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**THE FILMS OF CHANTAL AKERMAN:
A CINEMA OF DISPLACEMENTS**

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SUMMARY

This thesis attempts to broaden the critical boundaries within which the films of Chantal Akerman have been discussed. First, it extends analysis from Akerman's 70s to her 80s and 90s films. Second, it argues that as well as her gender and aesthetic identities, Akerman's Belgian and Jewish identities should be acknowledged. Finally, it suggests that each of these four identities: woman, independent film-maker, Belgian and Jewish allow her a position of marginality, figured in her films through the trope of 'displacement'.

The structure of the thesis is two-fold: it extends discussion of Akerman's cinema to films not previously considered, and through this extension engages with contemporary issues in film and cultural theory such as female authorship, independent and national, and marginal cinemas. Chapter one 'Woman' and chapter two 'Independent' extend the reading of gender and sexuality and formal and aesthetic innovation in Akerman's cinema. In the first chapter this is done through consideration of the films Golden Eighties (1986) and Nuit et jour (1990), while in the second her short films, video work and work for television are examined.

My third and fourth chapters offer areas of Akerman's work which have not previously been studied. Chapter three, 'Belgian', considers the significance of Akerman's nationality for her film-making while engaging with theories around national cinema. It examines the possibility of a 'Belgian national cinema' and the intersections which arise between this and Akerman's cinema, especially around Toute une nuit (1982). Finally, in my fourth chapter, 'Jewish', I use Histoires d'Amérique (1989) and D'Est (1993) to argue that Akerman's is a 'wandering' cinema, in which she is constantly examining the homelessness and displacement that her Jewishness engenders.

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INTRODUCTION

“What does it matter who is speaking?” (Foucault Author 101)

Michel Foucault's question above, which he borrows from Samuel Beckett, provides a way to introduce the scope and structure of this thesis. Beckett's question is used by Foucault in order to prompt a reflection on the notion of ‘the author’. Like Foucault my starting place in this thesis is with the author, in this case the filmmaker Chantal Akerman. However before Foucault's question can be addressed, it is necessary to introduce the author more fully.

Chantal Akerman was born in Brussels in 1950, of émigré Polish Jewish parents. Early aspirations to be a writer were exchanged, on viewing Jean-Luc Godard's Pierrot le fou (1965), for a career as a film-maker. Akerman spent a year at the Belgian film school INSAS (Institut national supérieur des arts du spectacle et techniques de diffusion), she travelled to Paris, then to New York after making her first short film, Saute ma ville/Blow up my town (1968), Despite her films' constant changes of form and location, evidence of a strong authorial personality remains, and Akerman has produced, since Saute ma ville, one of the most substantial bodies of work in both modernist and women's cinema.

Akerman's most infamous film Jeanne Dielman 23, quai du Commerce 1080 Bruxelles (1975), depicts three days in the life of a housewife who is also a prostitute, played by Delphine Seyrig. Rejecting both linear classical narrative and the conventional use of woman as a seductive presence, Jeanne Dielman offers a film which is shaped by Jeanne's own sense of ritual, time and space. News from Home (1976) extends this film's system of anti-seduction, replacing classical narrative's voyeuristic and fragmented gaze with an intimate and lingering look (the

film consists of a series of long takes of New York with Akerman's voice-over reading letters written to her by her mother). In Les Rendez-vous d'Anna (1978), Aurore Clément plays a (semi-autobiographical?) Belgian film-maker who journeys from Cologne to Paris. Toute une nuit/All Night Long (1982), a 'choreography' around one hot night in Brussels, was followed by Golden Eighties (1986), a post-modern musical. Despite its charm and vitality, the film was not a success, and with Histoires d'Amérique: Food, Family and Philosophy/American Stories (1988), Akerman returned to a more intimate mode of production and a more varied phase in her cinema, in which she has mixed short films with television and video.

A complete filmography (with short synopses) of Akerman's work is available in the appendix. However, for quick reference, the chronological sequence of the films discussed in this thesis is as follows:

1968 Saute ma ville (short)

1972 La Chambre (short)

1973 Le 15/8

Hotel Monterey

1974 Je tu il elle

1975 Jeanne Dielman 23, quai du Commerce 1080 Bruxelles

1976 News from Home

1978 Les Rendez-vous d'Anna

1982 Toute une nuit

1983 L'Homme a la valise (made for television)

Un Jour Pina m'a demandé (documentary for television)

1984 Les Années 80 (pilot film)

J'ai faim j'ai froid (short)

A Family Business (short)

Sloth (short)

Letters Home

1986 Golden Eighties

1988 Histoires d'Amérique: Food, Family and Philosophy

1989 Trois strophes sur le nom de Sacher (video)

1991 Nuit et jour

1992 Le Déménagement (made for television)

1993 D'Est

1994 Portrait d'une jeune fille à la fin des années 60 (made for television)

Within the discipline of film studies, the notion of the director as auteur and as organising principle of a study, has been substantially challenged, especially in the 60s and 70s. It is therefore appropriate to explain briefly the basic premise of this thesis, before moving on to a more detailed examination of its critical and theoretical field and parameters. First, Akerman's working methods and in particular her high degree of control over her films (as already mentioned) give a strong material coherence to her body of films. Second, her gender, nationality and ethnic/cultural specificities reinforce the need for a study of her films. Finally, as I will develop below, whereas her 70s work (especially Jeanne Dielman) has been the focus of substantial feminist work, the rest of her films have been virtually ignored.

Foucault uses the question in the quote at the beginning of this introduction in the context of a reflection on 'the author-function' in Western thought. Shifting the question from a literary to a cinematic context, my premise in this thesis is that, for the films of Chantal Akerman, it matters very much who is speaking. The starting point for my study of her films is therefore emphatically located with her.

The centrality of Akerman, the author, to this thesis is reflected in the fact that each of my four chapters takes as its focus one aspect of her 'identity', thus: (1) Woman, (2) Independent, (3) Belgian and (4) Jewish. 'Woman', 'Belgian' and 'Jewish' are all identities which arise from Akerman's biography, describing her gender, nationality and ethnic/racial affiliations. By contrast, 'Independent' is a position designated by the form and content of her films, thus to her institutional placement. However, though Independence does not arise directly from Akerman's biography, I would suggest that her positions as Woman, Belgian and Jewish, with the difference and otherness which each involves, reinforce her position as an Independent filmmaker.

Foucault describes two levels on which we can think of the "author-function" "description and designation"(106) and this duality also informs the structure of this thesis. Thus my work will begin by 'describing' Akerman's specificity as Female, Belgian, Jewish and an Independent director. My analysis, however, will not be confined to the biographical, instead, I will explore what I argue is 'designated' by the name Akerman: the trope of 'displacement'.

Although I read Akerman's films as illustrations of her gender and sexuality, her national and ethnic/racial affiliations, I also acknowledge that this does not mean that she will necessarily take up these positions. Instead, I would agree with the view of identity outlined by Midi Onodera who writes about her own films:

These films, and the rest of my work, are informed by my perspective as a lesbian, as a woman of colour as a feminist and as a Canadian. However, any work is not dictated by any of these positions. (25)

The distinction which needs to be made in my naming of Akerman as Woman, Independent, Belgian and Jewish, is that between 'informed by' and 'dictated by'. Thus I will argue in this thesis not that Akerman's cinema is necessarily fixed or determined by her identities, but rather that it is informed by them. Another way of thinking of this problematic is offered by Richard Dyer: "What is significant is the authors' material social position in relation to discourse, the access to discourses they have on account of who they are." (Fairies 186). Akerman's four identities allow her access to a variety of 'marginal' positions and I will suggest that the proof of her engagement with these positions lies in the fact that her cinema enacts the multiple displacements which the sum of these identities provide. Displacement occurs on several levels: formal, geographical, institutional, and personal. The discourse of displacement which I will explore manifests itself in terms which will recur in this thesis such as: 'marginal', 'difference', 'otherness', 'liminal', 'in between' and 'minority'.

The Discourse of Displacement

The term 'displacement' acquires several more layers of meaning in relation to Akerman's cinema. Initially the conjunction evokes an inter-textual framework, as the journey from Je tu il elle to Nuit et jour brings with it a shift of our frames of reference as spectators of her films, or of the 'names' which can be applied to Akerman's cinema. As it has developed, Akerman's cinema has traversed forms, styles and subjects, refusing all attempts to encompass it under a single heading. At different moments in this history it can be said to have 'belonged' to the avant-garde, and to North American underground movement, as well as to (European) art cinema, with each position implying a different mode of address, audience and status within cinema history.

Along with institutional displacement, goes a sense of geographical dislocation. If we take the origin of Akerman's cinema as Belgium (the home of her first three works) it can be said that this origin is repeatedly rejected then embraced, as her films find new locations in America and France. Within this map of Akerman's cinema, Belgium emerges as the in-between of America and France, and Akerman's cinema finds itself staged in the cities of New York, Paris and Brussels.

The final space in this discourse of displacement is contained in the four names defined earlier: Woman, Independent, Belgian, Jewish. The signifier 'Chantal Akerman' is quadruply displaced, with each quarter of her name including her as a part of a marginal discourse. For example, woman has for a long time now been conceived of as the binary opposite of man, an arrangement which is premised upon a power struggle which generally constructs man as dominant and woman as subordinate. In her 70s work Akerman addresses the marginality of the female, through making visible that which had previously been unrepresented (and indeed, judged unrepresentable). In Akerman's early films the women are neither glamorised nor used as a seductive presence. Her 80s films however, play with the pleasures of classical narrative, and its figuration of the woman. Thus Golden Eighties presents a world which is emphatically seductive, glamorous and presented to attract. Elsewhere, the female is fragmented, bisexual, performed and, through this pluralising process, displaced from its relative stronghold as the unified other of the masculine.

Reading Akerman as 'Belgian' locates her in a similar position of displacement. As I have previously indicated, Belgium inhabits a space in Akerman's cinema which can be read as the in-between of American and France. But the country itself engenders a sense of division with its three official languages (French, Dutch and

German), and its position as a meeting place of cultures, bordered as it is by four very different countries. The final name for Akerman, Jewish, raises a problem of naming. This fourth identity is derived from identities held by her mother and father - and presumably their parents.

Some thoughts upon the connotations which arise from the intersection of Woman with Independent, Belgian and Jewish are needed. It is tempting to see woman as the most 'important' or 'significant' of Akerman's identities. Such a view is partly critically constructed: woman being the first name to be attached to Akerman's cinema, and one which has been retained. Despite Akerman's protests against such labelling, critics have been reluctant to extend their thinking from the area of sexual attachment to that of national or ethnic affiliation. The theoretical work which bridges these two areas has only recently becoming available. In the collection Nationalisms and Sexualities (Parker, Russo et al, 1992) R. Radhakrishan notes:

If the categories of gender, sexuality, nationality or class neither speak for the totality nor for one another but are yet implicated in one another relationally, how is the historical subject to produce a narrative from such a radical relationship a relationality without recourse? (Parker, Russo et al, 1992: 77-95)

In thesis I have taken the problems observed by Radhakrishan into account, and have aimed, through my conception of the author's name as a description (woman, independent, Belgian, Jew) and a designation (displacement), to accomodate these problems. In order to suggest in more detail how this is accomplished it is appropriate to give an outline of each chapter.

In my first chapter, 'Woman', I consider perhaps the strongest critical 'naming' of Akerman, as a director whose work focuses on the 'female, feminine and feminist'. This first name for Akerman was strongly constructed within the emerging field of feminist film theory, with her work providing the practical illustration of concepts such as 'female authorship', a 'feminist film practice' and a 'female aesthetic'. This first name is associated with, and was based upon, Akerman's 70s films, in particular Jeanne Dielman (1975). My main point of contention in this chapter is with the relative absence of Akerman's 80s and 90s work from feminist film theory. Concentrating on Golden Eighties (1986) and Nuit et jour, (1990) I suggest that both films offer an extension of the feminist film practice engendered in Akerman's 70s work. Both films also allow an extension of the notion of female authorship and address conflicts in feminist film theory, namely, around the gaze and alternative pleasures.

My second chapter, 'Independent', addresses the second dominant part of Akerman's 'name' which is concerned with formal and aesthetic innovation, present in descriptions such as 'minimalist' or 'avant-garde'. It addresses in particular Akerman's short films, videos and work for television, assessing how the inclusion of these works shifts the terms of this naming. As with my first chapter, this second chapter begins with a discussion of how this name has been constructed, and addresses in particular Peter Wollen's assertion that Akerman's work occurs 'in between' two avant gardes, which he defines as European and American. Here again, I contend that there has been a lack of attention to Akerman's 80s and 90s work, and that this name associates Akerman's cinema with 70s counter-cinema. Once Akerman's later work is considered within this naming process, so what emerges is her insistence upon 'Independence'. It is this notion of Independence

which this chapter then addresses, questioning the possibility of Independence in the cinema, examining the historical field of film-making which it describes and charting how Independence has shifted over the past twenty years. Independence is analysed as containing various positions, including the singular, the marginal, difference and exclusion. After Akerman's initial difference is established, her oeuvre is examined for the positions it takes up.

My third and fourth chapters suggest new names for Akerman, that is: 'Belgian' and 'Jewish'. My 'Belgian' chapter begins with the question of why Akerman's cinema has never been read as Belgian, that is, through her national identity. After providing evidence of this identity, it is then suggested that the reason for this omission lies in two aspects: the lack of critical visibility of Belgian cinema in general, and Akerman's gradual move towards France, which obscures her Belgian origins. I then examine what happens once we open up the flow between Akerman's cinema and Belgian cinema. My discussion of Belgian cinema leads me into debates around national cinemas, and the question of whether we can define a 'Belgian national'. Meanwhile attention to Akerman as Belgian prompts a consideration of Akerman's ambivalence, towards nationality as well as of the metaphoric locations of home and transit. Having explored the notion of Belgian national cinema, I turn to Toute une nuit which, I suggest, can be seen as Belgian in two ways. First, the film engages with fragments of the text of Belgianicity, defined as the 'minor' (associated with the work of Henri Storck) and the magical (associated with the work of André Delvaux). Second, it offers a vision of the Bruxellois, or of the 'locality' of Belgianness. My final discussion, almost a post-script in this chapter, addresses Akerman's shift towards France and Paris which was first raised in my second chapter. Having opened up the flow between Belgian cinema and Akerman's cinema, I then discuss the way in which Akerman constructs her relationship to Paris as a displaced person.

Even less critically visible than Akerman's Belgian nationality have been her Jewish ties, which I examine in my final chapter. Though Akerman mentions her parents' Jewish origins in early interviews, critics have rarely pursued the significance of this for her film-making. Akerman has also suggested that her films become 'more and more' Jewish, and it is this premise which this chapter follows. I then proceed to re-reading Akerman's 70s films through a Jewish frame. Jeanne Dielman in particular emerges as an illustration of Akerman's engagement with 'Jewishness'. However, once we move into the 80s and 90s work this initial engagement becomes increasingly visible, first in Histoires d'Amérique (1989) and second in D'Est (1994). It is these films which I analyse in the second half of this chapter. As I explore what each film reveals of Akerman's attitude to her Jewishness.

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CHAPTER ONE: WOMAN

Jeanne Dielman, 23 Quai du Commerce-1080 Bruxelles (1975) is the most important film to première at this year's Filmex and the best feature that I have ever seen made by women.” (Marsha Kinder, 248)

I'm not making women's films, I'm making Chantal Akerman's films.
(Chantal Akerman) (Qtd. in Martin, 24)

[Hitchcock's *Marnie*]...Let's try, in theory nothing prevents us, to imagine the contrary, 'Chantal Akerman's *Bobby*.'...(Raymond Bellour, Enunciation 67)

Introduction

In her 1979 article 'In the Name of Feminist Film Criticism' B. Ruby Rich suggests that essentially for:

women working in film-making and film criticism today...[w]hile our work is no longer invisible, and not yet unspeakable, it still goes dangerously unnamed. (Rich, 209)

Given the history of invisibility, absence and erasure which women have undergone in all spheres of public life, Rich's words pinpoint the fact that the feminist project will always involve a certain amount of 'naming'. Naming' here implies the designation of categories, descriptions, critical and theoretical placings, which thereby enable the unnamed to become visible.¹ In the article which follows her observation above, Rich criticises not the act of naming itself, but the lack of names

which have been used to describe categories such as, feminist film practice. Later in her article Rich gives Akerman's film Jeanne Dielman 23, quai du Commerce 1080 Bruxelles² (1975) (hereafter Jeanne Dielman) as an example of a film which has been mis-named: “. . . a strategy of patriarchy” (Rich Name 214). After citing various reviews of Jeanne Dielman which illustrate this mis-naming Rich suggests that, in fact, we need new names before we can fully appreciate the importance of films such as Jeanne Dielman (the other example she uses is Yvonne Rainer's Film About a Woman Who... (1974)³).

This thesis aims to re-examine the names which have been given to Chantal Akerman's cinema, and must thus be seen in the light of Rich's comments above. Rich suggests that Jeanne Dielman has been mis-named; my main contention in this thesis, however, will be that it is in fact Akerman herself who has been mis-named, and largely because of this film. In this first chapter I will be tracing the name of ‘woman’ through Akerman's cinema. While I acknowledge that ‘woman’ has been one of the most important names in the critical placing of Akerman, I will also suggest that it is through the dominance of this name that Akerman has been mis-named with two consequences:

- 1) Akerman has remained entwined with the Jeanne Dielman moment of her cinema. Thus there has been little feminist engagement with any of her 1980s or 1990s work.
- 2) The possibility of other names has been obscured.

If this chapter attempts to correct the first tendency - considering not simply Jeanne Dielman and Je tu il elle (1974) but also Golden Eighties (1986) and Nuit et jour

(1991) - my later three chapters will offer other names for Akerman's cinema, these being: Independent, Belgian, and Jewish.

The juxtaposition of the three quotes above acts out a process of designation and then rejection of certain names for Akerman's cinema. Marsha Kinder's words imply that Jeanne Dielman should be placed within the category of 'women's cinema'; Akerman's words refuse that placement, and she insists instead on her place within auteur cinema. Finally, Bellour's comment denies Akerman's right to 'auteur-ship' defining her, rather, as the antithesis of Hitchcock, the meta-auteur. Through these quotes the path of this chapter is also mapped out, as I will use each category: 'woman' 'auteur' and 'contrary' or 'non-auteur' to chart the critical reception of Akerman's 70s work, and the construction of her name.

The three phrases (or phases): women's cinema, Chantal Akerman's cinema and 'contrary' will form the dialectical strands of this chapter. Beginning with Kinder's quotation I will explore the early critical construction of both Akerman and feminist film theory, largely in the Anglo-American context, through the film Jeanne Dielman. As an ur-text for 70s film feminism (that is, both theory and practice) Jeanne Dielman becomes emblematic for an understanding of the variety of debates, proposals, films, writings and, in short, 'feminisms' of the period. In my discussion of this film I will focus in particular upon the emergence and designation of the term 'women's cinema', establishing its critical, historical and cultural boundaries.

When it comes to the second and third of the quotes above concerning Akerman's auteur status, asserted by herself and denied by Bellour, our cultural context needs to shift from the Anglo-American to the French. Akerman's announcement of her position as an auteur is conducted in the face of gender 'ghettoisation'. This gesture

of self-assertion acquires full significance once one considers the discursive nature of the author - outlined by Foucault as the 'author-function'⁴ - as well as a sense of the cinematic process as a complex power and decision-making system. As I will discuss later, being labelled a woman film-maker within a French/Belgian context would deny Akerman access to certain economic, technological, critical and institutional spaces. By contrast, the category of auteur suggests a relative autonomy, an artistic respectability, and a historical ubiquity; the implication is that while 'women's cinema' might date, or go out of fashion, 'auteur cinema' is timeless.

The frame of reference is in fact complicated for Akerman, and it is necessary to address the term **auteur/author** in all its various manifestations, and **female authorship** as constructed by feminist critics. Bellour's conception of the auteur descends from and expands upon the theories of authorship developed in the late 50s/early 1960s, by the writers of the journal Cahiers du cinéma. Cahiers' conception of the director as the source of all meaning, and thus as a distanced creative presence, turned a cinema industry into an art form, thereby allowing the first films of Godard, Truffaut, Chabrol and others to be read within such a logic. Taken up by Andrew Sarris in America, and filtered through journals such as Movie in England, 'la politique des auteurs' became 'the auteur theory' with the shift in terms reflecting the conversion from a polemical tool, to a whole new way of conceiving of the cinema.⁵

As film studies gained academic respectability, taking on board psychoanalytic, linguistic and semiotic theories, so the romantic vision of authorship had to undergo a similar complication. With the work of Peter Wollen⁶ authorship became a structure which it was up to the critic to identify. Then, following the attempt by

Christian Metz to define a film 'language',⁷ the author become an 'enunciator'. It is at this point that Bellour takes up the theory, in his article "Hitchcock, The Enunciator".

The term enunciator as I use it marks both the person who possesses the right of speech within the film and the source (instance) toward which the series of representations is logically channelled back.(Bellour Alternation 94)

Once again the auteur had undergone a shift, as the romantic vision which it had once referenced was replaced by a more theoretically dedicated stance, in which the critic had to prove that the director translated his (at this stage the auteur was emphatically male) desire through the text. For Bellour then, Hitchcock's auteur status resided in the way that his films circulated his desire, via various textual and formal mechanisms, which Bellour claims as Hitchcock's 'signature system'(Enunciation 80). 'Auteur' here comes to signify a particular relation to classical narrative and to the cinematic apparatus. More importantly, the auteur is defined here within a purely male, heterosexual, classical narrative enunciative system, and it is partly because of this strict definition that Akerman is labelled as Hitchcock's 'contrary'.

During its journey from Cahiers to Bellour, authorship was consistently defined as male territory: delineated by male critics and applied to the work of male directors. This situation can be partly explained by the relative lack of female input in film studies. It could thus be suggested that the absence of female film critics compounded the lack of critical or theoretical work on women directors. It is not surprising that the first feminist interventions into theories of authorship did not occur until the mid-70s, when the first generation of 70s feminists was graduating.

This late entry into the auteur debate meant that feminist film critics missed out on the 'naive' phase of authorship, and had arrived at the time of the greatest challenge to authorship. They were plunged immediately into defining systems of female authorship, a term which has come to indicate the presence of a female desire in the text. Female authorship, as a way of 'authenticating' films as 'women's' films, will be discussed in detail later in this chapter.

Bellour's use of the term auteur indicates the dual register of the phrase, signifying as it does both a textual and a critical positioning. In other words, Hitchcock is constructed as the meaning-maker of his films, and the command which this signifies is used to sell his films as 'Hitchcock' films. It is precisely such a theoretical/critical or inter-textual/extra-textual duality which structures the differences between the terms 'female authorship' and 'auteur cinema'. In making these claims I am referring specifically to the critical usage of each of the terms. Typically, when female authorship is mentioned a woman director's enunciative system is being sought. Meanwhile, 'auteur cinema' has more relation to what Foucault's "author-function", meaning the name of the author constructed through discourse.

In her work Akerman can be seen to combine these two meanings of the term auteur. First, as an emerging film-maker Akerman was keen to claim her films as her own within 'classic' auteur cinema. Second her early films were also the subject of attempts to theorise female authorship, a task which is set for this chapter too. Finally, as she moved, in the 80s, towards France she became part of a third designation, which can be roughly termed European auteur cinema. As a critical designation, which adheres to Foucault's 'author-function' this third placement returns Akerman, as it does theory, to the 'naive', creative artist position so

championed by Cahiers in the late 1950s. In designating this position for Akerman I mean also to indicate shifts in her films' style and content. However, once Akerman is placed within the model of European auteur cinema, the question remains as to the place of the female in this ultimately male model of authorship.

In order to fully comprehend the reasons for and implications of each of the three 'namings' contained in the opening quotes, it is necessary to give a detailed account of a number of cultural contexts. For the moment though I would draw attention to the cultural differences between Kinder, Akerman and Bellour, as well as Akerman's position 'in between' two particular contexts: the Anglo-American and the French. Marsha Kinder's comments on Jeanne Dielman need to be read in the context of 1970s American, as well as British feminist film criticism. My main point is, though, that the juxtaposition of Kinder and Bellour brings into contact Anglo-American and French thought. It is between these two different contexts (albeit with some cross-fertilisation)⁸ that Akerman's cinema circulates, and will thus be discussed.

The article from which Marsha Kinder's words are drawn was just one of several which placed Jeanne Dielman at the centre of debates around such terms as 'women and cinema', 'women's cinema' and 'feminist film practice'.⁹ I use the plural 'debates' in order since indicate that more than one configuration of 'women and cinema' is necessary, since these debates were operating on a variety of levels, each of which had a different aim in mind and promoted different means of achieving that aim. Given the multi-dimensional texture of the 70s feminist moment, and my own need to retain a focus on Akerman, it will be possible to give only a brief account. However, in order to delineate each of these debates, several differences can be indicated:

1. cultural: between England, America and France/Belgium,
2. institutional: between the critics who came out of the women's movements and those from academia,
3. professional: between those film-makers such as Shirley Clarke¹⁰ and Agnès Varda¹¹ who had been making films before the women's movement (and often had a different agenda to the 'newer' feminists), and those who came out of or after the women's movement,
4. conceptual: between those critics who promoted a separatist women's cinema, built upon a 'feminine aesthetic' and those who demanded a more complex engagement with the (newly theorised) 'cinematic apparatus'.
5. social: between women: racial, religious, ethnic, sexual, generational etc, differences.

Having separated out these various strains, I must of course acknowledge that overlaps exist between each of the groups. More importantly though one 'grand' intersection occurred around Jeanne Dielman, which somehow seemed to fulfil aspects of the desires, aims and needs of each of the separate groups listed above. The film will therefore be the focus for my discussion of feminism and film in the 70s in all its guises. Equally I will use the process of emergence of the term 'women's cinema' to refract the multiple facets of women and film at the time.

1: Topographies of Women's Cinema - the Female, the Feminine, the Feminist

Each of the terms above: female, feminine, feminist, will be used to suggest diverging currents in the larger sphere of women's cinema. Before exploring these terms, it should be noted that one large division informs the debates of the time, namely that of the belief in, or resistance to, the concept of essentialism. More

recently Judith Mayne has noted: “virtually any mention of ‘real women’... tends to inspire a by-now-familiar recitation of the ‘dangers’ of essentialism ”(Keyhole 90). However, the premise of all female interventions in the cinema has been that the position of women is an unequal one, with men having control over film-making and therefore over image-making, as well as over film theory and thus the interpretation of those images. Therefore, given the first objective of all feminist attention was to reveal the female, it is not surprising that there has been a tendency to lean on ‘essentialist’ models which affirm difference, and look for the ‘true’ female in the cinema.

At the same time, British feminist film theorists strongly rejected cinéma vérité film-making which, so Claire Johnston believed: “promotes...a passive subjectivity at the expense of analysis” (Counter-Cinema 29) and insisted that women's cinema must work with narrative - a project which replaced an essentialist with a theoretical perspective. It is in the light of such contradictory demands that one can come to understand the complex reception of Jeanne Dielman, which through its content adheres to many essentialist tenets, such as the promotion of a ‘women-only’ space in the cinema, yet through its form engages directly with the marks of ‘male’ enunciation, allowing for the theoretical articulation of the female.

Jeanne Dielman's importance goes beyond its contextual connections however, and it will be used here for its particular polemical power. The film manages to combine two dominant yet opposing schools of film feminism: the documentary, consciousness-raising impulse which is manifest in the desire for collectivity and autonomy; and the more theoretically committed impulse which is interested in formal innovation. Through this paradoxical combination, Jeanne Dielman becomes a limit-case for the conflicts inherent in the notions of first a ‘feminist film practice’

(juxtaposing collectivity and women's cinema with independence and auteur cinema) and, second, feminist film theory where documentary, cinéma vérité and 'truth' are balanced against narrative and 'demystification'¹². Before I begin my discussion of the female, feminine and feminist it is necessary to introduce 'woman' to the cinema.

Mapping the field of 'Woman'

As early as 1949 (before she declared herself a feminist) Simone de Beauvoir was asking:

If her functioning as a female is not enough to define woman, if we decline also to explain her through 'the eternal feminine', and if nevertheless we admit, provisionally, that women do exist, then we must face the question: what is a woman? (46)

In response to this question feminist critics more than twenty years later offered a variety of answers: "By woman I mean a fictional construct" (de Lauretis Alice 5) "Within a sexist ideology and a male-dominated cinema, woman is presented as what she represents for man." (Johnston Counter-Cinema 25) In spite of the variety of responses, the descriptive terms used: "fictional", and, "what she represents for man", hinge upon the same sense of negativity.

As I have previously indicated, western analyses of woman's condition converge upon one factor: her inequality, whether in relation to her access to power, to government, to work, to the economy or, more specifically, to the "determining male gaze" (Mulvey, Visual 11) upon which western vision and cinema are constructed. The first feminist theorists confronted with this inequality of woman

began to de-construct that term, in order to show it up as itself a construction. Thus, 'woman' should be recognised as an umbrella term which encompasses the categories of: sex, gender, sexual practice and desire. It is through each of these four registers that the modality of woman is filtered and gradually accumulates meaning. The key difference in these registers is that between sex and gender. The division of these two terms originates in a desire to dislodge the stability of the 'biology is destiny' argument. Radical American feminists such as Kate Millet or Susan Brownmiller offered, in their 1970s work, a critique of 'masculinity' and 'femininity', suggesting that these were simply socially constructed categories and not, in fact, 'natural' oppositions (Millet, 1970. Brownmiller, 1975). Following these writers, if sex is meant to indicate male or female as biological categories, then gender is meant to refer to the cultural construction of these categories, and the resulting descriptions of femininity and masculinity. Thus, Judith Butler can describe gender as: "the cultural meanings that the sexed body assumes." (6)

It is with a similar impulse of exposure and analysis that feminism turned to the cinema. Four main positions were offered to women in the cinema: as representations, as directors, as part of the production team, and as spectators. The first academic feminist film studies undertook to make visible the formerly invisible or erased, uncovering the work of women film-makers,¹³ theorising the act of female spectatorship¹⁴ and equally placing themselves into the male dominated film theory. (Flitterman Woman. Desire) (Bergstrom, Enunciation) The first 'women and cinema' books however were concerned with women as representations: Marjorie Rosen's Popcorn Venus (1973) Molly Haskell's From Reverence to Rape and Joan Mellen's Women and their Sexuality in the New Film (both in 1974). The conclusion these books draw from their analyses of women as representations is neatly summed up by Haskell's title. In the films of male directors, women were

either treated as mysterious essences - what de Beauvoir refers to as the “eternal feminine”- or they became (sex) objects of masculine desire.

If woman as image was dealt with by these first, largely sociological studies of women in the cinema, woman as director was focused upon in two ways: through the burgeoning feminist film theory and through a developing feminist film practice. The years 1972-74 saw the first ‘women and film’ festivals and events: the New York International Festival of Women's Films (June 1972), a Women's Film Event, Edinburgh (72), Toronto and Washington Women's Film Festivals (73), the Chicago Festival (74) and the Paris Feminist Film Festival (74). All in all then, by the time of Jeanne Dielman's release the female, feminine and feminist were firmly on the critical agenda.

The Female

There were no women's films and everyone was calling for a woman's film... People would call the Newsreel office and say ‘Do you have any women's films?’ So we had to decide what was the next film to make and it was clear we would have to make a women's film¹⁵

As Judy Smith's states above, when the second wave of feminism began in the late 1960s “there were no women's films”. This is not to suggest that no women had made films for some had; rather, Smith is referring to the lack of application, and appropriation of the term ‘women's films’. Such a claim returns us to B. Ruby Rich and her ‘naming’ and implies that we should recognise the discursive nature of the term ‘women's cinema’: as a cinema which belongs to women it must first be claimed by women to become a term of reference. With this in mind, there is a very

strong sense in which 'women's cinema' really does only exist from the 1970s onwards.

In its earliest application, 'women's cinema' should be read as 'cinema from the women's movement'. Such a classification refers us to the fact that these films were made by those "moved" as Jan Rosenberg notes, "by social and political not aesthetic impulses" (19). Wanting to create a space for women to emerge from their imposed position of invisibility, silence and absence these women seized the visibility and the voice that the medium of film allowed. In labelling this first trend 'female' I am highlighting the emphasis which is placed upon gender issues, the sex of the directors and the subjects of the films, as well as the tendency to homogenise. 'Female' can also be distinguished from 'feminine' as less essentialist and from 'feminist' as militant rather than ideological.

The main project of the women who turned to film was that of consciousness-raising, promoting women's issues and allowing women a space to speak. As part of an activist current, the films which emerged were aiming for a 'truthful' image of woman, which would make visible what was formerly invisible, and generally avoid or critique the patriarchal, whether that was conceived as woman's place in society or in mainstream narrative fiction.¹⁶ Films were typically documentaries or *cinéma vérité* style accounts, with a strong avoidance of fiction and narrative, and a sense that 'truth' was guaranteed by the frankness of these forms. The women's movement politics of 'togetherness' and 'sisterhood' were echoed in the frequent insistence on the need to work in collectives, which challenged capitalist and sexist cinematic practice,¹⁷ and to exhibit and distribute the films independently, often to 'women-only' spaces accompanied by the production team and followed by (or constructed around) discussions. Many of these films were about women's issues such as health

(We're Alive, California Institute for Women Video, 1975; Self Health, San Francisco Women's Health Collective, 1974) or women's lives, (Growing Up Female, Julia Reichert/Jim Klein, 1971) in all cases areas which were seen to be excluded from dominant cinema.

Although these collective models can be seen as positive, there is also a sense in which this kind of challenge to the hierarchical, patriarchal cinematic model, could also become a re-affirmation of women's exclusion from dominant cinema. And while collectivity and marginality underlined the film-makers' agenda, such practices were also dictated by economic and institutional factors. Finally, it should be acknowledged that collective work did not originate solely in the women's movement in the 70s; instead, it has a long and varied international history.

An examination of some aspects of the history of collective film-making reveals other implications for practice. In England, for instance, collectivity can be traced back to the GPO film unit in the 30s. In the late 60s, many of those wanting to make political cinema formed militant collectives, with equality and lack of hierarchy as their main goals. One example is the Dziga Vertov group formed by Godard and others in France.¹⁸ This particular heritage of political collectivism connects women's cinema with counter-culture movements in America, the political left in England, and May '68 in France¹⁹. Godard's collective activity is especially significant in the present context, since the Dziga Vertov group embodies an overt challenge to the traditions of authorship, traditions which Godard had himself played a part in constructing. Returning to the women's movement with this challenge in mind, women's collective film-making can be seen as a reaction against male auteur cinema. Thus, one strong belief of the women's movement film-makers,

through which they would clash with film feminists, is the rejection of the concept of a 'women's auteur cinema'.

Jeanne Dielman and the Female

Initially Jeanne Dielman connects with its time due to its mode of production. In using an all-women crew, Jeanne Dielman answers women's cinema demands for a cinema made 'by' a collective of women.²⁰ Although the film addresses narrative and not documentary forms, and although Akerman is ultimately still 'in charge' of Jeanne Dielman, the chosen subject (a housewife), and the methods of production mean that the sense of the film as 'female' necessarily widens.

Through its focus on housework the film also shares some of the 'authenticating' or essentialising aspects of the women's movement films. 1975, the year in which Jeanne Dielman was made, was the first International Women's Year. It was also the year of a series of demonstrations for wages for housework in Britain, Italy, Canada and the United States (all on May 3rd),²¹ and these need to be seen in the context of feminism's sustained battle for equal rights for women. Housework differs from the earlier struggles for the vote, legal abortions, contraception or child-care, since it inserts many women's daily occupation, formerly seen as a woman's 'natural' occupation, into the category of paid work and thereby demands recognition of their status as workers. These demands are reflected in the cultural sphere by an insistence on the importance of activities typically labelled as 'female', and connects with the wider feminist claim that 'the personal is political'.

Despite the apparent coincidences between the women's cinema inspired by the women's movement and that practised by Chantal Akerman, a closer examination

yields evidence that the relationship between Akerman and the women's movement is not at all clear-cut. She has said:

I'm not interested in working collectively in the sense that word is usually used. In collaboration, yes. At the time of Jeanne Dielman...there were many things against women in movies, so I wanted to show that you could make a movie with only women. (qtd. in Indiana, 59)

My earlier account of collectivity creates our first sense of 'women's cinema' as, among other things, an opposition to 'auteur cinema'. The fact that such an opposition suggests that women's cinema should not be an auteur cinema may explain why Akerman rejects women's cinema as well as, ironically, why Bellour rejects Akerman as auteur; it may also explain why Akerman's work was often rejected by the women's movement, Angela Martin notes: "[T]wo women critics who could have interviewed [Akerman] declined the offer, one of them saying that her films were marginal to the interests of the women's movement" (25). However, Akerman was undoubtedly influenced by the movement, which also praised aspects of her cinema.

Although she rejected 'women's cinema' in 1979, and the idea of collectivity in her 1983 interview (above), previously Akerman reported how, after screenings of Saute ma ville (1971, Oberhausen festival) and Je tu il elle (Brussels and Nice festivals, 1974), she sent a script to the Belgian Ministry of Culture, who agreed to give her some production money partly for the 'feminist' content of that script: "at that point everybody was talking about women" so it was "the right time".²² Equally, in an interview with Camera Obscura in November 1976, Akerman asserts about Jeanne Dielman: "I do think it's a feminist film" (Bergstrom Jeanne Dielman 118).

Meanwhile, Jayne Loader's review article of Jeanne Dielman can be seen to express some of the complexity of the reception of the film:

The sections of Jeanne Dielman which examine in minute detail the function and practice of house-work and the role of the traditional mother within the repressive structure of the nuclear family are among the finest examples of feminist cinema yet. (12)

The representation of women's work, and the portrayal of the female condition are therefore praised, however, Loader continues:

I only wish Akerman had been content with this magnificent and unique achievement rather than succumbing to the demands of the traditional narrative film form that requires a bang-up ending and the culture that requires a neatly packaged and thoroughly acceptable message. In this case: killing is good for you. (12)

Further analysis of Loader's article reveals that it is the formal, narrative aspects of Jeanne Dielman which she objects to, in other words, I would argue, the fact that Akerman is interested in issues to do with the 'feminine' and 'feminist' rather than simply the 'female'. In more concrete terms, the places where the suture between Akerman and the women's movement come apart are those where collective clashes with auteur cinema and cinéma vérité meets narrative. The metaphor of 'in-between-ness' seems the most apt to describe Akerman's relation to collective and to auteur work. Jeanne Dielman can be seen as the moment when the two paradigms of women's cinema and auteur cinema met, and she was allowed to exist momentarily in both critical spaces.

The Feminine

I will focus in this section on the move to theorise a realm of the feminine which exists apart from, and in opposition to, the masculine and patriarchal, as well as to the female (as previously considered) and the feminist. I will indicate the differences which exist especially in the French cultural sphere, and will consider Jeanne Dielman's figuring of the feminine.

French women, motivated by the events of May '68 as much as by the upsurge of the women's movement, followed the Anglo-American model of women's groups in the early 1970s. The documentary/cinéma vérité impulse existed as much in France as elsewhere, with women's groups being formed, festivals held and films made: for example Mais qu'est-ce qu'elles veulent?/What do they want (Celine Serreau, 1978). Soon though women abandoned overtly feminist collective film work, in order to pursue film-making using the dominant model in France: that of European auteur cinema, a model of enormous importance for Akerman especially from the 1980s onwards. I want to focus for the moment on the way in which this denial of the feminist is problematised by the reverence for and prevalence of the 'feminine,' in the work of groups such as "Psych et Po"²³ and prominent French feminist (at least initially) writers Julia Kristeva, Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray. Though each of those named address the problems of the feminine in terms of literature and not film, their work was to have resonance in Anglo-American feminist film studies and it is for this reason that I am including them.

The theories of the body proposed by the three writers above are separatist, and seen by many as essentialist. If the women's movement's solution to the inequality of women was to raise their profile and by extension status, Cixous, Kristeva and

Irigaray on the other hand resist any notion of equality to posit instead a valorisation of woman's pure difference. In this shift from 'female' to 'feminine' the strong homogenising impulse means the 'woman' is constructed through difference to man, while there is little if any sense of, for example, social or ethnic differences between women. There is however an important lesbian component particularly in the work of Luce Irigaray.²⁴

The insistence on the significance of sexual difference is unique in a French climate which has largely dismissed any theory or practice which carries the distinction 'women's' or 'female' and, importantly (after the early 1980s) 'feminist'. French film theory is male dominated, and it offers little space for a consideration of gender and how it might produce differences. Also, as I will discuss in more detail in my second chapter, the 'politics of identity' which have occupied Anglo-American critics over the past ten years have, in France, been relatively absent. Instead of considerations of Lesbian, Gay, or Black cinemas, French film criticism tends to condone an auteur model of film-making. In order to survive in the French film industry women directors have therefore had to drop (or at best tone down) feminist allegiances to affirm their authorship.

In its concentration upon the rituals and gestures which make up one woman's life, Jeanne Dielman could be said to be close to many of the French feminists' work. While Anglo-American feminists sought out a separate and equal female tradition, many French feminists insisted that this would only be found in the gaps and margins of masculine discourse. Believing that woman's difference should be seen in terms of both sexuality and language, Hélène Cixous developed the notion of 'écriture féminine' which, she believes, can subvert the masculine logic. 'Ecriture féminine' is described as: "an erotic, fluid syntax and new images, puns and

absences' which will 'release women's bodies from existing representations'.(Humm, 195) or, in Cixous' own words: "Write! Writing is for you, you are for you; your body is yours, take it.'(qtd. in Humm, 198). Julia Kristeva, meanwhile, rejects any association of masculine and feminine with man and woman and suggests that the place of sexual difference is the 'semiotic'. In order for true expression to take place, whether for men or women, there must be a return to the pre-symbolic world of semiotics. Like Cixous, Kristeva uses the word jouissance. Translated literally, this term refers to female sexual pleasure. Both writers seem to use the word to indicate pleasures which exist outside of the symbolic order, in the realm of the feminine. Translated into film theory, the writings of Kristeva and Cixous offer one way of describing what has in other places been referred to as a 'female aesthetic'.

Drawing from Kristeva's belief that historical, linear time is masculine, and that feminine time is cyclical and monumental,²⁵ it is possible to see the structure of Jeanne Dielman as, in some sense, 'feminine'. Through the concentration on housework and the routine this imposes upon Jeanne's life, the film involves us in the endless cycle of Jeanne's minutes, hours and days. Though the film does have a certain classical structure: a beginning, a climax and end, its form encourages its spectator to experience it minute by minute, paying attention to the cyclical, to the significance of small details, rather than to any narrative line.

The form of Jeanne Dielman will be discussed in more detail later. However, in order to elucidate further its feminine possibilities one can draw from Cixous. If the structure of the film discourages the linear, then it is possible to see the film's images as concerned with 'writing the body' of Jeanne. Throughout Jeanne Dielman Jeanne is placed in the centre of the frame; we do not cross a space unless she

crosses it, we do not enter a space unless she enters it. It is with Jeanne, the way her body fills and moves through space that the film's interest lies. Equally, the close attention to gesture and to the movement of the body in space shifts the emphasis away from narrative progression, to a world of movement, space and bodies.

I have introduced Cixous and Kristeva into the discussion of Jeanne Dielman not simply because the film has often been interpreted with reference to their work, (Longfellow, 1989) but also because Akerman has frequently spoken of her films using the phrase: 'la jouissance du voir': When I saw *Hotel Monterey* again this morning, I really thought it was an erotic film. I felt that way - *la jouissance du voir*. (Bergstrom Jeanne 121)

This term has been aptly translated by Sandy Flitterman-Lewis as "an erotics of vision unhampered by the strictures of voyeuristic definition". (Flitterman-Lewis Differently 21) In using such a phrase, Akerman is referencing a very specifically feminine pleasure, yet she also places herself in the territory of female essentialism. Talk of écriture féminine, jouissance and erotics inscribes Jeanne Dielman in a position of pure difference. It will be the project of my final section on the 'feminist' to construct a way of thinking about these qualities which avoids this essentialism, explaining them through a more theoretically committed model.

The Feminist

The documentaries which came out of the women's movement offered an initial feminist alternative to dominant cinema, whilst equally providing a consolidating space. However, film feminism's ambivalent attitude to narrative and its pleasures - both of which are rejected by the women's movement films - is revealed in the fact that, soon, feminists were calling for a return to "the entertainment film" a phrase

used by Claire Johnston (Counter-Cinema 31) to refer to classical Hollywood cinema. With this in mind, Molly Haskell seemed to be voicing the feelings of many film feminists when she wrote: The time has come to take the insights yielded by these documentaries and to enlarge upon them, to create imaginary worlds with fictional characters and boundaries.²⁶ Haskell's advice, given the same year that Jeanne Dielman was being made, and therefore only a year before it was first shown, serves as a prophetic introduction of the film to the debates of the time.

I have illustrated how Jeanne Dielman can be seen to draw from the early female and feminine currents, with its production process, its emphasis upon housework and a woman's time and space; but to this 'more real' content the film adds a radical critique and re-working of the dominant classical narrative form. Thus, having suggested areas of influence in which Jeanne Dielman can be seen to fit with many of the women's movement ideas, it must be admitted that the film sits more easily alongside the theoretical strands of feminism of the time. With these points in mind, Jeanne Dielman will be used to illustrate feminist film theory's alternative take on the phrase 'women's cinema'.

Having argued that 'women's cinema' is a term which comes into usage with the first films from the women's movement of the late 1960s, I would also suggest that once 'women's cinema' acquires 'theoretical' overtones it is superseded by 'feminist film practice'.²⁷ Along with this shifting of names, the onus upon women as auteurs offers another challenge to the way the term 'women's cinema' has been previously defined. The notion of the auteur, with its implications of individual creativity and the individualising which any analysis of female authorship entails, necessarily challenges the more 'collective' notion of women's cinema. With these points in

mind 70s feminist film theory can be seen to be torn between constructing a coherent (and therefore homogenised) field of women's cinema and exploring the work of individual filmmakers. It is not until the 80s and 90s that 'women's cinema' is fully abandoned, and the differences between women are pulled into focus.

If woman as on-screen representation traditionally found herself important only in terms of male desire, the feminist critic searching for her place in film theory was left in a similarly marginal position. By the time Claire Johnston, Laura Mulvey, Sandy Flitterman-Lewis or Janet Bergstrom turned their attention to the cinema, the dominant theoretical paradigms had been firmly put in place by male critics. Initially working with these paradigms²⁸, Anglo-American film feminists contributed by adding gender at all levels, thereby revealing the axis of sexual difference upon which the cinema and film theory and criticism turned.

Britain

Although British and American film theory are often bracketed under the term 'Anglo-American', differences and disagreements exist within each of the contexts. The development of British feminist theory is typically located with three names: Claire Johnston, Pam Cook and Laura Mulvey. Though these three women were not the only female presences in British film theory, concentration upon them will allow me to introduce the major debates.

All three theorists shared common intellectual influences though their perspectives differed. While Johnston and Cook examined the films of Dorothy Arzner, Laura Mulvey addressed herself to classical Hollywood cinema and melodrama; Johnston also insisted upon the importance of "fantasy" and was involved with collective film-making²⁹, whereas Mulvey advised the destruction of pleasure, and made

avant-garde films with Peter Wollen. (Including Penthesilea, Queen of the Amazons (1974) Riddles of the Sphinx (1977) and Amy! (1980))

What all three film feminists shared though, was an insistence that film feminism needed to develop a viable theoretical position based upon a more complex account of the functioning of women in the cinema, through recourse to the newly claimed disciplines of psychoanalysis, semiotics and linguistics as tools for the analysis of the cinematic apparatus.

America

Though the British film feminists were criticised by some Americans for the theoretical density of their writing, (Kaplan Aspects of) they were typically more active as practitioners than the Americans, who wrote from the more distanced space of academia. Unlike Mulvey, few of the major American film feminists made films, and unlike Johnston few were involved in film collectives. The main 'names' in the critical field of film feminism in America emerged attached to two journals: Camera Obscura (Janet Bergstrom, Constance Penley and Sandy Flitterman-Lewis) and Jump Cut (Julia Lesage, E. Ann Kaplan, B. Ruby Rich). Jump Cut differs from Camera Obscura in being more journalistic and politically radical. Yet these two groups of women should not be completely divided since all, at one time or another, were involved in the first - international and American - feminist film journal: Women and Film (1972-1975).³⁰ Equally, their later books occupied similar theoretical spaces to those of Janet Bergstrom and Sandy Flitterman-Lewis.

Despite cultural differences, there was a constant cross-fertilisation in the work of the British and American feminist film theorists. For example, the first issue of

Camera Obscura cites the work of Johnston and Cook on Arzner and Laura Mulvey's article "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" as influencing their own critical politics. Meanwhile, in Britain the journal Screen, which had published Mulvey's article in 1975, carried reviews of American feminist articles, Women and Film publications, and, equally, included work by American film feminists.³¹

France

Although feminist film theory swiftly developed in Britain and the US as well as in Italy (Bruno and Nadotti: 1988) and Germany (most visibly signified by the journal Frauen und Film)³², there was little feminist theoretical engagement with the cinema in France, as I noted earlier. This absence of an indigenous feminist film theory takes on paradoxical dimensions once one considers, as Ginette Vincendeau has noted (Vincendeau: 1987) the founding importance of both male (Christian Metz, Raymond Bellour..) and female (Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray, Hélène Cixous) French theoreticians to the work of the Anglo-Americans. In spite of the centrality of the work of the male French theorists to the formation of Anglo-American feminist film theory, it should be emphasised that the theories of critics such as Althusser and Barthes were not themselves feminist, in fact most echoed in some ways the sexism of French society. One such example of the sexist/feminist dichotomy, which is also particularly relevant here is raised by the work of Raymond Bellour. While in America Bellour's work has been published in Camera Obscura the journal of feminist film theory; in Paris, in the corridors and publications of academia, there was no mention of either feminism, or, sexual difference in relation to Bellour's work.

The attitude of ignorance and/or disregard evident in male theory towards feminist film theory is aptly illustrated by an interview with Raymond Bellour conducted by

Janet Bergstrom in 1979 (Bellour Alternation). Bergstrom laments the pessimistic position which she suggests Bellour's analysis of enunciation provides for the woman, Bellour replies thus:

If women want to and are able to do analysis of these films and find representations both of themselves and of the relations between the sexes which will satisfy them, by all means let them do so: I would be very eager to see the results, even though I can't help feeling a bit sceptical...I think that a woman can love, accept and give a positive value to these films only from her own masochism, and from a certain sadism that she can exercise in return on the masculine subject. (97)

Bellour's dismissal and ghettoising of feminist film criticism is reflective of the gender-biased structure of academia and intellectual thought in France - it might also, of course, offer a clue to his dismissal of Akerman. Since men hold the highest academic positions, and the editorial posts, two of the avenues which have proven so rich to British and American feminists are closed to French women. A further result of this male domination in France can be seen as the lack of theoretical response on the French scene to Akerman's work, in comparison to America and Britain. Additionally, where French theory is applied to Akerman, it is undertaken by Anglo-American women theorists. (Longfellow, 1989) Having suggested the connections between Jeanne Dielman, the female and the feminine, I will now extend my analysis of this film and of the feminist through a discussion of the concept of female authorship.

Jeanne Dielman was released as the first authorial analyses of films made by women were being published, and the film was used as an example of how the Bellourian

concept of enunciation might work for a feminist cinema. After introducing the concept of female authorship, I will ‘test’ Jeanne Dielman against Laura Mulvey's “Visual pleasure and narrative cinema” and Raymond Bellour's “Hitchcock and enunciation”, both articles which describe a cinematic process in which the female is totally excluded. From this introduction of Jeanne Dielman's strategies I will chart its reception by feminist film theory, before suggesting how it can, in fact, be seen to illustrate a female authorial voice at work.

2: Female Authorship and Chantal Akerman's Cinema

Introduction

Feminist opinion over the women's movement documentaries was divided. While Claire Johnston rejected their ‘non-interventionist’ stance outright: The ‘truth’ of our oppression cannot be captured on celluloid with the ‘innocence’ of the camera (Counter-Cinema 28). E. Ann Kaplan insisted on their worth:

feminist cinéma vérité films like Ashur/Barton/Mulford/Paleweski's Janie's Janie ...do not demystify realist conventions...but they reorder the signs within that convention, giving us unfamiliar images of women.(Kaplan Happytime 52)

Whether rejected or embraced though, there is no doubt of the documentaries' importance in the formation of feminist film theory. Given the monopolisation of film theory by male theorists, it is clear that films made by women provided excellent grounds within which feminist critics could develop their own theories. While negotiating their way through male theorists' work, feminist critics were able to point to the new women's films as challenges to the patriarchal past, and instances

of a possible feminist future. As well as polemical articles on these women's films and analyses of male theory, feminist film criticism turned its attention to subjects which proved to be key problematics in the field of feminist film theory, namely: authorship and spectatorship. Both subjects contributed towards the theorisation of the position of the woman director, the textual operations of women's films and the concomitant position of the female spectator.

