic. To overcome that distance, we began sharing memories of cinema going as an act of friendship and solidarity. We imagined meeting and going to the Rio together, to the women's film screenings uncovered in my research. As the conversation continued, we exchanged childhood memories of our first films in the cinema, and the terrors that continued to haunt our unconscious because of those early experiences. These discussions about our pandemic lives, living in different cities, friendship in a time of separation, and cinema as a sharing culture led us to collaborate on an essay film called *Projectionism* (2022) for the ICO's Cinema of Ideas online platform.¹⁶ Even though *Projectionism* explores similar themes as this thesis, I decided not to include it as part of this research because the film was commissioned for a separate project that was not directly related to the Rio archive. In summary, it was these conversations that prompted affective, practical and intangible encounters with the archive's materiality, with its promise of 'what it could be', that pushed me in the direction to make a tape/slide as a feminist palimpsestic embodied practice to imagine 'what could have been'.

The material traces of tape/slide's obsolescence warrant further reflection. As noted, it was a moving image technology with a distinctive use of sound and image, used by a number of key and emerging feminist artists and Black collectives. Largely ignored by national archives and institutions, it is an obsolete film medium that has been forgotten by historians and critics.¹⁷ Kim Knowles argues, 'framed as obsolete and outmoded, time-consuming and cumbersome, film technology has shifted from a dominant to a marginal position, one of relative invisibility and insignificance in an increasingly digital world' (2017: 107). Yet as Knowles reminds, it was Walter Benjamin, in his assessment of historical progress, who pointed out that it is at the point of becoming obsolete that a technology or practice rediscovers

¹⁶ *Projectionism* (2022) is an essay film made for the ICO's 'Cinema of Ideas' online platform and enabled by the East Anglian Film Archive. Available at: <https://www.independentcinemaoffice.org.uk/films/projectionism/> (accessed 4 May 2023).

¹⁷ For an analysis of why tape/slide as an artists' moving image media has been forgotten, see Mary C. White (2019), 'After All This Time, Isn't It Still "About Time"?' Artist's work in slide-tape in the UK since the 1970s. *Open Screens*, 2(1): 1-15.

its true potential, unlocking what he names as ‘revolutionary energies’ (ibid.).¹⁸ Reading obsolescence as a productive, regenerative, even revolutionary force, whilst focusing on the medium specificity of tape/slide and its historic connection with feminist moving image practice, I wanted to make a tape/slide that would show a materiality of thinking about an archive that I was not able to physically access during the pandemic years of 2020-21. Making use of what was I was able to recycle and close to hand, in conversation with Stephenson’s tape/slide, the Rio Tape/Slide archive, whilst folding feminist histories in with artists working in tape/slide forms and technologies in the 1980s, my tape/slide was palimpsestic by intent. As I endeavored to recover the ‘revolutionary energies’ of tape/slide through its obsolescence and its distinct aesthetic, as a forgotten cinematic practice in the development of women’s artist moving image history.

Re-using the slideshow I made for the community archiving session (to revisit see Chapter Five: Practicing in the archive), I selected images and photographs as the visual component for the tape/slide. At the same time, I began working on a piece of creative writing for Sarah Wood to read so she could experience the archive and connect with my research. This became a film script. The film script is a blueprint for how we will work together, in the future, to make an essay film on the Rio feminist archive. Click on this link to read the ‘Rio Women’s Cinema’ film script: <https://tinyurl.com/riofilmscriptfinal>

Initially, the focus with the tape/slide was to use it as a critical tool to address this thesis’ research questions and the implications of practice on my methodologies. Yet when I started to write, the film script took the form of an imagined dialogue between Sarah Wood, myself and the Rio archive. In a diaristic manner, I reflected on my experience of lockdown, ways of remembering the Rio’s feminist histories and the value of friendship and collaboration in a time of separation. Drawing on Ann Cvetkovich (2019), I was guided to take this approach to working in the archive, because like her, I am not a conventional historian, nor am I a filmmaker, rather my interest lies in exploring an embodied relationship to the material, in order to reveal the archive’s ephemeral and affective dimensions as new knowledge. The ephemerality of the archive pushed me in the direction to write a script as a form of epistolary, as Sarah Wood became an embodied spectator for me to refract and reflect on my encounters in the Rio archive and its feminist re-imaginings whilst living through the pandemic.

¹⁸ Walter Benjamin (1978), Surrealism: the last snapshot of the European intelligentsia. In: *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings*, trans. Edmund Jephcott, pp.171-2. New York: Schocken Books.

The tape/slide was made on my mac using QuickTime, in response to my environment. The carousel clicks and field sounds of Ridley Road market were timbres that were added later to situate the piece locally and through the medium's aesthetic and technological histories. As the storyteller, I wanted to place myself in the archive and in the Rio's feminist and queer histories. Linking feminist queer cinema histories and solidarities on and off screen, 'Feminist Re-Imaginations at the Rio, 1980-2020' sets out to re-construct a cultural and collective memory of the Rio's feminist film programming and curating histories, responding to the archive's hauntings and loss through its material remnants. Click on this link to view the tape/slide: <https://tinyurl.com/riotapeslide>.

Re-watching the tape/slide now, within the context of the pandemic and the COVID-19 Inquiry that has begun, there is a ghostly presence of being in time that has past: an affect that comes with the carousel click and pause between one slide and the next.¹⁹ A haunting or many hauntings of what has been lost and what remains. These are 'ghostly matters' that continue to haunt the present, 'to be haunted' as Avery Gordon writes, 'is to be tied to historical and social effects' (2008: 190). Watching the tape/slide today, I see not only a story from the Rio's feminist past remembered in the context of the pandemic, but also where I am in this unfolding narrative. The tape/slide compels me to return to Girish Shambu's reading of *cinophilia*, which he writes is

[a *cinophilia*] that is fully in contact with its present, global moment—that accompanies it, that moves and travels with it. No matter how ardent and passionate our love for this medium, the world is bigger and vastly more important than cinema. (2019)

Drawing on Shambu, I fold my tape/slide in with this inclusive *cinophilia*, as a film that responds to the re-writing feminist film history and to the present moment. As a way of thinking through practice that embraces and connects with a genealogy of feminist film programming and curating practice as reparative, advocacy and activist work.

It is the archive's spatial and affective hauntings that materialised into a tape/slide, and my ongoing engagement with Rowbotham's writing that continues to stimulate this research. Although the archive's ephemerality remains evocatively out of touch, the tape/slide brings a particular haptic encounter and corporeality to the archive, leaving its own paper trail for the

¹⁹ UK COVID-19 Inquiry. Available at: <https://covid19.public-inquiry.uk/> (accessed 22 July 2023).

future. Made during a time of separation and rapid technological change, the tape/slide's obsolescence, with its handmade tactile aesthetic, lends itself to an collective viewing experience, a lost encounter that has become even more marked. Lastly, there remains a particular ghostliness to the imaginary sonic presence of the projection apparatus—the carousel, that points to not only the forgotten history of tape/slide and feminist screening practices that exhibited the work. But also the absent presence of the social audience and their memories and the potential of cinema to stimulate a collective viewing experience, all of which remain central concerns of this thesis.

Concluding remarks

This chapter has set out to trace my research journey as I was forced to re-orientate my practice-based research due to the pandemic. Locked out of the archive, I illustrate the ways in which the situation compelled me to reflect on what it was that I was looking for in the archive, and what fresh methods and methodologies I needed to turn to continue with the research. This searching drew me back to the Rio archive, and an encounter with a document that I had previously overlooked. A discovery which took my practice-based research in a new direction. Revisiting tape/slide an obsolete feminist art practice and technology, I have contextualised why and how I made the tape/slide, and the creative trails I took to make the piece. Re-watching the tape/slide, at the point submitting this thesis, I offer some reflections on how I experience viewing it post pandemic, re-situating it, within the context of this thesis practice-based research and current urgencies.

Conclusion

What did my over forty years of work with the LHA [Lesbian Herstory Archives] teach me — to question orthodoxies, the Nation's and within our own communities; to refuse allotted places; to move into unknown waters with comrades on either side; to take on huge statements of no; to collectively say yes to previously unthought-of equities; to take pleasure in new decipherings of old conversations; to compose homes in exile; to find the songs of the exiled who perhaps need another kind of body; to look always for the national absences; to keep alive the markings of the disappeared.

Joan Nestle (2015: 242)

Breaking Ground: Towards a new queer feminist curation

I begin my conclusion by conjuring Joan Nestle, the 83-year-old lesbian feminist writer, activist, educator and co-founder of the LHA, a New York based lesbian archive and community resource set up at the juncture of gay liberation and the WLM. Nestle's words speak to her vision of radical archiving from a lesbian feminist perspective, ideas and actions which dialogues with my queer feminist approach to archiving the Rio's feminist past and the responsibility I feel towards the materials. Nestle visited the Rio on 24 August 1988, at the invitation of the WMRP in conjunction with Sheba Feminist Press, to promote their publication of her book, *A Restricted Country* (1988). Nestle came to the Rio to present 'A Question of Archiving', a tape/slide on the Lesbian Herstory Archives. This occasion was, in turn, re-remembered 38 years later at the Rio. It was recalled by Sue O'Sullivan, collective member of Sheba Feminist Press, at a community film screening programmed by me and CDF that took place on 6 September 2023.¹ O'Sullivan recalled Nestle, a queer feminist butch working-class lesbian, rolling up her sleeves at the 1988 event. She did so ready to confront and potentially fight a member of the audience who took issue with her pro-sex, anti-pornography stance. This remained a vivid memory for O'Sullivan related to the ruptures and factions in the lesbian 'sex wars' debates of the 1980s.² The story was a moment from the past that became tangible (no less because O'Sullivan acted the scene out for everyone present), reanimated for those of us assembled on the stage and the young audiences present yearning for these historical

¹ Club des Femmes x Rio x PEER: Hackney Feminisms in the 1980s. Available at: <https://www.clubdesfemmes.com/events/rio-x-peer-x-club-des-femmes-hackney-feminisms-in-the-1980s/> (accessed 18 September 2023).

² For a reflection of that decade, see Sue O'Sullivan (1999), What a Difference a Decade Makes: *Coming to Power* and *The Second Coming*. *Feminist Review*, 61: 97-126.

knowledges from the Rio basement. The delight O'Sullivan emanated touched us all. Her anecdote illustrates the argument my thesis makes for the value of reconstructing feminist and queer film history *through* feminist curation as a scholarly methodology. I have found that queer feminist curation as practice-based research realises scholarship through embodied, affective, experiential and ephemeral methods that co-occur across programmers, films, speakers, audiences and spaces as an alternative way of thinking and doing in the archive. Moreover, O'Sullivan's story, as an affective and embodied experience, presents another key finding of this thesis, which argues that there is value in documenting and keeping alive collective experiences of feminist screenings and community events because of the programming and cultural knowledge held in those encounters. As I have argued throughout this thesis, when we document our experiences as film programmers, cinema workers, spectators and audiences, how much those experiences tell us when they are recorded.

As part of that Rio event in September 2023, CDF presented *Breaking Ground*, Irish artist filmmaker Michelle Deignan's 2013 documentary on the history of the London Irish Women's Centre (1983-2012), together with 'Feminist Re-Imaginations at the Rio, 1980-2020,' my tape/slide on the Rio's feminist archive. See <https://tinyurl.com/riotapeslide>. This was the tape/slide's premiere. Presenting the film to the Rio audience on the eve of this thesis' submission, marked the end of this period of my research journey with the Rio archive. Conjuring Nestle (1979) and her lesbian feminist approach to radical archiving and listening to the women who came to the Rio share their memories, reignited the elements of this thesis. This encounter would not have happened without this research. In effect, the Rio event brought together the threads from across this thesis to assert that feminist curation, as a scholarly practice addressing absences in the archive and in the critical methodologies to date, is not just words but deeds. Feminist film programming and curating as a set of practices, a way of thinking in the archive and a mode of activism, continues to challenge film history and the epistemological questions and methods we use to do this work. Inserting practice-based research into film history has set out to break new ground in developing a new way of adding to the archive. In the doing and thinking through practice, an elided history of feminist film programming and curating comes forward.

Inserting the doing and practice into film history

Throughout this research, I have argued how feminist film curation as an epistemology, a method of practice and a way of knowing and feeling in the archive offers new knowledge and

fresh ways of thinking about history. By studying a history of feminist programming and curating, an intervention into dominant narratives of feminist film history takes place, an intervention which counter-acts the forgetfulness of film history and collective memory. A case in point was 'Being Ruby Rich: Film Curation as Advocacy and Activism.' This was a piece of original work in the form of a curated Symposium that set about piecing together the archival residues of feminist film programming and curating through an engagement with Rich's curating and critical scholarship. The event was an unpredictable, messy, overheated and at times fragile encounter with history, memory and the archive, illustrating the value of finding new ways of practising theory through the doing of practice-based research. In the same way, the film programming and community archiving at the Rio, that took place as part of 'Feminist Re-Imaginations at the Rio, 1980-2020' revealed the ways in which a queer feminist curating practice can hold affective and critical frameworks to listen to the archive's materialities, as a reparative reading strategy to write feminist film history through practice-based research.

Strategies of recalling the past: The slippage of memory in the remembering

The performance of memory as an unstable position and the ways in which this slippage is held in its materialities has remained a key epistemological question throughout this research. When, in 2015, I was taken down to the Rio basement and shown the 35mm slides taken by the Rio Tape/Slide Newsreel Group and boxes of ephemera, I realised that I was touching a collective memory of feminist film programming and curating in 1980s London. Yet this archive's holdings were greater than the Rio, the ephemera held a cultural memory of British feminist film culture from the 1970s and 1980s. A history and culture embodied within its materiality which set out to change and transform women's lives. The revelation of this discovery compelled me to consider what objects remained palpable in the archive 40 years later, and how the archive's materialities might be made visible today. This inquiry has sought to come to terms with this undertaking, to map the spatial and affective contours of the Rio's feminist archive in absentia through a queer, feminist and cultural memory practice-based methodology. These strategies of recalling the past are palimpsestic, fragmented, revealing, often contractionary and discursive. As noted in Chapter Four, Aleida Assmann (2011) argues that this is the function of cultural memory, how the slippages of remembering and forgetting provide shades and contours for the research process. For instance, Annette Kuhn's moment of forgetting that she came to the Rio in 1985 at the invitation of Vicky Grut and the WMRP to discuss *Desert Hearts*; or Jan Worth's difficult memories of the 1979 Feminism and Cinema

event at Edinburgh, her feelings of alienation from the festival's high theory of film screening. Both accounts are equally revealing for not only what is remembered and what is forgotten, but the ways in which their stories were told. In the same way, my own mis-rememberings and difficulties in recalling the past, specifically what happened and when were issues that were brought to light when it came to analysing the 'Being Ruby Rich' event and the 'Feminist Re-Imaginations' community archiving and film screening. These were methodological issues which reveal how the 'ruined map' as an archaeology of feminist knowledge is still a map. Gaps and silences remain, absences are felt, and deviations and dead ends continue.

Yet listening to Laura Mulvey, Lynne Segal, Rich and O'Sullivan talk at the events I co-curated, as feminists who participated in the beginning moments of 1970s women's liberation and the feminist film movement, prompted me to reflect on the ways in which our bodies become our archives, as receptacles and technologies of memory. Our bodies as embodied and situated knowledge become the archive particularly when the hegemonic archive is deemed patriarchal, heteronormative and capitalist. The *Breaking Ground* post screening discussion at the Rio illustrated this point. O'Sullivan and two founder members of the London Irish Women Centre, Angie Birtill and Ann Rossiter, participated on the panel. Their stories illustrated the ways that women's political histories continue to be remembered and passed down, through archival practice and oral history. At a certain point in the discussion, I decided to step back and let the conversation flow. I wanted to bear witness and remember their personal and collective histories. For their bodies became the receptacle of history's memory, they were performing and embodying that role. They became the conduits mediating the production of cultural memory.

Bodies in the archive

These reflections on the body as a receptacle and production of cultural memory led me to consider a key methodological framework for this inquiry, namely: my imagined dialogue across space and time with the work of Mulvey, Claire Johnston, Rich and Sheila Rowbotham. Four feminists with distinct yet connected narratives who have been at the vanguard of women's liberation politics, theory and practice in the 1970s and 1980s. Although I was able to interview Mulvey in person and co-curate a film season and facilitate the 'Being Ruby Rich' event with Rich, my connection with Johnston and Rowbotham has been no less felt. In fact, even though Rowbotham is 80 years old and still active in public life, both herself and Johnston's textual hauntings the archive became even more marked when I began to read the range and full extent of their ideas. By tracing and mapping a different history of Mulvey,

Johnston, Rich and Rowbotham, I identify what has been lost when their narratives get fixed and flattened out. By returning attention to their film programming and curatorial efforts, has been to uncover another perspective, which gives a holistic sense of their work. This in turn nuances thinking about their engagement with feminist theory and practice, and illustrates how ideas are embodied, communicated in the doing which defies language. Over the course of four chapters, using the methods and methodologies inspired by each of them, an embodied politics of knowledge materialises that reveal their experiences in women's liberation politics, cinefeminism and political cinema cultures more broadly. Read individually and collectively, their memories make up a politics of knowledge that continue to challenge ahistorical timelines, narratives determined by power structures and heteronormative definitions of the past. As such, this is a feminist research project which sets out to repair 'the ruined and fragmentary map' of feminist film history by re-centring Rowbotham, Rich, Johnston and Mulvey by recontextualising their ideas and experiences within the present moment.

Women on the periphery of film history: Missing women and the invisible work of feminists as film programmers and curators

One of the unexpected outcomes of this research has been a recognition that in my pursuit to uncover an elided history of feminist film programming and curating through practice, in the doing of that practice, I have uncovered another layer of historicity: a search and desire to find myself as a film programmer alongside CDF's pre-history in Londo; to conceive of my practice in the future. The difficulties of this undertaking were starkly presented when I realised I had few memories of my own film screenings and events and had kept very little documentation regarding my work. When I began doing research in the Rio archive and I was equally confronted with trying to re-construct an ephemeral history that had left few material traces. In fact, I realised that this was a history of women's collective work in film programming that had barely been remembered, frequently ignored or erased entirely. In 2016 as I started to meet with some of the women connected with the Rio in the 1980s to ask them about their film programming at that time, what struck me was that they did not see themselves as film programmers, rather they remembered their work as cinema, film or video workers. Their responses revealed an important insight regarding gendered labour, and how women programming at film festivals and in cinemas have historically not valued their work, due in part to the widespread discrimination in the film industry which undervalues women's work and contributions (Bell, 2021: 5-6). Whereas film programmer and archivist Henri Langlois positioned his work inside culture, in that he was curating and creating culture, he defined his

role within that matrix: the women I spoke to were labouring, collectively, on the margins, their programming work was unrecognised and ignored. On reflection, their responses mirrored my own anxieties about my identity as a film programmer, and the fact that such a skill continues to exist on the periphery of the film industry and in theory. When studied in this context, a feminist consideration of curation and programming as a labour practice, primarily undertaken by women, feminists and queer people, has the potential to challenge paradigms of film studies, such as authorship and modes of production.

Feminist film programming in 1970s and 1980s as a textual haunting in the archive continues to shade how that history is remembered today. Consequently, this research has been an encounter with absence, silence, unknowability and conjecture. Re-constructing a memory of the WMRP and RWC has been to work in an archaeological site of textual fragments. I had to go down to the Rio's basement, under the pavements of Dalston, to do this rescue work. The community archiving and film screening began the work of recovering a cultural memory of the group's programming practices. In the doing, I wanted to explore which archiving and history writing practices and methods might animate the groups' histories and affects, without pre-determining any outcomes. Equally, by remembering them, I wanted their work as media activists, programmers and cinema workers to be remembered, making a claim that their cultural collective work mattered, that their affects and memories, when recorded and documented, remain historically significant, holding resonance for queer feminist cinema cultures today. What struck me after I had finished the interviews and closed my practice-based research at the Rio, was the impact of trauma as an affective experience. Specifically, the emotional and messy effects of liberation politics which attach themselves to feminist, lesbian and queer collective and cultural work. However utopian, chaotic and complicated, drawing on Cvetkovich, I recognised that a history of trauma depends on the evidence of memory to address that trauma through witnessing (2003: 242). It was this archive of emotion that Anne Robinson, one of my participants recalled when I asked for her reflections about that time in her younger life.

The thing that [is] quite hard to convey is to do with the homophobia because obviously there's something about that sense of urgency about your politics and wanting change because every aspect of your life is being affected by sexism and homophobia, and racism as well. That idea of being very on the outside. It wasn't just to do with being young and deciding to go and live in that kind of interesting

situation, have good parties and stuff because we did have a great party. And I mean, I don't think we thought we were allowed to live anywhere else (2020).

