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Women and Home in Cinema: Film Practice and Gendered Spaces

PhD in Film

Louise Radinger Field

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Department of Film, Theatre & Television
University of Reading

Declaration

I confirm that this is my own work and the use of all material from other sources has been properly and fully acknowledged.

Louise Radinger Field
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Abstract

This thesis investigates how domestic space is represented in ten films released between 1936 and 2013 in which the woman in the home is placed at the heart of the drama. It examines how material structures are reconfigured into onscreen spaces which are full of expressivity and imbued with meaning. To understand how filmmakers achieve these spatial transformations, the thesis focuses on four material processes: *découpage*, mise-en-scène, sound and editing. Each chapter covers one of these cinematic 'building blocks' and discusses how it is used to reshape domestic space in two contrasting films. As each filmmaking process is clarified, its related critical theory is challenged and reassessed.

The figure of a woman in a house is familiar, culturally as well as cinematically. These films take this trope as their starting point and subject it to a series of provocations, manipulations, and mutations. As well as written close analysis, the thesis contains an element of practice as research. A video essay made with found footage from all ten films was presented as a three-screen installation. This work is reflected upon in the thesis, and the theoretical potential of videographic practice as a tool in film studies is discussed. An online link to the installation, reconfigured as a video essay, is an integral part of this thesis.

The films show home as both a material and an imaginative space, organised and shaped by the interiority of its inhabitants. Sometimes the home is a magical space warped by unconscious drives. At others, it is an everyday space which follows spatial logic. Yet even in these apparently more transparent texts, psychic drives and emotional urgencies are played out spatially. Drawing upon spatial and feminist film theory, the thesis aims to offer a fresh commentary into how the home is represented onscreen.

Contents

Introduction

We know this curtained world…
for we have been asked with regularity to dwell in this room.
Giuliana Bruno

This thesis investigates the portrayal of women in houses in a series of films in which this relationship is placed at the heart of the drama. I attend to the resonance that exists between spatial organisation onscreen and internal, emotional states. There are confluences between film and architecture and understanding how these two arts overlap, inform and complement one another becomes useful when studying how space is represented and sculpted onscreen. The conjunction between cinema and architecture is formulated by Maureen Turim in her study of architecture in avant-garde films:

> One visual structure, architectonic, stable, fixed, embued with the power to symbolize, as well as determine the movements of surrounding activities, is submitted to the bold and active force of another visual structure (that of the film) to transform. (Turim 1991: 37)

Turim's summarisation is useful, and her visualisation of how these two structuring arts come together contributes significantly towards my approach in this thesis. The task is to examine how filmmakers approach tangible buildings – be they constructed sets or real locations – and transmute them into spaces full of meaning and expressivity using the cinematic tools available to them. It is an enquiry rooted in a close analysis of film texts and an investigation into the material, creative decision-making processes that are involved in their making. John Gibbs and Doug Pye give a good account of this theoretical position in the introduction to their collection *Style and Meaning: Studies in the Detailed Analysis of Film* (2005). 'It is the film itself,' they argue, 'that provides the basis for argument and understanding' (Gibbs and Pye 2005: 6). I engage as closely as I can with what these films are saying by probing into how they say it. Such close work keeps me at

'eye-level' with the film texts, to borrow a phrase from George Toles (2001: 170), and as attentive as possible to what it is that they seek to convey.

The 'woman in the house' is a trope with which we are familiar culturally as well as cinematically. We find her in the early days of cinema, in notable films such as *The Lonely Villa* (D W Griffith 1909) and *Suspense* (Lois Weber 1913). To some extent, placing narrative within this boundaried location was useful because the limited contours of a house or room allowed early filmmakers to work out an emergent cinematic vocabulary. Issues of lighting and spatial organisation were at stake and being gradually worked out.[1] But cinema also inherited the trope from the culture and society which surrounded it, and continues to invest in it as a fecund source of narrative. My aim here is to unpack this seemingly inevitable and archaic coupling of 'woman + house', to untangle its reciprocal invocation on film and to open it up to a broader enquiry into how space becomes expressive onscreen. This requires me to engage with the common perception of the home as a feminine sphere, because the house and home have been key figures in the cultural construction of femininity. But although changes can be detected, sociological reflection upon the home as a feminine sphere is not my main concern. These films adventure into the mythopoetic potential of cinematic space, and what emerges is a far from straightforward progression from the home as a place of enclosure to one of liberation. We are invited to imaginatively occupy spaces rich in ambiguity in all of these films. A broader impulse is at work, nourished by the rich and metaphorical connections that obtain between the material world of the architectural interior and the non-material interiority of the self. The perceived connection between inner and outer realms found expression in the novel and in the language of psychoanalysis. Cinema appropriates this into its own audiovisual language with great ease and fluency.

How is space made meaningful in these films, how do the women inhabit these spaces, and how best can we talk about it? In order to avoid what spatial anthropologist Tim Ingold refers to as

[1] These ideas are taken up in more depth by Brian R Jacobson in his exploration of how the architecture and technology of the first film studios contributed towards the emergence and shaping of cinematic space (2015).

'abstract riffing on space'[2] I structure my enquiry around the material, constructive processes involved in filmmaking. I ask how concrete, architectural structures are reconfigured by filmmakers into expressive onscreen structures imbued with emotion and subjectivity. I draw upon insight from film theorists, but I also address my subject through the lens of spatial and architectural theory. Giuliana Bruno writes that, 'Despite the richness of the fields of feminist theory, geographical studies, and film scholarship, a merging of the three discplines has yet to occur. By rethinking each through the others, one might expand the range of all these fields' (Bruno 2007: 82). My work here is just such an interconnective enquiry.

Choice of films

I look at ten films in detail. These are: *Craig's Wife* (Dorothy Arzner 1936), *Meshes of the Afternoon* (Maya Deren 1943), *Secret Beyond the Door* (Fritz Lang 1947), *Midnight Lace* (David Miller 1960), *Saute Ma Ville* (Chantal Akerman 1968), *A Woman Under the Influence* (John Cassavetes 1974), *Jeanne Dielman, 23 Quai de Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles* (Chantal Akerman 1975), *Outer Space* (Peter Tscherkassy 1999), *The House* (Eija-Liisa Ahtila 2002), and *Exhibition* (Joanna Hogg 2013).

There is much that divides these films and much that binds them together. Each filmmaker subjects the trope to a different set of pressures, concerns and inventions. The homes vary from grand mansions to small flats, some belong to the women and some do not, and some live in their homes while others come to live in them as part a recent marriage. None of the characters feel quite 'at home'. The women roam through their internal topographies like psychic Geiger counters, aware of their emplacement but also of their out-of-placeness. Yet paradoxically, despite feelings of estrangement, ambivalence or even fear, the women in these films are the buildings' true occupants because they are the ones who fully inhabit their structures and engage with whatever psychic truths its architectonic structures embody, transmit or seek to contain. It is not a question of how

2 Hayden Lorimer, on the work of social anthropologist Tim Ingold in *Key Thinkers on Space and Place*, eds. Phil Hubbard & Rob Kitchin. (2013). pp. 249-256

many hours are spent inside them or how much housework they do or do not perform. The women cohere in and interact with these spatial structures in ways that are not available to their male counterparts. These spaces are used by the filmmakers to organise and articulate the emotional urgencies of their inhabitants. Everything about these onscreen buildings has the potential to become meaningful and revelatory. 'Architectural space reveals and instructs' writes spatial philosopher Yi-Fu Tuan (2014: 114). The house is a generative, unfolding entity in these films and the woman is to be found at the heart of it clutching a drink, a torch, a knife or a key.

Home and Gendered Space

It has been hard for feminists to find any positive valence in the idea of the home. The purposes to which the gendered allocation of the public and private spheres have been put are specific and insidious. 'It is clear that the public-private distinction is gendered' writes Nancy Duncan. 'This binary opposition is employed to legitimate oppression and dependence on the basis of gender; it has also been used to regulate sexuality' (Duncan 1996: 128). The idea of the home as a female space goes back a long way, and can be traced in architectural discourse as well as architecture itself. The association of architecture with the human body is a very old idea. The Roman architect Vitruvius formulated ways in which public buildings should be designed according to the exact proportions of a 'finely shaped' human body (Garber 2012: 123). Garber traces how this coupling became inflected by bodily functions and hierarchies and, inevitably, by gender:

> The body is a house, the house of the soul, claimed a medieval treatise on the interior of the body. But since a woman's body was 'open', its boundaries convoluted, the inside-out version of a man's, she needed a second 'house', a building. (Garber 2012: 125)

Leon Battista Alberti's influential 15th century treatise on architecture allocates the sequestered interior of a house to the woman. He builds upon the earlier ideas of the 4th century BC Greek writer Xenophon, who insisted that 'the gods made women for indoor, and man for outdoor,

pursuits' (Garber: 126). Garber neatly summarises the bleak formula that emerges from all of this: 'The man moves; the woman remains at home. In essence she *is* the home' (Garber: 126). It is clear the home has been viewed as the woman's place for a long time and that the 'discourses of space and sexuality cannot be separated' (Wigley 1992: 357). Reference to Antiquity is common in feminist critiques of home, signalling a diagnostic drive to find out 'where it all began' (Colomina 1992, Wigley 1992, Bergren 1993, Grosz 1994, Bruno 2007, and Young 2005). 'For millennia the image of Penelope sitting by the hearth and weaving, saving and preserving the home while her man roams the earth in daring adventures, has defined one of Western culture's basic ideas of womanhood', writes Young (2005: 123). 'Ulysses has a place of return' writes Bruno, and a house is 'an emotional-architectural container with a woman in it' (2007: 80).

But the home is a mutable place in cinema, and more recent spatial and feminist enquiry sets out to review notions of the fixity of home. Theorists and artists recognise the 'fluidity of home as a concept, metaphor and lived experience' (Blunt and Dowling 2006: 21). There is a move to unsettle 'the home as a fixed and stable location' (33) and to 'understand home as a *relation* between material and imaginative realms and processes' (22). These notions resonate with how the home is presented in the films I discuss. Real-life achitectures are reshaped to more accurately depict our imaginative relationship with them. Architectonic features such as walls, doors, staircases, hallways and windows function metaphorically as well as materially.

Interiors and Interiority

We did not always associate the interior of our homes with our subjectivity. Homes were once communal spaces. 'Life was a public affair' Witold Rybczynski reminds us, 'and just as one did not have a strongly developed self-consciousness, one did not have a room of one's own' (Rybczynski 1986: 35). According to Rybczynski, the home as a setting for an 'emerging interior life' began with the evolution of the bourgeoisie in 17th century in Holland, or more accurately the 'brand new state' of the United Provinces of the Netherlands (51). He quotes Lukacs: 'as the self-consciousness of medieval people was spare, the interiors of their houses were bare, including the

halls of nobles and of kings. The interior furniture of houses appeared together with the interior furniture of minds' (36). This new focus on domestic space as a private domain in which one could develop a sense of one's own subjectivity spread into northern Europe and beyond – and indeed shows no sign of abating. The mise-en-scène of our lives continues to take shape inside our homes. Ewa Lajer-Burcharth and Beate Söntgen note how the emergence of psychoanalysis and Freud's theorization of the psyche in the 20th century contributed further towards this modelling of interiority in spatial terms:

> The very structure of psychic life has been conceptualized by Freud in spatial terms as an internal topography, and he often used interior metaphors to talk about the key components of the mental apparatus, e.g., when he envisioned the unconscious as a suite of rooms. (Lajer-Burcharth and Söntgen 2015: 13)

The films I discuss play their part in this spatial inscription of subjectivity. One significant feature of the architectural structures in, and of, these particular films is their presentation of spaces as a series of nested domains. Spaces are enclosed within spaces, like the interconnected and concealed spaces inside a Chinese box. This structure finds correspondence in the psychic realm. We are directed towards the interior core of the house through a series of rooms within rooms and this deepening spatial investigation becomes tied to a journey into the deeper recesses of the self. As Barry Curtis writes in his book about the haunted house on film:

> Freud suggested that in the labyrinthine structure of the mind the threads of patients' narratives descend into the past as if they are returning to the scene of a crime or trying to find their way back to the house where the problems originated. (Curtis 2008: 28)

Literary critics have long recognised the analogous relationship between the house, the novel and the self and there is a wealth of critical theory on the subject. 'Containers within containers – let us begin with this recurrent and compelling image', writes Karen Chase in her reflections upon the

'Interior Design' of *Jane Eyre* (Chase 2012: 336). Chase's observation echoes one made about film by Jeanine Basinger: 'The woman's world on film is a box within a box' (Basinger 1994: 216). But this nested system of spatial domains 'at whose innermost point lies a source of dangerous emotive energy' (Chase: 336) is not the only direction of movement found in these films. Characters also move outwards, over and beyond – and they do not have to physically go outside to do so, although they often do. The material nature of the cinematic medium is such that its characters can, if the filmmaker requires them to do so, go anywhere. They can cross over between spaces and transgress invisible borders while remaining in the same room. Part of my project here is to identify how filmmakers materially construct these border crossings.

Cinema, Architecture and The House as the Hinge between the Two

Cinema, like architecture, constructs spatial experiences. We often find film framed in architectural terms, and it is not uncommon for architects to become involved in filmmaking and vice versa. 'People are incorrect to compare a director to an author' observed John Ford. 'If he's a creator, he's more like an architect' (Ford quoted in Perez 1998: 1). An affinity between the two practices has been recognised since the early days of cinema. In 1923 Dziga Vertov described filmmaking thus:

> I have placed you, whom I've created today, in an extraordinary room which did not exist until just now when I also created it. In this room there are twelve walls shot by me in various parts of the world. In bringing together shots of walls and details, I've managed to arrange them in an order that is pleasing and to construct with intervals, correctly, a film-phrase which is the room. (Vertov quoted in Richard Martin 2014: 9)

Sergei Eisenstein compared the sequence of consecutive views as we get closer to a building (he cites the Acropolis to illustrate his point) to the passing by of successive images in the cinema, and thought of cinema as architecture's natural successor (Eisenstein, translated by Yve-Alain Bois and Michael Glenny 1989). Architects frame their work in similar ways. 'One conceives and reads a

building in terms of sequences' writes French architect Jean Nouvel, 'In the continuous shot/sequence that a building is, the architect works with cuts and edits, framing and openings…' (Nouvel quoted in Pallasmaa 2007: 17). Spatial theorist Giuliana Bruno frames film as an 'architectural art form' generated by 'spatial curiosity' (2007: 345, 135). Finnish architect Juhani Pallasmaa reconciles their apparent differences. 'The fact that images of architecture are eternalised in matter, whereas cinematic images are only an illusion projected onto the screen, has no decisive significance' he writes. 'Both art forms define frames of life, situations of human interaction and horizons of understanding the world' (Pallasmaa 2007: 18)

However, much architecturally positioned film criticism gathers around the notable representation of specific architecture in particular films and is not hugely enlightening from a film theory point of view. Peter Wollen notes that, 'Most studies of film architecture… seem to gravitate unreflectively towards the small group of films which feature architecture as "star"' (Wollen 2002: 208). There is not a sizeable amount of film theory that draws productive associations between the two practices and employs architectural theory to illuminate how films structure space to generate meaning. Richard Martin's study of how architecture functions in David Lynch's work is a welcome addition to the field (2014). He aims to explore how 'cinema functions spatially' and to show that there is 'a perceptual framework shared by film-makers and architects' (Martin 2014: 8). John David Rhodes's recent book *Spectacle of Property: The House in American Film* (2017) is a valuable contribution and useful to my work here. Rhodes probes into the representation of the American house on film and cinema's 'insistent interest and investment in it' (2017: viii). The 'cinema and the house should be seen to *communicate'* he writes, 'Cinema and architecture open onto one another, and in doing so, they also open up to one another' (Rhodes 2017: 11). Bruno explores similar territory. In her wide-reaching book *Atlas of Emotion: Journeys in Art, Architecture and Film* (2007) she identifies the house as 'the hinge that opens the door between architecture and cinema' (104).