I have previously noted, that perhaps the first distinction to be made between those from the women's movement and the film feminists is the latter's belief in the power of female authorship. However certain contours needed to be added to this claim. The belief in female authorship was not present from the start, and instead, there was a certain amount of caution in talking of authorship. On this note Claire Johnston points out that the first issue of Women and Film condemn's authorship. this is surprising given the significant amount of work on the subject undertaken by both Jump Cut and Camera Obscura. With this in mind I would suggest that the early task of film feminism was the creation of a female canon which can stand up to the canon of male auteurs. Thus in the re-discovery of the work of Dorothy Arzner, Maya Deren, Germaine Dulac or Alice Guy that was undertaken at film festivals and in feminist film criticism the underlying impulse was one of canon construction.³³ Equally though this assertion of women past also represented an attempt to create a field of women's cinema which could be investigated for consistencies, evidence of similarities and differences in the attempt to answer key questions such as that suggested by Sandy Flitterman-Lewis: Can a voice which speaks through an apparatus so fundamentally structured according to this masculine logic say anything of - and in - the feminine? (Flitterman-Lewis 2)

Having constructed a canon of great male directors, male critics supposedly abandoned authorship, thus excluding the newly discovered women directors from that canon. They (women directors) could not be great because they could not be auteurs, and they could not be auteurs because auteur theory was dead. However, despite Barthes' killing off of the auteur and male theory's adoption of new critical approaches, film feminists managed to claim auteur status for many women directors. One of the first critical constructions of female authorship was Claire Johnston and Pam Cook's work on Dorothy Arzner. In their reading of Arzner's films, made in the Hollywood 'masculine discourse' system, Johnston and Cook detected textual disorder, gaps, cracks and contradictions, through which, they suggested, a female discourse could be detected. Film feminists' re-readings of both Johnston and Cook's work and Arzner's films have challenged this model of female authorship. Also, only years after Johnston and Cook's work Raymond Bellour, Thierry Kuntzel and Stephen Heath "sought to shed some light on...the necessity for the text to rupture and fissure itself."(Penley Future 43) What had been read by Johnston and Cook as evidence of a female discourse, was 'naturalised' through the work of Bellour, Kuntzel and Heath, as simply one of the many negotiations that the classical text had to make.

Although the work of Arzner was at first seized for feminist analysis, this initial enthusiasm was swiftly replaced by a resigned acceptance that, in fact, Arzner's work simply reinforced the near impossibility of the female being present in the classical system. The female remains at this stage a structuring absence. Thus Flitterman-Lewis speaks of female sexuality as: "The unspoken, that which cannot be figured, the ruptures in the coherence of male patriarchal discourse"(Woman, desire 242). This problem with the classical system would not really be fully addressed until the 1980s, when film feminists would turn towards the popular, in

order to defend its relevance for women. In the 70s though, the 'solution' to this impasse was to turn away from the classical cinema to assert, as Jacqueline Suter suggests:

...a reformulation of [the] elements [of narrative logic] into an order different from what has come to be known as the classic text, [which] may allow the feminine to express itself more forcefully. (Suter, 148)

As an example Suter cites Jeanne Dielman in which the turn to experimental cinema marks the re-emergence of the author. Rose is just one of many critics for whom Jeanne Dielman supplies all that had formerly been absent. Perhaps the full impact of the film can be felt through the juxtaposition below:

According to Mulvey, the woman is not visible in the audience which is perceived as male; according to Johnston, the woman is not visible on the screen...how does one formulate an understanding of a structure that insists on our absence even in the face of our presence?"(B. Ruby Rich, qtd. in de Lauretis Alice 29)

[Jeanne Dielman] invents a new language capable of transmitting truths previously unspoken."(B. Ruby Rich Name 212)

[Jeanne Dielman] defines all points of identification... as female, feminine or feminist."(Teresa de Lauretis Rethinking 146)

If, in social, ideological, philosophical or psychoanalytic terms woman is figured only as a negative or absent other, then the comments above imply that Jeanne Dielman's revelation is that, through various representational, formal and aesthetic strategies, woman is made present. In the light of Rich's complaint about a 'lack of names', the quotes by de Lauretis: "female, feminine and feminist" or Rich's talk of "a new language" imply that Jeanne Dielman enunciates the formerly silenced. Searching for a way to define a female aesthetic, female authorship or a cinema which addresses itself to women, film feminists found their search fulfilled by the omnipresence of the female, feminine and feminist in Jeanne Dielman.

While in my discussion of Jeanne Dielman's connections to the female and feminine, I noted certain ambivalences in the words of critics, when it comes to the film's place in the feminist sphere, ambivalence is replaced by almost total admiration. If in my female section Jeanne Dielman was praised for its production process, and in the feminine, for the alternative it offers to the linear, patriarchal model of narrative, in the feminist sphere praise is given on a variety of levels. Initially much is made in reviews of Jeanne Dielman of the film's structure. More often than not this form was seen as 'radical' a term which suggests affiliation to avant- garde practices, as well as to an extreme current in feminism.

In the various reviews and articles on Jeanne Dielman as well as in theoretical works (either at the time or later) which mention the film, two areas of intervention can be outlined: first, the engagement with the patriarchal model of the apparatus, and second, the making present of an alternative model, described through such notions as a "counter-cinema", (Perlmutter 132) "feminine writing" (Kuhn, Women's Pictures 168) or "a feminine perspective and sensibility" (Kinder Reflections 248). Jeanne Dielman seemed to fulfil the desires of many as it countered, de-constructed,

intervened, made present and visible, and not surprisingly it formed the focus of this early phase of feminist film theory. Bellour's mention of Akerman in his founding article on enunciation, could thus be seen as a mark of awareness on his part of the currency of Akerman's name.

As well as being praised by Kinder and named in Rich's article as a "film of correspondence",³⁴ Jeanne Dielman featured in the second edition of Camera Obscura, which included an article and interview with Akerman. (Bergstrom, 1979). In her article Janet Bergstrom uses the film in order to address questions about the feminist film practice which Jeanne Dielman seems to epitomise. The film, so the comments of both Bergstrom and Suter suggest, relieves feminist film theory from the critical impasse put in place through analyses of Hollywood cinema, as well as through the pattern of development of film theory in general which, as illustrated in the Heath/Kuntzel previously detailed, tended to disavow feminist claims. Throughout the various articles written on Jeanne Dielman, a consensus emerges that it is a work of female authorship, and that the female thereby becomes visible. In order to understand how this happens I will compare Jeanne Dielman with both Laura Mulvey and Raymond Bellour's founding articles.

Visual Pleasure, Enunciation and Akerman's 'Anti' Cinema

Laura Mulvey's analysis of classical narrative is important for the feminist challenge it poses to the work of such critics as Peter Wollen, Christian Metz, Roland Barthes and Raymond Bellour. Wollen and Metz believed that cinema was a signifying system which positioned the spectator in terms of various unconscious mechanisms. What Mulvey's article pointed out was that the unconscious was a realm of sexual difference. This meant, Mulvey suggested, that the cinematic experience was an unequal one for women. If, in material and social spaces, woman found herself cast

as subordinate to man's rule, in the cinematic space the female spectator experienced a parallel sense of inequality.

Mulvey's article works with the model of the classical system defined by Metz and Wollen, which effaces its marks of enunciation so that the spectator may be 'sutured' into the drama. Bellour meanwhile contests part of this model, as he argues that Hitchcock's enunciation is premised on a control which actually figures him as (in different ways) present. Hitchcock's possession of the image and enactment of his phantasy through fictional delegates is effected by his use of point of view shots, of particular framings, close ups and shot/counter-shot patterns which include the spectator in the fiction. Paradoxically though, the more Hitchcock intervenes, directing the gaze with camera movements and framings and constructing a point of view, the more the spectator is involved in the drama, and thereby replaces, or assumes the position of, the author.

Mulvey suggests that the symbolic order, which Metz had used to describe the workings of the cinematic apparatus, was dependent upon the representation of the female form. Within that order woman represents the threat of castration, and the male 'other'. In order to prevent the threat of castration which the image of the woman signifies, the man (whether director, screen character or spectator) exerts over the woman the power of his gaze. This power is present in the mechanisms of scopophilia (the taking of other people as objects) including voyeurism and fetishism. Through this gaze woman is relegated, in the cinematic process, to the position of 'image' where she becomes an erotic object for both the character and the spectator. Man, meanwhile, as well as controlling the gaze of the film, is the main narrative actant, forwarding the story, controlling time (through editing and the narrative drive) and space (through the changes in distance and editing).

Bellour's analysis can be seen to interact with this description of woman's position in the fiction. In his account, Hitchcock's (enactment of his) desire is wholly a desire for the woman who is, through his (Hitchcock's) enunciation, fully objectified and marked as an object of mystery, eroticism and spectacle. Hitchcock's enunciative system, as a system to translate a desire (Bellour uses the term 'camera-wish'³⁵) is constructed around the woman and her '*to-be-looked-at-ness*' (Mulvey Visual 11).

If Bellour's analysis illustrates the way in which the cinematic apparatus is structured to produce a very specific patriarchal pleasure, the picture of the cinematic experience painted by Mulvey's article is an equally pessimistic one for women. Since as an image "the meaning of woman is sexual difference" (Mulvey Visual 13), then what Mulvey's article emphasises is the fact that the classical cinema caters mainly for a male spectator. When it comes to female authorship, that is, to the effect which the presence of a woman behind the camera might have upon this cinematic economy, Mulvey is less prescriptive. The question that both Mulvey's and Bellour's articles prompt is: how can the female become visible in a system which is so totally male-dominated? I will argue that Jeanne Dielman offers an answer to this question.

Bellour suggests that part of the guarantee of Hitchcock's authorship is based on his repetition of certain formal and aesthetic preoccupations. The point of view shots, the attitude to the woman and the spectatorial experiences that his films offer. Within these terms Akerman could equally be constructed as an auteur. In this case her marks of enunciation, based on Jeanne Dielman, are a lack of close ups, of point of view shots and of angle reverse angles, coupled with various other formal,

thematic and visual preoccupations which I will discuss later. Also, and perhaps most importantly, there is no mechanism to encourage (or even allow) identification.

Initially then, Akerman's system of enunciation makes absent everything that Hitchcock makes present. Bellour locates Hitchcock's signature in moments when he interferes with the fictional world, telling the spectator where to look, what is important, what s/he should think or feel about a particular character. By contrast, Akerman's lack of camera movement, point of view shots and close ups suggest a concomitant lack of authorial interference, or, to put it another way, of enunciation. This is not to suggest that the tableaux shots are completely unmediated, since they can be seen as an equal sign of control. Instead, while a space is framed for the spectator by Akerman, s/he is allowed a certain amount of freedom to roam that space. The level of evident authorial control is very different from that of Hitchcock.

I will now turn to Mulvey to assess the implications of Akerman's strategies. Several of the key factors which Mulvey suggests construct the cinematic experience are challenged by Akerman's chosen *mise-en-scène*. Scopophilia, the taking of other people (mostly women) as objects, is premised upon a controlling gaze which can fragment those objects/people, examining them from all angles, and generally satisfying one's curiosity. The lack of close ups and camera movement thwart the scopophilic desire. Jeanne is not the subject of the spectator's gaze, and not only does Akerman not allow Jeanne's space to be invaded by the camera/gaze, but that gaze's lack of control is emphasised. Jeanne is frequently framed from behind, for example when she is washing up, and a violation of the gaze's power to see all is suggested by this particular framing. This violation is then strengthened by the film's use of temporal ellipsis. The first two sequences in which Jeanne takes her

clients into her bedroom are elided, thus the 'thrill' factor which the prostitution scene might have held is denied.

Once directed at a woman, scopophilia turns that woman into, not simply an object, but an erotic object. Woman thus comes to be important for her seductive presence. In Jeanne Dielman however, Akerman refuses the use of Jeanne as seductive presence, as all aspects of mise-en-scène work towards the construction of a de-glamorised image of woman. Akerman's strategy of de-glamorisation is located in her concentration on a housewife, rather than a femme fatale, and thus a woman from the 'real' world, rather than a construction from the 'fantasy' world of cinema. Having chosen a housewife as her central character, Akerman then builds on the 'real' aesthetic by structuring the film around Jeanne's daily routine; de-glamorisation is therefore followed by de-dramatisation. The spectator's position as voyeur is also denied, due to his/her lack of control of camera movement and narrative information both of which forbid the conventional position of omnipotence, and the disavowal of any sense of Jeanne as an erotic object, challenging both the invisibility and the control which voyeurism implies.

When comparing Jeanne Dielman's systems to those analysed by Mulvey and Bellour, the film emerges very strongly as the contrary to the classical system and to Hitchcock's mode of enunciation. It is perhaps this sense of 'negativity', in which Akerman practices a strategy of denial, that has lead many to label Akerman's an 'anti' cinema.³⁶ Suter notes Jeanne Dielman's complete engagement with all aspects of the apparatus:

instead of isolated interventions into a classic text, we have a systematic reordering of certain crucial elements upon which the classic text depends

and a recognition of other elements which the classic text chooses invariably to ignore. (148)

This anti-aesthetic, implying anti-narrative and anti-spectacle was generally taken as the key manifestation of a feminist film practice. Hence, the first suggestions of how to counter-act the negative aspects of the cinematic apparatus hinged around a sense of denial. Generally, calls for a feminist film practice were pitched in terms of the use and abuse of narrative. Thus as well as Johnston's advocacy of 'intervention'³⁷, the 'Camera Obscura collective' call for a 'deconstructive' feminist film practice.³⁸ Both terms draw on 'Brechtian' techniques of combining the political with entertainment, yet there are disagreements. Against the 'ghettoisation' of women's cinema and the active encouragement to work with narrative, Johnston writes:

In order to counter our objectification in the cinema, our collective fantasies must be released: women's cinema must embody the working through of desire: such an objective demands the use of the entertainment film. (31)

this comment can be read against Mulvey's closing insistence in her article two years later that: "Women...cannot view the decline of the traditional film form with anything much more than sentimental regret." (Visual18)

Obvious differences between Mulvey and Johnston's perspectives are illustrated by these quotes. In America a similar debate was operating between those writing for Jump Cut and those who formed the 'Camera Obscura Collective'. The division between these two journals can be crystallised by the suggestion by B. Ruby Rich that: "Overall, there is a growing acceptance of feminist film as a area of study

rather than as a sphere of action.” (Name 212). Camera Obscura, (the journal) thus dedicated itself to theorising film and feminism, drawing from French theorists and using recent women's avant garde work. Meanwhile, writers such as Julia Lesage and B. Ruby Rich retained a political, activist stance and engaged with Hollywood and classical narrative.

Taken collectively the various opinions above highlight what I would suggest as a problem with pleasure. As Jeanne Dielman illustrates, an anti-cinema denies the pleasures of the apparatus, yet the question is begged: with what does it replace them? what pleasures does such a feminist film practice offer? But even though feminist film theory moved on to address classical narrative in more detail, this key question was never answered. For example, in 1983, in a discussion on “Feminist film practice and pleasure” it is noted that at a screening of Akerman's Les Rendez-vous d'Anna (1978) an audience, encouraged by a review in Spare Rib and therefore expecting: “[the] pleasure of feminist identification with a narrative about women or with a heroic female character” was largely disappointed. The question was then asked: “are the pleasures of traditional film forms and feminism incompatible or are they there to be reworked?”, Though nothing further was said about pleasure. (Formations Editorial Collective, 157).

Two points can be extracted from the above example. First, the fact that Akerman's 70s work does not allow for the typical pleasures of classical narrative, (indeed, it is most often thought of as a cinema of anti-pleasure). Second, that, despite an awareness that a feminist film practice should forbid the pleasurable aspects of cinema-going, there is frequently little sense of what pleasures will be offered instead. In order for the different ‘pleasures’ of Jeanne Dielman to emerge, it is necessary to abandon Mulvey and Bellour, to instead give credit to the

‘experimental’ nature of Jeanne Dielman. The film therefore needs to be read ‘differently’ and that is the project of the following section.

Reading the ‘Difference’ of Jeanne Dielman

Several methods are available in Jeanne Dielman through which meaning can be made. The first method, and perhaps the most dominant, requires a careful attention to the structure of Jeanne's daily routine, through which the meaning which we would usually find in the linear pattern of narrative, in character interaction or framing, and camera movement - all of which are absent in this film - is available. Having stated in my section on écriture féminine, that Akerman concentrates upon Jeanne's daily rituals and gestures, it should be emphasised that it is only through careful attention to these rituals, and to the pattern that emerges from them, that the film's meaning emerges.

Before exploring the structure of Jeanne Dielman it is important to consider how the spectator's relation to Jeanne is constructed. Jeanne may not be an erotic or seductive object, yet she is central to both narrative and image. A closeness is implied simply through the fact that the film takes place in her space and evolves (more or less) according to her sense of time. Such a claim seems to imply an identification with Jeanne, which Akerman however prevents through the use of distancing devices which explode the Benvenistian self-effacing myth of the ‘story told from nowhere by nobody but received by someone.’³⁹

Akerman's initial distancing device is a denial of spectatorial privilege, positing the spectator at the centre of a suspended text. From the very beginning of the film access to the diegetic flow of information is denied, as information is not available in the conventional way. Instead, all knowledge of Jeanne is accumulative, coming

through a placement within her routine. Equally there is a pattern of suspension throughout the film. Jeanne Dielman opens on 'day one', yet we do not start at the beginning of the day; we have missed Jeanne getting up, Sylvain going to school etc. We catch Jeanne in the middle of making some coffee. If we add to this the fact that the period of the film covers a Tuesday to Thursday - thus mid-week - everything would seem to be happening 'in-between'. The film opens, yet does not begin at the beginning, and closes, yet does not really end in the conventional sense of the word, since nothing has really been resolved. Akerman is proposing Jeanne Dielman as a 'glimpse' of a life which, through its spectatorial positioning, exposes the viewing process itself as temporary.

Jeanne Dielman's structure hinges around repetition and ritual. While some elements of classical narrative do exist (there is a sense of cause and effect and ultimately a climax), as I indicated in my 'feminine' section, the thrust of the film is not linear. In fact the system of repetition is such that rather than offering the progression of linear narrative, Jeanne Dielman is constructed towards a stasis, illustrating the control Jeanne exhibits over her time and space, as well as her fear of change.

This system of stasis or 'reduction' can be illustrated by Jeanne's movements and the framing in each of the three sequences in which she shows in her clients. First Jeanne's actions are as follows: The bell rings, Jeanne undoes her housecoat, walks from the kitchen to the hall, pulls her cardigan around her chest, walks through the hallway turning on the light, opens the door, stands facing the client and takes his hat/coat/scarf, pulls her cardigan once again, and walks to the bedroom followed by client. Meanwhile the camera action and framing can be described as: Jeanne is framed in the kitchen area, the bell rings, as she walks forward to turn off the light so the spectator is presented with a beheaded body (a kind of close up) the kitchen is

held in darkness, we hear Jeanne's shoes walking outside, a door opening then "Bonjour" a door shuts. We cut to the hallway. Jeanne is framed from the side in medium close-up from neck to hips, the camera is static as she moves out of frame to hang up a coat, then turns to walk down the corridor to her bedroom.

Analysis of this sequence, which is repeated for each of the three clients, reveals repetition and ritual as the main structures of the film; yet I will concentrate on what I will call a 'reductive' pattern, hinged around a 'folded' action, and I will argue that both the pattern and the action produce the stasis previously mentioned. The most important and apparent folding shots are those framing the sexual act. As I have described the sequence it should be evident that the movement from the front door to the bedroom, then from the bedroom to the front door offer mirror images. Thus, when the bedroom door is opened the actions of both Jeanne and the camera are repeated, but in reverse. The effect is such that the shot is almost folded in half, with the sexual act as a dividing line that vanishes into nothingness. A similar pattern is present in Jeanne and Sylvain's nocturnal walk around the block, filmed in a series of three shots, the first and third being exactly the same, only in reverse. Also, as Jeanne moves through space and moves things, she returns them almost immediately to their place. Finally, the end of the day mirrors the beginning. What emerges is a pattern of 'reduction'. Once the action is completed we return to where we started. This sense of stasis is in keeping with Jeanne's desire for fixity, through ritual and repetition, as well as being a necessary condition in her construction and maintenance of her own time and space.

Having painstakingly constructed the strict rules and rituals of Jeanne's life, and emphasised the need for control and stasis, Akerman uses this sense of routine to underline its breakdown. From the reductive system of its opening day, Jeanne

Dielman therefore shifts to a system which demands an act of recognition and remembrance from the spectator. Now familiar with how things 'should' be, the spectator is encouraged to notice the, at first subtle, differences. It is again through this attention to Jeanne's actions and those of the camera that meaning is made.⁴⁰ Thus, on the second day after the client's visit, Jeanne moves not to the kitchen, but back to the bedroom, thus prolonging the concentration on this act. The next sequence showing her stripping the bed and bathing, which contains ellipses, emphasises a slippage in Jeanne's time plan, caught perhaps by something unexpected during the sexual act. When we finally do return to the kitchen, the potatoes have burnt (the first obvious break in Jeanne's routine), and both her reactions and those of the camera combine to reinforce this break:

- 1) Jeanne's entrance into the kitchen is framed from a new angle, (the only time that such an angle is used) which reveals the formerly concealed fourth wall of the space, ie: the position previously occupied by the camera
- 2) The ritual of turning off the lights is broken, the potatoes are burnt and consequently Jeanne's automatic performance is shattered, as she wanders distractedly from room to room.

Through the course of the second and third days the breakdown escalates, with Jeanne's loss of control indicated by a fragmentation of her sense of her own time and space. Formerly she moved with ease through her space, and filled her time, yet as the film proceeds so Jeanne's occupancy of the flat is fragmented, and her sense of time is wrong. On the first day her action consisted of economical and precise movements, the second day this becomes less precise, whilst by the third day she actually pauses and seems lost in her space. Her rooms seem to have moved from 'containers' suggesting ordered and functional zones, to 'vacuums' in which she is

no longer sure of her place, relation or meaning, and this is re-inforced by her rather drifting activities on the third day.

The confidence and efficiency of Jeanne's actions on day one, and her completion of everything started, suggests her control of the temporal axis of her days. The disintegration is initiated on the second day with an ellipsis, which could imply a hurrying on her part, fully manifest on the third day. Jeanne's day begins out of time, she gets up too early, and gets to a post-office before it is open. Then on returning to the flat she has difficulty filling her time, and makes constant trips to her alarm clock. Finally, on the third day, after a futile shopping trip trying to match a button, she is interrupted in her opening of a parcel by the arrival of a client.

While the structure of Jeanne Dielman holds the meaning of the film, the gaze does not merely 'tell the story', Instead, it also offers an experience which is not wholly tied to Jeanne. I would suggest that the (often noted) distance and attention of the gaze produces an intimate and tactile sort of vision. Through our constant exposure to this vision we become aware of spaces and their spatial properties, and the patterning of space and dimension provides an alternative, yet re-inforcing narrative.

The gradual breakdown of Jeanne's routine, a routine which had been established in the first third of the film, lends the film its structure. Without this careful attention to Jeanne's rituals, the film would seem to build towards a climax. If we do not observe Jeanne as the camera, the framing and the structure of the film encourage us to, then the film assumes a totally different shape and loses much of its meaning. Once we do watch as the film encourages us to, another world of space, movement, sounds and light opens up for analysis. This other world becomes our main index to the film's expression. Thus, Jeanne's heels announce her constant presence, and we in

turn are surrounded by the sounds which sustain her ritualised life: food boiling, doors shutting, water running, traffic outside or lights clicking on and off. The absence of facial or verbal expression seems to posit Jeanne's gestures as our only index to her self outside of the rules and rituals. As well as the clasping of her hands, and pulling of her cardigan around her, attention is drawn to her making of the meat loaf, or peeling the potatoes, through which she seems to vent her frustration, or attempt to restore to her day the balance which was formerly present.

Through my analysis I have hoped to outline some of the ways in which Akerman manages not simply to avoid the classical and Bellourian models, but also to construct an alternative model in which narrative makes way for (her own) authorship. In this way, part of Bellour's dismissal of Akerman in relation to Hitchcock has been addressed. However, in my next section I want to explore his comment in more detail. In his comparison between 'Hitchcock's Marnie' and 'Chantal Akerman's Bobby' Bellour implies the unlikely event of Akerman controlling a film in the same way that Hitchcock does. I will use Akerman's first feature length film Je tu il elle (1974) to explore this notion of control further, concentrating in particular upon the way in which this is effected by the camera's gaze (in Hitchcock's case by the point of view shot). Again Bellour's article will be my main point of comparison, although it will be my aim to analyse not simply Akerman's difference to Hitchcock, but the way in which that difference might be taken to indicate a different desire. Thus, I am moving closer to a sense of a female authorial system.

Je tu il elle or “Chantal Akerman's Bobby”

[T]he central narrative function of cinema is based upon the look.
(Flitterman Woman, desire 243)

Je tu il elle can be used to explore Akerman's difference in more detail, for it is in this film, I will suggest, that Akerman's desire and her look were first formed. Only by noting this moment does desire become visible in the films that followed this feature-length debut. There are two main instances during which the gaze is important in the opening of this three-part film. In the first, Akerman on the soundtrack says “I took off my clothes and looked at myself”. The shot which shows Akerman looking in a mirror occurs several minutes afterwards. In the second instance, Akerman says that people were walking past her window and that she “stood still so that they could look at me.” This opening sequence introduces Akerman as willing subject and object of the look. In both cases the important point is that the look is stated, not hidden, and voyeurism is thereby denied.

The second part of Je tu il elle covers Akerman's hitchhiking journey with the driver of an articulated lorry. We see her in turn travelling in the cab, in a café, in the cab, in a bar, back in the cab, (where she masturbates the driver), in a restaurant, and in the men's toilet. This final section in the toilet offers us an example of a woman looking at a man. In relation to Bellour's article on enunciation mentioned earlier in this chapter, this sequence could be said to illustrate the notion of ‘Chantal Akerman's bobby’ that is, Akerman possessing a man. Yet as I will show, the implied voyeuristic nature of that possession is ruptured twice, first by the structure of the sequence, and second by the third part of the film which follows it.

The scenes in the cab are framed so that the man occupies most of the space, with Akerman squeezed to one side, looking on. Though Akerman is marginalised, she is, nevertheless, always present and always shown to be 'looking' at the lorry driver. Her gaze becomes central at two points in this second part. After the first café stop we cut back to the man in the cab. At first the image is indistinct, due both to the fact that it is very grainy and that a dark shadow covers it. On the sound-track Akerman says: "I looked at his broad, beautiful neck" and the shadow suddenly moves away from the image to reveal the driver's neck and back. As this change takes place so it becomes evident that the shadow was made by Akerman herself, who moves across and out of frame to reveal the 'view' which she described.

Given that this shot is constructed as 'Akerman looking' and that we see what she says she saw, the shot could be termed a point of view shot. Yet there was no eye line match to formally mark this shot as a point of view. Instead, it is only Akerman's voice on the sound-track which has lead us to this interpretation. This scene ends with Akerman saying "and I felt like kissing him". Such an admission marks the previous look as one of desire, yet there seems to be difference between Akerman's desire and that of Hitchcock. Hitchcock does not tell us either that he is looking, or what he is feeling when he looks. Instead, the desirous Hitchcockian gaze is covert. Indeed, Hitchcock's is a desire which can only exist as long as it is not seen, or acknowledged.

If the second part of *Je tu il elle* reveals the desiring look of the woman at the man, acknowledged as such, then the third part reverses this ocular logic, concealing, or rather not revealing, the desiring look of Akerman at her female lover. When Akerman arrives at her girl-friend's house, after eating and drinking she starts to undress the young woman, undoing two of her night dress' buttons. The scene is

filmed in a similar way to the scene in the cab with Akerman as the looker and the girl-friend as the object of the look. However, two important differences should be noted: first: there is no point of view shot of Akerman's look, (we do not 'see' her look) and second there is little differentiation between the two women, who are equally placed in the frame. Whilst we are denied the desiring look though, we are allowed open access to the intimate love scene which follows.

Cinematic convention is broken three times by these examples from the second and third parts of Je tu il elle. First, the desiring look we are allowed to see objectifies a man, rather than a woman; second, Akerman's gaze at the woman, which we would expect to see, is denied while, third, the love scene which we would not expect to see, is shown. The difference of Akerman's cinema to classical conventions is stronger than a mere reversal though. Although the man is the object of the gaze, that gaze exhibits a certain care and attention: Akerman is not in complete control, since the man is not displayed and we can see only his back.

The 'fascination' present in Akerman's gaze is more fully explored in a later scene in the men's room. As the man in the foreground shaves, so Akerman in the background looks on. We see her looking at him while he looks in the mirror. Given that he is performing actions which are part of the cultural construction of masculinity: shaving and grooming himself, actions which we do not normally see (while, of course dominant cinema contains many representations of women putting on their make-up etc.). Akerman's attention to these actions is conveyed as a fascination with the 'other' and this fascination is defined as desirous, and is once again acknowledged.

In Je tu il elle, as in each of Akerman's first four feature films: Jeanne Dielman, News from Home (1976) and Les Rendez-vous d'Anna (1978) the look which is present is neither hidden nor voyeuristic. Instead, it always comes attached to its author. It is illuminating to compare Akerman's approach to that of Hitchcock. From as early as the credit sequence. Hitchcock, as Bellour suggests, announces his possession of Marnie ("Hitchcock's Marnie"). Comparing this to Akerman's 'announced' look at the man in Je tu il elle, or of the positioning of the camera in each of her other three early films, possession is present. Akerman has a certain measure of control over what she frames this control, however, is always coupled with a respectful distance which thus relinquishes the conventional narrative control of the spectator. While we are given a narrative, we, as spectators, do not have the usual control over the flow of information. In all the three above-mentioned films except News from Home we are presented with a fictional world, yet complete involvement is disallowed through the denial of 'suture'. Instead, the way in which control and involvement are effected is, I would suggest, through the presence (whether excessive or autobiographical, as I will explain later) of the author, Chantal Akerman.

Although it could be argued that the 'presence' of Chantal Akerman is similar to the 'presence' of Alfred Hitchcock, the vital difference between these two positions is the fact that there is no moment of 'substitution'. Akerman's spectator is never encouraged to take up the position of either the author or the female character. Julie, (Je tu il elle) Jeanne (Jeanne Dielman) and Anna (Les Rendez-vous d'Anna) are unwilling heroines who refuse to be fully comprehended, or fully knowable. While this could imply a regression to the 'woman as mystery' stereotype, the quality of the 'look' refuses such an interpretation. As Akerman has said in relation to Jeanne Dielman: "[Y]ou always knew where I was . . . [the film] wasn't shot through the

keyhole. . .”(qtd. in Bergstrom Jeanne Dielman 119) the respect and the distance of the controlling look mean that these unknowable women are not scrutinised, but are instead lovingly observed.

The difference between Akerman's loving observation and Hitchcock's voyeuristic fascination is clearly one of a difference of desire. As the patriarchal look is denied, so the marks of enunciation are restored and sexual difference is foregrounded. However, there is another, equally important, difference between Hitchcock and Akerman present in Je tu il elle. Whilst Hitchcock's desire is located solely with the woman, Akerman's is allowed versatility, as her gaze is directed at herself, at the man and at the woman. The second and third sequences of the film can be seen to map out clearly the desiring properties of those looks.

Both Je tu il elle and Jeanne Dielman have been labelled as examples of female authorship largely because of the presence of Akerman in each: through excess in the first - since she is present as on-screen character, off-screen narrator and, by implication, the author behind the camera - and through auto-biography in the second - since she has suggested in interviews that this is a film about her mother. It is largely this model of mediated presence which has remained with Akerman across her career. Regardless of institutional, contextual, formal and aesthetic shifts Akerman is still associated with the anti-cinema of her early years. However, once we take account of the differences which occur between her work from the 70s to the 90s work, such a model is no longer appropriate. Before these differences can be explored though, I wish to give a more detailed account of developments in feminist debates about female authorship.

There are several important recent studies of female authorship. I will focus on the work of Judith Mayne on Dorothy Arzner, (Mayne Keyhole; Arzner 1994) Sandy Flitterman-Lewis on Germaine Dulac, Marie Epstein and Agnès Varda, (Flitterman-Lewis Differently) and Kaja Silverman on Liliana Cavani (Silverman, Acoustic) Judith Mayne's work on Dorothy Arzner's cinema also offers a 90s intervention into 70s feminist film theory. Mayne takes Johnston's premise that Arzner was attempting to disrupt the masculine discourse system, but re-reads this analysis and adds a new dimension: that of Arzner's suggested lesbian identity. Mayne then locates Arzner's female authorship in two separate traits: "in [her cinema's] ironic inflection of heterosexual norms" and "[in] the representation of lesbian codes" (Keyhole 112). Mayne's analysis depends on a reading of Arzner's work against the grain for its validation. It also works on two levels, the biographical (evidence about Arzner's lifestyle and preferences), and the textual (instances in which the lesbian subverts, or threatens to break out of the masculine discourse).

For Sandy Flitterman-Lewis female authorship should be seen not simply on two, but on three different levels as:

1. ... a historical phenomenon, suggesting the cultural context;
2. ... a desiring position, involving determinants of sexuality and gender; and
- 3.... a textual moment, incorporating the specific stylistics and preoccupations of the filmmaker. (Differently 21/22)

Flitterman-Lewis thus insists on the significance of the context in which the director is working as well as, along with Mayne, specific details about that author's desiring position. Finally, Kaja Silverman recommends a theorisation of female authorship to account for a diversity of authorial inscriptions such as: "certain sounds, images,

characterological motifs, narrative patterns, and or formal configurations.”(212) Silverman's notion of authorship works on a variety of levels, yet it requires mainly evidence from the text, and therefore coheres most strongly with Flitterman-Lewis' third category.

From the early, 'naive' descriptions of the director as a creative artist, through analyses of how the author becomes an instance in the text, the models of female authorship described above clearly show the increased sophistication of the field. Initially I would suggest that, for Akerman, authorship definitely must be seen on more than one level and the models above therefore offer enlightening accounts. Mayne's model defines authorship as a desire and a textual instance, Flitterman-Lewis as contextual, authorial and textual aspects, while for Silverman it is the text which is important.

Each of these three models clearly takes account of the triple structure of the apparatus: divided between the author, the text and the spectator. Each analysis is also very aware of what Silverman calls, the author outside and the author outside the text.⁴¹ Although these divisions seem like a return to Wollen's discussion of John Ford and 'John Ford', (Wollen Signs) they actually do incorporate a move forward, with the outside and the inside being emphasised as working together and indeed feeding off each other. Given the tendency for fixing female authorship which each of the models above (perhaps unwittingly) illustrates, the application of any one to Akerman's cinema is problematic. The challenge when seeking a model, is therefore to suggest some coherent criteria, without losing sight of the slipperiness of the term 'Chantal Akerman's cinema' which, as I have suggested (and will explore further in this thesis) is a cinema of displacements.

Akerman's cinema can be seen to shift and change on two levels, on the level of authorial presence. Akerman's cinema is initially one which displays an excess of authorship, with Akerman as voice, main character and desiring gaze in Je tu il elle. With Jeanne Dielman and Akerman's next two films her presence recedes slightly, but remains (and is read) on an auto-biographical level, an interpretation which is consolidated by interviews. At this stage Akerman is therefore very much in control of her films. As she moves into the 80s and 90s however, her presence recedes behind narrative and genre, for example in Golden Eighties. In Nuit et jour however, she returns as the narrator.

A further shift is indicated by this narratorial position in Nuit et jour, one which indicates developing desires. Much was made of Akerman's comments that Jeanne Dielman was a love film for her mother, a declaration which positioned her firmly in the place of the daughter. From daughter Akerman seems to have grown up in her films, and by the time of Histoires d'Amérique (1988) she is taking up the position of possible mother. This 'growing up' is significant, in that it affects Akerman's authorial position in relation to her films. Of equal significance is the variety of desiring positions which her films figure. Such an observation raises questions which I have not yet addressed, regarding the sexuality of Akerman's authorship. Akerman as 'lesbian' is a position that is usually produced through textual evidence in Je tu il elle and Les Rendez-vous d'Anna, strong enough for feminists to include Je tu il elle in a discussion of "lesbians and film" (Becker et al) and to have been sustained long enough for Judith Mayne, in 1991 to suggest that the film challenges the "heterosexual codes of cinema" (Keyhole 219) and for the 1994 London Lesbian and Gay film festival to include Akerman as one of several film-makers asked to pick their favourite (lesbian, gay or other) film. ⁴²

The strongest example of this tendency though, and someone who actually names Akerman as lesbian occurs in Andrea Weiss' book Vampires and Violets. Weiss asserts: Akerman dismantles both heterosexual romantic myths and the structures for male visual pleasure, but she cannot envisage any alternative film language for female desire. (118) Weiss' analysis hinges around her claim that in Je tu il elle, Akerman's unsuccessful letter-writing in the first part is actually addressed to the woman in the third part. She also points to Anna's unsuccessful attempts to reach a woman lover in Les Rendez-vous d'Anna.

Whilst I agree with Weiss' analysis contained in the first half of the quote, I would dispute her conclusion. Instead I would suggest that an alternative language for female desire is provided in Akerman's cinema, but that language and that desire cannot be reduced to a single position. As well as the 'disappearing' author figure we witness as Akerman's cinema evolves, it is necessary to take into account the variety of desiring positions this cinema offers. Unlike Dorothy Arzner, photographs of whom are used by Judith Mayne (Mayne, 1994) in her construction of Arzner's lesbian identity, Akerman and her various desiring positions cannot be - unproblematically - related to biographical lesbianism. I would argue that although Andrea Weiss assumes automatically that Akerman's cinema originates from a 'queer' desiring source, it is in fact impossible to pin down the different desires to one coherent position. Instead, like so many other things in Akerman's cinema, the desire is changeable.

If the first level of shifts in Akerman's cinema was in authorial position. The second level is textual. Her cinema moves from the avant-garde through art cinema and towards popular forms such as melodrama and the musical, and consequently her style of enunciation changes. From the cinema of anti-seduction practised in her 70s

films Akerman shifts to address narrative and spectacle more directly. With this shift, the enunciative style described in my analyses of Jeanne Dielman and Je tu il elle which served so well for her 70s films, becomes less useful for her 80s and 90s work. At the same time, however, I would argue that one level on which Akerman's cinema does not change is that of address. Despite the adoption of more classical systems and the disappearance of the author, Akerman's remains a cinema of non-identification and non-involvement (although as I showed in my analysis of Jeanne Dielman this does not occlude involvement altogether) this means that voyeurism, scopophilia and fetishism are denied.

With these thoughts in mind, it will be necessary to evolve a model for Akerman which sees her cinema in an arc of development, rather than as isolated moments. My model of female authorship for Akerman will operate on two levels. The first will take into account a mutable desire, which allows for difference, developments and divisions in textual terms. The second will highlight the unchanging address of her films which can be constructed through her particular 'look' described in Je tu il elle as well as through a sense of the 'jouissance du voir' mentioned earlier. I will pursue this model in relation to the films Golden Eighties and Nuit et jour. Both I will suggest offer continuities and differences with Akerman's 70s work. The continuities contribute towards a sense of the development of Akerman's cinema, while the differences challenge the 70s model of enunciation.

3: Women's Cinema, Feminist Film Theory and the (not so) Golden Eighties

Whilst the name Jeanne, when mentioned in the same sentence as that of Akerman, will immediately call up the vision of Delphine Seyrig in Jeanne Dielman, another Jeanne does exist. The second Jeanne, Jeanne Schwarz is a character in Golden Eighties also played by Delphine Seyrig; she has been (and still is) married, works

in a shop and has a son. The comparison of Jeanne Dielman and Jeanne Schwarz, may at first seem a wild one. Of course Jeanne Schwarz is not narratively signalled as Jeanne Dielman, neither has Chantal Akerman ever suggested such a connection. Yet it is a comparison implicitly prompted by the casting of Delphine Seyrig in both roles; and once such a connection is made, further similarities become apparent.

Jeanne Schwarz is not so far removed from Jeanne Dielman; she is still repressed by her husband and son who force her into a role, a fact which is visually represented by her position of subservience behind the counter. Like Jeanne Dielman her movements are restricted and this restriction, although imposed by others, is weakly tolerated by herself. Finally, through the course of Golden Eighties, Jeanne Schwarz also undergoes a disruption to her routine with the sudden entrance of Eli the American (John Berry), who offers her the chance to escape from her 'rut'. Her refusal of his offer holds the same significance as the murder in Jeanne Dielman - a complicity with repression.

Five years after Golden Eighties Akerman's cinema seems to stretch back upon itself a second time, as Nuit et jour introduces another 'Julie'. Unlike the travelling Julie played by Akerman in Je tu il elle, this Julie (Guilaine Londez) has come to rest (momentarily) in Paris and finds herself involved in a love triangle. The multiple desires represented by the tri-part structure of Je tu il elle, have seemingly been changed to two heterosexual couplings. Meanwhile the author, an 'excessive' presence in the first film, takes up the position of narrator in Nuit et jour.

Golden Eighties and Nuit et jour are the two films which present the strongest challenge to the anti-seductive cinema of Akerman's early work. However, the connection of the two Jeanes and the two Julies prompts a comparative analysis of

these films to their 70s predecessors Jeanne Dielman and Je tu il elle. In comparing these four films my purpose will be two-fold: to indicate what happens to Akerman's authorship once she moves towards narrative and pleasure, and to offer an account of the development of 'women's cinema' and the discourses which were set in motion in the 70s.

It should now be clear that none of my three opening quotes to this chapter takes us past the 70s. This begs the question: what becomes of 'women's cinema' 'auteur' or even 'Chantal Akerman's cinema' after the 70s?. Equally, what names will succeed these? In the case, first, of women's cinema, the term gradually loses its use value, a fact which is indicated in the following selection of quotes:

The ICA prefers the term 'women's films' to 'feminist films' because one point of the season is to reflect on the richness and diversity of what women are producing, whether they call themselves feminist or not.”(Clayton Panic 1)

Women's cinema...as *a cinema by and for women*. But which women? (de Lauretis Guerilla 7)

Women's cinema cannot be equated with feminist cinema (Vincendeau Créteil 11)

The quotes above suggest two main separations: of the homogenising term women's from women's cinema, and of feminist films from women's films. Akerman's 80s work engenders a similar sense of challenge. For example, Ginette Vincendeau notes that at the 1987 Créteil festival of women's films Akerman announced that the notion of women's cinema was “out-dated” (Créteil 4). It might seem that a backlash

took place between 80s and 70s film feminism. Yet rather than this simplistic explanation, I will argue that, in fact, what happened is that feminist film theory's privileged space of 'women's cinema', into which Jeanne Dielman fitted so neatly, no longer existed in the 80s. I will suggest three intersecting reasons for the disappearance of 'women's cinema': institutional shifts in Independent cinema, changes in the women's movement, and the pattern of the development of feminist film theory. Once each of these shift have been outlined, I will analyse Golden Eighties and Nuit et jour.

Institutional Shifts

Since changes in the field of Independent cinema will largely form the subject of my second chapter, I intend to restrict myself purely to facts which are significant for women's cinema. It must be remembered that the feminist film practice which has been praised and had largely helped constitute film feminism was made in avant-garde contexts, and was therefore marginal to the mainstream, circulating on the festival and art cinema/independent circuit. This cinema had been produced as much by material and institutional conditions, as by 70s feminist discourses. In the early 1970s in Britain, France and America there was a sufficient counter-culture of politically committed movements to validate and encourage an engaged feminist film practice. In material terms it was relatively cheap to make a film, thanks to Bolex cameras, and more flexible film-stock. Equally the 'un-professional' look of many feminist films fitted well into the rough aesthetics of the time, whether the structuralist filmmakers in Britain or the underground movement in America.

By the late 70s/early 80s conditions were changing so that materially, aesthetically, politically and theoretically low-budget film-making was no longer viable (there was less money around, and fewer chances to exhibit and distribute these films) or

so popular. This shift in demand can partly be explained by changes in taste - as new fashions and trends took over. Equally, the rejection of the small-scale and 'unprofessional' could be seen as natural progression - after years of short or low-budget films the call was for features and for films which aimed for 'bigger and better things', and this included women directors. In short, what was demanded was 'going mainstream', as noted by Michelle Citron:

In the United States at least, the term film-maker has lost some of its currency and, with the exception perhaps of small avant-garde films, is now rarely used. Its replacement with 'director' has gained popular recognition and mythical status in our culture

She also admits:

Feminist film-makers had little desire to enter into the mainstream film world. We wanted to make films that challenged the status quo...But in a changing political context, the dominant film world has become more enticing. (45)

In the British context the impact of television - especially Channel 4 - can be seen as partly responsible for the more 'professional' films produced. A further reason for this shift is one which I indicate in my second chapter: it was simply no longer feasible to remain marginal. Within this scenario Akerman can be seen as someone who followed the 'bigger and better' trend, making Les Rendez-vous d'Anna with backing from a major European company, then planning a big budget feature (which was never made). However as I will show in my second chapter, Akerman has always relied upon a certain sense of marginality to structure her cinema. Equally,

this 'bigger and better' trend was soon rejected by Akerman, as she made both large and small-scale productions in turn.

The Women's Movement

In a sense the dissociation from the term 'women's cinema' which can be traced in film feminism echoes a similar problematic with the women's movement. Once sexual difference was officially rejected in favour of gender, so 'woman', once the unifying point of difference was recognised for her own differences: of class, race, ethnicity, sexual preference etc. With this shift in progress the early politics of consciousness-raising and positive images came under strong criticism and were accused of naiveté and over-simplification. Unification under the term woman or women was simply no longer possible.

Feminist Film Theory

From its early period of struggle for a voice, feminist film theory can be said to have moved from a(n urgent) whisper to a shout. If the 70s can be seen as a period of infancy, growing up and adolescence, then the 80s fulfil the role of the awkward teenage years. Accordingly it was in the 80s that many of the 70s debates were abandoned, re-written, or simply rejected. But rather than problems being solved or questions answered, a gap seems to have opened between the 70s and the 90s and it is into this gap that Akerman's work falls.

Two impulses dominate 80s feminist film theory's reaction to its past: re-vision and omission. In the first category, re-vision, one can include Laura Mulvey's "Afterthoughts on Visual Pleasure..." where she re-thinks and extends some of the points in her earlier article, taking on board contentions from other feminist critics. Equally Teresa de Lauretis in "Rethinking women's cinema" struggles with this

category and its use value. De Lauretis is one of many critics involved in taking a step back from the 70s, to survey the scene and re-write the (perhaps) frantic 'adolescent' accounts which had been put in place.⁴³ Rarely then, are recent films by women included in these articles; instead de Lauretis includes Re-dupers (1977) Thriller (1979) and Jeanne Dielman. The inclusion of the latter would seem surprising given the fact that it was made ten years before the article came out; however writing in the 1990s about female authorship Judith Mayne too suggests: "[Akerman] offer[s] a stunning demonstration of [a] female authorial signature"(Keyhole 125), using once again Jeanne Dielman as proof.

With regard to the second category above, omission, I mean to use this word in a very particular sense. In its constant questioning, re-writing, challenging and discussion of Laura Mulvey's founding article, 80s film feminism is continually engaging with its past. However, I would argue that this engagement operates on a highly selective level, and while questions of the gaze and spectacle have been repeatedly addressed, there has been less concentration upon Mulvey's concluding statement, as detailed earlier, that:

Women, whose image has continually been stolen and used for this end, cannot view the decline of the traditional film form with anything much more than sentimental regret. (Visual 18)

Although several film feminists have taken up and challenged Mulvey's assumption that women can find no pleasure in popular cinema, (Tasker, 1993), (Stacey, 1994), few have considered what other forms of pleasure a feminist film practice might offer, a question which is particularly pertinent to Akerman's work.

The Liminal 80s

Although Akerman has been critically confined to the 70s, her post-70s work strongly engages with areas of feminist film criticism. Part of the reason for this confinement could be attributed to the fact that the areas she engaged with were part of the rejected/omitted ground of film feminism, namely narrative and (its) pleasures. Golden Eighties was made at a time when Akerman refused the label 'feminist'. However there is a sense in which the crisis which the film represents within Akerman's cinema echoes a similar crisis in feminist film theory at that time. In making a musical, Akerman was positioned by critics as just another avant-garde director who wanted to make bigger-budget and mainstream features; for instance Pam Cook:

Chantal Akerman is one of several women film-makers whose work has crept out of the 70s avant-garde closet into the glare of bigger ..budgets and larger (though still art house) audiences. (Golden 67)

Golden Eighties may seem to represent a shift towards the mainstream on Akerman's part, however I will argue that Akerman's early aesthetic principles are used to full effect within this post-modern musical.

It would be easy to suggest that feminist film theory went one way and practice another, as certainly both went their separate ways. Yet, in relation to Akerman and other directors such as Sally Potter and Yvonne Rainer, those separate ways followed quite similar paths. Ironically, though feminist film theory has turned its back on Akerman to deal with more mainstream pleasures, Akerman's work has also moved increasingly towards classical narrative and its pleasures and the seductive qualities of mainstream forms (such as the musical). Both Golden Eighties and Nuit

et jour were coldly received by feminist film theorists, with only a handful of reviews of and articles written about the films. Whilst one of the reasons for this poor reception is undoubtedly the poor distribution of the films,⁴⁴ I will suggest that these two films underline a weakness which I indicated earlier in feminist film theory in general: a problem with 'pleasure'.

The problematic nature of cinematic pleasure for feminist film theory is understandable given that the classical Hollywood narrative model constructs its 'pleasures' around the male gaze at the woman, with the repressive mechanisms of voyeurism, fetishism and scopophilia that the gaze implies. Similarly, part of the guarantee of narrative pleasure, for example closure, involves either returning a potentially subversive woman to her place, or finding a romantic (marriage) partner for an otherwise independent woman. The psychic processes of the text, it is claimed, also offer the pleasures of identification with (male) author and characters, and thus a sense that one is in control of, and involved in, the narrative. Thus, early feminist film theory noted that the pleasures of the classical text were at the expense of women, whether on screen, behind the camera or in the audience.

After Laura Mulvey's article, which advocated the destruction of pleasure (through its de-construction), theorists were generally divided over how female directors should deal with cinematic pleasure. Should they side with Mulvey and designate a 'counter-cinema' opposed to the classical model and thus to the pleasures involved? Should they suggest an exclusive, female pleasure in a gesture towards the essentialist tactics of Kristeva, Cixous or Irigaray? (for example A Question of Silence 1981, Marleen Gorris) Or could female spectators find pleasure in less radical changes, thus in positive, independent heroines (eg: Working Girl 1988, Mike Nichols), in the subversion of 'male' genres (Thelma and Louise 1991, Ridley

Scott) or in the re-appropriation of 'female' genres (Girlfriends 1978, Claudia Weill)?. Finally, critics such as Jackie Stacey, (Stacey, 1994) Judith Mayne (Mayne, 1990) and Tania Modleski (Modleski, 1988), practising a strategy of reading against the grain, offered re-readings of the classical system, through which they suggested pleasures could be found in places which Mulvey had assumed were closed to women. These debates should be seen against the shifting context of theory and practice in the 80s/90s. The independent and avant-garde models which had served women film-makers so well in the 70s were no longer viable, yet feminist film theory had approved a women's film practice which figured an 'anti-aesthetic' which supposedly denied the effects of the classical model.

I have already mentioned Akerman's tendency in her film practice to rest 'in between' different schools of thought. Such a term (in between) can be applied to the early 80s period of women's cinema. For most of the key women film-makers of the 70s, the transition to the 80s was far from smooth. To take just a few examples: Sally Potter after the success of the de-constructive Thriller (1979) made The Gold Diggers (1983). This film begins with a song on the sound-track which asks: "please give me back my pleasure"; yet, in its tale of betrayal, fascination and mystery, The Gold Diggers does not seem to know what that pleasure was. The film was not a success, either commercially or critically and instead was received with a bemused silence by feminist film critics.

Yvonne Rainer, after Film about a Woman Who... (1974) which is often discussed in the same breath as Akerman's 70s films, made The Man Who Envied Women (1985). While Rainer took on some of the tenets of film feminism in her film - around psychoanalysis, the female voice and gaze, feminist film analysis of the film has been rare. An evolution is detectable in both Potter and Rainer's cinemas. Potter

was moving from short films to features, and from de-construction to (some sense of) re-construction; and Rainer was re-working early ideas now influenced by feminist thinking. However, feminist film theory seemed to have moved on to other things, and showed little interest in these two film-makers post-70s work.

Like feminist film theory itself Akerman moved on, and while it would be easy to fold her cinema into two halves placing anti-pleasure against pleasure, anti-narrative against narrative in order to honour the authorial model detailed above, it is important to see her work as in continuous motion. Golden Eighties and Nuit et jour should be seen first for the continuities they offer with the past, before we notice their more obvious differences. Both films display Akerman's use of non-identification, which prevents any suturing of the spectator into the text, and encourages instead an active, 'working' spectator. Both are highly self-conscious about their representation of gender, male and female, as well as their use of narrative. Where these films differ from Akerman's 70s work, though, is in the attitude they take to spectacle and the gaze, both 'effects' which had in the past been strongly avoided. Instead, each film takes as its project the foregrounding of: spectacle in Golden Eighties, and the gaze in Nuit et jour, which they then playfully explore. In focusing on the ways in which each film differs from Akerman's earlier work I will be interested in how this affects the authorial model, as well as how it moves on the concept of 'la jouissance du voir' and of the gaze outlined in my analysis of Je tu il elle. These subjects will lead me first to a closer analysis of Akerman's own way of handling the pleasures of more mainstream forms, and second, to a renewed exploration of the desiring positions present in these later films.

Golden Eighties

Golden Eighties represents a jump for Akerman, albeit one which she had prepared for with Toute une Nuit. It moves her from the avant-garde to the mainstream, and from alternative forms to the popular. The attitude Jeanne Dielman and Golden Eighties develop towards classical narrative, romantic love and the mainstream use of image and spectacle place the films as bi-polar opposites. While in Jeanne Dielman the eradication of pleasure was Jeanne's only security, for those who populate the world of Golden Eighties pleasure is not simply sought but actively practised, through ritualised games of flirtation and display.

Lucy Fischer has noted, in describing the musical genre, its “focus on looking at women”(133). Although this suggests that the musical might hold problematic connotations for women, it is precisely because of these spectacular qualities that Akerman chose it. Akerman's use of the musical genre in Golden Eighties retains a dual strategy. Through its post-modern attitude and its setting in a shopping mall, the utopian qualities associated with the heterosexual couple are de-constructed, while the artifice, spectacle and performance that the musical engenders, are used in order to celebrate the spectacular and ‘attractive’ qualities of the cinema.

Spectacle is a term which has been used in two different ways. First, it is often used to describe the relation between a male subject and a female object. According to Mulvey if the male's task is in forwarding the narrative, the place of the female is the realm of spectacle, as the gaze is attracted to her and the narrative is thereby halted with moments of erotic contemplation. In Mulvey's account then, spectacle is placed in opposition to narrative, the juxtaposition of the two suggesting a conflict between the linear, forward-moving narrative, and the time-stopping, spectacular

moment. Second, spectacle has been used to indicate a fascination with pure surface, that is with the image and its visual pleasures. Again though we should not miss the axis of sexual difference which underlines this use of the term. It is in this sense that the term spectacle has found its way into the discourse of post-modernism, describing one of the ways in which film embodies the post-modern.