Robinson's account speaks to Nestle's idea of radical archival, memories which reveal the idiosyncratic, ephemeral queer nature of lesbian archives, bringing the archive's material specificities into the present. This is also about creating an archive of space and facilitating a permission to speak. My research has provided a space of intergenerational and intersectional conversations, of listening to women and listening to women speak with each other, whilst enacting a feminist ethics of care and 'close listening' to the most fragile of memories.

Re-connecting feminist film practice with theory and audiences

In Chapters Two and Three, I situated the emergence of a feminist practice of film programming and curating within theory and the historical moment in the 1970s. This was a moment in which women's counter-cinema practices were in direct conversation with the filmmaking avant-garde, theorists and audiences. Concurrently, the impact of semiotics, Marxist and psychoanalysis drew feminists' attention to the ways in which women were represented, symbolically and socially. This thesis argues, that in addition to the debates that emerged in theory and avant-garde filmmaking concerning women and film, a feminist practice of film programming and curating was equally part of this emerging moment. In fact, women's counter-cinema screening practices and audiences were the third, missing element in relation to understanding the formation of feminist film theory and filmmaking of the 1970s: a feminist film movement, which materialised from the decade's historical, socio-cultural and intellectual conjunctures.

I have argued that film scholarship has failed to account for film programming and curation as critical and affective practice due to its perceived invisibility and ephemeral qualities which have been hard to document, and because ephemera has been undervalued within film studies. Langlois' programming has always been recognised, primarily because of his authored, textual approach concerning the *auteur* and the canon as its own system of values that structure film studies as a discipline and vis versa. What I have uncovered, especially in recovering Mulvey's 'lost' film programming, is no less valuable. My research reveals how issues were programmed and how a movement was formed and given a platform to speak and exist; how audiences were located, and identities and communities were formed. My research presents a counter-history of programming related to audiences and politics, community

identity and how identity politics was formed. The academy may have claimed the theory, but my intervention is that I have reconnected the theory with its radical politics and activism.

I have taken an archaeological approach to piecing together the ‘ghostly matter’ of feminist film programming and curating within the contexts of its time, by reconnecting the full braid of Laura Mulvey and Claire Johnston’s film scholarship in the 1970s. In the case of Mulvey, I have shown how the canonical weight of ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’ (1975) led feminist film history into a particular discussion and narrative, one that foregrounded the dominant weight of theory. Yet if Mulvey’s film programming, which includes her spectating and researching, is re-inserted into the thread of her work as a film theorist and filmmaker, the full promise of her scholarship emerges. If we return to film programming, a looser definition of ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’ is revealed, one in which her active spectating becomes rooted in the real world and the social audience, the theory is no longer ahistorical, universalised, it is embedded in her film programming and curating work.

I have taken a similar approach with Johnston, whose key intervention saw her merge new modes of theoretical inquiry with feminist pedagogy and organising, alongside creative and cultural practice. Johnston’s essay, ‘Women’s Cinema as Counter-Cinema’ (1972), has become a key text in teaching feminist media studies today. Yet just as with Mulvey, the canonisation and subsequent academisation of this theory has buried Johnston’s lesser-known histories. By recuperating and reconnecting the expansiveness of Johnston’s work as a theorist, activist, educator, filmmaker and film programmer back together, her theory is re-contextualised and we can bring forward another history of her film programming work. By looking again at the historical moment in dialogue with the politics, the activism, the theory and the practice, I have demonstrated how theoretical concepts themselves were subject to history, due to the contingent relationship at the moment in which they surfaced. Linked together, Johnston and Mulvey’s multiple histories are part of an archaeology of feminist film archiving. I argue, that in the excavation of their film programming work, another layer of knowledge and texture to the history comes to the fore, a history of feminist counter-cinema practice that has often been covered and forgotten.

The Historical Moment: Now—in the project of feminist film historiography

This research folds in with CDF’s ongoing curatorial practice that has been connected to the re-staging, revisitation and re-contextualisation of 1970s feminist thought and counter-cinema practices, as well as re-evaluating the radical queer feminist film work of the 1980s. Our

curatorial work presents fresh ways of experiencing, analysing and archiving the more ephemeral work of 1970s women's liberation and 1980s queer feminist activism. Where appropriate, I have referred to this programming work in the thesis. As noted in the Introduction, this feminist historiography practice-based research project was instigated in 2015/6 because of what I discovered in the Rio archive. This discovery of ephemera related to the Rio's feminist past, prompted CDF's first screening of *Carry Greenham Home* (Beeban Kidron and Amanda Richardson, 1983) at the Rio in January 2016. For that screening we received funding via The Time is Now project, a BFI funded national programme of feminist films in support of the release of Sarah Gavron's *Suffragette* (2015). We argued for screening *Carry Greenham Home* as one of *Suffragette*'s few precursors in British cinema history. It was another film directed by women that focused on collective political activism, and also because *Suffragette* itself stood as evidence that the learning found at Greenham had been lost from contemporary British mainstream politics and culture.³ In the project of feminist film historiography, CDF continues to programme feminist moving image work made in the context of Greenham Common. In February 2024, CDF will curate a Greenham-centred film event as part of Tate Britain's major exhibition, 'Women in Revolt!: Art, Activism and the Women's Movement in the UK 1970-1990,' the first ever national survey of feminist activist art of that era.⁴

In addition to this thesis' practice-based research which has been informed by CDF's curatorial work, there have in the past years been significance interventions into the archive and historical investigations into writing and exhibiting women's participation in the history of cinema, from queer, feminist and postcolonial perspectives. The most recent of which is the gallery exhibition and film programming project, 'No Master Territories: Feminist Worldmaking and the Moving Image,' conceived and curated by Erika Balsom and Hila Peleg for the Haus der Kulturen der Welt in Berlin and the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw.⁵ I have also found a valuable resource in Four Corners Archive project which began in 2016 with a grant from Heritage Lottery Funding. The project has researched, digitised, archived and made oral history recordings to create a new digital archive of Four Corners' activities in the 1970s

³ See, Club des Femmes (2020, 4 February), "...learning at Greenham": Transmitting Feminist Granularity in Activism Film Curation. The Maya Deren [unpublished] lecture. Institut für Film-, Theater-, Medien- und Kulturwissenschaft Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz.

⁴ Tate Britain (2023), Women in Revolt!: Art and Activism and the Women's Movement in the UK 1970-1990. Tate Britain. Available at: <https://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-britain/women-in-revolt> (accessed 20 September 2023).

⁵ Erica Balsom and Hila Peleg (eds) (2023), *Feminist Worldmaking and the Moving Image*. Cambridge and Berlin: The MIT Press and Haus der Kulturen der Welt.

and 1980s. I am interested in the film heritage of Four Corners (a cultural organisation so closely aligned with the Rio), and specifically Four Corners' feminist screening practices, a history of which has been digitised and exhibited for the first time.⁶

In August 2023, the ICA, in conjunction with the feminist film collective Invisible Women, presented and toured the UK premiers of seven new restorations of Yvonne Rainer's work. Rainer's filmmaking in the 1970s and 1980s was key to the development of women's political cinema and the film-making avant-garde. Her experimental approaches posited as a feminist counter-cinema being called for by Johnston and Mulvey who, as theorists, spectators and programmers, advocated and championed her work. As such Rainer's films now constitute a canon of women's cinema. It is therefore encouraging that Rainer's work is being re-contextualised and re-screened in the cinema to new audiences.⁷

Lastly, in August 2023, under the new programme director Kate Taylor, the Edinburgh International Film Festival re-emerged from its collapse in October 2022, centring a new project of 'cinophile activism' featuring the overlooked film career of Lynda Myles. *The Lynda Myles Project* (Susan Kemp, 2023) sets out to recognise the significance of Myles' contribution to Edinburgh's film culture and independent film culture.⁸ The value of this feminist film historiography project is significant because it re-centres Myles's curation of the Edinburgh Film Festival during her time as Festival Director from 1973-1980. My research has contributed to this renewed interest in rethinking the past through the collective labour of women programming and curating at film festivals and in cinemas, feminists who shaped the reception and circulation of feminist, cultural and alternative moving image practices.

Where the research can go

There continues to be many opportunities to do further research on the Rio archive. For instance, a whole thesis could be written on The Sound Kitchen, the WMRP run 16-track sound recording studio which opened in the Rio basement in July 1986. One of my participants was involved in building the studio and running the project. She has shared some of her personal archive which has revealed an absorbing insight into women's alternative media practices in Hackney. Also, further research could be done on excavating the WMRP's First National Women's Video Festival 1987. The festival was a culturally significant and ambitious media

⁶ Four Corners Archive. Available at: <https://www.fourcornersarchive.org/> (accessed 25 September 2023).

⁷ Institute of Contemporary Arts (2023, 17-23 August), Yvonne Rainer: A Retrospective. ICA. <https://www.ica.art/films/yvonne-rainer> (accessed 27 September 2023).

⁸ Edinburgh International Film Festival (2023), EIFF launch event: *The Lynda Myles project*. Edinburgh International Film Festival. Available at: <https://www.eiff.co.uk/events/eiff-launch-event-the-lynda-myles-project> (accessed 27 September 2023).

event held in multiple cinemas and women's spaces across London. Yet The Sound Kitchen and the festival are in danger of being forgotten, which has consequences not only for feminist media historiography but also for the counter and collective memory of feminist and lesbian audio-visual culture in the 1980s.

Finally, Sarah Wood and I want to continue 'Feminist Re-Imaginations at the Rio, 1980-2020', by turning the tape/slide I made into an essay film using a collage of textual, visual, audio and affective fragments responding to my findings in the archive, which looks back (to look forward) at 1980s queer feminist media cultures. The film could provoke fresh interventions in the Rio archive and new viewpoints about community archiving and feminist cultural life in Hackney in the 1980s.

Useful in the world

The interviews that I have conducted over the course of this research have been invaluable. Together with the community archive and film events, these conversations have helped shape this thesis. My methodological approach which blends form and content, has been the framework to write an affective and embodied history that is accessible, open, relatable and connected with the communities and archives in which these feminist pasts have been embedded. In this way, by remembering the Rio's feminist programming and curating histories, I have added to the shape and texture of the Rio archive. In that what I have found and what I have done with the material has been affective and embodied. My exhibiting of the archive reveals the marks of my intervention. As I discovered, when film programming is put 'to use' as a tool of feminist activism, knowledge production and community building, women's lives change. Moreover, being in the Rio archive has also renewed a commitment to my own ethical engagement with film programming and curating and a fresh consciousness about archiving my own work.

I close by considering B. Rich's keynote, which she delivered at the Barbican Cinema on Thursday 22 June 2017. Titled 'Beyond Recognition, Beyond Opposition: A cinema of urgency for rapacious times,' Rich wrote her talk in the light of the Grenfell Tower fire in West London, which had happened a week prior in the early morning of Wednesday 14 June 2017. Rich dedicated her talk to the Gambian/British artist Khadija Saye killed in the fire. In that heightened political moment, Rich remembered Saye by conjuring another young female artist, Sara Gómez, the director of *One Way or Another/ De Cierta Manera* (1974), a film we watched together. In her call for a new Cinema of Urgency, Rich addressed the need for 'a new cinematic practice that can craft modes of address and a rhetoric of persuasion for the new

political movement,' calling for 'a new cinema of conjuring, of bringing something into existence' (2017).⁹ My research speaks to Rich's calls to arms, to reckon with the feminist past, to put histories of feminist counter-cinema practice to use because of the programming and cultural knowledge held in those encounters. Collective, radical, revolutionary: the cultural archives of feminist film programming and curating, re-imagined now, can offer a blueprint for resistance and action.

⁹ Barbican (2017, 2 October), ScreenTalks Archive: B. Ruby Rich on *De Cierta Manera*. Available at: <https://www.barbican.org.uk/read-watch-listen/screentalks-archive-b-ruby-rich-on-de-cierta-manera> (accessed 27 June 2023).

Appendices

Appendix A: The Women's Event, Edinburgh Film Festival 1972

Appendix B: A Festival of Women's Films at the Rio 1980. Rio Cinema archive.

Appendix C: Information Sheet

Appendix D: Interview with Vicky Grut

Appendix E: Interview with Kate Meynell

Appendix F: Interview with Laura Mulvey

Appendix G: Interview with Laura Mulvey

Appendix H: Interview with Fiona Scott

Appendix I: Interview with Maggie Thacker

Appendix J: Interview with Jan Worth

Appendix K: Notes on women's programming at the Rio in the 1980s. Rio Cinema archive

Appendix A: The Women's Event, Edinburgh Film Festival 1972. From Laura Mulvey's personal archive.

WOMEN'S FILM FESTIVAL

A festival of films made by women must take as its starting-point the overpowering imbalance which has always worked against women in the cinema. A festival of men's films would simply be absurd. It is only because so few women have been able to make films that this festival exists.

The bar against women as directors has not sprung out of lack of confidence in women's artistic powers, though no doubt this plays its part. Primarily it exists because a film director is in a position of economic and executive power. He has to exert authority over the whole process of film-making, planning a complex battle campaign and bringing the film in within budget. In a way, John Ford summed it up when he said a woman could never be a good director because she could not throw a straight left to the jaw.

The greater the financial investment in a project, the less likely it is to be entrusted to a woman. In the twenties, before sound and the heyday of the studio system, it was relatively easier for women to make films, simply because there was more independent small-budget production. The same is true today. The high watermark for Hollywood was the low watermark for women. Only three women found regular work in Hollywood as directors: Dorothy Arzner, Jean Yarbrough and Ida Lupino. Naturally the triumphal values of male domination were transmitted into the films themselves.

Because of the grotesque discrimination against women there has been in the cinema, it is right to pay homage to those who have managed to make films, against all the odds. But a festival such as this need not stop short at homage. The growth of the Women's Liberation Movement gives us every right to expect that, sooner or later, the barriers will be broken down. It is possible to envisage a genuine women's cinema, not simply films made by women in a man's cinema. Hopefully, this festival could make some kind of contribution towards building such a cinema.

What would a women's cinema be like? First, it is obvious that the image of women on the screen would be changed. This is not purely a question of correcting stereotypes and insisting that women should be shown in more dynamic roles. It goes further than that. Women are fighting not just against the world of reality, but against the world of male fantasy as well. The fetishistic view of women which dominates so much of the cinema is as important as the social and psychological portrayal of women characters. Women have to transform cinema myth as well as cinema reality: female fantasy must be released. Women's cinema should impinge on the unconscious as much as men's.

Women are often pigeon-holed as good at dealing with realistic human dramas which demand sensitivity of treatment. But accuracy or even insight into situations, including situations of oppression, are not so important as exploding the whole world of assumptions on which the cinema is built. There is a marked streak of craziness in films made by women at the moment and this is an excellent thing. The violence done to women in the world of the image has to be returned in kind.

It is women, particularly, who have always been looked at and undergone the look and gaze of men. They have been encouraged to be exhibitionists to gratify the voyeurism of men. Here too the whole nature of the cinema must be put in question, the dynamics of looking at film. Women must question the relationship between looker and looked-at, spectator and spectacle, exhibitionist and voyeur.

Finally, women can question, as they already are doing, the whole role and status of the director. It is right for women, as an intermediate goal, to struggle to become directors in the male-dominated cinema of today, structured by a rigid division of labour and hierarchy of authority. But women have been trapped too long in dead-end jobs like continuity girl or negative cutter to be content with the cinema as it is organized now. Women's cinema will aim for a flexibility of skills and roles, open-ended involvement and collective work.

Single sparks can start prairie fires, especially out of celluloid.

CLAIRE JOHNSTON
LAURA MULVEY
LYNDA MYLES

Women's Film Event films (numbers in square brackets indicate which page of the programme has the film's description):

Das Blaue Licht (Leni Riefenstahl, 1932) [14]

The Lenin Gang (Kirstin Stenbaekr, 1972) and *Fakenham Women's Occupation* (Sue Shapiro and Socialist Women) [14]

Reason over Passion (Joyce Wieland) [15]

Le Fruit de Paradis (Vera Chytilova) and *Woman, are you satisfied with your life?* (Tufnell Women's Liberation Workshop, 1969) [19]

Le Danois Extravagant (Kirsten Stenbaek) and *The Merry-Go-Round* (Kirsten Stenbaek) [19]

Three Lives (Kate Millet) and *Hornsey Film* (Patricia Holland) [20]

Coming Attractions (Beverly Grant Conrad) and *Four Square* (Tony and Beverly Conrad) and *The Flicker* (Tony Conrad) [25]

Come to the Point, Baby (May Spils) and *Women Against the Bill* (Esther Ronay) [25]

Mädchen in Uniform (Leontine Sagan, 1931) and *The Smiling Madame Beudet* (Germain Dulac, 1922) [26]

Faustine et le Bel Ete (Nina Companeez) [30]

Lady from Constantinople (Judith Elek) and *At Land* (Maya Deren) [30-31]

Women Talking (Midge Mackenzie, 1969-70) and *Woman's Place* (Liberation Films, 1971)

La Fiancee du Pirate (Nelly Kaplan, 1969) [35]

Little Marja (Eija-Elina Bergholm, 1972) [36]

Dance Girl Dance (Dorothy Arzner) [36]

Paris 1900 [36]

The Other Side of Underneath (Jane Arden) [40]

Papa Les Petits Bateaux (Nelly Kaplan) [40]

Wanda (Barbara Loden, 1970) and *The Woman's Film* (Newsreel, 1971) [41]

Appendix B: A Festival of Women's Films at the Rio 1980. Rio Cinema archive



A FESTIVAL OF WOMEN'S FILMS AT THE RIO
107, KINGSLAND HIGH ST. E.8. TEL: 254 6677

MONDAY 12th MAY at 6.15 & 8.30 FOLLOWED BY DISCUSSION
A TOKEN GESTURE 1978 Canada, Micheline Lanctot
SIZE 10 1978 Australia, Susan Lambert & Sarah Gibson
*** SOME AMERICAN FEMINISTS** 1976 Canada, Luce Guilbeault
 Nicole Brossand, Margaret Wescott
 One showing only at 8.00 **A WOMAN'S PLACE** 1971 U.K. Liberation Films

TUESDAY 13th MAY at 6.15 & 8.45
OFTEN DURING THE DAY 1979 U.K. Joanna Davis
WOMEN OF THE RHONDDA 1973 U.S.A. M.Cappa, M.Kelly, M.Dickinson,
 E.Rosay, B.Seagrave, H.Trevelyan
COUP POUR COUP 1971 France Marin Karmitz

WEDNESDAY 14th MAY at 8.15 & 8.45
MY LOVE HAS BEEN BURNING 1949 Japan Genji Hinozuchi
BERNICE BOBS HER HAIR 1976 U.S.A. Joan Micklin Silver

THURSDAY 15th MAY at 6.15 & 8.45
SECRET STORM 1977 Australia Martha Amara
NINE MONTHS 1976 Hungary Marta Meszaros
 One showing only at 8.20 **ANIMATION FOR LIVE ACTION** 1979 U.K.

FRIDAY 16th MAY at 7.15
TAKING A PART 1979 U.K. Jan Worth
 at 8.20 **KLUTE** 1971 U.S.A. Alan Pakula FOLLOWED BY DISCUSSION

FRIDAY LATE: at 11.15
QUEEN CHRISTINA 1933 U.S.A. Ruben Mamoulian
CHRISTOPHER STRONG 1933 U.S.A. Dorothy Arzner

SATURDAY 17th MAY at 4.45 & 7.55
THE SPELL OF THE PAST 1979 U.K. Barbara Evans
*** WE'RE ALIVE** 1974 U.S.A., Women's Film Workshop, Univ. of California
 Los Angeles & Video Workshop, California Institute For Women
LINA BRAAKE 1975 W.Germany Bernhard Sinkel

SATURDAY LATE: at 11.15
ADAM'S RIB 1949 U.S.A. George Cukor
NOW VOYAGER 1942 U.S.A. Irving Rapper

Tickets £1.20 • Club Membership 10p • First showing in London

Women's Cinema at the Rio

The Rio is a community cinema and the Women's Cinema Group has been working there for the past year, putting on monthly programmes of women's films. Out of this came the idea to have a week of women's cinema around a particular theme. The programming for the week was done collectively by the group after a lot of research, discussion and looking at films.

We decided to look for films which would fit around the theme of film as an expression of feminist consciousness and put together a programme of films which did this in different ways. In the last few years "women's films" have become a fashionable commodity: Hollywood has produced a number of films co-opting feminist ideas and presenting their version of the "liberated woman". (e.g. An Unmarried Woman, Julia, Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore etc.) At the same time there is a growing number of independent feminist film-makers who are having to work with limited resources and fight for distribution.

We wanted to present films from both of these categories which showed women as exercising some power and control over their lives, portraying the reality of their experience without presenting them as the "eternal victim".