Films speak about space, and they also make space speak – a phrase Anne Goliot employs to discuss domestic space in George Cukor's 1944 film *Gaslight* (my translation from Goliot 1991: 71). In other words, architecture is shaped by the narrative, but it can also generate it. The architecture of the homes in these films provides filmmakers with ways to express visually what cannot be said with words. Architecture has agency on film. It is never just a 'silent shell, standing there indifferently, every façade, every building is involved and has something to say' (Schaal 2013: 54). This brings me to the subject of non-verbal expressivity and how these films are interconnected by the melodramatic mode.

The Melodramatic Mode

One may not think of films such as *Meshes of the Afternoon, Exhibition* or *Jeanne Dielman* as melodramas. Yet all of the films I discuss are in dialogue with melodrama. This genre has been much discussed, and Christine Gledhill and Linda Williams revisit it in *Melodrama Unbound* (2018). In this volume theorists review the melodramatic 'field' as earlier theorised by Gledhill (1988) and reposition it as a 'mode'. 'To recognise the melodramatic mode' writes Despina Kakoudaki, 'we have to see it not as overlay but as substrate, as the foundation upon which all the other narrative and dramatic elements are built' (Kakoudaki 2018: 316). Understanding melodrama as a 'substrate' and a 'foundation' enables me draw these ten films together into the same critical net, one which recognises their commonalities as well as their differences. The woman in the house is a common figure in melodrama. She stalks the corridors holding a flickering candle in Gothic melodramas, and does the same but with a torch in Hollywood ones. Even in the modern art film *Exhibition* she is still found creeping along the corridor late at night, afraid of what might be behind the door.

The Hollywood domestic melodrama (and its sub-genres, the family melodrama and the maternal melodrama) uses the space of the family home as a primal site for its narratives. The family, writes Mulvey, 'provides a physical setting, the home, that can hold a drama in claustrophobic intensity and represent, with its high connotative architectural organisation, the

passions and antagonisms that lie behind it' (Mulvey 1989: 74). It is precisely the inability of people to say things that forces other modes of speaking to arise. Gledhill, Mulvey and Elsaesser have theorised the links between the melodramatic mode of expression and the language of the unconscious (Gledhill 1987). Through their perceptive mise-en-scène criticism, we understand how Hollywood melodramas speak through the symptom or sign, existing 'on the knife edge' as Mulvey puts it, 'between meaning and silence.' (1989: 72). Film architecture takes part in this structure of non-verbal meaning. Architectural space becomes, as Mulvey suggests, 'highly connotative' (72). *Exhibition*, *Jeanne Dielman* and *House* are art films in dialogue with melodrama, even though their audiovisual signs and and symptoms indicate meaning in less obvious, subtler and more fragmented ways.

The characters in these films express themselves with their bodies, often more eloquently than with words. This can be understood as a melodramatic trait. In his discussion of melodrama in Italian post-war cinema, (a genre of films which one might not immediately assume were melodramas because they deliberately avoid emotional excess), Louis Bayman explores the concept of 'Lyricism'. The lyrical expression of sentiment 'is a guiding principle of these dramas, especially strong affective elements grounded in the body' (Bayman 2018: 275). He continues:

> This overwhelming, yet fragile, bodily expressivity is made lyrical in its appearance alongside indicators of a different register, removed from the immediate realms of setting and action, but privileged as expressing a more intimate condition, in particular through the musical soundtrack but also via lighting, editing, and composition. (Bayman 2018: 275)

In all the films I discuss, the way the women move around in their space is significant. Jeanne Dielman may be doing something quotidian like the washing up, but she does not do this simple thing 'normally'. Mabel Longhetti in *A Woman Under the Influence* cannot express herself well in words, but her arms speak volumes. As I become more intimate with these film texts, I become

drawn to the performativity of these gestures. This is something I am better able to explore in my practical research with found footage.

In short, the films I have selected are interconnected with the melodramatic mode, some more obviously so than others. The space of the home in these films is structured by and colludes with the characters' inner lives – and it is the women to whom it is most connected. Feminist and psychoanalytical film theory looks closely at how female subjectivity fares within the cinematic process.

Feminist Film Theory & Psychoanalytical Film Theory

I draw upon the critical work of Mary Ann Doane at various points throughout this thesis. In *Desire to Desire* she describes how woman's films of the 1940s are 'extremely compelling' but how at the same time they present what she calls 'mythemes of femininity' which 'trade on their very familiarity and recognizability' (1988: 3). The cinematic trope of the woman in the house presents us with just such a mytheme, one which colludes with 'the "obvious truths" of femininity with which we are all acquainted' (3). Doane encourages us to re-see these films and to interrogate them and her call to make such films 'not strange enough' is something I take up here.

The connection between psychoanalysis and cinema is widely recognised and discussed. One basic correlation is well summarised by Doane, who writes that, 'The "stories" psychoanalysis tells, its fictions of subjectivity, are fully compatible with those proffered by the cinema' (Doane 1988: 20). The ways in which we are sometimes inexplicably emotionally touched by certain moments in films encourages us to psychoanalytically reflect upon them. This is a form of transference and border crossing – an encounter, conscious and unconscious, that takes place between the film and the spectator. Luke Hockley gives a good account of how images in cinema work upon our unconscious. Our 'own being' he writes, 'intersects with the narrative of the film and in so doing it is diverted and becomes intertwined with our own personal story' (Hockley 2015: 84). He goes on to suggest that 'it is the ability of the cinematic to contain contradictory qualities which

makes it such a profoundly psychological medium' (84). This goes some way to describe why we are drawn to discuss film in psychoanalytical terms. Elizabeth Bronfen's book *Home in Hollywood: The Imaginary Geography of Cinema* shows how enlightening psychoanalytical analysis can be when intelligently applied to film texts (Bronfen 2004). Psychoanalysis is not a mechanism with which to decode films. It would be a pretty uninteresting read if that were the case (e.g. stairs mean you go up or down in your life). Moreoever, as Freud recognised, it is often the least interesting object in a dream which deceives us. Maya Deren firmly rejected psychoanalytic readings of her films despite the fact that their oneiric qualities encourage such a response. But film work can be usefully compared to dream work. Both processes assort, select and integrate the 'raw materials of fantasy' (25). These notions are discussed in more depth in Chapter 4, in which I look at films by Deren, Peter Tscherkassky and Eija-Liisa Ahtila. All three filmmakers take the internal world of the psyche and its spatial representation on film as their subject matter.

Mulvey's foundational essay (1975) demonstrated how women are 'housed' as objects to be looked at in the cinema and explained how this is structured in psychoanalytical terms through a rigorous interpellation of Freudian theory with cinematic and spectatorial processes. I do not offer a radical repositioning of feminist film theory and any in-depth dissection of psychoanalytical film theory falls outside the intent of this thesis. But I do venture towards a spatial understanding of subjectivity which allows me to re-view the figure of the woman in the home as it plays out in cinema and to offer a new perspective upon it. Bruno's work signals one way forward. 'Mobilizing gender positions requires a series of displacements' she writes (Bruno 2016: 165). 'It requires undoing the fixity of binary systems that have immobilized the female subject in the domestic realm and erased her from the map of urban mobility' (165). Bruno proposes we replace the term *voyeur* with *voyageuse*, in other words that we develop a conception of the woman in the domestic realm in the cinema, and the female spectator who watches her, as a cinematic traveller. 'Thinking as a *voyageuse,* then, can trigger a relation to dwelling that is much more *transitorial* than the fixity of *oikos,* and a cartography that is errant' (Bruno 2007: 86). Bruno's proposition resonates with my desire to move away from fixed positions and assumptions. And there are a lot of fixed

positions to contend with. Teresa de Lauretis responds to the semiotic theory of Jurÿ Lotman, who conjectures that a basic principle of mythical narrative is that the 'Woman is the place, man is the hero'. Lauretis takes this theory on, and outlines how this 'picture of the world produced in mythical thought since the very beginning of culture' is predicated upon 'what we call biology':

> Opposite pairs such as inside/outside, the raw/the cooked, or life/death appear to be merely derivatives of the fundamental opposition between boundary and passage; … all these terms are predicated on the *single* figure of the hero who crosses the boundary and penetrates the other space. In so doing the hero, the mythical subject, is constructed as human being and as male; he is the active principle of culture, the establisher of distinction, the creator of differences. Female is what is not susceptible to transformation, to life or death; she (it) is an element of plot-space, a topos, a resistance, matrix and matter. (Teresa de Lauretis 1984: 119)

The films I look at in this thesis are most assuredly set in a topos and a fixed space – the home. But, their internal domains are far from fixed containers and the women who roam inside them are most assuredly 'susceptible to transformation'. Rooms become territories, doors become portals, corridors become regions – the home is transformed into an architecture of emotion to be explored. The houses in these films are subjective constructions, and the women who dwell in them are not easily formulated or contained. Things do not always stay where they should, boundaries dissolve, objects are not what they seem and meanings overflow. My psychoanalytical and feminist approach towards these films is an open and personal one, but my interpretation of them is firmly grounded in a close study of how and why filmmakers materially achieve these spatial transfigurations.

Thesis Structure

A film can be seen as an assemblage of parts; a spatio-visual-aural construction that is assembled into a whole in a process not unlike the architectural process of designing and

constructing a building. I structure my thesis into chapters built around four processes or 'building blocks' of filmmaking; *découpage*, mise-en-scène, sound and editing. In reality of course, these materialist processes are far from separate. They are interconnected and interdependent, and form what Gibbs and Pye call a 'complex tapestry of decision-making' (Gibbs & Pye 2005: 10). Cinematic elements work in context with one another to generate meaning, and viewing them separately is something of a contrivance. Although the chapters are self-contained they cannot be wholly impermeable. It is difficult to discuss the mise-en-scène of a film without discussing its *découpage* at some point and vice versa, or sound without editing and so forth. As V F Perkins observes:

> If we isolate cutting from the complex which includes the movement of the actors, the shape of the setting, the movement of the camera, and variations of light and shade – which change *within* the separate shots as well as between them – we shall understand none of the elements (and certainly not the editing) because each of them derives its value from the relationship with others. (Perkins 1972: 23)

Nevertheless, focusing upon these processes individually is useful. It helps me clarify what the processes actually are, and to probe more deeply into why decisions are made and what effects they produce. There is mise-en-scène criticism as well as mise-en-scène practice, and asking *découpage*-based questions means we need to be clear about what *découpage* is. As a consequence, we learn that some films – particularly the more recent ones – present a challenge to the film theorist. There are other decision-making processes I could have chosen to discuss, such as lighting ('variations of light and shade'), costume, music (or lack of it), performance and ways of directing actors. All of these (and more) contribute towards the overall 'complex tapestry of decision-making' involved when one makes a film and I do not claim to cover all of the ground. But the ground I do cover is that which most pertains to my overarching interest in the cinematic construction and rendition of space.

In Chapter 1, I discuss the *découpage* in two films: *Craig's Wife* (Dorothy Arzner 1936) and *A Woman Under the Influence* (John Cassavetes 1976). Can a process of *découpage* be discerned in either of these works and if so, what shape might that take and why? I engage with how we might define *découpage* and distinguish it from its parallel activity, mise-en-scène. The critical work in this field by Timothy Barnard (2014), Christian Keathley (2012) and Douglas Pye (2015) provides clarification and points the way forward for the film theorist. I take the position that *découpage* arises from an attitude taken by the filmmaker and his/her creative team towards the dramatic narrative and the space in which it occurs so that it is filmed by the camera in a particular way in order to show and reveal particular things about that space and the person's relationship with it. This attitude guides where one places the camera, how one moves it around (or not), what lens one uses and – and this is an area of some debate – how one *preplans* or *visualizes* the shots prior to shooting them. In short, *découpage* is how one shapes space and sculpts narrative with the camerawork. *Craig's Wife* is a studio film made in 1936. *A Woman Under the Influence* was made outside of the studio system forty years later. Their *découpage* is entirely different. Yet despite their differences the films resonate with one another – which is why bringing them into dialogue with one another becomes fruitful. Both films were made by strong and opinionated filmmakers, people who had ideas about their subject matter and the ambivalence that inheres to it. I explore what the reasons for the difference in *découpage* might be, and how each film spatialises the subjectivity of its protagonist.

In Chapter 2 I discuss the mise-en-scène in two films: *Jeanne Dielman, 23 Commerce Quay, 1080 Brussels* (Chantal Akerman 1975) and *Exhibition* (Joanna Hogg 2013). As in the previous chapter, I clarify my critical position because mise-en-scène has been defined in a variety of ways. For the purposes of my study here, I extract camera placement out of mise-en-scène activity, as *découpage* provides critical space for that discussion. I analyse what we see within the frame. Classical mise-en-scène theory has shown how mise-en-scène functions expressively in melodrama. I find the need to draw upon other ways of discussing the mise-en-scène of these two more modern art films. I draw upon theory that re-engages with mise-en-scène criticism (Kessler

2014, Gibbs 2002 and 2013), and theory which challenges traditional modes of mise-en-scène analysis (Adrian Martin 2011 and 2014). Neither of the two films is a classical melodrama, but both spring from the trope which melodrama has found so useful, and continue to be inflected by its manner of speaking non-verbally. Akerman's film presents us with a cinematic *dispositif* at work. I discuss what this means and explore how Akerman employs her *dispositif* to function as a creative restraint. Hogg's later film echoes Akerman's quiet formalism, but whether or not we can detect a similar *dispositif* or patterning at work is debatable. What becomes clear is that the stylistic stance of each film resists aspects of traditional mise-en-scène criticism.

Chapter 3 explores how female characters inhabit film space on an aural level. In other words, I explore how sonic space is used to structure subjectivity. I focus on how the female voice functions in another pair of similar yet contrasting films; *The Secret Beyond the Door* (Fritz Lang 1947) and *Midnight Lace* (David Miller 1960). These films are examples of the 'Modern Gothic' or the 'Somebody's Trying to Kill Me and I Think It's my Husband' genre (Russ 1973), but one is an updated version set in London on the verge of the swinging sixties. The sonic dimension is distinctive in both films and I look into whether this suggestive realm provides the characters with a less regulated domain within which to exist and express themselves. Sonic space, though invisible, is just as constructed as the space we see on screen. It calls up spaces we cannot and will never be able to see, creating for the audience what Elsaesser and Hagener describe as 'cinema's imaginary topography' (2010: 130). Sound also modulates what we *do* see. I look closely at how the female voice in both films works with and against the image (and the body in the image) and provides access to meanings which are contradictory and not always straightforward.