Initially Golden Eighties seems to offer everything which Jeanne Dielman denied. Spectacle and narrative are restored, as the form and content of the musical are closely adhered to. If the musical world is one in which spectacle, artificiality and performance dominate, then Golden Eighties amplifies each of these qualities by first, using irony and play to make the musical 'post-modern', and second, through its setting in a shopping mall, which links display with consumption, love with commerce and the cinema screen with the shop window. In order to reveal Akerman's ironic attitude in more detail, I will examine the triple registers of Golden Eighties as a musical, as a post-modern musical and as a post-modern musical set in a shopping mall.

... as a Post-Modern Musical Set in a Shopping Mall

Post-modern is a term which could quite appropriately be applied to Akerman's films from Toute une nuit onwards, as, I would argue, Akerman's cinema becomes more playful. Rather than disrupting cinematic conventions it plays with them teasingly. The re-playing of early Jeanne and early Julie in Golden Eighties and Nuit et jour suggests both a connection to and a separation from the past. In interviews Akerman has frequently spoken of Jeanne Dielman as a 'love film' to her mother. Such an admission was, as already mentioned, to position Akerman firmly in the role of the daughter, which connoted - in the films from Jeanne Dielman and News from Home to Les Rendez-vous d'Anna - youth, potential, excitement, and, most

importantly, innocence. By contrast, Golden Eighties' post-modern world figures a growing-up process which has left in its place an attitude of wisdom and play.

Golden Eighties presents a world which is extremely self-aware, both in terms of the knowledge of its pretexts (the American and European musicals, Akerman's cinema/past) and in its attitude to the cinematic experience; with which it continually plays. While in Jeanne Dielman youthfulness was inscribed through the film-maker as child's look at her mother, in Golden Eighties the generation gap is present in the very text of the film. From the title, which combines the nostalgically tinged 'Golden' with the modern or contemporary 'Eighties', through the opposition represented by the characters of Lili and Jeanne, to the very concept of making a musical in the 1980s, Golden Eighties combines the past with the present.

My association of the term post-modern with Akerman's cinema, embroils her in a set of theories which are complicated and contentious. I do not mean to confuse the matter unnecessarily. However, my decision to introduce the term, is prompted by two factors:

- 1) the connection Golden Eighties makes with its time, a connection which begins with its title, and is continued through its set, plot, theme and politics.
- 2) the use of various strategies which have been theorised as part of the post-modern style, for example: play, irony, inter-textuality⁴⁵ - in this case the re-use of the musical genre and Akerman/past.

Play

Whilst the word 'play' will be used for its post-modern connotations, it also has some place in the text of pleasure which I will argue Golden Eighties constructs. In

Golden Eighties love, typically the staple diet of the musical, becomes something to be bought and sold, like a dress and invested with such crude connotations that, were we to transpose the ending of Golden Eighties on to that of Singin' in the Rain (US 1952 Stanley Donen) the 'false' woman (Lili/Lena) is not exposed as a sham, but goes on to win the guy (Robert/Don) whilst the 'genuine' lover (Mado/Cathy) misses out completely. Substituting sex for love, the musical in Golden Eighties has become an excuse for flirtation and match-making. Rather than the innocent hug under blue skies of Don and Cathy at the end of Singin' in the Rain, we get the love-making of Robert and Lili in a changing cubicle. This 'post-modernisation' of the musical can be seen more clearly if we evoke Richard Dyer's analysis of the musical's properties. Dyer classifies the musical as evoking a utopian sense of feeling, constituted by the qualities of "energy, abundance, intensity, transparency and community" (Dyer Entertainment 228) I would suggest that, whilst using each of these qualities, Golden Eighties also disrupts them, that disruption being caused by the impossibility of achieving such 'utopias' in an 80s post-modern world.

In this post-modern world, energy is replaced by a kind of second-hand living. The mall is an air-conditioned, artificially lit, imitation world or "life lived permanently in a conservatory".⁴⁶ Although performance goes some way towards re-vitalising this atmosphere, the restriction imposed by the setting contains any energy otherwise generated. The mall, designed with an emphasis on spectacle, may seem an abundant setting, yet the people within it are trapped, the women closed behind windows, the men trapped in roles as oppressors. Thus M. Schwarz, who tells his son of his own extra-marital relations, yet will not tolerate them in his wife.

The setting also denies any intensity, a fact underlined by the song 'il pleut/it's raining'. Typically in the musical 'it's raining' should signal a moment of

celebration and community. Here reference can be made to either Singin' in the rain or to Jacques Demy's Les Parapluies de Cherbourg (France, 1964) in both of which rain represents a moment of revelation. In Golden Eighties while most of the cast join in the song, and in this sense it is the most communal number, the lyrics and the use of the setting undercut any celebration of utopian feelings. The song 'singin' in the rain' occurred after Don had been with Cathy and functioned to affirm his love for her, with the scene accompanied by Gene Kelly getting soaked by the rain. The emphasis was on the cleansing aspect of the down-pour, connecting love to all things 'natural': blue skies singing birds etc. By contrast 'it's raining' exists as a chance for men to ogle women. It also occurs inside the mall, where it isn't raining at all. Beginning with the onslaught of people sheltering in the mall, rain is seen initially as something to escape from by those in the outside world. However for those who work in the mall the rain is something to escape to, a feeling which is expressed in Pascale's part of the song.

The true love which transparency implies is shown to be a sham. Mado loves Robert, yet not only does Robert fancy Lili, he is far from the Romeo one would normally expect in a love story. Indeed, the male chorus mock him as being 'Le romeo des pantalons/The Romeo of the trousers'; that being the role his father wants him to fill. The shopping mall exists as "a space which makes spectators of everyone and an actor in spite of oneself"⁴⁷ this illustrates just what has happened to the musical's sense of community. The girls are divided against the boys, the older generation against the younger, and Lili against everyone. The songs and plot figure a number of solos including Sylvie, Pascale, Mado, Jeanne whom the male and female chorus mock or comment upon (usually to criticise). This seems to suggest that a dispersion of point-of-view is at work; true, everyone is involved in this game of love, yet rather than our attention being distributed and as Toute une Nuit (1982)

it seems to be spread thinly. Such a strategy produces a general malaise which, due to the characters' containment in a restricted space, has infected all of them.

The ironic distance which Golden Eighties takes from its musical referents can be further evoked through the character of Sylvie, perhaps the most obvious reference to the work of Jacques Demy, in this case the film Les Demoiselles de Rochefort (France, 1966). Like Mme Yvonne in that film, Sylvie is trapped behind a bar which keeps her from really living, yet consequently gives her an excuse to live in her dreams. The result in the Demy film is that for twenty years Mme Yvonne has lived in the same town as the lover she jilted, without even knowing it. At the end of Demy's film, in traditional musical style Mme Yvonne frees herself from her position behind the bar, and retrieves her lover, thereby securing a happy ending. By contrast, in Golden Eighties Sylvie is horrified that her fantasy lover may return from Canada, putting paid to her escapist dreams and - in effect - giving her a happy ending. Whilst outwardly agonisingly longed for, happy endings in Golden Eighties seem things which must, at all costs, stay in the characters' dreams. The business of life in this artificial world is precisely that of agonising, which, like Jeanne Dielman's self-sustaining rituals, provides a sense of continuity to their life, in turn positioning them as actors, and thus players in the drama. The closure of a happy ending would, seemingly, halt the continuum, thereby putting them out of play, and forbidding participation. Lili knows this more than anyone else, and is consequently the prime player in the drama.

Display

Akerman subverts the thematic, innocent qualities of the musical, by placing them alongside the disillusioned post-modern world; this subversion can be extended to the aesthetics of the film. If the musical form operates on dual registers through

which, as Judith Williamson has noted, 'bubbles in time' as the characters break out into song. (Williamson, 25) are created, I want to suggest that it is the second, narrative-halting register which Akerman emphasises in Golden Eighties. If typically the performance numbers halt the narrative, then Akerman exaggerates the disruptive value of the numbers. As the film progresses, spectacle is formed into a system of 'display' which ultimately threatens to take over from the narrative.

The disruption of the narrative by moments of display and spectacle is embedded within another system of the film which makes the world of Golden Eighties into a mise-en-abyme of the cinematic experience. Thus, the spectator/screen relation is echoed in Golden Eighties by a shopper/window, or looker/window coupling. The gaze which is demanded in order for spectacle to work is therefore facilitated through the setting in the shopping mall and the specularity which this evokes. The equation of window shopping with cinematic spectatorship has been noted:

From the middle of the nineteenth century the shop window succeeded the mirror as a site of identity construction, and then...the shop window was displaced and incorporated by the cinema screen.(Friedberg Window 66)

The shopping mall exists then, as a space which makes spectators of everyone and an actor in spite of oneself. Through its design, display and artificiality are emphasised, and in both cases are converted into gender games.

The cinematic frame becomes a window in Golden Eighties with two effects. First, the characters, particularly the women, frequently display themselves in front of the camera. The introductions of Jeanne and Lili are particularly important in this context. For Jeanne, we look through a window where a hand is putting a shoe on to

one of the display mannequins, another hand then taps on the front of the window (Sylvie), we cut to Jeanne's face as she turns it to look through the glass and a spotlight suddenly illuminates it. Jeanne's face is on display in three senses then, first because she is in the display window, second because she turns to face the camera and third through the spotlight.

If Jeanne's introduction seems artificial then Lili's first entrance is even more contrived. This sequence begins with one of the hairdressers shouting "it's eleven o'clock, Lili's going to be here". This message is passed from girl to girl to become a loud gossiping, during which characters run outside the salon and groups themselves around the stairwell, which leads from the street down to the mall. The chorus-boys walk across the front of the space singing "Lili, Lili". Lili arrives, stops centre space, smiles at the camera, then walks into the salon. This arrival clearly marks her as an object of the gaze and with her blonde hair, her perfect figure and her red skimpy dress she is created as the stereotypical femme fatale. This description also posits Lili as the complete opposite to Jeanne Dielman's non-seductive presence. A regression to the oppressive cinematic gaze is implied, yet I will argue this is not delivered. Instead, the spectator is invited to partake in the spectacle, through direct address, and then his/her position is played with.

when performers in musicals turn to face us directly, we do not enter another register, but as we have seen, the potentially disorientating effects or the break in narrative are minimised by the presence of the audience in the film and by mechanisms of identification. (Feuer, 36)

The convention of direct address, one that the musical makes great use of, is evoked and then subverted in Golden Eighties. It is used to make the spectator present in the

drama, and then 'abused' to effect a *mise-en-abyme* of spectatorship. In the opening of Golden Eighties Akerman seems to be adhering to the conventions of the musical form. For the first song Sylvie faces the camera and begins to sing the contents of her latest love letter. As Jane Feuer has noted in relation to the musical in general, the facing of the camera is neutralised by the next shot and Akerman follows this system with a reverse angle which reveals the audience Sylvie was performing for, and therefore neutralises the impact of Sylvie's direct address. According to Feuer the effect is such that, this second shot encourages the spectator to identify with that audience. Once this audience has been established through this opening song, Akerman plays with this notion of actions, songs and, generally, life being overseen by an audience, and performed by the characters. Actions are constantly overheard or overseen by other people, and events are relayed via gazes in the fictional world.

As I have previously noted, Lili constitutes a graphic example of someone constructed to be looked at, yet paradoxically, it is also with Lili that the conventions of direct address are destroyed. Thus it was evident from Lili's first entrance that while she is object of the look she is also aware of that gaze. As she walks around she frequently looks around her to check who is looking (or to check that people are looking). The epitome of Lili's attempts to attract occurs in her one and only song. M. Jean is complaining that he does not see enough of Lili; she walks around and says "but you're seeing me now". He then begins to get angry, so she throws her arms around him and starts to sing.

At first Lili and M. Jean stand side on to the camera, and she looks into his face as she sings to him. After one quick glance and smile at the camera Lili gradually addresses her song straight to it in an extremely flirtatious manner, smiling and fluttering her eyelashes. Suddenly M. Jean sees her looking out and also looks into

the camera with a look of bewilderment on his face. In discovering her looking out M. Jean seems to realise simultaneously Lili's duplicity: while she is singing to him she is making eyes at the cinematic spectator.

What is important for our current reading is the fact that Lili's acknowledgement of the spectator returns the spectator's gaze. This is the main instance of what becomes a key strategy in the film. As well as Lili's look, the male and female chorus address the camera and Jeanne also glances at it from time to time. The notion of 'display' can be extended to much of the movement during the songs, as chorus girls often drape themselves around the frame, thereby drawing attention to its shape. In acknowledging the presence of the spectator and in returning his/her gaze Golden Eighties is, I would suggest, turning the spectator into a spectacle, since it is primarily the frame - and by implication all that exists behind it - that is the object of the diegetic gaze. Through this exaggeration of direct address, Akerman once again denies the voyeurism of the classical text. The spectator's position is not only not hidden, it is over-emphasised.

The dominating specularly of Golden Eighties brings us to the second meaning of spectacle, which is the fascination with pure surface. Typically such a trait has been used negatively in order to evoke the a generation which, it is suggested, simply plays with the past, and looks for superficial experiences. (Since authentic experiences are no longer possible). However, I wish to use the term positively, connecting it with Tom Gunning's notion of a cinema of attractions, as well as with Akerman's 'jouissance du voir'.

Tom Gunning has analysed primitive cinema in terms of what he has called a "cinema of attractions". Through the use of static tableaux shots which actively

court the gaze of the spectator, this cinema is exhibitionist, attracted by the possibilities the frame holds for looking. Gunning describes his cinema of attractions as a: “the story simply provides a frame upon which to string a demonstration of the magical possibilities of the cinema” (Attractions 64) He suggests that the cinema of attractions went underground with the coming of the classical narrative system, but remained to be found in the avant-garde and genres such as the musical. Gunning's theory is pertinent to Akerman's cinema from its earliest stages, one of her prime recurring themes being a fascination with the possibilities the camera hold for framing a space, and thereby focusing a gaze. In films such as News from Home, as I will examine in chapter two, the exhibition of the camera's ‘framing’ qualities takes priority over either narrative or image. How does this relate to Golden Eighties? While the tableaux shot is not as prominent, the frame is nevertheless emphasised, as I have just shown. Re-reading the frame-as-window paradigm, this suggests a similar celebration of the cinema's specularly, the possibilities it offers for vision and viewing.

Certain concessions must be noted however in the shift from Akerman's 70s framings to those which take place in Golden Eighties. First, Gunning's use of the term ‘cinema of attractions’ evokes a primitive gaze, hinged around a pre-narrative fascination with the newly invented apparatus. While such a system is appropriate for Akerman's 70s work, it seems less so for her post-modern 80s films. The distinction between Golden Eighties and those films which precede it can therefore be seen as governed by a shift in the place of narrative in Akerman's cinema. thus, in her 70s films, Akerman's concern seems to be with something besides narrative: in Jeanne Dielman it is with the rituals and gestures of Jeanne's life, in News from Home with the topography of the city and in Les Rendez-vous d'Anna the empty, alienated spaces which Anna's journey passes through⁴⁸. By the time of Golden

Eighties this sense of an alternative concern has taken over, yet through Akerman's careful choice of the musical genre it does not disrupt the narrative so much as become the narrative.

To illustrate the way in which specularity is the logic of Golden Eighties we can turn to the opening shot of the film, which frames a piece of floor across which various pairs of female legs walk. We concentrate upon these legs for the total opening credit sequence, and patterns begin to emerge, as they acquire differing rhythms, moving faster or slower, some wearing high heels, others flat shoes, some with tights others with bare legs, (all wear skirts though). Rewinding to Akerman's 70s films, this shot evokes once more the care and attention to the gaze, which is here exhibiting a fascination with pattern and shape. Through this fascination the actuality of the shapes (that they are women's legs) disappears, and instead a different logic of looking takes over, which sees only differences in shape, size, pattern, movement, colour or light and shadow.

As Fischer noted, one of the tendencies of the musical concerns the 'display' of women, and it is possible to connect this opening to Busby Berkeley's endlessly patterned choreography, in which hundreds of women are reduced to a swirling mass of light, shadow and shapes. However, where Akerman differs from Berkeley, and where her films become important for film feminism, is through the total absence of a suturing address. Once again, voyeurism and the objectification of the woman (which Berkeley effects) are denied by Akerman, though curiously this time denial is ensured not by an absence (of spectacle, seduction and pleasure) but by a presence, or more precisely an over-presence.

Since I have been arguing that the category of women's cinema disappeared in the 80s, is there a theoretical space into which we can fit Golden Eighties? I would suggest that yes there is, and it is a space which is indicated by Teresa de Lauretis, when she suggests the “notion of address...[as] a more useful criterion by which to define women's cinema as a cinema by and for women”(Guerilla 14). De Lauretis' suggestion overcomes the changes in the style, aesthetics or practice of films made by women (which negates the possibility to describe women's cinema through its form) and moves to the question of how does a film address its spectator; does it address her as a woman - whatever that might mean -? In the sense that Akerman's cinema avoids and forbids that address which has been characterised as male, in order to offer an opposition to this structure, then yes her cinema is part of women's cinema.

Once the echo between feminist film theory and Akerman's cinema through this system of address has been recognised, further points of connection emerge. Having suggested that Akerman's cinema ‘grows up’, becoming more knowing in its style and less self-absorbed in its subject, I would like to point out that the same is true of feminist film theory. As it shifts from the 70s to the 90s so feminist film theory changes from oppositional to negotiational. As I mentioned earlier though, part of this transitional process incorporates a negation of issues which had faced it from the beginning and it is through Akerman's address of these problems that feminist film theory and Akerman's cinema come apart.

4: Nuit et jour - Re-Writing the Body

The Two Julies

Nuit et jour (1991) has perhaps the most conventional narrative of all Akerman's films. It tells the story of a young couple, Julie and Jack, who move to Paris from

the Provinces. By night Jack drives taxis while Julie explores the city; by day they are together in their apartment. The harmony of this first love is soon shattered as Julie becomes involved with Jack's partner Joseph, who drives the taxi by day. At first Julie is able to conduct both liaisons, but gradually Joseph becomes more demanding and at the end of the film she leaves both Jack, Joseph and the city of Paris.

I have suggested that Akerman's (re-)use of the name Julie in Nuit et jour prompts us to connect this film to Je tu il elle. I will argue that Nuit et jour the film further develops the relations between what Judith Mayne has termed: "female authorship and an erotics of female desire" (Keyhole 8), taking up in particular the representation of the female body which was central part of Je tu il elle and connecting it more forcefully with 'la jouissance du voir', a way of looking which has been associated with Akerman from her earliest films onwards, and yet has never been fully explored in relation to her cinema.

Like Golden Eighties, Nuit et jour re-plays previous cinemas. First, through the connection to Je tu il elle Akerman's past is evoked, though ultimately this is in order to measure Nuit et jour's distance and difference from that past. Second, through the setting in Paris aspects of French cinema are conjured up, and Akerman's particular use of these aspects will be explored in the third chapter of this thesis. Finally, through its love triangle narrative Nuit et jour references Truffaut's Jules et Jim (1961) which it then challenges. What is important to extract from this inter-textuality is the 'post-modern' attitude of Nuit et jour. Like Golden Eighties, Nuit et jour represents a progression in Akerman's cinema (measured) through a self-consciousness about its precedents. If in Golden Eighties this progression indicated a growing willingness to deal with the spectacular aspects of the cinema,

in Nuit et jour it indicates a developed attitude to the female body and the pleasures and dangers which it connotes. Since the inter-texts of Paris and Jules et Jim form the subject of other chapters it is upon the representation of Julie, through which I would suggest a re-writing of the female body is undertaken that I will concentrate upon.

Besides the echoes in the titles of each film, further connections exist between the two Julies. In terms of the plot of the films both characters are involved in two 'relationships'. I use the word advisedly since in Je tu il elle the actual nature of Julie's encounters with the man in the second part and the woman in the third, are not clearly defined. Akerman/Julie's changing around of her room in the first part of Je tu il elle is repeated in Nuit et jour (though more drastically) as Jack and Julie knock down a dividing wall and paint a room. Also both Julies leave at the end of the film, their actions accompanied by children singing (in the first film this is only on the sound-track, while in the second we see the group of children): Julie (1) leaves her female lover and Julie (2) leaves Jack and Joseph - so the narrator tells us. As well as these plot details, the two Julies are connected through the manner in which each is visually represented. The various shots of Julie (2) from behind echo shots of Julie (1) nude in Je tu il elle. Like this earlier film in which Julie(1) constructs our time through her menstrual cycle ("I think 28 days had passed"); Julie in Nuit et jour constructs our space and our sense of Paris. When Julie is clothed, walking through the streets of the city, we follow Paris through Julie, rather than following Julie through the city.

These echoes between Nuit et jour and Je tu il elle will be used in this analysis to justify a reading of the former using aspects of the latter. Such a justification is needed due to the apparent opposition of the two films when we consider the formal

and aesthetic positions of each. The low-budget, avant-garde look of Je tu il elle has become in Nuit et jour a professional, art cinema (or European auteur cinema) aesthetic and this exchange brings with it a difference in style, form and address.

In Je tu il elle I noted that Akerman's desire and her look are first made present. Her omnipresence in the film suggested an excess of authorship, which marked her overwhelmingly as the source of meaning in the film. In Nuit et jour Akerman is no longer present on the image-track, although she again assumes the role of narrator on the sound-track. In my analysis of Je tu il elle I charted the way in which Akerman is a willing subject and object of the look. This was made apparent through scenes in which Akerman on the sound-track commented, first, that someone passed her window and she stood still so that they could look at her, and second, that she took her clothes off and looked at herself. In both cases I suggested that since Akerman's look was announced and not hidden, voyeurism was denied. In Nuit et jour the more conventional use of narrative and image suggests that the denial of voyeurism might not occur as easily. Since the authorial figure is displaced from an avant-garde, excessive presence to an art cinema, textual presence, the level of control which Akerman has over the meaning-making process would also seem to be reduced.

Suggesting that Nuit et jour is a study of the nude could imply that the film is both conventional (in mainstream cinema the female body is frequently shown nude) and patriarchal. In view of Akerman's feminist past, both the above implications could suggest a reversal of her early stance on the representation of women in the cinema. With Nuit et jour providing the two ingredients which early (pre-1980s) Akerman's cinema denied: romantic love and the spectacle of the female body. Yet despite the 'negative' implications of Julie's nudity, I will suggest that,

through Akerman's treatment of the body, the nude becomes the site of 'la jouissance du voir', a gaze which is eroticised, yet is not defined through voyeurism.

The Author, from Excess to Inter-text

Having noted that in Je tu il elle the gaze was neither hidden nor voyeuristic but attached to its author, this raises the question of how the differences of Nuit et jour shift this gaze. Equally, how does Akerman enunciate her desire in such a different textual system? These questions will be addressed in this final section. Initially I will examine the difference of address which Nuit et jour's adoption of a European auteur cinematic style evokes. If the avant-garde style of Je tu il elle, and Akerman's excessive presence, allowed her unproblematised agency, in Jeanne Dielman this agency still went unquestioned, being present in 'authorial' themes, stylistic preoccupations and a sense of autobiography. With the move from avant-garde cinema stylistics to a European auteur model, the notion of agency necessarily changes. Firstly, the European auteur model is one associated strongly with the French cinema, and it is because of Akerman's involvement in this cultural sphere that I propose this model for Nuit et jour. As I suggested earlier, this model returns us to a 'naive' conception of authorship, in which the film is seen as the director's personal vision, and a director's work is read for evidence of personal themes, obsessions or preoccupations. The second aspect of this model however, is the fact that it is largely male dominated and it would seem to deny differences of gender. The task of locating a female desire and authorial voice is problematised by the increase in 'noise' which the shift towards this male dominated model of filmmaking brings about. Accordingly a European auteur analysis of Nuit et jour would extract from the film thematic, aesthetic or formal consistencies for Akerman, which would mark it as an 'Akerman' film, but would obscure any sense of the difference

of desire which, as I have insisted in this chapter, is a structuring feature of Akerman's cinema.

In my discussion of the ways in which pleasure has been theorised in 80s feminist film theory I mentioned several strategies, of which I now want to isolate one: a reading against the grain. Used by Mayne in her analysis of Arzner, and Stacey in her work on female spectatorship, reading against the grain offers a rejection of the 'obvious', 'conventional' or 'ideal' readings to read instead from a position of difference or otherness. It is such a reading which I now wish to offer for Nuit et jour as I re-introduce the lesbian identity which was hinted at in my discussion of Je tu il elle and which has been hovering in the background of Akerman's films ever since. The significance of this lesbian identity becomes clear if we return momentarily to that former film. I indicated in my analysis that two looks were available in Je tu il elle: Akerman's look at herself, and Akerman's look at the man. What was absent though was the third explicit look: Akerman's look at her female lover; and it is this look which I will argue is finally figured in Nuit et jour. My concentration in my analysis of this film will be on the systems of looking which Akerman uses, for it is through these, I will suggest, that the erotics of female desire are inscribed.

The Third Look

I will argue that this 'third look' in Nuit et jour, is primarily located with Julie and Akerman's treatment of her as a female nude. The repeated nudity of Julie raises the problem of the connotations of the nude female body. Since in general a female nude in the cinema is treated 'objectively', through a voyeuristic gaze, it is necessary to assess how Akerman avoids such an interpretation. I will suggest that in order to see how this is achieved we need to read against the grain. This reading

will begin with the décor and plot of the film, through which I will argue the nature of looking is problematised. It will then take into account the connotations of Akerman's narration, before finally returning to the female nude to re-read what is, I will suggest, Akerman's re-writing of the female body refracted through a gaze of jouissance.

Much of the Julie/Jack story takes place in their apartment, in which the flat's topography is used in order to subvert norms of looking. Julie and Jack's apartment seems to be built in an 'n' shape, with the bedroom as the bridge of the n, and the living room and bathroom facing each other, separated by a courtyard, though with windows looking at each other. Great use is made of this shape, with several sequences set in one room, such as the living room through the window of which we can see action taking place (through the two windows) in the bathroom. The effect is very much like Chinese boxes, with frames inside other frames, and several planes of space viewable at once.

This construction and use of space are significant here, since they set up a 'rear window' voyeuristic scenario, in which the spectator is looking through one window into another window, inside which action is taking place. Much of the action between Jack and Julie is therefore framed, and I would argue that for the spectator this framing effect distances him/her from the action. However, *Nuit t jour* is not a case of "Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at." (Berger, 47). First, the division into looker/looked at is destroyed: Jack and Joseph look at Julie yet Julie also looks at them, and her looks are emphasised as much as theirs. Second, the power of Julie's look is gradually established in the film. Initially Julie's look is equivalent to that of Joseph. For example, the first time that Joseph and Julie arrange to meet the sequence begins with a shot of Joseph looking out from a café

window, then the next time they meet there is an equivalent shot of Julie. Later on in the film Julie seems to acquire more dominance, as the only clear point of view shot in the film is one in which Julie looks at Jack. The sequence reads: we see a close-up of Julie's face asleep, she opens her eyes, we see Jack standing at the open window, naked from the hips upwards, he looks into the window shutters and sees her looking and says "your eyes are open". At this moment it would seem we are positioned with Julie, seeing what she sees. By contrast, the conventional cinematic gaze at Julie is not as easily described.

These isolated instances of looking can be moulded into a more overt discourse of looks and the concept of surveillance, or hiding from the look is actually built into the narrative, as Julie's deception of Jack relies upon her remaining 'un-seen'. This discourse of seeing/being seen, emerges in several instances. Thus, at one point Jack muses upon why he never actually sees Julie walking in Paris; shortly afterwards, we have a shot of Julie walking and Jack driving past her. He sees her, but what he does not see is Joseph on the other side of the road waiting for her. Later Julie is in the taxi with Jack and she sees Joseph, though he does not see her. Finally, towards the end of the film, when she is increasingly nervous about being found out, Julie thinks she sees Jack.

The various systems of looking in Nuit et jour outlined above offer a separate yet supporting discourse to the film's narrative. Though only one real point of view shot can be defined in the film, the spectator is constantly reminded of his/her look through the use of decor and through the narrative itself. If this 'reminding' provokes distance from the film, then this is reinforced by the nature and use of the narration. More importantly for my current focus, the narration is the most obvious

manifestation of Akerman's presence and therefore offers the first strong indication of the different desire which I will chart through this film.

The authorial position constructed by Akerman's presence on the sound-track can be illustrated if we consider the function of the narrator. After close-up shots of Julie and of Jack, Akerman as narrator introduces the characters: "Julie and Jack came from the provinces...". Following this initial 'story-telling' function, the purpose of the narration changes from description of the characters' feelings, to the filling in of details; for example: "Then along the banks of the Seine, in a part of town where she had already been I do believe they kissed". This particular piece of narration also illustrates the intervention of Akerman herself. Several times, later, Akerman expresses doubt; thus: "Their bodies searched for more especially after what was going to happen to her. But I'm anticipating..." or "How what might not have happened did happen? I don't know yet; maybe Julie was tired of walking alone in the big city and she loved Jack so much...". At these moments Akerman seems to be intervening in the fiction. In the first example her narration removes from the spectator the impulse to read meaning into action or image: she tells what the characters were thinking or feeling; in the second example she emphasises the fact that this is a story over which she has control.

If Akerman 'enters' *Nuit et jour* through her narration, then the 'third look' becomes present through the treatment of Julie's nude body. Through casting and mise-en-scène Akerman breaks several 'rules' in the filming of the female nude body. First, Guilaine Londez who plays Julie, does not conform to conventional notions of beauty (ie: the standards set in Western ideology by advertising, the media etc..). Whilst facially, Guilaine has Jewish features (a slightly hooked nose, small eyes, tight curly hair) physically she is voluptuous, with big hips and legs and Akerman

constantly frames the character of Julie so as to emphasise her shape. Generally, when Julie is framed with one of the men it is she who is dominant, (both actors are of slight build). Examples include the second opening shot of the film, in which Julie moves from the window to lie with Jack on the bed, and a later shot with Joseph, in which Julie sits in the foreground with her back to the camera, while Joseph stands in the background.

In both these cases Julie is naked, yet Akerman breaks many of the conventions of screen nudity. Unlike classical cinema, which most frequently 'signals' nudity through a woman's bare breasts, Akerman repeatedly shows Julie's body from behind, denying the breasts and emphasising the actresses curves. The repeated framing of Julie from behind, suggests an altering of the conventional erotic use of the woman. Despite her frequent nakedness I would argue that Julie is not objectified. Instead, the distance which the discourse of looking and the narration have imposed, as well as the lack of conventional identification mechanisms, denies the voyeurism and objectification which the female nude would usually produce.

The most important factor though, when considering the 'difference' of the look at the woman in Nuit et jour is the representation of Julie herself. The narrative sets Julie up as a woman in possession of her own desires and the film's gaze does not attempt to 'possess' these desires. Unlike Marnie in Hitchcock's film, whose desire for herself is allowed only in so far as it satisfies a patriarchal desire, Julie is no one's fantasy. Her desire is her own, and the camera's gaze respects that fact. Again, the absence of point of view shots denies the impulse of identification, thus we never look with a character at Julie. Equally it could be argued that the frequent references that Nuit et jour makes to Akerman's past positions encourage an identification with those past positions. If the use of the name Julie, and the nudity

call up the memory of Akerman in Je tu il elle, then that inter-textual re-play is meant, I will suggest, to leave one with a sense of the difference which underlines the author's historical passage.

Instead of the conventional, patriarchal gaze, Nuit et jour offers the 'erotics of vision' conjured up by the phrase 'la jouissance du voir'. This is a gaze which has consistently been associated with Akerman's cinema. Akerman suggested such an association in early interviews, and it has subsequently been reiterated by Flitterman-Lewis and others as a way of figuring the difference of female authorship. In French 'jouissance' describes sexual pleasure, and critically it has been seized by writers such as Irigaray and Kristeva to describe the realm of the feminine. Equally though, jouissance is opposed to the linear by Roland Barthes in his description of the 'writerly' and the 'readerly' texts. In my association of jouissance with Akerman here I want to echo the sense of an erotics of vision designated by Flitterman-Lewis, but also to suggest that Nuit et jour extends this gaze to the female body. Previously jouissance had been used to describe Akerman's fascination with spaces, light shadow and the 'attraction' aspects of the camera frame. By contrast, in Nuit et jour this erotics of vision is directed towards the female body.

A development is necessarily defined by this film, for whilst in Jeanne Dielman Akerman's authorial difference was figured through a denial of pleasure and of the female body, in Nuit et jour that body not only not denied, it is the main presence of the film. Equally, a progression is figured in Akerman's gaze as Nuit et jour figures as fully present the 'third look' that is to say Akerman's look at the woman, which had been erased from Je tu il elle. Finally, reflecting upon the formal and critical developments which Nuit et jour implies, not only does Akerman go against

Mulvey's proposed rejection of popular cinema and address the problematics of spectacle and the gaze which feminist film theory had avoided, but she does so while sustaining a sense of continuum between the 70s and the 90s.

Given that I have borrowed my methodology for the above analysis from critics whose central project is to explore the 'lesbian' as a desiring, authorial or spectatorial position, it might seem logical to attribute such a label to Akerman's place in Nuit et jour. Such a conclusion would also offer a neat ending to this chapter. If I began by citing three instances of naming for Akerman: as part of 'women's cinema', and as 'auteur', and as 'contrary' to Hitchcock, my analysis of Nuit et jour could suggest a fourth, absented 'name' for Akerman, that of 'lesbian'. However, despite the neatness of such a conclusion I am persuaded against this fourth naming. First, I am swayed against this conclusion by Akerman herself and in particular by an incident cited by Martha Gever who writes:

In my collection of clippings on lesbian film I've preserved another item that appeared in the Village Voice in late 1984, detailing the refusal of Belgian film-maker Chantal Akerman to have her film Je tu il elle screened as the New York gay festival. According to the article, she told the festival director, "This is not a business decision...but a moral and ethical one. I will not be ghettoized.(Gevers, Ourselves 198)

Having begun with Akerman insisting upon non-ghettoisation, I therefore finish with a re-inforcing quote. Importantly though, to deny Akerman's cinema the label 'lesbian' does not mean that position is not available in her cinema. Instead, as I have argued earlier, what I am denying is the restriction to one position when in fact the phrase 'Chantal Akerman's films' encompasses many. The complexities of this

'lesbian' position which is both embraced and refused by Akerman; visually figured (Je tu il elle) and, I have suggested metaphorically re-visited in Nuit et jour, needs further exploration. This thesis must move on to other terrain meaning that this 'lesbian' name is left behind, yet there is a sense in which it could offer the starting point of a renewed analysis by feminist film theorists of Akerman's more recent work.

NOTES

- ¹ The significance of ‘naming’ for film feminism is indicated by the recurrence of the term in feminist film criticism. Thus in her article "Desperately Seeking Difference" on the subject of the theorisation of female spectatorship, Jackie Stacey notes: “In an area insufficiently theorised to offer easy answers, a problem of labelling presents itself.”(112). Also, in the context of ‘Feminist Film Culture in West Germany’ Miriam Hansen notes: “The effect of not naming is censorship, whether caused by the imperialism of patriarchal language or the under development of a feminist language. We need to begin analysing our own films, but first it is necessary to speak in our own name.” (Hansen, Frauen und: 294)
- ² I have taken my capitalisation and punctuation of this full title from press releases and publicity for the film.
- ³ “The critical response to Rainer's films, especially *Film about a Woman Who...*(1974) adds further instances of naming malpractice.” (Rich, Name: 216)
- ⁴ “The author's name is a proper name, and therefore it raises the problems common to all proper names . . . Obviously, one cannot turn a proper name into a pure and simple reference. It has other than indicative functions: more than an indication, a gesture, a finger pointed at someone, it is the equivalent of a description.” (Foucault Author105)
- ⁵ The shift from Cahiers' term ‘la politique des auteurs’ to the term ‘the theory of authorship’ is one which has been accompanied by much controversy. Edward Buscombe notes that it was Andrew Sarris who effected this translation when he imported Cahiers' work into America. (Buscombe Ideas). Buscombe also points out that ‘la politique’ was never really a theory instead it “was meant to define an attitude to the cinema and a course of action”(22) In John Caughie

ed

- ⁶ This idea is manifest in Wollen's first edition of Signs and Meaning in the Cinema 1967, and then extended (as Caughie points out, contradicting somewhat his former position: Caughie, Theories:127) in the 1972 second edition: "It is wrong, in the name of a denial of the traditional idea of creative subjectivity, to deny any status to individuals at all. But Fuller or Hawks or Hitchcock, the directors, are quite separate from 'Fuller' or 'Hawks' or 'Hitchcock', the structures named after them,..[t]here can be no doubt that the presence of a structure in the text can often be connected with the presence of a director on the set, but the situation in the cinema...is very different from that in the other arts, where there is a much more direct relationship between artist and work. It is in this sense that it is possible to speak of a film *auteur* as an unconscious catalyst." (Wollen rpt. in Caughie Theories146-147)
- ⁷ See Christian Metz, 1974
- ⁸ The suggestion that Akerman belongs in between an Anglo-American context and a French one begs the question: what about Belgium? As I will discuss in my third chapter there are definite stylistic connections between Akerman and Belgium, yet the critical blankness of Belgian cinema (as Judith Mayne notes "there is no movement no 'new Belgian cinema' no shared alternative tradition of which Chantal Akerman's film Jeanne Dielman is a part" Mayne, Keyhole: 202) has prevented any exploration of Akerman's possible connection to a Belgian school of theory.
- ⁹ Other articles include Janet Bergstrom's "*Jeanne Dielman, 23 Quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles* by Chantal Akerman" in which Bergstrom discusses female authorship and desire in the cinema; Annette Kuhn discusses the different pleasures offered by the film in Women's Pictures: feminism and the cinema 163-169 and Teresa de Lauretis analyses the 'female' in the film; de Lauretis Rethinking,

- ¹⁰ For a detailed discussion of Shirley Clarke's work, within the framework of feminist film theory see Rabinovitz Points.
- ¹¹ Sandy Flitterman-Lewis discusses the problematics involved in Varda's work for feminist film theory. See Flitterman-Lewis Differently 215-247
- ¹² Johnston: "A collective film *of itself* cannot reflect the conditions of its production. What collective methods do provide is the real possibility of examining how cinema works and how we can best interrogate and **demystify** the workings of ideology: it will be from these insights that a genuinely revolutionary conception of counter-cinema for the women's struggle will come." (Counter-Cinema 31)
- ¹³ For examples see Kay and Peary Dance girl Dance. Or Gerald Peary "Alice Guy Blaché (Czarina of the silent screen" in Kay and Peary eds. Women and.
- ¹⁴ For example: Mary Ann Doane "Film and the Masquerade - Theorising the female spectator" Screen 23. 3-4 (Sept-Oct 1982). 74-87.
- ¹⁵ Judy Smith, one of the co-makers of The Woman's Film quoted from an interview with Rosenberg. January 1976. (Rosenberg 20)
- ¹⁶ The quotes below should serve to emphasise some of the agendas: "...The first independent women's film groups grabbed camera or video and went to talk to women about their lives and experiences." Christine Gledhill "Whose Choice?: Teaching Films About Abortion" Screen Education 24, (1977) : 38 "We are in the process of setting up our own distribution service... we would like our films to be used as part of an ongoing process of discussion and action; for this reason we do not want them to be shown in the same context as commercial movies. We aim to send out a speaker with all the films and believe that all showings should be followed by a discussion on the issues raised by the films." (Statement by The London Women's Film Group) Spare Rib no 14 August 1973. "[w]e propose to sustain, promote and distribute all films made by women. films

that promote and portray a **more truthful** image of women”(Manifesto of the movement) Vicki Weatherstone “The International Convention of Women in the Cinema” Framework Issue 1 (1975) :20.

- ¹⁷ Thus Rosenberg notes: “The feminists' emphasis on collectivism represents a profound counterpoint to women's traditional isolation.” (59)
- ¹⁸ The Dziga Vertov collective included: Gérard Martin, Nathalie Billard, Armand Marco and Jean-Pierre Gorin. For more information on this group see Steve Cannon.
- ¹⁹ Such connections also exist in Germany, thus Julia Knight “the main impetus for the contemporary women's movement came from within the student protest movement which emerged in Germany and other western countries during the 60s.”(73)
- ²⁰ However, though during the filming of Jeanne Dielman most of the crew were women, in the post-production stage, many of the names were male. For example: sound mixer: Alain Marchal, design and costumes, Philippe Graff, mixing, Jean-Paul Loublié. Apart from anything else this division of labour indicates the inaccessibility of certain parts of the film industry to women.
- ²¹ As documented in Spare Rib no 20 1974
- ²² From World Film Directors Vol 2 1945-85 .4
- ²³ The members of Psych et Po, which included Hélène Cixous originated from the University of Paris at Vincennes. As well as writing they were active in creating their own bookshops and publishing house under the name of ‘des femmes’. Claire Duchén notes: “Psych et Po's project has been specifically named ‘the revolution of the symbolic’ a revolution to bring about the existence of the feminine...” (Duchén 85)
- ²⁴ For examples of the theorisation of lesbian identity see in particular Luce Irigaray “Commodities among themselves” in Irigaray, This sex 192-197. Also,

more recently “Love of same, love of other” Irigaray, An Ethics 97-115.

²⁵ “As for time, female subjectivity would seem to provide a specific measure that essentially retains *repetition* and *eternity* from among the multiple modalities of time known...” (Kristeva in Humm, 216)

²⁶ Molly Haskell “Time to Judge Women's Films on Merit” Village Voice, Dec 29, (1975) : 68 as quoted in Rosenberg (23)

²⁷ Thus E. Ann Kaplan “A study of Sheila Page's Women's happytime Commune provides an opportunity to survey the kinds of films women have been making since the resurgence of the women's movement in the late 60s. People are now ready for analysis of the practical, theoretical and methodological problems of making feminist films and of developing a concept of feminist cinema.” My emphasis. . “Women's Happytime Commune - New Departures in Women's Films” Jump Cut no 9.(1975) 9-11.

²⁸ Examples of feminist engagement with male paradigms include Johnston's use of Barthes work on myth in “Women's cinema as counter-cinema” Mulvey's use of Lacan in “Visual pleasure and narrative cinema” and Doane's use of Saussure and Metz in “Film and the masquerade”.

²⁹ Kaplan (Ibid) also notes that Claire Johnston was involved in the film The Amazing Equal Pay Show

³⁰ Women and Film was formed in 1972 by Saunie Saylor and Siew-hwa- Beh. Contributors to the five issues included: Beverle Houston, Marsha Kinder, Constance Penley, Sandy Flitterman and Julia Lesage.

³¹ Further examples of cross-currents include: Jump Cut Nov-Dec 1974 no 4 “Review of the Screen special issue on Brecht”

³² Miriam Hansen talks of how Frauen und Film founded by Helke Sander in 1974 aimed “(a) to analyze the workings of patriarchal culture in cinema; (b) to recognize and name feminist starting points in film and develop them further.”

These are taken from Frauen und Film no 6, 1975. (Hansen, 295)

- 33 Canon formation was and still is “a political issue” (Janet Staiger Politics). Thus even 20 years after the emergence of feminist film theory women film makers' work rarely finds its way into film canons. Two recent examples of this spring to mind in the British and French contexts. For the centenary of cinema the BBC arranged a season of 100 ‘canonic’ films, out of that 100 only **three** were made by women (Desperately Seeking Susan Susan Seidelman, 1986 Chocolat Claire Denis, 1988 and Blue Steel Kathryn Bigelow, 1990). Meanwhile France commissioned several film-makers to make special centenary films, one of whom was Agnès Varda. Despite the fact that the choice of Varda seems to suggest a step forward, the resulting film Les Cent et une nuits/One hundred and one nights celebrates a cinema which is, again largely male populated.
- 34 “Films of correspondence...would be those investigating correspondences, between emotion and objectivity, narrative and deconstruction, art and ideology. Thus Jeanne Dielman is a film of correspondence in its exploration of the bonds between housework and madness, prostitution and heterosexuality.....”Rich Name 223.
- 35 “By observing Marnie, object of desire..Hitchcock becomes a sort of double of Mark and of Strutt... his own representation as duplicate image of himself as pure image power - the camera-wish, of which the object-choice is here the woman.” Bellour Enunciation 73
- 36 This sense of Akerman's cinema as ‘anti’ is suggested in the following: Jan Dawson Review of News From Home. Monthly Film Bulletin 546 Jul (1979) :150 “ The normal proportions of narrative cinema are reversed.”. Also JumpCut Introduction “Hollywood and counter-cinema: The roots of Jump Cut” Peter Steven. (16) “Counter cinema...there is a wealth of such films and film-makers: from the innovative film and photo league in the U. S... to the feminist

cinema of Chantal Akerman and Michelle Citron in the 1980s”.

- 37 Johnston warns against non-intervention “The danger of developing a cinema of non- intervention is that it promotes a passive subjectivity at the expense of analysis” Counter-Cinema 29.
- 38 In their article “an interrogation of the cinematic sign: woman as sexual signifier in Jackie Raynals' Deux Fois” the writers praise Raynal's de-constructive cinema. Camera Obscura no 1
- 39 In his chapter “Story/Discourse: A Note on Two kind of Voyeurisms” (Metz Signifier) Metz notes that in the classical model of cinema all signs of enunciation are effaced and the film presents itself not as ‘discourse’, which would imply an enunciator as being present, but as ‘histoire’, in which there are no enuncaitive signs, thus: “since history...is always by definition a story told from nowhere, told by nobody, but received by someone..It is therefore, in a sense, the receiver...who tells it”(230)
- 40 An enlightening analysis of this particular part of the film can be found in Ben Singer's “Jeanne Dielman: Cinematic Interrogation and ‘Amplification’” (Singer, 1989).
- 41 “I am in fundamental agreement...that the author who should be the chief object of current theoretical concern is the one who occupies the interior of the text, and I will henceforth refer to that figure as the author ‘inside’ the text. I am less prepared than was Barthes of 1969 to bracket the biographical author altogether, and will instead attempt to propose a new model for conceptualising the relation between the author ‘inside’ the text and what I will from this point forward designate the author ‘outside’ the text.” (Silverman, Acoustic: 193)
- 42 The phrasing to this section actually reads: “We asked lesbian and gay filmmakers...”
- 43 De Lauretis exhibits a similar impulse of reflection upon the late 80s in 1990 with

her article: "Guerilla in the Midst: Women's Cinema in the 80s" Screen 31,
1 Spring (1990) : 6-25

⁴⁴ Both Golden Eighties and Nuit et jour were poorly distributed in Britain. In the case of the latter, it was due to come out in 1992 but was eventually released in 1993, and only for a very brief period of time.

⁴⁵ See Frederick Jameson "Postmodernism and consumer Society" Rpt. in Postmodern Culture Ed. Hal Foster London: Pluto Press, 1985. 111-125

⁴⁶ "Conservatory Blues" review of the film by Jill Forbes Sight and Sound LVI/2 Spring (1987) 145.

⁴⁷ As translated from the plot synopsis on the back of the soundtrack record of the film.

⁴⁸ This fact is illustrated in the first shot of the film. Although, narratively the opening documents the arrival of Anna, since we see her get off a train, through the framing of the sequence, attention is drawn to the space of the railway station, rather than to her actions.

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Introduction

As I illustrated in my first chapter, one part of Akerman's 'name' has been tied to feminist film practice, and its 70s connotations. What I will explore in this chapter is how another part has been associated with experiment and formal innovation, thus Angela Martin: "...there are two ways in which Akerman breaks with traditional cinema: her work in the avant-garde, and her work on images of women" (32). Though I have separated these two parts, they obviously intersect and as I showed in my first chapter, formal innovation is frequently carried out in the name of feminist intervention.

Like 'woman', Akerman's formal experimentation is constructed across an Anglo-American/European axis and it has frequently been suggested that her cinema exists somewhere in between these two traditions. Examples of such a proposition can be traced to Peter Wollen's article: "The Two Avant-Gardes: Europe and America" which offers a revision of his earlier (1975) article "The Two Avant Gardes". In this second article Wollen suggests two positions: "New York, stood for modernism, Paris stood for May '68 and theory"(9) while the work of Akerman, he suggests, "combine[s] the two avant-gardes" (9).

Wollen's relatively brief mention of Akerman in this article raises many questions, many of which this chapter will explore. As I have previously emphasised, each of these four chapter attempts to intervene in some way in the 'name' of Chantal Akerman. In this chapter I will be engaging with this construction of Akerman as 'in

between' two avant-gardes. While initially it will be my aim to establish what sort of position this 'in between' allows, my main focus will be on those works which are rarely discussed, namely short and medium-length films, work for television, and videos. Thus this chapter will feature much information on the context of Akerman's film-making, and, among other things, it will be interested in the mechanics of Akerman's film-making such as how funding influences the finished product, or how television work might restrict Akerman's authorial position.

Although I have noted that Akerman's construction as an experimental film-maker is derived from her early work, I will argue that the sense of formal innovation and "radical aspiration"¹ that such a stance incorporates is continued in her 80s and 90s work through her insistence on a position of independence. It is this notion of 'independence' which this chapter will explore, and will offer as the second of Akerman's four displacing identities. 'Independence' suggests an insistence on an autonomy and singularity which rejects all placings alongside other cinemas. However, ironically, while the literal meaning of independence is 'apart-ness', within the cinematic context it also suggests that film-makers are 'a part of' a whole history, namely that of independent cinema(s). It will thus be necessary to chart the development of independent cinemas and Akerman's place within this critical field.

The problems involved in achieving independence in the cinema will be discussed in detail below. For the moment I simply want to isolate the fact that while in my opening chapter Akerman's statement: "I'm not making women's films, I'm making Chantal Akerman's films." (qtd. in Martin, 24) was read mainly for her denial of 'women's films', in this second chapter I will shift the emphasis in order to examine

the 'declaration of independence' which is represented in the phrase 'Chantal Akerman's films'.

1: Chantal Akerman's films

Akerman's films require, if not a different viewing situation, at least a different viewing attitude (Martin 35)

Chantal Akerman's work demands an adjustment to pace, a discovery of a different tension than that normally associated with the cinema. (Laura Mulvey, Guest 19)

As Martin and Mulvey note above, the experience of watching Akerman's films, whether her 70s or her 90s work, is not a 'normal' one, where normal indicates the familiar, the repeated or the expected in cinema-going. Instead, Akerman's cinema offers multiple layers of difference, all of which add up to the different experience described above, and many of which will be taken up and explored in this chapter.

In its most literal sense, independence, a lack of dependence, suggests apart-ness, autonomy, and singularity. In insisting on her independence, Akerman is taking up a classic authorial position: her suggestion is that she alone should be seen as the creator of her films, and that she, therefore, should not be judged alongside any other movements, whether gendered, historical, cultural or national. In the cinematic vocabulary, a different set of problems and issues presents itself. Read historically, 'independent' forces an examination of cinema as an institution, or of the mechanics

of film-making: the division of labour sometimes between hundreds of people, and the reliance of the film-maker on outside forces for financial backing, and for the exhibition and distribution of film. All these factors strongly challenge the sense of autonomy, control and singularity implied by Akerman's designation of 'Chantal Akerman's films'.

In its purest sense independent cinema suggests complete isolation from all structures and systems of support, with the onus of meaning-making shifted from the audience and the film's reception, to the film-maker and the film's making. The result of these adjustments would transform film from a global industry into a local artistry, contrasting the mass with the individual and, typically, commerce with art. As a technological process, cinema essentially goes against independence's designated image of the single artistic vision. Allen and Gomery:

The film-maker cannot escape the relatively high degree of technological complexity that is a pre-requisite to the production of any film . . . no film has ever been created outside of an economic context (110)

Typically then, even an independent film-maker will 'depend' on investors, subsidising bodies or financial backers in order to fund the project, technicians, actors and actresses during the filming process, editors, and developers as the film is printed then post-produced, and distributors and exhibitors, through whom the finished product is shown.

In commercial cinema this final film-making-to-audience space is absolutely paramount, yet even in independent cinemas, where profit may no longer be the founding logic, the alternative purposes (film as art, film as political document, film

as pedagogy) still maintain that 'final judgement' element throughout. The final part of the cinematic process (exhibition), is perhaps the way in which film-makers are most dependent. There have been instances throughout cinema's history in which film-makers have achieved almost full independence in the first two stages (financial backing and production) financing the film themselves, and working as their own camera-person, actor/actress, editor etc (indeed this is the case for Akerman's first film Saute ma ville 1968) however, as soon as the film is finished the problem of exhibition raises its head. As Sylvia Harvey notes: Without the private means not only to finance a film project but beyond that to buy up a few cinemas in which to show it, no film-maker is 'independent'.²

It is not only technology which threatens the possibility of independence, it is equally the need for an audience. Perhaps because of the problem of exhibition, independence in the cinema is most typically thought of in terms of the director and the film, or the creative and the textual processes. There is less concentration on how the film was made: who funded it and what sort of circumstances (and thus dependence) the funding brought about. Given the pre-determined nature of film-making it is more productive to think of independence as 'various forms of dependence'. In general terms the phrase independent cinema refers us to: "the forms of cinema that exist outside of a popular or commercial mainstream film industry" (The Woman's Companion to International Film 215) also: "something newer, smaller, more personal and more unusual"(Jonas Mekas)³ or, "something marginalised, alternative or oppositional".(Woman's Companion . . . 215)

It is worth exploring, briefly, the implications of these terms. Mekas' designation of a newer cinema seems to operate on the sense of the mainstream as a traditional

cinema, with any alternative as avant garde, ahead of its time or at least 'of the moment'. Smaller and more personal define themselves against mainstream modes of working, in which films are large-scale productions, which make use of hundreds of personnel. Independent cinema is thereby posited as small-scale, indicating a different level of funding, as well as different reception expectations: these films are not necessarily meant to appeal to the largest audience possible. Personal also refers to traditions of authorship and to the singular nature of the film-making: these films are undoubtedly the works of their directors. Finally, by more unusual Mezas is suggesting opposition to the familiar, to the entirely regulated and familiar experience of mainstream cinema.