The bias of the programme is towards the more obviously feminist work but we thought it useful to include some Hollywood and mainstream features where they could be juxtaposed with independent films with a similar preoccupation. Most of the films were directed by women but we have included some films directed by men which have a relevance to the programme.

Monday 12th

A programme of shorts and documentaries covering 10 years of the women's movement in America, Canada, Australia and the UK.

A TOKEN GESTURE
 8 minutes, 1978 Canada, Micheline Lanctot
 A humorous animated film which cleverly shows up the limitations of 'liberal' society's solutions to end women's oppression.

SIZE 10
 17 minutes, 1978 Australia, Susan Lambert & Sarah Gibson
 A group of women talk about how they have dealt with feelings about their bodies and society's conditioning of women's appearance.

SOME AMERICAN FEMINISTS
 56 minutes, 1976 Canada, Luce Guilbeault, Nicole Brossand, Margaret Wescott
 A lively documentary about the development of the women's movement in America over the last 10 years with contributions from Betty Friedan, Kate Millet, Ti-Grace Atkinson, Rita Mae Brown and others.

Sunday 18th Women's Cinema Workshop (women only)
 at CENTERPRISE, 136 Kingsland High St, Hackney, E.8.
 (just opposite the Rio Cinema).

What is the relationship between feminist film and the women's movement?
 How has feminist film developed over the last ten years?
 What is a feminist audience?
 What direction do we want to see feminist film take?

These are some of the questions we want to discuss with women who have been to the films during the week and women involved in film making and distribution.

Outline Programme
 10.15 Coffee
 10.30 Brief introduction from Rio Women's Cinema Group
 10.45 Screenings of some early feminist films to introduce discussion
 11.30 DISCUSSION

1.00 LUNCH

2.00 Screenings of some recent feminist films to introduce discussion
 3.30 DISCUSSION

Minimum charges for coffee and lunch.

Phone Rio 254 6677 by Wednesday, 14th May if your child needs the creche on Sunday.

HOW TO GET THERE
 BUSES
 30, 38, 22, 48, 76, 67, 149, 97, 227, 236, 243
 BR → N. LONDON DALSTON JUNCTION
 HIGHBURY + ISLINGTON + BUS
 ANGEL + BUS

Appendix C: Information Sheet

Selina Robertson

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PhD candidate, Film, Media, Cultural Studies, School of Arts, Birkbeck, University of London.

PhD title: Remembering through creative practice the feminist film archive at the Rio Cinema in 1980s London

This research is a queer feminist curatorial project that sets out to remember through creative practice the feminist film archive at the Rio cinema. Drawing on B. Ruby Rich's (1998) concept of socially informed film curation and criticism, my thesis sets out to construct a new archive out of historical absence, that tells the story of how feminists working collectively as film programmers, cinema workers and curators shaped a dynamic intersectional feminist film culture and community.

Interview use:

The interview will be either be conducted via email or audio recorded and transcribed for the purposes of my research. I will keep all audio and email files and notes secure and safe.

I will include the interview in my written thesis in the form of analysis and use aspects of it in my practice as research, specifically in the community archiving sessions where aspects of the interviews will be folded into my questions and comments during the sessions.

From Feb 2020-March 2021 I will be carrying out my archival practice at the Rio. On 31 March 2021 my practice will finish, this will mark the point when I end the public engagement aspect of the research and take the material to analyse on my own. I will inform you via email that this is the case.

You have the right to withdraw from the project and to decline to answer any particular questions, or withdraw any information given or from the interview and project at any time.

This research is a feminist enterprise with a commitment to an ethics of curation as feminist care in the archive (Laura U. Marks 2004) and a practice of 'speaking nearby' (Trinh T. Minh-ha 1982) that recognizes the power dynamics within the research process.

I am involving participants in a process of reflection as well as creating a space for that to happen, but ultimately, I am responsible for how the material is then presented for my PhD.

Thank you very much. I hope my research will be of interest to you. I will keep you informed about how my research project develops. If the material is made public in the future, I will get back in touch to you know the context and details.

Appendix D: Interview with Vicky Grut

Selina Robertson (SR) interview with Vicky Grut (VG) at City Lit, London. 3 March 2019

SR: Can you tell me about your art school background before you joined the WMRP?

VG: I went to Goldsmiths in 1981-1984. The second year I became involved with the women's group there and one of things we did was a collective exhibition. We took over the exhibition space, and we sat in there and came up with an idea of what we wanted to put in there. We went off and got all these carpet tubes and hung them in the centre of the room and put speakers inside and we recorded our conversation about what we could do. Audiences could lie on pillows and listen to us rambling on about what we should be doing. From that, three of the women and I made a documentary about that experience and from that we got into working as a video collective and we made about three pieces of work together. We were adamant that we were a collective, we were put under quite a lot of pressure you know because we put our work in for our final degree as a collective and there was quite a lot of pressure to say who had done camera and sound and who was director and we refused. We shared the technical roles. Given that we were in an art school we were quite surprised at the level of opposition to that because there quite a lot at stake within the art schools for everybody to be individuals and they really didn't like the idea of this group of women who wouldn't say who did what, who were glued together. Obviously, people have different roles in the collective, but you do arrive at things together.

SR: Do you remember the names of the women who were in your collective?

VG: It was Sheila Gilly. I think I've lost contact with most of them. She went onto be a technician working in art schools. Sally Fonseca and Jennifer Holland. Jennifer Holland went on to work for Cinenova and I am still in touch with her.

SR: Who taught you at Goldsmiths?

VG: It was very loose. Mary Kelly was very influential figure for us. She ran some seminars on psychoanalysis that we went to in the second year, but we didn't have a lot of direct teaching. There was somebody call Ross, I can't remember his surname, in the film and video side of

things. He was very supportive when people were attacking us. He was saying that they are part of a tradition, he gave some external references for us like *The Song of the Shirt*.

SR: Did you say that Tina Keane was there?

VG: Yes, Tina Keane was an external examiner, she came in to examine us. Mary Kelly brought her in as the external examiner. She was very supportive. She gave us a first. Which was very annoying for a lot of people who taught there, they did not want that to happen!

SR: Did you go onto teach after Goldsmiths?

VG: I didn't teach. I did a year at St Martins, it was the Film and Video Advanced, it became an MA the following year. Jo Neylin who went to work at Women's Media Resource Project. She did the diploma and she said if you want to carry on working gaining access to equipment you should do that course.

SR: Was Tina Keane at St Martin's at that time?

VG: She might have been, I think she probably was.

SR: Who was teaching you?

VG: I can't remember the name of the man; he was very low key. This was 1984 or 1985.

SR: It sounds like it was at Goldsmiths when you started to engage with feminism and the women's movement.

VG: Definitely. We set up our own women's group.

SR: You came to the women's movement through being at art school rather than being on demonstrations and protest, or alongside...

VG: Through the experience of talking to other students and Mary Kelly was very important.

SR: Did you engage with feminist theory with your own work at the time?

VG: A little bit, we were reading all sorts of things. A lot of sociology, not so much feminist theory I was say. We read quite a lot of feminist sociology, we got really into social issues. We were reading Mandy Merck and Annette Kuhn.

SR: Annette's book *Women's Pictures*

VG: Also, Laura Mulvey, who was a friend of Mary Kelly's.

SR: Did you read any Claire Johnston's work?

VG: We were reading Marxist stuff. We would go to critical theory seminars and that was very much Marxist.

SR: Did you go up to Edinburgh in the 1970s? Did you know what was going on up there? The women's screenings, symposia, theory writing, the networking?

VG: No. I didn't come to England until 1980. I grew up outside of England. My mother is South African, and my father is Canadian. So, I grew up elsewhere. I began in 1980.

SR: In the 1980s, did you go to the London Filmmakers Co-operative?

VG: Probably not so much.

SR: Did you go to Four Corners?

VG: Later, we became aware of Four Corners. My friend Jenny was working at Cinenova so she was in the same space, so sometimes I went to things there.

SR: Were you aware of the London Filmmakers Co-op?

VG: No, I don't think so. Was it based in north London somewhere? I think we went there once. We were very much in our own little bubble. When you are in art school, you have everything there. We ran our own film club; we got Ken Loach to come in and talk.

SR: You putting on film screenings at Goldsmiths?

VG: Yes, not so much as a women's group. I was showing films with a couple of other men.

SR: So that was your first experience of putting on films.

VG: Yes, and learning how to project, swap over the reels, 16mm things.

SR: When did you start working with WMRP and what was your role?

VG: I think I applied for the job. I think there was a part time job advertised.

SR: Where did you see the job advertised?

VG: I knew about it through Jo who was already working there. It was word of mouth. I think it was a full-time job and I applied, and Siobhan Cleary applied, and she did a blinding interview. They decided to appoint the two of us, as a job share. I think it was originally a full-time post. She had been working on things like *Despite TV*, a media project in Tower Hamlets. She came from a documentary background. We were extremely green both of us. It was our first job. Neither of us had had any serious work experience. Jo was still there ushering us along how to do things. Then she moved off to work for *Aphra Videos*, a women's screening project and film, scripting writing. Based in Kentish Town. Named after *Aphra Ben*. She also worked for *Women's Film and Television Network*. I was on the board of that for a short time.

SR: What was your job description? I remember when we spoke before you said you were not a film programmer.

VG: We were called video workers, not programmers, but essentially the project was to put on women only screenings at the Rio. At the time we arrived, there had been a lot of discussion I think about what the video side of the project would do. So, I think a lot of the management

committee were unhappy with just that screening commitment, they wanted it to be more practical.

SR: More training?

VG: I think so, there was some sort of disagreement and a lot of the board members left. People like Kate Meynell and the founders left.

SR: It was going in a different direction...

VG: I think Jo did. Perhaps they had some new board members coming in.

SR: Did you enjoy the job?

VG: Yes it was fantastic. I was tremendously committed to it. I remember we did things like the fire alarm would go off in the middle of the night and I was the key holder. I would have to get up and go off. I lived in south London. I would do things like that. Above and beyond. I think it took up a lot of energy. When you are young you have lots of energy, oh yes! I supposed after a certain point, I started to move towards more of the administrative side of things. I mean there was the sound studio, that was a very large commitment, that was huge. Recruiting people and running courses. I was not involved in that. There were two women who were involved with the sound. Maggie Thacker who was great, a good steady person. I was involved in the programming. Siobhan and I would decide what we would show and get speakers in, and then try to get it publicised.

SR: How did you get the word out about your screenings and events?

VG: I suppose we had a budget for producing a programme, at the beginning it was quite chaotic. The Rio had a place for publicity outside the cinema, they had a mailing list possibly. By the time we got things together, we would get things in those boxes outside. Listings magazines, *Time Out* and *City Limits* and they would do free listings.

SR: Did you try to reach local women's groups and organisations?

VG: Later on we did. We had a funded project by Hackney Council that was to engage with women's groups. Hackney Council was one of the funders. This was a special one-off thing. We interviewed an African Women's group, Asian Women's group and we did a little documentary about them.

SR: Do you know where that film is?

VG: I did have a VHS copy somewhere. I will try and have a look. It was called *Hackney Women Want More*. They were very open to talking to us, but I am not sure if they were that interested in coming to the Rio, they had their own interests.

SR: Just going through some of the programming. You worked closely with Circles and Cinema of Women. A lot of the programming was reaching out to diverse audiences. Were the audiences predominantly white who came, or black and brown audiences too?

VG: They were most probably white. If they were Hackney sophisticate, middle class women. We didn't do anything with schools or outreach.

SR: Do you remember any of the budgets? You kept the check book?

VG: I did the budgets, the bookkeeping. All of that stayed in the office. I remember being shown how to use excel, revelation. The first budget we did for Hackney Council, I thought you had to add 10% on the previous year and get all the pennies to add up. The budget officer was killing himself laughing. Siobhan said that you don't have the get the pennies to add it. Childishness, one time we overdrew in the bank. Oh, we didn't know! That's when I thought it's time to get serious. I think there had been a bit of a debate with the Board before. What the Board wanted was there to be an administrator, two part time people and one part time sound person and one part time video worker. I think the people who were employed at the time, argued against that and said that the administrator could be shared. Then in the end, what we did have to do was to appoint an administrator. Three different funders.

SR: Do you remember who that was?

VG: It was a woman called Mary Fahy, but that happened towards the end of my time there. After Siobhan had left in 1987/88.

SR: Did getting funding interfere with the group's idea of remaining independent or working as a collective?

VG: We had no preconceived ideas of how it should be, we just came in and started. It was what we walked into. So that was how we were in it.

SR: When Channel 4 came on air, did you consider constituting yourselves as a Workshop?

VG: No, it was so much about the association with the Rio.

SR: What were the ambitions for the group? Was it a political project, in terms of a feminist project?

VG: I think it was about having a space for women, a women-only space. I remember Siobhan and I going to Bracknell [Video] Festival and feeling very much that the men totally dominated, and we felt that about the Workshop movement that it tended to be dominated by men, even if it was mixed groups. Men still had the loudest voices. Women took a secondary role. I remember, we had a lot of debates about the women-only thing. Both Siobhan and I, we were not lesbians, everyone who we were working with, the Board, were probably lesbians, there was a slight tension in terms of sexual orientation and sexuality. We felt that we quite not approved of. There was sometimes a feeling of 'passing' to join the group.

SR: Do you remember the atmosphere at the screenings and events?

VG: There was a huge range, some of them were very badly attended.

SR: Single figures?

VG: 10 people. I think they were always interesting the people who came they got something out of it. As we went on, we learnt to work with other groups, and so there were events we

were doing benefits, some of them were fantastic. I do remember the screening where we had Annette Kuhn and Mandy Merck attending.

SR: Was it 'Spectacles of Patriarchy'?

VG: No that was the first one that we ever did.

SR: I thought that was such a good title.

VG: That was the sort of thing we stopped doing. We spent hours thinking about it, but who came to that? It was such an in-joke. I think that we had leave a lot of that behind.

SR: Leaving some of the feminist film theory behind?

VG: Yes, making it a bit more accessible. I think that was the very first screening we did.

SR: With Annette Kuhn and Mandy Merck?

VG: No, it was a drama.

SR: Was it *Desert Hearts*?

VG: Yes, it was *Desert Hearts*, it was fantastic. We had it in the big screen and they got up and spoke. I think they may have been on the balcony. I remember it being a fantastic raucous atmosphere, that was a lovely event. Wonderful film.

SR: They showed the film recently at BFI Flare, Donna Deitch came over. It was a sell-out.

VG: I remember that feeling of yes. Everyone really enjoyed it.

SR: How did you work collectively? Did you have regular meetings?

VG: We had a weekly meeting. We had an office space a couple door down from the Rio. To begin with we were in the Metropolitan Workshops, it was very inconvenient as we had to get

the bus all the way to the Rio, but then we got this office space above one of the shops. We all had a desk and we would have our meetings there.

SR: Regular weekly meetings? Were minutes taken? I wonder who has that documentation.

VG: Landfill! Certainly, we would have board meeting. Those would be minuted. There were always some tensions between the staff grouping. Maggie and I were the donkeys and then Siobhan and the other person... I think the sound workers revolved quite a bit. There was a woman called Pat Thomas. She really wanted to be a pop singer. She would come in late, and Siobhan would come in late. Maggie and I would be seething, so there would be those sorts of things that you have. Little tensions.

SR: How did you learn about programming? Did you learn as you went along? Did you talk to anyone at the Rio?

VG: I remember Rob [Robert Rider] being very helpful. This film is coming up but a lot of the time we were not showing new things. We were trying to show Margarethe von Trotta's work from the 1970s, women director who had done what we thought were really good work. It wasn't so much about getting the latest thing. As the Rio was doing that, unless there was something new coming up.

SR: Did the Rio book at the films for you?

VG: We booked them.

SR: How did you know how to do that? Did Robert [Rider] give you the contact details?

VG: I think we knew about *The Other Cinema*. Obviously, *Circles*, because Jenny was working there, and *Cinema of Women*. Those were the ones I remember.

SR: Obviously you were showing everything on 35mm. You were not projecting them.

VG: No, we weren't. The Rio had the projectionist. I remember at one point he was getting his nephew in, and his nephew went out for a takeaway and left the reel flipping in the middle.

Then we did get some money for a video projector and that was something that expanded the range of what we could show, and it could project onto the main screen and we could project videos in the main cinema.

SR: By that time had you moved down the basement?

VG: We never had an office down there.

SR: But did you put on screenings down there?

VG: We did have some events down there.

SR: That was when there was some money that came in from the BFI to set up a second screening space downstairs in 1986 or 1987, I think.

VG: We had to deal with all the building work to get somebody into damp proof it. Then Maggie was already working with this guy who was in Stockport who did the sound proofing for The Sound Kitchen, so I think that we got him to do the projection.

SR: I found a photograph in the Rio's archive of that basement screening space, it looked rudimentary, with fold up chairs. That room has gone now, since the Rio built a second screening down there. When we did our Greenham screenings, we used the basement space as you had it.

VG: Probably not a lot when on down there, I think that we tended to use the main cinema. I remember being downstairs most of the time. We had Shawn Slovo who is the South African daughter of Ruth First, she had an autobiography out. Her sister is a novelist I think, Robyn Slovo, she came to talk and that was not that well attended.

SR: You didn't take any photographs, or document anything?

VG: No not at all. I mean there some of the launch of The Sound Kitchen.

SR: I have seen those. Did you host any of the screenings or discussions yourself or did you get others to do it?

VG: I think that we always got a speaker and then either myself or Siobhan would introduce the person.

SR: You were more behind the scenes.

VG: Yes, trying to get people who would bring in an audience.

SR: Did you attend the London Film Festival in the 1980s.

VG: No.

SR: Did you go to the Scala Cinema?

VG: Yes and the Ritzy, that was my local.

SR: You would have got ideas for programming at the Scala and the Ritzy.

VG: Yes they were doing things like Andy Warhol, we would go to that.

SR: Did you go to Greenham Common?

VG: As a student, not afterwards.

SR: Were there other women involved at Greenham at the Women's Media Resource Project?

VG: No, I don't think so. There was a lot of contact with the London Irish Women's Centre, quite a lot, before Siobhan, I think. At one point, Maggie was going out with somebody who worked there. Her name was Breagh.

SR: Breagh is in my friend Michelle's [Deignan] documentary, *Breaking Ground*.

VG: viv [acious] was very involved in both too.

SR: Circles and COW, did they approach you about film programming.

VG: We would be talking to them on the phone about what's coming up.

SR: They did some fabulous programmes with you at the Rio. Were they well attended?

VG: I remember going to a couple, they were well attended.

SR: Did you have many dealings with Robert and Ramsay.

VG: Robert and Ramsay were like a duo. They would go around together. Robert was kinder shall we say, and Ramsay was more sarcastic. He was a little bit more intimidating. There was an administrator called Nicola who we also had dealings with. I think they felt a little bit that we were a bit political. There was some debate about that, when they screened *Blue Velvet*, there was a picket outside. There was a bit of tension about that.

SR: I have read in the archive that there was a discussion with the Rio's management committee about getting more involved with the types of films being screened, the new releases. The Rio actively not showing films that were sexist, homophobic, racist. For the women to become more active in the programming choices.

VG: I don't think that was us particularly. They held out for the right to show art films.

SR: Were you involved with the Blue Velvet picket?

VG: I didn't picket but I was aware of it and probably thought that they should not screen it. I don't know. I'm not sure.

SR: Do you remember what your financial arrangements with the Rio, box office split, hiring space? Did they pay for film hire.

VG: Not, we paid for that. I think it was all quite amicable. We paid some sort of rent, and we took the box office. I can't remember really. It wasn't an issue. We had an agreement, and it would just run.

SR: Your attendances?

VG: Very variable, sometimes packed to the rafters and other times.

SR: Dead.

VG: Yes!

SR: Did you collaborate with other women who were running the Rio Women's Cinema group, people like Esther Ronay?

VG: No, I am not sure that I was aware that they had a women's group, was it at the same time?

SR: Yes. The Rio Women's Group, they started programming before the Women's Media Resource Project came to work with the Rio. I think the first screening that the Women's Media Resource Project did, was under the auspices of the Rio Women's Cinema and then you started on your own.

VG: I don't recollect that at all.

SR: I re-read the essay that you wrote.

VG: It's very much of that time.

SR: You talked about the impact of Channel 4, when it started transmitting, and their remit to giving voices to ethnic minorities and women. Did that impact on your audiences?

VG: When did they start?

SR: 1982

VG: See I was still a student then. I remember buying a television because of Channel 4. I didn't watch television before.

SR: I see, maybe you can't answer that question then.

VG: No, but Channel 4 was very important. It was part of the landscape and we felt that we part of that world. It was important to know that there was an interest in alternative ways of making films.