Sound can be discussed in spatial terms as work by Doane (1980), Levin (1984), Silverman (1988) Altman (1992) Chion (1999) and Elsaesser and Hagener (2010) demonstrates, and I draw upon this theory in my analysis. Issues of gendered space arise even in this invisible, unbordered space. Kaja Silverman theorises that female characters are as prone to being contained within the sonic realm as they are in the visual one (1988). Like the 'visual *vraisemblable*' she writes, 'the

sonic *vraisemblable* is sexually differentiated, working to identify even the *embodied* male voice with the attributes of the cinematic apparatus, but always situating the female voice within a hyperbolically diegetic context' (1988: 45). My work in this chapter ventures towards another less bleak reading of events. There are ways in which the voice is, as Chion puts it, 'neither entirely inside nor clearly outside' the narrative (1999: 4). Theoretical work in this area by Maria Tatar (2004) and Britta Sjogren (2006) is helpful to my enquiry in this regard.

In Chapter 4 I explore how visual and sonic space can be further manipulated, accentuated and even radically disrupted in the editing suite. I look at three films in which the editing is of particular note: *Meshes of the Afternoon* (Maya Deren 1943); *Outer Space* (Peter Tscherkassky 1999); and *House* (Eija-Liisa Ahtila 2002). Space is shaped in highly original and distinctive ways in these avant-garde works although once again, they start from the same simple image – a woman in a house. The contemporary, everyday homes in these films become magical spaces, transformed and reshaped through the editing process. We can trace a thematic line from Deren's seminal film through to Tscherkassky and Ahtila's later works. We can also trace a similar impulse: to disrupt idealised notions of a unified, linear, coherent selfhood and to represent more accurately and speak more directly to the non-linear world of the inner being and its inner realities. Each filmmaker uses the materialist processes involved in editing to deconstruct one stable world and create another more mutable one that is reshaped and warped by the movements of the mind, memory and the unconscious. There are ethical impulses behind each of these works, which becomes evident as I pursue how their makers distort space and why. In this regard, work by Turim (1986, 2007), Annette Michelson (2001) and Mieke Bal (2013) is particularly insightful, and I draw upon their observations. As in previous chapters, I start by clarifying my critical position. Jacques Aumont's monograph on editing – although it is called *Montage* – provides clarification and historical perspective (2014). In my close analysis of all three films, I also draw extensively upon the filmmakers' own reflections upon their work.

A Woman's Place: Home in Cinema: Videographic Research Practice

This thesis also contains an element of videographic exploration. In Chapter 5 I reflect back upon this work. I embarked upon this research as an alternate way of understanding and experiencing the ten films I discuss in writing. I reassemble sounds and images from the films in order to stage performatively how they resonate with and differ from one another. This experimental research took final shape as a 20-minute video essay installation, credited in the work itself as an audiovisual collage. It was shown as a three-screen installation in the Bulmershe Theatre in the Department of Film, Theatre & Television at the University of Reading in December 2019. Exploring films in their own terms – talking about film with film – engaged me with these works in a way that deepened my critical appreciation of them. Digital tools enabled me to take apart something I knew had been assiduously constructed. At times this felt almost transgressive. Victor Burgin describes his own experience as 'dismantling and reconfiguring the once inviolable objects' (Burgin 2004: 8). Yet, prising filmic material open, disassembling and reassembling films in order to see how they work, enabled me to *get in touch* with them more directly. Everything I wrote after this practical research was inflected by the discoveries I made about how these films were put together. Furthermore, such work allows the emotional response to film to be considered – indeed it positively encourages it. This helps to integrate our unconscious response to film into our overall critical consideration of how films work upon the spectator. In Chapter 5 I also relate how the video essay took shape, reflect upon why I chose three screens, and discuss practical and theoretical issues arising from process of creating a three-screen installation.

This introduction is a summary of my aims and intentions. The thesis considers cinema's particular affinity with space and its unique ability to portray interiority spatially. I hope to generate fresh commentary on a familiar cinematic trope and the gendered attribution of space with which it is associated. In the following theoretical and practical research I reflect upon these films as complex spaces for us to imaginatively occupy. They are spaces as full of wit, enigma, invention and heterogeneity as those who live inside them and who watch them.

Chapter 1

Découpage:
Building the House in Segments

Craig's Wife (Dorothy Arzner, 1936) ends on a moment of revelation. Alone in her house at last, Harriet Craig (Rosalind Russell) wakes up to reality. Her eyes open wide to fully absorb her surroundings for the first time and what she sees fills her with fear. The audience is invited to watch this climactic scene with equally as wide-eyed attention. We have come to know well this pristine suburban palace Harriet calls home. We are familiar with its open spaces and its nooks and crannies; the little cupboard where Walter Craig (John Boles) puts away his hat and coat, the small breakfast room where he hides away to read the paper, the strangely empty kitchen, the neat bedrooms, the grandiose staircase, the huge living room which serves as the main stage of the drama. But in this scene, as Harriet stands transfixed in the hallway, we 're-see' the house as we watch her 're-seeing it'. All this is achieved visually. There is no dialogue for there is no one left to talk to. Harriet realises this when she speaks her final words of the film, an unfinished sentence that trails into thin air as the front door closes upon her self-isolation. Arzner directs these closing moments using the deceptively simple approach with which the entire film has been shot. It is precisely the way in which the filmic space is constructed through the creative use of the camera which enables these revelatory final moments of the film to be as piercing and effective as they are. This creative positioning of the camera and organisation of filmic space into different set-ups is a process that can be described as *découpage*.

In this chapter I examine the *découpage* of two contrasting films, *Craig's Wife* and *A Woman Under the Influence* (John Cassavetes, 1974). Both films concern a woman and her house and the relationship that exists between them, yet they are filmed in markedly different ways. Before continuing, it is worth providing a brief clarification of my use and understanding of the apparently untranslatable term *découpage*.

The history of *découpage* as both a concept and theoretical term, its mistranslation from the French and the path of its loss and retrieval as a term in film theory and analysis has been charted by Timothy Barnard in his recent book on the subject (Barnard 2014). The term has had a complex history since its inception in the 1910s and Barnard charts its use by different critics and filmmakers. A major focus for Barnard is the mistranslation of '*découpage*' into 'editing' or 'cutting', most notably by Hugh Gray in his translation of André Bazin's collected articles in the volumes *What is Cinema?* (1967 and 1971), which contributed significantly to its obfuscation. In his review of Barnard's book in *Movie: a journal of film criticism*, Douglas Pye sheds further light upon the matter, offering a pithy summary of the debate and the areas of confusion that adhere to it, particularly with regards to the critical history of the parallel term mise-en-scène (Pye 2015: 97-100). That there is no word in the English language equivalent to '*découpage*' is only part of the problem. What is at stake is the complexity of filmmaking and how best to understand and describe its processes. Pye draws our attention to the work of Christian Keathley, who uses the concept to great analytical effect in his essay about *Bonjour Tristesse* (Otto Preminger 1958) (Keathley 2012a: 67-72). Keathley's analysis of a reoccurring set of shot patterns is a good example of *découpage* criticism, and makes what Pye calls an 'eloquent case for its [*découpage's*] potential role in style-based criticism' (Pye 2015: 97).

My understanding is that *découpage* arises from an attitude taken towards the dramatic narrative so that it is filmed by the camera in a particular way in order to show particular things. This attitude guides where one places the camera, how one moves it around (or not) and what lens one uses. It also – and this is what distinguishes it from other ways of thinking about film style – includes how one *preplans* or *visualizes* the shots individually and in sequence. Keathley writes, '*Découpage* is a formal plan, prepared in advance of shooting, a visualization that is designed in relationship to the narrative/dramatic material' (2012a: 69). This preplanning includes not only how each shot is framed but the relationship *between* shots. In this way *découpage* adumbrates the moment when shots are actually placed together in the editing process.

This relationship between *découpage* and editing has caused a measure of confusion, and not solely as a result of mistranslation. Some filmmakers, as becomes evident in my analysis of Cassavetes's film *A Woman Under the Influence*, do not have a 'formal plan' that is 'prepared in advance', nor do they wish to. In fact, they deliberately avoid it. In which case perhaps *découpage* cannot be detected in their work. But if we view *découpage* as a form of decision-making that occurs not only *prior to* but also *during* the filming process, this offers more flexibility. It acknowledges that creative decisions as to how to film a scene are not always preplanned but can be responsive. In 1959, filmmaker Georges Franju described *découpage* as a 'spatial attitude' (Barnard 2014: 22), which implies that shaping space with the camera is guided by the demands of the narrative and also by the nature of the space in which one is filming. Referring to Bazin's writings on *découpage*, Barnard writes that to speak of *découpage* is to 'refer to a process, a nebulous, ineffable, diffuse creative process which in order to discern requires that we both plunge deeper into the work (and into the work of creating the work)' (Barnard 2014: 19). Barnard encourages us to persevere in our enquiry despite its ineffability. Pye warns us that 'the 'ineffable' dimensions of *découpage*… may be 'suggestive' or even seductive, but may be best avoided' (Pye 2015: 100). In this chapter I aim to avoid nebulous conclusions and to 'plunge deeper into the work' by looking 'into the work of creating the work'. If the study of *découpage* is to be intrinsically useful as a theoretical tool then it is worth seeing how – and indeed if – it can be usefully applied to two stylistically diverse films. One film demonstrates what one can recognise as a distinct and clear *découpage*, while the other presents the theorist with a challenge.

The *découpage* in *Craig's Wife* avoids elaborate camera positioning. There are no odd or intriguing camera angles, nor are there any quick or deliberately surprising shifts from one camera position to another. A stylistic tone which one could describe as cool and steady is established from the beginning of the film and the spectator becomes attuned to it. This is what makes the final moments of the film so extraordinary, because they are achieved with the minimum of fuss.

However, woven into this steady and processive unfolding of cinematic space there are cinematic flourishes. These flourishes are made all the more articulate by virtue of their rarity and precision.

The opening of the film is worth close examination. The credits fade to an empty frame, up into which the fleshy face of housekeeper Mrs Harold (Jane Darwell) suddenly swoops crying "Mazie!" The camera follows Mrs Harold as she dashes across to the fireplace to admonish poor Mazie the maid (Nydia Westman), who has been unwisely dusting an ornamental Grecian urn on the mantelpiece. "Take your hands off that!" Mrs Harold cries, quickly establishing how obsessed the mistress is with the house. She continues with a breathless list of perceived threats: "If there was such a thing as a pin out of place… she'd lose her mind… catch the first train home… you'd catch it from her alright if she was here!". This scene takes place in one shot with both women held in the frame. Mrs Harold ends her tirade with the injunction, "Mazie, never forget, this room is the holy of holies!". On this solemn pronouncement, we switch perspective entirely from close intimacy with the characters to what is the widest and deepest shot of the film.

This shot takes in the whole room (floors, walls and ceiling), the entire 'holy of holies', as well as the opening in the far wall leading to a distant hallway with a staircase rising up beyond. The camera is situated where the invisible fourth wall in a theatre would be, the frame effectively acting as a proscenium arch. The housekeeper and maid, standing to the right of the picture, are dwarfed by the space which surrounds them. We see and understand that this is a room full of symmetries; squares, verticals and the orthogonal convergence of lines. The opening at the back of the room, framed by white pillars and flanked by tall, black candlesticks, leads out into the hallway where another statuesque black candlestick dissects its pristine white space. The furniture is laid out with precision; chaise longue in the middle, grand piano and fireplace to the left and right, identical white cabinets in each far corner echoing white pillars which lead into the hall. Tall windows are bordered by long and sculptural drapes, a chandelier hangs dead centre carrying dark candles. The mathematical order which inheres in the room is underpinned by the chequerboard pattern on the floor. This room is a three-dimensional matrix in which nothing moves and nothing

is out of place – except for the two nervous little figures to the right. Arzner holds this picture, allowing us time for its absorption. There then begins a slow and steady dissolve into the next scene. As we watch one room become another, we realise it is a highly organised dissolve. It aligns the vertical lines and upright bodies in one room with six tall candlesticks on the table in another – a dining room where a man and woman (Walter Craig and his aunt) are finishing their supper. A slow dissolve such as this, so exacting and with 'not a pin out of place', is never repeated in the film. Situated at the opening of the film, it actively situates us within a process of reading images in a particular way. A room set out like a matrix dwarfing the two figures who move within its grid is systematically dissolved into another room which also contains vertical shapes and two figures. Such diagrammatic *découpage* and symmetrical mise-en-scène within the frame indicates a schematised mode of thinking. It sets the tone, the immediate purpose of which is not at first apparent to us but which surely has something to do with refining the way we watch the film, and with teaching us about how space is organised within the house. Something is being described for us and a way of watching is being inculcated. This dissolve is *conceptual* and initiates us into how to read significance into the spatial organisation of the film's themes.

Fig. 1.1 The stately dissolve

In her study of space and meaning in 17th century Dutch art, Martha Hollander looks at a tradition which explores the pictorial language of space. It is of interest here because it was a tradition in which artists explored the spatial illusionism of domestic space, 'based on the placement of figures and architectural elements in relation to one another' (Hollander 2002: 23). Hollander traces the 'evolution of pictorial syntax in the West' and how it enabled the representation of conceptual thinking in visual art in Europe (18). Various visual strategies were developed in the Middle Ages as an aural tradition gave way to a 'visual system of pictures and writing' (19). Hollander describes how artists invented ways to incorporate rhetorical play into the image; illustrated margins, 'speech bubbles', recessive spaces, geometric shapes and patterns, image layering and doors opening out into other worlds were all methods by which artists could make their pictures discursive, multi-layered and eventful. 'This new organization of signs – the diagram – was the essence of visual thinking' she writes, and 'a variety of figures or motifs could be displayed simultaneously on a page, automatically establishing certain relationships among them – explanatory, oppositional, or comparative' (19). Artists learnt how to make art that was representational *and* conceptual. Patterns, visual relationships and multitudinous events could both tell a story and promote allegorical thinking. Hollander observes how similar methods emerged in literature, and refers to Angus Fletcher's study of allegory. The diagrammatic and geometric forms in writing are 'both highly schematized means of thinking' writes Fletcher. 'By such abstractive means the poet can isolate the forms of nature and human conduct and can subject them to analysis' (Fletcher quoted in Hollander 2002: 23). Arzner's precisely aligned and carefully paced cinematic dissolve is an example of what Fletcher calls a 'visualising, isolating tendency' and is functional in this diagrammatic way. It aims to refine and sensitise our viewing, asking that we be attentive as we watch and become attuned to what Hollander describes as 'conceptual thinking in visual terms' (22). It indicates a style of *découpage* is at work.

The film portrays a woman who aligns herself with her home and its objects so utterly that she is incapable of human intimacy. In fact we learn that it is because she is incapable of human

intimacy that she organises herself in this way. “You want your house Harriet,” says her husband’s perceptive aunt Miss Austen (Alma Kruger), “and that is all you do want. And that’s all you’ll have at the finish”. Harriet successfully alienates each member of the household, driving every one of them away until at last she reaches her destination – a woman alone in her home, a woman-domus, a ‘house-wife’.