The second collection of definitions, 'marginalised', 'alternative' 'oppositional', refers less to the specific character of independent cinemas and more to the position they occupy in relation to the mainstream. Thus a whole history of independence in the cinema, multiple and sprawling, can also be contained through the notion of difference - from the popular, commercial and mainstream. My elaboration of the definitions above offers three levels of difference:

1. as non-popular: thus not made in order to please an audience but governed by another logic; or aimed at a marginal audience
2. as non-commercial: not made for profit, maybe not distributed on a circuit, with the governing logic as non-commercial (but art, politics, pedagogy etc...)
3. as non-mainstream: a category which could indicate anything from non-Hollywood, to (once again) the targeting of a specific audience, or articulation of the ideology of a marginal social grouping, to the film's 'non mainstream' form or aesthetic systems.

Some of the complexities of the notion of independence in the cinema emerge from these categories. On the one hand is Akerman's claim to independence as an aesthetic project, which, as I will later show, translates into a critical construction. In this first sense, independence refers to a discursive position, and is based on textual and theoretical evidence. Independence here can be allied with critical terms such as avant-garde, art cinema, structuralist film-making, modernism or counter-cinema, where what we are describing is an aesthetic project. On the other hand, independence refers to exhibition and distribution strategies. In this second sense, we are concerned more with the practicalities of film-making. Thus at its most precise, independent cinema implies that the film-maker has complete control over how his/her work is written, filmed, edited, promoted, distributed and exhibited. The problems of such an assumption will be discussed in this chapter.

Independence in the Cinema - The Critical Field

Given the difficulties which arise from the juxtaposition of the word independent to the word cinema, it should not be surprising that there is not a consolidated field of independent film theory. Instead, critics have generally sought out movements or moments, whether defined by film-makers, by critics or simply by historical circumstances. Organised groupings which have been studied include the British independent documentary film-makers of the 1920s and 1930s (Macpherson), the London Film-makers Co-op formed in 1966, the Dziga Vertov group in France and the New American cinema. Approaches have been multiple and varied, and can be suggested with reference to some of the above. Thus, Don Macpherson's British Cinema, Traditions of Independence offers analyses of the cultural background to the work of the independent documentary film-makers. Independence in this context

becomes culturally specific, with the Independent Film-makers Association (IFA) themselves describing their position thus:

We have become independent in the sense that we are 'absent'. We are absent because what we have made present in our work has been systematically censored by the established productive and critical forces.
(Macpherson, 2)

Studies of the London Film Co-op and the Dziga Vertov group have typically been auteurist in tone, concentrating on individual film-makers (Peter Gidal, Lis Rhodes or Peter Kubelka for the former, Jean-Luc Godard for the latter). Meanwhile, writings on the new American cinema have ranged from contextual studies of a movement (Parker Tyler, 1969) through aesthetic histories (Sitney, 1979) to more audience-related work (Hoberman & Rosenbaum, 1983).

In terms of film history a topography of independence can be mapped out to include a wider range of moments: the avant-garde (thus the French 'first' avant garde of the 20s), German expressionism, those film-makers whose work concentrated on the possibilities of montage (in 20s Russia), the French New Wave, Italian Neo-realism, Cinema Novo in Brazil or Queer cinema. Finally, there are several film-makers whose work has been hailed as contributing to the aesthetic field of independence; they include: Maya Deren, Stan Brakhage, Derek Jarman, Sally Potter, Jean-Luc Godard and Straub/Huillet and, of course, Chantal Akerman.

If the study of dominant cinema has offered a way into popular culture, then the diverse independent scene has most frequently been the place for the theorisation of the cinematic apparatus and its various functions as a signifying, a representational

or a psychoanalytic system. It is no coincidence that some of the earliest film critics (in the 1920s) wrote on avant-garde films;⁴ or that one of the first feminist film journals, Camera Obscura turned to experimental works by women directors - including Akerman⁵ in order to understand how the representational system worked.⁶ While offering a way into understanding the workings of the cinematic apparatus, independent cinemas have also provided a polemical, political or identifying space, re-defining the place of the spectator and broadening the boundaries enforced by dominant cinema.

From the list of moments above it is possible to distinguish three phases of independence in the cinema:

1. the beginnings of cinema up to the coming of sound
2. the 1950s - 1980s
3. the 1980s to the present.

We can see the first period as a moment of 'emergence' in which, as the cinema is taken seriously by critics and artists, independent discourses are set in motion. In the second period the notion of independence is fully explored, as the modernist project allows for experimental cinemas such as those detailed by Peter Wollen. In the final period, as B. Ruby Rich has noted, "[T]here is a search for origins and identities that is motivated, in part, by the collapse of old categories." (Rich New 10). I do not mean to suggest that independent cinemas only existed at these times. Such a claim could be disproved by my third chapter in which I detail the work of Henri Storck, an independent director who has worked from the late 20s to the 80s. Instead, my three-part division is meant to indicate instances which have been important for the critical discourse of independence. In my discussion of Akerman's

independence I will pursue each of these periods, concentrating though on the latter two since they feature Akerman's work. Throughout I will be keen to establish how notions of independence changed, and how these changes were dependent on cultural, historical or institutional shifts. Initially though, it is necessary to establish how Akerman has been critically constructed in this field.

2: Constructing Akerman as independent

Akerman's critical construction can be broken down into key-words thus:

Chantal Akerman's monosyllabic, restless heroines are partly pleasurable because they offer a feminine figure starring in the familiar 'what is the meaning of life'? art cinema story." (Charlotte Brunsdon 55)

Akerman's Les Rendez-vous d'Anna fits more securely within the art cinema model, softening the avant garde tendencies of Je tu il elle (Andrea Weiss 115)

. . . more avant garde films, like those of Yvonne Rainer, Chantal Akerman... (B. Ruby Rich Name 222)

Chantal Akerman's Jeanne Dielman all 198 minutes of it, is an example of what is frequently referred to as minimal cinema. (John Coleman)

Chantal Akerman a shrewd young Belgian who is bridging the gap between the commercial film and the structural (Patterson/Farber 48)

. . . the first avant garde film-maker to move into big budget productions building on, not compromising with her aesthetic principles (Laura Mulvey Guest 19)

Les Rendez-vous d'Anna is a summa of minimalism: what comes next will be fascinating (Jill Forbes Review 139)

From the quotes above four 'names' emerge: art cinema (into which Akerman does and does not fit) avant garde, minimal(ist) and structural. These terms describe both aesthetic and institutional positions. Thus art cinema encompasses a range of aesthetic strategies which convey its difference from classical Hollywood narrative, while at the same time operating through a whole other exhibition/distribution circuit. The main shift of emphasis here is, as Pam Cook points out, on the promotion of the director over stars or budget. (Cook, Cinema 114-146) Similarly, 'avant garde' can describe experimental aesthetic strategies, as well as a different conception of the screening process, with films often screened only at special festivals and therefore, as I indicated earlier, a different function for the screening process. Meanwhile, 'minimal' and 'structural' refer to the aesthetic project of the films. Minimal suggests the sparse, low-key tone, and a preoccupation with the quotidien, and structural is derived from a movement which began in the late 60s with the aim of making films which "replac[ed] a form which has internal evolution with a monomorphic shape and . . . affirm[ed] the priority of the mechanics of the tools over the eye of the film-maker" (Sitney Visionary 169).

Distinctions can be made between these various labels. First, several of the quotes indicate either that Akerman fits uneasily into a certain category, that she has moved from one to another (Mulvey) or that she straddles more than one (Weiss). Thus it can be seen that the critical construction of Akerman does not agree on one name for her. Secondly, a division can be made between the first two labels of avant garde and art cinema, which evoke European cinemas, and the second two, minimalist and structural, which circulate more in an Anglo-American context. Equally, it is doubtful whether the label 'art cinema' actually fits into the category of independent cinemas. As a standard of European film-making, art cinema is certainly the most 'dependent' of the four cinemas defined above. It also goes against many of the categories designated for independent cinemas, since generally it is made to appeal to a wide audience or to make a profit, and there is a strong sense of regulation or repetition, which allows us to think of art cinema stylistically. The suggestion that Akerman's work might fit into an art cinema niche problematises the notion of her independence; it also offers one further problematic to be explored in this chapter.

The quotes above also echo Wollen's suggestion that Akerman's work occurs at the intersection of two avant-garde traditions: the European and the American. But while this split is true for Akerman's 70s work, it applies less to her 80s and 90s work in which she seems to align herself more firmly with a European, auteur (or art) cinema. However, my concern in this chapter is not simply with whom Akerman can be compared; instead, I am interested in why Akerman would want to insist on a position of independence, beyond the obvious suggestion of control which independence implies. Several reasons for independence have already been suggested: the pursuit of formal difference and experimentation, the promotion of alternative political or identifying positions, or a desire to challenge the regulated experience of dominant cinemas. From my discussion thus far, Akerman could be

said to engage with each of these reasons. Thus, her cinema is interested in “the way in which cinema tells stories” (Martin 33). It offers different positions of desire, and challenges its spectator to make meaning differently, for example through the observation of rituals, routine or gestures. It is not difficult then, to illustrate areas of ‘difference’ for Akerman. Yet this prompts the question as to how Akerman's position came about. For instance, was it chosen or imposed? Was this difference evident from the beginning or did it develop gradually? And how does one accommodate the apparent shift towards more ‘dependent’ models of film-making in this stance of independence? In order to answer some of these questions it is necessary to refer back to the origins of Akerman's cinema.

Among the myth of the emergence of Akerman as a film-maker, two ‘facts’ can be isolated. The first is one of the most repeated aspects of the Akerman-myth: that it was after seeing Godard's Pierrot le fou (1965) that Akerman decided to become a film-maker.⁷ Previously (as she has stated) she wanted to be a writer, and her experience of cinema had been tied to conventional classical narrative, American or French films. What her repeated accounts emphasise, and what it is important to seize on is the ‘difference’ which Pierrot le fou signified for Akerman. This early Godard suggested to Akerman that film did not have to tell conventional stories, provide ‘classical’ pleasures or entertain. Given the experimentation present in Pierrot le fou, and the evidence of Akerman's aspirations to fulfil the dream of the romantic artist figure (she wanted to be a writer in Paris), the attraction of film for her can be extended from the initial recognition of ‘difference’, to a realisation of the space that film offered for experimentation and personal expression. The importance of this ‘anecdotal’ detail, should not be underestimated, since it offers an initial indication of the position Akerman hoped to occupy once she became a film-maker. If Akerman's identities of Jewish, Belgian and Woman ‘allow’ her access to

the discourse of displacement, then this Pierrot detail can be read as the first indication that she wanted to take up the position these identities offer.

The second 'fact' which is relevant to our present account is contained once again in accounts of Akerman's origins. Interviews and articles describe her departure from Belgium in 1970, first to study theatre in Paris, and second, around 1971, to travel to New York.⁸ It is in New York that Akerman met Babette Mangolte, who would play a very important part in her life and career. First, Mangolte introduced Akerman to the New York scene and took her to films by Michael Snow, Hollis Frampton etc. ; second, later on, Mangolte became the cinematographer for her first features. (Jeanne Dielman, News from home, Les Rendez-vous d'Anna).

The second key fact in the emergence of Akerman as a film-maker relates to Michael Snow and the 70s. The Europe/America split, identified by Peter Wollen has been constant throughout Akerman's work: Europe, most obviously because Akerman has consistently worked either in Brussels or Paris, and has made films in the French language using Belgian/French money. But equally because her films can be said to take up and develop European subjects, and to refer to European film-making traditions, particularly those associated with Godard at the time of Pierrot le fou. Akerman's work can be associated with America in two ways; first because of the Michael Snow connection (that is, Akerman's professed admiration for Snow's work) and her subsequent connection with the structuralist style. Second, for Akerman's return to New York city in 1989 to address the Jewishness of that city, after having made several films there in the early 70s.

One could be even more specific and suggest that in fact Akerman refers to Godard's pre-'68 work and to Snow's works around the time of Wavelength in '67/8. These

specific lines of 'influence' signal two equally important moments in independent cinema history: the French New Wave and the experimental cinemas that came out of the new American cinema. In terms of my three tier chronology of independence, both influences above position Akerman within the second moment. Although I will initially explore Akerman's independence through this second moment, it will also be necessary to signal the significance of the first moment as the originating space for many of the discourses which would find their way into the years which followed.

My exploration of Akerman's independence will begin with her two announced influences. Pierrot, signifying Godard's work around the mid-60s, will take me towards the French New wave out of which Godard's work sprung. Snow, meanwhile, will prompt a consideration of the New York scene within which Michael Snow worked, and inspired by which Akerman made such films as News from Home. My focus in these two accounts will be on the comparative models of independence which Godard and Snow offer. Restrictions of space mean that it will be impossible to explore these models of independence in great detail. Instead, my analysis of Godard and the French New Wave will focus on the challenge to the illusionist narrative which each offers. For this section I will compare Pierrot le fou with Akerman's first film Saute ma ville, introducing a model of independence which positions itself through its relation to the dominant (as opposite, counter or other).

My analysis of Snow's work will consider the model of experimentation and radical difference which his work offers, and how that fits in with other currents in the American scene. In this section I will compare four of Akerman's films: La Chambre (1972), Le 15/8 (1973) Hotel Monterey (1973) and News from Home (1976). In

order to situate the work of Godard and Snow it is necessary to set the discourse of independence in motion. This can be achieved through a brief account of the 'first avant garde'⁹ in 20s France.

The Roots of Independence : French Film-making of the 20s¹⁰

In the context of this chapter French cinema in the 1920s could be said to offer one of the first examples of experimental cinema. It is also the place where one can locate the origins of the tradition of art cinema with which Akerman works. Meanwhile within film history, the 1920s is a period which has been represented as the final moment of creativity before the coming of sound.

Because it envisioned the problem according to the point of view of aesthetics only, because it wanted to ignore the economic laws which determine it, the Avant garde is dead. (Moussinac, qtd. in Abel First Wave 274)¹¹

With reference to the split in independence (between formal and aesthetic systems, and film practices), Moussinac's words suggest that the cinema of this time had more success in the former, with less consideration of the latter. Indeed one only has to examine the careers of René Clair or Germaine Dulac to see that any sense of real non-dependence was extremely short lived. Clair and Dulac's films which have been claimed as experimental were only possible because they were at that time under patronage. Richard Abel notes of René Clair: "In order to continue his independent status through another three films, Clair accepted the patronage of René Fernand and the Rolf de Maré" (Abel First Wave 26). Equally, Dulac moves from setting up an independent production company with her husband, to working for the company Film D'Art (backed by Pathé), to making popular Cinéroman serials.

In its early days, some cinema practitioners were challenging cinema's popular, low origins, as well as the class of audience it was attracting. The 'first' and 'second' avant-gardes suggest struggles to constitute cinema as high art, and therefore as part of the art establishment. This is a project which was repeated by the Cahiers writers thirty years later as they attempted to construct film as the place of the auteur. Of importance for our present discussion is a term coined by Italian critic Ricciotto Canudo: film as the 'seventh art'.¹² The belief in film as the seventh art brought with it two implications: a separation of film from other art forms, and a treatment of film as equal in importance and creative opportunity to the other arts. I will briefly examine each of these propositions.

A Separation of film

The separation from other art forms, as well as from the growing belief of film as meant for commerce and entertainment, was effected through the construction of film as art and the film-maker as artist. Both of these constructions had economic implications. In their attempt to raise film to an art, the avant garde film-makers had to fight against the national status of cinema at the time. In his work on early cinema Noël Burch observes that early French cinema was aimed at the working classes, and failed to address the bourgeois intelligentsia (Burch Shadows). It is not surprising then that in order to effect their plan the avant-garde artists chose, initially, to separate their films from those of the dominant cinema, thereby defining them as different.

The early films of this 'movement' were shown in front of friends, critics and (the newly emerging) cinéphiles. Not only do the categories of film as art, and the director as artist achieve currency around this time, but widespread experimentation

was also undertaken. Difference was represented through the persistence of the short film format and, most importantly, aesthetic experimentation. In order to validate their contention that film deserved to be seen as separate from other arts, the film-makers of the avant garde effected a search for a 'pure' film form. Whilst Dulac and Louis Delluc saw pure form in terms of the impressionistic rendering of states of subjectivity (a search which would be taken up by Alain Resnais in the 60s), Louis Buñuel and Salvadore Dali were to advocate film as the place for the unconscious to reign free. In using film to explore various levels of the subject, in insisting on the film-maker as artist and in shunning any concessions to public taste, these film-makers were suggesting film as a more personal medium.

Film as equal in importance

The film-makers of the avant garde constructed the 'equality' of film in stages:

1. Exposure. This stage was concerned with raising the profile of film, in the same way as one might today build up an actor as a star. Through newspaper reviews it became acceptable to talk seriously about film. Then, discussion was encouraged through the appearance of new magazines and journals dedicated to film. These early stages were to contribute toward a discourse of the cinema.
2. Intellectual validation. The next move was towards the study and sponsorship of films. Films were studied in the emerging cine-clubs, which organised screenings of international films, as well as those of the French avant garde; they also helped to construct a body of international cinema which could be considered as 'art' cinema. The sense of national experiment was matched then, by a sense of international discovery. One of the most effective ways in which film was validated as an art was through its construction by a group of artists. Thus the avant-garde was made up of artists and intellectuals who set themselves apart from the mainstream population.

3. Creation of an alternative structure. By 1926 a whole milieu of film critics, cinema journals, ciné-clubs, lectures, exhibitions and specialised cinemas had been established in Paris. The first books devoted to film were published and a tradition of film was being discovered and preserved. There was no agreement as to the 'specificity' of film, but the practical explorations of its formal properties were growing. With the increase in demand for avant garde films many of the specialised cinemas entered into film production and distribution, and some state finance was provided. With the coming of sound these avant-gardes were fragmented, however Alan Williams sums this period up: The modernist independents thought of themselves as heralding the future not only of cinema, but of society. But their day had all but passed by decade's end. (254)

Although Akerman does not begin her career until some fifty years after these early innovations, many of the developments I have signalled are significant for her film-making. Thus, Akerman's independent stance sits firmly within the notion, elaborated in the 20s, that film is an art and the director a creator. Of equal importance for Akerman is the sense of the personal, as well as of film-making as an experimental or explorative process. This discourse of independence once set in motion in the 20s was continued in fits and bursts in schools of documentary (for example in Belgium), and in the work of Kenneth Anger or Maya Deren in the 1940s. However it was not really until the 1950s that an intervention into the critical discourse was effected, as *Cahiers du cinéma* took up the notion of the film artist in their criticism, and offered a renewed sense of creation and experiment in their film practice. It is to this period then, that I will now turn.

The French New Wave: Change and Innovation in the 50s/60s

Contrary to popular journalistic opinion at the time the New Wave was not a consensual movement, in fact it was hardly a 'movement' at all. Those directors who are associated with the moment of innovation include writers for Cahiers du cinéma turned directors (François Truffaut, Jean-Luc Godard, Claude Chabrol, Eric Rohmer and Jacques Rivette), film-makers who had, up until that time, made short films or documentaries (Alain Resnais, Jean Rouch, Georges Franju and Chris Marker), and others who were simply making their first films (Agnès Varda, Louis Malle). Despite the diversity of work at this time, I nevertheless want to pin-point a common goal for my present discussion, and that is the rejection of the old guard of film-making practice which has been called the 'cinéma du papa', the 'tradition de la qualité' or, in translation, an escapist, formulaic, attempted imitation of the best American product. The new generation of film-making, which took place between roughly 1957 and 1967¹³ will be studied, then, for its commitment to a rejection of pre-57 film-making, replacing it with a more personal, experimental and in most cases, challenging cinema.

The call for independence initiated by Truffaut was amply followed in the new work, as new formal and aesthetic practices were adopted. Godard and Truffaut embraced film as art as well as a popular form, wanting to be both idolised in the art cinemas and (up to a point) popular on the streets. While Truffaut, Godard and Chabrol resisted the sense that independent cinema should be marginal, directors such as Rivette, Rohmer, Resnais and Varda, (more avant-garde and politically engaged) had their films shown in 'mainstream' Paris cinemas.

The success of New Wave film-makers is the subject of another study. For my present analysis, it is important to isolate the sense of a 'new' agenda for film theory

and practice which the New Wave symbolised, and which followed on from the originating discourse of the 20s. In order to limit my study, I wish to concentrate on the work of Godard, initially A bout de souffle (1959) but also Pierrot le fou, (1965) since this latter film plays such an important part in Akerman's own filmography.

Important for our historiography of independence in the cinema is the shift in conceptions of the director which the New Wave in general and Godard's work in particular brought about. Thanks largely to Cahiers du cinéma the film-maker, created as an artist in the 20s, becomes an auteur in the 50s, favouring (for instance in A bout de souffle) a non-professional and even amateur aesthetic. Godard's film often uses the 'wrong' film stock, pays little attention to conventional lighting, and plays with the 'illusionism' of cinema.

Whilst many of Godard's techniques could be read simply as an inattention to the rules, it could equally be that his intentions are elsewhere. With this in mind A bout de souffle seems to offer us a fictional world which is closer to the real world: where events don't always make sense, where characters are often unreliable, and time passes both quickly and slowly. If this film is in many senses more 'real', it is also more like art. Thus, Godard's frequent allusions to other works of art: William Faulkner's novel The Wild Palms, paintings by Juan Miro and Salvador Dali. At the same time, the image-bank of the film mixes the American with the European, as Michel copies Humphrey Bogart and key motifs from American genres are referenced. What I want to emphasise for my study of Akerman is the shifting of hierarchies which A bout de souffle undertakes, as 'dead time' and quotidien events are given as much screen time as a kiss, or a murder. Also, and even more importantly, the investigation into the nature of cinema undertaken in particular by

Alain Resnais, Agnès Varda and Jean Rouch, but also by Godard exists as an important precedent for Akerman's work.

Pierrot and Saute ma ville

Pierrot le fou was produced as the crest of the New Wave was falling, as the directors associated with it were moving on to other territories and as Godard himself was about to embark on a more politically active cinema. (This cinema was initiated in Alphaville (1965) and then continued in Godard's work after May '68.) Akerman's first film Saute ma ville was made only three years after Pierrot le fou. In my comparative analysis of the two films I will extract similarities as well as differences, in order to move closer to a definition of Akerman's position at the origins of her cinema.

Saute ma ville, (see appendix for full synopsis) which lasts 11 minutes, involves Akerman wreaking havoc in a kitchen. While the situation foreshadows Jeanne Dielman, the tone of the film is more comic and ironic, even surreal. As the film opens Akerman herself is seen entering a block of flats. Inside she picks up some mail, then proceeds to climb the stairs. Within these first few sequences the sound-track is established as someone making noises, thus as Akerman climbs, the voice on the sound-track pants. On entering her flat, of which we see only the kitchen, Akerman undertakes a series of 'housewifely tasks'. She unpacks her shopping, polishes some shoes and cleans the floor and the cooker. However, during each task she makes mistakes: smearing polish all over herself, spilling water over the floor and finally - the ending of the film - blowing herself up.

The narrative of Pierrot le fou is, like that of most of Godard's films, relatively complicated. In general terms it could be described as a road movie. Ferdinand, (Jean-Paul Belmondo) a married man living in Paris with one child goes to a party. On coming home he realises his baby-sitter, Marianne (Anna Karina) is a woman he used to know. He suggests that he take her home but instead they elope together. Marianne is seemingly in pursuit of her brother, and insists on calling Ferdinand 'Pierrot'. The rest of the film involves their journey to the South of France in the course of which Marianne kills a man, Ferdinand is captured by a gang and blamed for the murder, and Marianne disappears. Finally, stranded on an island, Ferdinand first kills Marianne then blows himself up. I will now compare the two films according to a number of headings.

The Personal

In Saute ma ville Akerman plays the film's only 'character' and, as I will show, through her performance, emphasises the importance of her own presence, a narcissistic stress which will be carried to her first feature: Je tu il elle. In Pierrot le fou the stress on the personal is effected more through the inclusion of personal motifs such as the intertextuality of novels, other films and quotes from directors, a rambling narrative and creative use of mise-en-scène, editing and camera movement.

Play

The action in Saute ma ville centres around Akerman wreaking havoc in a kitchen, with much of the humour of the film stemming from the attitude of Akerman as she undertakes her various tasks. This tone can be compared to the playful nature of Godard's film: with its intertextuality, its jokes and playing around with narrative. For example, as if to de-construct the conventions of the romantic couple, as they

travel along, so Marianne and Ferdinand construct the way their love story will be mythified.

In both Godard's and Akerman's films the on-screen action/characters constantly reference the presence of the off-screen spectator, thus breaking illusion. Rather than ignoring the camera, and the 'hidden' world behind it, Akerman actively courts its gaze, and performs her actions for effect. Her acting is melodramatic and excessive. By using the term melodramatic I mean to reference a style of acting in which "nothing is understood, all is overstated" (Brooks 41). While Peter Brooks locates his definition in relation to the written text, in Saute ma ville there is not only no written text, but there is no dialogue either. In this film theatricality and the melodramatic are located in Akerman's use of her body, and of gesture.

In Pierrot le fou de-construction operates on several levels at once. First one could cite the irreverence to the rules of narrative and of cinema : thus Godard plays with the audience's expectations. Equally, one could refer to the non-serious tone of the film: the plot is rambling, with various digressions and halts. Finally one could include Godard's playing with the image, using coloured filters, awkward camera angles and creative editing techniques.

Image vs sound

The sound-track of Saute ma ville also transforms action into performance, as Akerman's actions on the image-track are accompanied by sounds of encouragement and appreciation on the sound-track. The relation between sound and image is such that, at different times one seems to be affecting or connecting with the other, for example: as the film opens, so a series of swiftly cut shots shows Akerman entering a block of flats, picking up a letter and proceeding to climb a set of stairs.

Meanwhile, on the sound-track, these three sets of actions are accompanied by (respectively) singing, singing, and then heavy breathing. The sound-track of the film could therefore be said to represent a person making sounds to accompany the action. Both the image and sound-tracks of Saute ma ville deny any sense of film as an illusion and instead 'announce' film as artifice, representation and performance. Towards the end of the film sound and image become inter-active. Having polished her shoes and covered herself in polish, Akerman next rubs her face with cleaning fluid. As she carries out this action, so the sound-track changes from a loud humming to laughter.

In Pierrot le fou sound and image are signalled as dis-jointed from the very beginning of the film. The opening provides us with a dis-embodied voice reading a passage from a novel, while we cut from seemingly disconnected images. At other times in the film we hear Marianne and Ferdinand announcing chapter headings for the various episodes. If Akerman's sound-track offers a point of identification for the spectator (since it suggests reactions to the images), Godard's sound-track further distances his spectator from his drama, offering multiple texts with which to engage.

Mise-en-abyme of spectatorship

Both Akerman's overstated performance and the various noises of the sound-track make obvious the position of the spectator. The sound-track indicates someone watching Akerman, and this is underlined by Akerman's own 'showy' performance. This pattern of performer/audience climaxes shortly after the scene already described:

Akerman has just finished wiping dry the floor (after having thrown a bowl of water over it). From a high angle we see her sitting on a chair with a pencil in her

hand. On the sound-track there is humming. She takes a copy of a newspaper (Le Soir), the humming becomes louder. The camera then pans to the right and stops, framing a rectangular mirror. In the mirror we see Akerman kneeling on a table taping up the window. Finishing this job she jumps off the table. Still reflected in the mirror we see her walking to a work top. She takes some cleaning fluid and puts it on her face. The humming turns to laughter, Akerman turns and sees herself in the mirror.

Akerman's look in the mirror is the equivalent to a look straight into the camera, since her look connects with the look of the camera, and therefore of the spectator. Whilst her actions previous to this moment could be seen as performances, which, along with the sound-track, suggest the presence of the spectator, it is not until this moment that any relation between performer (ie: Akerman) and spectator is made present. This moment then, can be seen as a 'discovery'. Akerman is discovered performing, and the spectator/camera is discovered looking. Both of these actions are prompted by the reaction of the sound to the image, that is, the laughter, and by Akerman turning to face the camera.

There are several moments in Pierrot le fou which could be compared to the sequence above. While in all cases Godard is not present in the same way as Akerman, there is still a sense in which he too is performing, as he frequently makes allusions to his earlier films and therefore it is Godard who is on show. On a simpler level though, we could turn to the example of the 'show' which Marianne and Ferdinand put on in the south of France, in which she plays a vietnamese woman, while he plays an American G.I. Spectatorship is figured in the frame here in the crowd watching the two characters. Though this is the most extended example,

throughout the film the characters speak to, thus making it evident that they are aware of, the camera.

A summary of the points raised by Saute ma ville gives a sense of Akerman's first position of independence. Akerman's cinema challenges the usual processes of the cinematic apparatus. Rather than a cinema of artifice and illusion, this is an all-knowing cinema which posits the relation between the on-screen and the behind-screen as one of 'presence' rather than absence. Akerman is extremely present and presented, thus favouring the avant-garde model which sees the film work as personal and close to its maker. Narrative could be said to be the main organising system of the film, although it is a rather anarchic and muddled form of narrative. The film's relation to classical cinema is one of playful irreverence, as its rules are broken and the film's difference is measured against it. Finally, largely due to the presence of the author, the film leaves only a tentative position for its audience, and is instead relatively self-absorbed.

If we take this first film as a statement of intent on Akerman's part, what does her cinema offer, how does it fit in with my schema of independent cinema, and how does it imagine its difference? The most obvious difference in this film is Akerman's breaking with illusionism. While a coherent fictional world is created (we are asked to believe in Saute ma ville that this space is a kitchen), the film is ambivalent about the level of involvement it requires from its spectator. There is no effort to involve through 'classical' mechanisms of identification or empathy. Instead of this privileged position, the film often places its spectator in an uncomfortable position, for example, at the moment of 'discovery' which ends with the laughter on the sound-track. Also, in tune with Godard's cinema, and unlike many avant-garde filmmakers, Akerman retains narrative and works with the experience which it implies.

This analysis of Akerman's relation to Godard, and how this is manifest in her first film allows a glimpse of the difference that her early films offer. In order to extend this difference and to address Akerman's alleged 'in between' position, I will now turn to the second of her two 'influences' Michael Snow, and the New York independent scene of the late 60s. My connection of Snow with New York is due to this city being the most constant location for his work, although Snow came from Canada, where he was known as a photographer as well as film-maker. My aim in this section will be two-fold: to pick up the discourse of independence which I left with the French New Wave and to explore the structuralist aspects of Akerman's name.

New York, Experimentation and the 'Radical Aspiration'

Godard's work originated within a wave of innovation and first time film-making; Michael Snow meanwhile made his first film within a similar atmosphere of change and innovation. For before Snow's first films in the 1960s, independent cinema output in New York City had grown significantly. The moment has its origins in the film-poems of Maya Deren, the anarchic visions of Kenneth Anger, the 'free cinema' of Shirley Clarke and John Cassavettes and the visionary work of Stan Brakhage. It had been fed by changes in art movements such as minimalism and structuralism in painting, by technological developments, such as the Bolex 16mm camera, and by a certain campaigning by key figures in the critical arena, including Jonas Mekas and Amos Vogel. Following Mekas' calls for a new generation of film-makers, experimental works were premiered at open screenings in New York at Cinema 16, in various parts of East village and at the Charles and Bleeker street cinemas.

Although there was in the early-60s no funding in America for experimental films, film-making was relatively cheap and the formation of film co-ops meant that film-makers could distribute their own films. By 1966 the production of such cinema was prevalent enough to warrant a section in the 4th New York film festival: 'the independent cinema - a program of 27 events covering various aspects of independent film making in the United States today'. This program, which meant to encourage a belief in the legitimacy of an independent alternative, can be compared to the raising of the profile of film outlined in my account of the 20s. As well as 'academic' events: lectures and discussions, there were screenings of American and European works which were frequently attended by the film-makers.

Despite the organisation of an 'event' such as the one above, which suggests a unified movement, the independent scene in New York was far from consolidated. Instead, rival factions competed for audiences and for an all-defining manifesto. Jonas Mekas has been seen as one of the voices of the new American cinema, partly because of his published articles in Cinema Journal (this is particularly the case in Parker Tyler's account, Tyler Underground). Mekas and his followers should be separated from Snow though, since they did not reject the possibility of an alternative cinema becoming dominant:

the films we are making are not the films we want to make forever, they are not our ideal of art; they are the films we must make if we don't want to betray ourselves and our art, if we want to move forward.¹⁴

While Snow's films were shown at some of the new American screenings, he can be separated from this movement, and instead fits in a lineage which originates with Maya Deren and Stan Brakhage. These two are figures whose alternative visions

have consistently remained outside the mainstream, and for whom there is no place for their work in the dominant. What Snow, Deren and Brakhage share is the belief that cinema was not meant to be narrative or commercial, and they offer what they feel it should be used for in their films.

Stan Brakhage provides an example of a film-maker whose conception of his position was radically other to the distanced Hollywood auteur. Sitney notes:

Since the early 1960s he had been prophesying a break-through for the avant garde film-maker when films would be available for purchase like books, records, and painting reproductions and could therefore be owned and screened many times and at pleasure. (Visionary 200)

Brakhage's vision for the future of cinema challenges not simply the conditions of the screening situation: the darkened auditorium, sitting among other people, but equally issues of ownership over film. Whilst Brakhage's work is emphatically concerned with the film strip, his prescribed future for film bears a resemblance to the contemporary video culture in which films, on video have become available for ownership. In his work Brakhage also suggests a serious re-thinking of the screening process, as much as of the position of film and film-maker. As part of an avant-garde which posits film as a personal art form, Brakhage comes close to a literal sense of independence, since in shifting the importance of the screening process he is dependent only for funding.

When Maya Deren began making films in the late 1940s there was no independent film movement and no strong women's movement. Her films have, nevertheless, been appreciated by both for their originality and radical aspirations. Deren made her films outside of the commercial film industry, borrowing her equipment and

working at home at weekends with her husband at that time, Czech émigré Alexander Hammid. Her exploration of 'vertical time' (rather than conventional linear, or horizontal time)¹⁵, and her expression of subjective states of being led the way for the more intimate exercises of Brakhage, and the personal side of 70s feminist film practice. Like Brakhage's Deren's work has been seen as innovative and avant-garde (Rabinovitz Points). Yet she contradicts Brakhage's elitist discounting of the screening situation, to instead affirm its importance:

My films are for everyone...I reject... that inversion of democracy which is detachment, that detachment which is expressed in the formula of equal but separate opinions - the vicious snobbery which tolerates and even welcomes the distinctions and divisions of differences. I believe that, in every man, there is an area which speaks and hears in the poetic idiom.. to insist on this capacity in all men, to address my films to this - that, to me, is the true democracy. (Deren)¹⁶

Although Deren's emphasis still falls on the director as artist and the films as personal, unlike Brakhage's choice positioning apart from any sense of the dominant cinema, inside an avant-garde margin, Deren places herself at the centre aiming for her work to change the nature of the mainstream.

It is within the tradition of Deren and Brakhage that Michael Snow's films must be seen. Curiously enough, while Snow did not play a great part in the new American cinema movement, its existence granted him critical approval. Like most movements, the moment of the 1960s was short lived, and by the 70s state and federal funding was being organised, and the respectability which this granted the independent scene also dampened much of its inspiration. Along with funding,

Anthology film archives began to collect and preserve the previous decade's experimental features. However, such an action necessarily imposed hierarchies, as certain films and film-makers were valued above others and a canon of the moment was thus produced, Harold Rosenberg: "Instead of being...an act of rebellion, despair or self-indulgence, art is being normalised as a professional activity within society."¹⁷ Snow was among the film-makers whose work was collected, while he also achieved respectability through inclusion in the emerging film courses in universities and college institutions. Further changes were to affect this scene, such as the rise in feminist activity, which Yvonne Rainer claims: "...is the main in-road into change in the alternative film history in the 70s".¹⁸ Also, financial problems at the Museum of the Moving Image and the Whitney Museum meant that their private funding then diminished.

For the purposes of my present argument I will concentrate on Snow's work in particular, and the New York scene in general, to see how they fulfil the model of 'experimentation' which describes, via Deren and Brakhage, an important part of the independent field. If Godard served to elucidate Akerman's initial attitude of difference, then Snow will be used for his suggestion of the radical possibilities of film-making, and thus for a non-commercial side to independence.

Snow's films are made outside the mainstream, but inside the art world. Thus there is little sense of a challenge to the dominant (something which is achieved in Godard's early films where American cinema is directly addressed). What Snow's work offers is an alternative experience, in which cinematic time and space are explored through techniques of framing and duration. In my comparison of Akerman and Snow I will be using Akerman's 'New York trilogy' of films: Hotel

Monterey News from Home and Le 15/8, with attention to La Chambre (1972) which was made in Paris.

While Saute ma ville confronted the spectator with his/her own expectations of the cinematic experience, La Chambre, Hotel Monterey and News from Home offer the alternatives suggested at the opening of this chapter by Mulvey and Martin. To these three films can also be added Le 15/8 (a medium feature, at nearly an hour's length) so named because it was filmed on the 15 August, with Samy Szlingerbaum (who himself made one film, which I discuss in Chapter Three, and who appears briefly in Toute une nuit as the man who cannot sleep) as, it would seem, a light-hearted collaboration between friends. Yet this latter film should be distinguished from the three former titles, since in its treatment of its central woman, it contradicts Akerman's representation of women as discussed in my first chapter.

The film follows a woman around her apartment, as she poses for the camera. Meanwhile on the sound-track a female voice is having a telephone conversation. The study of woman as image which Le 15/8 offers, works in direct contrast to the very different 'non-seductive, non-idealised' images of women which are otherwise present in Akerman's cinema. Rather than suggesting that this difference is due to the presence of Szlingerbaum, (a fact which would be hard to prove), I favour the interpretation that the difference comes from the different purpose of the film itself. Thus, it could be suggested that in her 'experimental' films Akerman felt free to work out her relation to dominant cinema, whilst in her films made to be shown more widely she was able to 'showcase' her difference and otherness. The alternative dimension to the figure of the director which emerges through such suggestions as these does not disappear as Akerman/cinema develops. Instead, I shall be keen to retain this dimension for my discussion of Akerman's television and

video work in which, I will suggest, Akerman's position as director is extended, played with and ultimately altered.

La Chambre, made during a stay in New York, shares some of the different attitudes to the film-maker displayed in Le 15/8. Like the latter film, La Chambre suggests itself as part of a process of the working-out of a personal aesthetic. A press release for the film¹⁹ describes La Chambre thus:

a camera pivots in a circle around a bedroom. In this room there is a window, a table, an armchair and a bed. In this bed there is a woman (Chantal) who sits eating an apple. The camera approaches her then retreats, the movement being carried out over a period of ten minutes. During this time we hear a voice, a whisper, a murmur, the sound of words which tell a story, a journey in New York.

Through this description La Chambre can be imagined as a homage to Snow, as well as a space of experiment for Akerman. For though it repeats many of the techniques of structural film it also anticipates the exploration of time and space and the separation of sound and image which later become an integral part of Akerman's cinema.

Hotel Monterey and News from Home

After the two films above, Akerman made Jeanne Dielman. Despite the latter's success, Akerman did not aim immediately for 'bigger and better' things, but instead returned to a small-scale experimental mode of production. From Le 15/8 and La Chambre Akerman moved on to the 65 minute Hotel Monterey and the feature-length News from Home. Both films were small budget productions, and Hotel Monterey was made purely from Akerman's own funds, News from Home was

made with money from the Institute National de l'Audiovisuel (INA) in France and a Belgian production company, Unité Trois. This difference in funding is itself interesting: thus, only after Jeanne Dielman is it possible for Akerman to secure funding for her work. In comparison to Le 15/8 and La Chambre, Hotel Monterey and News from Home connect more obviously with Akerman's other films. In Hotel Monterey example, it is possible to trace the beginnings of Akerman's personal aesthetic as outlined in my opening chapter, involving a gaze characterised by its jouissance.

Neither Hotel Monterey nor News from Home have 'classical' narratives or characters; rather than being stories, they offer studies of spaces (a hotel, a city) mobilised by an exploration of the process of perception. The emphasis of the two films is on the powers of vision, and I will argue that within their worlds of excessive visibility, the spectator takes up the position of 'looker' rather than 'story-teller'. The lack of point-of-view, angle reverse angle, close-ups and camera movement suggests a certain 'primitive' attitude to the camera. Rather than these movements/techniques, all of which are essential to the suturing of the spectator into the fictional world, Hotel Monterey prefers a still, tableau-like method of framing. The use of tableaux as well as the exhibitionist camera, recall a connection I noted in my first chapter, that is, to Tom Gunning's "cinema of attractions":

Cinema of attraction bases itself on...its ability to show something. Contrasted to the voyeuristic aspect of narrative cinema analysed by Christian Metz, this is an exhibitionist cinema. (Gunning Attraction 64)

While many of the studies of corridors, floors and rooms in Hotel Monterey 'show off' the camera's ability to frame and thereby focus attention, the camera is at its

most exhibitionist when 'framing' people in the hotel. This 'framing' operates in two contrasting ways, first, the camera frequently pauses to confront people, to see their reactions and to catch them unawares. Second, there are a number of posed shots in which people freeze in certain positions, looking directly into the camera.²⁰ These two different techniques suggest an oscillation of the exhibitionist impulse. In the first, the public are confronted by the camera, while in the second it is the camera itself which is being challenged, and thus the spectator behind that camera. As in Saute ma ville, the typically invisible screen is made present, so that what is in front of the screen (that which we see) and beyond the screen (the spectator, the darkened auditorium, the projector) are made aware of the other's presence.

Hotel Monterey and News from Home can be seen as experiments in what happens to a space once it has been framed. Intimately connected with this is the question of what happens to the voyeuristic gaze of the cinema when it is converted into a stare. The second question invites a comparison between Akerman's distinctive long static shots and the relentless 45 minute zoom of Michael Snow's Wavelength (1968). The critical reception of Snow's film was impressive, Annette Michelson writes:

The film [Wavelength] broke on the world with the force, the power of conviction which defines a new level of enterprise, a threshold in the evolution of the medium (qtd. in Mellencamp Receivable 76).²¹

Both Hotel Monterey and News from Home can be compared to Wavelength in terms of what they do to the cinematic gaze. If Snow's film challenges and disrupts that gaze in extraordinary ways, Akerman's films follow that disruption with a sense of alternative images and experiences. A distinction must be made between Akerman and Snow here: If Snow carries out his work purely in the name of a

structuralist experimentation, then Akerman's stance is inflected with a sense of her sexual difference. Although both film-makers might claim to challenge the 'patriarchal' nature of the apparatus it is only Akerman who offers any real alternative for women. This point is picked up by Patricia Mellencamp in her history of avant-garde cinema from 1960-1980: "While it might be true that 'woman' was not blatantly exchanged or grotesquely commodified by avant-garde films, neither was she centrally figured" (79). In order to explore the way in which Akerman's alternative vision is inflected by her sexual difference in more detail it is instructive to compare News from Home with Wavelength.

The forty-five minute zoom which structures Wavelength has the effect of closing down a space to concentrate on one specific area, in this case a photograph of waves. The film has also been seen to operate on a more metaphoric level as a paradigm of narrative, with the zoom signifying the flow of information which is gradually siphoned into a point of closure. Travelling from close-up to wide angle, the final shot of News from Home could be seen as a reverse of the zoom in Wavelength. Several distinctions must be noted, namely News from Home's shot lasts only ten minutes as opposed to forty-five, and the movement from close to wide angle is not achieved from a lens movement, but from the movement of the ferry on which the camera has been placed. In referring to the News from Home shot as a zoom, I mean to indicate not a lens movement, but the change in framing that is taking place, which can be aligned to the effect of a zoom. Thus, the two movements can be distinguished as:

a zoom back (News from Home)

and

a zoom forth (Wavelength).

As a reversal of the zoom in Wavelength, the last shot of News from Home could be considered a reversal of narrative, and if Wavelength's zoom 'closes down' then News from Home's zoom 'opens up' or, to use a term often associated with Jean-Luc Godard, Akerman replaces closure with aperture.²² This strategy of 'aperture', of denying a satisfying conclusion to their films, indicates on the behalf of Akerman and Godard a breakdown of the very 'spectacle' of film itself, and in turn an alternative conception of the spectator.

Wavelength's narrative pull occurs via the static positioning of the camera. From the very beginning of the film, the end (the picture of the waves) is in sight, although not fully defined, since at first it seems as if the focus is elsewhere. The spectator's expectations - that we will travel toward that point in the distance - are fulfilled. Such a structure operates as might the theme of the couple in a classical narrative film: we know they will get together, the only question is 'how'. News from Home's zoom 'back' has the effect of continually unsettling the spectator's perception of the image presented. An image is seen forming or, given the content, (the Manhattan skyline), a 'myth' becoming visible. The continual re-framing of the image, invoked by the movement away of the ferry, denies a final conception of that image. In contrast with the previous shots of New York in which an area was framed, here no framing is allowed. Instead, the image recedes into the distance, unfixed, and in turn unfixing its spectator. One interpretation of this final shot is that it offers a disruption of the usual system of signification. As well as 'opening-up' the film ending it enforces a 'separation' between signifier: the Manhattan skyline and signified: New York, city of dreams. However, such an interpretation does not take account of the preceding eighty minutes in which the sound-track had contained letters written by Akerman's mother to Akerman and the image-track had shown the

less well-known parts of New York city. These images and sound change our interpretation quite strongly.

At the intersection of image and sound in News from Home lies a confusion of tenses. Typically it can be assumed that a film's tense will be clearly defined. Thus a movement into the past will be legitimated, for instance by the pages of a calendar being blown back, as in the film Written on the Wind (Douglas Sirk, US 1956). News from Home assumes a present, this being the time of filming, but this is complicated by the play of tenses in the mother's letters. It is not clear whether the letters were written during, before, or after the filming and thus how 'new' the 'news from home' is. Two 'presents' are being constructed in the film. That of the images, which is non-specific, and that of the sound-track referred to in the letters, which is constantly changing. The juxtaposition of the two worlds - the one seen without comment, the other commented on, but unseen, creates a space in the film. A point of fusion is needed, an author, and such is the position of Chantal Akerman in the film, existing as the film's 'person'.

In News from Home Akerman reads letters that her mother has sent her, thus speaking her mother's words, (further removed from their origin in the English version of the film in which Akerman speaks the words in English). The absence, distance and separation - of Akerman from her home and her mother - which inform the film, have thus become internalised into its structure. The 'I' of the letters has been effaced, and we do not hear Akerman's replies to the letters, there is an absence at the very heart of the sound-track. Similarly, we do not see the 'eye' of the image-track and the confusion of 'person' and 'tense' problematises the spectator's own position. Although I suggested Akerman as the point of fusion of the two tracks, it

should be noted that this does not position her as present. Instead, the process of the film is such that the only real 'presence' is that of the spectator.

Re-reading the final image of News from Home, the signification of this over-mythified sign for New York city takes on alternative connotations. Thus, whilst most of the film involved static shots of a strange city, towards the end the camera became more mobile, as if Akerman was also finding her way around. Equally, while the rest of the film was punctuated by her mother's voice, the closing shot is silent. The final shot of News from Home can thus be said to signify a return to the mother (who is silenced and waiting) along with one final look at the once strange city. It could also be suggested that the final shot is for the benefit of the mother: a description of New York city which - in the nature of such descriptions - falls back on the mythic construction, failing to recount the minor and marginal parts so lovingly captured in the rest of Akerman's film. Finally, the closing shot suggests a further separation between Akerman and her mother as her mother is excluded from Akerman's journey, and given only the 'official version'.

3: Re-placing Akerman in the field of independence

If we re-read News from Home incorporating the 'feminist' project which is a constant part of Akerman's cinema, divisions emerge between this film and the structural cinema which it supposedly emulates. Thus, Akerman's aim in this film is something besides formal innovations. Similarly, in my comparison between Godard's Pierrot le fou and Saute ma ville differences were noted in terms of the position each director assumed in relation to their film. While Godard figured his control through a series of 'authorial repetitions' Akerman's control was effected by her narcissistic presence in the film. I would argue furthermore that new contours should be added to the notion of Akerman as in between two avant-gardes. Clearly,

while her work does combine aspects of both the European and the Anglo-American traditions, it also incorporates important differences, which construct her specific independent stance. With this in mind, it is now possible to detail the components of Akerman's independence in terms of her difference, of why she insists on such a position, and how that is constructed, as a formal or aesthetic project.

My analysis of Saute ma ville revealed Akerman's textual position, and my work on Hotel Monterey and News from Home extended this position, added a sense of institutional and critical space. I would argue that Akerman's independence can be broken down into three different components:

- 1) A different attitude to narrative, which manifests itself in terms of textual differences
- 2) An oscillation between Anglo-American and European traditions, both in terms of the project of her cinema, and the critical and institutional spaces where it is placed or takes place
- 3) A radical aspiration, seen in the rejection of the mainstream experience of cinema, and of the 'bigger and better' mentality.

Each of these three positions emerges from my analysis of Akerman's 70s work. The different attitude to narrative is suggested by Saute ma ville, in which all illusionism was destroyed, and the 'story' was therefore interrupted by other pleasures. Equally in most of Akerman's film-making, narrative is retained only so that its properties or the expectations which it sets up in the audience can be disrupted.

If we consider independence as non-belonging or apart-ness, then Akerman's second component of oscillation between the Anglo-American and European seems to be a

way of achieving this. While it might be argued that Akerman can be placed in either one of the traditions, in each case something is lacking. Thus, as I showed in my comparison of News from Home and Wavelength Akerman's project goes beyond the boundaries of structuralism, in this case, towards feminism. Equally, as I will later show, in many of her films supposedly made in the European art cinema tradition, (which she moves towards) Akerman incorporates aspects of Anglo-American practice, which again problematise the notion of a fixed position. Finally, Akerman leans towards film-makers such as Brakhage in her embrace of the radical in film-making. This is first suggested in the 70s, through the fact that after Jeanne Dielman she does not immediately build on the success of that film, but takes some time out to make small-scale productions. The lack of the 'bigger and better' mentality again suggests that for Akerman's prime focus is the creative and experimental process. In her use of the term radical aspiration Annette Michelson describes an alternative conception of the destiny of cinema, and this is recalled by the very different experiences offered by Akerman's films. These three aspects of Akerman's independence (textual difference, an oscillation between... and a radical aspiration) emerge in her 70s work serve to construct, and problematise her position in the 80s and 90s. Each will therefore be used to focus my discussion of Akerman's 80s and 90s films.

Independence in the 80s/90s

Initially it is necessary to continue my historiography of independence into the 80s/90s in order to set up a context for Akerman's work. If the first two eras of independence in the cinema can be described by the keywords avant-garde, art cinema, counter-cinema, structuralist and minimalist then the period from the 80s onwards sees them exchanged for those of: Feminist, Gay or Lesbian, Queer, Afro-

American, Black British cinemas. While in the first group the origin of the words were mixed between European (avant-garde, art cinema...) and Anglo-American (structuralist, materialist), this second group of words is tied firmly to Anglo-American culture, whereas in the French/Belgian context, 'Auteur' has (again) taken centre stage. Both groups (70s independent film and 80s/90s work) shared a difference from the mainstream, and situate themselves as 'not-dominant'. However the transition from the first to the second group is accomplished through a crucial shift from formal preoccupations to questions of identity and address. The new terms, which have become part of an Anglo-American vocabulary, as well as the dominance of auteurism in France, are indicative of larger shifts in the aesthetics, form, and production context of those cinemas which count themselves as independent.

Within the Anglo-American context, those films which fit into the labels above (Feminist, Gay or Lesbian, Queer, Afro-american, Black British), have become closer to the production, distribution and exhibition conventions of dominant cinema. Whilst the practice of avant-garde and structuralist film-making involved the use of multiple formats, 8mm and 16mm, as well as the making of short or medium length films, the 80s/90s films typically are feature length work. From the 80s onwards, definite shifts can be identified in the field of Anglo-American independent film-making. While pre-80s notions of independence, innovation and experiment have been gradually erased, experimentation still take place, but in different ways.

The changes in the notion of independent cinema can be characterised by two formative trends. First, experiment is now carried out in the name of various identities, whether sexual, racial or ethnic. Such a change is reflected in the fact that

'experimental' film festivals have declined. The Knokke-le-Zoute experimental film festival in Belgium, which had nurtured independent talent in the 50s and 60s, finished in 1974²³ and there is no longer any one experimental film festival in New York. There are however several gay and lesbian film festivals in the city (the Gay and Lesbian festival, the Gay and Lesbian experimental festival, the Gay and Lesbian video festival) as well as an Asian film festival. Differentiation is made, then, through the director's ethnic and sexual identity, rather than through the aesthetic identity of the film. Whilst this implies that the onus is still on the filmmaker as an artist and the film as an art, it also segregates the audience. Gay and Lesbian films do not necessarily attract or cater for only gay and lesbian audiences, but by proclaiming their identities, certain readings are inevitably implied.

While Queer and Afro-American film-making has become prominent in the American independent scene, the spirit of amateur experiment has, it has been argued, disappeared. There are far fewer short films made and instead many first films are features. Yvonne Rainer has described the difference thus:

more and more people are making films in film school using the facilities of the schools...it's more difficult to make a long film independent of an institution of some kind or another. It's a tremendous pressure on an emerging film-maker to have to be successful. You can't make mistakes you can't spend a long time, you can't experiment, you can't collaborate with people and say let's try this, you have to do it in a pretty conventional way.²⁴

The second trend in the independent scene, which is tied to this loss of a sense of freedom and experiment, is a collapse of the old categories of film, through the

blurring of the margin between mainstream and independent cinema. In a documentary made for Channel 4 (in 1990) about independent cinema in America²⁵, the director Quentin Tarantino states that the independent scene is the place where Hollywood does its research. Such a claim suggests that independent cinema now is something which is 'tolerated', and indeed something which Hollywood finds vital to its own successful functioning. On a similar note, Steven Soderberg (the director of Sex Lies and Videotape) suggests: "If 'Sex lies...' had been made in the 70s it would have been a mainstream film, the audience has changed and speciality films have been ghettoised".²⁶ This proposed shift in audience recognition has been accompanied by an actual shift in distribution, in America and Europe. As well as fewer outlets for distributing independent films, there are fewer theatres to show them. In Britain the onset of video, and the lack of sponsorship for the arts have been blamed for the closure of many repertory theatres. At the same time TV (especially Channel 4) has played an important role in sustaining independent cinema.