SR: Can we talk about your involvement with the first National Women's Video Festival in 1987. What was your involvement with Siobhan, what was your role?

VG: I think it was probably Siobhan's idea and we started having meetings at the Women's Centre in Wild Court, which was funded by Camden Council. The woman there Linda Ezekiel was very open to the idea of it happening at the Women's Centre so suddenly it all came about. You know when you see a space, you pick a date, it starts to become a reality. I think we worked for quite a long time, probably 8-9 months to get everything in place and the programme together. There was some liaison with women in Oxford and other women's workshops and so on. A lot of it was stuff that we programmed I supposed.

SR: There were screenings at the Rio.

VG: Yes. The launch was at the Fridge in Brixton, and something at the Rio. The focus was the weekend happening. Mainly video, different monitors set up, different workshops. We even did some merchandise, we had T-shirts.

SR: One of the t-shirts from the festival is at the Victoria and Albert Museum.

VG: Through the printing workshop, I think it was a co-operative in Greenwich. They did the printing. That is how the Victoria and Albert Museum took all of that.

SR: Where did you find the videos? Was it open submission?

VG: There were calls for submissions. I don't remember the details I am afraid.

SR: It was very ambitious; a lot of videos being screened.

VG: We probably worked with Circles; we got their input.

SR: Just going back to your text, the festival's ethos grew out of the independent video sector at the time. Were you involved with London Video Arts?

VG: Not really, but we were aware of them and Four Corners. That was the context. Black Audio Collective, they were a local group. I think Siobhan knew the women in that group, Nadine and I remember Isaac Julien coming into teach me when I was at St Martins. He said 'seize the means of production. I mean take the camera' and I thought that was a bit silly.

SR: Were you aware of his film *Territories*?

VG: Yes, I was.

SR: Do you have any memories of the video festival?

VG: When you are organising something, it's very stressful. I just remember all the practical stuff.

SR: Did you get to any of the screenings.

VG: I remember running around and being quite stressed!

SR: Why did it not run for a second year?

VG: I think it was an enormous amount of effort and there was a little bit of tension with the Women's Media Resource Project. The sound people felt that it was taking too much energy. Then Siobhan left, so that took away the main impetus. I think she left in 1988. I left in 1989. I then had a different track, I applied for a job at the BFI, but I didn't get it.

SR: In the programme unit?

VG: I think it was programming at the National Film Theatre. The guy who got it, he didn't stay that long he went off to UCLA. I remember he rang me up and said 'hi, I just got the job as programmer and I'd just like to get some ideas' and I said, 'I have met you.' He got so embarrassed. I thought it was good that he was reaching out to women's groups, but it was a little bit painful. That was a bit of a blow. I went sideways, I had enough of film. I applied for job for a left-wing publisher, I become their book keeper, they are still going. They were the publishers of the Communist party; it was very interesting. From doing that, I moved into doing some copy editing.

SR: Are you still in touch with any members of the Women's Media Resource Project?

VG: Only Siobhan really.

VG: I passed on the email [to Siobhan Cleary], I didn't hear anything. I am still friends with Jenny Holland. She is now working in the NHS.

SR: Last weekend I met Helen Mackintosh, the *City Limits* and *Time Out* film critic. The Rio used her copy. She still lives near the Rio. Then I met Elaine Burrows, she worked at the BFI in the archive. She was on the management committee and then she was involved with Rio Women's Cinema. They contacted her about film materials in the archive. Helen and Elaine had not seen each other since 1980s, they both live in Hackney. Part of my project is bringing women like you who were involved in the Rio in the 1980s back together again.

VG: Are you going to do some sort of launch?

SR: I was hoping to do some screenings this summer and bring some of the women back. Would you be happy to be part of the discussion?

VG: I was terribly devoted to four years! Okay yes.

SR: I thought about screening a Margarethe von Trotta film.

VG: I think she's fantastic.

SR: I have been involved in the ICO's recent Margarethe von Trotta film tour, perhaps *The German Sisters*.

VG: I think that would be fantastic.

SR: Thank you so much Vicky. Is there anything else you wanted to say?

VG: One thing I forgot to say was that equal opportunities was a big thing in the 1980s and we took it very seriously, especially since we were funded by Hackney Council and the Greater London Council Women's Committee. There were quite a few staff changes in the time I worked there. When short-listing and interviewing for new staff we did our best to apply equal opportunities considerations, both in terms of class and race. Many of the women employed on the sound side were from BAME backgrounds.

Maggie Thacker stayed in post the longest, but she had several co-workers. For a very short time, when Siobhan and I first started, I think it was September 1985, Maggie was working with a young mixed-race woman called Vanessa Smith. Vanessa was followed by Pat Thomas, who was Afro-Caribbean and, I would say, working-class. Pat was there for the launch of The Sound Kitchen, and she performed at the launch party at the Fridge nightclub in Brixton. I think Pat was replaced by a woman called Mabinté. I can't remember her surname. She was African. I left soon after she was appointed.

When Siobhan left, her replacement was a white, working-class woman called Linda Flint. I'm not sure who replaced me, perhaps it was Cherry Smyth. I think I left in 1988, or possibly early in 1989. The administrator who joined some time in 1987 or 88 was Mary Fahey, a working-class white woman. I will have another root around for that VHS and will let you know.

Appendix E: Interview with Kate Meynell

Selina Robertson (SR) interview with Kate Meynell (KM) at her home in London, 10

March 2020

SR: Thank you so much for this time. I have a bunch of questions but if they are not relevant, we can skip them.

KM: Sure.

SR: So, the first one I wanted to ask you about was your art school background, because you went to the Royal College, right?

KM: Yes, I went to the Royal College as a person who was termed as mature. I was 28 which meant that I could get more money which was terrific because in those days you had grants to do an MA. I was in the department of Environmental Media which had some really interesting staff: Lis Rhodes, Rose Finn-Kelcey, Peter Gidal amongst others. That was a formative time, it was a very short-lived department, I think it lasted for about 10 years and then it was closed down, I think. Well Peter Cardia who ran it, was fairly radical and he was interested in having a group of people around him who were ideas-led, and their politics and ideas didn't really conform to the rest of the institution, so he got swept out shortly after that, I think. It was a really nice place to be, good studios, equipment grants, I had my films processed for me, yes!

SR: Do you remember the dates for that?

KM: 1980-1983 because you could take an optional extra year which I chose to do, can you imagine a 3-year paid MA sounds quite strange now.

SR: Did you come to feminism through the Royal College, or through activism or theory?

KM: Absolutely not, way before that. I'd been involved with Endell Street in Covent Garden, there was a women's liberation newsletter that ran out of there. I was a very young person, I guess I was 16 and I used to go there and put things in envelopes and volunteer for odd hours and I joined a consciousness raising group about that time which I did for a few years. I guess

between 16-19 years old I was in a consciousness raising group, but also I had come across women's liberation for the first time at The Roundhouse in an Implosion, which was a sort of sex and drugs and rock n roll far out event that ran from the mid 60s. I lived round the corner, so I used to go out on Sunday afternoons to watch light shows and take drugs and generally behave badly. They had events there, so it's odd to explain, sort of happenings. I saw a man vomit six feet into a bucket and I also heard somebody come and talk about women's liberation in 1968/9, I was quite politicised at that point. I had been as a 14-year-old in Grosvenor Square and the big anti-Vietnam protest and that sort of thing. It was partly to do with family background. My grandfather in particular had been quite a radical, and my American uncles were quite radical.

My mother was less radical in a sort of dramatic way but she was also really interesting in what she did. My parents had split up, she moved to Scotland and started the Women's Liberation workshop in Edinburgh in her basement. I remember her coming to London when I must have been about 18 and taking me to see Erin Pizzey's Chiswick House because they wanted to set up a battered wives home in Edinburgh, which was the first refuge in Scotland, which she helped organise. She is a very ... I would not say she's modest ... she's not a me person. She never puts herself in the front, that is all probably all lost history but obviously that was quite important to me, as a young woman to think about those things, through my mother, even though my mother had left when I was eight, so we've always had a semi-detached relationship. So, as a person, she's hugely admirable to me but as a mother she's not particularly great.

SR: Good role model in terms of...

KM: Yes, if she had been an aunt that would have been fine. I remember coming home from the Implosion and speaking to my father and my sister about women's liberation. I remember absolutely clear as a bell him saying 'next they will be having dog's liberation' and it was like, I was 14, come on Dad! Don't give me a hard time for thinking!

SR: That is funny that you remember that it an absurd thing to say, such a dad thing to say.

KM: Yes, as he was bringing us up there were lots of things like child benefit would always go to the woman, and he thought that was unfair because he was bringing us up and he would not see the logic that it was right and essential. It was quite a lively household in terms of ideas.

Feminism had come to me early. Oh! My grandmother, my father's stepmother was the first woman to join the Board of Trade, she was a highflying civil servant and had trained as a barrister.

SR: Did you know her?

KM: Yes, she looked after me a lot of the time, when my mother had gone. We were very close.

SR: Back to the Royal College, were you part of any women's group there?

KM: Yes, I was part of the Women's Group and the video I made for the Women's Group (1982), Laura Guy got out it of the archive. Do you know Laura?

You can watch it if you want, it's not very long.

KM: There is a problematic section in it. I am not going to discuss the problematic section on record. The Dundee exhibition, that Sophia Howe did last year screened it and discussed it. So it's been out there once and a half.

SR: Did you engage with feminist theory as regards your own practice at that time?

KM: Yes. Angela Davis' 'Women Race and Class' was huge for me. There was also a book called 'Not in God's Image'... I have forgotten her name. Social science sort of stuff, ideas of dirt and matter out of place - Mary Douglas' stuff. An Australian woman who did things on education which was really interesting, where she charted how intelligence tests were skewed in of certain types of knowledges and education .. whose name I have forgotten. There was a lot of stuff out there, I read a lot of women's literature. It was the moment of having Sisterwrite on Upper Street and Women's Press and Virago and all of that and *Spare Rib*, it was quite a moment for accessibility and visibility of material. So that was pretty lucky. It had huge implications for what I was thinking and doing.

SR: Did you go to Edinburgh in the 1970s to the film festival? Were you conscious of the feminism and film developments there?

KM: Not really. My mother was living there and I only visited for holidays.

SR: Did you go to the Co-op to film screenings?

KM: Yes, but not until a bit later in the 1980s.

SR: Four Corners?

KM: Occasionally but not so often. I was involved with LVA and you have to understand that this is really important that video has been underwritten in relation to the film history and I did do little bits of film overlap but really my practice was in video from the early 1980s and even before that, a little bit of performance. Particularly at that time, there were material aesthetic differences and you had to be in one camp or the other. A few people overlapped like Tina Keane but even if you intellectually overlapped, socially it was not what happened. I got involved with the video lot, that was where my work was screened and made. That was the basis on which I got my Arts Council money and so on, it was different.

SR: I wanted to ask you about London Video Arts, and your motivations for setting up WEFT/WMRP, was that one of the connections being involved with LVA and wanting to set up the project?

KM: Yes, So Marion Urch was working at London Video Arts and she had been at the Royal College with us. There was me, Zoë and Marion. We had set up another women's group between the Slade and the RCA that was very short lived, there seemed to have been a group of people of overlapped from that. There were people who came in from the co-op and I have been struggling to try to remember John Smith's then girlfriend's name who was with us – Ange...? It's awful isn't it. Not being able to remember someone from who they were with! I didn't really know her, she was quite involved with us. Through Zoë there was a whole group of people down Grove Green Road and the Acme Studios. Acme artist organisation had a whole load of roads that were artist house squats, people like Jocelyn Pook, John Smith, Graham Eller, Cornelia Parker, loads of artist and sound people. House Watch emerged from there. Zoë was part of that group. We were an informal group, there was also, Claire Hodson and Gill (whose name I forget) and a woman called Zuni Luni.

SR: Cathy Lane showed me a cassette tape with Zuni Luni's name handwritten on it.

KM: There was a woman who was associated with Zuni Luni, whose name again alludes me, whose was in charge of the Duke of Wellington Pub, the Stoke Newington Irish Women group. There were lots and lots of different things. I got involved with Greenham Common support group where I was living, in the other side of Shepherds Bush. I belonged to a West London Greenham Group which was directly came out of being arrested in Trafalgar Square, demonstrating against the deployment of cruise missiles at the point at which that was going through Parliament in 1983. I had just left the college and I was by myself and I got ruffed up by the police and that was a formative experience. I was arrested and stuck in Bow Street. That made me more determined. I consider things like that being a radicalisation process, coming from the other side! You can't really accept that kind of nonsense from the state, really oppressive.

I got involved with the West London Greenham support group and that was quite interesting because, it was set up that you had five people's phone numbers. You rang five people, they rang five people, so you could mobilise people with old fashioned technology, more or less instantly. Then it turned out that as Zoë and Marian and Claire and Gill and all of that lot were also wanting to go to Greenham at the weekends together and camp and hang out. I think fairly early on we had the idea for a kind of working network, Claire and Gill had been working with people who later became part of Sankofa, Isaac Julien and that lot. They had somehow been on the GLC Lesbian and Gay unit. There was funding for all sorts of stuff, including film and video and they had been involved in that and knew all that lot. If you think about it, there was all sorts of interesting networking of people across a wide range of people, I wish I could remember more! It felt like, I mean Zoë said it to me last year, 'we felt like we could change the world, we felt like it was going somewhere else', looking back it just seems kind of crazy and also terribly sad.

SR: Perhaps it is when you are at that age, embedded in politics and activism and art making, that is about changing the world, and you can do it together.

KM: Yes, but also the Greater London Council had money for us and people weren't objecting to us and you could find somewhere to live, you could squat, you could sign on, so everybody

could find a way of having a piece of it rather than being outside of it. I think it was a really different atmosphere at that point.

SR: Absolutely, from the other interviews I've done with other people who were connected to the Rio, they talked about this explosive moment in London, but also around the country. In London there was structural, institutional support, there was the political will. This created a very dynamic and productive decade.

KM: Yes and there was a functioning welfare state. Mary Renney who was a mate of Zoë and became part of the WEFT group, she was living in Charles Rubenstein of the Rio's house. She had a room there. So that all connected up. We called ourselves WEFT when we were at Greenham, because there was a song about the warp and the weft. Then WEFT seemed a bit whimsical, and we were trying to apply for money, so we then became the Women's Media Resource Project and we had also then gathered a bigger group. Me and Zoë got some money, we got a grant from the Greater London Council from the Women's Committee. That was the period when there was that big building down Kingsway that was going to be the women's building, they took over an old church building. That didn't last very long and it went with the GLC. Then we had lots of friends and people who were working and attached to the Greater London Council at that point, everybody knew somebody who somehow was involved. My friend Kerstin Hern worked in the Disability Unit. It felt very connected.

SR: Networks and friendships. Can I ask you what your motivation was to set up the WMRP? Frustrations about having a career in video or sound as a woman artist? Did you form a group to combat that?

KM: That was not our motivation. Our motivation was a group of makers, coming from an artist angle and wanting access to equipment, equal access to things. I think training and access to jobs may have been part of it but it was not, from my point of view and quite possibly, I am only representing my own point of view, it was about having access to equipment. But access didn't just mean to hire it or borrow it, it was being able to know how to use it, because in that era it was really hard to get somebody to tell you how to use something, without them feeling that they could humiliate you for being a woman. I had numerous run-ins when I was at the Royal College which probably the technicians did not think were run-ins. I remember being humiliated on two or three occasions and I remember one where I had borrowed a 4-track tape

recorder to take down to the Co-op for a recorded soundtrack, this was with Hump another women's group I was involved with. We were hooking a whole event of slides and actions to a soundtrack and I had got down to the film Co-op with this machine and half the sound was not coming out and they would not tell me what to do, so I had to take the machine back South Kensington to get them to show me that there was a 2 track and 4 track button because they wanted to teach me a lesson. You know I was weeping with anger because they could have just said it on the phone.

There was another one where I got humiliated for not knowing the difference between 5 pin and a BNC in public, and you think, why? If you don't know something, why not say it? There was the feeling that women would not do that to other women, whether that is actually true or not, that is another matter. I think it was being able to communicate information without putting someone down, it was what I wanted. I was constantly feeling anxious.

SR: A safe space?

KM: A safe space, yes, and a sharing of knowledge and generosity of spirit and all of those things that come out best in collective practice. I have one friend I worked with very frequently, Susan H, and we have had a working relationship of over 30 years and it really does work like that but really, we all know that it doesn't quite, anyway! That was the idealism of that era.

SR: WEFT/ WMRP do you remember the date of this name change?

KM: It would have been 1984, at the point of funding because Zoë was pregnant and we got an office in the old Kingsland Road hospital, the Metropolitan Hospital which was really grim and dreary. It was an abandoned building effectively and then we moved down the road to Kingsland Road, just next door to the Rio. That was after we had left.

SR: Would you say that it was a feminist project?

KM: Yes definitely.

SR: This idea of a women's space, collective work?

KM: Also, it had a political agenda attached of the kind of work that we were interested in happening.

SR: Zoë, where does she live now?

KM: She lives in France; I can give you contact details for her.

SR: Thank you. For you, the women who were part of WEFT/WMRP, began with yourself, Zoe, Marian...

KM: There were other people who floated in and out...

SR: Zoë, what's her last name?

KM: Redmond. We fell out but we are on speaking terms again! Sandra Drew put on an exhibition 'From a Kitchen Table' and Zoë and Marion and me all had pieces in that show as well as Judith Goddard and various other people who were connected.

SR: Do you think that your work and the politics of LVA, did that impact the motivation for WEFT? Having a visibility of women's video art practice.

KM: Yes, absolutely, because all of the technical stuff was dominated by men, and it was really clear and I think more so in video than in film. ACTT cards and all the rest of it, I was not particularly interested in having one because I was not interested in an industry career that was a real big fat thing. Really hugely difficult.

SR: How did you organise yourselves at the beginning? Did you have intention of doing video screenings?

KM: We were having bits of screenings, a discussion group, people would bring works sometimes. We didn't do it at the Rio or the office before that. LVA had some screenings and events at the Air Gallery on Rosebury Avenue and we were very much part of that, a break away part of that.

SR: You had formalised yourselves in that way and named yourselves at WMRP?

KM: We were at the point where we had got the money and were trying to develop this thing, and then we left. We were part of larger network of different things going on, screenings, events, drawing people in from all these different things, Greenham, doing screenings at the Air Gallery and so on. All of that was going on. We set something up and that was when our association finished.

SR: All the stuff at the Rio was after your time?

KM: Yes, I did go to a couple of WMRP screenings. They had a women's video festival at some point, they didn't take my work. I went to it, which I found quite hard work, I still remember thinking I will have to go anyway.

SR: That was a very ambitious, big festival.

KM: I submitted work and they rejected it. That's life! I was idealistic that I had to swallow my pride rather than going fuck you, I want nothing to do with it. So, I went along to a few of the screenings there. I don't remember anything. All I remember is swallowing my pride. It was different people running the group.

SR: Do you remember what sort of budget you had when you got this funding from GLC.

KM: It was more than a couple of hundred quid, because it paid our rent and some wages and then we decided we needed to have a proper paid job and get the committee to decide who should have it and that was when Zoë did not get it and we sort of disappeared and other people carried on.

SR: Did you ever think about setting up to apply for C4/GLC/ ACTT Workshop funding?

KM: I didn't, I think other people did in different ways. There were other people doing that, that seemed much more industry, television focused.

SR: We covered all the network you were involved in the 1980s, groups and organisations. Did you ever encounter Esther Ronay at the Rio?

KM: The name is familiar but I no, I don't think.

SR: What year did you leave the group?

KM: Just after it was set up! Then actually, there was a time around 1987 where I went back to the meetings on Kingsland Road and I used to sit in on them. I don't think I was part of the management committee. I was part of the LVA management at that point, I think I tried to come along to WMRP for about 6 months to a year, in the late 80s in the attic room in the house next door to the Rio. I didn't know anyone anymore. That was ok. I came along for support.

SR: Did you go to the Rio for other screenings?

KM: I went to the Rio a lot. It was my local cinema. Pete Brooks was running the children's Saturday morning screenings which I used to take my daughter to, and he used to get performance artists to do a turn at the beginning. That is where I first met Trevor Stewart who was doing disgusting things, eating his brains with a spoon, it was bonkers. They had performance art for 10 minutes where they were so good, they got such wonderful people that the kids stopped throwing sweets, and everyone was quiet and then you had the film. I would take my daughter along to them. We had to leave *The Little Mermaid*, she got too frightened. It was short-lived. I sometimes still go to the Rio.

SR: Did you ever go to the women's screenings at the Rio?

KM: Yes, I used to go there fairly regularly to see this and that.

SR: After you left the group, what did you do in terms of your art practice?