But in these final moments she is stricken and suddenly feels profoundly not ‘at home’. Made in 1936 when the societal role of women was in flux, *Craig’s Wife* was generally regarded as a film which would be of primary interest to women. Yet critical reception was shot through with misanthropy. Were women to relate to Harriet Craig as a mistress of the home and seeker of independence from patriarchy, or were they being warned away from such behavior because it means that one ends up alone? Were audiences to feel satisfaction at her ‘comeuppance’ (some audiences are reported to have cheered when Walter Craig finally walks out) or to feel compassion for her? Jeanine Basinger points out that these kinds of internal contradictions characterise the woman’s films of this period. In *A Woman’s View: How Hollywood Spoke to Women, 1930 – 1960* she writes:

> Thus, what emerges on close examination of hundreds of women’s movies is how strange and ambivalent they are. Stereotypes are presented, then undermined, and then reinforced. Contradictions abound [...] But they are more than plot confusion. They exist as an integral and even necessary aspect of what drives the movies and gives them their appeal. These movies were a way of recognizing the problems of women, of addressing their desire to have things be other than the way they were offscreen. (Basinger 1994: 7)

Within Arzner’s carefully composed frames there is primarily similarity, echo and reflection. The preponderance of horizontals and verticals created in the mise-en-scène (statues on plinths, candles on stands, lines and stripes on bedcovers and blinds) bolster the symmetry while indicating a repressive impulse at work. Within the frame, and within the house within the frame, there are

no opposites or alternatives, no 'rhetorical strategies of comparison and opposition' (Hollander 2002: 18). We may have depth of field in the vast living room, but no different world or alternative way of thinking is suggested beyond. Instead we see only more symmetry. This is Arzner's intention; to create a recursive world, a space continually folding back in on itself in a never-ending narcissistic urge. However, because such care is taken to preserve this 'sameness' it is all the more shocking when something is actually out of place. When we encounter things within the frame that do not concur with the symmetry, we know they cannot be borne by Harriet. They become polluting stains, such as cigarette butts flowing over the ashtray onto the surface of the coffee table, a white scratch on the brilliantine black floor, a Grecian urn out of place, wrinkles on the chaise longue, rose petals on the piano, and the maid's boyfriend in the kitchen. Arzner draws our attention to these stains so we become aware of them before Harriet does, and thereby await her response. In one scene her husband is talking to the little grandson of their neighbour outside the house. The picturesque scene is framed in the doorway and this is precisely how Harriet sees it when she comes down the stairs. We know what her response will be. Arzner is aware of the rhetorical power of such 'stains' within the image and uses them economically. The length apportioned to each shot and their slow and steady concatenation towards the film's climactic end, enables such 'stains' to accumulate and build up in pressure. There are no 'cutaway' shots to focus upon these visual aberrations. Instead, their alien-ness is allowed to bleed relentlessly into the image. This is particularly apparent in an early scene, in which we first meet Harriet as she returns home from visiting her terminally ill sister in hospital. She is bringing her niece Ethel (Dorothy Wilson) home with her on the train, ostensibly to give her a rest although we soon learn that such generous motives are not to be attributed to her. During their conversation, it becomes clear that the stranger seated between the two women with their back to them will never be referred to but will never go away. What is especially curious is that they appear out of nowhere. Arzner cuts to a few close-up shots of each woman as they discuss marriage, love and independence. "I married to be independent" says Harriet. "You don't mean independent of your husband too?" answers her niece, as we cut to her. "Independent of everybody" is Harriet's unequivocal reply. On this reply the shot cuts back to the wider shot of the two women, and in between them a large, dark seat with its

back to us has been inserted. Someone is sitting in it, we can just perceive the top of their hat. We cannot be sure if it is a man or woman, and the ambiguity is intentional. This figure and the seat they occupy was not there before, although there is a rather more oblique seat behind Ethel in which an elderly man has been seated throughout. The conversation continues with this huge, unknown figure sitting obtrusively between them and his or her presence slowly but surely inflects the rest of the scene. When Harriet proclaims, "No one can know another human being well enough to trust him", the 'stain' of this stranger visually reiterates her mistrust. The stage is set for the unravelling of the marriage which will take place when they arrive at Harriet's house. What we are seeing at work here is a conscious mise-en-scène, but also the spatio-temporal organisation of that mise-en-scène via *découpage*.

Arzner provides contrast within the shots themselves. But she does the same in the way she places the shots next to each other in her *découpage*. This is the defining feature of *découpage* that has been confused with the editing process. The nature and source of this confusion is clarified in Barnard's book and he quotes several filmmakers and theorists on the subject. Luis Buñuel distinguishes between the 'material segments (editing) and ideal segments (découpage)' (Barnard: 3). The physical act of cutting bits of film together differs from the act of imagining how they might work together. André Bazin describes *découpage* as 'the aesthetic of the relations between shots' (Barnard: 6), which is surely dangerously close to what editing can be. Barnard clarifies, 'Today we view these relations as the work of editing, but Bazin conceived shots as something created by the camera and their sequencing as envisioned at an earlier stage of a film's creation.' (Barnard: 6).

Arzner makes full use of this relationship between shots in her presentation of the house next door, which provides a stark contrast to the Craig residence. The neighbour, Mrs Frazier (Billie Burke), is inseparable from the roses she grows in profusion. "My roses will never take any prizes, but I love them". We first meet her outside watering her garden, "poor darlings, they get so thirsty after these long, hot days", when she and Walter have a neighbourly chat. This scene occurs at the beginning of the film before he drives off to visit a friend – something he is able to do only

because his wife is away visiting her ailing sister. Surrounded by abundant foliage that pays no attention to boundaries and has no truck with symmetry, Mrs Frazier is a vision of fecundity and goodwill. It is the lively movement of nature that we notice; the leaves and flowers moving in the breeze around her, growing recklessly through the lattice, the flickering shadows, the sheer messiness and unpredictability of living things. There are no frozen statues here. Mrs Frazier and her garden are brimful of vitality while the Craig residence feels as if it contains, in Miss Austen's words, "rooms that have died, and are laid out". When Walter leaves the house for the last time at the end of the film, he drives away into movement. We register the dappled light under trees, the play of shadows through leaves, a young boy riding a bike (who seems to look towards the house), the constant flow of life. When Arzner cuts back inside to show us Harriet's erect figure watching through the venetian blinds, shadows falling like bars upon the wall behind her, we inwardly choke with claustrophobia. Inside nothing moves nor must anything be moved. Mrs Frazier makes several appearances in the film, bringing roses to Walter's aunt and even bringing her small grandchild into the house. All these visitations are rebuffed by Harriet. She cannot abide them. The roses will drop petals in the house, the child will disturb the furniture – fecundity and growth must not defile the sterile order just as Walter must not mess up the bed by sitting on it.

Let us look more closely at the exquisitely paced final scene. Walter drives away for good and Harriet is left alone in the silence. As she turns away from the window some music starts which is hesitant but not unhappy. She moves across to the chaise longue (where Walter spent his final night), straightens the covers a little and tidies away the cigarette butts left by him the night before. But her movements are half-hearted and she leaves these tasks incomplete. Looking up, she sees the mirror over the mantelpiece and approaches it as if seeing something that needs to be done. She shifts the two classical busts at either end of the mantelpiece closer together. Yet her eyes flicker a little too quickly between them and her face is unsteady. She has her back to us but we can see her expression in the mirror, and we are able to watch closely because so far this scene has been filmed in one take. We notice how she becomes aware of the empty place between the statues. This is where the Grecian urn once stood, the one Mazie mistakenly moved at the beginning of the film

and which Mr Craig flung to the floor and smashed to pieces once he understood his marriage was a sham. It is not insignificant that this urn was Harriet's most prized possession. An urn is a funereal object, one which personifies "rooms that have died and are laid out". But now it is no longer there and Harriet falters. Her hands flicker into the gap as if trying to find something that is lost. It is a small gesture, but eloquent. The *découpage* has taught us to notice such things. As Hollander says about a tiny yet insignificant figure in a painting, it is 'like a grace note, small but transformative' (Hollander 2002: 167). At this moment, the doorbell rings. One could say that this ring is a call to attention, part of the slow and gradual 'calling to attention' of Harriet.

It is the young boy seen earlier on his bike, bearing a telegram. Arzner cuts to outside the door behind the boy's back, deliberately breaking the scene and our reflections upon it. But as Harriet signs for it and turns around to go back inside, we witness the real reason Arzner shows us the door – Harriet forgets to close it. She leaves it wide open, something she has never done before. In fact earlier in the film she admonished Mazie for not closing it. We notice this forgetfulness, in the same way that we notice Jeanne's slip-ups in Akerman's *Jeanne Dielman*. Harriet walks into the hallway and down into the living room reading the telegram, where we are given the luxury of a close-up. As suspected, it is not good news. The close-up allows us to observe Harriet's emotional shift – and to appreciate Russell's performance. Her eyes move up from reading, tears break and she collapses down out of the frame. This telegram surely announces the final departure from Harriet's life – the death of her sister. Arzner cuts to show us Harriet lying on the chaise longue, weeping into its suddenly disregarded silken covers. It is the first time in the entire film that we have seen her horizontal. She has been upright throughout, as rigidly vertical as the statues and pillars with which she surrounds herself. There is a sense of release and we feel we are at last seeing her vulnerable. It is an odd moment too because for once we feel the scene may not be organised. For why would it be? She is alone and only she generates the action now.

But in the distance the doorbell rings once again, another awakening in this slow process of agnition. Arzner takes us outside the front door once again, where we stand behind Mrs Frazier

who is bearing roses. She gingerly steps through the unexpectedly open door. Arzner need not have cut to the front door at this point. We could have remained upon Harriet crying on the chaise longue, heard the bell ring, and then watched Mrs Frazier enter into the hallway behind her. However, in taking us back outside Arzner echoes the earlier cut to the telegram boy. This reiteration is deliberate and serves to emphasise the slow, carefully paced concatenation of events. These scenes outside the front door were filmed and the relationship between them and those inside the house was envisioned prior to being physically put together in the editing suite. In his distinction between 'material segments' and 'ideal segments', Buñuel writes:

> The authentic moment in a film, creating through segmentation. A landscape, if it is to be recreated in cinema, must be segmented into fifty, a hundred or more bits. Later, these will follow on one after the other vermiculously, arranged in colonies, to compose the film… (Buñuel quoted in Barnard 2014: 3).

Returning to the previous wide shot of the living room with Harriet crying in the foreground, Mrs Frazier ventures into the hallway behind. She looks up the stairs and sensing no-one is there, approaches the steps into the living room. Harriet hears her and starts up. "I hope you'll forgive me for walking in like this…" Mrs Frazier says as she steps down into the room. Unaware that Harriet has driven her away, she explains she is bringing Miss Austen some roses. "She seemed to like them so much and I have so many…". She trails off. Harriet thanks her, something she has never done before, and automatically takes them from her. This has a special irony, given that previous rose offerings have been unceremoniously rejected by Harriet as messy. Understanding something must be wrong, Mrs Frazier asks after Harriet's sister and our fears are confirmed. Harriet tells Mrs Frazier (and us) that her sister died that morning at 6 o'clock. Mrs Frazier asks if there is anything she can do, her eyes sparkling with genuine sympathy. But Harriet replies softly as if from a great depth "I don't think there's anything anyone can do… that anyone can do…anyone can do". As she repeats these words she slowly sits back down, staring into space. Mrs Frazier backs away,

her legs literally leaving the frame. We see no shot of her actually leave, but remain looking at Harriet.

Harriet seems trance-like. “I’m all alone in the house now. I’m all alone here.” Russell speaks with a childlike quality which is touching. She continues, “So if you wouldn’t mind, I…” and looks up hopefully, a smile on her face, only to see there is no one there. In sudden panic she gets up and runs into the hallway, still clutching the roses. It is a funny, childish little run – as if to avoid slipping on the shiny floor. But it is one which endears her to us because her movements up till now have been so controlled. She stops still. We cut to a reverse shot of the front door closing slowly and silently, seemingly by itself. It is an uncanny moment, deliberately so, and seen from Harriet’s point-of-view. We cut to look directly at Harriet from the door’s point-of-view. She stretches her arm forwards in a gesture of appeal only to drop it realising there is no point. This was the last trace of human contact. The house has literally closed itself in upon her.

Now we approach the finale, which the music heralds in with a refrain heard in the opening credits. We cut to a highly composed shot, wide yet taken from a low angle, looking up at Harriet from the living room below. She stands statuesque, tall and dark-haired in the hallway, wearing a long silken robe, flanked on either side by pedestals, the massive staircase curving up to the right behind her. She slowly revolves to look up the staircase. Arzner moves her camera around to catch the expression on Harriet’s face as she turns, eyes searching, ears listening. She looks incredulous. This is attentive and meticulous *découpage* which rises to meet the measure and pace of Harriet’s slow psychic awakening. The scene is filmed with an observance commensurate to the magnitude of the moment. Harriet’s eyes move round again and we cut back to the other side of her body to watch as she turns back to face the living room laid out in front of her. It is clear that we are to be more concerned with watching Harriet *in the process* of seeing than we are to be with *what* she is seeing. The *découpage* and actress work together slowly and carefully, because the moment cannot be rushed. Harriet’s dark eyes are very wide and she looks as if she is seeing everything for the first time. She moves forward. At this point the film cuts to a wider shot set further back in space, taking

in the living room and Harriet surveying it from the top of the steps. It is not dissimilar to the wide shot at the beginning of the film. There is no point-of-view shot of the room as she looks at it. Beverle Houston suggests that Arzner's withholding of a reverse shot at this point demonstrates a subversive impulse in her *découpage*. After all, as Houston asks, 'Did she refuse, rethink, reformulate *any* elements of classic cinema, in whose history she is so repeatedly and insistently denied the place that may be understood in terms of these very interventions?' (1984: 26). Houston theorises that this refusal of a reverse shot denies us 'the primary mechanism of suture and of mastery through identification' (Houston 1984: 31). The film 'denies the viewer access, not to the woman, but to what she sees as she herself pursues an aggressive act of looking' (25). She draws upon the problematics of cinematic address as theorised by Doane. In 'The 'Woman's film': Possession and Address' Doane suggests that the female gaze in the woman's film, rather than assuming agency over the process of viewing, becomes turned in upon itself and the 'process of seeing is designed to unveil an aggression against itself' (Doane 1994: 288). Houston suggests that Harriet's prolonged looking at the room, without any answering shot to frame – or show ownership of – what she is looking at, serves to underline how she cannot possess what she sees. 'The woman who looks possesses nothing' she writes, 'yet she continues to look defiantly, so that we understand that to look is her crime' (Houston 1984: 31).

But Arzner does not completely eschew the point-of-view shot, as the shot of the closing front door shows. Arzner retrains the spectator not to expect or be satisfied by the counter-shot which confirms the seen object, but to discern in the image that which does not fit. The film invites us to read the screen carefully and to spot the stains that Harriet has yet to see. Thus, what we see in this final scene is that it is Harriet herself who does not fit. She takes this further by leaning against the wall – her diagonality at odds with the strict matrix that surrounds her. Arzner gives us time to look and to understand how alienated Harriet now feels. Finally she cuts to a close-up of Harriet's face – the final shot of the film. She judges it important for us to fully see Harriet emerge from her emotional paralysis and wake up to the empty stage set of her life.

In her article about the film (and more specifically about the collaboration between Arzner and the uncredited production designer William Haines), Lee Wallace writes:

> In *Craig's Wife* – this tendency of inanimate objects to come to symbolic life in the vicinity of the camera [a feature of melodrama's mise-en-scène] is reversed in the climactic scene of the film, in which a flesh-and-blood character takes on the quality of stone. (Wallace 2008: 397).