The growing restrictions and unfashionable nature of experimental films outlined in the Anglo-American contexts can be extended to the French context, where non-narrative or experimental cinema in particular have increasingly few choices of exhibition. If America has seen the margins approaching the mainstream, then Europe, in particular France, has seen television and video offering the space to experiment formerly occupied by the Super 8mm or 16mm formats.

Since Akerman looks for funding along the France-Belgium axis, the aesthetic agendas of these contexts necessarily affects her work. Within the Parisian context, identifying categories such as feminist, gay and lesbian etc are not available to those film-makers making films in France and Belgium, who are instead subsumed under

the universal title of auteur. When gay or lesbian film-makers do make films: which have formed part of Queer cinema in an Anglo-American context, these films are, in the French/Belgian context, not recognised as part of 'identity politics'.²⁷ Equally, in Belgium film-makers such as Palestinian Michel Khlefi are discussed for the style of their work rather than for their exiled or marginal status or their ethnic identity.

The chronology of Akerman's work in the 80s/90s is indicated in table 1. This shows the different formats with which she has worked. As will be seen, besides nine features, Akerman has made nineteen other films, ranging from short films and videos, to medium-length works and documentaries. I will analyse of this table, along with evidence collected from interviews and articles, in order to extend my definition of independence as far as Akerman is concerned.

Thus far I have discussed Akerman's independent position in terms of her chosen strategies. However it is important to note that 'independence' has also been something imposed on her. Rather than returning to small-scale working mode after Les Rendez-vous d'Anna, there is evidence that Akerman wanted to go further towards the mainstream, this evidence is present in accounts of her two projects at that time: Le Manoir and La Galerie. After Les Rendez-vous d'Anna, she nourished a project to adapt two books by the Jewish/Polish writer Isaac Bashevis Singer (who lives in America) . Akerman travelled to America to meet Singer and secured the rights to adapt his books. Then she set about raising money for the project, travelling around Europe and even to Los Angeles.

The myth surrounding Akerman's 'musical' project - which eventually became Golden Eighties [1986] - echoes that of Le Manoir. Akerman wrote an initial version of the script with Jean Gruault (scriptwriter for Truffaut and Resnais) and

then addressed Ministries in Belgium and France and production companies with that script. Descriptions of both projects illustrate Akerman's more commercial ambitions. On Le Manoir:

I can only see great mythical actors of the Hollywood type in the three key roles...it will be a ...vast adventure which is both intimate in style and bursting with life and with characters of strong and contradictory passion.²⁸

and of La Galerie:

It's going to be a big musical, all music, but not all the time singing. It's going to have five hundred actors, in a set we'll construct. It's going to be about love, and commerce, about people who are working in a shopping center.²⁹

Akerman was unsuccessful in raising money for either La Galerie or Le Manoir. She had to abandon the Singer project, and instead made Toute une nuit, with money provided by various producers whom she had met at the Cannes Film festival. For La Galerie she made a pilot film, Les Années 80 (to be discussed later), which was shown at Cannes, with the aim of raising money for her larger, more ambitious musical project.

The above examples show how what began as a chosen position (apart from) became an imposed position. Akerman's main hurdle in trying to raise money for these projects was her by then established image as an independent film-maker: people did not believe she was capable of making an epic or a musical. What becomes clear is that though Akerman's position in the field of independent cinema is relatively mobile, the divisions between independent cinema and mainstream

cinema are clearly fixed; therefore Akerman's avant-garde experience may have 'allowed' a step into art cinema, yet it excluded her from bridging the bigger gap, to mainstream cinema.

It is perhaps Akerman's experience with these two projects which encouraged the pattern of short and non-circuit work illustrated in the first table. For, while Akerman failed to move into larger productions, the space which she had previously occupied in the 70s (of experimentation and the small scale) was rapidly disappearing. I will argue that each of the three components which make up Akerman's independent stance, are problematised by these shifts in the wider field of independence. For example, Akerman's 'in between' position was no longer tenable in the 80s/90s, since the Anglo-American and European traditions moved farther apart. It is perhaps for this reason that Akerman had difficulty funding feature work. Equally, as I noted earlier 'experimentation' is no longer an important part of the independent cinemas of the 80s/90s. Instead a more professional look is promoted. Akerman's response to these changes is to carve out her own space, a difficult option, which is not achieved without compromise. It is to this process that I will now turn.

Remaining 'In between'

Before addressing how Akerman remains 'in between' in the 80s/90s, I will consider an example (Les Rendez-vous d'Anna) of how she achieved this in the 70s. My discussion of this film also offers an answer to the question of Akerman's position within art cinema, which I noted earlier would seem at first to depart from her independent work. Akerman's biggest film - in terms of budget and backing, circulation and reputation, Les Rendez-vous d'Anna can also be seen as (perhaps)

her most difficult thus far. Les Rendez-vous d'Anna had the backing of Gaumont, German TV and companies in France and Belgium. It was made largely on the strength of Jeanne Dielman and must have seemed at the time, like a perfect opportunity for Akerman to move into the 'respectable' and more financially secure ground of art cinema.

In comparison to Jeanne Dielman, Les Rendez-vous d'Anna does seem more conventional. It was made with a team of both men and women, was within the standard duration of a feature film, had recognisable art cinema traits to be discussed later, and, after a debut at film festivals, was shown in cinemas around the world. The art cinema space within which Les Rendez-vous d'Anna circulated is one which, like avant-garde cinema, affirms the status of the film as its director's personal vision (the autobiographical resonances) and equally posits film as art, rather than commerce. However, the division between art and commerce is not as clear cut as when Akerman was an unknown film-maker, making small scale avant-garde films. Now, (with Les Rendez-vous d'Anna) there was a shooting schedule, and a sense of the potential audience for the film and of where it would be screened even before shooting was finished.

With Les Rendez-vous d'Anna, Akerman entered a different level of cinematic currency, where the film's reception was both fixed and negotiable. The film was released with Akerman's reputation attached to it as, by 1978 Akerman's earlier films had been shown in England, America and France and would thus be judged according to its similarity to, or difference from, Akerman's earlier films, with a resulting affirmation of, or challenge to, Akerman's 'name'. On the level of production details, casting (using well-known European actors) and marketing, Les Rendez-vous D'Anna therefore fits into an art cinema model. I do not intend, at this

point, to enter into a detailed analysis of the film, which will take place in other chapters. Instead, I will suggest how Les Rendez-vous d'Anna transgresses the boundaries of art cinema and thus of the European model, through a brief discussion of how the film illustrates Akerman's 'minimalism' and thus the Anglo-American models.

The term minimalism, frequently used to describe films by Akerman, Michael Snow, Jim Jarmusch and others, originated in the late 50s and early 60s art scene. A movement in both painting and sculpture, minimalism generally described the use of spare forms and broad colour areas. One particular group of artists, known as 'Fluxus' affirmed in their work: "the fundamental worth to be found in the seeming triviality of everyday experience".³⁰ In their work the minimalist artists often used everyday objects. For example the sculptures of Dan Flavin, were made up of fluorescent lighting. Attacking the notion of the skilled, creative artist, to suggest that anyone can make art, minimalists were also working towards a non-illusionist and non-metaphoric concreteness. The effect of 'minimalism' on the text of Les Rendez-vous d'Anna can be discussed in three stages, in terms of its effects on conceptions of the author, the text and the spectator.

Through its emphasis on simplicity and the use of everyday objects, minimalism challenges the idea of the talented artist. In Les Rendez-vous d'Anna the lack of complicated camera angles/movements and mise-en-scène, as well as those registers which are typically used to aid interpretation and inflect the world with meaning, suggest a rejection of the skilled authorial voice which is otherwise associated with the art cinema.

An example of this rejection of 'skill' occurs in the opening of the film which, instead of leading us into the drama, is relatively low-key. We frame a train station, a train arrives and people descend. Then, it is only when she is the only person left on the platform that it is hinted that Anna might be the protagonist of the drama. There is also a preoccupation with routine details: journeys, arrivals and departures, which relate to minimalism's emphasis on the ordinary and quotidien.

The replacement of linearity with a system of repetition, circularity, matching of pattern, coheres with minimalism's rejection of illusionism and expression. Another point to note is the stress which minimalism will often place on space and perception. This can be related to the film's use of 'the look'. Thus, while the packaging of Les Rendez-vous d'Anna suggests it as a product of art cinema, a more avant-garde and even structuralist experience is offered in the textual system of the film.

This example of the textual combination of the two traditions recurs in Akerman's 80s/90s work, though not in such an extreme form. Instead, I will argue that Akerman's in between position is reflected in the fact that, once the two traditions move farther apart, there is no space left for Akerman to occupy. This fact is reflected in the transitional film Les Années 80, made in 1983. Before this film Akerman's work existed very much in a Anglo-American, experimental space. After the film Akerman turns more towards France, and more specifically, Paris. Les Années 80, on the other hand, seems to come out of nowhere, which is why it can be described as transitional. The liminality of the film can be extended from its production process - made with very little money to its content (a film about making a musical) and finally to its purpose: to raise money for Akerman's musical Golden

Eighties. The film, did not really 'belong' to anyone. The unconventional nature of the film is signalled in the press release:³¹

Who will the actors be? who will design the sets? the costumes? the lights? and the music? Between the words of a filmscript and the film there is a whole territory to cross. 'Les Années 80' the Eighties is the story of the time passed in this territory.

The press book also reveals that the first part of the film, showing auditions, rehearsals and research for Les Années 80, was on video, while the second part was on 35mm film; and contained prototypical sequences for the future film. The unique screening of Les Années 80 at the 1984 Cannes film festival, set a pattern which many of Akerman's films since have followed, namely either being made for special occasions, or only having achieved one showing. However, the significance of the film within Akerman's filmography can be extended further.

Les Années 80 combines the strains of pre and post 1983 Akerman, while at the same time signalling, the state of independent cinema at the time. Essentially a pilot film, as already mentioned, Les Années 80 signals that Akerman had been 'ghettoised' as a small-scale experimental film-maker and that the space within which she had worked in the 70s was no longer available. Yet, though it professes to be an 'advertisement' for a more mainstream production, it is still a relatively experimental, work. Finally, after the 'once-only' showing at Cannes, there was no defined space within which Les Années 80 could be screened. As I have discussed, the margins were approaching the mainstream, short or medium-length features had little life, and experiment in France was taking place solely in the auteur/art cinema space. Les Années 80 stands, then, as a quite unique film in Akerman's oeuvre. It is

a film for which its 'liminal' position meant not that it shared two contexts (ie: the Anglo-American and European) but rather that it fell in between the two.

Upholding the Radical through Mixed Formats

Given the reduction of the 'experimental' space of independence, what becomes of radical film-making? How is it possible to sustain an alternative vision of cinematic practice, when the options open to film-makers are reduced? Akerman's strategy, as can be seen again, in table 1 was to turn to video and short films, and generally to inhabit a space outside the commercial circuits. While I present this as a choice, there is a strong sense, that this strategy was imposed on Akerman. Thus, as I have noted, for some time in the mid-80s there was no space for Akerman's 'liminal' practice. Leaving aside the question of whether this non-circuit work is chosen or imposed, my focus will be on the way in which it offers a similar space of experiment to that found in works such as Hotel Monterey or La Chambre in the 70s.

In 1986 besides the Golden Eighties Akerman, made three films on video: Le Marteau, about a sculptor, Mallet Stevens about the artist, while in 1984 she made Letters Home, a video of the performance of a play about the letters between Sylvia Plath and her daughter, starring Delphine Seyrig and her own daughter. In each case, Akerman was commissioned, for the first two by the Pompidou centre in Paris. The third one originated as a play, which Delphine Seyrig suggested Akerman should film. Money was provided by the Centre Simone de Beauvoir (which Seyrig had helped found) where the video resides. Also in this group of videos is Trois strophes pour une stanza...³²(1989) in which a static camera films a cello performance (by Sonia Weider Atherton)³³ in the foreground, with a couple rowing in the background.

The difficulty of access to most of these videos, which makes close analysis difficult, also raises questions of 'access', of the purpose of these films and how they might be used in a study of Akerman's work. If we agree that: "If meanings are produced at the point of reception, then films in order to signify must actually be seen." (Kuhn Women's 153) then the lack of a point of reception for these videos - each of which is held in an archive, challenges the conventional meaning-making process as well as the conventions of distribution and exhibition. Akerman's, her early films were shown at film festivals, conferences, retrospectives, art centres and film museums, rather than being released. More recently, with her television work has retained the same sense of privacy and inaccessibility. Films such as Sloth (1984) and Portrait de... (1994) (which I will discuss later), were made for, and shown on, French television, without access to international exhibition and access. Thus Akerman's non-circuit work conceives of the reception process in a different way. The variety of 'circulations' of Akerman's cinema is apparent in table 2, which shows where each of Akerman's films were shown, or at least, 'available' for seeing. This table illustrates how, chronologically, Akerman has moved from the cinema circuit to the festival circuit and television.

The main body of Akerman's 80s/90s (mostly commissioned) films are non-circuit work, (ie: not shown in cinemas) and are therefore not distributed in the conventional sense. This shift in exhibition context also, necessarily, produces an alteration of the critical reception of the films. Akerman's short and experimental work explored in the first part of this chapter cohered most closely with the 'purist' definition of independence, since it was made for no particular audience, but in the first instance for the film-maker. With the films made for television, the screening

context and the production conventions shift the cinematic norms quite drastically. If in the Anglo-American context independence becomes associated with non-mainstream (in America non-Hollywood) feature productions, in France different levels of 'dependence' are less clear-cut. Thus whereas the short films made for television have little place in the Anglo-American independent context, in the French context they procure for Akerman inclusion in the realm of auteur cinema.

Akerman's work since the late 1960s bridges the two categories of independent cinema, (avant-garde, art cinema, structuralist and minimalist cinema on the one hand, and Gay and Lesbian, Queer or Black cinema on the other). However, as already mentioned, she has been critically fixed in the first half of the list. Why is it that since 1980, there has there been no link between Akerman and the development of independent film theory beyond questions of availability? Why do her films not appear on the Anglo-American critical agenda? And, once her films are read within contemporary theories of independent film, can other 'names' can be applied to her work? In view of the fact that her insistence on experimentation, a concept taken from the 'first era', is coupled most recently with a stress on Jewishness and thus her ethnic/racial³⁴ affiliations, I would argue her position can be seen as carrying the 'old guard' of independent cinema into the new.

Textual Differences - Assuming the Author

Akerman retains a position of independence because of her textual differences, but also because of her position 'in between' and her radical aspirations. The textual strategies of Akerman's 80s feature work (*Nuit et jour*) will be discussed in my other chapters, therefore Akerman's television work which will be the subject of this section. As I have already pointed out, much of Akerman's Tv work was commissioned, thus the notion of creative in-put is necessarily 'compromised'.

How, then does one analyse Un jour Pina a demandé (1983) and Sloth, both made for German television, the one a documentary on Pina Bausch and the other one of seven interpretations by women film-makers on the theme of the seven sins? Neither films 'fits' with Akerman's typical concerns, although she appears in each (asking Pina Bausch questions in the first, and starring in the second). I will suggest however that these and other television films to Akerman only really achieve meaning when read alongside the rest of her work. The Akerman Pina Bausch, coupling reverberates across Akerman's work, as the dance-like movement of bodies in Toute une nuit and Akerman's studies of the female form (in Je tu il elle, and Nuit et jour) are offered a point of comparison. Similarly, Sloth features a cello solo performed by Sonia Weider Atherton, who would then plays music for Trois Strophes..., Histoires d'Amérique, Nuit et jour and D'Est.

Once Akerman's television work is included in her oeuvre, so the apparent development of her cinema from the avant-garde to art cinema is challenged. As with video, television work allows Akerman to experiment more than she can in her features. At the same time, the television films operate as 'inter-texts' through which 'feature Akerman' is mimicked, de-constructed and reflected on.

In particular, Akerman reflects in her television work on her position as director. In Sloth she plays herself (ie: a film-maker). The film begins with her alarm going off as she lies in bed. She appears from under the bedcovers and says: "Today it's Saturday and I'm making a film about laziness." She then contemplates for five minutes whether she should get up or not. Sloth indicates a shift in the position which Akerman occupies in relation to her films. In her 70s work she seemed to be experimenting as much with herself as a film-maker - what that might mean and what access (in the Foucauldian sense) that might allow her, as she was with the

medium of cinema itself. But in the 80s, from the time of Sloth onwards, Akerman seems to have settled into the role, and this is indicated by her appearance in many of her short films, not simply as a 30-something woman (as she was then), but as a film-maker. This role of Akerman as film-maker in her films is present through two other films L'Homme à la valise (1983) and A Family Business (1984) and it is to these which I will turn now.

L'Homme à la valise begins with Akerman playing herself as a film-maker, returning to her flat, in the hope of completing some work. On the first day, she wanders about, putting off her task. On the second day, she opens her front door, to find a very tall American who has come to stay. The rest of the film is concerned with Akerman's efforts to avoid all contact with the intruder.

While the narrative of L'Homme à la valise is new, the film draws on and re-plays many of Akerman's cinema's themes and obsessions. The primary connection to Akerman's cinema past, is through the emphasis on a routine. The film is divided into days, and each new day is introduced with an inter-title: "Day two - I got myself ready to write...day four - I organised myself so that we don't have to meet...day seven - God rested, but not us...'

As time passes, we see 'bits' of each day, enough to establish a routine. While the Akerman character's aim is, at first, to forget about the man so that she can do some work, her attempts to avoid him soon grow into an obsession with his presence. By the fifth day, she has adjusted to his routine, having made a chart of his activities. She knows, then, when she can take a bath, use the kitchen and eat her lunch without any chance of encountering him. Her observation of his routine, and detailed planning of her own, echo the rigour of Jeanne in Jeanne Dielman. Je tu il

elle is also recalled, through a shot in which Akerman, on her knees, moves a piece of furniture in her room, a direct match for the opening of the earlier film.

Further resonances with Akerman's cinema/past can be defined. There is an emphasis upon space, through both the smallness of the flat, and the characteristically static medium shots with which Akerman films this space. However, perhaps the strongest sense of connection with Akerman's past though, is through the obsessional nature of her performance. From trying to avoid the American, Akerman moves on to locking herself in her room, and finally, to setting up a video camera so that she can watch his movements. Essentially, the American's crime is to invade her space, and that crime is given the significance of the over-boiled potatoes in Jeanne Dielman or every caress and touch of hands in Toute une nuit. Throughout L'Homme à la valise, Akerman's style of performance matches her first appearance in Saute ma ville, as she moves very fast, tottering around on high heels, and often reacting in an eccentric manner (for example, on her arrival in the flat, she proceeds to tidy by throwing objects out of the window).

L'Homme à la valise also provides an interesting example of a rupturing of her 'feature' conventions. Since through its playfulness and explicit inter-textuality, this film could be seen as a 'composite' Akerman film, or, to put it another way, a show-reel. Akerman's own performance makes her appear funnier than she has before, and thus challenges the 'austere, feminist' labels which she earned through Jeanne Dielman and Les Rendez-vous d'Anna. The address of L'Homme à la Valise doubles: to those spectators who have a knowledge of Akerman's cinema past, the film offers the pleasure of recognition and direct references; meanwhile, those who are not familiar with Akerman's work are offered a comic duologue (between

Akerman and the American), in which the 'universal' creative process (here the attempted writing of a script) is given a specific treatment.

If L'Homme à la valise offers a glimpse of the creative process, then A Family Business, with dialogue in English, shows its economic side: the attempt to secure funding for a project. In this film made for Channel Four in Britain, Akerman flies to Los Angeles to try to get some money from her rich uncle. The film works on various levels: as a witty comment on the difficulty of film-making in Europe, as a glimpse of the differences between a 'European' film and a 'Hollywood' production and finally as an inter-text to Akerman's own work. The first level is conveyed quite straightforwardly: over the opening shot of Akerman, another woman and a child coming into view at an airport, we hear Akerman's voice-over:

Yesterday my mother told me, Chantal, since no one wants to give you any money to make your film, why don't you go to ask your uncle in America? and since I am sure this film is going to be a hit at least the money will stay in the family.

Over the next fifteen minutes Akerman tries, in vain, to find her uncle and the film ends with her preparing to go to New York, having been told that he is there.

The comparison of European and Hollywood film-making relies on the acting styles, dialogue and setting. Having phoned her uncle from Los Angeles airport, Akerman then goes along to see him. Even the scenario suggests the European/Hollywood comparison, as Akerman's trip is covered in detail: first she phones a wrong number, then she has to walk to her uncle's with a heavy case. Discovering that he lives farther than she thought she leaves the woman and child accompanying her and goes

on alone. When she gets to the address, her uncle is not in. Up to this point Akerman has played her now familiar screen persona: tottering about on high heels and talking very fast (seen in Saute ma ville and L'Homme à la valise). Once she reaches the house, Akerman is shown in (or rather grabbed and pulled in) by a glamorous American woman in a swimming costume. The woman waits with her before dashing off to the telephone. Akerman then wanders out to the pool in the garden where she meets Aurore Clément (leading actress in Les Rendez-vous d'Anna) who plays a French actress starring in a French film whose director wants it to be made in English.

Akerman and Aurore represent European cinema, and (obviously) the American woman Hollywood. Differences are exaggerated, thus, the American, an archetypal bathing beauty, is in a swimsuit, while Akerman is decidedly unglamorous in trousers and a t-shirt. The American also behaves as if she has just stepped out of a caricatural Hollywood film: she keeps running to the phone to her lover, then on returning repeats how much she loved him. In comparison with the American's cliché love scenario, the scene between Akerman and Aurore relies for its meaning on interpretation of the more subtle dialogue, the movements, facial expressions and overall performances. This multi-layered meaning is particularly apparent in a scene towards the end. Akerman agrees to coach Aurore for her English accent. Having said she will 'coach' her, both then sit down on a 'couch' (a verbal/visual pun). Akerman stands as Aurore reads, then Aurore stands and Akerman sits, and they alternate positions throughout the scene. The verbal puns continue as Akerman often 'corrects' Aurore by telling her the wrong way to pronounce things (thus, 'cheated' becomes 'shitted'). Both are continually saying 'you're welcome' (making fun of non-English speakers speaking English) and the scene ends with Aurore in tears of emotion over her speech. As if this illustration of Akerman's difference and distance

from Hollywood, was not enough, Aurore and Akerman have the following exchange when they meet:

-“Is it an American movie?”

-“No, you see it's a Belgian/Swiss co-production and the director wants to break in here so he thinks all those 500 million people, they don't even speak French.”

-“Oh you can't expect any American to speak French”

In terms of the inter-textuality it is also largely this scene with Aurore Clément which supplies the largest reference, referring back to Les Rendez-vous d'Anna and Toute un nuit. Aurore's performance in both films as a woman who is unsettled and unlucky in love offers a stark contrast to the love-sick American woman who runs in and out of the scene. Also the speech which Aurore reads is in fact a conversation from Golden Eighties between M. Jean to Mme Schwarz (Delphine Seyrig) about his love for Lili.

4: Identities: Becoming European/French/Parisian

Having explored how on-screen Akerman takes on the role of director in much of her short television work, and how she retains a sense of an alternative through her video work, one final aspect remains to be examined, for which I will use J'ai faim, J'ai froid, Le Déménagement (1992) and Portrait d'une jeune fille de la fin des années 60. Each of the three films mentioned were made within certain constraints. J'ai faim, was made as part of an 'episode' film called Paris vu par...vingt ans après made to complement the earlier Paris vu par.. (1964) in which the contributing directors were: Jean-Luc Godard, Eric Rohmer, Claude Chabrol, Jean Rouch, Douchet and Pollet. The 'monologues' series for which Le Déménagement was made, produced by the French cultural channel La Sept, was aiming to introduce the theatrical to the televisual and, through this encounter, to extend the possibilities of

both media. Portrait... made for the series: 'Tous les garçons et les filles de mon âge' for Arte based on the theme of the director's own adolescence and music. Two requirements were made: there had to be one party scene which featured the music of the era as well as the leisure activities of the teenagers, and the film-makers were told to make films about their memories of being eighteen. I want to briefly examine the production contexts of these serial films, therefore for the position which they offer to Akerman within their specific constraints. Through her alternation of formats and exhibition spaces, Akerman retains some sense of independence. However, how much 'control' does she actually have over her work within these spaces?

J'ai faim j'ai froid was suggested as a contemporary 'new new wave' setting up a comparison between the directors of the 60s and the contemporary group. Sloth(1986) is from a series which is supposedly a re-make of 1961 films: Les Sept pêches capitaux with Godard and Demy among others, itself a re-make of seven sketches shot in 1952 by several Italian directors including Diego Fabbri and Roberto Rossellini. 'new New Wave' is the rationale, but if one looks at the other directors who participated in the 1984 series: Bette Gordon, Ulrike Ottinger and Helke Sanders a grouping through gender is also suggested. Meanwhile the series' for Le Déménagement and for Portrait... were made up of established French directors including: André Techiné, Claire Denis, Olivier Assayas, Patricia Mazuy. In each case Akerman appears among a grouping which reads either 'new new Wave' or French auteur cinema.

In her series films, Akerman is either positioned as one of an exciting new generation (thus the 'new new' Wave) or, among a group of French film-makers. Although she does not engage with the Anglo-American aesthetic agenda of

'identities' (gay, lesbian etc) her work does take on an identity: European/ French/ Parisian. And it is precisely through becoming Parisian that Akerman is able to sustain her 'independent' activities, gain access to the French production system.

Each moment of Akerman's cinema discussed has, in turn, been embedded in a different institutional context. From Saute ma ville, anchored in the avant-garde, I moved to the experiment of La Chambre and Le 15/8, and the more widely exhibited examples of Hotel Monterey and News from Home. The next move from Jeanne Dielman towards Les Rendez-vous and art cinema, was challenged within the text of each film. Later, Akerman's attempt to go mainstream was itself challenged. Finally, Akerman/cinema in the late 80s and 90s has become on the one hand diversified, playful and inter-textual, and on the other European/French/Parisian.

What emerges from this chronological sketch of Akerman's films is the wealth of positions from which Akerman's cinema has addressed its public. Just as she seems to have settled into one identity, Akerman moves towards another. Having begun with the task of defining Akerman's independence, I seem to have arrived at a sense of independence as a position in transit, a passing position, whose only dependence is on its past, a past which must be displaced in order to ensure a future.

Paradoxically, in order to secure the artistic independence which was signified by her claim to 'Chantal Akerman's films', Akerman has had to embrace dependence in the form of cultural identity (Parisian). However, to be Parisian does not necessarily mean to 'belong' to Paris and my next chapter will explore how, in fact, Akerman can be critically constructed as Parisian and yet still uphold her 'Belgianicity' in her film-making.

NOTES

- 1 Taken from “Film and the radical aspiration” Annette Michelson Rpt. in Sitney Culture
- 2 Sylvia Harvey “Independent Cinema?” West Midlands Arts, 1978; as quoted in Sheila Whitaker “Declarations of Independence” 89 in Auty/Roddick.
- 3 From Jonas Mekas' weekly column in The Village Voice. As quoted in Ehrenstein, 19.
- 4 For detailed examples of French film criticism in the 20s see Richard Abel, First Wave Vols 1 and 2.
- 5 As I noted in my first chapter, Camera Obscura 2 and 3-4 feature articles and an interview with Akerman, whose work was frequently discussed in the journal.
- 6 For example, the first issue gives a detailed analysis of Jackie Raynal's Deux Fois, and the second uses the work of Yvonne Rainer and Chantal Akerman.
- 7 These details are drawn from the following reviews/articles: “Chantal's big challenge” Screen International 198, 14 July (1979). 4. “A vast project for Chantal Akerman” Cinéma Français 34 April 1980. 44. Cahiers du cinéma 322. 14. April 1981. v-vi. There are also various other accounts in interviews with Akerman, for example in Angela Martin's article Akerman admits: “After I saw one film in particular [Pierrot le fou by Jean-Luc Godard], which really did impress me, I decided to make movies instead of acting or writing.” (29)
- 8 Ibid
- 9 Richard Abel (First Wave 279) writes: “The ‘First Avant-Garde’ or the ‘Impressionist’ Cinema’ - these are the labels that have long been attached to the French narrative avant-garde films of the 1920s and gives account” he then

continues to give an account of the history of this term and later “historians and critics have used it to distinguish one group or ‘wave’ of filmmakers and their films from several other later ones.” then he divides the groups as follows: first avant-garde : Abel Gance, Marcel L'Herbier, Louis Delluc, Germaine Dulac, Jean Epstein; second avant-garde as the pure film advocates and those who made dada and surrealist films.

¹⁰ For critical accounts of this period see Abel First Wave, Alan Williams Republic and Sandy Flitterman-Lewis “Chapter Two” on Germaine Dulac in Differently.

¹¹ Leon Moussinac from Panoramique du Cinéma 1929. 307-319 as quoted in Abel First Wave . 274.

¹² See Ricciotto Canudo “Reflections on the Seventh Art” Re-printed in Abel Criticism 291-303

¹³ The end of the New Wave can generally be taken to be around the time of May '68. There is evidence to suggest that audiences were getting tired of New Wave films before this period, and equally the films were changing, however it was not until May 68 that the cultural agenda shifted, with France in general becoming more politically engaged, so much as to make New Wave film-making passé. For discussions of this period see Williams Republic or Forbes Cinema in France.

¹⁴ See “The First Statement of the New American Cinema Group”Film Culture 22-23 - Summer 61. Reprinted in Sitney Ed. Culture 79-83.

¹⁵ On the subject of ‘vertical’ time Lauren Rabinovitz notes: “[Deren's] classification of vertical and horizontal modes is a truncated version of Eisenstein's more elaborate editing theories put forward in *Film Form: Essays in Film Theory* and *The Film Sense*. But, even though she admired Eisenstein's montage sequences and poetic concepts, she still found the overall form of such films as *Potemkin* too steeped in literary narrative. Her argument . . . shifts the dominant emphasis from the horizontal to the vertical axis as the way to

reorganize cinematic material more subjectively and to break from Hollywood mimesis.” (75)

¹⁶ Maya Deren “Statement of Principles” reprinted in Film as Film Arts Council of Great Britain, 1979.

¹⁷ Harold Rosenberg as quoted in Diana Crane, The Transformation of the Avant-garde: The New York Art World, 1940-1985 Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987, 45. This reference cited in Rabinovitz. 187.

¹⁸ From an Interview with Yvonne Rainer, 30.3.1993

¹⁹ Unfortunately I have been unable to see this film. Although a print does exist at the Belgian Cinémathèque it is not always available for viewing. Also, there is some confusion over whether there are two La Chambre's (La Chambre I and La Chambre II). Since I have found little information upon La Chambre II I have not included the film in my filmography.

²⁰ These ‘posed shots’ are copied twelve years later in Akerman's film about Eastern Europe: D'Est (1993). Therefore, for a more detailed discussion of their connotations see my fourth chapter.

²¹ In her article Mellencamp notes that she has “combed [Annette Michelson's] writings for this source, to no avail.

²² See Peter Wollen “Godard and Counter-Cinema: Vent d'est” Rpt. in Nichols Movies II 500-509.

²³ “The experimental film festival” which took place in a casino at Knokke-le-Zoute began in 1949 and finished in 1974 by which time some 74 films were being shown in competition. Wavelength was shown there in 1967 and won the ‘Grand Prix’. Henri Storck suggests that its end was due to shifts in film-making “the abandonment of political, sexual themes which had been the highlight of these screenings” he also suggests bureaucratic problems around funding.

(Encyclopédie “Knokke” 159)

- ²⁴ Yvonne Rainer, interview with the author. 30.3.93
- ²⁵ Taken from the documentary ‘Made in the USA’ transmitted on Channel 4
- ²⁶ Ibid.
- ²⁷ A recent examples is (the late) Cyril Collard's film Les Nuits sauvage (1993).
- ²⁸ Cinéma Francais 34 April 1980. 44.
- ²⁹ "Getting ready for the Golden Eighties: A Conversation with Chantal Akerman"
Gary Indiana ArtForum Summer 1983. 61.
- ³⁰ From Barbara Haskell Blam! The Explosion of Pop, Minimalism
and Performance 1958-1964 New York: Whitney Museum of American Art. 1984
- ³¹ Again, I have been unable to see Les Années 80.
- ³² Mallet Stevens and Le Marteau are available for viewing in the catalogue of the
Georges Pompidou centre, Paris. Letters Home and Trois Strophes... are available
from the Centre Simone de Beauvoir, Paris. I have been unable to see the first
two, but was lucky enough to view the second two at the 1992 Créteil film
festival, Paris.
- ³³ As I note in my next chapter, since 1988 Sonia Weider Atherton is a regular
collaborator with Akerman, providing music for Sloth [1986], Nuit et jour and
D'Est
- ³⁴ For a discussion of how to ‘name’ Jewishness (is it a race, an ethnic category
etc) see the final chapter.

	Short	Feature	Short For Tv	Pilot Film	Documentary For Tv	Series For Tv	Video
1968	Saute ma ville						
1971	L'Enfant aimée						
1972	La Chambre Le 15/8	Hotel Monterey					
1974		Je tu il elle					
1975		Jeanne Dielman					
1976		News from Home					
1978		Les Rendez-vous					
1980			Dis-moi				
1982		Toute une nuit					
1983			L'Homme à la valise	Les Années 80	Un Jour Pina.		
1984						Sloth	
			A Family Business			J'ai faim J'ai froid	
1986		Golden Eighties					Letters Home Le Marteau
1988		Histoires					Mallet Stevens
1989							Trois strophes.
1991		Nuit et jour					
1992						Le Déménagement	
1993					D'Est		
1994						Portrait d'une ...	

TABLE 2

Film title	Theatrically released	Festival	Retrospective	TV	Commissioned		
Saute ma ville		Oberhausen, Hyères, Avignon, Dinard. All '71					
L'enfant aimée		ICA. London 1979					
La Chambre		Biennale de Paris '73.					
Le 15/8							
Hotel Monterey				BRT '72			
		London Avant garde festival	Nancy. Toulon. Musidora Paris.				
Je tu il elle	yes	10th National festival of Belgian film. Toronto 1977					
Jeanne Dielman	yes	Premiere, Filmex. Directors fortnight, Cannes					
News from Home	yes	Cannes 1977					
Les Rendez-vous...	yes	Paris. Chicago. Belgium (Prix Cavens)					
Dis-moi				INA, France.			
Toute une nuit	yes	Venice. London. Toronto.					
Les Années 80		Cannes 1985					
L'Homme à la valise				INA. 1984. TF1			
Un jour Pina...							
J'ai faim							
A Family Business				Channel 4			
Sloth		Festival of Video, Montréal					
Letters Home							
Golden Eighties	yes	Paris. Cannes					Centre Simone de Beauvoir
Le Marteau							Centre G. Pompidou
Mallet Stevens							Centre G. Pompidou
Histoires d'Amérique	yes			Télé 21			
Trois strophes...							
Nuit et jour	yes	Venice, Sydney & Melbourne					
Video Letter							
Le Déménagement				Arte			
D'Est		Locarno					
Portrait...				Arte			

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CHAPTER THREE: AKERMAN AS BELGIAN

Introduction

I have maintained that Akerman's cinema is one of displacements, and it is in these next two chapters that notion takes on its spatial characteristics, as I explore Akerman's affiliations to Belgium and to Jewishness. The link between Jewishness and displacement should be relatively transparent, and I will explore this in detail in my next chapter. However, Akerman's 'Belgian-ness', would initially seem to 'place' Akerman, denying the implications of displacement. In this chapter I will explore the ways in which Akerman manages to affirm her 'Belgian-ness', whilst still resisting the 'fixing' which such an identity might imply. In general terms this is achieved through sustaining a sense of ambivalence in relation to Belgium, which is created as both 'home' and 'non-home', 'familiar' and 'strange', 'sameness' (or self) and 'difference' (or other).

I have already traced the shifts in Akerman's identities, as woman: from single to multiple points of desire, and from her mother's daughter to herself taking up a motherly position; and as independent: from a secure position within a well-defined critical field, to a more marginal and mobile space which is almost self-defined. With Belgian Akerman shifts from, first, a closeness to Belgium/home, which is the space of the mother, to a need to escape from that home and see it from a distance. Secondly, Belgium becomes a space which is remembered from afar, with 'Belgian-ness' used to construct a sameness/difference relation to Paris, or to France.

It is not my intention to suggest that Akerman's films become unproblematically Belgian, that she herself exhibits a coherent Belgian identity, or that a fixed and

homogenous definition of 'Belgian cinema' exists. Instead, what I will emphasise throughout this chapter is that both Akerman's Belgian nationality and 'Belgian national cinema' should be seen as "sites of contestation" (John Hill, 17)¹, as spaces which allow contradictions and oppositions to bond together and come apart.

The connection between Belgium and Akerman should be seen as a two way flow of 'contestation'. For Akerman affiliation to Belgium throws up questions of the connection between place and identity, and the nature of terms such as 'home' and 'origin'. Meanwhile reading in the opposite direction, Akerman's films, in which I will suggest fragments of 'Belgianicity' are featured, take part in the construction of a 'Belgian national cinema'. By the term 'Belgianicity' I mean to refer to the way in which 'Belgian-ness' is constructed in Belgian cinema. Neither Akerman as Belgian nor 'Belgian national cinema' can be easily conceptualised, as any attempts to 'place' Akerman are problematised by the displacing character of her cinema. Equally, any talk of the national in relation to Belgium must address the differences and divisions which have characterised the country throughout its history, because of which it is necessary to place quotation marks around the term Belgian.

In order to suggest more concretely the way in which Belgium can allow both a rooting effect and a restlessness, I will explore the nature of Akerman's affiliation to Belgium. Initially it is enlightening to ask why so little connection has been made between Akerman and Belgium, and to establish the nature of any possible correlation. The main factor which legitimates a discussion of Belgian cinema within the larger frame of Akerman's cinema is Akerman's status as a Belgian national. Yet although Akerman is linked to Belgium through her nationality, as I will show that link is itself 'displaced', and it is this displacement which allows her a position of ambivalence. Once Akerman's national affiliations have been discussed

I will explore the metaphoric resonances which Belgium instates: those of home and origin, and the ways in which these are negotiated within the larger text of homelessness and displacement. I will then analyse the term Belgian national cinema, before assessing Akerman's place within the national text.

One of my contentions in this chapter will be that, aesthetically, many of Akerman's stylistic traits have a place in [the national text of] Belgian cinema. Without taking away any of Akerman's 'authorial signature', it is merely my intention to open up a flow between Akerman's cinema and Belgian cinema through which each contributes meanings to the other. The culmination of this flow will be marked by two propositions:

- 1) that one of the texts of Belgian cinema is a text of difference, and that Akerman's cinema partakes in this text of difference
- 2) that Toute une nuit offers a view of 'nationhood' in Brussels

Through these two conclusions I hope to show how strong the link between Akerman and Belgium actually is.

1: A Female, Independent BELGIAN film-maker : Placing Belgian in the field of Akerman

Belgium as 'blankness'

In my first two chapters I noted that Akerman's namings as 'woman' and as 'independent' were highly visible identities, since they came immediately out of the critical field of Akerman. Given that Belgian - and later Jewish - are considerably less visible namings and even at times 'invisible', my assessment of Akerman's

relation to Belgium will necessarily need to be carried out differently. Rather than the re-assessment, re-reading and de-construction of how Akerman had been critically constructed, which was the substance of my first two chapters, I will undertake a certain amount of **construction** of what is, essentially, an overlooked part of Akerman's cinema.

The first question to be addressed in this chapter is why exactly Akerman's films have never been read as Belgian, given that the nationality of a given director often dictates how s/he is constructed. Thus, it is common for a director to be placed within the cinema of his/her country of origin, and for meaning to be made through comparison with other directors, national genres, themes or obsessions. This is especially the case for a director's early work. For instance Godard was at first seen for the challenge he offered to 50s French cinema. Yet with Akerman this critical location within a national milieu never took place. Early reviews and articles do mention the fact that she is Belgian, yet once mentioned this is not pursued.²

I would argue that the lack of critical attention to Akerman's Belgian nationality hinges on the relative 'blankness' of Belgium, both as a visual signifier, as a presence in her cinema, and on a critical level as a national cinema. Akerman does not foreground 'Belgian-ness' in her films. As far as the two which take place wholly in Belgium (Jeanne Dielman 1975 and Toute une nuit 1982) are concerned, critical attention was focused on the more obvious aesthetic and formal elements, neglecting the significance of the Brussels backgrounds.³ In both films French or Anglo-American rather than Belgian discourses were the main subject of analysis. Thus, the presence of Delphine Seyrig in Jeanne Dielman suggested in many critics' minds, a de-construction on the part of Akerman of Seyrig's 'European Art Cinema' connotations.⁴

This exclusion of 'the Belgian' from readings of Akerman's cinema, can be partly attributed to the fact that Belgian cinema itself is not strongly represented in Anglo-American film history or criticism. Equally, whereas the films of directors such as André Delvaux and Jean-Jacques Andrien, often take as their subject an aspect of Belgian history, or figure in their narratives the relation between the Belgians and the Belgian landscape, by contrast, in most of the representations of Belgium in Akerman's films we rarely find any overt sense of Belgium as a country. Akerman never uses or refers to its regions⁵ (for example the Ardennes, Namur or Liège). Instead, Belgium is always Brussels. If many, if not most, capital cities end up signifying their countries on a cinematic scale (London for England, Paris for France etc) Brussels, again like other capitals, actually signifies something 'other than' the rest of Belgium.

Given Akerman's departure from the 'blankness' of Brussels to the visibility of Paris in the mid-80s it is not surprising that she was thought of as a 'French' director, and as Paul Davay notes: "...her reputation was made in Paris"⁶ and not in Brussels. Also, besides her Parisian 'elopement' Akerman's films, after Toute une nuit, began to signal 'European-ness'. This quality is initiated by Les Rendez-vous d'Anna (1978) which, backed by Gaumont, demanded a more classical level of casting, mise-en-scène and direction.

Despite the evident influence of economic factors I do not wish to suggest that Akerman was forced to leave Belgium, or that she had no choice or intentions when conceiving her films. Such a conclusion is dispelled by Golden Eighties (1986) which Akerman had always planned to make in Brussels' 'Toison d'or' shopping centre. However, the required level of technical expertise was not available in

Belgium, and it was therefore necessary to film on a sound stage near Paris.⁷ Furthermore, though I have suggested in this and other chapters that those discourses which are most visible in Akerman's cinema (and therefore picked up by critics) are the French and Anglo-American, the 'Belgian' is still present, though on a less visible level. Stylistic comparisons will be made between Akerman's and Belgium's cinemas. Additionally, in terms of personnel, Akerman has always had a relatively consistent level of Belgian presence. She has used Belgian actors/actresses: Claire Wauthion (Je tu il elle 1974), Jan Decorte (Jeanne Dielman), Lio⁸ and Pascale Salkin (J'ai faim j'ai froid 1984 Golden Eighties 1986), has worked consistently with her producer in Brussels, Marilyn Watelet (and production company, Paradise Films), as well as with the composer Marc Herouet (Golden Eighties) and musician Sonia Weider Atherton (Sloth, 1984 Histoires d'Amérique, 1988 Nuit et jour 1991).⁹

The recurring decision to work with Belgian personnel contradicts the visual displacement of Belgium in Akerman's cinema. It is for this, among many other reasons, that I will insist on an association between Akerman's cinema and Belgium, and in this chapter I will reveal some of the critically-absent(ed) ties which bind the two together. This process of 'illumination' will begin with the first ostensible figuring of Belgium within the Akerman frame: in both the title and the topography of Jeanne Dielman.¹⁰

Jeanne Dielman and 'Bruxelles'

Jeanne Dielman displays Akerman's most visible sign of 'Belgian-ness' in its full title: ...23, quai du Commerce 1080 Bruxelles. Perhaps the first clue to the 'blankness' of Belgium and Brussels as cinematic signs is provided by the habitual way in which this title is shortened. Though it is a critical convention to shorten to

provide memorability (witness: Céline et Julie vont en bateau (Jacques Rivette, France 1974) as Céline et Julie), it also suggests that what is important is not the address, but the woman. The inscription of Jeanne's space in this title has frequently been commented on:

The full title of the film immediately tells us that Jeanne Dielman is defined and circumscribed by the space she occupies - 23 Quai du Commerce 1080 Bruxelles. (Kinder Reflections 252)

Comment is made then on way that Jeanne is described by her living space: '23 quai du Commerce', but there is no pursuit (to my knowledge) of the significance the actual geography which this address describes. Yet once one pursues this address Jeanne Dielman, seized on by feminist critics as 'representative' of every woman, begins to be differentiated. Not only is she a widow trying to sustain a petit-bourgeois lifestyle, but her address indicates that she occupies a specific space in the city of Brussels. Equally, consideration of the full title brings with it connotations for the whole film, for while there is a '23, quai du Commerce' in Brussels that particular area is not in '1080' Bruxelles but in '1000,' in the centre of the city.¹¹ Anyone with knowledge of Brussels would therefore realise the fictitiousness of Jeanne's address. If one ignores the area code and takes simply the road, then Jeanne is situated in a Brussels neighbourhood which is on the border of Francophone and Flemish districts.

The fictitious title of Jeanne Dielman introduces an ambivalence to Akerman's cinema, as it is clear that different readings of the film are available depending on one's knowledge of Belgium. This is only the first of a series of 'ambivalences' which will be used to describe aspects of Belgian cinema, 'Belgian-ness' and

Akerman's own attitude to Belgium. The term ambivalence is useful in this context, since it echoes the 'double-ness' which is a key part of 'Belgian-ness' a term which, though it encompasses three national language groups (Dutch, French and German) refers mainly to two, the Dutch and French.

As well as 'situating' the beginnings of Akerman's cinema in Brussels, Jeanne Dielman offers a view of life lived in a city which is divided linguistically, culturally and socially, between Francophone and Dutch speakers and Walloon and 'Flemish'¹² traditions. The sense of division which is invoked by Jeanne's titular address can be extended through textual evidence, in particular in a scene from the first day. After dinner, Jeanne makes her son Stefan read to her. In the conversation which follows, it transpires that Stefan has insisted on going to a Dutch-speaking school. At first he was teased about his French accent (when speaking Dutch), but now he is beginning to lose that accent. Jeanne, however, is unhappy about her son's choice of school and of language. These nightly reading sessions seem designed to ensure he retains some French instruction, in this case through reading from Baudelaire's Les Ennemis/The Enemies. Given the resonances of the film's title, this sequence offers a mise-en-abyme of the divisions of Jeanne's neighbourhood, and clearly situates the film in a Belgian social milieu.

Further Belgian connections exist. While much international attention was paid to the casting of the French actress Delphine Seyrig as Jeanne, there has been little mention of other casting choices. Thus, the Frenchness which Seyrig connotes is balanced by Jan Decorte (as the son) who himself became a film-maker in Belgium,¹³ but most importantly by Jeanne's first client, played by the 'godfather'¹⁴ of Belgian cinema, Henri Storck. This casting represents the equivalent to the use of Jean Renoir in French cinema, John Ford in American cinema or David Lean in

British cinema. In other words, through the figure of Storck Akerman conjures up a whole history of Belgian cinema, within which it is inferred Jeanne Dielman should be placed.

Throughout his career Storck enthusiastically promoted cinema in his country, and was influential in the creation of the workshop system practised by the Centre de l'Audiovisuel à Bruxelles, (CBA, which has at times given Akerman money), and in building the reputation of the Cinémathèque Royale/Koninklijk Filmarchief in Brussels. If Storck's name signifies Belgian cinematic practices, institutions, and history, his films are illustrations of each of these significations. Throughout his career Storck never lost sight of his roots or habitat. His filmography of more than eighty films, most of which were commissioned, and all of which utilise aspects of his 'documentary realism', record the history, habits, rituals, communities and landscape of Belgium. Through its humanist stance, Storck's work attains a universal appeal. At the same time, the complexities and contradictions of the term Belgian were a constant source of inspiration to him. Making films in both French and Dutch and in all the regions of Belgium, Storck (along with André Delvaux), stands out as one director whose films justifiably merit the ambiguous description 'Belgian'.

Akerman's use of Henri Storck in Jeanne Dielman is something which, in Belgium at least, is likely to have been recognised and it is through her choice to cast Storck in this film that the discourse between Akerman and Belgian cinema is first set in motion. Having initiated the connection between Akerman and Belgium, I will explore how she escapes the apparent fixity of nationality, as well as how she constructs spatial identities, before pursuing further the signification of Henri Storck and the Belgian cinematic heritage he carries with him.

Akerman: Dislocating Nationality

Akerman may be a Belgian national yet, as I indicated in chapter two, she has moved away from Belgium towards Paris, with the result that her name is connected to the French cinema scene. It is this association which France (a country which shares her mother tongue) which has at times obscured Akerman's Belgian origins. For example, in February 1994 the French Institute in London presented a cinema season "focused on films directed by French Women directors". Among the familiar names of Yannick Bellon, Coline Serreau and Diane Kurys were those of Marion Hänsel and Chantal Akerman. Hänsel is a French national based in Brussels making films in Belgium; Akerman reverses this order, as a Belgian national, based in Paris and making films (most recently) in France. This example of the claiming of Hänsel and Akerman as 'French' can be used to introduce the complex issue of nationality.

Having questioned the appropriateness of the claim that Hänsel and Akerman are 'French', I wish to ask in what way each is, in fact, Belgian. Before such an assessment is possible though, it is necessary to define 'nationality'. In general terms I would suggest that nationality has two main meanings, each of which attach it to past and to present moments and spaces. First, nationality can be claimed through place of birth. When used in this first sense it signifies origin, and is thus an identity inscribed through a connection to a place in the past. Second, nationality can be claimed through place of habitat. In this second sense it signifies home, and is an identity inscribed in a continuous present.

In individual terms, Hänsel can be called Belgian because she has chosen to live and work in Belgium. Hers is an acquired identity which constructs Belgium as home, though not as origin. Meanwhile, Akerman falls within both categories of

nationality. Akerman is Belgian because Belgium is her country of birth and (periodically) her living space. Certain reservations must immediately be made, leading to a more specific account of the connections and ruptures between Akerman and her Belgian nationality.

In an issue of the Quarterly Review of Film and Video on 'The National' and its relation to the media, Marcia Butzel and Ana M. Lopez finish their introduction by suggesting that "one significant aspect of nationalism" which is not discussed in the issue is that of "questions of race and ethnicity" (Butzel/Lopez, 6). It is suggested that it is necessary to consider Akerman's 'Jewishness' before a full interpretation of her Belgian identity can be given. Akerman's birth in Belgium was dependent on her parents living there. However, her parents' origins are not in Belgium but in Poland, and their settlement in Belgium needs to be situated in the history of the Jewish diaspora, and their Belgian nationality recognised as enforced exile.¹⁵ For Akerman's parents Belgian nationality connotes loss as much as it does belonging, and it can be claimed that Akerman also receives her parents' ambivalent nationality.

Turning to the second meaning of nationality, as home, the same sense of ambivalence to the Belgian applies. Belgium has been Akerman's home, since she has lived there, yet any sense of home as a spatial, continuous present is challenged by Akerman's restlessness, and most recently her move to Paris. Nationality as origin is challenged by Akerman's Jewishness and nationality as home is challenged by the fact that she lives elsewhere. Yet while challenging the coherence of Akerman's Belgianicity, her Jewishness and 'Parisian-ness' do not offer full alternatives. Any replacement of Belgian origins with Jewish origins is thwarted by Akerman's parents' refusal to 'remember'. Similarly, the ties which remain between

Akerman and Belgium mean that she can never really wholly belong in Paris, that Paris will never really be 'home'.

Everybody needs a home, so at least you can have some place to leave, which is where most folks will say you must be coming from. (June Jordan qtd. in Morely/Robins Heimat 1)

Given the way in which Akerman's Jewishness problematises aspects of her nationality, it is necessary to ask what sort of affiliation 'Belgian-ness' offers to Akerman and her cinema. Is it simply the case that, in tune with June Jordan's words above, Belgium is for Akerman where she comes from and, by extension, where she used to live? this would posit the bond between Akerman and Belgium as something which exists purely in the past, and has value only as a past location. Within this logic, Belgium becomes a home which had to be left, since it is only by leaving that one can ever belong. These questions will be used to structure my analysis of the textual manifestation of 'Belgian-ness' in Akerman's cinema.

Belgium, home and(/as) transit

Given the problems involved in making anything but small-scale films in Belgium, it is not surprising that once Akerman wanted to make films with a wider appeal she had to leave Belgium. Aside from this necessary, practical migration, Akerman's films had actually been acting out such a departure from their very beginnings. Thus, in Je tu il elle Akerman leaves her small white room in Brussels, in News from Home her journeys in New York city are accompanied by her mother's news

from Brussels, and in Les Rendez-vous d'Anna it is Paris which is Anna's final destination, although her stay is soon revealed as the beginning of another journey.

Both literally and textually Belgium has to be left behind, and this act of leaving Belgium, of leaving home, confirms Akerman's cinema as a displaced cinema. However, it is not that Akerman actually leaves home; instead 'home' becomes displaced, and Akerman begins to explore the concept of home through her films, in particular (as I will later illustrate) Histoires d'Amérique (1988) and D'Est (1993) which centre around her Jewishness. Home, it should be noted, is also associated with the mother. It is significant then that if we return to Akerman's authorial position, charted in my first chapter, when Akerman leaves home, after Toute une nuit, she increasingly takes on the role of mother, and turns towards an exploration of her 'Jewishness'.