KM: I started working with Susan at Geffen Press actually. My practice as an artist is partly video and it's more a fine art artist, if one can call it that, but I do kind performance and drawing and film and video, photographs.

SR: Are you still in touch with any of the group?

KM: I sometimes see Zoë or Marion. I have done particularly in the last year because of Sandra's show 'From the Kitchen Table'. I must give you a GRACE manifesto, that is the performance group I am part of.

SR: Do have any material from the group?

KM: I have something of us at Greenham, I have some slides that I scanned in for a talk I gave at Canterbury last year. I don't think that I have much else. I kept the Greenham stuff, obviously.

Appendix F: Interview with Laura Mulvey

**Selina Robertson (SR) interview with Laura Mulvey (LM) at her home in London. 31
January 2017**

SR: There are five groupings I would like to cover. The first is the antecedents to the Edinburgh Film Festival; the next is the programming that you did during the 1970s. The third is reception and audiences, and then the fourth affect and transformation. Lastly, a look back at Edinburgh from the present day. Griselda Pollock has this term ‘historical encounters’ and if you feel that it is important to keep that connection with Edinburgh in the 1970s in the contemporary moment.

Leading up to Edinburgh 72, what was your relationship to film, feminism and the Women’s Movement? What were the discussions?

LM: The women’s movement was formally inaugurated in summer 1969 when under the influence of the women’s movement in the United States, women here with quite a lot of American women organised the first women’s liberation event at Ruskin College. I didn’t have any involvement until 1971 and that was when I joined the London Women’s Liberation Reading Group – Family Studies, The History Group. It just happened by chance that I was interested in the cinema because during the 60s I had been going to the cinema a lot with Peter Wollen and other friends, so we were a cinephile gang. We met at Oxford, but we were not involved at the same time as Victor Perkins. We were really interested following the *Cahiers du cinéma* and Hollywood movies. I had no interest in the question of women or women and film or anything of that kind, at all. I had been brought up to be interested in cinema and my mother had always been interested in Hollywood. During the 1950s going to the cinema as what is now the Gate, which was the Embassy in those days, and the Roxy in Westbourne Grove which has now disappeared. I used to go to the Academy in Oxford St too. It was much more French films and Italian films. So, what really happened in the early 1970s was that having suddenly encountered the women’s movement, and thinking what else am I interested in? I was not interested in much except for the movies as I had not done very well at university, and I had not really thrived during the 60s on the margins of *New Left Review*, although I had

already been politically conscious, I did not feel happy or at ease with this very particularly close male group around *New Left Review*. Although they were my friends.

So the first challenge that the women's movement suddenly put to me was, ok, if you are interested in film how can it engage with this new political dimension? Looking back, I think the very first symptom was the idea of doing Women's event at Edinburgh, because before that Peter [Wollen] had been working with Edinburgh quite closely since '68 and in '69 he had been a very key person for the Sam Fuller retrospective. Then Edinburgh was a kind of pivot moment, a turning point, between Edinburgh being part of the reinvention of Hollywood and inviting the great directors over and them coming and having retrospectives of their films which went on until the mid 1970s. Although that strand went on, Edinburgh was beginning to shift with Lynda Myles coming, the key programming positions changing and the festival beginning to programme more independent films and more cinematically radical films. Then because other things were happening in the film world in London, like the London Filmmakers Co-op started in '69, Andi and Pam Engel started Politkino in about 1970. They started Politkino to launch Straub and Huillet and they showed *Chronicle of Anna Magdalena Bach* (1968) and that made a very deep impression on people. So there was just a beginning, a new sense that there was another cinema in the offing and that the Hollywood that we loved so much was over, was finished. These charming elderly men no longer had futures, no longer were making films, they had been cut off by the re-organisation of Hollywood and they were fossils, interesting fossils, but fossils.

There was a sense of a new cinema just beginning. The way I see it, that was just beginning to take route with the London Filmmakers Co-op, Politkino, Peter Sainsbury and Simon Field's journal *Afterimage* and that developed quite rapidly into the early 1970s. By 1975, a little bit later, there was a real sense of an independent film movement existing here, but this was just very the beginning.

Peter was very involved with Lynda and her then husband Dave Will. Murray Grigor had stepped back and left it to them. They were interested in new kinds of film theory and picking up very quickly on the beginnings of *Screen*, and the new wave that was just coming into existence. At the same time, Paul Willemen and Claire Johnson were working with Edinburgh and with *Screen*. They were an important bridge between the two, and so was Peter.

From my point of view there was nothing really before this and when it came up out of discussions, I think it was Peter and me talking about things where the idea came from. We took it to Lynda and she was very enthusiastic and then said we should get Claire involved. This is how I met her.

I did a lot of research and Lynda was involved in running the whole festival, and she was really young. I used to go to the BFI Library in Dean St and just try to find as many films made by women as possible. As I have said often before, at this point there was no sense of discrimination because films made by women were so few and far between, we really just wanted them to be programmed together and seen as films made by women without pre-figuring or pre-imagining what it would mean, or what kinds of films we would actually programme in the end. It was the work of archaeology to begin with, along the same side as Virago, and Griselda Pollock and Rosie Parker with art and Germaine Greer with her obstacle race. That kind of work was very much in the air. No one else had been doing it in so far that we knew on film. In actual fact a group of women in New York had been doing it and we didn't find this out until we were quite far advanced. Their festival was in New York in May/June and ours was in August. I remember hearing about it and getting their programme and being very excited to see the overlaps and where we had been thinking along the same lines and how there had been a slightly different angle in the United States from the United Kingdom. Best way to describe it as very much as coming out of a tabula rasa. There was not much in terms of prescience except New York, but we really didn't know that.

SR: The programming at the Cinémathèque française with Henri Langlois, was that in the back your mind with Edinburgh in 1972?

LM: What Lynda was doing was much more of a radical framework. Going to Paris to the Cinémathèque was very exciting. Great Hollywood movies and seeing Rossellini's *India* there. When we went to Paris during the 60s it would be to follow Hollywood movies.

SR: It was not the experience of watching how certain films were placed together, and this collective viewing experience. These ideas and discussions did not have an impact on how you were framing 1972.

LM: I think it did, yes. As we went on and as we collected the films together there came more of a sense that we had to have some sort of curatorial and programmatic view. In the first instance, from my point of view the excitement was finding the films, but the problem then was getting hold of them.

SR: I can't imagine how difficult that must have been.

LM: It was very difficult but then we had Lynda's experience and we had help with people from the BFI. Through Lynda we found that there were important pathways which were where women's films were being made, the most important where women filmmakers from Eastern Europe, Vera Chytilová and Judit Elek.

SR: There were a lot of films that were screening at Edinburgh that went into distribution and were screened again like Vera Chytilová's work but there were many films have been forgotten from women's film histories.

LM: Yes, apart from Vera Chytilová, but the other thing about Eastern Europe they had a highly subsidized film distribution system. It was not difficult to get subtitled prints and then there were nice fellow travelling distribution companies over here like Contemporary Films, they were CP members and very close to Eastern Europe. That meant that there was a given interest in Eastern Europe. I mean it's something you might say there is an equivalent now. You might say looking at Iranian women's cinema, where there is the same state backing. With Hungary and Czechoslovakia, I can't remember Poland, they made the films available and subtitled them and the films seemed to use exciting and interesting forms.

Then there were a few French and Swedish film, the odd May Spils. Did we show a Varda? What I don't remember anything about was Kerstin Stenbaek and why she figures so much, there are several films by her. Then of course it was important to show some of the early films like *The Blue Light*, *Mädchen in Uniform* made a huge impression on people, particularly on Ruby [Rich] I think. Then the other one that was the great discovery and very exciting was *Dance, Girl Dance*, the Dorothy Arzner and that we found a negative at the BFI and they made a print for the festival.

SR: This was the first time that these films had been screened within the context of a women's film festival.

LM: Yes, and then we wanted to show the new budding women and film movement, activist films. For instance, the Fakenham film and *Women Against the Bill* by Esther Ronay. *The Other Side of the Underneath* was very controversial, the Jane Arden film. There was a kind of cult around Jane Arden and Jack Bond, and we didn't feel that they had the right feminist spirit to them but in a way, it was a film that could not be ignored either. If we had not shown it, it would have been very Stalinist somehow. I can't remember it, but I was just beginning to be interested in psychoanalysis. I took a rather theoretically hard line on it as well. It was much more coming out of anti-psychiatry. We were just being interested in Freud, this seemed less theoretical and more encounter. *The Women's Film* from Newsreel, I remember thinking was really important. It came out of the California Newsreel movement, and it was a proper agitational women's film and I think the first.

SR: How did you find out about that film?

LM: I had been reading about Newsreel, how they were trying to make films that were showing up the involvement of various companies that were involved in the Vietnam war. They were making 16mm movies as agitational film to show in political meetings. I got interested in those films when Peter was working on *7 Days*. I didn't want to be involved in *7 Days*. It was a socialist weekly that came out of a splinter group of *New Left Review* and were trying to do a popular Left weekly. It was very beautiful, it was huge. There had been a screening of Newsreel films in London, I had volunteered to go along to write something about them and that is how I found out about *The Woman's Film*. That was again coming out of the same background, made for consciousness raising, women's groups and there were a lot of others at the time. That might have been then when Claire was so hostile to that kind of filmmaking, which became quite a thing. I was too but I wasn't against the films as such, they were not the films I was so interested in but I did not feel that films made about consciousness raising was wrong.

SR: How did you work together with Lynda and Claire, as a collective?

LM: I don't remember working together very much. Lynda was not around very much as she was working in Edinburgh, working on the festival. Claire was around. What I think Claire's

very important contribution was as the films were collected, I think there was a pool of them, I think it was Claire who said let's try and find some kind of spirit that holds these together and she was looking for something kind of surrealist, off the wall, something of a women's subversive spirit, and I think there is something of that. Although I cannot remember *The Lenin Gang*.

SR: Janet [McCabe] told me that you wanted to show *Saute Ma Ville* before *All that Heaven Allows*?

LM: I wanted it but could not get hold of it. By 1972 Chantal [Akerman] had gone to New York and it was probably hiding that under her bed in Brussels, but no, that it a very nice myth. Actually, the Douglas Sirk season was going on in 1972 at the same time. There was no overlap whatsoever between the women's films and the rest of the programme.

SR: Am I right in thinking that in 1979 the films shown at the Feminism and Cinema conference were not in a separate section they were put in the rest of the programme?

LM: I cannot remember.

SR: I read Matt Lloyd's book about Edinburgh's *cinophilia*. He thought they were placed in the programme rather than separate out?

LM: I can't believe that there were being spread out. Why I have a blank on 1979, this happens so much in any kind of political movement, anywhere. 1972 had this wonderful spirit of utopianism, and everybody was very excited, the excitement of seeing *The Blue Light*, *Reason over Passion*, the Joyce Wieland film I was very excited about. It was just before Yvonne Rainer started making movies. The first film of Chantal's I remember being shown at Edinburgh, *Jeanne Dielmann*, was in 1975.

SR: Not *Je, Tu, Il, Elle*?

LM: I remember seeing that in London not Edinburgh. I remember *Jeanne Dielmann* because it was such a shock and made such deep impression. Just to bracket this for a moment the pure excitement of seeing *The Blue Light*, *Reason over Passion* the Vera Chytilová film and Kate

Millett's *Three Lives* was another one of the consciousness-raising film. I am not sure why we showed the Beverley Conrad, I think she was one of the few filmmakers we could find working in the independent area in the United States.

SR: Had you not encountered Carolee Schneemann's *Fuses*?

LM: Now why did we not show *Fuses*? I think in another context I've said it could have been, but we didn't know about it. When did she make it, in the 60s?

SR: Yes in 1967, but she had come live in London as well.

LM: Yes that is where I knew her, I met her with her boyfriend Anthony McCall. Why didn't we show *Fuses* in 1979? I think that seems slightly puritanical on our part because we were just moving in the new face of minimalism, the women's body can't be shown, the women's naked body has been exploited massively for hundreds of years but I don't think that is an excuse so I think that there might well have been a kind of censorship moment there. I must ask Lynda to see if she remembers. I am sure that was the reason why I never wrote about *Fuses* because I was really excited by Yvonne Rainer and Chantal Akerman and the psychoanalytic formal theory films, I was not interested in personal expression and the kind of spirit of the underground really, which was a bit unfair on Carolee. After all, if we showed *The Other Side of the Underneath* I don't see why we should not have shown *Fuses*. Then as Ruby must have said to you that *La Fiancée du Pirate* that was of great excitement to us as was *Dance, Girl, Dance*. Also, *At Land* by Maya Deren and *The Smiling Madame Beudet*, we got it after the festival started. There was someone from the BBC who knew the BBC had a print of it, and he went out of his way to get it.

Paris 1900 doesn't even say Nicole Védres there, looking back that was something important that we must have shown but I don't think it got a lot of attention at the time. Definitely Claire wanted to have films with a spirit of subversiveness which was there in *The Blue Light* and in *Reason over Passion*, Vera Chytilová, *Mädchen in Uniform*, *La Fiancée du Pirate*, *Dance, Girl, Dance* and *Wanda*, which did find its way in. Though I don't feel we felt *Wanda* was so much of this kind of subversive spirit but was an important cotemporary film to include. Those ones I've just mentioned mixed with the women's films like Pat Holland, Esther Ronay, Midge

Mackensie and Liberation Films, that kind of new wave films that literally came of the women's movement.

The overall lines I can see where films that were really important historically but also were infused by this spirit of strangeness and new films from the women's movement. Then a few others that were thrown in. *Little Marja*, I have no idea what that was.

Then if you look at the Edinburgh catalogue after this, you do see that women's filmmaking was taking off and within a couple of years there really was a new wave of women's films that really quite important.

SR: Can we talk next about audiences and reception of the films and whether 1979 impacted a wider film culture. Firstly, when you were putting the programme together for 1972, who was your audience at that time?

LM: We didn't really have a sense of an audience; it was just important to put them on.

SR: But you were putting them on for women?

LM: Yes but it was almost as much as a gesture to say these films exists, women have made films. Then the other side of it was a real sense that all this research had turned up really comparatively little in the history of film and someone like Jane Gaines was always saying to me that early women's cinema was not allowed to be shown and I never really knew what she meant by that. But it might have been again a sense from coming from the United States, we were all rather censorious but actually if we had been able to get the films and had known about this we would have been delighted to have shown them.

SR: Isn't it a question of access and availability?

LM: We didn't even know they existed. If we did know that they existed, we didn't know how to get hold of them. It was really the beginning. Jane says no they were not allowed to be shown.

SR: Do you remember the demographic who came?

LM: No, I think it was people who just came to the festival.

SR: In 1979 you had more of an international remit, than 1972?

LM: People came up from London and abroad. They would have come to Edinburgh rather than for this particularly. Kay Armatage was there in 1972 and 1979 and Ruby was there too.

SR: Was it open for anyone to come?

LM: I don't remember. It would have been run within the structure of the festival. In 1972 there was a spirit of excitement and the novelty of it all. By the time 1979 came along there seemed to be a lot of different war-ing groups.

SR: Ruby has written about the fact she came over for a keynote on Sara Gomez, the print of her film *One Way or Another* didn't arrive and so she spoke off the top of her head about Chantal Akerman. She was also placed on a panel with Pam Cook and that they had anticipated that they would have a blow up and they did not.

LM: I can't remember 1979 and who organise it. I remember endless discussions on how different it was from 1972 where no one really cared what we did so we did what we could. Whereas by time it came to 1979 there was so many ideological axes to grind and that everything came much more fraught and because I have a particular 'anti-frautness personality' I kind of didn't want to be involved with all this too-ing and fro-ing with people denouncing each other and Claire was very censorious and by that time completely Althusserian. I was much easier going about things. Then there was the question of the representation of lesbianism and lesbian films, where we doing enough and so on.

SR: In 1979, Ruby writes about this her account of Edinburgh. Did you feel that the women's screening and discussions were beginning to have a wider impact on film culture at the time?

LM: Yes I think so, definitely. The other point, which is always important to remember that moments like that it's not only the screenings, but also the writing and the discussion. During

1970s, there was a consciousness and questions about women and film. Representation was very much on the agenda.

SR: After 1972, some of the programme travelled to Chicago with Ruby.

LM: We did it from scratch really.

SR: She writes about festival about having a profound effect on women.

LM: Chicago was different, we had a proper all women organising group which took the whole question of programming very seriously and Ruby was already programming at that point at The Art Institute.

SR: Edinburgh was not so professionalised in that way.

LM: No, Edinburgh was very ad hoc and just doing it.

SR: There wasn't a curatorial agenda as much.

LM: No, accept as I said a curatorial agenda emerged gradually but generally there was not a curatorial agenda behind the scenes. It emerged more about of the films as we put them together. Chicago was much more professional, much more feminist, much more conceived in terms of audience. There were some tensions as the Chicago Herald Tribune, Gene Siskel, was financing it. We were slightly wary, to what extent were we expected to do a certain kind of festival and was that going to be the same as our festival. So that meant, I would say there was 50-70% more consciousness of what we were doing.

SR: Did you feel with Edinburgh there was any institutional difficulty with delivering 1972 and 1979 with the Board.

LM: In 1972, we just did it. 1979 could have been. It was much bigger and more elaborate. It must have been more formal.

SR: Can we turn to affect and transformation. Did you feel that Edinburgh affected women and audiences; was it profound experience for people who came?

LM: I think Edinburgh 1972 was, although I can't cite chapter and verse. Although the next step was that Claire took it to London and then she wrote her pamphlet 'Notes on Women Cinema', which I must look at again.

SR: What about the atmosphere, do you have any memories to share?

LM: In Edinburgh 1972 it was really a lot of excitement and all the women who were making these feminist liberation films came up. We did have a big discussion day when the guy from the BBC wanted to make a film about us all. Everybody said you can't make a film about us; you will have to hand over the camera and equipment to us and we will make a film about us. The film has since been lost. There were key women making that film who knew how to use cameras and equipment and work collectively, and they were responsible for everything. I think they had been at the National Film and Television School. There were a core of women working as filmmakers coming out of the film school, who were coming up to Edinburgh.

SR: How do you think the festival fostered this environment of connecting activism, theory and feminist programming? Was this the festival or yourself, Claire and Lynda?

LM: Yes.

SR: Can we talk about Edinburgh today. Kim Knowles *Re-Grouping* screening event and discussion in 2016? Can you share any responses to that screening with Lizzie Borden. Also, audiences' response?

LM: When was *Re-Grouping* shown?

SR: In 1976. How had the politics around the film changed (or not) between then and now?

LM: I had completely forgotten about this. During Edinburgh '76, my beloved grandmother died and so I did not want to stay. I wanted to go straight back to the country. That was Regina Cornwall who played this rather strange role of denouncing *Re-Grouping* and Lizzie, which

always seemed so strange to me. I don't remember it because I don't think I even saw the film. I thought it was remarkable when I saw it last year. At the time, I don't think that it was the kind of film that we would have wanted to write about, again, as it was insufficiently theoretical. Retrospectively, looking back on it, it's fascinating but at the time I didn't see because of my grandmother dying.

Can I come back to the National Film and Television School; it was established in 1971. I think having a group of women there, that turned into the London Women's Film Group was very important. It would have been early days. They knew how to make films, set things up. The rest of us would not have a clue of what to do with a camera. It's such a pity, Francine died a couple of years ago. Esther now lives in Budapest, but it would be interesting to revisit them. Then again, I think Claire was involved in the London Women's Film Group.

SR: We talk about looking back at Edinburgh in the 1970s in the light of today. In terms of curating or programming feminism as an activist practice. Do you feel that you achieved what you wanted to do at that time – within the limits of what was available?

LM: I might have to save this up and answer it another time. In some ways what happened was having the possibility to make films which shifted my interest much more towards production, one. Two, I was involved with The Other Cinema and their efforts to get the Charlotte Street cinema off the ground, and that was much more a kind of general effort that one that would have seen showing women's films and programming women's films as very much part of its remit. In fact, during its short time that it was alive, it premiered *Riddles of the Sphinx*, which I have told you before, in a very interesting and original way. So, there were new kinds of possibilities of programming starting.

A big impact on me was Simon Field and Dave Curtis' Independent Film Season at the National Film Theatre in 1972 or 1973. That was where I saw *Hotel Monterrey* and *The Lives of the Performers*. I associate with this time or whether this was at that event – the VALIE EXPORT film *Invisible Adversaries*. There were other films that have dropped out of sight now, certainly Claire and Paul were very interested in a film by Claudia von Aleman called *The Point is to Change It*. I don't know what's happened to that. She was a young German filmmaker on the fringes of New German cinema, Marxist feminist. That was the first time that I had seen a

body of films made by women that were feature films that added up to enough work for you to feel that there was a women's film movement.

SR: After Edinburgh 1979, did you go onto do any other programming?