Giuliana Bruno reads this scene in a similar way:

> For Harriet the housewife, "house" and "wife" have been incorporated to such an extent that the wife has *become* the house. This shift is epitomised in a long shot in which Harriet Craig looks like a column as she stands in front of the staircase of her home. She has become the pillar of the house. There is such a collapse of body with building that, by the end of the film she has, *tout court,* become the house. (Bruno 2002: 90).

Bruno and Wallace see Harriet as having become another object in the house. We have well understood the over-signification Harriet places upon the arrangement of objects throughout the film. Yet to say she has now become one is not quite accurate. What one has been able to gradually perceive, and what has been made clearer to us in this slowly unfolding final scene, is that these objects are there to serve one purpose only – to mask the psychic abyss she cannot abide within herself. Their material presence prevents empty space itself from becoming visible. When Harriet comprehends that the urn on the mantelpiece is no longer there and her hands move anxiously into the gap as if trying to find it, she is beginning to feel something authentic. It is not yet a moment of agnition, but it is a movement towards it. Arzner's deceptively simple *découpage* invites us to follow a series of small steps and incremental moments, recorded in detail and in turn as Harriet proceeds towards what one might call the psychological 'grand reveal'. This is the joy of these

moments. They have a treasure-trail quality to them. We know where the treasure is but the heroine does not, and Arzner is in no rush to reveal it to her.

To return to the suggestion that Harriet has become absorbed into the house as an object at the end of the film, I would argue these interpretations fail to recognise the more radical aspects of Arzner's project. While they may be a response to ideological and feminist concerns raised by the film, they do not account for the estranging effect the house has upon her.

Audiences and critics at the time also responded to these ideological concerns, inevitable given the subject matter. As Kathleen McHugh writes in her article 'Housekeeping in Hollywood: The Case of Craig's Wife', 'For audiences in the twenties and thirties, the condemnation of a rigid, controlling, compulsive housewife would resonate with new cultural priorities stressing the importance of sex and romance in marriage' (McHugh 1994: 128-9). She goes on to quote a review from *Variety*, which noted Harriet's 'abnormal passion for householding at the expense of every other homely and affectionate relationship between man and wife' and coined her a 'married spinster' (129). The same magazine wrote:

> Every neighbourhood has its Mrs Craig whose husband is a sympathetic concern for other women… Men will secretly hope that overly meticulous wifes [sic] will see the show and that also should nudge the gate. (McHugh 1994: 124).

McHugh recognises how critical perception of Harriet as an 'inappropriate' wife accords with prevailing ideas about domesticity. She points out how these reviews perpetuate Harriet as 'representative of a certain social type' and acknowledges they only take the film at face value. For McHugh, the film tells a more complex story and this complexity is located in what she terms the 'fixed debate' between 'two historically chronological versions of marriage and domesticity' (McHugh 1994: 124). Basinger recognises the complexity within the audience. 'Let *that* be an appropriate warning to all the women in the audience' she writes about the ending of the film. But

she continues, 'And yet, with true contradiction, how many women out there would have been happy enough to have been left to themselves in a substantial house when they got home from the movies?' (Basinger 1994: 247).

But the film is more than an exploration of 'woman's place in the home' and the traditional positioning of the man as its master. Even as Walter lashes out at his wife, "The brass of you! And the presumption! You set yourself up to control the very destiny of a man!", this is an issue that raises its head along the way somewhat in the manner of a placard. It is something he is feeling, it is not an issue we are meant to particularly align ourselves with or against. It is woven into a film text that, I suggest, is attempting something more complex. If one is to read the final scene as the film's apotheosis, as I believe we need to, we can see this film is investigating being at home in a more fundamental sense. It is a portrayal of psychic estrangement, and broader issues of dwelling and a sense of our own emplacement in the world are at stake. In 'The World and the Home' Homi K. Bhabha writes, 'The unhomely moment creeps up on you as stealthily as your own shadow, and suddenly you find yourself, with Henry James's Isabel Archer, taking the measure of your dwelling in a state of 'incredulous terror" (Bhabha 1992: 141). Harriet stands still and aghast in her hallway, but not because she has become one with the objects and the house. In fact the opposite has taken place. The house and its objects have been suddenly decontexualised, and this in turn allows her own 'being-ness' to become recuperable to her. This sense of 'being-ness' or 'being-in-the-world' is theorised by Martin Heidegger as '*Da-sein'* (hereafter *Dasein*). Far from becoming one more object among many, Harriet experiences herself as alive and breathing among their inert and insensible array. Their usefulness to her, a usefulness Heidegger refers to as the 'ready-to-handness' of objects, no longer applies. They have been stripped of meaning. Once the meaning-making 'ready-to-handness' of the objects in the space around her is removed, Harriet's space is, to draw upon another Heideggerian concept, 'de-worlded' and no longer makes any sense. Experiencing such moments of clarity are, Heidegger proposes, fundamental and informative. They wake us up to our sense of *Dasein,* of our dwelling within the world. We cannot feel fully at home anywhere if we do not acknowledge this empty space, if we are not aware *at the same time* that we are also homeless.

Will this moment transform Harriet? We might be tempted to read this into the final seconds of the film. Harriet's eyes move upwards as if to heaven and her face is lit more intensely. But we cannot be expected to accept any last-minute recognition of a higher power as a convincing resolution. Arzner's quasi-conventional ending is deceptive. The film has a built-in ambivalence towards its subject, the 'holy of holies': The American Home. Harriet's gaze upward dissolves into the image of an open book on whose pages we read: "People who live to themselves, are generally left to themselves' – an admonishing adage reeled off earlier to Harriet by Miss Austen. The book slowly closes as the words 'The End' appear. But Arzner's ending is not a closed book and would have elicited more questions in the female (and male) audiences of its day than the above quoted critical responses might suggest. Does Harriet see the light? In one way she does. But not in any conventional, tidy sense. This might be an opportunity for her to change her life, something hinted at by her lifted face and the uplifting music which accompanies it. After all, Miss Austen and Mrs Harold team up to go off together on a world tour. Arzner poses a set of questions, and the proverbial quote at the end is not intended as a neat assumption. Houston rightly points out that the audience is left 'uneasy'.

Arzner does not leave the audience feeling 'uneasy' through her own indecision as a filmmaker. If we look at the way she prepared for the film, we see quite the reverse to be true. She signed up to direct *Craig's Wife* in 1936 and proceeded to make the film on her own terms. She arrived as an independent director at Columbia Studios in 1934 having been a studio director at Paramount until 1932. She negotiated her own contract to ensure significant control over production. This also exempted her from attending the story conferences traditionally held on producer Harry Cohn's yacht. Cohn was happy to concede as he had wanted her to work at the studio since 1927. But Arzner enraged Cohn by casting the relatively unknown actress Rosalind Russell without his approval. According to McHugh, 'Cohn retaliated by ordering a set, 'Columbia fashion', for the film'. However, this too Arzner took issue with. She had a distinct vision as to what the Craig interior should look like. Gwendolyn Audrey Foster describes how Arzner:

> famously insisted that the set for the Craig house be designed to look as cold and uninviting as a museum. She asked the art directors at Columbia to make the set of the house (a character in itself) appear to be very fake, like a giant overdressed dollhouse, but she was not at all happy with the results. (Foster 2014)

The set was gigantic. Wallace quotes a review from Modern Screen in 1936 describing the set as 'undoubtedly one of the most artistic and complete interiors ever constructed on the lot. A ten-room house was built in its entirety, with an estimated cost of $60,000 in furnishings' (Wallace 2008: 405). Cohn threatened to fire Arzner after this expense was revealed. But Arzner was unhappy with the art directors' choice of furnishings. McHugh relates how 'Arzner simply hired interior designer William Haines and the two of them "sneaked into the studio at night and transformed the set according to Arzner's wishes"'. (McHugh quoting from *Features and Directors: Films Directed by Women* 1974, in 1994: 127). Once Arzner and Haines had subversively prepared the space themselves, she set about filming it as she wished.

This leads me to a final point about Arzner's *découpage*. Most of the film's action happens inside the house. This enabled Arzner to shoot the film chronologically, 'in the right order as though it were a play' (Wallace 2008: 397). This method was not standard Studio practice. But Arzner understood it would help crew and actors graduate towards the film's conclusion. Everything could unfold inside the house. This provides me with an appropriate turning point in my discussion. *A Woman Under the Influence* was also filmed in chronological order (apart from a few exterior shots). But Cassavetes's film features a house totally unlike the Craig residence. It also exhibits a *découpage* – if we can reliably assert that there is one – which functions in an entirely different manner.

The Longhetti home is a 'blue-collar' household as opposed to the 'white-collar' household of the Craigs. The source of the Craig wealth is not visible. But we see how hard Nick Longhetti

(Peter Falk) works, leading a team of workers in the municipal waste disposal department. Neither woman works – an obvious point but one which might need reiterating. The Longhetti house is messy and mutable. Rooms double up and routes within the house are fluid. There are sliding glass doors inside, the dining room doubles as the conjugal bedroom and the sofa opens out to become a double bed. Harriet's marriage bed is inviolate and it is made clear that not much sex, if any, goes on beneath its unruffled covers. The Longhetti marriage bed is a site of intimacy. It is downstairs in the dining room and open to all as well as the couple themselves – three children, Mabel's mother, even a man Mabel picks up in a bar. What kind of *découpage* is deployed to portray this environment?

We first meet Mabel Longhetti (Gena Rowlands) in the hectic process of packing her three children off into her mother's car. We have learnt that she and Nick have a special night planned, as in an earlier phone call with his boss we hear Nick refusing to work on this particular evening. This scene outside provides much information about Mabel and the family dynamics. She rushes frenetically to and fro making sure everything is packed. There is a breathless quality to the way she runs around and this is reflected in the mobile, darting camerawork and the sudden cuts between shots. It is clear Mabel adores her children and is overflowing with energy. We also intuit that she is a nervous character prone to anxiety. She attends to every worry as it occurs and there is pressure on every moment. The camera rushes around trying to keep up. She waves them off, then turns towards the house muttering "I shouldn't have let them go…". She runs across the front lawn, losing and retrieving a shoe in the process. The film pre-empts her entrance and cuts to the interior of the house.

The camera looks along the hallway with the front door on the left. Placing the camera inside before Mabel enters emphasises this quiet, interior world. An ambivalence about the home and Mabel's loneliness within it is suggested, a theme at the heart of the film. The camera is no longer restless and we see a composed, carefully lit shot of the interior. The hallway is never as dark or shot with such a depth of field as it is here. For Cassavetes, this effect is easy enough to obtain:

> We all know how to make something lonely. You go far away and you light it very dimly here and there and very sketchily and very beautifully depending on how you want to do it, and you shoot wide angle and you let a woman wander through a house. It's easy to make a woman lonely… (Interview in 1975, found in Carney 2001: 342)

But he continues, 'What's important is that Gena [Rowlands] goes out and takes her kids and sends them away from her house so she can be alone with her husband'. This qualification provides insight into Cassvetes's priorities. Creating a beautiful shot of the hallway is possible, but it is not his prime concern – nor is it to be ours. He frames it here as something 'we' could all do, and no special skill or relevance is to be attributed to it. What is important is what is going on the scene. The history behind this shot is informative. It was set up by Caleb Deschanel, a 'star student' at the American Film Institute, who Cassavetes initially hired as director of photography as part of his deal with the AFI in return for the loan of their equipment. However, Cassavetes soon clashed with Deschanel's more conventional approach and dismissed him a few weeks into the shoot. Deschanel's methods entailed detailed preparation and long lighting and camera set-ups. Such crafted work is time-consuming and inevitably requires actors and the rest of the crew to wait around. For Cassavetes, this was neither necessary nor productive and crucially, it prevented actors from working well. In a recorded discussion with Rowlands and a live audience (given while publicising the film and written up in Carney's 2001 book), Cassavetes states the following things:

> It's much easier for an operator to follow action that's free and natural than staged action… If the action is wrong and you don't believe it and you're not zeroed into it and it's phony and it stinks – your photography stinks…

> It's much easier not to stage – but of course you must be prepared… We're in a room here and I have a camera and I gotta shoot everybody in the room that's the problem… you gotta be a good focus puller, gotta have good depth…

(Cassavetes audio interview 1975, accessed on cinephiliabeyond.org)

These statements show the tension at the heart of Cassavetes's method. No amount of wonderful photography will matter if the action is 'phony'. Yet one must be prepared. Michael Ventura's book detailing the shooting of the director's later film *Love Streams* (1984) provides further insight into this methodology, and the frustration it could cause. Cassavetes says (italics are in the text):

> Only a schmuck comes on the set day after day, every day, and says it has to be *this* way, we have to follow *that* decision. The film goes its own way, makes its own demands, *and you go with it*. If you don't, you're dead. They say, 'You always change your mind.' Yes! I change my mind! I change. (Cassavetes in Ventura 2007: 78-79)

A Woman Under the Influence was largely understood by critics and audiences to be improvised because the actors' performances seem so natural. But Cassavetes made it clear this was not the case and that only 'two lines in *A Woman Under the Influence* were actually improvised' (Carney 2001: 341). He may change his mind and be open to creative input from the actors, but this does not preclude conscious shaping of his narrative. This is a fine line to tread. Ventura states that Cassavetes:

> … refuses to acknowledge that he's a fully conscious artist – though on the set it's clear he's seeking specific effects, consciously *every* time. As he often says, he doesn't know what's going to happen, as a director… but the not-knowing is contained within a strict framework of possibilities, a framework he's conscious of and certain about… (Ventura 2007: 108)

Cassavetes strives to dismantle unnecessary method and to inculcate total freedom on set. 'My system is to create as much confusion as I possibly can so that actors have the full knowledge that they're on their own' he claims (Cassavetes quoted in Carney 2001: 331). Yet on the set of this film certain rules were also applied. Actors were 'expected to leave their ordinary identities behind and

become the strangers they are in the film'. They were to 'stay in character, or at least not to blatantly come out of character'. They were forbidden to 'discuss their characters and roles with each other' and there was to be no 'chit-chat'. Can one find any working form of *découpage* given such an apparently contradictory ethos?

Fig. 1.2 Mabel walks through the dark hallway

Let us look further at the action in this scene. Mabel rushes in and slams the front door. The camera remains still. She pauses, and then performs an odd series of gestures. Walking towards camera, she points to parts of the room as if marking them out, making little sounds as she does so. She then turns and walks away to the room beyond. In the far doorway she repeats the same gestures before turning to her right. At this point she would effectively walk out of our view. Cassavetes cuts to a nearer view through the glass screen doors, enabling us to see Mabel thwack a large box down from the top of a cupboard. We would have missed this idiosyncratic gesture had the film's *découpage* held back in the hallway. Once we have registered the gesture – which tells us a lot about Mabel's excitement and natural sense of bravura – Cassavetes returns to the previous position. We watch from afar as she unpacks the box at the foot of the bed, bringing out a pink fluffy garment and some matching mules. These are obviously not worn often (if ever) and are being brought out for the special evening. Overall, the static camera and long shot allows us to

appreciate how Mabel grounds herself in and is grounded by her home and to register her adjustment to the empty space of the house.

Fig. 1.3 Mabel marks out her territory

Yet outside the camera was constantly on the move, and we learn no less about her. These contrasting scenes show how the film's *découpage* has no singular shaping mechanism. This is not due to the departure of Deschanel, although that accounts for the stand-alone nature of this individual hallway shot. An oscillation between moving and static shots shapes the whole film. Both positions are an attempt by Cassavetes's *découpage* to absorb as much about the character as possible. But there is a third and notable feature in the film's *découpage*. At close points of intimacy, characters walk away from the camera altogether.