After Jeanne Dielman, which Akerman has suggested as a film for her mother,¹⁶ the metaphor of Brussels as the mother-space is most graphically played out in News from Home, in which Akerman's New York wanderings are accompanied by her mother's letters from Brussels. Mother and daughter measure their time through their respective cities of Brussels and New York. Yet while for the daughter, time is measured spatially through her growing familiarity with New York, for the mother time is bounded by routine and rituals (of birthdays, engagements) and is lived through people, on a day-to-day basis. While both the experiences of mother and daughter suggest progression, what for Akerman is the development of an experience, for her mother is change, as her relations get older, get married and undertake the cycle of life. If at this point the mother signifies Brussels, it should also be noted that the world which her letters describe is not far removed from that depicted in Jeanne Dielman. By contrast, the image-track of News from home

depicts a very different world where all is strange, unbounded and spatially, rather than temporally, defined.

Although in News from Home Brussels is left, it is still not fully rejected, and instead Akerman relies on her mother's voice to signify Brussels. This 'placement' of the mother is not unusual, thus Doreen Massey notes:

It is interesting to note how frequently the characterisation of place as home comes from those who have left, and it would be fascinating to explore how often this characterisation is framed around those who - perforce - stayed behind; and how often the former were male . . . and the latter female . . . assigned the role of personifying a place which did not change.(11)

Much has been written on the desire for the mother, as a key part of Akerman's early films; for example: "If there is a recurring phantasmic core to the work of Chantal Akerman it lies in the desire to reconstitute the image of, the voice of the mother" (Longfellow 73)

However, the full complexity of this desire must be recognised, for the mother does not simply lead us towards a sexually different desire, as Brenda Longfellow above goes on to suggest.¹⁷ Instead, the mother is used to signify Akerman's Belgian and Jewish identities. From Je tu il elle to Les Rendez-vous d'Anna Brussels is the mother-space which Akerman can leave because her mother has stayed. After Toute une nuit, which is the point at which she inscribes herself into the mother-space, Akerman goes on to explore her own Jewishness and her 'Belgian-ness' is embraced, though rarely visually figured.

In Les Rendez-vous d'Anna the distance between the film-maker and her home is further removed, and the film shows a form of living which is 'in transit', thereby questioning the identification of 'home' with a particular space or place. This reading of Les Rendez-vous d'Anna is facilitated by the behaviour of Anna, a blank, alienated figure, who drifts, spectre-like from hotel to station and back again. Anna is in many ways a closed-book who has, it seems, withdrawn from the world.

The mobilisation of the home-space in Les Rendez-vous d'Anna is achieved particularly through the film's final sequence. After a journey from Germany across Belgium, Anna arrives home at her flat in Paris. Rather than the security and familiarity which such a space should provide, Anna's 'home' is as empty and 'un-lived-in' as the recent hotels and stations through which we have followed her journey. A sense of strangeness pervades the sequence and this is strengthened by Anna's actions. She enters the flat without turning on the lights, opens an empty fridge, then lies motionless on her bed listening to her answerphone. During these three sequences of (in)action, the feeling of strangeness builds. On entering the flat Anna walks into a room and opens a window, yet leaves the shutters closed, then stares at the dark and blank space. This sequence of actions is a repetition of an earlier scene at a German hotel. In the first scene Anna had entered the room, opened a window and flooded the room with sounds from the station below. Whilst in the hotel, opening the window meant letting the world in, in Anna's flat the action changes nothing: the darkness of the room and the blankness of Anna's expression remain uninterrupted.

Anna's position on her bed at home repeats how she lay on her bed in the hotel. In both cases she lay on her back, with her hands clasped over her stomach. The position connotes both composure and discomfort. Anna draws her body in - both

her arms and legs are crossed and therefore pulled inwards - rather than letting it relax, as if she is still waiting for something.¹⁸ If one adds to this image the content of the answer phone which tells, among other things, of the journey beginning again, then the sense of this home being neither lived in (homely) nor the final destination is complete. Instead, Anna seems to belong to this flat as little as she belongs to the hotel rooms and train carriages. By extension, home becomes transit.

Two terms which have recurred in these descriptions of Akerman's films are those of the 'familiar' and the 'strange'. Thus, News from Home combined the strangers' look at a new city with the familiar voice of and news from the mother. Jeanne Dielman offered a slice of a woman's life which was completely constructed around the familiarity of routines and rituals, in order to dispel the unexpected or strange. Even in Les Rendez-vous d'Anna, strange countries and people were intermingled with more familiar figures and places from Anna's past. The dichotomy of familiar/strange recurs in Akerman's cinema; such a state, (of feeling both at home, and a stranger) also offers an appropriate way of thinking of 'Belgianicity' and, as I will later discuss, this dichotomy has punctuated many aspects of Belgian cinema.

With Les Rendez-vous d'Anna Akerman seems to separate herself finally from Belgium as home. In Toute une nuit then, Brussels becomes a remembered and thus magical city. From Golden Eighties onwards Akerman is able to explore new land and city-scapes both real and imagined (thus in this film the use of an entirely artificial setting), while Histoires d'Amérique illustrates her rejection of Belgium as origin in order to explore her Jewish roots and a very different sense of 'home'. The pattern of development described above suggests an extension and dislocation of the self. Within such a scenario Belgium becomes a station in Akerman's past. Yet, I will argue that rather than totally rejecting Belgium, Akerman uses a sense of

‘Belgianicity’ to construct her relationship to France, or more precisely to Paris. I will explore this suggestion later through a comparison of Toute une nuit and Nuit et jour. However I want to turn first to the question of ‘Belgian national cinema’, and Akerman's contribution to this field of debate.

2: The Nation, the National and National Cinema

In exploring the relationship between Akerman, Belgium and the film-making practices of each I will be covering ground which falls into the field of ‘national cinemas’. In my analysis of Akerman's use of ‘Belgianicity’ I will therefore also want to discuss how this impinges upon the concept of ‘Belgian national cinema’. Given the problems which have already been expressed around any sense of the ‘Belgian’ it might seem that ‘the Belgian national’ is also a problematic concept. In order to approach this question it is necessary to consider the nation, the national, and finally Belgian national cinema.

The Nation

Although I have established that affiliation to a nation (nationality) can provide a sense of home and of origin, I have also shown how both home and origin are illusory in their suggestion of coherence, security and roots. What then, does the nation mean? and how does this affect the way we talk of ‘the national’? The origin of the word ‘nation’ can be traced to 18th century France, where it “emerged as a consequence of the French Enlightenment and the French Revolution” (Hayward, 2) From this first sense of the unification of a people against a common cause, the nation-space has been constantly de- and re-constructing itself.

The ability of the term nation, when applied to the topography of Europe, to define clearly either a group of people or an area of land, has, over the last fifty years, been

seriously questioned. Political changes have prompted the breaking down of various boundaries, most graphically represented in the destruction of the Berlin wall and the subsequent meeting of east and west Germany. This has been accompanied by a demographic motion, as the migrating, the diasporic and displaced peoples seek out homes in the new pluralised Europe. The “dissolving boundaries” have been concomitant with “expanding horizons”(Morley/Robins, *Heimat* 2). Equally, the association of culture with place has been ruptured, through the new media: cable and satellite which link domestic and global spaces.

The jump from nationality: a single identity, to nation: a group identity, brings with it a complication of the methods we have for constituting that group identity. Given the trend towards dispersal outlined above, claiming that any group of people have something in common is inherently dangerous. How then do we think of the nation space amidst this constant fusion and confusion of spatial boundaries? Benedict Anderson argues that, in its suggestion of an imaginary coherence, the nation comes close to myth and he defines the nation as: “an imagined political community - and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign.” (15). If we agree with Anderson's definition, then how do we begin to ‘imagine’ the nation and by extension the national?

“[N]ation is based *in* an assumption of difference (because its different-ness is its starting point.)” (Hayward, 3). The most common way of defining the nation has been, as Hayward suggests through comparison with other nations. Applying such a method to Belgium would define it in the negative: it is not Germany, France or the Netherlands. Yet the relationship of Belgium with these ‘others’ is complicated by the country's history, since over the years Belgium has been influenced, ruled or invaded by most of the nationalities which now populate Europe. It could be

suggested that such a problem exists for most of Europe's nations, since they were all at one time or another the homes to ethnographic groups who may in contemporary Europe no longer have any place (or trace). However, the case for Belgium is compounded by its three official languages: French, Dutch and German, challenging any sense of a unified Belgian culture, history or tradition. Instead, it is necessary to talk in terms of two communities: the Flemish and the Walloon, while making provision for the German speaking inhabitants who are mainly concentrated in the Eupen/Malmedy (the mid-East border with Germany).

The Belgian National

If both 'nationality' and 'the nation' can be conceived of as forms of belonging, which offer individual and group identities, then the national becomes the discourse through which these belongings are constructed. This being the case, one might expect the national to consist of all that the nation produces or shares: the common ground of the nation. Two nation spaces can be suggested: that constructed through common memory, and that constructed through the day-to-day. Both these national spaces are challenged in Belgium by divisions past and present, illustrated by Draguet and Matthis: "Belgium is born of time, but time has largely contributed to untying what has held it together" (20). In order to support this claim we need only point to the growth of Brussels as the European capital. Time does not bring Belgium nearer to its own identity, instead it complicates all sense of belonging, of union and of specificity. One might argue that for many nations this is the case; thus Paul Willemen writing on Indian cinema notes: "Nations are retroactive not retrospective constructions to which we are invited, often not very subtly, to adhere." (8).

In the case of Belgium though, the lack of any 'retrospective' sense of nationhood is accompanied by a problematisation of any possible 'retroactive' construction. The challenge when attempting to conceptualise the Belgian national is to negotiate a path somewhere between these two. In order to discuss 'the Belgian national' in relation to cinema, it is instructive to consider the national as a space of cultural production. This shift of focus immediately refers us to the cinema, but also to literature, painting, sculpture, music and dance, in fact to what Timothy Brennan calls the nation's "cultural fictions" (49).

Before discussing Belgian cinema as a cultural fiction it is interesting to consider the significance of other art forms in the country. Since it has been suggested that:

It is more to its art than to anything else that [Belgium] owes its real moral homogeneity. It preserved the autonomy of its art better than the integrity of its territory. (Rooses, 2)

I will examine the tradition of painting in Belgium, as one heritage which is not eroded by history, and its intersection with Belgian cinema. Painting can clearly be constructed as a Belgian heritage. Flanders has a long association with the art world, having produced schools of realism in the work of such figures as Pieter Paul Rubens, Bruegel the Elder and Constantin Permeke, as well as anticipating the schools of fantasy (in the work of Hieronymus Bosch), later developed by the Francophones René Magritte and Paul Delvaux. This pictorial heritage is of some significance when attempting to conceptualise 'Belgian national cinema',

With no fiction film tradition to build upon, pre-60s Belgian cinema had to seek inspiration elsewhere. Whilst directors such as Gaston Schoukens or Jan

Vanderheyden, who sought to entertain, turned to popular literature,¹⁹ others, who wished to explore the cinematic medium, were inspired by the painters who had framed the world before them. Comment is frequently made about Henri Storck's composition and how they echo those of Bruegel.²⁰ I would suggest that this painterly inspiration manifests itself in two main ways: stylistically, through an emphasis on the image over dialogue or narrative; and thematically, through a borrowing of the obsessions and preoccupations of Belgian painters.

The adoption of the pictorial models offered by the painting heritage, is most evident in generic traditions such as animation and cartoons. Of equal importance though, is the documentary tradition in Belgium which has been characterised by visual investigation. However, even in the field of feature film-making, direction is often motivated by a capturing of the pictorial, rather than any concentration on dialogue, character inter-action or a detailed plot. Paul Meyer and Jean-Jacques Andrien offer examples of directors for whom image rules over dialogue. In Paul Meyer's *Déjà s'envole la fleur maigre* (1960) sound is unimportant, there is little dialogue, and instead rituals and gestures form the driving interest. Meanwhile, many of Jean-Jacques Andrien's films feature particularly complex sound-tracks in which dialogue and sound-effects from previous scenes are often re-played over new scenes; the effect is to place the onus of meaning-making on the images. It could be suggested that an emphasis on the image rather than on dialogue is entirely appropriate for a country where, linguistically, communication is problematic.

The second manifestation of painting in the cinema is particularly prevalent in Storck's work. Storck's *Symphonie Paysanne* (1944), to be discussed later, shares some of Brueghels's "interest in ordinary people and their labours and past times" (Bovi 9) Equally the interlocking of man and the landscape is a theme of films by

Jean-Jacques Andrien (Le Grand Paysage d'Alexis Droeven 1981), Paul Meyer (Déjà s'envole la fleur maigre) and Benoît Lamy (Jambon d'Ardenes 1977). Finally, painterly themes which are taken up by directors include the fascination of beauty linked to death and decay to be found in the work of Hieronymous Bosch and Jan Breugel, and re-played by André Delvaux.

Much was made of the use of colour in Jeanne Dielman. (Lakeland) It could be pointed out that there is a tradition of colourists in Flemish painting for whom this film's yellow tones and its frequently dull overall colour, would have signified a sense of doom, and perhaps a similar conclusion could be drawn for the film. Also, there is a sense in which the simultaneous action implied by the structure of Toute une nuit distantly echoes the canvasses of Hieronymous Bosch, Breugel and (Paul) Delvaux, frequently crowded with a mass of figures, repetitions with a difference and 'mini narratives'. Although I do not wish to propose any notion of a direct influence between painting and film (Akerman's or otherwise), it is appropriate to point out some possible cultural resonances between the two art forms, as part of a common (if distant) cultural heritage.

Belgian National Cinema

Recently, studies of a nation's cinema have been conducted under the heading of 'national cinema', which has tended to replace the categories of genre and the author.²¹ Like the generic and the authorial, the national is essentially a way of ordering a group of films. Equally, like the national itself the concept of national cinema is an impossible construct since in the first instance, cinema is not made by nations, but by individuals. The term 'national cinema' however seems to imply that films which have a common country of origin may contribute to the expression of the national text. It is under such a rubric that recent publications such as Blood

Cinema by Marsha Kinder and French National Cinema by Susan Hayward have operated. Justifying her project, Marsha Kinder writes:

Blood Cinema...assumes that every national film movement seeks to win legitimisation as the 'valid' representative of its culture by striving for international recognition. (6)

Meanwhile, in the introduction to her book Susan Hayward suggests:

[F]ilm functions as a cultural articulation of a nation (even if it subverts it, it still addresses/reflects it...) . . . In this way, cinema - a 'national' cinema - is ineluctably 'reduced' to a series of enunciations that reverberate around two fundamental concepts: identity and difference. (x)

Kinder's remark above pin-points the fact that, as the expression of a particular nation, national cinema is constantly striving to be international; it is always an industry as well as a cultural structure. She also implies a factor which I mentioned earlier: that cinemas of the nation will always be struggling with one another, or in John Hill's words, they will be potential "sites of contestation". To this discussion Hayward adds the suggestion that national cinema takes two forms: identity and difference, in other words that which is recognised as the official national cinema, and that which does not conform to, but opposes it.

Expanding on this identity/difference dichotomy using recent film theory, I wish to suggest that until recently, in the case of European cinemas, art cinemas and heritage genres have constituted the main official body of national cinemas. Steve Neale has written of Art cinema as essential in:

the attempts made by a number of European countries both to counter American domination of their indigenous markets in film and also to foster a film industry and a film culture of their own. (11)

Art cinemas articulate that sense of the national which has to do with industry, as, marked as European, they are thus differentiated from mainstream Hollywood, yet through their emphasis on art, they allow the specificities of a particular nation to be played out. Meanwhile the heritage genre, which 'performs' national history, offering a space of nostalgia and superficial utopia, also fulfils the cultural criteria of a national cinema. A film made within the heritage genre is also typically of a big budget, and therefore attracts through its emphasis on spectacle, or attention to historical detail.

Both Kinder and Hayward's remarks above seem relevant to Belgian cinema. In order to open up the discussion between national cinema and Belgian cinema I will first offer a very brief account of cinema in Belgium before, second, turning to the (limited) critical field to see if any sense of the national is suggested. As I will show, there is constantly a struggle for legitimisation in Belgian cinema, which revolves around the bilingual nature of the nation. Hayward's notion of identity and difference is equally applicable, and I will suggest that outside Belgian cinema an official national discourse exists which is signified by Brussels, and it is only once we look beyond this that Belgium's difference becomes evident.

Cinema in Belgium

Given that the cinema was born only sixty years after Belgium had started moving towards a more settled and consolidated image (after its independence in 1830), one might expect it to be used as some sort of unifying medium to construct or simply

reflect on Belgian identity. However, when cinema finally arrived in Belgium it was in the form of an invasion rather than a salvation.

Following the invention and international exhibition of the Lumière cinematographe, the Pathé brothers sent a Frenchman, Alfred Machin, to Brussels to set up the country's first studio. As was the case with most countries, cinema came to Belgium via France. However the difference in Belgium was that this initial import was to set up a recurring pattern of invasion which has been echoed throughout the country's cinematic history. The potential of cinema as a national text or space for expression is hampered in Belgium by this recurring pattern of appropriation, invasion and erasure. The main barrier to creating a viable commercial Belgian cinema is the country's size, which makes it practically impossible to make a profit with a film purely through release on the Belgian market; this problem is then compounded by the country's bi-lingualism and the lack of a coherent structure for commercial film-making which still exists today. Thus Patrick Duynslaegher notes in 1990: "Financing films remains difficult, with government help insufficient to help a weak - some would say non-existing - industry." (80)

The sense of cultural diversity and non-specificity which Belgium's divisions create has provided a perfect environment for small scale, experimental film-making and it is appropriate that Akerman made many of her 'minor' films in Belgium. However, Belgian directors who aim for an exportable product, something which Akerman was to move increasingly towards, are forced to look for wider appeal through 'European' stars, the 'prestigious' genres (eg: documentary, art cinema) and co-productions (Marion Hänsel is one successful example).

Belgian cinema - the critical field

When researching the history of Belgian cinema, it is necessary (unless one speaks Dutch) to rely almost wholly on accounts written in French, since the only accounts written in English occur in Encyclopedias and are - without fail - brief and dismissive. In their Belgian entries, both The International Film Encyclopedia and The International Encyclopedia of Film stress Belgium's problems. The first suggests these as the country's proximity to France (a country to which many talented figures have emigrated), its size, and the 'inaccessibility' of the Flemish language. The second, while mentioning Henri Storck, notes that the country is "not notable until recently for feature production" (11). Both give Belgium less than three hundred words. The Dictionnaire du cinéma (Larousse, 1986) is more generous. Belgium is given over two thousand words in which production, cultural trends and funding are noted. Once again the problematic proximity of France is commented upon, along with the country's bi-lingualism.

The two main Francophone accounts of Belgian cinema are, Histoire Authentique du Cinéma Belge by Francis Bolen and Une Encyclopédie des cinémas de Belgique co-edited (by Guy Jungblutt, Patrick Leboutte and Dominique Païni). To these one can add several Francophone publications on Belgian cinema: Henri Storck: ou la traversée du cinéma (1976) written by Jean Queval, gives a detailed account of Storck's career, and Paul Davay's Cinéma de Belgique (1973) offers a study of the country's cinema up to the 1970s.

The first two works listed above, provide comprehensive guides to the field, though they differ in format, aim and opinion. Francis Bolen's book is largely influenced by his own experience of the Belgian cinema. Present at its birth, he seems to have assigned himself the position of its godfather. His book recounts, through folklore

and anecdote, the history of Belgian cinema from its origins to the mid-70s. Meanwhile, the Encyclopédie sets itself the task of providing an alternative to Bolen. Rather than giving a definitive history, it operates as an A-Z index of Belgian cinema. The auteurist stance of Bolen's work is rejected, and instead the Encyclopedia divides its entries between directors, films, movements and themes. It does not search for one Belgian cinema, but instead shows the many, thus the titular "des cinémas". Davay's book lies somewhere in-between these two, offering both a chronological account, and a sense of dominant styles, themes, authors and films.

If the two francophone accounts of Belgian cinema show the wealth of films and film-makers to have emerged from Belgium, the English accounts emphasise how few of these figures have attained international status. There is no doubt, then, that films are made in Belgium, and indeed the country has a healthy film culture: while being only slightly larger than Wales or Massachusetts, Belgium hosts Europe's largest variety of film festivals, has proportionally the highest number of film schools, and one of the most extensive archives, in its Cinémathèque Royale. However, the picture of an emphatically cine-enthusiastic country which is painted by this account, is obscured by the poor feature film out-put which dominates its international image.

An entry in the Encyclopédie claims that: "There are no common traits in Belgian cinema because there is no Belgian cinema...there is no Belgian cinema yet there are Belgian film-makers" (Smolders, 177). The statement is intentionally provocative, and actually forms part of a section entitled: 'Lieux communs/clichés' which goes on to suggest some of the clichés: a tradition in documentary, ethnographic cinema, magical realism and the film sur l'art. The project of the Encyclopédie, stated in the introduction, is to chart Belgium's less commercial cinemas which are divided as

follows: films sur l'art, experimentations with fiction, social documentary cinema (Cinéma-témoignage social) and films made by artists. (Pagé, 7). It is in the category of 'experimentations with fiction' that Akerman is placed, although the author (Pagé) does admit that the cinemas described share a tendency of:

interference, criss-crossings and other contaminations established in a style which erases the boundaries between the disciplines of cinema, painting, documentary, reality, and fiction.

Cinema in Belgium and the national

I wish to return to the question of how Belgian cinema expresses the national. For Belgium, the notion of the national must be divided in two, between the French and the Dutch linguistic areas. One result of this division is that any sense of the national as something constructed over time is not possible - since Belgium has been constantly divided between its two, and more recently three, linguistic groups. The impact of this division for a national cinema is such that the heritage genre in Belgian cinema actually offers a point of difference, rather than a point of identity. For example, a film such as Daens (Stijn Coninx, 1993) displays all the features of a heritage film, having intricate re-construction of period detail, and being set in the past, yet since it deals with an aspect of Flemish history, the past that Daens re-constructs is not a shared 'national' heritage. The linguistic divisions of Belgium further complicate any attempts to conceive of 'Belgian-ness' as different to other countries. Thus, for the Francophones, France is the space of sameness and difference, through which an ambivalent relation is constructed. However, for the Dutch speaking population the affiliations to the Netherlands are not so clear cut and instead the Dutch speakers are themselves divided between those who consider their heritage 'Flemish', Dutch or German.

In answer to the problems of constructing any sense of nation-ness or national cinema for Belgium we could cite the work of Homi Bhabha. Recognising the problems inherent in any conception of a coherent national space, Bhabha instructs that this space should be constructed from the margins, that is, by those who do not belong. Bhabha also suggests that we must get away from what I have been describing above, the sense that nation-ness is 'epochal' and evolves over time, instead he wants: "to displace the historicism that has dominated discussions of the nation as a cultural force" (Narration 292)

Instead of an "epochal" construction, Bhabha suggests a "performative" (Narration 299) notion of identity constructed "around" temporality [more] than 'about' historicity" (Narration 292). In other words, he suggests that we concentrate on the 'here and now' of the nation rather than the 'then'. Bhabha's thoughts are particularly appropriate for Belgium, a country in which there is little accumulative, epochal notion of Belgianicity, since it has, over time, grown towards Europe, and history has erased many of the specificities which might have existed. I would argue then, that identity can be constructed on two levels. The first level can be labelled 'national' while the second is best understood as 'local or regional'. In designating these two levels I am echoing Hayward's designation of identity and difference and signalling the need to look and look again at Belgium, or to look beyond the identity to the difference. Since my impulse is tied up with the visual, it is helpful to call upon the work of Roland Barthes in order to frame this double look.

Belgium - The Studium and the Punctum

In Camera Lucida (1980) Barthes analyses how point-of-view is constructed in photography as well as how he, as the viewer, reacts to certain photographs. Two

terms dominate his descriptions: the *Studium* and the *Punctum*. The *studium* refers to “a... general interest” or “an *average* effect” (26). Meanwhile *punctum*, “the notion of punctuation”, refers to “a detail” that attracts (43). As Barthes looks at an increasing number of photographs, so he develops his notion of the *punctum* into a detail whose presence forces him to change his reading. The *punctum*, then, is a detail, present and therefore highly visible in a photograph, yet which has to be picked out by the viewer. While the *studium* constitutes something which has been constructed (thus the photographer's choice of framing which points to a hierarchy of seeing), the *punctum* is less constructed and more attached to chance. Barthes continues his analysis: “There is another... expansion of the *punctum*: when, paradoxically, while remaining a “detail” it fills the whole picture,”(45) and the “last thing about the *punctum*: whether or not it is triggered, it is an addition: it is what I add to the photograph and what is nonetheless already there” (55).

Imagining Belgium as a photograph I would suggest the first view available, that is the national, or: Belgium as ‘European’, which can be seen as the *studium* (that which is coded, and thus wants to be seen). Having designated Belgium as European, I must point out that this is a view which can be taken entirely from Brussels. Meanwhile the local and regional, the *punctum* of Belgium, is what I will come to define as ‘difference’ and ‘the minor’.

Studium: Brussels as ‘Going European’

Despite a history of conflict and confusion, when it comes to the task of imagining a consolidated position in Europe, Belgium has had few problems. The presence of the European community's institutions has changed| “a previously provincial European town into a symbol of Europe's collective future” (Blyth/Watson 26). Yet Brussels, bureaucratic umbilicus of the new Europe, is by contrast the peripheral

capital without a kingdom, where the latin and germanic cultures meet and mingle, yet where over a quarter of the city's one million population are not of Belgian origin (Blyth/Watson 11). In its enthusiasm to embrace Europe, Brussels could be said to have effaced Belgium's specificities.

In order to fully realise the critical 'blankness' of Belgium, and also, in anticipating Akerman's own use of Brussels, it is interesting to compare Brussels with Paris. For Charles Baudelaire, pioneer of Modern Life in the nineteenth century,²² Paris was the home of the homme des foules otherwise known as the flâneur. Definitions and interpretations of the flâneur/flâneries differ; however Baudelaire defines this person (who is always taken to be masculine) thus:

For the perfect flâneur, for the passionate spectator, it is an immense joy to set up house in the heart of the multitude, amid the ebb and flow of movement, in the midst of the fugitive and the infinite. (9-10)

By contrast, Baudelaire described Brussels as follows:

...no shop windows. Strolling, something that nations with imagination love, is not possible in Brussels. There is nothing to see, and the streets are unusable. (qtd. in Benjamin Baudelaire 50)

Without necessarily endorsing Baudelaire's opinions I would contend that his contrast of Paris as spectacle and Brussels as visually blank serves as a fitting introduction to this section. Belgium as 'going European' is, as I have argued, the country's studium. By this I mean that it is, through Brussels, how Belgium promotes itself, it is the interpretation which the country wants the viewer to derive from looking at its image. When trying to construct 'Belgianicity', that is the

specificity of being Belgian, this studium is less useful since it is constituted through a process of erasure. The assumption of difference, which is a key part of conceiving of Belgium as a nation, is complicated by Brussels's appropriation of a certain 'European-ness', which works to erase any sign of difference. More importantly though, the sameness/difference paradigm is denied once one's attention is "prick[ed]" (Barthes, *Camera* 47) by Belgium's punctum (that identity which is smothered by the process of becoming European). Because of its relation to Brussels, Akerman's cinema is more visibly aligned with the studium of Belgium. However I will argue that the punctum is also present on a less visible level. On the one hand, I will suggest that the punctum consists of Belgium's smallness or 'minor-ness', and on the other hand, of the singular differences that the country's history has constructed for it.

Punctum: the minor and difference

I will use the term minor in its first sense, as small in size or importance. Perhaps my first definition of Belgium concerns its smallness, or rather, Belgium as a minor country. In order to analyse what a Belgian identity offers it is necessary to consider Belgium, e Belgian-ness and Belgian cinema. Though each of these will necessarily require a different approach, I would suggest that for each, Belgium's size is a great determining factor affecting everything, from its position in the new European community, to its state policies for the cinema. Belgium's smallness has also been its longest standing feature, Angèle Guller writes: "Belgium was founded on the 'commune' the village or borough principle ..by extension their interests are regional ones too." (190). From its very beginnings then, Belgian identity could be said to have been tied up with a sense of the regional and the local. Behind the studium of Belgium through which the country is promoted as essentially European,

the opposite exists. Difference divides Belgium, rather than consolidating its nation-ness. Belgium's sense of self is necessarily blurred due to its history of invasion, erasure and appropriation. From the 13th to 19th centuries the territory we now call Belgium (by turns part of the low countries, the Netherlands and France) was ruled by the Spanish, Austrians, French and Dutch. The division between French and Dutch occurred in Roman times and ever since the two traditions have struggled for dominance.

I have suggested that any sense of a Belgian national cinema united through history (for instance the heritage film) is impossible, and that Belgium's exportable cinema tends to exhibit the 'going European' quality of Brussels. (For example the co-productions of Gerard Corbiau Le Maître de musique/The Music Master 1988, or Farinelli, Il Castrato 1994). Two representations of Belgium can be defined then, Belgium, identified with Brussels, as going European and Belgium as minor and difference. In order to explore the place of Akerman in this Belgian national text I will initially to return to two points noted earlier: the evocation of Henri Storck and his work, and the suggestion by the Encyclopédie that Akerman has a place in the "boundary erasing" aspects of Belgian cinemas. It is these two suggestions which will shape my discussion of Toute une nuit.

3: Mapping Aspects of 'Belgianicity' Through *Toute une nuit*

Rather than seeking to assess Toute une nuit against examples of Belgian cinema, my analysis will work the other way round, extracting from this film various Belgian texts. Toute une nuit will be used, then, in order to develop, through textual examples, my discussion of Belgian national cinema. My approach can be compared to that of Guiliana Bruno in her book: Streetwalking on a Ruined Map. Confronted with the task of analysing the fragments which remained of the work of Italian film-

maker, Elvira Notari, Bruno adopts a “palimpsest[ical]”(3) analysis “indexical and inferential”(4). The evidence Bruno has accrued on Notari's work and life is used as an inter-text, through which other areas of interest are discussed. For example, in considering the first cinemas in Naples, and discovering that many had alternative functions, Bruno is lead into a discussion of the similarities between cinema spectatorship and the anatomy lesson. The work of Notari takes Bruno elsewhere, and through that elsewhere Notari's work is thereby enriched, and given a cultural and critical context which erases some of the gaps.

Although my work on Belgian cinema is not faced with the same gaps, erasures and loss of evidence as Bruno's on Notari, I will use Toute une nuit in a similar way, that is, as an inter-text through which connections between Akerman's and Belgium's cinemas are projected. Although this methodology might suggest a certain randomness, I will be extending points already noted around Belgium's national text, namely the minor and difference of its punctum, while also pursuing the description of much Belgian cinema as ‘boundary erasing’.

In a sense I have already begun my inter-textual “indexical and inferential” analysis of Akerman's and Belgium's cinemas, with my earlier observation of Henri Storck's appearance in Jeanne Dielman and it is with Henri Storck that I will again open my discussion. Before I do so however, I want to emphasise that it is not my intention to offer a comprehensive or extensive account of Belgian cinema; instead I will discuss purely those films, styles, themes or forms which are indexed by Akerman's Toute une nuit a film which, I will finally argue, offers a vision of the Bruxellois. As I have previously noted, Toute une nuit can be seen, after Jeanne Dielman as Akerman's most Belgian film. Initially this title is bestowed due to visible elements: the setting in Brussels and the use of various Belgian personnel - including many of

Akerman's friends and her mother. This analysis will hope to extend these initial Belgian inklings, to make a more convincing case for the film.

Toute une nuit can be identified as the pivotal film in Akerman's cinema, bridging a division after which the early anti-narrative stance is exchanged for a stance which actively and playfully addresses narrative and classical narration. This pivotal status means that many of the traits of 70s Akerman are combined with the move towards fiction and narrative which is part of 80s Akerman. Thus, like Jeanne Dielman before it, Toute une nuit is structured around gestures, yet with the difference that these are all gestures from the love story.

This gestures/love story split leads me towards the first of my indexes, which involves the division in much Belgian cinema between the real and the fantastic. Under the heading of 'the real' we could place all of those cinemas which attempt to document, to record, or represent a non-fictional reality: documentary in all its forms, the films of Henri Storck and the work of directors such as Michel Khlefi, Manu Bonmariage, Boris Lehman and Charles Dekeukelaire. Meanwhile under the heading of the fantastic we could place artists such as Marcel Broodthaers and René Magritte, and film-makers such as André Delvaux, Harry Kümel and Roland Lethem. These two 'styles' of film-making, (the real, the fantastic) and the names cited, represent perhaps the two most celebrated aspects of Belgian cinema.

The relevance of the above for my present discussion is two-fold. First we should note the flow which occurs between these schools, with directors such as those named making films in both areas. Second, I will suggest that in Toute une nuit the gestures/love story split is concomitant with a real/fantasy division which, in turn, represents the first way in which Akerman indexes a text of Belgian cinema. If the

'real' trope falls under my heading of the minor, then the fantastic can be more concretely thought of in terms of a magical realism which I will explore in the work of André Delvaux. Despite their different aesthetic projects, both the minor and magical realism engender a sense of difference, which is evoked through the familiar/strange dichotomy, and it is this which I will pursue later in my construction of 'Belgianicity'.

The Minor

The term 'minor' has a long critical association with Akerman's cinema. Jayne Loader writes on Jeanne Dielman: "Akerman's cinema focuses our attention on her smallest gestures, gestures that reveal character but would be lost in a more flamboyant film." (10) While not actually using the word 'minor' at this point, Loader and other critics identified Akerman's depiction of "banalités quotidiennes",²³ that is, day-to-day realities, as opposed to action which would conventionally be considered dramatic and important. It is also this play with the distinction between 'the real' and 'the dramatic' which we can find in Henri Storck's work. In his capturing of daily Flemish rituals or Walloon customs, and in his emphasis on the relation of people to the landscape and nature, Storck's cinema roots itself in a Belgium which is built on a sense of the quotidian and local. The sheer volume of Storck's out-put means that his work deserves an extensive discussion. However it is my intention to restrict my study of him purely to his contribution to the minor cinema which is my present subject. This being the case, my discussion of his films will focus on two aspects of the minor: the reversal of hierarchies, to make the ordinary dramatic and the utilisation of a look of observation.

Initially the comparison of Akerman and Storck might seem out of place, since in many (if not most) senses these film-makers come from very different schools

(critically, generically and formally). Storck, working from the 1920s to the 1980s (his last film was Permeke 1984-85 co-directed with Patrick Conrad) was involved largely in documentary realism. Despite the variety of his work (documentaries, lyrical films, experimental work, film sur l'art) it was in documentary realism cultural sphere that he made his mark. Thus Paul Davay, among others, calls him: “the leading Belgian pioneer in documentary filmmaking”²⁴ Akerman has of course being making films over the last twenty five years, and her work has been associated with feminist, avant-garde and art cinemas.

The differences in Storck and Akerman's film-making backgrounds suggest that with Storck the minor is embedded in the documentary tradition, where it indicates a certain ethnographic impulse: an attention to the real world and its faithful representation. By contrast, for Akerman the minor is subsumed by agendas both political, such as the feminist impulse to give correct representations of women; and aesthetic, such as minimalism founded on the recording of minute details. However, in my use of the minor I will argue first, that it actually constitutes a strong current in Belgian cinema, with various manifestations, and second, that it is through their joint involvement in this ‘Belgian text of the minor’ that Storck and Akerman can be compared.

Storck and the minor

With [Storck] the creative process begins first of all with observation, confident in the magic of reality (Davay Cinéma de, 40)

although he never succeeded in fiction film he put all his love, his sensibility and his penetrating and ironic gaze into so called minor genres (Davay Cinéma de, 54).

Many of Storck's films (totalling nearly 60) were shorts which were commissioned, with the subject therefore being determined beforehand, subjects include: the beach, (Images d'Ostende 1920-30) the countryside, (Symphonie paysanne 1942-44) a mining strike, (Misère au Borinage 1933 co-director Joris Ivens), and the renovation of houses (Les maisons de la misère 1937).

Though Storck is known as a documentary film-maker, his technique challenges the assumptions such a term engenders. Thus, many of his films make great use of the narrative form, typically through their linear organisation or use of cause and effect, enigma and closure patterns. Symphonie paysanne, is arranged as a narrative of the seasons which develops from summer to winter, while the structure of Trois vies et une corde 33' [1933] is dictated by the subject: a mountain climb, which thus demands a narrative which builds to the climactic peak. Similarly, Les Maisons de la misère follows the worsening conditions and then re-creation of a quartier. Narrative does exist in Storck's cinema, yet it is in each film secondary in importance to other things: establishing mood, making visual patterns or recording rituals; the main logic of his cinema then, is not to tell a story. Instead, Storck's technique, and one which we can read into Akerman's films, is the reversal of the hierarchies of that which is and is not considered dramatic. Symphonie paysanne (filmed in Flemish Brabant, Louvain, Wallonia Brabant and on the outskirts of Brussels) (Queval 57) is ostensibly a record of a year in the life of the Flemish countryside, focusing upon farm and village life. Divided into seasons with a special episode: 'Noces Paysannes/Country Wedding' in the middle, the film continually

emphasises - through the voice-over and the images - the union of a community with its land. As we follow the cycle of crop-growing, so human drama also progresses, from children taking their first holy communion, to a wedding and a death. Prior to the wedding the couple are counselled by a priest, his sermon consisting almost entirely of advice on how to build a good farm together.

Later, after their wedding, the couple grab a moment alone whilst the guests are eating. Sitting on a bench they look into each other's eyes. From the man's face we dissolve to him tending the crops and dreaming of his cattle, then from the woman's we dissolve to her making dough and picking apples. The most 'romantic' moment is therefore taken up with shared dreams of the farm they will create together. What should have been the most romantic moment: the kiss, is instead used in order to repeat the main theme of the film: the connection of the people with their land. Throughout this film it is the theme of the unity of a community with its land, and the complete dominance of the landscape over people's lives, which takes precedence. This being the case, the structuring of the film around the seasons can now be read less as a linear (or circular) narrative and more as an appropriate way of suggesting the importance of time, weather and the elements.

Trois vies et une corde serves as an even stronger example of Storck's shifting of the dramatic on to the quotidian. A conventional narrative would treat the climbing of a mountain as an excuse for a story of danger, possible accidents and a probable test of the hero's strength and determination. Instead, Storck's concern is to show the beauty of the mountains, the skill of the climbers and to capture the patterns made in the snow. After the first stage of the ascent the men rest in a hut and tell each other climbing stories. The visual depiction of these stories juxtaposes tales of

recklessness, danger and burlesque comedy (the conventional drama of climbing) with the more low-key climb recently witnessed.

While they use narrative, these films do not simply want to tell stories. The clue to their different intentions lies in the fact that those mechanisms which should involve and position the spectator: continuity editing, characterisation, subjective and point of view shots, are entirely absent. Instead of the conventional involvement mechanisms I would argue that Storck encourages us to observe and thereby appreciate these minor texts. Images d'Ostende (1920-30), Storck's second film) and Une Idylle à la plage (1931) are structured more as musical variations around a theme. Once again though that theme is low-key and not conventionally dramatic. In both films Storck picks details out of the everyday reality of a beach and its visitors. In Images d'Ostende the beach is broken down into its component parts through inter-titles: 'foam', 'the dunes', 'the North Sea'. The camera frames each part so as to emphasise its movement and shape. At one point the camera is tracking along the dunes, undulating according to their shape, when suddenly out of the wind-blown sand a black cat appears, turns its head, and then disappears again. The image frames an ordinary subject: a cat, in an ordinary space; a beach, yet the encounter, so unexpected, is made extraordinary.

Une Idylle à la plage shares Images d'Ostende's sensitivity to quotidian details, making the ordinary dramatic through care and attention. Beginning as a record of a North sea beach, the film records a chance encounter, then follows its development. As the film opens people are dashing for cover from the rain. A man taking shelter under a beach hut finds a young woman there. After nodding hello he hands her a shell, saying it will bring her luck. Immediately after, the sun comes out. The film then records the gestures of these young lovers, to whom the beach becomes a tactile

space which leads them to their final embrace. From drawing in the sand, the couple move to catching fish, and listening to sea shells. As in Symphonie paysanne, Les Maisons de la misère and Trois vies et une corde, the bodies become connected (or in this case literally attached) to the landscape. Lying down in the shape of starfish, the young man and woman begin to turn in a circle, drawing patterns in the sand with their feet. Shot from the air, the couple themselves become patterns, human starfish ejected from the sea.

In Henri Storck's cinema Bhabha's sense of the performed national comes to life, via the minute recording of day-to-day reality. Whilst the logic behind many of his films should have been promotional, instructional, illustrative or campaigning, Storck's treatment transforms his subjects, making them narrative, poetic or lyrical. Above all I would suggest Storck's impulse is to make the ordinary dramatic through detailed observation.

Storck's work can be used to pin-point a dominant stylistic in Belgian cinema which has provided a space for an articulation of the problematic nature of Belgianicity. His 'minor' aesthetic can be extended across history to encompass a mode with which several directors have chosen to treat their subjects. Whilst it would be impossible to explore the mixing of the fictional and the real, or the evocation of the minor in every Belgian film, several examples are available in order to develop this tendency:

Déjà s'envole la fleur maigre (Paul Meyer). Meyer draws greatly from Storck's work in this film. He sets it in the Borinage mining region previously featured in the Storck/Joris Ivens documentary Misère au Borinage (1933), and structures it through observation of the everyday life of the areas' immigrant workers. There is a

concentration on gesture, play and courting rituals which (due to the sparse dialogue), tell the story. It is shot mostly in long shots punctuated with occasional close-ups of hands and faces.

Le Fils d'Amr est mort (1975, Jean-Jacques Andrien) tells the story of a thief, Pierre, who acquires an accomplice. When that accomplice dies Pierre, realising he knew nothing about him, journeys to his home in South Tunisia. Whilst Andrien's film is more a fiction than a documentary, certain points challenge the linearity and narrative drive. Throughout, dialogue is minimal and information is conveyed largely by way of a complex sound-track. In the sound-track consistencies of time and space are broken, as past and present dialogue is juxtaposed with repeated sounds and voices. Once Pierre reaches the Tunisian village the narrative seems to collapse. The strangeness of the new environment to Pierre is translated in the method of filming. The camera suddenly becomes documentary in its approach, roaming spaces and faces. One particularly striking example of this is a moment when we concentrate wholly on an old man making tea, a meticulous process.

Home Sweet Home (1973, Benoît Lamy) Essentially the story of a rebellion in an old people's home. Lamy's strong narrative is interrupted by shots which pause on the old people's faces for long periods of time. Given that Lamy uses a mixed cast of actors and non-professional actors, these face-shots become moments when the real pierces the fiction. The film is transformed into a double structure: this is a film about the way old people are treated, and a chance to contemplate age in close-up. Paul Davay notes of this film: "its accurate observation of character and social setting... It's a kind of microcosm of average Belgian society, with its fundamental materialism" (Variety 1974, 83). Besides these individual films, directors who have

worked with the fiction/real division include Manu Bonmariage, Boris Lehman, Edmond Bernhard and Michel Khlefi.

Toute une nuit and the minor

I have already suggested that Jeanne Dielman shares common ground with the cinema of Henri Storck, and the connection with the fiction/reality dichotomy should be evident. Equally though, Akerman's early films can be read alongside the tradition of observation identified above. The observational look is evident in Hotel Monterey, News from Home, Jeanne Dielman and Les Rendez-vous d'Anna. In each, Akerman's camera retains a distanced position, which denies identification, point of view or any involvement in the conventional sense. Equally the logic in each is the capturing of a certain 'lived' reality: the experience of a hotel and its inhabitants, getting to know a city, three days in a life, and finally a journey. Stylistically, several if not all of the films mentioned sit somewhere in between the categories of fiction and documentary, as techniques from each are employed.

In Toute une nuit too observation, rather than participation, is encouraged as there is no one main protagonist with whom we can identify, and indeed, identification is thwarted by the shortness of each of the sequences. Also, like both Jeanne Dielman and News from Home, Toute une nuit is presented to the spectator as an experience. If meaning was made in the first film by a growing awareness of daily routine and in the second by the familiarisation with a city, in Toute une nuit the spectator is forced to experience "one whole night" and the magic it casts, in close-up. Again any sense of a linear narrative is denied, and instead the dominant feature of the film is a multi-dimensionality and simultaneity of actions, that offers a wide panorama of narrative, and an enlarged field of vision. The love story is constantly split, as we meet and discard a series of couples. This reduces the romantic scenario to 'a union'

with 'a couple'. The disconnected spaces and couples form chains of analogies, spinning a complex web of impressions and connections in which the city space is formally fragmented yet temporally bound together.

As spectators, we are made to observe, but the structure of Toute une nuit is such that, very much as in Jeanne Dielman, meaning resides in exactly how observant we are. Through observation then, the structure of Toute une nuit emerges as one of visual and thematic connections, patterns, associations, repetitions, and above all gestures. The connection to Storck's cinema should again be emphasised here, as what Akerman 'isolates' in Toute une nuit are the gestures of both love and night-time, which are then enlarged to become the source of all meaning. Toute une nuit becomes almost a choreography for the camera, in which montage creates the rhythm. If the love story has been reduced to the union of a couple, then that union has in turn been reduced to a series of key visual actions, or to the connection of bodies in space.

The first few sequences establish a system of 'looking' which is repeated with variations. In the first of the 'dusk' scenes, a man and a woman are seated either side of a line of tables. Both look off left; the suggestion seems to be that they are both looking at/for the same thing. The woman suddenly sees something, and we cut to a man coming in a space previously unseen, and they fall into each others' arms. Scene two: a man and a woman again sit at tables, this time side by side. An exchange is taking place: The woman looks at the man shyly/he drinks/she drinks/he looks shyly at her/she looks more blatantly at him/he gets up to pay/she fumbles in her purse/he exits to pay/she stands to do the same/he returns blocking her exit/they fall into an embrace. The slashes in my account of this sequence, are meant to indicate the way in which each of the movements or looks 'connects' with the

former, and 'produces' its successor. Whilst the couple sit at separate tables, and do not seem to know each other, a connection is initiated through action, and a pattern of cause/effect ensues.

Further moments of 'connection' punctuate the film: there is a connection through sound. Scene five depicts a woman waiting in the shadows of her front door; she hears the sound of high heels in the distance, and as if prompted by this sound, she too walks away making the same noise. Music is the final point of connection, and perhaps the most pervasive. There is the repetition of the song 'L'Amore perdonera' which becomes almost an anthem to the night. In tune with the image-track's splitting of point of view, on the sound-track of the film we hear love talk in German and French as well as the persistent Italian theme. The specificity of 'a night in Brussels' is opened up by this use of language to become more 'under a night sky in Europe'.

The various elements described above posit Toute une nuit as a film with a two-dimensional structure. While the night and the theme of the couple unify the images of the film, the continual action/connection which is the film's system, tends to split this unity, dispersing any meaning in a constant movement away from the concrete. The viewing experience of Toute une nuit therefore becomes one of constant negation in which what is gleaned from each individual image, is later taken away through repetition with a difference, variation, or contradiction. Inevitably the spectator's position becomes insecure, yet more importantly he/she is forced to live the film from moment to moment.

In keeping with metaphors of the visible employed to describe Belgianicity (the studium, the punctum) and with Belgium's self-effacing qualities, I would suggest

that once we examine the way that Belgianicity has been constructed, the problematic becomes, not what we do or do not see but how we look. Storck's films transcend boundaries of fact and fiction, report and narrative, whilst equally reversing the hierarchies of the ordinary and the extraordinary. It is in his encyclopedic recording of the everyday, his focus on communities, the regional and local, that I would suggest he creates a cinema of the 'minor'. Finally, Storck's techniques contribute to our sense of Belgian national cinema since he creates the nation as, in Bhabha's words, "the locality of culture"(Narration 292).

Through my analysis I have hoped to show how Akerman shares in the quotidian, observational aspects of the minor, which lead in turn to a cinema of non-identification. I will later discuss in my section on Brussels how she engages with the 'local' aspects. However, where Akerman seems to differ from Storck is in her restriction of the depiction of Belgium to Brussels. One question which is raised by this observation is how Akerman avoids the studium which Brussels invokes. This question will be more fully addressed in my next section on the magical.

The Magical

Delvaux....is gradually establishing his own unmistakable world... it is a land of the imagination, an area in which fantasy and reality blend and blur (Davay Variety 1974 84)

the true Delvaux we find in the finesse and the hypersensitivity of the observation, the truth of the gestures and looks (Davay Cinéma 65)

Like the later films Histoires d'Amérique and Nuit et jour (1990), Toute une nuit takes place at night. Akerman exploits night time by using coloured filters to envelop the films in deep colours, in particular blues and reds. In Toute une nuit in particular though, she makes use of the association with dreaming, and therefore with a loss of logic and coherence, which the night time evokes, and it is through this that Toute une nuit can be seen as an index to the text of magical realism which I will explore in the work of André Delvaux.

The stylistic current of magical realism can be traced from the canvases of [Hieronymous] Bosch and [Pieter Paul] Rubens to schools of fantastic literature illustrated in the work of Franz Hellers, Jean Ray and Michel Ghelderode. It also manifests itself in the successors to the Surrealists, the group known as Cobra, and finally, in the work of the painters René Magritte and Paul Delvaux to be discussed here.

Susie Gablik suggests that: “For Magritte, painting was a means of evoking a meta-reality which would transcend our knowledge of the phenomenal world” (12). Magritte's realism can be described as magical because it transcends reality. As Gablik notes, it takes place in the “subjunctive mood” (9), thereby depicting what ‘could be’. Initially Magritte's art seems to operate in stark contrast to the documentary observation of reality described above, relying as it does on the fantastic and the impossible. However, what Magritte shares with the minor, is a preoccupation with the everyday and common place. According to Gablik: “Magritte used only familiar objects, brought together or combined in such a way as to evoke something else, something *unfamiliar*” (14). Such claims are confirmed by Magritte's pictures. Favourite (and well-known) icons include a man with a bowler hat, an apple and an umbrella. Each of these are repeatedly placed in implausible

situations so that, after the first look which makes us think we understand the picture, we have to look again. Once again the dichotomy of familiar/strange emerges, as this 'double' look is precipitated by the fact that Magritte gives us the familiar in a strange context.

As if inspired by Magritte, Belgian cinema has contained endless examples of the fantastic, the symbolic and the magical. Thus, Henri D'Ursel's film La Perle (1929), Ernst Moerman's Fantomas (1937) and Marcel Marien's L'Imitation du Cinéma (1959). Each represents simply an isolated instance, and for evidence of a more continuous engagement with a 'magical realism', we can turn to the work of André Delvaux. In his films, Delvaux uses many symbols and images which evoke the work of the painter Paul Delvaux, such as trains, night time, stations, and dark colours. Also, in Belle he re-constructs a Delvaux painting as a dream image. Comparisons can also be made with Magritte, since, like Magritte's pictures, André Delvaux's films begin with what seem to be ordinary situations: a man is having breakfast De man die zijn haar kort liet knippen/The man who had his hair cut short (1965) a couple are meeting for dinner Un soir un train (1968)²⁵ or a writer is giving a talk Belle (1973). Through the course of the narrative however, the main protagonist (in all three cases cited a man) finds himself confronted with a situation with which he is not familiar, and a series of strange events ensues.

The particular resonance of Delvaux' work for my present discussion of Belgian national cinema comes through the fact that in each of the above cases the unfamiliar situation is associated with the Belgian landscape. In De man die zijn haar kort liet knippen the hero, who has just begun a new job as a barrister, is taken on a hot summers day to observe an autopsy of a possible murder victim. Much is made of the fact that the journey is taking them well out of the city, and in fact the

autopsy takes so long that it is necessary for the men to stay over in a local hotel. In Un soir un train a lecturer (Yves Montand) has got off a train which had come to a standstill; it then starts again but he fails to get back on. Along with two other men he wanders the flat, Belgian landscape, which is unfamiliar to him and eventually a ghost town is found. Finally in Belle a college professor driving home to Spa through the Hautes Fagnes countryside, discovers a wild woman living in a hut. He returns to the woman, bringing her food and gradually compromising his own life as a happily married professional.

In each case, it is through their location in a strange area of the Belgian landscape, that the protagonists err. It is also through contact with this strange landscape that each loses his sense of the familiar, and his ordinary life as a 'happily married family man'. The strangeness invoked by Magritte's paintings is, in André Delvaux's films, associated with the topography of Belgium. Like Storck's evocation of the Flemish countryside and Ostende coast, Delvaux concentrates on regions outside Brussels, and through this both film-makers avoid the 'going European' qualities of their capital. With Toute une nuit, I would suggest that Akerman comes to incorporate aspects of Delvaux' magical realism into her cinema, making a film which offers both the quotidian - in its nocturnal version - and the fantastic, present in the use of dance-like elements (my point about a choreography for the camera). It is also after this film that her cinema becomes increasingly playful, indulging more in the fantasy of narrative than in the documenting of the real.

In Toute une nuit everyday physical gestures are enlarged to revue-like proportions, or analysed in intimate close-up. If the night provides a space of presence, then the bodies in the film encourage a close, intimate atmosphere of contact. This intimate atmosphere is initiated in a scene in which a couple emerge from a house. Their

connection to the night is immediately emphasised as we see their shadows before we see them, and while the scene is dominated by sounds of an aeroplane overhead and passing traffic, what is predominant is the sound of their shoes on the gravel path. Finally, as the shot cuts to their front door, the couple pass alarmingly close to the camera, (perhaps the only 'close-up' of the film) and the woman complains about the heat. The effect when watching is such that the spectator too 'feels' the closeness and heat of the night.

Aesthetically the film is very pleasurable to watch. The use of blue and red gels throughout saturate the night in deep colours which, combined with the dwindling shadows, create a world appropriately rich and ready for the profusion of love which we will see and which seems very close to the nocturnal images of René Magritte or Paul Delvaux. I have mentioned the film's reflexivity through the use of the night; the darkness though has an even stronger effect in the opening passage of the film, which takes place in the suburbs. Men knock on doors, women run after them, and they all seem to be escaping. Visually this constant flight and escape is realised by the repeated appearance/disappearance of these figures from the darkness. The effect is to suggest not only that the night is the place of fantasies/love, but also to sustain the 'magic' of the night-time, where the mind is somehow freed from the confines of logic and the sensible light of day. Again, resonances take place between Akerman's films and the magical realism previously described. Brussels takes on in this film the connotations of 'mystery' which were an important part of André Delvaux' treatment of the Belgian landscape. At the same time, because most of the film is set at night the shadowy aesthetics conjure up the uncertainty and mystery as in Magritte's alienation of the familiar.