LM: No. I started working in academia and Peter and I still had another three films that we were going to make. Then we did the Freida Kahlo and Tina Modotti thing at the Whitechapel, which was a very different kind of curating. In those days, the BFI was a very vigorous and lively receptive organisation, during the 1970s, and they were constantly organising screenings and symposia and the women and film thing, and then there was a lot of interest in melodrama and feminism and avant-garde.

Also, the other thing that made a difference during the 1970s there was such a thriving independent film movement in the United Kingdom. Although there was the London Women's Film Group and a consciousness of feminism and film, these things were not segregated so much. For instance, in 1975, the first British Independent Festival at Bristol, there would not have been a sense of separating out women's films from the more general programme. I think that probably, I was very interested to read that MIRAJ issue and the discussion with Jean Mattee and Nina Danino, that they were very consciousness of working as a group of women who had their own agenda. I can't remember being involved in anything in that.

Circles, set up a consciousness, particularly because Lis Rhodes and Felicity Sparrow were also interested in curating as such and so they were interested in continuing the archaeological excavation, putting odd films together and working on women and film as a curatorial project. Apart from the odd Edinburgh events, I can't remember anything else. Claire and Pam [Cook] did their Dorothy Arzner thing and that was very much a curatorial project and that was quite important.

Appendix G: Interview with Anne Robinson

Interview with Anne Robinson on Zoom. 3 August 2020

Selina Robertson (SR): The first question was I wanted to ask you about when you were at St. Martin's, doing film, who were your lecturers and contemporaries?

Anne Robinson (AR): My lecturers were Tina Keane, Vera Neubauer, Anna Thew, Clare Pajikowska, William Raban, David Parsons. That is all that I can remember, I think.

SR: What is Clare's full name?

AR: Pajikowska. She was great. I spent quite a bit of time talking to her. She had made films as well. She's quite a feminist.

SR: Who were your contemporaries at St Martins?

AR: Students? In my year Ngozi Onwurah, Zac Offay and an Irish filmmaker, I have forgotten their name, sorry. The queer filmmakers that were around were Ruth Novaczek and Martine Thoquenne. Isaac Julien just left when I started, but I did see him because I knew him a bit before I went. Sandra Lahire of course. Sarah Turner was not there until later. Annette Kennerley was the year below me, she started when I was in the second year, she must have been the first year but then she left to have Jack. So then she didn't come back for a year or so after that. I think Sarah Turner didn't start until a year I left I think because I do remember William Raban mentioning her and I think I met her, but I didn't really know her until later.

SR: Were you involved with any collective work at this point? Four Corners or WAVES? Firstly, with WAVES. Someone at the Rio told me that they spoke to someone, and they thought that The Sound Kitchen, when it wound down, I can't really figure out when it was wound down, but it was donated to WAVES? The equipment and stuff, do you know anything about that?

AR: I kind of remember I think that when you did your event to the Rio recently, I think you had a couple of photographs from the opening party night for The Sound Kitchen, which I do remember. I remember that because I think I was doing the bar, I sort of remember being there and the people that were around and I sort of remember it as a project, but I don't know because I was not that involved in sound, you know, much more film and visual arts. I knew it was happening and I knew it was there. But I don't quite remember. I don't think I really got involved in WAVES until after I had left St Martins or in my final year. I think I remember Siobhan [Cleary] and the other people. It might have been via Ruth [Novaczek] as well, I can't really quite remember the order of things happening. In my opinion she mentioned that she wasn't directly involved or at that point I think she was later, but I remember going to the management committee meetings and stuff after I've left the Women's Media Resource Project, so maybe it was the Women's Media Resource Project and WAVES?

SR: Were you on the Management Committee for the Women's Media Resource Project for a while?

AR: Was I? [laughs]

SR: I can find specific documentation from the Rio, for instance any minuted meetings from the Women's Media Resource Project. I know viv [acious] that they said she was on the management committee of the Women's Media Resource Project.

AR: She was involved in The Sound Kitchen.

SR: Yes.

AR: She probably was, my memory is that it was called the Women's Media Resource Project, but I think The Sound Kitchen might have been first. Then because it was involving more video and visual stuff that it became media resources rather than just sound. It might have been the merging of two groups.

SR: As I understand it, from what I've figured out is that it was initially called WEFT.

AR: What on earth did that stand for?

SR: WEFT was taken from a Greenham song. The group was initially Kate Meynell, Zoë Redmond, Marion Urch and Claire Hodson.

AR: It wasn't anything to do with someone called Porter, Cherry Porter?

SR: I don't think so. They all met at Greenham and formed a group called WEFT. Most of them came out of London Video Arts. The name of the group was taken from a Greenham song about weaving, the weft and warp.

AR: Yes, this rings a bell.

SR: Then they applied for funding from the Women's Committee at the GLC and because of the funding they changed their name. Then Zoe went for the job to be one of the administrators. She didn't get it and then the founder members left. Then there was a new iteration that joined the group. So people like Siobhan [Cleary] and Vicky [Grut] who were job shared the video programming and events. The money also was used for training in sound.

AR: Yes I remember them. I think they may have some connection with Women in Sync, because I knew Women in Sync from before. So my connection to collectives and stuff goes back much earlier than that. And then during the time of St Martin's, partly I was just being a student and stuff, so I wasn't quite involved in things in a committed way. Lots of other reasons as well, too much partying.

SR: I want to go onto that later.

AR: You really don't!

SR: Can you tell me more about Women in Sync? If you were involved with that group too?

AR: I really don't know when they were set up. But what I remember about them was that when I started getting involved with filmmaking, which is about 1983 and when I was working with Caz [Caroline Sheldon], and we made the [17] *Lessons in Bed* film and other stuff, and then we had this kind of collective for a while. Quite a bit of what we were doing was just trying to

find work. I've got like two things from that time. I've got one recording of a feminist play at the Oval and something to do with the Camden Women's ... kind of people drumming, women drumming and stuff. We did kind of film gigs and things. So I think at that point, we definitely worked a bit with Women in Sync, or we definitely both knew each other anyway, Sarah [?], Penny [?] and Sarah [?], whatever the other Sarah was called and Rose [?] I remember them quite well, they were filming stuff and teaching skills. Caz had been teaching the women's courses at the Co-op. I didn't really know the ins and outs, but I started getting involved in the Co-op. I think there was a bit of factionalising going on, like the women trying to have more of a women's presence at the Co-op, but then there was some kind of take over. There was also, you know, just very positive things happening like Caz and Susan Stein, and other people teaching women's 16mm filmmaking courses. Quite a few people have mentioned as this being important in terms of teaching women's filmmaking skills. Including Annette and Ingrid Pollard and lots of other people who just learned from, and Langen Walsh, I don't know what happened to her but she made some great films and then went to the National Film and Television School. She was involved with Women in Sync. There was quite a network between the London Film-makers Co-operative women and Women in Sync and then people like us who were kind of at the edges of those and also doing our own thing. That was before I went to St Martin's actually, that was around 1983-84 and then obviously overlapping into because The Poison Girls wasn't finished until after I'd started that course. I was already a bit involved in stuff; I'd shown the War Memorials film a little bit. The *Lessons in Bed* film was definitely shown by Woman in Sync, because I do remember some big screening - there were a lot of women there.

SR: Where would they have hosted their screenings?

AR: That I really can't remember, it might have been Gay's the Word actually. But under their auspices or it was in a pub or so near there. I think it was somewhere around Marchmont Street. They were in Kings Cross, in Wharfdale Road.

SR: That's where they were based?

AR: Yeah. It was not gentrified, then. They were just behind Kings Cross Station, and Copy Print, there were a few art projects and there was a collage print collective called Copy Print. This was obviously pre digital days, they did lots of photocopying, and community arts and

and for artists as well. There was a few different art projects and smaller art projects and their cultural media projects. So Women in Sync were quite an established organization, although less involved, less overlapping. Unlike Four Corners or the Co-op, for example, less overlapping in film although they did a bit of teaching video skills and that's what I meant about Wild Tracks. Some of the time we were just doing jobs like we would get hired to go and film somebody who was doing a dance project or, you know, we film some stuff for the GLC, like these big concerts at Southbank. I remember being up on this kind of podium with a very heavy camera, and in all weather. We were doing things like that. And some of that was by Women in Sync and I think even when we filmed at Chats Palace for things like The Poison Girls and stuff, I think we used their mixing desks. I think Siobhan and Vicky probably had some connection with them as well, I think but you'd have to ask them I don't know. I was at St Martin's from 84 to 87. Still kind of connected with the Co-op but more as time went on involved in artist film. Although after I left St Martin's, me and someone from Women in Sync, we were doing some sort of camera work and stuff working with Isaac Julien and Sankofa, filmmaking bits of their rehearsals. I know it sounds really complicated, but it felt it was quite a fluid network of women who were in touch with each other. I mean, Bruna Fionda and Polly Gladwin, they worked with Isiling Zach Mack-Nataf from London College of Communication to make *The Mark of Lilith* – the lesbian vampire film.

SR: I know that film. I was going to screen it at one of my Rio events. Bruno and Polly were going to come. All these wonderful things!

AR: I mean, I don't even remember what events are happening. What I was thinking was that there were some women who became very highly skilled, in that they wanted to become cinematographers. Some people were more involved in the community side. After St. Martin's I worked that group of women doing lighting, probably not very well, on a film about women in rap music which never saw the light of day. I think it had Channel 4 money.

SR: Do you have any material?

AR: No, it was called Fuse to House, that was a really interesting project. WAVES moved to Wild Court didn't they. I remember them running a women's video festival. I mean Zach at the time was involved in running that women's video festival in '87?

SR: With Siobhan [Cleary]. That was a huge endeavour. It never happened again because I think it was so ambitious. I think they all had to take time off.

AR: It was just about the time that I left St Martin's, but I think from memory, the festival showed both [17] *Lessons in Bed* and the Poison Girls video. Linda Flint who was involved with the VET Training too. And then I don't really remember the connection between that and something that happened, which was definitely WAVES a year or so later, which was more of maybe two years later. I think 89 or 90, a festival which was more short videos and films that was at Wild Court, but also had kind of speakers.

SR: I haven't found out about that. I mean, I only know about the festival because Vicky [Grut] showed me the program.

AR: Do you remember what I lent you to read?

SR: Yes I do. Do you know if WAVES and Women in Sync were they funded by the Greater London Council?

AR: Pretty sure Women in Sync was, and maybe by Camden Council too.

SR: With the Rio screenings, I found some flyers. I'm going to try to show them to you.

AR: Oh yes, do you know what that was. When I left St Martin's, that must have been about '89. That's about the same time as this other thing, which you might be interested in. I got quite interested in film theory and I went off to do an MA, I mean full time. I actually did a part time MA at Westminster PCL. There was only a couple of film MA's then. But I got quite interested in more Film Studies side of things, which is how I kind of ended up teaching Film Studies, but I was doing some research about women and class, which I had started doing when I did my dissertation at St. Martin's. In fact, when I got involved in the Women's Media Resource Project. I said it would do a screening about that subject matter. So it was kind of weird in the context of the artists film stuff. I was looking more at representation. When they were running the WAVES festival at Wild Court. It was a big event, it was quite well attended because I remember they had a lecture theatre type space there, and it was quite full. And I did a talk about kind of images of working-class women in cinema. It was called something like blonde

bombshell. That's why I was doing those screenings at the Rio, as a form of feminist research and then I did the talk. I didn't really push it beyond that. I thought I was going to do a PhD, but then I did the course at PCL.

SR: Who were your lecturers there?

AR: Ian Green, who had also taught at St. Martin's and in Film Studies. Christopher Williamson, who writes about realism. The course leader was very interested in Canadian television and audience statistics. I was interested in theory and representation, artist film and Hollywood to an extent and British film, I was interested British cinema, in British cultural studies and representation. It was a taught MA course and some bits that were very social scientist statistics based. The women in class thing was what I was most interested in from. Also, because I was at the Rio and involved with programming. I mean, I did a screening of some work by Sandra Lahire.

SR: Was that to do with women and the nuclear industry?

AR: Yes, my film was called *Four Minute Cut*.

SR: I saw in the archive that you did some screenings. Do you remember anything about these screenings. The atmosphere or attendance or the sort of people that came? Were they in the main auditorium or in the basement?

AR: Small audiences, I think.

SR: Like thirty people or something like that?

AR: Yeah. Less maybe.

SR: Do you remember with the women's screenings at the Rio. Do you have memories of the atmosphere? Would you all meet at the Rio, go to the screening and then go out afterwards to the pub? Was it the same people who would come?

AR: Mostly the same sort of people who would come. In fact, I think I've sort of vaguely think we think somebody might have come because they wanted to see that one of the films, probably the Diana Dors one. I remember the nuclear one, we would definitely have discussions in the cinema. I don't remember the content really, but I do remember just people being around and quite up for talking. I remember talking to Sandra. I remember more things like screening films at Four Corners or with Women and Sync where people would have more of a social kind of time where they would go off to the pub afterwards. Not so much at the Rio, although I remember the events, like the one with Jeanette Winterson and Section 28.

SR: Was that the Clause and Effect event at the Rio in 1988? You went to that?

AR: Yeah.

SR: Do you have any memories to share?

AR: Not so much. I remember all night parties, and I remember doing the bar a couple of those things. I remember those more social occasions than the women's screenings, although I remember the women's screenings at Wild Court being more of a social occasion with music, and the women's video festival. That sticks in my head as being quite a major event and you know, a party time as well.

SR: You spoke brilliantly about Wild Tracks and the Poison Girls. I found in the archive that in 1980 they did a benefit gig for East London Gay Liberation Front with The Raincoats as part of the gay and lesbian festival for Gay Pride Week at the Rio.

AR: I wasn't even in London then, that sounds amazing. I really wish I had been there.

SR: I know I wish I could have been there too! I found out a little bit more about that festival too, because I didn't know who programmed it. I got in touch with Jim [MacSweeney] from Gays the Word and he did some digging around in Gay News. We found out that two days of the festival had to be cancelled. Apparently, they booked all the films with the distributors, but the distributors had not confirmed the bookings, especially the films from America. They booked *Dyketactics* and other lesbian films, but the distributors didn't want to send the films over because of the potential problems with customs. It seems that the Rio didn't have budget

to pay for the customs charges. Two days of the festival had to be cancelled, it sounded quite chaotic.

AR: Did you find out who it was who programmed it, somebody mentioned Richard Dyer.

SR: I got in touch with Richard and he said it wasn't him because he wasn't in London but that it was sad that these kind of histories get lost. He confirmed it wasn't Mark Finch either. But I still think the Jacqui Duckworth might have been involved.

AR: Jacqui Duckworth, yes, that was it. She lived near to the Rio.

SR: She was involved with the Rio because they made that film *One Day Off in Hackney*, and she was involved in that project.

AR: I remember two things happening that were kind of precursors to the Lesbian and Gay Film Festival and I can't remember the exact years. I think one is '84 and the other '85. One was an event at the Diorama, which Caz and I did something for that. I remember somebody coming round to our house in Victoria Park. Steve Farrar was involved. He was a gay guy who was involved in the Co-op. I think it might have been Brian Robinson. I happen to him, I think he was also involved in *Square Peg*. So I remember somebody coming around to collect a film from us. Then there was a Leicester Super 8 festival. Richard Dyer was involved in running a lesbian and gay screening part of it. I think that was '85 and I think it must have been before the very first lesbian and gay festival? It was before Section 28. I just remember lots of people piling up there from London, people from the Co-op and Isaac Julien. I was thinking about that because you were wondering who had run that gay pride festival at the Rio, who knows, maybe Jacqui?

SR: What is the Diorama?

AR: Diorama, I don't even know if it's still there, it's probably being used for corporate events and weddings. It is a strange building, a diorama just like they were built for some special purpose in 1800 near Regent's Park. At that point, it wasn't derelict, but it was certainly empty and being used for some arts projects. Maybe gigs and things.

SR: You said that you were living in a gay housing co-op in Hackney in the 1980s. Can you just give me a little bit of flavour of what that life was like there and more specifically Hackney dyke life?

SR: Our co-op was called April gay co-op. Our house was in Victoria Park Road and there were about 3 other co-op houses right next door to us. Two of them were lesbian houses, all lesbian houses I think, and the other one had probably some gay people in it I think, it was quite a mixed house. They were big houses - attic to basement. Four or five stories. They are now divided up into flats and they were renovated as housing associations. The other co-op was Patchwork which probably is Mosaic now, so there were different housing co-ops. Ours was specifically gay though it was much smaller, so it didn't become a big Housing Association. I think we had one paid part time worker who's responsible for the rent and things. There were quite a few houses Stoke Newington quite near the Rio, I remember the first meeting, because there was one in Lesbon Road. I was probably not long from Scotland, so I thought they were saying Lesbian Road. There probably should be a road in Stoke Newington called Lesbian Road but there isn't, it was Lesbon Road so that sticks in my head. There was one in Fulton Road and Brighton Road, and you know a lot of the students on the boats round Stoke Newington. There were lots of lesbian and gay households. I think there was probably more women than men involved and some mixed. Then when we got moved out of the bigger houses, some of us got moved into small council flats or ex council flats, so I lived briefly with Noski [Deville] who you have probably come across somewhere in your research. Then I went into a small flat in Western Road, near Bethnal Green. April was specifically a Hackney gay and lesbian co-op. I mean, there were a lot of artists around Victoria Park Road. Ruth [Novascek] lived there as well but not in our house. She was in one of the other houses. viv (acious) lived there at one point. There were four of these big co-op houses in a row. There were a lot lots of squats just around the corner on Victoria Park Road and on Cadogan Terrace. Also loads in Stoke Newington and London Fields, there is still a Black and lesbian housing co-op house on the corner of London Fields miraculously in the Georgian house. Miraculously because they are still there, they clung on. There was a big piece of corrugated iron along there that said, 'why pay rent and they don't give a damn about you' and that was there for years. And just beside that there are these very dilapidated Georgian houses and then they became some kind of co-op. Some of them are still there and are still housing co-ops. We were on Broadway

Market as well. Our flat was just at the bottom of Broadway Market. Very different place obviously.

SR: I found some information in the Rio archive about the Amersham commune. When I was reading this Gay Liberton Front flyer, they mention The Amersham commune.

AR: That might have become the April co-op. We moved in the summer of '83. And I've got an idea that the co-op had some kind of contact with Hackney council and been allowed to have these licenses. They weren't squats anymore. They were sort of licensed, very cheap rent co-op houses. So I think what happened was quite a lot of squats in places like Hackney, Lambeth, Camden and so on, rather than being kicked out altogether, the councillors would let them stay there just to stop buildings falling down. That's definitely what April was, that it was a short life housing co-op. Short life in the sense that once the council decides to do something with it, they kind of throw you out. There were lots of similar setups in Brixton.

SR: Where did you socialise in the area? Did you go to the Duke of Wellington?

AR: Duke of Wellington wasn't open until later I think I mean. I worked at Rackets, which was in the Pied Bull, it's now a Halifax Building Society. When I first lived there, there's a pub called the Calf Red Lion which is a restaurant now, it was called something like The Market Tavern. It was on the corner of Essex Road and St Peter's Street, just by Newington Green. And that had the downstairs bar, which was lesbian, gay, but particularly lesbian. I think they had a lesbian, gay, kind of punk night and then Ruth [Novascek] and Babs Millington did a kind of women's punk night. That's what I remember, and that would have been from '81-82. That was in the Calf Red Lion which was this basement bar. And then the women who ran that, someone called Mandy, I can't remember her friend's name, but they started running quite a lot of lesbian stuff in a bar that was along the road, which was the Pied Bull, that's on the corner of Liverpool Road and Upper Street. They had it seven nights a week at one point, but not the whole because it was one of those kind of big old London pubs that had a few bars. But there was a function bar, where there was gay stuff going on and lesbian too. That went on a few nights a week and sometimes Sunday lunchtimes with women musicians, but then it was taken over by new management. So Rackets was around for a few years. And I think they had some nights that were quite late, sort of two to three in the morning. That became a bit of an institution. Then there was The Fallen Angel or falling asleep I seem to remember somebody

calling it, but The Fallen Angel was down by the canal, so just off Upper Street. The Duke of Wellington opened sometime after that. So probably mid '80s I think, the Fallen Angel, Rackets and The Bell. We all went to The Bell actually. Rackets was fine but it was quite mixed women's crowd. The Bell was for a lot of the artists, filmmakers and musicians. That was definitely more our home. We used to get the number 30 bus. People have written about The Bell, it was quite a special place, there's a website about it. The Sleaze Sisters Pom and Trill (?) were the DJs and again it was completely gay. I mean it's still there, it's right next door to Kings Cross station at the start of Pentonville Road. It is still some kind of bar, but it was definitely a very important gay bar for 10-15 years, right through the '80s, it was very definitely the place that you went from all over London if you're into not just kind of conventional dance music.