Such a feature occurs at the end of this scene. Mabel realises Nick is not coming home. It is only after she sits immobilised with drink and disappointment late into the night that we find out what has happened. We cut to a chaotic scene downtown with water gushing everywhere, emergency vehicles, flashing lights and men in yellow jackets. Nick had to work after all and has failed to let Mabel know. He finally calls from a phone box to explain but it is too late. "I'm fine Nick, please believe me it's fine", she says. Yet when she slams down the phone the camera is close enough to observe her face twitch and twist with inner turmoil. Mabel then stands up and walks

away. The camera is left behind and we can only watch the back of her dress as she recedes. It would seem the *découpage* is playing a double game. It shows everything and yet it also cuts us out. Is one to conclude that the camera, which stands in for our own involved gaze, can never be capable of seeing everything? If we do arrive at this conclusion, which I believe Cassavetes's *découpage* gives us no option but to do, this reveals something significant about his views on reality. Mabel, so intimately available to us for so much of the time, cannot be fully known or accommodated. She can simply walk away. This third stylistic feature gives back privacy to the characters. 'All people are really private' says Cassavetes, 'as a writer and a director, you understand that that's the ground rule: people are private' (Cassavetes quoted in Carney 2001: 335). We may be coming a little closer to understanding the responsive nature of the *découpage* in the film. But how does Cassavetes's camera shape the space in which they live? Does it contribute towards our understanding of their interiority? Or is it just an empty shell?

Cassavetes filmed wide shots and close-ups with the same long lenses. This allowed the actors to be filmed closely without being obtrusive. But it was also a practical response to the space of the house. 'One of the reasons we used long lenses especially for all the work in the house, was to avoid a feeling of confinement' recalls Cassavetes. 'So much of the picture takes place in the Longhetti house there's a real danger of getting a feeling the actors are locked in by the camera' (Carney 1985: 188). It becomes clear that the physical environment in which they were shooting actively inflected the *découpage*. The decision to use long lenses had formal consequences of which Cassavetes was aware.

> I knew it would be technically impossible to do it all in focus. The operator and the focus puller couldn't possibly be in concert because there'd be no way of knowing where the actors would be at any one moment. It had to be a natural thing: certain things would come and go in focus because there were so many points of interest switching back and forth all the time. (Carney 1985: 199).

There were two cameras on set; a large and heavy 35 mm Mitchell BNC and a lighter, handheld Arriflex. Mike Ferris or Al Ruban shot the static and wide shots on the Mitchell, while Cassavetes shot close-ups and moving action with the Arriflex. As indicated earlier, the deal with the AFI meant that most of the crew were students learning on the job. Once Deschanel had departed Cassavetes recruited the 'lowly apprentice' Mike Ferris to shoot the film (Carney 2001: 347). According to Ferris, Cassavetes told him 'You and I are going to shoot this thing together!' (347). Technique was not to get in the way of what is important – the ability of the actors to express themselves. Ferris's account reveals the collaborative way in which they worked:

> We would light the rooms with photofloods, because you couldn't be stopping the action once it started [...] We would try to get a feel of what was going on as he would set things up. Then we'd put the camera here and another camera there, and the actors would start to go and we'd get what they did, documentary style. (Ferris in Charity 2001: 123).

700,000 – 1,000,000 feet of film were shot overall (figures from Cassavetes and Ferris respectively) producing over a hundred hours of footage – wildly in excess of normal studio shooting ratios. Cassavetes's primary aim was to create a working atmosphere in which his actors could be as exploratory and inventive as possible. Tom Charity explains:

> Cassavetes's 'realism' is not a question of diligently accumulated props and exemplary art direction, except at the most elementary level; his authenticity is above all temporal, and based on a strict philosophical commitment to the present tense, the actor's perceptual realization of the moment. (Charity 2001: 121)

But how does an audience read this form of *découpage*? Can anything be understood or gleaned from the final film, or are we simply required to lose ourselves in what Carney calls the "expressive disarray" of the characters (Carney 1991: 109)?

Let us turn to the house and see if it provides any answers. The choice of house was not a random one. Cassavetes looked at around 150 houses in Los Angeles before he found the right one. It had to be appropriate for the socio-economic status of the family and a home they could realistically afford.[3] The house has an awkward topography and was not an easy space in which to film. There is a narrow, wooden staircase, a bathroom downstairs with doors into it from rooms on either side, a small kitchen at the end of a narrow corridor, and one bedroom for three children. It is larger than it appears in the film. All the equipment had to be stored in the house and a production office installed, so at least one room upstairs was unavailable. Members of the crew slept in the house throughout the shoot and used its facilities. Like the fictional family inside it, cast and crew inhabited the space. The house became a nexus between reality and fiction. Carney records how:

> Rowlands said that since the cast and crew worked together in such a small space for such long hours, almost living together as a kind of big happy family, by the second week of shooting she felt that she actually lived there – that it really *was* her house. She moved through the spaces, from room to room, naturally. (Carney 2001: 320-1).

If we look more closely at this home, so different to the house in Arzner's film, we find a house full of spatial inconsistencies. Most of the action takes place downstairs in the room which doubles as dining room and Nick and Mabel's bedroom. Their bed is a sofa during the day and folds out into a bed at night. Therefore the room is both a public and a private space. It is divided from the hallway by a pair of glass screen doors which slide open from the middle. These can be locked from the inside (dining room side) preventing access from the hall. But the room can be accessed via a circular route through the kitchen and bathroom. Therefore, if the screen doors are locked one can just go around the other way. They are covered with net curtains, but it is not that difficult to see through them. The room is set at the corner of the house with two large windows on adjacent sides

3 Cassavetes also created the believable backstory that it was the in-laws who helped finance the purchase of the house.

of the bed covered by venetian blinds. These do not provide full privacy or entirely shut out the light from outside. Opposite the bed on the other side of the room is a closed door, on which a conspicuous official-looking sign reads 'PRIVATE'. This door leads directly into the bathroom which leads into the kitchen and back (via the corridor) into the hallway. As the film unfolds, we learn that borders are not stable in this house. One can see through to the bedroom from the hall, and one eats in the same room in which Nick and Mabel sleep. The bathroom has a sign on it saying 'PRIVATE' and yet it is easy to walk through. The screen doors can be locked, but fail to keep anyone out. At one point, finding the screen doors locked and wanting to speak to a non-responsive Mabel within, Nick simply goes around the other way to get into the room. There is a touch of farce to this house. Privacy is not available and any attempt to uphold it becomes absurd. Is this why the bathroom door is emblazoned with such an outsized sign? It looks like something indicating an area reserved for staff – so to whom is it addressed? Perhaps it is taken from Nick's municipal workplace, and erected in recognition of the lack of privacy to which the couple are subjected? These small hints towards farce and humour, delivered without words but told in the spatial language of the house, tell us something important about the idiosyncratic and insecure natures of Mabel and Nick. The house is a topographical representation of the unstable psychic lives of its inhabitants.

Like an inconsistent parent who imposes arbitrary rules when they feel out of control, borders in this house are either wholly disregarded or suddenly applied. The house is in an active relationship with its inhabitants – it is formed by them and forms them. Cassavetes became aware of this correlation during the making of the film. 'There's the outside world and there's the inside world' he said afterwards, and continued:

> The inside world is your home, your family, the things that create emotions within you. The outside world is you: where you are going and how you move and where you fly, you know? And they are two worlds. I really believe – after making the picture, not before – that the

> inside world really holds you, really contains you, can cause you pain that you didn't show outside, and that is why no one ever talks about it.
> (Loeb, Interview: March 1975)

That we are able to perceive this complex and reflective relationship between house and inhabitants is attributable to the efforts of Cassavetes to remain responsive not only to his actors, but to the creative possibilities of the space that surrounds them.

Mabel's behaviour becomes progressively more erratic the more profoundly she is unsupported and misunderstood by her husband. Even in this film made in 1976, we find the 'old themes' playing out: the hysterical woman, the controlling man, the confining house. But Nick and Mabel are complex characters and Cassavetes has no easy answers or conclusions. In an attempt to be a good mother, Mabel organises a small after-school party for her children and a few of their friends at which she encourages the children to dress up and have fun. In the ensuing melee her thrilled daughter ends up running through the house naked. Nick and his mother return to find the house in what they perceive to be an uproar. While in our more enlightened age we might experience this as a child having fun in their own home, they see it as domestic chaos and neglect bordering on abuse. "This kid is naked!" screams Nick's mother Margaret. "Who took your clothes off? Your mummy took your clothes off darling?" she shrieks to the mischievous little girl who becomes increasingly scared by their response. We witness how Nick, although he loves Mabel, is incapable of accompanying his wife as a true emotional partner in this film. He shows himself unable to fully escape his repressive upbringing, a pedagogy formidably personified in the figure of his mother (played by Cassavetes's own mother Katherine Cassavetes). After sending the other children packing and assaulting their father in the process, Nick orders his children to get dressed, keep quiet and go to bed. The camera is handheld throughout this scene, following the characters around the house.

In a later scene, we see how both cameras work in unison. In a moment of great treachery Nick has Mabel committed to an asylum. Six months later she is released and we move towards the final act. Their reconciliation is sudden. Nick surpasses himself in insensitivity by inviting a crowd of friends, acquaintances and strangers to welcome Mabel back. Margaret (to her credit) realizes this is a mistake and they are asked to leave. Only close family remain. Mabel arrives, well-dressed and subdued. She shyly requests to see the children, who are waiting patiently behind the screen doors in the dining room. Mabel slowly slides open the doors to go inside. In the following scene our look is closer to her than at any point in the film. Sometimes Cassavetes's handheld camera goes out of focus and Rowlands's face slips out of the centre of the frame. But we are accustomed to such cinematographic informalities and undisturbed by them. In return we can watch her face intently as she reacts to the waves of love flowing from the children. We cannot see them but their enfolding voices are more eloquent as a result. "Are you feeling better Mom? Have you got any more stomach aches? And have you got any more headaches?" "No… I'm just trying very hard not to get excited…" she whispers, "Ok, no emotions now, I really wanna be calm." Mabel knows she must present herself as a coherent 'sane' being and go back into the living room to face the family. We cut to a composed shot of the living room (no doubt the Mitchell camera) showing this grim group anxiously awaiting her entrance. We watch them watching as she slides the glass doors offscreen. We then cut to their point-of-view. We see Mabel still in her coat, standing in front of the screen doors with her head bowed, children just visible through the net curtains behind. It is a devastating portrait of a woman suppressing her liveliness, divided from her children and from the energy and love of that encounter – not by any massive, unscalable barrier, but by an ineptly screened glass door. This is the way families work. Psychic rules are played out spatially in the topography of their homes. None of this is stated in words, but all is conveyed visually. This scene would not have been planned beforehand in the way of classical *découpage*. Cassavetes prepared no storyboard and planned no series of shots in advance. This meaningful shot was uncovered *during* the process of filming and is pieced together by us as we watch. Rather than pointing things out, this form of *découpage* allows things to be discovered.

The ending comes quickly. After an awkward attempt at a family meal, Mabel struggles not to be 'inappropriate'. She tells jokes and the children laugh, get excited and stand on their chairs. Inevitably Nick loses his temper and shuts the effervescence down. "Siddown that's the end of the jokes!", he yells at them all. "Now we kill the jokes and we just talk! Hello! How are you! Conversation! Weather! Conversation!". After her father fails to stand up for her, Mabel has a relapse. Retreating into the privacy of her own world (for there is none in the house itself) she ends up standing on the sofa humming the music to Tchaikovsky's *Swan Lake*. (This music has imaginative significance for her – we remember it playing at the curtailed children's party earlier in the film). After looking on helplessly the defeated family leave and Nick and the children are left alone with her. In the ensuing struggle Mabel rushes into the bathroom and attempts to slit her wrists. Nick forces the razor out of her hand surrounded by the screaming children. She runs back to the sofa and stands on it in a trance, her hand dripping with blood. Shockingly, Nick resorts to knocking her down onto the floor.

As she lies there recovering, Nick struggles to carry the three children upstairs. Undaunted, they repeatedly storm back downstairs to protect her. Once again, this scene borders on the farcical. We see them clamber up and down the dark and narrow staircase. Finally, Mabel gets up. The children surround her and Nick gives up trying to corral them. "They wanna know if you're alright", he says with a smile. An invisible tension is released. Mabel seems to come out of a trance. Together they take the children upstairs. She bonds with each one in turn as they put them to bed. "You know I'm really nuts!" she says as they go back downstairs. "I don't even know how this whole thing got started!" Nick washes and dresses her hand and they start to clear the table. We watch them go through these humdrum motions, walking back and forth into the kitchen with trays, switching off lights in the living room. Then they prepare the bed. They move the table and chairs back, unfold the sofa, get out the bedding and, importantly, ignore a ringing phone. They are putting their broken life back together via these simple household rituals. Now there is no more close, anxious following around of Nick and Mabel in the *découpage*. Instead the camera hangs back in the hallway and we watch them through the open screen doors. Nick turns to perform one

more ritual. He slides the doors closed in front of us and draws the curtains across the glass. We can just see them chatting and laughing through the thin veil. But we are no longer allowed into their life. The *découpage* makes it clear that there is no more for us to see. It is the one point in the film at which we feel the borders really are being drawn definitively.

Carney suggests that Cassavetes wants to 'teach his viewers radically new ways of knowing – new ways of understanding themselves and others'. In order to achieve this goal, 'the filmmaker fully understood that disorientating his viewers, attacking their viewing habits, making them uncomfortable might be the necessary first step in this direction' (Carney 1991: 106). He suggests that Cassavetes's fractured, seemingly improvisational *découpage* – which looks as if it is just following the flow – is designed to divert the audience away from expectations about how cinematic narratives normally behave. Carney again:

> In comparison with the schematic crises and externalized struggles of other films (where characters face clear problems with well-defined solutions), Cassavetes's work explores twilight areas in our lives: subtle self-betrayals, secret bewilderments, and failures of self-awareness. That is, I believe, what he was getting at when he once said that contemporary filmmakers must move "beyond the artificial conflicts of melodrama," in order to define "new kinds of problems" deeper than those generated by external conflicts. (Carney 1991: 106)

But even the messy 'twilight areas' in our lives need shape for an audience to comprehend them as such. Moreover, as we have seen in *Craig's Wife*, a schematic approach does not foreclose ambiguity. It just enables it to be seen in a different way. Given that Arzner operated within the strict confines of the Hollywood system and was embedded in a narrative system that upheld what Cassavetes might term the "artificial conflicts of melodrama", it is astonishing that the ending to her film is as unusual as it is. Arzner does not employ her camera in any radical way. But the steady shapeliness of her *découpage* allows her film to proceed unflinchingly towards its shocking

conclusion. The unsettled *découpage* of Cassavetes works assiduously in the present tense to portray complicated, emotionally messy characters. The film's receptive and unobtrusive style gives space to the actors. But as we have also seen, it holds back in mute acknowledgement of their ultimate separation from us.