Returning to the concept of 'Belgianicity' which I have been attempting to construct, I would suggest that the fragment of the national text which I have chosen to highlight consists of a combination of the fictional with the real and the real with the fantastic. Where these forms cohere is in the fact that it is the everyday, the common place and quotidian which is in fact dramatic, and should therefore be given screen time and attention.

The significance of these analyses for Belgianicity becomes evident if we examine the implications of both Storck and Delvaux' cinemas more closely. One of the effects of the documentary impulse in Belgian cinema is to promote a look of 'observation' rather than of participation and this indexes terms I have used previously: familiar and strange. As an observer one is apart from the action, taking an alienated, estranged view of it. The same effect is present in Delvaux' cinema, which alienates one from the familiar through its magical realism. In terms of the national text, both of these forms suggests Belgianicity as a national text constructed through difference. There is, then, little sense of sameness or of common-ground, apart from the lived-in day-to-day reality. Through her "indexical and inferential" use of Delvaux and Storck, I would argue that Akerman participates in this text of difference, and it is in this way also that Toute une nuit weaves its place into a text of Belgianicity. This textual connection between Toute une nuit and Belgian national cinema is re-inforced by the way in which this film offers a vision of the Bruxellois, which I will now explore.

4: *Toute une nuit*: a vision of the *Bruxellois*

Brussels as non-place

Brussels interrogates its own identity...Brussels as a non-place.... no man's land...hollow country (Jungblutt et al 53)

I feel Paris is much more of a dead city. Paris has too much culture; that culture is over your shoulders like a big, heavy weight. Here it's freer, because although there is a Belgian culture, it's not recognised as a big culture. So, in fact, it's like Kafka in Czechoslovakia. It's a good place to work. (Akerman)²⁶

Having analysed the ways in which Toute une nuit indexes the minor and the magical, it is now necessary to address the film's more visible Belgian identity present in its use of Brussels. As I have noted before, Akerman's Belgian identity is something which she constructs in relation to France, or more precisely Paris. This being the case, part of my project in this final section will be to compare Akerman's representations of Brussels and of Paris. The second of the two quotations above indicates part of Akerman's attitude to Belgium. Her characterisation of Paris as 'dead/too much culture' and Belgium as 'freer' might suggest that Belgium is simply chosen for its anonymity. In my analysis of Akerman's use of Brussels I will be keen to establish whether this is the way she uses the city, or whether she does actually engage with any 'Belgian culture'.

Surprisingly, within the topography of Belgian cinema, Brussels does not emerge as dominant, instead the regions of Belgium are depicted as often as its capital. I say surprisingly because previously I have maintained that it is Brussels that comes to (over) signify Belgium, with a consequent 'European-ness' being attached to the

country. An account of every depiction of Brussels would be too large a project for this present work, and instead I have selected significant instances which can contribute towards our analysis of Akerman's representation of Brussels.

For many of Europe's cities a complex international image-bank of past representations exists which film-makers necessarily have to address; yet for Brussels this is not really the case. Instead of having to address any existing cinematic image, for Belgian film-makers wanting to work with the city, it is more a case of creating their own significations. This fact has several implications, three of which I will explore now in more detail.

1. Brussels as non-sign

The first implication of Brussels' cinematic blankness is that this does not allow for the same kind of 'recognition' value, which one might have with cities such as Paris, New York or London. In each of the three cities named it is possible to produce a 'monumental' signification: thus, the Eiffel tower, Manhattan skyline or Tower of London can be used, in each case to quickly establish location. Equally each of these monuments 'stands in for' the city, allowing an economy of representation. The implications of Brussels' blankness in this respect can be measured by using an example. *Pardon Cupidon* (Marie Mandy 1993) is ostensibly a fiction film about two couples whose relationships are breaking down. It is a film which is emphatically placed in Brussels, and this was picked up by reviews in Belgium: "Brussels has rarely looked so fantastical on the screen"; "a magically coloured Brussels (where the Atomium shines like the parthenon)"; "inventively anchored in reality Brussels reality, Brussels has rarely been shown so effectively on screen"; "Marie Mandy's film brings to life a city that has not yet found its poet in cinema".²⁷

What is notable in the present context, is the fact that Mandy suggests that she attempted to depict the city as one might an American city: using its city-scape as a third character in the narrative. Mandy attempts, then, to find a point of identification for Brussels, and the result is the use of the Atomium in the same way as one might use the Eiffel tower in Paris or New York's Manhattan skyline. Mandy's depiction of Brussels can be interpreted with much irony. Thus she attempts to locate an identifying image for Brussels, and what she comes up with is, in fact something built only fifty years ago, which marks the beginnings of Brussels 'going European'.²⁸ What Mandy's film suggests, is the immense difficulty one encounters in attempting to 'signify' Brussels.

2. Brussels and belonging

It is to the city that the migrants, the minorities, the diasporic come to change the history of the nation . . . It is the city which provides the space in which emergent identification and new social movements of the people are played out. (Bhabha, Narration 319-320)

The second implication of Brussels' cinematic blankness involves the fact that, with few points of recognition available, there is a sense in which the city is open to appropriation. It is just such a conclusion which is suggested by Bruxelles/Transit (Samy Szlingerbaum, 1980), which provides an immigrant vision of Brussels. This was Szlingerbaum's only feature film in a short career which was terminated by his death at the age of 37 in 1985. Previous to this film he had collaborated with Akerman (Le 15/8) and Boris Lehman (who plays the father in this film). Szlingerbaum also plays the man who cannot not sleep in Toute une nuit.

Bruxelles/Transit takes as its subject the arrival of a family of Jewish/Polish immigrants in Brussels. Rather than ‘telling the story’ of (an) immigration, the film attempts to show the experience of the couple and their two children. While on the sound-track of the film a mother reflects on her immigration (in Yiddish), on the image-track the images which should illustrate her story are absent. Instead, empty spaces are consistently framed: stations, streets, corridors and waiting rooms. These images are given a ghostly, impermanent feeling through the use of very grainy black and white film, which is frequently under or over-exposed.

The depiction of Brussels in Bruxelles/Transit lends it a ghostly, unreal quality. At first this could be any city; the spaces encountered are both indistinct and universal. Gradually though, spaces, people and the main characters become more distinct. Brussels is an anonymous city: all specificity is lost through the immigrant experience, and instead we are left with a series of gaping holes, voids, and vacuums into which meaning gradually creeps as life accumulates its sense of routine.

3. Brussels and the performative

The final implication of Brussels' cinematic blankness is suggested in the work of Boris Lehman, a director mentioned earlier as one who experiments with fiction. Over his twenty-year career, Lehman has directed, acted (in Samy Szlingerbaum's Bruxelles/Transit) collaborated (with Akerman and Storck among others). His films centre on the self yet, although frequent appearance by Lehman in his films suggests self-obsession, and cinema does become a medium through which he can explore his identity as both a Belgian and a Jew (Muet comme une carpe/Silent as a Fish 1987), total solipsism is prevented by an ethnographic approach. Evolved without a script, Lehman's films are created from an observation of reality, using real people

who play themselves, to chronicle particular places and the passing of time. It is this technique which Lehman used for Magnum Begynasium Bruxellense (1978), a film which offers a record of the Beguinage district of Brussels.

In Babel (1980/1990), a film Lehman made over a period of ten years, the city's identity is always of primary importance since (it is suggested), it will inform the identity of the self: Boris Lehman. The strangeness present in Szlingerbaum's film is absent in Lehman's. Instead, Babel shows a Brussels which is extremely ordinary and taken for granted. There is little evidence of a tourist's-eye-view, apart perhaps from the opening at Mont St. Jean, a popular tourist spot. The security and familiarity of Brussels depicted in the first half of the film, is then contrasted in the second half with the adventure and strangeness of a trip by Lehman to Mexico. If Bruxelles/Transit constructed the beginnings of a sense of 'belonging' to the capital, Babel constructs a capital which, beginning as home, must be left in order to achieve full significance and to feel like home.

Both Szlingerbaum and Lehman's films divide Brussels up, and the effect is first to fragment our experience of the city and second to deny any coherent 'mythologising' image. In Bruxelles/Transit division is enforced through the tableaux-like shots which are, in fact, reminiscent of Akerman's technique in News from Home. In Babel the linearity of narrative is replaced by the randomness of life. The film jumps around from place to place, frantically recording an intimate diary of some eight years of Lehman's life. Both Lehman and Szlingerbaum are united in trying to find a space for the self in the city. The significance of their films lies in the fact that for both Brussels' non-specificity seems to make it possible to address oneself to it on a personal and individual level.

In comparison to the cinematic depiction of cities such as New York or Paris, these two views of Brussels stress the ordinary over the extra-ordinary. The image of Brussels constructed in Babel is that of a city which is lived in and therefore taken for granted, as days record time spent in cafés, offices, streets, trains, travel agents and doctor's surgeries. Although Szlingerbaum's depiction evokes the strangeness and disorientation of immigration, it shares Babel's obsession with the quotidian. Recalling Baudelaire's lament that, in Brussels there is “nothing to see”, the two visions of the capital recently mentioned suggest that, in fact there is plenty to see yet that it depends on how you look. If one looks then, for a vision of Brussels which is like Paris - constructed through monuments, signs of the glorious past, and of the ‘epochal’ time of the city, then there is nothing to see. However, if one takes the advice of Lehman and Szlingerbaum and looks at the city through the ‘performative’; that is, through the every day, and lived-in experience, then there is plenty to see.

Toute une nuit and the text of ‘Belgianicity’

Toute une nuit's depiction of Brussels allows for Lehman, Szlingerbaum and Mandy's interpretations. Through the repetitions which structure the film, one coherent, or even accumulative vision of Brussels is denied. Thus Akerman uses no such symbol as the Atomium. Equally, through the emphasis on the quotidian, performative time, the city-space is denied any sense of the extra-ordinary. We do not concentrate on the monumental, historic side of Brussels; instead Toute une nuit is filmed in the lived-in spaces of the city: an ethnic quartier, the suburbs and an old apartment house. In most of the sequences a ‘home-space’ is depicted as a series of couples, leave or arrive at a house. If we add to this the fact that Akerman has herself affirmed that the cast of the film was largely made up of friends and relations (including her mother), then Toute une nuit emerges as Akerman's ‘home-movie’.

While Toute une nuit denies Marie Mandy's signifying of the city, its structure coheres with both Szlingerbaum and Lehman's depiction of Brussels as fragmented. The film's structure of repetition with a difference constantly draws us away from any 'official version'; instead, we are left with an impression of the endless possibilities of the love story, and the spatial disconnection of the city. The disconnection of each of the sequences and couples, leads to an interpretation of Brussels as an 'individual's city'. Such a reading would exemplify the 'Belgium as difference' strand of the country's punctum, in which only divisions and differences are emphasised. To extend this point slightly, I will refer to the work of Iris Marion Young. Young employs in her writing an idea of the city "as a place to enact a politics of difference" city-life therefore becomes "the 'being together' of strangers", she continues:

Strangers encounter one another, either face to face or through media, often remaining strangers and yet acknowledging their contiguity in living and the contributions each makes to the others, In such encountering people are not 'internally' related...and do not understand one another from within their own perspective. They are externally related, they experience each other as other, different, from different groups, histories, professions, cultures, which they do not understand."(318)

The opposition of a 'shared existence' with 'an independent life-experience' could become a way of seeing both the general term of the national and the more specific space of Belgian-ness. Several other oppositions naturally follow: together/apart, familiar/strange, shared/divided, all of which have figured in our vocabulary of

Belgian identity. Returning to my opening discussion of the national as home, several developments can be made. As home, the national retains its sense of ambivalence and impossibility. All sense of home is contingent and (entirely) self-created. Brussels can become as much a home to Szlingerbaum's Polish immigrants as it can to Boris Lehman, who has constructed his identity through his daily experience in the city. Akerman can construct a sense of Belgium as home, while still leaving that home. The meeting of Szlingerbaum and Lehman would constitute exactly Young's prescribed: "being together of strangers". Returning to Toute une nuit in the light of Iris Marion's words, it could be said that the film depicts figuratively exactly what she describes. Thus, every couple or individual is united through space: all are in Brussels, and through time: one long night. All could equally be seen as part of some larger narrative around love. However other than these connections, each is in fact very different and individual. There is a sense in which Toute une nuit, through the two-dimensional structure described above, acts out the national as the "being together of strangers", which is, in turn, a crucial part of the text of Belgianicity.

This connection between Toute une nuit and nation-ness can be extended if we think back to how the nation has been described. Two experiences were highlighted: according to Renan, the 'living the nation' and the 'time of the nation', and according to Bhabha, the nation as the everyday and as the epochal. Each of these views divides the nation between a smaller, detailed image of a present moment, and a larger more general image created over a period of time. It is precisely such a division which can be said to structure Toute une nuit. Thus: for the epochal time, we have the large image of Brussels and the overall unifying theme of the love story; meanwhile for the day-to-day realities we have the structuring motif of one

whole night, and the fragmenting of that night into moments, each split into tableaux sequences.

In my first and second chapters I concluded by suggesting 'new' positions which were the result of Akerman's cinema's constant transition. In my first chapter, the new position was one in which Akerman's look at her female lover was finally made visible in Nuit et jour. The result of this making visible, was the extension of an erotic look from one woman (Akerman) at another woman (Julie) in this film. In my second chapter what was added was Akerman's adoption of a certain 'French-ness' in name at least, which has ensured (for the time being) her an independent stance in some of her work. Meanwhile in this chapter, having pursued the ways in which Akerman and Belgium connect, I am concluding again with the 'French-ness' detailed in my second chapter. However, as I concluded in my previous two chapters, Akerman refuses the placement which a naming as 'French' implies to instead construct herself as displaced.

Constructing a space, as displaced, in relation to Paris

As I noted earlier Akerman has always been named as 'French' and this fact has prevented any construction of her as Belgian. Such a naming draws however from the ease with which Akerman fills a position in French cinema. Besides her professed Godardian influences, Akerman has made use of the French star system, through her casting of Delphine Seyrig, a figure who represents a certain ethereal, modernist aesthetic. In Golden Eighties she addresses this star system most directly, by casting the generation of Delphine Seyrig, Charles Denner and John Berry against the younger generation of Lio, Fanny Cottençon and Pascale Salkin. References to French cinema also exist in this film, which has been likened to Jacques Demy's musicals, in particular Les Parapluies de Cherbourg (1964) and in

which the casting of Charles Denner conjures up Truffaut's L'Homme qui aimait les femmes (1977).

Further, extra-textual resonances occur between Akerman and French cinema. French sources of finance have played a large part in enabling Akerman to make her films: thus the funding by the CNC (Centre Nationale de Cinématography) for Golden Eighties and INA (Institut Nationale de l'Audiovisuel) for News from Home. The naming of Akerman as French is understandable then, given the lack of resistance which Akerman puts up to the acquiring of a French image. Nuit et jour adds to this closeness to France through what could be considered a homage to French cinema. Like Truffaut's Jules et Jim, Nuit et jour charts the development of a love triangle in which a woman is torn between two men. Further references emerge. Like Jim who in Truffaut's film is Americanised to 'Geem', Jacques, Julie emphasises, is pronounced 'djack'. At different times we see Julie reading a book of "Les Aventures d'Antoine Doinel" and at one point she recites Delphine Seyrig's speech from Baisers volés (1968) "I am not an apparition I am a woman".

This Truffaut inter-text can be extended to encompass not only his work but that of the new wave in the late 50s and early 60s, since it is with the New Wave's representation of Paris that Akerman seems to play. In the same way as the cloistered rooms of Jeanne Dielman's house which dictated her daily routine, Nuit et jour's setting in Paris means that so much of the narrative has already been decided. The 'homage' which Nuit et jour seems to provide to Paris and its cinemas is noted in reviews of the film. Thus one critic writes: "Night and day...written with a compassionate nostalgia is an essay in a familiar French genre." the review continues:

And that, of course, sums up the dilemma for Belgian film-makers. Just as Georges Simenon from Liège in southern Belgium invented France's most famous fictional policeman, so Chantal Akerman has made a movie more French than France.²⁹

I have noted the echoes between Akerman and French cinema. However I would argue that far from being 'more French than France', Nuit et jour makes use of a French image-bank only to measure its difference from it. The attitude that the film takes to its inter-texts is indicated first by the fact that the main characters are strangers to Paris (coming from the provinces) and second by Akerman's position as the film's narrator. If Paris is seen from a distanced, even touristic space by Julie, then Akerman's voice on the sound-track reinforces this distance. Both these factors clearly mark Paris as a foreign city, and I will suggest, Akerman's various strategies are used in order to figure the sameness/difference relation which she herself holds towards France in the text of Nuit et jour. To return to Toute une nuit, if that film could be considered a home movie which played with Akerman's memories, then Nuit et jour is very much an 'away from home' movie which plays with the reusable memory bank of French cinema.

In my analysis of Toute une nuit I focused on formal and aesthetic systems, while paying less attention to Akerman's depiction of Brussels' topography. Nuit et jour provides an interesting point of comparison through which the topography of Paris and Brussels can be contrasted. Perhaps the most obvious difference between the representations of Paris and Brussels in the two films is the spatialisation of each. Paris, then, as mapped by Julie is a space to be walked through, with long straight boulevards, whose linearity is emphasised by the frequent use of tracking shots. Recurring spaces are marked by fountains, cafés and street life (thus the two scenes

in which Julie buys a shirt from a street vendor). The touristic spaces of Paris are also visited, as Julie and Joseph walk along the Seine or, at one point, walk with the Eiffel tower behind them.

Paris is therefore familiar in a touristic sense, and coherent due to the linear lines of night time walks and the repetition of locations. By contrast, the Brussels of Toute une nuit has none of Paris' coherence, linearity or, even, familiarity. Whilst over the course of the night we do linger in certain spaces - the suburbs, a large apartment house - space is, ultimately, fragmented and any sense of where each location is in relation to the next is impossible to discern. Rather than the linear strolls of Julie and Joseph, we are given an endless series of couples dashing around, meeting, parting, or missing each other. Brussels, then, is neither a strollable nor a coherent space. The difference between these two films can perhaps be seen as Akerman's different relation to the two cities. Thus, the representation of Paris is such that we are positioned as strangers. The film then allows us a familiarising trip around the city. However in Toute une nuit's Brussels, it is as if the city was already familiar, since it is the lived-in space, therefore no tour is necessary and instead we concentrate on the nocturnal happenings.

My analysis of Toute une nuit's part in Belgian national cinema suggests the film almost as a parting gesture to the Brussels which is left. Akerman depicts Brussels as the space of the 'minor' and difference which were part of Belgium's punctum, and she also uses techniques which connect the film to Belgian national cinema. In terms of her self narrative, this return to Brussels constitutes a remembered, magical vision of her home in which the two-dimensional structure constructs the experience of nation-ness, as if to express her own ambivalent national affiliations. However, Nuit et jour reveals that Belgium and Brussels are far from forgotten.

NOTES

- ¹ John Hill's comment is drawn from an article in which he takes up the national cinema debate in relation to British cinema. He writes: "national identity and the cultural forms in which it is given expression must be conceived of in dynamic terms". He then goes on to suggest that in conceiving of national identity as "dynamic" it is necessary to think of national cultures as changeable, as interactive and finally as "sites of actual and potential contestation and challenge."
(15)
- ² Examples of Akerman's nationality being mentioned include: "Chantal Akerman, a shrewd young Belgian who is bridging the gap between the commercial film and the structural..." (Patterson/Farber, 48). Or, "a recent film which examines narrative conventions from a radical Feminist perspective. The film *Jeanne Dielman, 23 Quai de Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles*, by Belgian film-maker Chantal Akerman...". (Perlmutter, 127). However in his interview with Akerman, Gary Indiana asks her: "Anyone coming to Brussels for the first time would see René Magritte and Paul Delvaux reflected; do you think this might be true for your work?" Akerman replies "In the organisation of space, perhaps" and "yes, the colors-the dark blue" (Indiana, 58)
- ³ Thus, Mary Jo Lakeland in her article on *Jeanne Dielman* seems initially to be going to comment on the significance of 'Bruxelles': "The frequent practice of referring to this film by the shortened title of *Jeanne Dielman* overlooks the heavy burden of signification implicit in the address--*Quai du Commerce*. The complete title not only locates Jeanne Dielman in an explicit geographical sense, but also defines her mode of existence." However, she then ignores the first half

of her observation to concentrate on the second half: “What Akerman does with colour in the film is to strongly reinforce this link of person to place and social system.” (216). Also, in her review of Toute une nuit Susan Barrowclough concentrates almost entirely on the film's structure. “*Toute une nuit* is made up entirely of a series of fragments...” Her one mention of the Brussels background actually dismisses the possibility of any possible significance: “While Akerman uses real locations for all the exteriors and most of the interiors, the film looks as if it were shot in a studio.” (103)

- 4 For example: “Whatever image one has of Delphine Seyrig is bound to be involved with her haute-couture sinuosity, her graceful undulating body and voice. But the Seyrig of LAST YEAR AT MARIENBAD and INDIA SONG doesn't even resemble the straight-up and-down puritan, Jeanne Dielman...” (Patterson/Farber 49)
- 5 Though it should be noted that in Les Rendez-vous d'Anna the train stops in Aachen.
- 6 Paul Davay from the Variety International Film Guide 1987, 114
- 7 The co-production contract between Paradise Films, Brussels and La Cecilia, Paris explains the reasons for this decision. “Filming is arranged for 10 weeks in a setting constructed in Paris. The filming in a real setting in Brussels was impossible given the inconvenience of hiring one place for such a long period and the real, un-occupied shopping malls posed technical problems for example with lighting and mise-en-scène (ceilings too low, shops too small)... To be able to construct the setting in around 6 to 8 weeks some 10-15 workers are needed, assistants who can design the setting and workers specialised in painting and plastering etc...Such workers simply do not exist in Belgium. It is for this reason that we have been persuaded to film in Paris. ” (See: “The Golden Eighties...”)
- 8 Despite her appearance in many French films since Golden Eighties Lio is from

Belgium, and began her career there as a singer. It could be suggested that Akerman cast her in Golden Eighties 'against type' since she is one of the few (if not the only) characters who does not sing.

- ⁹ Akerman's use of Sonia Weider-Atherton has been consistent since 1986/88, and Atherton's cello music has become an important part of Akerman's cinema. This being the case, it is significant that in the 'inter-textual' Nuit et jour Julie, while out walking, passes a poster advertising a concert by Atherton.
- ¹⁰ I say 'ostensible' since it is possible, and probable, that Je tu il elle takes place in Belgium. However, since so much of that film occurs inside: in a small room, a driver's cab and another room, there is little to be gained by analysing this as Akerman's first figuration of Belgium.
- ¹¹ One review given in a Belgian publication does actually note this 'wrong' postal address: "...Jeanne Dielman, 23, quai du Commerce, à 1080 Bruxelles...I know: officially, that's 1000. But Chantal must have her reasons..." ("Jeanne Dielman" Pourquoi Pas? 15/2/1976)
- ¹² While the Dutch speakers in Belgium are frequently referred to as 'Flemish', that term is historically, politically and linguistically contentious. Not only is Flemish a dialect of Dutch which is only spoken in certain regions of Flanders, the word carries segregational connotations: referring to the Dutch-speakers' struggle against the dominance of the Francophones in Belgium. The word Flemish also has connotations of the Flemish Nationalist movement which collaborated with the Germans during both wars. For an interesting insight into the relationship between the Flemish nationalists and the Germans during the first world war, and the way in which cinema was mobilised to secure a relationship see Convents, Le cinéma et la Première Guerre.... Also the subject of collaboration during the second world war is treated in André Delvaux' Vrouw tussend houd en wolf/Woman in a Twilight Garden (1979).

- ¹³ As far as I can tell Jan Decorte made only two films, Pierre (1976) and Hedda Garbler (1980). Descriptions of the films in the Davay's "Belgium" entry in the Variety International Film Guide (1977: 75 and 1979: 73) suggest a homage to Akerman, as throughout both films Decorte uses long, still shots and concentrates on the quotidian.
- ¹⁴ Storck's status as 'godfather' is suggested by several factors: 1) his age (born 1907) 2) his numerous 'founding' activities, which have created a heritage which includes the CBA (Centre de l'Audiovisuel à Bruxelles) and CFA (Centre du film sur l'art), and committees for the promotion of documentary film. 3) the permeation of Belgian cinema with his influence on two levels - professional: as a mentor for such film-makers as Luc De Heusch or Patrick Conrad, and aesthetic: in the film d'art genre and continuing documentary strand of Belgian cinema. Finally, while I note that accounts of Belgian cinema are brief and rare, in all cases Storck is mentioned.
- ¹⁵ Akerman: "My parents are from Poland to. They came to Belgium-my father in 1930 and my mother in 1938." 'Another Train Another Story' Time Out May 25-31 (1979) "My parents, both of Polish origin, never spoke about the war..." "Memories of an Unknown Past" Interview, Brigid Grauman The Bulletin February 9, (1989) : 21.
- ¹⁶ "Chantal Akerman has called [Jeanne Dielman] 'a love film for my mother. It gives recognition to that kind of woman'" (World Film Directors 4)
- ¹⁷ Using the films Je tu il elle, Jeanne Dielman and Les Rendez-vous d'Anna Longfellow proposes that the mother/daughter relationship which is figured in each film is Akerman's way of making present "the third woman" (85).
- ¹⁸ This 'waiting' position which Anna adopts is significant once one considers that throughout Les Rendez-vous d'Anna Anna is waiting for trains, phone calls, people and most importantly waiting to go home. Since home is posed as the final

destination (to which Anna is 'on her way' throughout the film) we naturally expect Anna to change/relax/be different when she finally arrives.

- ¹⁹ For example Schoukens' La Famille Klepkens (1929) was adapted from a popular comedy by Auguste Hendrickx while Vanderheyden's most celebrated film De Witte (1934) was taken from a novel by Ernest Claes.
- ²⁰ "Storck's films preserve a way of life...his composition recalls Brueghel and Permeke" (Davay, 1967)
- ²¹ Recent examples of books on national cinema include Hayward's French National Cinema. As well as the QRFV issue on "Mediating the nation", the past few years have seen special issues in Screen (29, Autumn 1989) and New Formations (12, Winter 1990).
- ²² Specifically in his essays "Heroism of modern life" and "Painter of modern life" published in 1863 (Baudelaire Painter 859-60).
- ²³ The phrase "banalités quotidian" is taken from a review of "Les Rendez-vous d'Anna" in Positif 214 (Jan 1979) 67-68.
- ²⁴ (Variety International Guide to Film 1988: 92)
- ²⁵ Delvaux with this his second film illustrates the problems entailed in making films in Belgium. Thus his first film, The Man who had his hair cut short was a great success winning several prizes all over Europe. However he could find no money in Belgium to make his second film and eventually Mag Godard, a French producer raised some money for him and interested the French branch of twentieth century Fox to invest the rest of the money. (Variety International Film Guide 1973, 97)
- ²⁶ "Du côté de chez Kafka" Ecran 75 December 1979. 45.
- ²⁷ These quotes are from the press book to the film, with no sources credited.
- ²⁸ Built as it was in 1958 to mark Brussels becoming the provisional seat of the European institutions, and from the top of which one is now able to make out a

model mini Europe)

²⁹ The European 5-8 Aug 93

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CHAPTER FOUR: JEWISH

1: Introducing 'Jewish' to Akerman's cinema

Introduction

This thesis has throughout concerned itself with the 'spaces' into which Akerman's various names inserted her, or to which they allowed her access. In my first chapter I showed how Akerman firmly rejected the names 'Woman' or 'Women's' director, since she perceived that they ghettoised her, restricting her artistic activities. In this light, her embracing of 'Independent' is understandable, since it grants her artistic, financial and institutional autonomy. Akerman's attitude to the 'Belgian' is more ambivalent, on the one hand she welcomes the access which it allows her to the space of French cinema; yet on the other she would, again, be aware of the possible ghettoising qualities which being 'Belgian' might contain. How does 'Jewish' figure in this mapping of the critical field?

In a survey of interviews given by Akerman to promote her films, her Jewishness is mentioned as early as 1977, when in relation to News from Home (1976) writers from Cahiers du cinéma observe: There's something which we often find in your films and of which you often speak: that's travelling and displacement...there is the notion of displacement but also of the margins". Akerman replies: "I think that can be explained by my Jewish origins..."(Dubroux et al. 36). From this moment on, Akerman consistently mentions her Jewish origins in interviews, even if they are not mentioned by the interviewer. Thus in 1979, immediately after making Les Rendez-vous d'Anna she asserts: "I feel more and more Jewish...and it's becoming more and more evident in my film-making"¹. Also, in 1979 Laura Mulvey writes:

Akerman ascribes her direct and non-prurient attitude to sexuality to her Jewish background. It is a background that has affected her work in other ways. In Les Rendez-vous d'Anna Anna's journey takes on a historical dimension echoing the Jewish emigration West...in other films you can see the tension between the strength of family ties and the heritage of an unsettled past. (Guest 19)

The most frequent mention of Akerman's Jewish ties though, is present between 1979 and 1981 during which time Akerman was trying to raise money for an adaptation of a novel by the Jewish nobel prize winner Issac Bashevis Singer. This project was to be her first 'Jewish' film, and from the documentation around the film, would seem to have been planned as a dramatic history of the Jewish diaspora of the early twentieth century. As a large-scale big-budget production, Le Manoir (from the title of Singer's novel) needed a huge amount of financial backing and unfortunately Akerman failed to convince people in Hollywood that she was capable of making such a film. It should be emphasised though that the failure of the 'Singer' project, was due not to the Jewish content of the project, but to Akerman's proposed 'Gone with the Wind' treatment of it.²

Of equal importance as a Jewish reference around this moment is a book mentioned by Akerman, again in 1979: Kafka : A Minor Literature written by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari.³ In this book Deleuze and Guattari reject the previous critical approaches to Kafka's work which are reduced to comparison and contrast, (therefore measuring the difference of Kafka's work in terms of his difference from the 'major' works of literature). Instead, the authors emphasise his work as part of a 'minor' literature, defined as follows:

a minor literature doesn't come from a minor language, it is rather than which a minority constructs within a major language. But the first characteristic within a minor literature in any case is that in its language is affected with a high coefficient of deterritorialisation.(16)

In the interview of which this quote forms a part, Akerman insists upon the relevance of Deleuze and Guattari's book to her own film-making. She links herself with Kafka through her similar obsession with 'sub-cultures', and through the way that each uses the dominant language. For Kafka, his sense of Jewishness was present with every word he wrote, since, writing in German while his mother tongue was Yiddish, he would always feel an outsider and foreigner. How this applies to Akerman will become more evident as this chapter develops.

In spite of the early critical thought on Akerman's Jewish identity this identity is never seriously taken up in longer articles on Akerman's cinema. Indeed, after the collapse of the 'Singer' project, Jewishness is dispelled from the critical vocabulary. Aside from Akerman's comments on Golden Eighties: "You could call it a cross between women's cinema, Jewish literature and musicals"⁴ little more is mentioned of her Jewishness. Furthermore, whilst Histoires d'Amérique (food family and philosophy) (1988, hereafter Histoires d'Amérique) and D'Est (1993) are Akerman's most obviously 'Jewish' films, they are also her least distributed and promoted,⁵ therefore, the Jewish discourse which might have been created by the two films was, instead, lost to critical eyes and ears. Before I explore how Akerman's Jewish identity manifests itself in textual terms, it is necessary to consider the position which the term 'Jewish' describes.

The Jew, Judaism and Jewishness

Each of Akerman's four identities: Woman, Independent, Belgian, Jewish, suggest affiliation: to the female, the minor, the European. However, in the case of 'Jewish', a common ground of belonging is not so easily defined. Akerman's Judaism is a biological identity passed on from her parents; yet, unlike 'Belgian', Jewish does not attach Akerman to a place, unlike 'Woman' it does not position her as an opposite and unlike 'Independent' no institutional placement is (obviously) implied.

As of 1981 41% of the world's Jews lived in the United States. Aside from Israel and the Soviet Union, no other country has more than one million Jews. Thus, what affects American Jews affects all Jews. Yet, even in America, Jews constitute only 2.7% of the population. This fact has led Marshall Sklare to conclude that as a group, the Jews represent the 'quintessential minority' (Patricia Erens Jew 6)

Taking on board Erens' observation of the Jews as the 'ultimate minority' it would seem natural to study Judaism alongside theories of minorities. Yet how does one then 'name' this minority? Are the Jews a race, a culture, a nation or, even, an ethnic group? The fact that the Jews have no common skin colour or birth place separates them from such groups as Africans or Chicanos. Ceri Peach writes of race as:

that group of physical characteristics, such as skin colour, hair texture, mouth and lip shape etc which can be genetically transmitted and which is thought to be characteristic of a group of people.(287)

Whilst stereotypical Jewish features do exist (ie: the high forehead, sunken eyes and hooked nose) the stereotype is not pervasive enough to qualify Jews fully within Peach's criteria. She goes on then to define culture as:

that group of institutions such as language, literature and social values which is maintained by a population. (287)

This definition would at first seem to fit the Jews better - certainly Judaism holds common beliefs about daily life and religious practice, yet there is no 'Jewish' spoken language. Also, this definition of culture excludes the religious side of Judaism.

Whilst they are, in some sense, a race (since one is typically Jewish by descent) but that part of Judaism which affects everyday life persuades us to read it as a culture, it is hard to find an all-defining term for the Jews is not forthcoming. In the light of my last chapter on Belgianicity, in which the national was found to be a relatively "imagined community" (Anderson, 15) we may ask how the Jews can be defined as a 'nation'? According to rabbi Ahad Ha-Am the Jews were a nation even before they were a religious community since: "Jewish identity is...not rooted in theological speculation; it is grounded in Jewish civilisation" (qtd. in Sherbok 173)

What Ahad Ha-Am suggests is that Judaism is forged through a sense of community, with religion as just one common link to celebrate that community. The Russian historian Simon Dubrow (1860-1941) anticipated the work of Benedict Anderson and, later, Homi Bhabha when he asserted that, as Sherbok puts it: "Jewry . . . evolved through various successive states: from its tribal origins it became a political entity and eventually adjusted to the loss of a country . . ." (Sherbok: 173)

For Dubrow then the Jewish people "could be a nation even without a homeland" (Sherbok, 173). One factor however challenges each term (which) we apply to the Jewish people: the history of division, exile and displacement with which their 'diasporic' wanderings have left them. In the light of the dispersion of the Jews

across the globe and the consequent differences and distances which such an experience brings about, many writers have been driven to describe Judaism in essentialist terms. Thus, Isaac Deutscher writes in The Non-Jewish Jew:

What then makes a Jew? Religion? I am an atheist. Jewish nationalism? I am an internationalist. In neither sense am I, therefore, a Jew. I am, however, a Jew by force of my unconditional solidarity with the persecuted and exterminated. I am a Jew because I feel the Jewish tragedy as my own tragedy; because I feel the pulse of Jewish history. (51)

For Deutscher, then, Judaism can be a sense of, and identification with, a past. Meanwhile, Harry Shapiro defines Judaism in more quotidian terms:

Judaism is more than a religious system regulating man's spiritual relations with God. It also prescribes rules of conduct between man and man, and between man and his natural environment. Every aspect of daily life is covered in the total system of Judaic belief. (58)

From these various interpretations Judaism emerges as a complex and disparate identity. On the one hand Sherbok argues that Judaism is something which has to be 'performed'. It is necessary to eat certain food, recite certain prayers at certain times and to undertake set calendrical celebrations. This 'cultural' Judaism seems to be a way of erasing the homeless past, through claiming the home as a Jewish space. On the other hand, Deutscher's remark suggests that Judaism has a more historical dimension, and is formed through a common history punctuated by pogroms, displacement and ghettoisation. In this second sense Judaism could be said to be formed into a 'national narrative' with the diaspora and the holocaust as its key texts.

Although it should be evident that there is not one way of speaking of the Jews, I actually want to propose that a common ground can be defined under the label of Jewishness. From the theories above, two locations for Jewishness can be extracted. The first location (as defined by Shapiro) is tied to notions of family, or ritual and repetition, and an identity performed across a temporal axis. The second location though - wandering, provoked by persecution - seems to deconstruct all that the first has set in place, since wandering suggests the loss of family and - through the non-belonging which placement in a strange country brings about - the loss of the familiarity which everyday rituals and repetition attempt to forge. These two locations reveal a paradox inherent in Jewishness: for whilst the first suggests togetherness, family and belonging, the second implies apartness, solitude and alienation.

The gender of Jewishness

Before turning to Akerman to apply some of these thoughts to her film-making, I wish to add one further perspective to this map of Jewishness, that is, the gender difference which is a part of both locations. Having suggested that the first location is a family space, the roles of men and women within that particular space should be noted. Between Jewish religion and Jewish social conventions, various gender contradictions arise. Religion is essentially a male dominated sphere: women are forbidden from entering certain parts of the synagogue⁶ and Jewish law exempts them from participating in public prayer and Torah reading. However, the sociological definition of Jewish status dictates that a person is Jewish if his/her mother is Jewish⁷ therefore Jewish identity is passed down through the mother.

The gender division of the Jewish family is reflected in the upbringing of children. Boys are brought up to fulfil their father's position. They are, therefore, expected to forge their Judaism through the study of Jewish religious texts and through finding a place in the synagogue. Girls though, as Paula E. Hyman notes:

[are] given little or no formal education...[and have] always derived their Jewish knowledge and identity from observation and celebration within the home. (224/233)

If the home space, our first location of Judaism, can be defined as a dominantly female space, then attention to cultural norms suggests our second 'wandering' location as male. In a different context⁸ Janet Wolff suggests: "In many societies, being feminine has been defined as sticking close to home. Masculinity, by contrast, has been the passport for travel." (229)

Despite the fact that the origin of the wandering location is tied up with whole communities, nations or families being forced to travel, once the Jewish woman's place becomes 'in the home', the wandering location is inevitably coloured as male.

The Films

"And I left, a small white room, level with the ground narrow like a corridor, where I remain motionless, attentive, and lying on my mattress..."

Akerman's first feature film *Je tu il elle* (1974) begins with her intoning the lines above, while the opening image of the film shows her playing the main character - seated at a table with her back to the camera. Two states are implied in this opening moment. First, there is the act of waiting, which is figured in the image of Akerman at her desk. Second, there is the sound-track's description of leaving, and thus of

beginning to wander. Both actions (or rather inaction in the case of waiting) are further explored in Je tu il elle. However, rather than pursuing each state in relation to this film I wish to connect this wandering/waiting diad to Jewishness.

While critical work locates the insertion of Jewishness with Les Rendez-vous d'Anna, I would suggest that it is present from the very beginning of Akerman's cinema, with the wandering/waiting diad of Je tu il elle, continuing with Jeanne Dielman, the paradigmatic waiting film, News from Home as Akerman's first step into errancy, and finally with Les Rendez-vous d'Anna, centred around a woman film-maker "condemned to wander".⁹

Jeanne Dielman: the paradigmatic 'waiting' film

Although Jeanne Dielman is Akerman's most critically discussed film - particularly within the emerging field of feminist film theory - no mention has been made of it in relation to Akerman's Jewish identity. Jeanne Dielman is a film in which the spectator and the main character seem to wait together; yet what has waiting to do with Jewishness? While wandering contains points of arrival and of departure, waiting emerges as a point 'in between' these two. As a point in between, waiting is a temporal state and can therefore be connected to my first Jewish location: the home space.

Jeanne Dielman provides an excellent example of the temporality of waiting. Jeanne has planned her whole routine, which the film follows, around efficiency and motion, around the filling of her time with her household tasks so that she does not have empty moments where the meaninglessness, the reality of her situation, will overtake her. Inevitably though, her routine itself is built around a waiting game: she

prepares food, then waits for it to cook, makes lunch, then waits for the right time to eat it, and her whole day is constructed around waiting for her son to come home from school. Once Jeanne's routine slips, caught by an over-long prostitution session with one of her daily clients, so the waiting increases, as she arrives too early at a post office, or, worst of all, finds herself with an empty moment, in which she has nothing to do.

Once Jeanne Dielman is connected with the second home location of Jewishness, the 'loving observation of the mother's rituals' which the film has been said to offer, acquires a new dimension. As mentioned in my section on gender and Jewishness, girls' Jewish identity was traditionally formed largely in the home where they learned...:"at their mother's skirts the skills that were essential for maintaining a kosher home and sustaining a family,"(Hyman, 224).

With Hyman's words in mind, Jeanne Dielman acquires the status of a Akerman's loving remembrance of her mother's daily rituals, rituals which sustained the Jewish home. After Jeanne Dielman though, the 'waiting' performed in the home space, is transformed into an exilic wandering. Jeanne Dielman, then, becomes the text from which each of Akerman's other films seeks to escape. Accordingly, Jeanne Dielman's image of domestic confinement is rejected, in films which explore the city-spaces of New York, Brussels, Paris and Eastern Europe. These films exchange the security and familiarity of Jeanne's daily routine, for the rootless sense of alienation and non-belonging of a stranger in a strange city. Akerman has said of Jeanne Dielman that it was: "a love film to [her] mother". In this sense, the shift from Jeanne Dielman is accomplished through the exchange of her mother's world for Akerman's own world. Thus the two Jewish 'locations' which I defined earlier can be identified in Akerman's cinema. The world of Jeanne Dielman depicts the

first location, in which a home space is created in order to nurture one's Jewish identity, and various rituals, ceremonies and enactments are performed.

The films which follow Jeanne Dielman represent the second location of Jewishness, in which this identity is forged through wandering, non-belonging and the alienated position. But although the home-space is lost, some sense of ritual and ceremony is retained in the form of Akerman's subsequent films. In the third part of this chapter I will discuss whether Jewishness can be conceived of as an aesthetic. For the moment though I wish to indicate that the strong, cyclical or repetitive structures of Akerman's films can (and later will) be linked to (her) Jewishness.

Having suggested the division between the 'Jeanne Dielman' home-space of Jewishness and the wandering which follows this film, I would argue that Histoires d'Amérique falls somewhere between these two halves. For, while the film consists of monologues of diasporic wanderings, it also depicts the ritualistic side of Jewishness, associated with the home space. Therefore, between the mother's world, depicted in Jeanne Dielman, and the daughters' travellings depicted thereafter, Histoires d'Amérique emerges as a celebration of Jewishness. This sense of 'liminality' is reflected in the film itself, and will be discussed in more detail later.

Histoires d'Amérique will be used in order to introduce the Jewishness in Akerman's cinema in more detail. From an analysis of the film I will extract a topography of Jewishness, based on and expanding my earlier quest for a 'name' for the Jews. Once this topography is in place I will move on to D'Est, which will be explored as a diasporic journey made by Akerman.

Histoires d'Amérique and D'Est display very different attitudes to their 'Jewish' subjects. Histoires d'Amérique consists of personal narratives performed by New York Jewish actors, which are punctuated by jokes and sketches. By contrast, D'Est take us on a silent journey - transported by still tableaux and tracking shots - across Eastern Europe. In the background of both films is News from Home made 15 years earlier. I will argue that in the last shot of News from Home has become the opening shot of Histoires d'Amérique. Meanwhile, D'Est re-plays the exploration of the city space which News from Home undertook. Where Histoires and D'Est measure their difference from News from Home though, is in the absence of the mother. Whilst the mothers' letters on News from Home's sound-track ensured her presence in Akerman's New York, in D'Est there is no dialogue on the sound-track (and no mother-presence); in Histoires d'Amérique the space of the mother is tentatively approached as, in one of two interjections made at the beginning of the film Akerman's own voice laments: "my own story is full of gaps, full of missing links, and I do not even have a child." This loss or rejection of the mother will be addressed in my analysis of both films.

2: Histoires d'Amérique (food, family and philosophy) : Constructing a Topography of Jewishness

Histoires d'Amérique can be divided into three parts: nine monologues, various jokes and sketches acted out in between these monologues, and a final gathering in a café where the action mixes short tales with more jokes. The monologues are generally concerned with the problems of assimilation into a new country, in this case America. By contrast, the sketches and jokes seem to be attempts to keep Jewishness alive, through the repetition of various folkloric elements. Finally, the

café scene which closes the film gathers together the cast of the film into an imaginary Jewish space where the differences among Jews are celebrated alongside the similarities. My analysis of the film will begin with its opening, since this establishes many of the film's themes, before moving on to the sketches, the monologues and then the café scene.

The opening: the past and presence of Jewishness

The opening mixes past and present moments with personal and group narratives, and serves as a fitting introduction to the film which follows. Depicting a journey towards the Manhattan skyline, the opening consists of three shots.

Shot One

The camera appears to have been placed on a ferry. The image is made up of three

bands of colour: grey/blue water, a dark strip of land on the horizon, and a sky which matches the sea in colour. The camera moves sideways, rocked by the water's motion, we pass the sun and the image briefly takes on a rosy colour, then returns to its blurred impressionist tones. From the beginning of the film a violin has been playing a soulful middle European tune. Once we have passed the sun and the credits appear, this tune is accompanied by whispering voices and the sound of the waves. The long sideways shot continues, taking in Ellis Island in front of which a ferry is passing. Once we reach the Manhattan skyline, the camera stops its sideways motion, and we begin to close down on the skyline.

Shot Two

We cut to a closer shot, which is more distinct, with the image itself taking on a dark blue colour. This and the many lights in the skyscrapers indicate that it is now night-

time. After about 10 seconds of this new shot Akerman begins a voice-over, at first recounting a Jewish parable, and secondly adding her own personal reflection.

Shot Three

It is during this reflection that we cut to an even closer shot, in which the outline of the skyline is no longer visible, and instead we are confronted with the blue darkness punctuated by millions of lights.

The division of the opening into these three "moments" is the first part of a greater division which will inform the structure and themes of the film. The first shot, with its faded tones and blurred image could be seen as an image from the past. Its movement - towards New York - describes the passage of immigrants coming to America, and the sound-track, with its whispering and violin marks this immigrant view as Jewish. The first view of the Manhattan skyline figures it as a ghostly white outline, shimmering in the distance, an image which could be taken to suggest metaphorically the dazed or displaced state of the migrant.

The second moment of the opening can be isolated as we cut to a close-up of the skyline. The image becomes markedly more distinct and more "present", it has lost its ghostly aspects and appears to be referring to a more recent moment in history. Akerman's voice-over also plays with the tense of the moment, since the parable she tells recreates a Jewish past, whilst her own reflection is rooted directly in the present.

the parable - a telling of Jewishness

A rabbi always passed a village to get to the forest, and there at the foot of a tree, and it was always the same one, he began to pray, and God heard him.

His son too always passed by the same village to get to the forest but he could not remember where the tree was, so he prayed at the foot of any old tree and god heard him. His grandson did not know where the tree was nor the forest, so he went to pray at the village, and God heard him. His great grandson did not know where the tree was nor the forest, nor even the village but he still knew the words of the prayer, so he prayed in his house and God heard him. His great grandson did not even know where the tree was, nor the forest, nor even the words of the prayer but he still knew the story, so he told it to his children and God heard him.

My own story is full of gaps, full of missing links, and I do not even have a child.

The parable offers us three main details about Jewishness:

1. The importance of enactment (here, the story-telling moment)
2. the lack of place for Jewishness
3. the centrality of the family

Akerman's words reflect upon this third aspect, for, in the light of the parable, if she does not 'even' have a child, how can she pass on her story? Once Akerman has set the film in motion with her parable and personal interjection she disappears. Akerman the person is never visually represented, a focus is set up for the spectator, this being: "what is the author (Akerman's) place in this history, this story?". Amongst the monologues and sketches then, weaves this line of enquiry. Yet there seems to be no obvious answer and instead, at the heart of the film will always be the circular narrative of Akerman. It is set in motion by this initial monologue, linked through the course of the film with the various stories, but ultimately incapable of settling anywhere, able only to exist as one of the gaps to which it

refers. While Akerman's question - how can she pass on her story if she has no children - is not answered in Histoires, I will wish to consider it as I analyse her films - thus part of the project of this chapter will be to determine exactly how Akerman enacts her own story.

The sketches - creating a topography of Jewishness

Unlike most of Akerman's early films, Histoires d'Amérique is a very wordy film. The monologues shot in a very static manner and consist merely of 'talking heads' facing the camera. Even the jokes and sketches in between usually work towards a punchline, rather than making their point through gesture. This being the case, my construction of a topography of Jewishness will be concentrated on the linguistic content of the jokes and sketches, while I will note other less prevalent details.

The content of the sketches vary, though the majority are built around two men meeting, conversing, a punchline, and then a parting. From these various meetings it is possible to extract a table of characteristics, constructed through repeated subjects and concerns. The first point to be made is that the sketches are largely male populated, with the lack of women suggesting a history, or a tradition which is largely man-made. This fact has implications not only for Akerman's personal narrative, but equally in the monologues where there is also a gender imbalance, although in the other direction. The lack of women in the folkloric space need not necessarily indicate an erasure of the female. Instead I would suggest that, in fact, the female has simply been excluded from the moment of enactment. If we return briefly to the parable which opened this section, it should be noted that it is a man who finds the first tree, and the story is then passed down to his son, grandson etc. However, it should be remembered that the Jewish name is actually passed down from the mother to her sons or daughters. In accordance with this seeming paradox,

while the sketches and jokes are told by men, the family described by Patricia Erens as: "the central organising factor in Jewish life, primary source of Jewish identity following religion." (Jew 9) is an especially important unit, and within this unit the wife is central. Not only do most of the men, when meeting, mention their families, but they seem to measure their own success against that of their family.

The telling of Jewishness is characterised as a male preserve, and the men who tell it succumb to several stereotypes. The Jewish man (always a husband and father) is presented as analytical, and is repeatedly asking questions or complaining. The climax of this constant questioning and analysis occurs in the café scene, as a man runs on shouting "I have an answer, does anyone have a question?" to which everyone puts up their hands. This habit of questioning has been characterised as particularly Jewish:

In Eastern European folk humour...it is proverbial that a Jew will always answer a question with another question. In part, this habit grows out of Talmudic debate, in which no question is ever considered simple. (Evelyn Torton Beck, 42)

Besides those sketches which re-tell old Jewish jokes, there are several which present the immigrant Jew confronted with the new country of America. In one sketch a man runs into view asking passers-by if they know where he can find a kosher deli. Getting no reply he raises his eyes to the heavens and recites a Hebrew phrase. Immediately Jewish men run to him, and the crowd leads him away. In another sketch a man stands in front of revolving doors. A man with a long beard walks in one side, then a clean shaven man walks out the other, the Jew watching cries: "hey, how did you manage to shave so quickly?".

The monologues - mixing the Jewish with the American

The content of the monologues ranges from a woman losing a husband and finding herself in the arms of his best friend, to a man giving up his religion, and then finding himself lost. Yet the common denominator of all of the monologues, is a changed situation: a man rejected his religion and became a free-thinker, now he feels empty and longs to return to his former beliefs; or a man brings his wife to New York from Poland, she becomes ill, he tries to kill them both, then suddenly she recovers and all is well. In all cases a change has occurred to bring about the present moment, which is in turn haunted by the memory of the past. The first difference to note then between the sketches and the monologues is this emphasis upon change. While (as I will discuss) the sketches create a static, unchanging world, the monologues provide a view of that world quite transformed by the influence of America. The safe family unit of the sketches is firmly fragmented by monologues in which a wife runs off with an artist, a girl is forced to marry in order to get into the country: “after the kiss they let me in” or a mother is asked to give up one of her children.

While the monologues are tales of coming to America, the jokes and sketches seem to tell of a different experience. However, both are connected by their sense of a Jewish past which is in conflict with the American present. The presence of a conflict is indicated from the very beginning, in the full title of the film, Histoires d'Amérique (food, family and philosophy). Firstly the film is titled in two different languages, suggesting the absence or difficulty of finding a common language with which to speak about Jewishness. Secondly we have the division between the “American stories”, and the “food, family and philosophy”. A hierarchy of power is indicated by the bracketing of the second set of subjects, and if we take the first half

to refer to the monologues, and the second to the sketches and jokes, then this hierarchy seems to cast the stories as more important than the sketches. Most importantly though in this title, is the description of the monologues as stories 'from America', (the second meaning of the French *Histoires d'Amérique*). For while the stories are now being told in America, the content actually has more to do with the moment before the coming to New York. In calling these 'stories from America', that past moment and life are erased.

Between the tales and their telling, between the sketches and the background of New York, something is lost, and like the "lost" narrative of Akerman which opened the film, it cannot be restored. Having discussed the linguistic content of the jokes, sketches and monologues, and once the setting and the performance are taken into account, the jarring between America and Jewishness can be fully appreciated.

The parable is axiomatic to the understanding of both the monologues and the opening moment. Once the importance of the 'enactment' has been established, so the opening is revealed as an 'enactment' of the journey to America and the monologues become important, not so much for the stories they have to tell, but rather for the act of story-telling which they represent. Such an interpretation is prompted not simply by the parable, but equally by the way in which the monologues are performed.

The costume and the delivery of the monologues drives us towards interpreting them as echoes of the opening shot of the film, which re-creates a past moment. Such an interpretation is prompted by the opening monologue. A woman faces the camera and is framed from the waist up. She wears a blouse which has a flowery frill at the neckline, her hair is long and brown and pulled away from her face then left to hang

down around her shoulders. Whilst neither the blouse nor her hairstyle are clearly marked as dated, the fact that the image is lit with a yellow light, which casts it with the sepia tone of old photographs, lends it the connotation of a past moment, or memory. The impulse to read these monologues as recreations, is no doubt prompted by the opening image of the film, which can also be seen as a recreation. In retrospect however, and when read in combination with the wider systems of the film, this jarring of time can be seen to different effect. Through the delivery of the monologues, a separation is instilled between the tale and its telling. Whilst two of the tellers are in their sixties, most of the speakers are actually too young to have experienced the events of which they speak, which would cast them as mere 'performers' of their stories. The varying deliveries strengthen such a view. At times the speakers seem melodramatic, with many facial movements; at others their delivery will be monotone, making little sense of the language and dispelling all emotion, and in one monologue in particular a girl's rushed delivery is accompanied by her stare, which shows that she is in fact reading the text she speaks.