SR: Were there other things that people would go to?

AR: We went into the West End. Some of that was just drinking stuff. I remember going to afterhours clubs in the West End, somewhere called The Pink Panther, somewhere in Soho. I went to the Wag Club, that wasn't a queer place as such. So we would go out in Soho a bit but more of that Hackney dyke crowd. There was the Ace of Clubs, although I didn't really like the Ace of Clubs that much. Some of those glitzy West End places, they were in the more sort of glitzy nightclub type places. There was somewhere that was quite good in an old church in Leicester Square as well, which again was more interesting music. And then I remember going to South London to some of the women who were running more blues parties. There was the South London Women's Centre. We would go out more in Hackney and to the Rio.

SR: There live music wasn't there?

AR: Yes and Chatts Palace.

SR: Yes, that's right.

AR: Definitely Chatts Palace. There was also Centerprise, although that was more like courses and social things than arty stuff. There used to be big gigs in town halls as well, that was partly in the Greater London Council era, I think things got funded more. So places like Hackney Town Hall, Stoke Newington and Camden Town Hall. There was Caxton Hall, which was somewhere in north London. I went out a lot. Clubbing, unnamed places I can't remember. The

Crown and Castle which I think is Nando's on the corner of Dalston. They had definitely queer stuff or new gay stuff. Our local pub in Victoria Park Road, there was a lot of lesbians playing pool, beating the guys at pool. I thought we all got barred at one point, and then there was some kind of demonstration. And it got in the Evening Standard and Time Out. I have no idea why.

SR: Because you're beating the men at pool.

AR: That's I think that was our theory, but I really can't remember why!

SR: Thank you, that's brilliant, you have painted a rich picture of that time. I think we've spoken quite a lot about Greenham Common and so we don't really need to go into that. But I wanted to ask, did you go to the Hackney Peace Week in 1983. I think I sent you that picture of three women who were building benders outside Hackney Town Ha. viv [acious] they were definitely Greenham women, and this was part of Hackney Peace Week and there screenings at the Rio. Were you aware of any of that?

AR: Yes, but I can't remember specifics. I've got a miner's lamp on the shelf here, which I won in a raffle probably during that week but I can't remember what happened. I remember going to something at Hackney Labour Club I think and maybe at Chatts Palace. I sort of remember just being around and there was stuff happening. I would have gone to Greenham.

SR: Were you a member of the Hackney Greenham Women's Support Group? Or did you go with your friends separately?

AR: Yes. I mean, I think the first time I went was the very first big demonstration. I remember going from Caz's house in Camberwell and I remember going from her place on a bus. Then I remember going with the women from the Victoria Park house who were Julie and Dill and Caz's mum. I think we went in one of the big coaches from Hackney, that's all I remember. Then I went and stayed there for a bit because I was making the film and I got to know other women and then we were a bit involved in some stuff up in Scotland, a Scottish women's base. I did stay there a bit when I was filming but really under our own steam, not part of that group.

SR: Your film *Four Minute Cut*, where else did you show that film apart from the Rio?

AR: Not very much. I've shown it read recently because somebody saw it at Five Years Gallery in Archway. I would not mind showing it again. The one that I made which I think you have seen, where I was filming at Greenham, just before I started at St Martin's, was called Royal Fellowship, which is about war narratives.

SR: We were going to show a clip from that weren't we at the Rio. I've only got two more questions. One was about your sort of engagement with feminism and film and lesbian politics in the 1980s. It sounds to me that it was very kind of rooted, obviously that living in Hackney, your filmmaking was part of your politics and then you started moved into teaching as well. Is that fair to say?

AR: I started teaching I guess because I just needed a job. My first bits of teaching were of not teaching but kind of workshops and stuff that is more to do with Brixton Gallery because there's quite a lot of film stuff and queer stuff going on there. I remember running some stuff there for gay Pride. I did some teaching video skills and young people. And then I got a job starting January 1990 at Hackney College, which then became Hackney Community College. There I became head of the Media department, and I taught film and video and I set up access courses. So actually, that was very locally rooted in the sense that I really enjoyed teaching the access courses, it seemed quite an important thing at the time, and quite a lot of the students went on to St. Martin's and Westminster and they were mainly working-class students, a lot Black students, quite a lot of refugees, quite a lot of queer students. Also women returners who had kind of dropped out of school at 16 because they had had a kid. Lots of different life experiences and people from every part of the world. I really loved working with those groups, and they would make stuff locally. They were refugees experiences, I've got tiny snippets of it and not even the best bits.

SR: When you ran these media courses at the Rio, was that part of it?

AR: I was half time and then I was full time and then I was kind of head of department but in that role, which was from about 1993, I think, to the late 1990s. Part of my job was to go and visit the off-site places where they were running different courses. My colleagues would have to go and visit off site courses for new textiles, painting or ceramics. I would go and visit the courses which were film and photography. Hoxton Hall, Chatts Palace, Centerprise and definitely the Rio because the tape/slide project was there. Edwina Fitzpatrick was running it.

I thought it was an interesting project. I didn't do anything for it particularly I just knew about it. It was being run properly. I remember Charles Rubenstein.

SR: Robert Rider and Ramsay Cameron, the co-programmers had left by then and Charles took over.

AR: I remember talking to him about student screenings, but we did them at Four Corners instead.

SR: I wanted to ask about your reflections about that time in your life. Was it Hackney or London that you wanted to come to when you moved to England?

AR: I moved to London because of starting work at See Red women's workshop, which is based in South London, near Elephant and Castle. I think it seemed more possible, at that point in time, to be actively involved in creative practice related to politics as well. Glasgow is a fantastic place, I love Glasgow and I love my friends, they are still there. When we did the book for See Red and we were talking about it a bit then. I think those of us who joined afterwards who weren't the founder members, I think we kind of thought the revolution was round the corner, we had to do something now and I think that's perhaps in the nature of being 21 years old you know. I think I was feeling a bit like that. When I realized there was an opportunity to go and work doing art related stuff with feminists and gay people then that seems like a good thing. So, I moved to London. I knew someone in Scotland who had a friend who had a hard to let flat to flat in Hackney, because that was the other kind of thing that people lived in. How to believe now, on Kingsmead Estate, which is in Homerton. So that's how I ended up in Hackney. A hard to let flat which was basically that you could go and queue up with the council housing office and be allocated a flat because they were empty. That's kind of completely unthinkable now. The Kingsmead Estate was quite big, 1920s or 1930s red brick housing estate which is now Hackney Wick. That was the first place I lived in London from 1981 and it is because a friend of a friend of had a flat there. It seemed exciting but it was a long way from Walworth Road, and I had no idea how big London was. I remember trying to cycle the first day which is quite a long way from Hackney Wick to Elephant. Things are closer together in Glasgow. Yes, now we all want to go back to Glasgow. Now considering the current situation.

SR: This is brilliant. You've given me so much. I wanted to get this picture of cultural political life in Hackney at that time. You really lived through it.

AR: I think it's funny because some of those things that we're talking about seem a long way apart, because when you are younger a year is a long time, two years is a long time. It was great doing that event about the Rio; you were doing it and it was great being there and showing the film. The thing that was quite hard to convey is to do with the homophobia because obviously there's something about that sense of urgency about your politics and wanting change because every aspect of your life is being affected by sexism and homophobia. And you know, racism as well. That idea of being very on the outside. It wasn't just to do with being young and deciding to go and live in that kind of interesting situation, have good parties and stuff because we did have a great party. And I mean, I don't think we thought we were allowed to live anywhere else. I don't know this is interesting or not: I know when we looked at the archive material for the See Red stuff, when I found an advert that I placed in something like the Women's Liberation newsletter for moving to London and trying to find somewhere to stay. Then I was thinking, well actually, the thing was, if you have moved as a 21-year-old to London at that point, without being gay or feminist or involved in politics or anything, then you'd probably be looking at the back of the Evening Standard, and you would have ended up with complete strangers. I suppose what we did have was a sense of okay if you're moving to a new place, partly for safety reasons, but obviously, for social reasons as well, you would then have a kind of network to tap into. So if I then moved to New York or something, you would have your friends or friends there, or a community noticeboard or something to look at things so obviously compared to now, you didn't have the internet but at that time, it felt like you were part of an underground scene, and that was very not overlapping with people who probably more involved in kind of mainstream things with straight jobs and stuff like that. And then some of us who were queer and artists and musicians, there was a whole spectrum of people. And now what I think about as well is it was a kind of social and class mobility because for example within those housing co-ops and things there would be people who had been rejected from their families, even if they were from quite privileged backgrounds. Whereas I think now, I don't know whether this is completely anecdotal and speculative but possibly people stick to their own social grouping. I can never quite put that thought into words, but it's something like to do with being on the outside, not in a kind of romantic way, that was where we were, we couldn't really get anywhere else.

SR: That's brilliant Anne, thank you so much. You have been an amazing resource. Thank you for doing this interview and as I said, I'm not sure when I'll be able to do these screenings at the Rio when it's safe. If I need to wait, you know, for the spring, then I'll do that as well. I got some funding from the CHASE Feminist Network, to help pay for some of some project. They gave me a year extension on that. It might be the beginning of next year might. But in the meantime, it was amazing that you came to the Fringe online event.

AR: I asked a couple of people, who were not at all Hackney based and they enjoyed it. I was really fascinated, partly obviously, because as you said I did live through some of it, but there's lots of things I didn't know as well.

SR: Thank you, Anne, and thank you so much for your time. I hope that you get some time off.

AR: I hope so too. Have fun in Berlin. Take care, thank you.

Appendix H: Interview with Fiona Scott

Selina Robertson (SR) interview with Fiona Scott (FS) at the Barbican. 28 November 2019

SR: Thank you very much for doing this, Fiona, I've got about 15 questions but some of them are quite short.

FS: Okay.

SR: In the 1980s did you live locally to the Rio Cinema, in Hackney?

FS: Yes, I was in Kingsland Road.

SR: What were you doing before you started working at the Rio?

FS: I didn't work at the Rio; I was on the management committee so that consisted of meetings every couple of weeks. I was working in a print co-operative full time and then involved with the Rio evenings and some weekends.

SR: What led you to joining the Rio Women's Cinema?

FS: I think that was proposed by Robert [Rider] and Ramsay [Cameron], the Rio's programmers, to involve Esther Ronay and myself and Elaine [Burrows].

SR: Was Esther on the management committee then?

FS: Yes, I think she was.

SR: Elaine too?

FS: No, she was working at the BFI.

SR: Do you remember when all of this was?

FS: 1983 or 1984 maybe?

SR: What did you do in the group, what was your role?

FS: At the time they wanted to promote a more feminist agenda at the theatre, I mean cinema. We had regular meetings to try and come up with a programme, films, and events with a feminist or female perspective. Looking for feminist films at that time was a bit of a non-starter but there were a few around.

SR: You met at the Rio, you knew Elaine and Esther, and talked about putting some film programmes together?

FS: We met at Esther's flat, near the Rio, because it was evenings and just discussed what was around. We used a selection of vintage films, European and Hollywood as well.

SR: Elaine was the person who researched the prints.

FS: I think Rob and Ramsay actually requested the films. Elaine's expertise was around, she worked in the cinema industry. Relevant films for women like *Millions Like Us*, it's by a male director, I can't remember his name. She had that expertise and Esther being a filmmaker knew more independent type film people and feminist activists.

SR: What did you bring to the group?

FS: [Laughs]...I brought a lot of enthusiasm and my fondness for 1930s screwball comedies. There were very strong female roles, they were so powerful at that time and a keen enthusiasm for film, which is why I got involved with the Rio in the first place.

SR: Did you get paid or were you a volunteer?

FS: We were volunteers. The Rio was in quite dire straits at the time, which is why they set up a local management committee and some of us volunteered in the box office, taking tickets and doing usher jobs.

SR: How long were you part of the group?

FS: I can't remember, I'm sorry. I think it was only about one year.

SR: What were your dealings with the Rio, with Robert & Ramsay, asking them to book films and with the management committee?

FS: Felicity Harvest was still there and later on Nicola Stephenson who you have spoken to. The thing I did was the flyers, I did some of the artwork for them. I put together flyers and posters.

SR: Did you design the Rio Women's Cinema logo?

FS: No, I think you showed me that, it may have been after I had been involved.

SR: How would you describe your engagement with feminist politics at that time? Was it cultural, activist and/or theoretical? Did you go to conferences and demonstrations?

FS: A mixture of things, it was such a big theme at the time. I was working in this left wing print co-op and some of us were in an organisation called Women in the Print Trades. We got some money from the GLC to make a little film about women working in different areas of print, very unusual.

SR: Was it called *No Set Type*?

FS: Yes.

SR: Because I've seen a flyer for the screening in the Rio archive. Did you design the flyer?

FS: Yes, it was a little leaflet to go with the film. We were wondering whether it is still around, as it was made on video by two women Jane Harris and I can't remember the name of the other woman I'm afraid. I still have the booklet we made to go with it, with cartoons. We did that and we did a screening at the old Greater London Council building. It was a bit limited because

it was shortly before printing went digital, so in fact what we were promoting didn't last very long. I went to conferences, Reclaim the Night marches, and later Greenham and that sort of thing. There was a group called Rights of Women. I did badges and various posters for them. They organised feminist walks through London, like the Matchgirl's Factory, places of interest for feminist history,

SR: Were they based in Hackney?

FS: No, not in Hackney, somewhere in North London. Gray's Inn Road, somewhere around Kings Cross.

SR: Returning to the Rio and Rio Women's Cinema. Did you use film screenings and events as a form of feminist activism – to explore and discuss issues of representation, gender and so on?

FS: I think so, very much. Now there are statistics published regularly how few women there are. This was stuff that was very prevalent in the 1980s, that was why the group was set up.

SR: You were consciously trying to change the film industry and film culture at a wider level?

FS: Yes, particularly looking for female directors: Sally Potter, Lizzie Borden and I remember we showed the Ida Lupino film *Outrage*, and *Dance, Girl, Dance* by Dorothy Arzner. Even know there are still not very many, there is only one woman who has won an Oscar.

SR: In terms of audiences, do you remember what attendances to your screenings were like?

FS: They were not very good to be honest. I think today, with the changes in Dalston, it is a fashionable place, there is social media and there are ways to get the message across. It would do better now, but at the time (laughs), we photocopied flyers and distributed them in the area. Some things did well, but there were times when it was a bit depressing, going in, and there would not be very many people.

SR: Double figures?

FS: I think that we probably did go to double figures, but it was very thin on the ground a lot of the time. I must ask the others about that.

SR: Did you screen films in the main auditorium?

FS: Yes on a Thursday evening.

SR: Do you have memories of any of the screenings, discussions or maybe parties?

FS: I think the Sally Potter film, *The Gold Diggers* because we had a question and answer after the film. It wasn't Sally who came, it was Lindsay Cooper and Rose English. That was very well attended. It was often disappointing though, if we had a funny film like *Gentleman Prefer Blonds*, you need a big audience for that. All the effort is on the screen [laughs].

SR: The Rio's cinema is a tough if you have only 30 people coming.

FS: It is a beautiful cinema. I think sometimes we did just the top, in the balcony.

SR: Did you have any ephemera from your time working with Rio Women's Cinema?

FS: I did have an AGM programme, but I am afraid I think I chucked it out, but the Rio should have something. I think I did the front cover for *Ben-Hur*. Felicity did most of that stuff. Have you been in touch with her?

SR: I have, but she didn't want to participate. It's okay as I am going to invite her to come to the Rio next year for my screenings and community archiving sessions. She sent me a very nice email and she told me a story about the Rio's cat. I think I can persuade her if I say that other people are coming.

I wanted to ask next about the Women's Media Resource Project? Did you have any encounters or memories of that group?

FS: They must have been after I had left.

SR: Do you remember working with any local feminist organisations or film collectives? The London Irish Women's Centre, Circles, Cinema of Women, the London Filmmakers Co-op, Hackney Greenham Women's Support Group?

FS: Cinema of Women, they had that COW logo. We worked together quite tightly. We didn't collaborate with other organisations.

SR: I think you told me that you got some criticism that your audiences were not diverse.

FS: Our selection of films was not diverse enough. It was too white, too European, which I think is fair, perhaps we didn't look hard enough for films outside the United Kingdom.

SR: It's also having access to information about those films.

FS: I think that John Akomfrah involved in the Rio. I think some of the criticism started with him and his group which was justified at the time. There were not many female filmmakers at the time.

SR: I think what you were doing was amazing because you were slowly trying to build a new feminist audience for films, it takes time.

FS: Certainly, I found it fascinating to learn about a history of people that I had never heard of. I can compare learning to programme was the way that somebody like Esther learned filmmaking, she learned edited by standing behind somebody for a year, watching what they did. Now there are courses, but she was on the old Steenbeck machine and learned how to do it and was an editor for years.

SR: Was that an aspect of the programming work that you loved? Learning about filmmakers, movements, periods of film history?

FS: It was an education for me.

SR: After the group finished, did you ever think of doing more film programming?

FS: No I wasn't involved in the Rio, I think I was doing too many thing probably.

SR: What did you do afterwards?

FS: I carried on working in the print co-op. But I always carried on going to the cinema.

SR: To the Rio?

FS: No, I moved out of the area, but I still go now.

SR: Is there anything else you would like to say? I have come to the end of my questions.

FS: I can't think, am afraid.

Appendix I: Interview with Maggie Thacker

Selina Robertson (SR) interview with Maggie Thacker (MT) on email. 11 September 2019

SR: In the 1980s did you live locally to the Rio in Hackney?

MT: Yes, I lived in Mildmay Road, around the corner from the Rio. But when I first got the job, the Women's Media Resource Project was based in a unit on Enfield Road, Metropolitan Workshops, N1 5AZ, and was called WEFT. I moved to Islington, and the office moved to 85 Kingsland High Street after the facilities were built at the Rio Cinema.

SR: Were you working in the arts or cultural production before you joined the Women's Media Resource Project?

MT: I had been living in Leicester when I applied for the post of Sound Co-ordinator for WEFT, as advertised in *City Limits* magazine. I was self-employed at the time, getting work in sound recording and media community projects. I have a copy of my letter of application which demonstrates how informal applying for jobs was in those days!

SR: What led you to joining the Women's Media Resource Project?

MT: I had made a decision that I wanted to be a Sound Engineer after I completed my first degree at Newcastle upon Tyne Polytechnic. I had a contact in my hometown of Leicester who ran a recording studio, and he let me work voluntarily at his studio and agreed to help me learn the job. I also completed a course with the London Film School aimed at training women in technical media jobs, as there was severe under representation at that time in these occupations. I saw the job advertised and felt that as a lesbian feminist this was an ideal opportunity for me. The only downside was that the job was part-time.

SR: When did you start working with group and how long did you stay?

MT: Not certain of the exact dates, but I believe it was 1985-1988.

SR: What was your role in the group? Where you involved in the screenings or The Sound Kitchen and the training workshops?

MT: I was employed as Sound Studio Co-ordinator. At the start I worked with another woman to develop the project and secure funding. When I started, it was necessary to set up basic operations systems such as PAYE for employed staff. We secured funding for two more part-time posts and eventually moved to an office in Kingsland Road. I and my co-workers Vanessa Sagoe, Vicky Grut and Siobhan Cleary were responsible for developing the Steering Committee, Sound Advisory Group and Video Advisory Group to identify premises, build, set up and operate the two media facilities which were named The Sound Kitchen and the Video Lounge. The former was a multitrack sound recording studio, the latter a screening room, both eventually built in the basement of the Rio Cinema on Kingsland Road, Dalston. My responsibilities were mostly to do with the Sound Studio, which we designed and built first, and which opened in July 1986. After opening, I was involved with organising and advertising training courses and commercial recording sessions. The Video Lounge opened later in 1988, I think.

SR: Did you get paid or were you a volunteer?

MT: I was a paid member of staff, job sharing a full-time post with first Vanessa Sagoe and subsequently Pat Thomas.

SR: How did you work collectively within the group?

MT: I can't remember how the group was constituted, probably as a limited liability voluntary organisation, with unpaid Management Committee who met regularly. In effect the project workers ran and managed the organisation with ratification from the Management Committee. The project began with one member of staff, then 2 x part-time, then 4 part-time and ended with 5 part-time staff.

SR: What were your dealings with the Rio Cinema, with Robert Rider t & Ramsay Cameron and the Board?

MT: I met with the Rio during the refurbishment of the basement, but the Rio staff mostly met with the Video Project workers.

SR: What was your engagement with feminism at that time, was it grassroots, cultural and/or theoretical?

MT: I considered myself a lesbian feminist. I would support causes like Section 28, go to Pride but was not part of any activist group. While in Newcastle, I was a member of lesbian feminist band the Friggin' Little Bits, and I continued with music projects in Leicester, London and Newcastle.