It would be more useful to discuss what *type* of *découpage* this is, rather than whether or not it exists at all. One could call up conventional categories of 'classical' (Arzner) and 'modern' (Cassavetes). But these oppositions are problematic, as Linda Williams points out in '"Tales of Sound and Fury…" or, the Elephant of Melodrama' (2018: 209). 'Hardly anyone spoke of a "classical" cinema during what many agree was its heyday' she writes, and continues:

> The vast majority of early observers, especially the classically inclined French, admired the energy, speed, and dynamism of the cinema – attributes associated with modernity that seemed in direct opposition to what they observed in the classicism of art and drama. (Williams 2018: 209)

Annette Michelson's doubled description of filmic style as both the 'structural and sensuous incarnation of the artist's will' is useful (Michelson 1969). Arzner's *découpage* could be described as structural and Cassavetes's as sensuous. We could also regard Arzner's *découpage* as 'theme-led' and Cassavetes's as 'actor-led'. What is clear is that the way both films are shot reflects their subject matter. Arzner's style is as symmetrical and schematic as the house in which her characters live. She creates a character who arranges her life along strict and emotionally arid lines. By following a systematic route, Arzner can eventually overturn the system and lead us calmly towards an epiphany of surprising alterity. Cassavetes's camera serves his actors, giving them space to perform and invent. As a result, this actor-led *découpage* is as mutable as the characters and house in which they live. Through this more responsive and reactive route, Cassavetes can bring us into a closer encounter with the messy complexity of their – and our – inner lives.

Victor Perkins writes in *Film as Film* that, 'In the cinema style reflects a way of seeing, it embodies the filmmaker's relationship to objects and actions' (Perkins 1993: 134). He does not use the word *découpage,* but instead uses the phrase a 'way of seeing'. The 'way of seeing', the *découpage,* in each of these two films serves the aims and worldviews of two very different filmmakers making films in different contexts. One is nested inside the studio system, and one is radically outside it. Close analysis shows how, although their strategies differ, each film achieves what Turim describes as the 'filmic transformation of architecture into a conceptual rather than a referential space' (Turim 1991: 29).

In the next chapter, I explore how mise-en-scène works upon interior space. I study two films that pose a challenge to traditional mise-en-scène analysis and engage in a parallel attempt to adapt and clarify critical terminology and practice.

Fig. 1.4 Cassavetes filming Gena Rowlands in 'A Woman Under the Influence'

Fig. 1.5 Arzner on the set of Craig's Wife with cinematographer Lucien Ballard

Chapter 2

Mise-en-Scène:
Picturing the Rooms

This is a home. Warm and friendly as a home should be.
But not for us… not for us…
From 'No Man of Her Own'

At the end of *Strangers When we Meet* (Quine 1960), architect Larry Coe (Kirk Douglas) and his neighbour Maggie Gault (Kim Novak) visit a newly built house in the Los Angeles hills. Larry designed it and it has been in construction throughout the film. Their first illicit meeting took place on the site when it was just an empty plot of land. Maggie helped him measure out the area, they literally marked out the plot together. This is the first time Maggie, and the film audience, see the long-awaited house. It is beautiful and contemporary; made of wood, perched on the hilltop overlooking the valley, spacious, Japanese inspired, full of coloured glass and light. But it is to be their last meeting. Larry realises he cannot break up his marriage. As they stand in the empty space (the client has not yet moved in), they realise it has been their house all along. It personifies a relationship they dream about but can never have. They must return to their conventional 'all-passion-spent' marriages and Levitt-style suburban homes. The fabric of stability is maintained for the good of all. As Larry turns to watch Maggie leave, three pools of coloured light remain on the floor where she has been standing, a trace of her presence. Over his right shoulder we see a balcony looking out over the hills beyond, gesturing towards a future they will never journey into. None of this is expressed verbally, the two can barely talk to each other, yet all of it we comprehend. The building of this house has been so deeply imbricated with their growing relationship that we cannot help but 'read' this scene in this way. The house speaks for itself. The eloquence of the rectangular screen space is augmented by the skilful use of CinemaScope, a screen ratio which provides an even wider screen within which to visualise this encounter. It is a width almost double that of the previously more common Academy format. That this shot helps elevate this scene (and indeed the

entire film) from what might have remained a predictable, middle-of-the-road romance movie into something more complex, moving and expressive, is due in no small part to the contribution of cinematographer Charles Lang, who was nominated for 18 Academy awards during his career.[4] In her analysis of architectural space in the film *Gaslight* (Cukor 1994) film scholar Anne Goliot draws our attention to the innate ability of film to sculpt space and make it meaningful. Film, Goliot suggests, allows two things to happen; it both 'speaks of space' and 'makes space speak' (Goliot 1991: 71, my translation). This final scene of *Strangers When we Meet* is one example of just how eloquent space on screen can become.

Fig. 2.1 Larry watches Maggie leave in 'Strangers When we Meet'

In this chapter, I focus upon ways in which material space is transfigured into suggestive onscreen space through the mise-en-scène in two films: *Exhibition* (Hogg 2013) and *Jeanne Dielman, 23, quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles* (hereafter referred to as *Jeanne Dielman,* Akerman 1975).

Spatial theorist Elisabeth Grosz writes that the 'ways in which space has been historically conceived have always functioned either to contain women or to obliterate them.' (1994: 26). While

[4] Lang is thus placed equal first among the most nominated cinematographers by the Academy along with Leon Shamroy

this polemical statement speaks true, it does not speak for all women all of the time, nor does it account for the complexity of their lived experience within the spaces of their homes. D (Viv Albertine) and Jeanne (Delphine Seyrig) rely upon the spatial inscription of themselves into their homes to provide them with a sense of psychic emplacement and stability. But their feelings are rooted in ambivalence. It is worth investigating whether these onscreen dwelling places offer any more ambiguous or multidimensional readings than the bleak alternatives posited by Grosz and if so, how this is achieved through the use of mise-en-scène.

Before I proceed, it is worth clarifying what I mean by mise-en-scène. Critical literature on the subject is extensive and definitions have shape-shifted over time. But as Frank Kessler proposes in his recent monograph on the subject, film theorists and critics must 'come to grips' with mise-en-scène, 'embracing it, rejecting it or simply trying to grasp the possibilities it offers, the effects it can produce and the functions it can fulfil' (2014: 49). The trajectory travelled by the concept in writing about film is charted by Kessler as well as by John Gibbs (2002, 2013) and Adrian Martin (2011, 2014). These works situate the concept historically and culturally, which helps to explain how and why definitions differ. Although Kessler concludes that mise-en-scène 'remains an utterly elusive term' (49), we find a variety of useful and succinct definitions offered in these works: 'the contents of the frame and the way that they are organised' (Gibbs 2002: 5); 'to shape and give body to the diegesis, the world in which the story occurs' (Kessler: 33-34); 'the art of arranging, choreographing and displaying… what is staged (predominately, actors in an environment) for a camera' (Martin 2014: 15). The concept of mise-en-scène has also come under some scrutiny. Gibbs, Kessler and Martin all set out to ascertain how the concept is 'holding up' and to reposition it as an indispensable critical tool for film analysis. The final scene from *Strangers When We Meet* shows how generative mise-en-scène analysis can be when applied to a classical Hollywood film. But mise-en-scène criticism is challenged when faced with films which deliberately withhold meaning and which employ fragmentary and non-communicatory ways of telling a story. *Jeanne Dielman* and *Exhibition* organise the relationship between body and space

within the cinematic frame in particular ways. But both films resist traditional methods of mise-en-scène analysis.

The characters in these films may not consciously ascribe meaning to the spaces and objects with which they are surrounded, but we as theorists and audiences certainly tend to. That there is a world of significance embodied within and emanating from mute environments and objects which the mise-en-scène draws to our attention has been identified as one of the primary operating drives of melodrama in the cinematic medium. As Laura Mulvey succinctly puts it, 'The investment of meaning in mise-en-scène and certain privileged objects has generally been considered to be a defining characteristic of the melodrama's aesthetic' (Mulvey 2016: 28). However, one might not immediately identify these two films as melodramas. Both valorise the undramatic 'everyday-ness' of life and show us such prosaic events as washing-up, looking out of a window, or walking down a road. Ivone Margulies' book about Chantal Akerman's work is not inappropriately titled *Nothing Happens* (1996). Yet *Jeanne Dielman* culminates with a murder and *Exhibition* with a wrenching move out of a beloved house. Theorists remind us that melodrama takes its stand in this 'material world of everyday reality and lived experience' (Gledhill 1994: 33). Gledhill corrects the erroneous belief that contemporary 'non-dramatic' realism usurps old-fashioned 'dramatic' melodrama. On the contrary, she writes, 'as realism offers up new areas of representation, so the terms and material of the world melodrama seeks to melodramatise will shift. What realism uncovers becomes new material for the melodramatic project' (31).

We can better identify *Exhibition* and *Jeanne Dielman* as 'melodrama manqués'. Louis Bayman introduces us to this concept in his essay on postwar Italian cinema, itself a contribution to *Melodrama Unbound* (Gledhill & Williams 2018). This recent volume revisits the melodramatic 'field' theorised by Gledhill in 1987 and redraws it into a 'mode'. In his contribution to this renewed theoretical impulse, Bayman offers the 'melodrama mancato' or 'manqué'. These are what one might call '"failed" melodramas', in as much as they are films in which an avoidance of the excessive emotion traditionally associated with melodrama becomes the main directive. Bayman

cites the films of Antonioni as exemplary of the 'melodrama manqué', because in them we find a 'deliberate removal of melodramatic expressivity', conflicts which are 'not played out to their resolution' and a narration that 'appears not to care about bringing us closer to the inner processes that constitute personhood.' (Bayman 2018: 280). Bayman counters Deleuze's assertion that a move away from 'action' characters in the 1960s towards those who wander 'displaced and disoriented through the ruined spaces of postwar breakdown' marks a shift into new aesthetic territory. He observes that psychic and physical displacement is actually a feature familiar to melodrama rather than one set up in opposition to it. Such films, Bayman suggests, 'refunction for the purposes of art cinema what is in fact a common melodramatic figure of the disoriented protagonist lost in an alienating environment' (278). We could describe both D and Jeanne in this way; as displaced, alienated figures who do not feel 'at home' in their environments – their homes. But if one identifies these films as melodrama manqués, can we also assume their mise-en-scène functions in the same expressive manner, one which 'proceeds to force into aesthetic presence identity, value and plenitude of meaning' (Gledhill 1994: 33)? Is the 'plenitude of meaning' commonly associated with melodramatic visual excess negated by the de-dramatising tendency of either of these films? Is meaning sucked out of the mise-en-scène – or located elsewhere?

Let us look more closely at the buildings in each film. Both films were shot in real locations; a late 20th century modern house in west London in *Exhibition* and a late 19th century apartment in Brussels in *Jeanne Dielman*. It is useful to recall Maureen Turim's basic description of how the two structuring positions of architecture and film come together in the filmmaking process:

> One visual structure, architectonic, stable, fixed, imbued with the power to symbolize, as well as determine the movements of surrounding activities, is submitted to the bold and active force of another visual structure (that of the film) to transform. (Turim 1991: 37)

Turim describes how architectural structures are re-structured by the cinematic endeavour. As real structures are transformed into filmic ones, features become hypersignified. What one might

perceive as a tendency or atmosphere about a place in real life becomes accentuated on film. In order for this transformation to occur, one must first pay attention to the qualities of the spaces themselves. Akerman and Hogg spent time in their locations to become familiar with their potentialities and limitations. Babette Mangolte, the cinematographer on *Jeanne Dielman,* describes the importance of location in this way:

> What was important is that it was not shot in a studio but in a real apartment. In the two weeks preparation before the shooting we did the shot list together at the kitchen table of the apartment… We would read through the script and decide, ok, this line will be this shot, and we would basically come up with the shot list of every scene by going into the room to look with a viewer how to frame each action. We shot everything according to each room and each angle except the last shot of the film. For example, we shot all the dinner scenes one after the other… Jeanne has a life, which is locked in, disciplined, so the static camera totally goes with the subject matter.
> (Jordan Cronk, Interview: 2017)

Mangolte clarifies how receptivity to space is essential if one is to capture its potential. Her thoughts echo those of other filmmakers concerned with architectural space and place. Wim Wenders for example, finds it crucial to 'travel inside the site [location] to know it and describe it' (Wenders quoted in Bruno 2002: 34). Michelangelo Antonioni has a similar methodology. 'The most direct way to recreate a scene is to enter into a rapport with the environment itself' he writes, 'it's the simplest way to let the environment suggest something to us' (Antonioni 1996: 27).

Akerman spent time inside the apartment planning how to film it. She also established rules for herself and her team. We are familiar with these rules. The camera is placed frontally or sideways (with a few exceptional diagonal shots), and at a low height (apart from the murder scene), suggestive both of Akerman's perception of her own diminutive height and the height of an observant child. There are no point-of-view shots, cutaway shot/countershots or close-ups. The

action is filmed from a repeated set of camera angles. Because of this repetition and regularity we come to know well the topology of Jeanne's apartment:

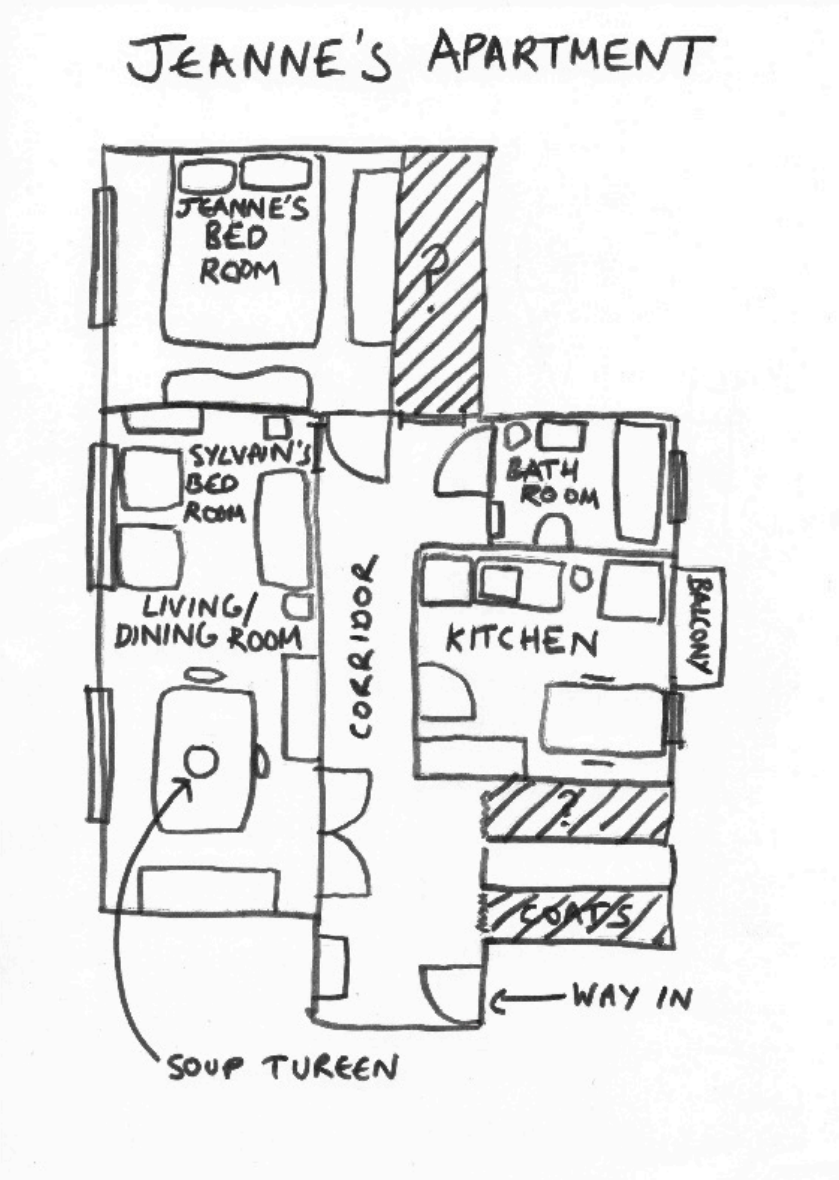

Fig. 2.2 Plan of Jeanne's apartment, by the author

This rigorous patterning and organisation of cinematic elements can be described as a *dispositif*. In 'Turn the Page: from *Mise-en-scène* to *Dispositif*', Martin clarifies how the term applies to artistic activity:

> A *dispositif* is not a writing or painting from a formless real; nor is it something arrived at, on the set, spontaneously, intuitively or mystically. It is a preconceived, or organically developed, work of form… it is about the integrated arrangement of form and content elements at all levels, from first conception to final mixing and grading.