Both the monologues and the sketches are set on the edge of New York city in a ghostly shadowy space. The setting of these monologues places them inside a New York which hangs between the past of the opening skyline and the present which we cut to in shot two. The style of the monologues is such that all of the speakers stand or sit facing the camera, speaking directly like 'talking heads'. New York, then, is present in the image as its background, existing as a series of lights, shadows and traffic noises, while in many of the sketches the figures appear out of the darkness.

Like the first sighting of the skyline, there is a sense in which this New York city is simply a ghost city. No people are present in the view of the city, apart from the Jewish characters who populate *Histoires*. Due to the setting at night, the images of

both the monologues and sketches are extremely shadowy and in the second monologue the image flickers as shadows of water pass over it. But perhaps the most striking example of this ghostly America, occurs in a sketch towards the beginning of the film. Two men emerge from opposite sides of the frame; one of them sighs deeply, the other asks “what's the matter?”; “what's the matter? my shoes are killing me”; “so why are you wearing them?” “why? well I'm going to tell you why”. He then launches into an explanation of his miserable life in which nothing is going right, his tale ends with:

each night when I come back from a fruitless day of work and I look at my bills and I look at my family I could kill myself, so I take off my shoes and mister this minute, when my shoes are off my feet is such a mehia!¹⁰ that it makes life worth living.

The action of the scene is set in front of a wall covered with graffiti, among which can be seen quite clearly the writing ‘Lords of Brooklyn’ also, during the sketch, there is a moment when the two men are suddenly covered by a swooping shadow of a line of figures, made, one presumes by a car's headlights sweeping across the space. Taking the ‘ghost’ writing, which has the effect of claiming territory, along with the casting of the shadow over the conversation, the background America can be said to be interfering with the Jewishness played out in front of it. The second use of setting, seen in this sequence, is notable for its interaction with the foreground. As the speakers tell their stories, so background America interferes with the telling. This effect is enforced both aurally and visually. While the monologues in themselves ask for us more to listen than to watch (since the speakers are static, and there is little use of gesture to complement the words), the America

which is their setting threatens to drown out the words, through traffic noises, which draw our attention away through movement, or simply distract.

One particularly graphic example of the interaction of the past of the monologues with the present of their setting involves the use of the weather (which will become increasingly present through the film, the ending of which includes a rainstorm). In one particular monologue a woman sits in front of us telling her story, while the increasing volume of the wind threatens to blow her words away. Through the setting of the monologues, then, America and Jewishness are shown to exist in a conflicting relationship.

Jewishness as loss

Whereas in the jokes and sketches a static Jewish world is depicted, in the monologues, the distance between the tales and their tellers (revealed as mere performers), as well as the interference of background America, reinforce the loss which the diasporic journey brings about. Given the fact that Jewishness consists of such a scattered identity, one would presume that one way of consolidating this identity would be through talking of the moment before that scattering occurs. However yet the monologues concentrate purely on the American present. This being the case, the monologues could thus be said to operate upon a boundary which is, in a sense, figured in the first image from the ferry. They will not go beyond that boundary, they will not talk about 'before', and instead, this 'before' is revisited in the monologues as a blank or missing link.

From the opening monologue onwards the absencing of the moment before coming to America, is in evidence. The monologues are filled with melodramatic phrases: "terror gripped my heart but I chased it away" or "he kissed me the way a man

kisses a woman". Yet amidst all of this melodrama is one line which tells of a very different past: "we had lived through pogroms, hunger, cold it was even said that today in Europe people were being taken into slavery, but so many things were being said". The juxtaposition of a story set in the present about infidelity, with the hint of this past suffering, undermines the importance of the present crisis, and casts it as quite trivial. This initial glimpse of another story, a sub-text to these American stories, is present in gestures the speakers make to their past. A man brings his fiancée to America from Poland; her parents say 'shiva'¹¹ for her, believing that such a move means she is as good as dead. Or a girl falls in love, yet is kept from marrying by the memory of her rape in her native village: "but how can I, a dishonourable/dishonoured? woman, marry him?".

The most graphic juxtaposition of present America with a Jewish past occurs in the final monologue, a simple story of a woman torn between two lovers, one whom she has met and another (the Jewish one) who she has only written letters to. The opening sets the tone of the delivery: "I'm split in two and my heart is broken into a thousand pieces, I cannot eat, I hardly sleep here is why: I love two men, have you ever heard of such a thing?"

The terms in which the woman speaks of the men indicates something of the difference :between present America and the memory of the past which still haunts her.

I feel I am a part of this world when I am with him but it frightens me that he's not a Jew, although I am a progressive person, but with the other man it is completely different, each word he writes me warms my heart and sounds

so familiar it is like a part of the old country that I left behind me over there and that I miss every day.

Finally, this monologue offers us the dichotomy between America and Jewishness, metaphorically represented by two men. America is the land of images, or presence, promise, decision and change; Jewishness represents the continuity with the past, opposing the seen with the written or heard, change with ritual and tradition, and presence with absence and memory.

The café scene - exploring the contours of Jewishness

Histoires d'Amérique's third part, the café scene, brings the first two parts together. With jokes, shorter monologues, songs and dancing all set in a strangely lit outdoor café, the third part of Histoires d'Amérique could be seen as an imaginary Jewish space. Since the Jews can be characterised as having no 'home', any communal space will necessarily be 'imagined'. However, such an interpretation is also invited by the fantastic quality of this café scene. The café consists of rows of tables, above each of which is a light-bulb hanging from an invisible thread. Above the light bulb is the dark blue night sky, below the tables is damp grass and behind them, bins, litter and desolate buildings; and, in the far distance, the Williamsburg bridge. The action hinges around a waiter, who goes from table to table, as well as the space in front of the tables in which various people perform.

The importance of food, its preparation and consumption, is highlighted in this third part. At the same time the philosophic questions, the pessimistic anecdotes and the paradoxical humour continue. In one sense the café scene reinforces much of what has gone before - there is only one woman sitting at the tables (compared to at least

seven men, and, a male waiter) yet it also allows for interaction between many of the actors/actresses whom we have already seen. Generational differences are explored, as a mother complains “our children are ashamed of us because we speak Yiddish”, and a father tries to persuade his daughter to go out with a ‘nice Jewish boy’. Equally, dialogue is constructed between people, as, for example, a group of people contemplate the night:

“what a beautiful night tonight”
 “what's so beautiful about this night”
 “I don't see anything beautiful”
 “see or not see as long as you hear”

This final section emphasises togetherness and an exchange of Jewishness, although any utopian undertones are destroyed by the diverse image of the Jews which it presents.

3: Histoires d'Amérique (food family and philosophy): Towards an Aesthetics of Jewishness

The second part of this chapter used Histoires in order to construct a topography of Jewishness. What was omitted from my analysis of the film was any sense of how its formal structure affected the way that it would be experienced as a film. In taking Histoires for its contents, for the picture it painted of Jewishness, I ignored the way that content is portrayed: the style of the painting. Having analysed the straight-to-camera delivery of the monologues in terms of enactment of the story-telling moment, I will now ask how such a technique works ‘cinematically’. This second section will concentrate more upon the form of Akerman's cinema, as if to contemplate a question posed by R B Kitaj:

After almost a lifetime as a painter, my painting thoughts begin to dwell on whether or not the Jews are a nation, or a state of mind, or what they are; among the answers lies an aesthetic...(53)

What is the connection, then, between Jewishness and cinema, and between Jewishness and film-making? Is it possible to discern a cinematic aesthetic which could be labelled 'Jewish'? Or, to put it another way, is it possible to attribute Akerman's own use of film language to her Jewishness? Before attempting an answer to these questions, I have two proposals for the intersection between Jewishness and the cinema.

1. The Jews and Hollywood

When considering the presence of Jewishness in film history, one is met with a startling paradox, this is that while any film history is dominated by the Hollywood machine, and thus by America, that machine was in fact largely constructed by Eastern European Jews. The peculiar relation of European Jews to the American cinema is documented in Neal Gabler's book An Empire of Their Own. Gabler traces the way that European Jews, emigrating to America at the turn of the century, began to work in the emerging Hollywood film system:

If the Jews were proscribed from entering the real corridors of gentility and status in America, the movies offered an ingenious option. Within the studios and on the screen the Jews would create a new country - an empire of their own - so to speak - one where they would not only be admitted, but would govern as well. (5)

Another paradox emerges in that the Hollywood cinema and the image of the American dream which it promotes, were in fact largely constructed by non-American immigrants. In their move to America these Jews brought with them their experience of fashion and retail, which made them aware of public taste and the game of competition. In addition, their immigrant status gave them a certain empathy with early movie-going audiences, largely composed of immigrants and working-class families. Having come to America to pursue the American dream, the Jewish immigrants were disillusioned; yet, Gabler points out:

They [the Jews of Hollywood] not only believed in the American dream, rather than see it fail, they tried desperately and successfully to manufacture the evidence for its survival, and for its existence. (432)

The early Hollywood Jews included Adolphe Zukor, builder of Paramount pictures, William Fox of Fox film corporation, and Louis B. Mayer head of Metro Goldwyn Mayer, testifying to the prominence of this situation. The Jews' involvement in Hollywood certainly seems to be a reflection of their place in America. Howard Jakobsen writes of the Jews and New York city: “[New York] the city that most approximates to the giant ghetto amongst the clouds which the Jews have always wanted to build.”¹² Yet America ‘the great melting pot’ has always welcomed, and indeed is a country of minorities.

The ideology which Hollywood perpetuated was one of universality. Themselves exiled from their homes, and outsiders, the Jews who made Hollywood created a fantasy world in which the marginal and exiled were excluded and in which anyone could participate as long as they were white Anglo-saxon and middle-class. It is exactly this form of cinema that Akerman's film-making flees. From its earliest days

her cinema has filled in the gaps papered over by Hollywood and has concerned itself with the exclusion zones and sub-culture. Where the Hollywood Jews used film as a way of belonging, Akerman has celebrated non-belonging, and resisted all forms of affiliation. It is in this sense that Akerman's films reveal themselves as a 'counter-cinema' to Hollywood.

2. Jewishness, cinema and travel

Our taverns and our metropolitan streets, our offices and furnished rooms, our railroad stations and our factories appeared to have us locked up hopelessly. Then came film and burst this prison-world asunder...in the midst of its far-flung ruins and debris, we calmly and adventurously go travelling. (Walter Benjamin Illuminations 229)

Diasporism...relies on a mind set which is often occupied with vagaries of history,

kin, homelands, the scattering of people...(Kitaj, 21)

The two quotes above are drawn from the work of two artists (a writer and a painter respectively) whose Jewishness was, both to them and to their critics, an important part of their work. Walter Benjamin's writings have been described as pursuing the path of messianic Judaism - seeking an instant redemption, celebrating the past in the present (indeed, insisting upon its presence in the present) and elaborating a mournful, elegiac, pessimistic tone which has it has been argued Jewish characteristics. More importantly though, Benjamin's writerly evolution resists the conventional measurements to development and instead, remains unclassifiable and unassimilated, a reflection of : "his quietly determined failure to belong - to a

speciality, to an institution, to an easily specifiable tradition of thought.”¹³ R B Kitaj's words above are taken from his book The First Diasporist Manifesto in which he reflects upon what he calls ‘diasporism’: “People are always saying the meanings in my pictures refuse to be fixed, to be settled, to be stable: that's diasporism...”(37) Again, the sense of ‘non-belonging’ and ‘non-affiliation’ dominates the definition of diasporism and Kitaj's thoughts upon his own place within that tradition.

In his article “Benjamin the Intellectual”; Zygmunt Bauman suggests that Benjamin's exiled position can be seen as the archetypal position of the intellectual. The intellectual needs to feel apart from the world, alienated. Howard Jakobsen agrees with Bauman's suggestion when he asserts: “all writers are Jewish, feeling out of it..”¹⁴ Finally, in The Non-Jewish Jew Issac Deutscher seems to gesture towards the exiled artist as some sort of Jewish archetype:

Spinoza, Heine, Marx, Rosa Luxembourg, Freud...They had in themselves something of the quintessence of Jewish life and of the Jewish intellect...as Jews they dwelt on the borderlines of various civilisations, religions and national cultures. (26-27)

The connection between diaspora and artistic/intellectual life seems a dominant one in the Jewish heritage and Akerman's position as a film-maker should be seen along this axis of influence. Like Walter Benjamin, Akerman has gone through various stages of displacement and exile; and like Kitaj's paintings, her films tend to avoid fixing, closure and stasis. However, the link which I wish to emphasise in this section is that between Jewishness, travel and the cinema.

The opening quote from Walter Benjamin describes the experience of the spectator once confronted with the ‘moving’ image of cinema. Benjamin's analogy between

cinema and travel can and should be extended, to the experience of the film-maker. A certain amount of travelling is demanded, due to concrete conditions of film-making: the need to raise money which - in Akerman's case - often leads to co-productions with various countries. Or, the round of promotional interviews, appearances at screenings and festivals becomes increasingly unavoidable if Akerman is to continue making films. These conditions are, in fact, represented in Les Rendez-vous d'Anna where we follow Anna, the Belgian, Jewish film-maker from screening to screening, town to town and country to country. The script to this film begins: "Anna is a film-maker. We are never quite sure why, maybe it's just so that she can wander," (Akerman, 1978). This opening description of Anna could be considered to reflect upon Akerman's own reason for film-making. Having suggested that after Jeanne Dielman Akerman takes up the position of the wanderer, I would add that, not only do her films wander - across countries, aesthetic styles, and critical categories - but that she, as a film-maker, also wanders. Thus, in some sense, Akerman's film-making becomes a way for her to express her own Jewish identity. With this in mind, Histoires and D'Est can be seen as journeys in more ways than one. In both films Akerman travelled to foreign countries (America, Eastern Europe) with an idea of, yet no concrete structure for, her films. With Histoires the film took shape around the cast of Jewish actors/actresses whom Akerman assembled. With D'Est though, the shape of the film came less easily and, as I will suggest in my analysis, D'Est can be seen as Akerman's own diasporic journey.

Tableaux and telling - the narration of Histoires d'Amérique

As I showed in my opening chapter, Akerman's film-making is typically spoken of under two levels: women's (or feminist) and minimalist. With its static camera and tableaux shots Histoires d'Amérique fits in the second of these two terms. However,

a difference clearly exists between Akerman's use of these techniques in this film and her use of them in a film such as News from Home. While News from Home has been called 'structuralist' and has been assigned a place alongside the work of such American avant-gardists as Michael Snow, Histoires seems to come from a very different direction.

Histoires is not, obviously, a film about form, yet it would be wrong to let the film's content, a celebration of Jewishness, overshadow its delivery. This point becomes especially significant in the light of the words of the film's opening parable: the tree and prayer were forgotten, but the story-telling moment was repeated and thus Jewishness was kept alive. The act of narration has in film studies most recently been conceived of as 'enunciation'. The telling or enunciation of a film is typically located with the author/film-maker. The film-maker 'tells' the film/tale through his/her use of the camera, editing and aspects of mise-en-scène, but those signs of telling then have to be erased in order for the cinematic illusion to be fully achieved. In my previous three chapters I have established Akerman's difference to this 'classical' enunciative system. In Akerman's cinema, the signs of enunciation remain in place, signalling, as I suggested in my first chapter, a different desire and, ultimately, a different position for the spectator in relation to both the film and the film-maker.

In Histoires the film is 'told' through the use of static tableau shots. For spectators used to quick cutting, point of view shots and close ups, the tableau creates a very different sense of both time and space. Time is continuous in the monologues and jokes/sketches. This leads us to our first interpretation of the tableau: with continuous time, the film is akin to a theatrical performance, and thus the tableaux should be considered as a theatrical device. Peter Brooks writes:

there tends throughout melodrama and most especially at the end of scenes and acts, to be a resolution of meaning in tableau, where the characters' attitudes and gestures, compositionally arranged and frozen for a moment, give, like an illustrative painting, a visual summary of the emotional situation (48).

Although the tableaux used in Histoires are not frozen, there is a sense in which they are there to draw attention. Since the camera is static, we are encouraged to pay attention to the word and the performance before us or, to the 'telling' of the tale. This technique seems an attempt to emphasise the Jewishness of the actors/actresses performances. Evelyn Torton Beck writes that:

Jewish culture...like the Yiddish variety act, relies heavily on wordplay, intonation and gesture to give significance to or alter the meaning of the spoken word. (43)

The concentration of attention which the static tableau shot enforces should thus be read as an attempt to make the spectator recognise the Jewishness present. Remaining with the theatrical resonances of the tableau, perhaps a better known use of the technique is in Brechtian epic theatre practice. Barthes writes:

In epic theatre (which proceeds by successive tableaux) all the burden of meaning and pleasure bears on each scene, not on the whole...there is no final meaning, nothing but a series of segmentations. (Barthes Image Music72)

Barthes' words describe more accurately Akerman's use of the tableau shot. In segmenting her films with tableaux, she draws attention to each small part, whilst minimalising the whole. The structure of Histoires d'Amérique can be seen as depicting the many contours of Jewishness, instead of striving to create one whole Jewish essence. The tableau shot demands concentration on what it frames: a space, a person, a monologue; at the same time it severs connections between shots, so that each small moment becomes as important as the hour, day or year which contains it.

Akerman's tableaux may not be 'frozen' in Peter Brooks' sense, they are nevertheless filmed with a static camera which counters the mobile frame of the classical cinema. Such a technique obviously has an effect upon our experience of space. By comparison with the mobile frame, the tableau suggests a flattening of the image and a restriction of space. Considered alongside Walter Benjamin's thoughts on space in the cinema, the tableau refuses, as it were, the travel, which Benjamin applauded, and instead returns us to the "taverns" which had us "locked up". A more satisfying explanation is available if we consider Benjamin's own obsession with space. Benjamin's work is riddled with spatial metaphors. As well as his work on various cities: Naples, Moscow, Marseilles and Paris, in his article "One way Street" he takes his reader on a walk through spaces: "the filling station", "the breakfast room" and "the construction site". Susan Sontag writes that for Benjamin: "Reminiscences of self are reminiscences of a place and how he positions himself in it, navigates around it"(Sontag Introduction to Benjamin, 1972: 10) whilst Benjamin himself writes: "I have long, indeed for years, played with the idea of setting out the picture of life - bios - graphically on a map."(Benjamin, 1972: 295)

Benjamin's artistic obsession with boundaries and borders could be a reaction to his actual sense of homelessness and displacement; the same could be said for

Akerman. She is displaced geographically, and her cinema effectively maps out her wandering, but her use of static, tableau framings seems an attempt to impose a border, or boundary around that sense of homelessness, in the most literal way. The static, square framings freeze both time and space and are a sign of control on Akerman's part. In Histoires the effect is not only to emphasise her position as narrator, but also to emphasise the moment of enactment which each tableau represents.

Part Three: D'Est - A Traveller's Tale

D'Est the far east

The path of Akerman's cinema from Je tu il elle to Nuit et jour, leads to France, or more precisely Paris. From the mid-1980s onwards Akerman has lived, worked and made her films in Paris. Also, as I noted in my second chapter, her name has been increasingly associated with French film-makers and a French 'new new wave'. Besides this geographic journey, Akerman's cinema has turned away from the 'anti' cinema of her 1970s work to embrace narrative and its pleasures in a move that incorporates a studied accessibility.

Although from Nuit et jour Akerman's film-making seemed firmly set on a path towards (a form of) European auteur cinema, D'Est, made only two years later, provided a change. Not only is D'Est not set in France, it actually broadens the territory of Akerman's cinema beyond Western Europe and America to Eastern Europe (the former East Germany, Poland, Russia). Meanwhile, aesthetically, it seems to stage a return to her 70s, and in particular News from Home. Like the 1976 film, D'Est is an exploration of a city space, although in this case that space is filled as much with countryside as with city life. In place of News from Home's chaotic

city streets, D'Est shows us wide open spaces, endless roads and cafés, as well as more populated central city areas.

The main difference between the two films, is encapsulated by the actual geographical differences. In News from Home the camera was exploring a city with an over-blown cinematic image, and Akerman's intention was thus to avoid this image, to present instead the usually over-looked sub-culture of New York city. The aim of the film, then, was to replace the familiar with the strange, in order to attempt a new representation of New York City. D'Est was made to be shown on the French/German television channel Arte, thus it was seen by largely western audiences. It was also made by a Western film-maker who was visiting many of the locations for the first time. With these two factors in mind, D'Est emerges as the look of a stranger at a 'strange' country.

East meets west

The familiar/strange dichotomy is present in News from Home and can be used to describe the film's structure. Whilst we begin with static tableau shots of streets, the camera acquires motion, at first panning. Then it is placed on a tube, in a car, on a train then on the Staten Island Ferry. This acquisition of motion can be compared to a stranger (Akerman herself) finding their way around a city, acquiring confidence and ultimately a sense of belonging. When described in this way, News from Home almost becomes a narrative film, with the final ferry shot in which the skyline is framed - and therefore the city is 'known' - as the climax.

In contrast to News from Home, D'Est has no dominant pattern, and therefore no narrative line. The camera does not become familiar with the city - or in this case with the landscapes of the East - and the film can be said to develop through specific

sections, usually marked by similar spaces. D'Est begins with an indistinct image made up of green and red horizontal lines across the screen. This image could have come straight from News from home, especially as it is accompanied by the sound of passing cars. From this image we cut to a shot from inside a café looking out through a window at a road, and this shot begins a sequence which seems to be set near a village, then by the sea. All of the opening shots are tableau-like, and static. Yet the form and symmetry of New York city are lost here, and although we still look down narrow spaces (for example a bridge) and across horizontal planes, the landscape itself is more irregular and refuses the order which was part of News from Home.

After several empty images of landscape we are suddenly presented with a medium close up of a young man sitting on a bench; he stares straight at the camera then looks away, as if uncomfortable. This is the first of many images in which the border between fiction and reality is transgressed. We do not know for sure whether the young man has simply been 'captured' or whether Akerman has set this image up. Whatever the answer to this question, the confrontation of the camera's drifting gaze with that of the young man is has a startling effect. Whilst D'Est opened as if it was a documentary, this shot challenges the supposed unmediated status of that term and is the first indication that the logic of the film may lie elsewhere. This opening also establishes the peculiar sound-track of the film. Times sound seems to be synchronous, and therefore connects with the images; at other times images are played with no sound. Music is also important in the film, as I will discuss later, and extra-diegetic sounds will often dominate an image. This latter use of sound is evident in one of the first images. The camera is set up so that it is looking along a bridge. We hear the sound of an off-screen train, and thus the image is revealed as showing a bridge over a station.

Shortly after the close-up shot of the young man we get the first tracking shot - which follows an old woman as she makes her way along a pavement. This image is then cut off by long shots of a beach. Again, sound dominates: the beach is filmed from a distance, while operatic music plays in the foreground. The fact that this music continues over the next shot - of an unrelated location - persuades one that the music is from a non-diegetic source. After the beach sequence we have the second 'posed' image. A woman sits on a green settee wearing a bright orange dress. This image seems even more posed than the first one. Given that the woman is sitting indoors, it seems unlikely that Akerman has simply 'captured' her. Also, the woman sits awkwardly on the settee, and stares at the camera as if inviting its gaze, in contrast to the young man's discomfort.

The mythic east

From the second 'posed shot' *D'Est* shows people at an outdoor theatre enjoying a concert, a line of people walking past a building (dressed and walking as if they are on their way to church) and then cuts to an empty shot of a tree at the fork in a road. Just as the posed shots disrupt the otherwise harmonious observation of the camera's gaze, this 'tree' shot is the first of many which acquire a different status. Whereas many of the images seem relatively ordinary: 'a road', 'a café', 'a beach'; this image of the tree by the road-side seems to have mythic connotations, as if it could be the tree of which Akerman spoke in the parable in *Histoires d'Amérique*. Given that Akerman's parents were originally from Poland, it would seem logical that in journeying to the East, she hoped to find some evidence of her parents' Jewish past. Occasionally, as with this tree, she seems to find it.

From the tree image we cut to an extended sequence of 'posed shots' as a woman sits at a table, a man eats and another woman sits, still and expressionless. We then move into a city sequence, of dark streets filled with people dancing. A daytime shot suggests a new location, and we are once again on a deserted road. Images of country landscapes are interrupted by a sequence in which people work and walk. The first shot of people walking is silent, as they appear over the brow of a hill on a sunny day. Suddenly though the shot cuts to the same people walking side on to the camera, the sun has turned to snow and the silence is filled with the sound of their feet crunching on the ground.

The walking sequence acquires something of the mythic quality present in the earlier tree shot. Bundled up in layers of clothes, and carrying heavy bags these figures could easily be wandering Jews traversing countries. The sequence is interrupted by the third of the 'posed shots'. The camera is placed so that it looks down a corridor, a woman carries a casserole dish through the corridor. We cut to an old woman sitting to the side of a television. Although it is switched on she is not watching it. The first of these two shots seems strangely familiar, recalling Jeanne Dielman, her flat and her daily actions. This being the case, the posed images seem to be becoming increasingly fictionalised, forming a counter-discourse to the otherwise documentary images of the film.

The Tracking/Travelling shot

From the countryside the camera moves to the city again, though to a different city. The difference of the city is signalled by the people - who are in long lines, as if queuing - and the camera - which begins a tracking shot from a moving vehicle. Since the shot is a medium close up, the camera is seen by the people. They react in different ways, some shout, some smile and others choose to ignore it. This shot cuts

to inside a station, then outside again to more people waiting in line, with the tracking motion as continuous.

Although other sequences are inter-cut with this tracking shot (more poses, a scene in a dance-hall, children playing in the snow) most of the final part of D'Est consists of another long tracking shot along a line of people waiting : either outside, for a bus, or inside a station, for a train. Whilst the tableau shot is static, and therefore freezes the space within its frame, the tracking shot is emphatically mobile. Like the mobile frame, the tracking shot allows a broader definition of space. However, given the largely lateral movement of the tracking shots in D'Est, that space is still two rather than three-dimensional. Equally, while new space is constantly being framed, at the same time that same space is being lost. The tracking shot allows for travel, but ultimately it emphasises loss. Thus, in a sense, the tableau shot allows Akerman to control space, and the tracking shot surrenders that control, to permit instead a continual wandering motion.

Two more east/west divisions are pin-pointed by these tracking shots. The first is a difference in pace: life in D'Est seems far slower than life in News from Home. Not only do the cars travel slower, the people are shown to be constantly waiting, in queues or at stations. This slow pace is then regulated by the camera's movement as it leisurely tracks along the streets, roads and station platform. Perhaps the biggest difference between East and West though, is in the people. In News from Home, once they realise that the camera is pointing at them, people either ignore it, move out of its view or play up to it. By contrast, in D'Est, when people see the camera they do nothing. This lack of action becomes particularly troubling given that, gradually, the camera get closer and closer to the lines of people until it is framing them in head and shoulder shots. Rather than simply observing the people,

Akerman's camera actually intrudes into their space. With this in mind it seems necessary to consider the voyeurism of Akerman's camera.

Voyeur or 'Voyageur' ? - the Camera's Look

After a screening of D'Est at the Norwich Women's Film Weekend (27-30 May 1994) there was a long discussion over the possible voyeurism of the fixed look which D'Est directs at its Eastern subjects. Since the audience was composed of a large proportion of film-makers, much of the discussion centred around the practicalities of filming in the East, and the question was raised as to how Akerman had got permission to film in Russia, East Germany and Poland. The suggestion was made, in relation to the long tracking sequences that, in fact, Akerman may have had officials of one sort or another with her - police or soldiers. Whether Akerman did or did not cannot be confirmed. However, once one considers such a possibility, the camera's 'stare' acquires sinister connotations. If Akerman was being accompanied by officials, then that would explain the relative submissiveness of the people to the power of the gaze. Yet if she was not, how do we explain the power of the gaze over these people, with its probing, interfering quality?

The question of voyeurism: "the libidinal aspect of pleasurable looking"(Stam et al, 1992:160) has been raised before in relation to Akerman's cinema, although largely in connection to her female authorship. Commenting on Jeanne Dielman Akerman has said: "It's not voyeuristic because it wasn't shot through a keyhole, instead you always knew where I was."¹⁵ Akerman's words imply that in order for a look to be voyeuristic the looker must be hidden, so that the person looked at is not aware of their look. Certainly this is the conventional definition of voyeurism. How, then, do we define the look in D'Est? Its subjects cannot, or will not avoid the look, and the

look does not conceal that it is looking, yet, as noted in the Norwich discussion, the exchange of looks makes the audience uncomfortable.

The Jewish East

In order to try to explain this question I will evoke the travelling and story-telling metaphors which have been so important to our account of Jewishness. More importantly though, it is necessary to restore a figure who has for a long time been absent, and that is Akerman herself who, after her parable and personal reflection, withdrew from sight. D'Est is Akerman's own journey, we see the images she has chosen for us, our itinerary (if we have one) has been mapped out by her.

For Akerman D'Est represents a journey into her parents' past, a past they have tried to forget, and about which they have refused to talk. While Eastern Europe is not totally Jewish, with Akerman as our guide, this is the path that we are persuaded to take. Just as the tree image and the people walking seemed to fulfil a mythic function as Jewish images, the continuous tracking shots can be thought of in a similar way. Once we adopt a 'Jewish mind-set' people and places are transformed. The stations in which people wait emerge as the threshold spaces for emigrants waiting to settle in a new country, and fall between such categories as 'home' and 'away', the familiar and the strange. Along the same logic, the long tracking shots are created as shots of concentration camps. The people staring at the camera become prisoners (thus the hopelessly submissive expressions), and the horizontal travellings are familiar from footage from such camps, shot by the Germans.

One final space of imagining remains to be analysed, and that is the various posed shots which punctuate the film. In order to interpret these images it is necessary to return to the comparison between D'Est and News from Home. Whereas the latter

has the mother's letters on the sound-track, the former has no dialogue, only music, traffic, birds or people mumbling. The mother, it could be argued is absent from D'Est. Such an observation seems obvious, given my earlier suggestion that Akerman had to reject her mother's world in order to wander. Yet the paradox of D'Est is that it is, metaphorically, through her mother's world that Akerman is travelling in the film. The paradox can be explained if we recall Akerman's words in Histoires: "My own life is full of blanks, full of missing links, and I do not even have a child." Not only does Akerman have no one to tell her story to (no child), she has no story to tell, since her parents will not speak of their (concentration camp) past. D'Est, then, represents Akerman's effort to travel to the place her parents cannot return to, and to take them with her through her imagined images.

With this in mind, it seems appropriate that, when she films peasants walking as if they were wandering Jews, that people waiting become Jewish emigrés, and that, in the faces of rows of people she should see the echoes of concentration camp victims. Finally then, the posed shots of the women sitting, cooking, playing with children or listening to music become Akerman's attempt to re-place her mother in the Jewish imaginary she has created for her.

NOTES

- 1 From "Du côté de chez Kafka" Ecran 75 Dec 1979. 45.
- 2 In an interview given in Time Out May 25-31 1979 Akerman says: "for ten years dreamed about making a film about the Diaspora and when I read Singer's book I thought that would be an approach. The funniest thing is that I will be making a love story. The Jewish side will be underplayed, it will be more like Madame Bovary than anything else. So finally I'm going to do - not exactly "Julia" - but a more narrative movie. It will not be minimal. It will look like some romantic film with beautiful women. Like "Gone with the Wind" that's what I want to do."
- 3 From Du côté de chez Kafka 50.
- 4 From "Brussels Sprite" Stills 15 Dec 1984 - Jan 1985. 11.
- 5 D'Est premiered at the 1993 Locarno festival and was shown on the Franco-German channel Arte but did not get a theatrical release);
- 6 Jewish law discriminates against women by exempting them from the obligation to observe positive time-bound commandments. Equally, it is written in Jewish law that women are not allowed to enter the synagogue when they are menstruating.
- 7 Whilst this is generally the case, Sherbok also notes that :“in 1983 the central conference of American Rabbi's decreed that a child of either a Jewish mother or a Jewish father should be regarded as Jewish.”(Sherbok, 186)
- 8 This quote is actually from an article in which Wolff analyses contemporary theory's use of travel metaphors, suggesting that it exhibits the eternal critical tendency to exclude women critics.
- 9 From a review of the film by Jill Forbes: "It is no accident that the drama of the diaspora and the persecution of the Jews is as much a sub-text as feminism, or

that the woman film-maker is condemned to wander.” Monthly film Bulletin
1979

¹⁰ Mehia! - a Jewish expression meaning, bliss, or joy.

¹¹ Shiva - Hebrew. A mournful prayer said in order to honour the dead.

¹² Taken from the programme “Travels with Howard Jakobsen” in which Jakobsen travels to various cities in search of Jewishness. the quote in question is from an episode on New York city.

¹³ From the Editorial to New Formations no 20 Summer 1993 pV (a special issue on Walter Benjamin)

¹⁴ Jakobsen Ibid

¹⁵ Taken from Camera Obscura...

CONCLUSION

It has been my aim in this thesis to 'expand' upon and 'extend' the critical boundaries within which Akerman's films have been discussed and my main conclusion is that, once such a process takes place so all (pre-)conceptions of Akerman and her cinema have to be radically reassessed. My expansion of Akerman's 'name' has been effected by considering formerly absented identities: 'Belgian' 'Jewish' and by shifting attention from her 70s films to her work in the 80s and 90s. Each of my chapters have pushed the boundaries further, though in very different directions.

In my first chapter I attempted to forge a renewed sense of connection between Akerman's cinema and feminist film theory, both of which had little contact since the 70s. Through a consideration of Akerman's 80s and 90s work (Golden Eighties 1986 and Nuit et jour 1991) key areas in feminist film theory were addressed. As a result of these analyses, the association of Akerman's name with a 70s 'anti' cinema tradition was challenged. Instead, the continuity and development of Akerman's interrogation of gendered and sexualised representations was established.

My second chapter set out to challenge the 70s counter-cinema associations of Akerman's name, and to, in turn, question the apparent development of her cinema towards a form of European auteur cinema. Analysis of Akerman's 'non-circuit' work: short experimental films, videos and television work revealed a different, though sustaining narrative for Akerman's oeuvre. Rather than the linear progression which Akerman's feature films map out, Akerman's non-circuit work suggests that she has never really abandoned her 'experimental' roots. This work also reveals that while independent cinemas have moved on and that the space within which

Akerman worked in the 70s no longer exists, Akerman has managed to carve out another space for herself, which allows a certain 'non-dependence'. However, this space is not gained without compromise, and my final conclusion in this chapter was that in order to retain a certain autonomy, Akerman has, paradoxically, had to embrace a 'Parisian' identity.

My Belgian and Jewish chapters were concerned less with 'challenging' and more with 'constructing' as each was intent upon addressing a gap in the critical field of Akerman's cinema. In my Belgian chapter this gap was found to be more of an erasure. Akerman's Belgian nationality had been generally ignored, in favour of the more critically visible French axis of influence. The complexities of attempting to link Akerman with a Belgian national cinema were acknowledged, yet a flow of meaning was nevertheless detectable between the two.

In her 70s work it was suggested that Akerman explored her affiliation with Belgium. This was primarily conducted from a distance, thus the city of New York in News from Home. It was Toute une nuit, however, which offered the most fruitful example of Akerman taking up her Belgian affiliations. In this film I argued, Akerman offers an 'indexical' engagement with fragments of Belgian cinema, namely the minor and the magical. This film also offers a vision of nationhood in Brussels, as such it is Akerman's strongest 'home-movie'. Yet Toute une nuit is equally an anticipation of the move Akerman would make towards Paris, since it offers a memory of a past position which is then used to construct Akerman's position as displaced in Paris.

In my final chapter the metaphors of travelling, transition and dislocation with which I had described Akerman's development were fully addressed. If in

geographic terms Akerman moved towards Paris, then this was accompanied by an increasing attention in her films to her Jewish affiliations. However, while each of my previous chapters explored places of 'belonging' for Akerman, this chapter analysed the alienated wanderings engendered by News from Home to culminate (at least to date) in D'Est. I argued that Histoires d'Amérique (1988) and D'Est provide two stages in Akerman's exploration of her Jewishness. In the first film Akerman offers a celebration within which she weaves her own insecurities about her Jewish identity. Meanwhile, in the second film her tone is more sober, as she undertakes her own 'diasporic' journey through Eastern Europe.

Each of my chapters could be said to effect a shift in Akerman's 'critical' name, and as a result Akerman is 'left' in a very different space to where she was located at the beginning of this thesis. Thus at the end of this thesis Akerman has been positioned in the 90s rather than the 70s, playing with classical narrative and pleasure, rather than 'countering' both. Though I have attempted to move Akerman's name on, it is in the Belgian and Jewish spaces that I would suggest more work is needed. Once connections are renewed between her two 'origins' so her cinema opens up to an inter-action with a whole history of texts of the minor, (Belgian cinema) as well as to the metaphoric (and most recently) literal errant displacements possible through her Jewishness. The acknowledgement of this text of displacement transforms any reading of Akerman's cinema and it is just such a transformation that this thesis has aimed to effect.

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FILMOGRAPHY AND SYNOPSIS

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FILMOGRAPHY AND SYNOPSES

Filmographies of Akerman's work rarely agree upon how many films she has made, with confusions arising particularly around her 70s 'non-circuit' films. The most contentious films are La Chambre, with some reviews listing two versions (La Chambre I and La Chambre II); Le 15/8 which goes under various titles, and Hanging out also known as Hanging out Yonkers. Since it is the aim of this thesis to 'extend' knowledge around Akerman's oeuvre I wanted to include details upon as many films as possible. My decision as to which films to include in this filmography has been dictated by whether I could prove that the films did exist. Thus I have left out La Chambre II, since I have found no information on it, yet included Hanging out thanks to the discovery of a contract written for the film (in which Akerman was appealing for money in order to finish it).

In all cases I have concentrated upon giving more detail for those films which are less widely available, and merely summarising those which are likely to have been seen. '*' indicates that I have not been able to see the film.

Saute ma ville/ Blow up my Town 13' 1968 (b&w)

Cast: Chantal Akerman.

The film begins outside an apartment building, on the sound-track someone is singing 'tra la la'. Akerman arrives, walks inside the lobby and picks up some letters. She runs upstairs and the voice on the sound-track begins to pant, as if out of breath. Akerman enters an apartment, where the rest of the action will take place, and sits at a table in a kitchen. She looks at the door, turns on the gas, opens a can and pours some spaghetti into a saucepan. She then puts black masking tape all around the frame of the door. She takes the saucepan off the cooker and eats the

spaghetti. The soundtrack changes from the 'tra la la' to a whining sound, at which Akerman smiles. Moving very fast, Akerman fills up a kettle, finishes taping up the door, picks up a cat and throws it out of the window. From a high angle we see her fill a bucket with water and throw in some washing powder. She then puts on a coat and head scarf and begins to mop the floor. There is no sound as she throws the whole bucket of water over the floor, cleans the walls then walks towards the camera and the screen goes black. The camera pans around the room and stops on Akerman cleaning some shoes. She brushes the polish from her shoes onto her arms and legs, then there is a cut. The floor is now clear of water and Akerman is wiping it dry with a cloth. From a high angle Akerman sits with a pencil, there is humming on the sound-track. Akerman takes a newspaper (Le Soir), the humming becomes louder and distorted. The camera cuts to a mirror in which we see Akerman taping up the window. She then jumps down, walks along the kitchen, takes the cleaning fluid and smears it all over her face. The sound-track changes to laughing. Akerman sees herself in the mirror, she lights a match, on the sound-track a voice says 'bang, bang'. She turns on the gas, lies on top of the cooker then we cut to black. The credits to the film are read out.

***L'Enfant aimé/ Je joue a être une femme marié/ The Loved Child/Playing at being Married 35 min. 1971**

Cast: Claire Wauthion

The portrait of a shop girl, the type who we would be unlikely to see on the cover of women's magazines (such as Elle or Marie Claire) A married woman confides her life to her friend (Chantal) and her daughter (Daphna). She looks at herself in the mirror, tells about herself, yet never really comes close to questioning herself.

(This film was never released. A copy exists in the Cinémathèque Royale in Brussels, but this can only be watched without the sound.)

La Chambre/The Room 10' 1972

Cast: Chantal Akerman

A camera circles a room. In this room there is a window, a table, an armchair and a bed, and in the bed a girl (Chantal) who is eating an apple. The camera approaches her, then retreats in one long sequence which lasts 10 minutes. Besides this camera movement we can hear a voice, a whistle, a murmur, words which tell a story of a journey in New York.

Hanging Out Yonkers 1973 (Uncompleted)

Filmed some 20 km from New York city this unedited footage treats the subject of adolescence, by way of a series of stories from maladjusted children. The film is not simply an account of the people, but also a description of the place they call home.

Le 15/8 (Co-directed with Samy Szlingerbaum) 1973 (In English) Approx. 45 min.

Cast: Chris Mullkoski

Over the opening credits we hear a voice which seems to be talking on the telephone. It begins "I'm sitting in the kitchen smoking...". A woman in a kitchen picks up some milk and sits back at a table. She stays sitting and the telephone conversation continues. We cut to a low angle looking upstairs. The woman stands at the top holding some flowers and posing. We cut to a bedroom, the woman is next to some curtains which she looks through. We cut to outside a balcony and see the woman looking through the curtains. We return to the kitchen where the woman is eating some bread. The voice on the sound-track seems to be that of a foreigner (since there is an accent) who has only recently come to this country: "I got very depressed when I came to France for the first few days." We keep cutting from the kitchen to the stairs, with the woman posing for the camera. The film closes with the woman looking out of the front doorway.

Hotel Monterey 1973 60min

The film opens with a shot of a yellow wall on which there is a mirror, people pass in front of the mirror. The camera cuts around this space so that gradually we see more and more of it (although there is no establishing shot). We cut to a chequered floor, there is a couch, on which some old ladies sit, one of whom rises and looks at the camera. The third shot is very dark and shadowy, it becomes evident that we are in a lift as the door opens and we see outside. People enter and exit. Often when the door opens and they look in (thus seeing the camera) they do not enter, equally those who do enter frequently squeeze against the camera, obscuring the view.

We cut to a bedroom (the first strong clue that this is a hotel), then to a bathroom. The film then continues to cut between the various floors of the hotel, perusing the corridors, and entering the lift each time that a higher floor is explored. The emphasis throughout this film seems to be upon space, how it is altered through colour, light and shadow or camera angle. The film ends at the top of the hotel on the roof, with a pan up then down from the sky above, to the river and buildings below.

**Jeanne Dielman 23, quai du Commerce 1080 Bruxelles 1975 (In French)
198min**

Cast: Delphine Seyrig, Henri Storck, Jan Decorte, Yves Bical, Jacques Doniol-Valcroze

Three days in the life of Jeanne Dielman, a widow with one son, who lives in Brussels. Every afternoon Jeanne sleeps with a man. We begin half way into the first day as one of Jeanne's 'clients' arrives. Once he has left Jeanne resumes her routine of making dinner for her son Stefan. Stefan returns from school, they eat, he reads for her, she reads a letter from her sister in Canada, she knits, they walk around the

block, then both go to bed. The second day shows us the routine we had missed on the first day. Jeanne gets up, Stefan goes to school, Jeanne shops, prepares dinner and receives her client. However after this client's visit her routine begins to break down, with the potatoes over-boiling and Jeanne appearing slightly flustered. This break-down escalates on the third day. Jeanne wakes too early, and her routine is generally disrupted. When the client visits we cut for the first time to the bedroom. We see the sexual act, Jeanne dresses then picks up some scissors from her dressing table and stabs the client. The film closes with a long still shot of Jeanne sitting at the dining room table staring ahead of her. Throughout, the film uses long and medium shots with no close ups and no camera movement.

News From Home 1976 (Sound-track recorded in two versions, English and French) 90min

The film consists of long static, tableaux shots which frame spaces in New York city. Occasionally over these shots Akerman reads letters written to her by her mother. The only other sound is that of traffic, or street scenes which often drown out the mother's words. Locations include side streets, larger roads, the underground and shopping areas. Throughout, as with Hotel Monterey, the focus seems to be upon the spaces themselves and the way that the camera can frame them, rather than upon the people who may or may not fill them. While there is little sense of a linear narrative, there is some development. From the early static shots the camera moves to a panning shot (360 degrees), then to being placed in cars, on a train and finally on the Manhattan ferry. The closing shot on this ferry is of the movement away from the Manhattan skyline.

Les Rendez-vous d'Anna/Meetings with Anna 120' 1978

Cast: Aurore Clément, Lea Massari, Helmut Griem, Magali Noel Hanns Zischler, Jean-Pierre Cassell

The Anna of the title is a film-maker, who we see here journeying from Germany back to Paris. Anna is promoting her film in a German town and we first meet her at the station, getting off her train, then at her hotel where she is trying to call an Italian woman, and where a friend calls her. Over the course of the film Anna meets several people, all of whom talk to her as she listens. The first, Heinrich, attends the screening of her film. He invites her out for a drink, they go back to her hotel, but she stops their love-making. He invites her to his house the next day to see his daughter. Continuing her journey Anna is met at Köln station by Ida, whose son she used to date. Anna then travels to see her mother in Brussels. Staying with her in a hotel Anna tells of her first sexual encounter with a woman. On the train to Paris Anna speaks with Hans, then is met by her lover Daniel. After an unsuccessful reunion, in which Daniel feels ill, Anna returns to her flat. The film closes as Anna lies on her bed listening to her answer machine. One of the messages is from an Italian woman (the one, we presume, she has been trying to phone) while another instructs her of her next journey,

***Dis-moi/Tell Me 1980 (In French)**

Short film made for the INA series "Lettre d'un cinéaste" in which Akerman interviews Aurore Clément.

Toute une nuit/All Night Long 1982 90 min (In French)

Cast includes: Aurore Clément, Samy Szlingerbaum, Nathalie Akerman (mother), Jan Decorte.

Over the course of a hot summer's night in Brussels we follow the actions of various people. The opening of the film indicates what will follow: we begin looking down from higher Brussels onto the lower town. Then we cut to someone walking along and down steps, people in a car (of which we hear the radio blaring out what will

become a recurring tune) and someone else catching a bus. These 'fragments' of actions continue, though each one rarely lasts more than five minutes. While the city of Brussels provides the common link to all these actions, other areas of intersection can be discerned. Thus, after the opening described we have several scenes in cafés, then in suburbs, and finally in one large apartment building. As well as these spatial coherences, there are connections through the repetition of certain gestures, actions ('trying to sleep') or themes ('unrequited love'). Finally, all of this is tied together by the Aurore Clément character, who is the only person to which we keep returning, as she waits for a lover to call.

***Les Années 80/The Eighties 1983 (In French) 60min**

Cast includes: Aurore Clément, Lio, Magali Noel, Pascale Salkin, Samy Szlingerbaum.

This film is divided into two parts, the first is entitled 'the audition' and the second 'the project'. The first part is on video and shows auditions and rehearsals; the second part on 35mm gives some typical sequences from the future film. ("Les télescopes de Chantal Akerman" Libération 17/5/1983)

L'Homme à la valise/The Man with the Suitcase 1983 60min (In French)

Made for the series INA "Télévision du Chambre"

Cast: Chantal Akerman, Jeremy Weeks.

Akerman (playing a film-maker) returns to her flat in Paris after some time away. Her pleasure at being home is interrupted by the arrival of a large American who insists that Akerman invited him to stay. The rest of the film concerns Akerman's attempts to avoid this man who has invaded her space (she had returned to try to do

some writing). The film is punctuated by inter-titles which mark the days: “Day two, I prepare to start writing. . . . Day four, I arrange it so we never have to meet . . . day eight he didn't come back last night.” Though at first Akerman arranges her routine so that she will avoid the American, gradually she begins to become obsessed about his presence, and charts his every move. Finally the American leaves and Akerman begins to write. Much of this film is shot using Akerman's characteristic medium height static framings. Connections with Akerman's previous work are also made through her performance which, as she rushes around on high heels, recalls Saute ma ville and even Je tu il elle.

Un Jour Pina a demandé/ One Day Pina Asked 1983 Approx. (In French) 60 min.

Shown on French and German television.

A straightforward documentary on the work of the Pina Bausch dance-theatre company. This film consists mainly of footage of the company working, however towards the end of the film we see Akerman interview Pina Bausch.

J'ai faim J'ai froid/ I'm Hungry I'm Cold 1984 12 min (In French)

Cast: Pascale Salkin, Maria De Meideros

Two young girls arrive in Paris from Brussels intent upon adventure. The following day they eat breakfast in a café, leave without paying, decide to sing for their supper and are picked up by two men. They go home with one of the men and while one girl cooks herself an omlette the other loses her virginity. Both girls then walk off into the night. Through out this ‘minimal’ narrative the action is swift, with the girls talking very fast, acting automatically (without thought or expression) and repeating ‘J'ai faim/I'm hungry’ “J'ai froid/I'm cold”.

A Family Business 1984 (In English) 15min.

Cast: Chantal Akerman, Aurore Clément, Marilyn Watelet and son.

Akerman travels to L.A. to try to persuade her rich Jewish uncle to give her some money for her new film. The film opens at the airport where Akerman has just arrived, along with her producer and her (producer's) small child. Akerman first attempts to find her uncle, making phone calls, then walking to his house. She leaves her producer behind and goes on alone. On reaching what she thinks is the correct address she is pulled indoors by an American woman in a swimming costume who talks very fast, without listening to what Akerman has to say. While the American is on the phone Akerman wanders outside to the pool where she finds Aurore Clément, an actress from France/Belgium who is rehearsing her lines for a European co-production being made in America. Akerman helps Aurore, then realises this is the wrong house and returns to her producer. The next day Akerman is making more phone calls and finds her uncle has gone to New York. The tone of this film is comic, with Akerman acting out her by now familiar screen persona, racing around on high heels and speaking very fast.

Letters Home 1984 Approx 104min (In French)

Cast: Delphine Seyrig and her daughter.

This is an adaptation of a performance by the same name. The subject of the play was the letters which passed between Sylvia Plath and her mother. Akerman chooses to film this performance using static framing and relatively close shots.

Sloth 1984 10-15 min. (In French)

Made for the ZDF series 'Seven Women, Seven Sins'.

Akerman's chosen sin is sloth or 'laziness'. She begins the film in bed saying that she has to make a film about laziness, but she can't seem to get up. Eventually she does get up, and wanders around her flat. A woman (Sonia Weider Atherton) plays a cello. Then Akerman wanders out of her flat and downstairs.

Golden Eighties 1986 90 min. (In French)

Cast includes: Delphine Seyrig, John Berry, Lio, Fanny Cottençon, Charles Denner, John Berry, Myriam Boyer.

The (musical) lives and love of the shop-keepers, hairdressers and those who frequent an underground shopping mall. the central narrative concerns Lili with whom Robert is in love yet who is in turn loved by Mado. Meanwhile Lili is having an affair with the married M. Jean. several other narratives surround this focus: Jeanne, married to Robert's father experiences a shock when a man from her (concentration camp) past drifts into the mall. Sylvie, who works behind a refreshment counter, receives letters from her boyfriend who works in Canada and whom she dreams of joining. All of this is told with much playfulness, using a camera which, for once, is not afraid to move, and singing and dancing to accompany the lively cast. The film ends after Mado has been jilted by Robert, who was caught kissing Lili. Mado leaves with Robert's parents and is told that 'love is like buying a dress'.

***Le Marteau 1986**

***Mallet Stevens 1986**

Both short subject videos, made for the Centre Georges Pompidou.

Histoires d'Amérique (food family and philosophy) 1988 90 min (In English)

A large cast of Jewish actors/actresses

Under the dark evening sky, on the edge of New York city, a group of Jewish actors recite monologues and perform Jewish jokes. The final part of the film then takes place in a café, where the cast come together for a celebration of Jewishness. the film begins with Akerman re-telling a piece of Jewish folklore while the image-track offers pictures of the approach to the Manhattan skyline. Once she has set the film in motion Akerman disappears. The monologues are framed as tableaux shots with the people talking straight to camera emphasising both gesture and performance.

Trois strophes sur le nom de Sacher/Three Stanzas for Sacher 1989 13 min.

Video made for the Centre Simone de Beauvoir, Paris.

Sonia Weider Atherton plays her cello as a couple are seen through a window in the background rowing. The camera cuts from close ups on the cello playing to fuller shots in which we see both foreground and background.

Nuit et jour/Night and Day 1991 (In French) 90min.

Cast: Guilane Londez, Thomas Langman, François Négret

Julie and Jack move to Paris from the provinces. By night he drives a taxi and by day they lie in bed together. Their blissful happiness is changed when Julie becomes involved in Jack's taxi partner Joseph (who drives by day). At first Julie thinks she can love both men, but Joseph becomes too demanding and Jack senses something has changed. At the end of the film Julie leaves both men and the city of Paris.

Le Déménagement/Moving 1992 40 min.

Made for the Arte series 'Monologues'

Sami Frey crosses a room and sits on a chair. There he remains for the rest of this film as he tells us of his relationship with the three girls who used to live next to him. As the monologue proceeds to we move closer to him, finishing with a close up of his head and shoulders. Also we learn that each of the girls left him for someone else, and that he has now moved (thus the title).

D'Est 1993 110 min.

A journey across Eastern Europe. The film begins very much in the style of News from Home. Spaces are framed: a road, a field, a bridge, then, as the film progresses so the shots become more varied. First, the tableaux are punctuated with more 'posed' shots in which people remain still for the camera. Second, the camera shifts from the static shot to tracking shots along pavements on which lines of people wait. Just as there is no real beginning, so there is no real ending and instead the film suddenly closes.

Portrait d'une jeune fille à la fin des années 60/Portrait of a girl in the late sixties 1994 50 min

From a series made for Arte 'tous les garçons et les filles de mon âge'

We follow the main character, a girl, through the course of one day in Brussels. During this time she meets her friend from school, is chatted up by a boy in a café, and goes back to where he is staying with him, then later goes with her friend to a party. Much is made of the exchange of glances between the two girls, and there is a sense in which these are desiring looks. This is particularly strong in a sequence at the party. The girl dances in the middle of the ring, then when she has to choose

someone to dance with her she pulls in her friend. However, after a while her friend dances with someone else. The girls walk home together