SR: As a feminist working with a community cinema like the Rio, did the Women's Media Resource Project use the screenings as tools of feminist activism?

MT: I didn't really work with the screening room, but other members of the project definitely used the Video Lounge as a way of putting on films and discussions related to feminism, racism and homophobia. The Sound Kitchen was more about getting women involved in roles where we'd been traditionally excluded. The 'Kitchen' bit was meant to be ironic, but most mainstream media didn't really get that at the time.

SR: Do you remember the audiences who came to the Women's Media Resource Project events? Did you attend them yourself?

MT: I don't have many memories of this as the two facilities became pretty separate. The screening room was fairly small, probably only about 35 seats or so. I have flyers and publicity which show the kind of programming etc, I will scan and send on.

SR: Thank you. Did you take any photographs, or do you have any flyers, ephemera from your time with the Women's Media Resource Project?

MT:

Annual Report 1986/87

Annual Report 1987/88

Annual Report 1988/89

5 x Sound Kitchen flyers

2 x Video Lounge flyers

1 x WEFT flyer

Business Cards

OVA Music Studio flyer

My handwritten application notes.

SR: I am also researching Rio Women's Cinema and Making It Public screenings and events who active at the Rio in the 1980s. Do you have any memories of them?

MT: No.

SR: Do you remember working with any local feminist organisations, activist groups, collectives? The London Irish Women's Centre, Circles, Cinema of Women, Hackney Greenham Women's Support Group.

MT: I remember the organisations, but didn't really work with them during my time, though other members of the group did.

SR: Is there anything else you would like to say?

MT: The main thing I remember about my time is that we managed to survive the end of the Greater London Council and secure 'transitional funding' to allow us to continue. A women-only anything was generally ridiculed at that time and feminism was not mainstream. We did feel that we were trailblazing. I remember we once appeared in *Private Eye* in a column they used to run called "Loony Feminist Nonsense" and feeling very proud we'd been noticed! You got £50 for submitting something to loony feminist nonsense and the woman who submitted an advert for The Sound Kitchen went on to become a 'feminist' writer. If I remember her name, I'll pass it on. I can scan and send memorabilia to you if you'd like it.

Just remembered the name of the person who submitted us to Loony Feminist Nonsense was Penny Vincenzi.

Appendix J: Interview with Jan Worth

Selina Robertson (SR) interview with Jan Worth (JW) on email. 9 October 2021

SR: In your essay for the BFI's DVD release of *Taking a Part* (TAP), you write, 'I felt I needed to examine my own reaction [to sex work]. I therefore wanted whoever watched the film to also examine their reaction'. What are your memories of the Feminism and Cinema conference in 1979, the audiences and discussions that your film engendered?

JW: What I remember about the Edinburgh that year was the apparent division between the film makers and the academics, the supposed 'purveyors of meaning', that was being enacted at that time. After TAP had been accepted at the festival, I was then summoned to meet a panel of female academics that were then to present the film. Their intention was to 'properly' theorise both its form and content in preparation for the festival event. The assumption was that I, the filmmaker, had somehow, maybe intuitively, created this piece of work, without conscious thought. For this piece of work to be understood, and in some ways legitimised, then others of a different profession were needed to do that work. This played out at the festival itself, both practically in terms who was invited and some cases who was paid to attend and who spoke on the various panels. I think it was the time when the place of film studies in universities was struggling to be recognised and many female academics were working in insecure jobs and looking for legitimacy. It was also a struggle for control of the narrative - which continues to this day. This division was a continuation of the false separation between theory and practice that plays out in film education to the detriment of primarily film production students. This also contributes to the moribund nature of many film scripts still constrained by simplistic and formulaic, male and white notions of narrative structures. The Association of Media Practice educators was brought into being for this reason in the late nineties at the tail-end of a more radical approach to film production which was just about still evident. It is also a structural issue that reflects a class-based notion that the technician, the film maker is the servant to the intellectual whose responsibility it is to be the keeper of meaning and authority. The positive outcome to this at the time was a rebellion from the floor of the film makers attending resulting in a healthy questioning of the established order.

One of the things I strongly remember at this screening was the working-class middle-aged usher approaching me afterwards to say how much she had enjoyed the film. It was a

conversation I really appreciated and confirmed to me that the cinema did not have to follow expected norms to be accessible and relatable.

SR: After Edinburgh, in November 1979 I see that TAP was programmed at the Rio in double bill with *Shirin's Wedding*. The screening was organised in association with the Hackney and Islington Socialist Feminist Group. Do you remember attending the screening, or indeed who programmed your film at the Rio, was it Christine Jackson or Esther Ronay, the audiences who came and again the discussions that ensued?

JW: I can't remember who programmed the film it was likely Esther as she is the person I knew personally. The Rio was quite a unique venue in extensive network of exhibition spaces available at that time. It was first and foremost a Cinema, housed in a classical building with an interesting history. It was a great feeling as an independent filmmaker to see the films name up in lights on a London high street in a proper cinema. My first experience of showing a film there was with the French filmmakers Jean-Marie Straub and Danielle Huillet. I had attended a screening and talk by them I think at the ICA. I had a heated discussion with them about the inaccessibility of the film they were showing. In conversation after the event, they asked to see the film I was working on which was TAP. The Rio, I assume at the request of The Other Cinema, arranged a private screening. This was the first time I had seen the film on a big screen sitting with these two very charismatic filmmakers as part of global movement in this unique space.

I remember the cinema was packed on the night of the screening of TAP and *Shirin's Wedding*. The two films programmed together created a counter point to each other in style and approaches that provided fertile ground for the discussion that followed. As I remember Helma Sanders Brahm's film was centred around the plight of peasant girl from Turkey drawn into the downward spiral of female immigrant labour when she follows the man she is betrothed to Germany. Whilst both films featured sex work as elements in the films, *Shirin's Wedding* chooses traditional social realist form to place the protagonist as outside the experience of the audience and essentially a victim, TAP deliberately works against this form of representation by involving the protagonist in the re-telling of what is a transparent reconstruction of their own story. TAP is intentionally uncomfortable, precisely because it disrupts the easy relationship of moral outrage and empathy with the intention of precipitating the audience to take a more questioning and conscious response to the space they occupy. The discussion was

intense. Whilst people were willing to listen, there was a divide in the audience in their response. I remember one member of the audience complaining angrily to me that she did not know where she fitted into the narrative, she was so deeply accustomed to a kind of cinema where the fate of the protagonist is mediated by the 'good, the philanthropic' moral centre of the film. Whilst other members of the audience engaged more openly with a debate about the nature of form itself, and if it was possible as Audre Lorde decried to use 'The Master's Tools to Dismantle the Master's House'.

SR: What are your memories or reflections on the convergence in the 1970s and 1980s between the women's movement, film exhibition and emerging feminist audiences? Perhaps you could tell me specifically about the Rio premier of *Doll's Eye*, the filmic event, the audiences, atmosphere, post screening discussion? If you were willing to share that photo of you and Anne Cottringer standing outside the Rio, I'd love to see it.

I think that the strongest thing at the time was the extensive network of distribution and exhibition centres that flourished both here and abroad. The Other Cinema was quite pivotal to this movement. They had a very close relationship with the filmmakers that they distributed and were very proactive in securing exhibition and promoting their films. It is telling to me that Charles Rubinstein who worked at The Other Cinema when they acquired my films then moved on to manage the Rio. The emergence of Cinema of Women and Circles in 1979 created a space for women film makers, this movement was mirrored in major cities across Europe and the United States. The London Women's Film Group was followed by a new regionalism that saw the growth of women's film groups spread outwards to Sheffield, Cardiff, Leeds and across the country creating more opportunity for feminist film production and small-scale exhibition. It was also possible to secure funding both to make and distribute films. The BFI Production Board, headed up by Peter Sainsbury, was a lifeline for funds to both develop scripts and then produce them. *Dolls Eye* received funding from the institute to develop the film script, the final film was then coproduced by the BFI and Channel 4. The Arts Council provided funding to make prints of all my films and the British Council provided support for me to travel with my films to numerous festivals here and abroad.

SR: You mentioned in your email that you find it interesting 'how history has now been packaged, and disseminated in current literature and exhibition', could you expand on that?

JW: When I look back at this time, I am in awe of how much space there was in the system for movement. It's as if everything was thrown in the air for just (as it turns out) a brief moment. This created cracks and fissures where people like me could slip through, and work could be made that was less boxed in more challenging. The natural order of things seemed shaken, there was less surety of what this order should be. In terms of cinema, 'independent film' as represented by the reach of the Independent Film Association, housed everything from Malcom La Grice to Cinema Action. Feminist film makers and Black filmmakers produced an equally diverse range of films which were often programmed together in the network of exhibition venues from the Rio and the Ritzy, to countless regional cinemas, and workshop spaces across the UK. That space has narrowed, the notion of political cinema encapsulated by the work of the Radical Filmmakers Association is separated from avant garde cinema, now to be found in galleries, and the telling of the history is now colonised and canonised in a way which echoes my original experience of the Edinburgh in the late seventies.

SR: You write that TAP was criticised by some in the movement because of its representation of sex work. How do you think both your films stand next to and with feminism's current urgencies?

JW: One of the most shocking events for me was when TAP was scheduled to be shown at Holloway prison. At the last minute a female lawyer enforced the cancellation of the screening as it was said to encourage prostitution. This response was common but not usually revealed as starkly as this. The film often worked to divide audiences. This was in response to the way the construction of the film impacted on the content. The subjects of the film were in on the act and not available to be owned by the audience. This created anger not only because the usually comfortable place of the audience was disrupted but because this was exacerbated as the two subjects of the film were or could possibly be sex workers.

It was noticeable to me that this response happened much less when the film was shown within a socialist feminist context. In this context the films were often programmed with traditional (and problematic) representations of class as expressed through social realist films. This juxtaposition of different ways to represent class, and sex workers as part of the working class, highlighted the need to audiences (especially for socialist feminists who were more receptive to the significance of class) for less patriarchal, paternal and philanthropic approaches to class representation.

In spite of the support structures that enabled independent film to flourish, the sector was overwhelming middle class (with a good smattering of the really wealthy) male and white. Independent film often meaning independently wealthy. These class tensions did not vanish, they were there in the screenings and debates after both films. There was only a small amount of working-class feminist filmmakers or audience members in many of the venues, the most diverse and the most critical of the status quo often coming from the LGBTQ audiences. The emergence of black film makers came more in the eighties via the Workshop Movement with groups like Sankofa and the Black Audio Film Collective. I cannot remember out of all the many screenings of my films ever been programmed with a black British filmmaker. Whereas the films of the time appeared diverse neither the audience nor the makers truly were.

That particular economic and social moment meant that filmmakers like me, from a non-traditional background, had more of a space to make films and there was a security within the status quo for these films to exist and to be taken seriously as a legitimate part of the debate. That space has all but disappeared.

The feminist movement at that time fought for hard-won spaces, these spaces were never truly inclusive, the need to vociferously defend these spaces as chances and opportunities closed down as the fights for gains seemed to be under threat. This reflects the ways in which exclusivity and the policing of boundaries seems to be central in powerful sections of the contemporary feminist movement.

Appendix K: Notes on women's programming at the Rio in the 1980s. Rio Cinema archive

- Publicity - 7:51.
- 6:30. Tape-Slides - 'They told me' 9 mins. by Jean Perse.
'UNTITLED' 4 mins by Jean Perse
- 6:45. INVITATION TO MARILYN 6 19 mins by Jacqui Duckworth km
- 7:00. ~~THE TITE TOP. 3 mins U-Matic~~
CATHERINE ET LA SIRENE. 4 mins Super 8mm Machine
Thoquenne.
- 7:05? TABLE TALK 10 mins 16mm double head. Emma Benck
- # 7:20 DO TITE TOP? 3 mins. U-Matic by ELECTRIC GIRLS
- 7:25. STRANGE LANGUAGE MUSIC TAPE. 11 mins U-Matic Vivacious
Kate Nowaczek and Alka Williams.
- 7:40 LIBERTY, EQUALITY... MATERNITY? 32 mins U-Matic by
Brisell Tapes
- 8:15. FEPTARD NIVES 25 mins U-Matic Bethnal Green Womens
Group
- 8:45. AGAINST THE CURRENT. # U-Matic 15 mins. Jane Harris
- * 9:00. A QUESTION OF SILENCE. .

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Filmography

- A Prayer Before Birth*. dir. Jacqui Duckworth. 1991. United Kingdom. 20mins.
- A Woman's Place*. dir. Liberation Films. 1971. United Kingdom. 32:24mins.
- Amazing Equal Pay Show. The*. dir. The London Women's Film Group. 1974. United Kingdom. 48mins.
- Anne Devlin*. dir. Pat Murphy. 1984. Ireland. 121mins.
- Ben Hur*. dir. William Wyler. 1959. United States. 211mins.
- Blot. The*. dir. Lois Weber. 1921. United States. 94mins.
- Blue, Light. The*. dir. Leni Riefenstahl. 1932. Germany. 92mins.
- Blue Velvet*. dir. David Lynch. 1986. United States. 120mins.
- Brainwashed: Sex-Camera-Power*. dir. Nina Menkes. 2022. United States. 105mins.
- Breaking Ground*. dir. Michelle Deignan. 2013. Ireland. 63 mins.
- Calamity Jane*. dir. David Butler. 1953. United States. 101mins.
- Carry Greenham Home*. dir. Beeban Kidron and Amanda Richardson. 1983. United Kingdom. 69mins.
- Chronicle of Anna Magdalena Bach*. dirs. Danièle Huillet and Jean-Marie Straub. 1968. West Germany/Italy. 94mins.
- Dance, Girl, Dance*. dir. Dorothy Arzner. 1940. United States. 90mins.
- Daughter Rite*. dir. Michelle Citron. 1978. United States. 53mins.
- Daughters of the Dust*. dir. Julie Dash. 1991. United States. 112mins.
- De Cierta Manera / One Way or Another*. dir. Sara Gómez. 1975. Cuba. 77mins.
- Desert Hearts*. dir. Donna Deitch. 1985. United States. 91mins.
- Desk Set. The*. dir. Walter Lang. 1957. United States. 104mins.
- Doll's Eye*. dir. Jan Worth. 1982. United Kingdom. 73mins.
- Dunkirk*. dir. Christopher Nolan. 2017. United Kingdom. 106mins.
- Dyketactics*. dir. Barbara Hammer. 1974. United States. 4mins.
- Expeditions One: Signs of Empire*. dir. Black Audio Collective. 1982. United Kingdom. 26mins.
- Expeditions Two: Images of Nationality*. dir. Black Audio Collective. 1984. United Kingdom. 22mins.
- Feminist Re-Imagings at the Rio, 1980-2020*. dir. Selina Robertson. 2022. United Kingdom. 10mins.

- Four Minute Cut.* dir. Anne Robinson. United Kingdom. 1987. 8mins.
- Freedom.* dir. Yoko Oko. 1970. United States. 1min.
- Fuses.* dir. Carolee Schneemann. 1967. United States. 23mins.
- Gentlemen Prefer Blonds.* dir. Howard Hawks. 1953. 91mins.
- Girlfriends.* dir. Claudia Weill. 1978. United States. 88mins.
- Give us a Smile.* dir. Leeds Animation Workshop. 1983. United Kingdom. 13mins.
- German Sisters. The.* dir. Margarethe von Trotta. 1981. West Germany. 107mins.
- Gold Diggers. The.* dir. Sally Potter. 1983. United Kingdom. 90mins.
- Hackney Women Want More.* dir. Women's Media Resource Project. 1984/5(?). United Kingdom. n.d.
- Hang on a Minute.* dir. Lis Rhodes and Joanna Davis. 1983. United Kingdom. 13mins.
- Hôtel Monterrey.* dir. Chantal Akerman. 1972. Belgium/United States.
- Hour of the Furnaces. The.* dirs. Octavio Getino and Fernando Solanas. 1968. Argentina. 85mins.
- Illusions.* dir. Julie Dash. 1982. United States. 34mins.
- In Six Easy Lessons.* dir. Jacqueline Audry. 1958. France. 96mins.
- India: Matri Bhumi.* dir. Roberto Rossellini. 1959. Italy. 90mins.
- Invisible Adversaries.* dir. VALIE EXPORT. 1976. Austria. 108mins.
- Jeanne Dielman, 23 quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles.* dir. Chantal Akerman, 1975. Belgium/France. 201mins.
- Kristina Talking Pictures.* dir. Yvonne Rainer. 1976. United States. 93mins.
- La Ciénaga.* dir. Lucretia Martel. 2001. Argentina. 103mins.
- Linda Myles Project, The.* dir. Susan Kemp. 2003. United Kingdom. (work in progress).
- Lives of Performers.* dir. Yvonne Rainer. 1972. United States. 90mins.
- Mademoiselle.* dir. Tony Richardson. 1966. France/United Kingdom. 105mins.
- Mädchen in Uniform.* dir. Leontine Sagan. 1931. West Germany. 88mins.
- Maeve.* dir. Pat Murphy and John Davies. 1981. Ireland/United Kingdom. 110mins.
- Millions Like Us.* dir. Sidney Gilliant and Frank Launder. 1943. 103mins.
- My Name is Andrea.* dir. Pratibha Parma. 2022. United States. 92mins.
- My Own Private Idaho.* dir. Gus van Sant. 1991. United States. 104mins.
- Nightcleaners.* dir. The Berwick Street Collective. 1975. United Kingdom. 90mins.
- No Set Type.* dir. Jane Harris. 1985. United Kingdom. 32mins.
- November Moon.* dir. Alexandra von Grote. 1985. West Germany. 108mins.

- On Guard.* dir. Susan Lambert. 1984. Australia. 50mins.
- One Day Off in Hackney.* dir. The One Day Off in Hackney Collective. 1984. 10mins.
- Other Side of Underneath. The.* dir. Jane Arden. 1972. 142mins.
- Out on Tuesday.* 1989-1994. Channel 4. United Kingdom.
- Outrage.* dir. Ida Lupino. 1950. United States. 75mins.
- Parks and Recreation.* 2009-2015. NBC. United States. Open 4 Business Productions, Deedle-Dee Productions, Fremulon, 3 Arts Entertainment, Universal Television.
- Penthesilia: Queen of the Amazons.* dirs. Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen. 1974. United Kingdom. 99mins.
- Projectionism.* dir. Sarah Wood. 2022. United Kingdom. 12mins.
- Rapunzel Let Down Your Hair.* dir. The London Women's Film Group. 1978. United Kingdom. 78mins.
- Reassemblage.* dir. Trinh T. Minh-ha. 1982. United States. 40mins.
- Re-Grouping.* dir. Lizzie Borden. 1976. United States. 80mins.
- Revolt of Mamie Stover. The.* dir. Raoul Walsh. 1956. United States. 92mins.
- Riddles of the Sphinx.* dirs. Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen, 1977. United Kingdom. 90mins.
- Rosa Luxembourg.* dir. Margarethe von Trotta, 1986. West Germany. 122mins.
- Sambizanga.* dir. Sarah Maldoror. 1972. Angola. 97mins.
- Second Awakening of Christa Klages. The.* dir. Margarethe von Trotta. 1978. West Germany. 93mins.
- Serious Undertakings.* dir. Helen Grace. 1983. Australia. 27mins.
- She Must Be Seeing Things.* dir. Sheila MacLaughlin. 1987. United States. 95mins.
- Shirin's Wedding.* dir. Helma Sanders-Brahms. 1976. West Germany. 120mins.
- Song of the Shirt.* dirs. Sue Clayton and Jonathan Curling. 1979. United Kingdom. 129mins.
- Strip Searching in Armagh/ Stop Strip Searching.* dir. Derry Film and Video Workshop. 1986. Northern Ireland. 30mins.
- Stud Life.* dir. Campbell X. 2012. United Kingdom. 91mins.
- Suffragette.* dir. Sarah Gavron. 2015. United Kingdom. 106mins.
- Territories.* dir. Isaac Julien. 1984. United Kingdom. 25mins.
- Town Bloody Hall.* dirs. Chris Hegedus & D. A. Pennebaker. 1971. United States. 85mins.
- Taking A Part.* dir. Jan Worth. 1979. United Kingdom. 45mins.
- Three Lives.* dirs. Kate Millett, Louva Irvine and Susan Kleckner. 1971. United States. 70mins.
- Thriller.* dir. Sally Potter. 1979. UK. 34mins.

Vision: From the Life of Hildegard von Bingen. dir. Margarethe von Trotta. 2009. Germany.
111mins.

Women Against the Bill. dir. Esther Ronay. 1972. United Kingdom. (no running time available).

Woman, Are You Satisfied With Your Life? dir. The Tufnell Park Liberation Workshop, 1969.
United Kingdom. 10mins.