He goes on to define a *dispositif* film more specifically:

> a *dispositif* film is both a *conceit*… and a *machine*. Above all, it is a conceptual film… that usually announces its structure or system at the outset, in the opening scene, even in its title, and then must follow through with this structure, step by step all the way to the bitter or blessed end. (Martin 2011)

Akerman's *dispositif* submits the architectonics of the apartment to a particular structuring process – or what Turim describes as a 'bold and active force'. What also becomes clear as we watch the film is that Akerman's way of filming the space (her formal *dispositif*) coincides with the way in which Jeanne's life is regulated within that space. We discover the apartment itself is a spatial *dispositif*, a physical machine geared towards regulating Jeanne's behaviour. Effectively we have a *dispositif* within a *dispositif*. Or better still, we can say the two work hand in hand. This aesthetic, patterning stance is well understood by the audience. Once it is established, the interaction between formal and spatial *dispositifs* functions as a device to generate drama in an ingenious way.

Before I explore this further it is important to clarify how, and indeed if, I can include the notion of a *dispositif* within the context of mise-en-scène analysis. Are these two interpretative approaches at odds with one other or do they overlap? Martin tackles this issue and referring to the idea of a '*dispositif*' as a 'tendency', he asks whether this tendency:

> has been marginalised or literally undetected by the protocols of *mise en scène* critique, with its inevitable, in-built biases and exclusions? A tendency which is not the opposite of *mise en scène* or its negation, but a particular, pointed mutation of it? (Martin 2011)

By 'biases and exclusions' Martin is referring to what he perceives as the weight traditional mise-en-scène analysis places upon creative decisions made on set. He sets this against the prior arrangement of cinematic elements that the application of a *dispositif* would entail. He goes on to ask, 'does the notion of the *dispositif* name or point to something that is and has always been inherent in *mise en scène* – maybe even larger or greater than it, as an overall formal category?' (2011). In this regard he draws upon Raymond Bellour's investigations into the subject:

> This is what Raymond Bellour suggested in 1997 when he proposed that *la-mise-en-scène*… is a classical approach that corresponds "to both an age and a vision of cinema, a certain kind of belief in the story and the shot", but that it is ultimately only one of the available "modes of organising images" in cinema. (Martin 2011)

Martin discusses Abbas Kiarostami's short documentary film *No* (2011), portraying a group of young girls who all say "no" to having their hair cut short for a fiction film. He asks when the idea occurred to Kiarostami to structure the film around the word 'no'. The answer 'matters little', he writes, 'whether grasped by chance during the process, or manoeuvred at the outset', Kiarostami has nevertheless structured a 'splendid, miniature *dispositif*' (Martin 2014: 187). That the idea may have been 'grasped by chance during the process' seems to allow for precisely the kind of on-set decision-making Martin has previously ascribed to the process of mise-en-scène. Moreover, mise-en-scène decisions are often decided well in advance and are by no means limited to on-set flashes of inspiration. What is clear, and what Martin acknowledges, is that a *dispositif* is not a rigid, mechanistic system. It is 'more like an aesthetic guide-track' he writes, 'open to as much alteration, surprise or artful contradiction as the filmmaker who sets it in motion decrees' (192).

Jeanne Dielman and *Exhibition* are two films with a distinctive mise-en-scène, but *Jeanne Dielman* has a strong *dispositif* while *Exhibition* does not. Or to put it more accurately, the *dispositif* in *Jeanne Dielman* is instigated by Akerman and rigorously maintained by actors and crew for creative reasons, while if there is a *dispositif* in Hogg's film (which is debatable as we shall see) it is instigated by the architectural form of the modern house itself. Whether or not I agree with Martin's revisionist suggestion that we view mise-en-scène as only a part, a 'layer, screen or element' of the cinematic endeavour is not something I can debate at length in this thesis (Martin 2014: 197). I venture a basic definition here and apply it to my analysis. A *dispositif* is a formal arrangement of elements, conceived before the film is made and carried through into the editing process. It involves a series of decisions which primarily function as creative restraints. Such decisions can vary from deciding the film will contain 13 tracking shots travelling from right to left with ten minutes between them (as in Varda's 1985 film *Vagabonde*), to the decision to film in black and white as in *Roma* (Alfonso Cuarón 2018). Mise-en-scène is what we see and hear in films, what is 'put into place' in the audiovisual world before us in the film's frame, and it is put there for expressive purposes. There are overlaps between a *dispositif* and a mise-en-scène, but one is more orientated towards a deliberate structuring or restraining of elements for purposes of creative restraint than the other.

Jeanne Dielman presents us with a working *dispositif*. This *dispositif* is part and parcel of Akerman's overall mise-en-scène. However, when engaging with the mise-en-scène of this film there is one more complicating factor. The way in which objects and décor function in *Jeanne Dielman* does not entirely accord with the way in which they are expected to function in traditional mise-en-scène analysis.

Jeanne's apartment is a system of control and a controlling system. It functions as a mechanism to support Jeanne's emotional repression, and she must keep it well-oiled and shipshape. It is a finely-tuned, infernal machine. Jeanne cannot leave a room without turning the light off nor enter it without turning the light on and the same applies to the opening and closing of

doors. She walks purposefully back and forth across the corridor, up and down along it, in and out of rooms, performing a series of daily, repeated gestures and activities that conform to a strictly maintained regime. The camerawork supports this system – her personal *dispositif* – by filming her actions from a repeated and regular series of angles. The aural dimension of the film also plays its part. The sounds of doors closing and opening, lights being switched on and off, and Jeanne's militaristic footsteps click-clacking across the parquet floor, all contribute towards our apprehension of Jeanne's world as a mechanistic apparatus. Despite the apparent flawlessness of this regime and the rigour with which it is upheld by both Jeanne and Akerman, we know this joyless existence cannot continue, that it is a defensive edifice against an invisible anxiety that threatens to warp and distort the system, and that such a system cannot be borne.

How do we know this? Because crucially, the system has gaps. Not everything adds up as it should, and into these gaps floods ambiguity. Jeanne's routine famously comes undone on the second day when she has an unwanted orgasm with one of her clients. This is conjecture, given that we only witness her have an orgasm on the third day (although Akerman confirms it in an interview with *Camera Obscura* in Bergstrom, 1977: 120). Things feel off-kilter when she emerges with her client from the bedroom without turning on the hall light as usual. She hurriedly corrects her mistake. We also notice her hair looks messier than usual. This disruption is reiterated formally. The camera takes up a new position in the kitchen waiting by the now overcooked potatoes on the stove, as if in rebuke. The film itself alerts us to a malfunction. We find disturbing oddities and discrepancies at work throughout the film, all working to signify a subversive dynamic beneath the surface. For example, Jeanne's corridor is sometimes overwhelmed by a notable, swallowing darkness that is not entirely attributable to the lack of electric light in that area. The walk that Jeanne and her son Sylvain (Jan Decorte) take each evening is never explained. They simply put on their coats, go outside and recede into a Stygian gloom only to emerge from it a few minutes later – and we are none the wiser as to where they might have been during the ellipsis. The apartment has unknown areas which we never enter at all. If we look closely, we notice a closed door between the bathroom and Jeanne's bedroom. What might be in that room? Next to the closet

in the hall is another recess screened by a curtain. Although seen clearly from the living room, it is neither used nor opened. You can see both areas in my plan above. The apartment is not as systematic as the spatial *dispositif* would have us believe. It has ambiguous areas and a recurring darkness which floods the corridor and makes it difficult to see.

Jeanne's apartment is also a flawed time machine. On the surface, the film adheres to a strict chronology. On closer inspection the internal chronology is open to doubt. Jeanne tells her son how when the war ended she was an orphan living with her aunts. She soon married, and had Sylvain. This should place the film sometime in the sixties as a period piece, but it appears to be set in the seventies. The décor – part of the mise-en-scène – also evokes earlier time-scales, the fifties and before, so much so that we experience Jeanne's electric coffee-grinder as a something of a mod-con. The actor playing Sylvain is the same age as Akerman, somewhat older than the high-school age character he plays. Chronological verisimilitude is not upheld, because it is not important. Time past bleeds into time present.

Objects play their role in this swimming around in time. The beer bottle at the dinner table is set down ritualistically every night, but we never see it opened. So why is it there at all? Is it perhaps a hang-over from when the father, the man of the house, was alive? Does it function as some kind of substitute, memory, reminder – or even taunt? It sits mutely yet suggestively on the table like an object from a dream. *Jeanne Dielman* is not as realistic a film text as it would have us believe, and a different kind of truth emerges from the gaps.

This points towards a crucial element in Akerman's *dispositif* that needs to be recognised. Like Georges Perec, a French writer much loved by Akerman, Akerman applies creative constraints upon her work for a reason. She realises that for a *dispositif* to work in a generative way there must be a quirk or deviation, something inside it which defies the system and 'puts a spanner in the works'. Perec's novel *Life, A User's Manual* (1978) provides a good example of this in action. The book revolves around the interconnected lives of the inhabitants in a large Parisian apartment

block. The structure of the book is generated by a complex system of spatial patterning and structural game-playing. Perec drew a grid of the building and created complex lists of objects which he then distributed around each room according to a set of numerical rules. He then used the knight's moves on a chessboard to determine the direction of travel from room to room, chapter to chapter, character to character. Perec applies this strict *dispositif* in order to structure his work in much the same way as Akerman organises her film. But like Akerman, Perec also installs errors or gaps in the system. There is no chapter 66 for example, (we jump from 65 to 67) and accordingly no room in the building for that move. Perec did not deliberately program such faults into his system as an act of frivolity. He believed that if he allowed his system to work perfectly it would have no life. 'The system of constraints – and this is important – must be destroyed', he writes. 'It must not be rigid, there must be some play in it, it must, as they say, "creak" a bit"…' (Perec quoted in Motte 1986: 276). Creativity emerges from the gaps and faults and it is important that these must be arbitrarily applied. Perec and the OuLiPo writing group of which he was a member employed the term 'clinamen' to identify these aleatory deviations. This is an Epicurian concept, which postulates that atoms do not fall in straight lines as Democritus previously conjectured, but occasionally swerve off course for no apparent reason.[5]

In Perec's diagram below, we see a dark void in the bottom left hand corner. There is no room here, simply a void. This void functions in the same disruptive manner as Jeanne's dark corridor, the two absent spaces in the apartment, and her nightly walks into obscurity.

[5] The 'clinamen atomorum' or 'swerve of atoms' is essential, as explained in Lucretius' later account:
Though atoms fall straight downward through the void
by their own weight, yet at uncertain times
and at uncertain points, they swerve a bit –
enough that one may say they changed direction.
And if they did not swerve, they all would fall
downward like raindrops through the boundless void;
no clashes would occur, no blows befall
the atoms; nature would never have made a thing.
(trans. Frank O Copley, quoted in Warren F Motte Jr 1986: 264)

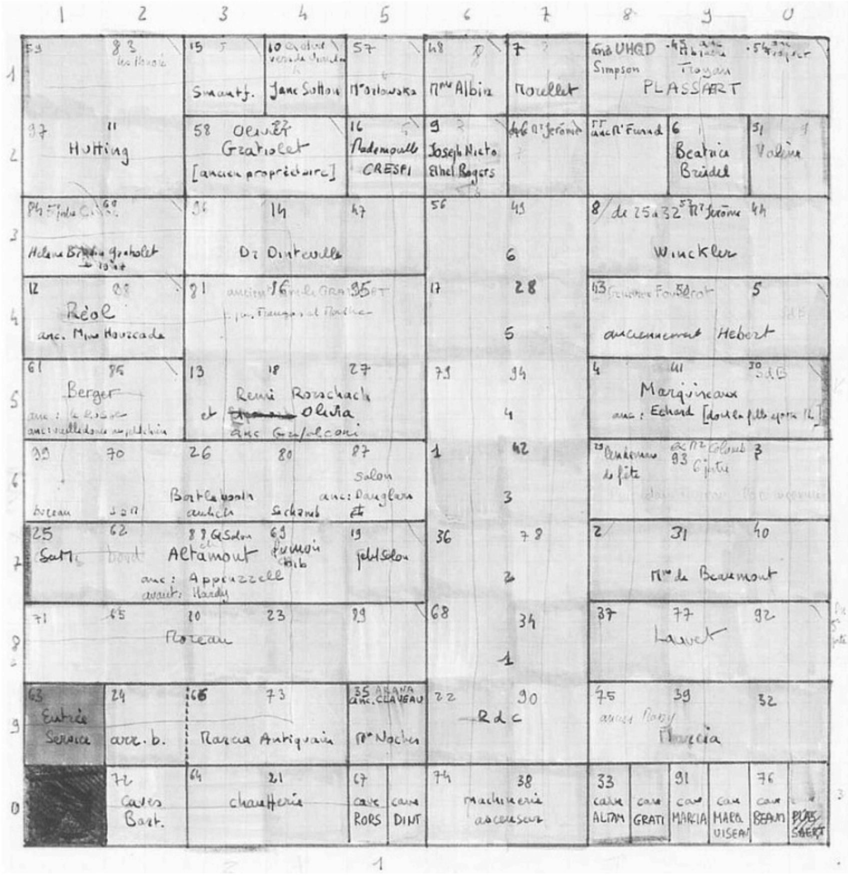

Fig. 2.3 Perec's plan of the apartment

Any break in a strongly upheld narrative system will have a more dramatic impact. Jeanne's self-imposed *dispositif* is a system of repression, and we witness the terrible consequences of its breakdown at the end of the film. It is the precisely rigour with which the system is upheld that leads us to appreciate the magnitude of the error when Jeanne overcooks the potatoes. But there is another way in which Akerman refines our awareness. She teaches us to interrogate what we see through her prominent use of the long take. These durational shots ask us to visually roam the frame and we have no choice but to closely attend to the mise-en-scène.

Here we discover that Jeanne's body and the environment in which it is placed are afforded equal weight within the frame. Jeanne is as 'placed' as that which surrounds her. This produces a flattened visual density in which 'live' and 'non-live' elements are held together with a tensile strength. Akerman avoids close-ups, so no face or object dominates the frame. Jeanne shares the

space with walls, doors, windows and wallpaper patterns. This becomes particularly clear when Jeanne comes to a halt. Such moments are held for a long time. The stamina of these long takes invites us to become hyper-attentive. We are required to interrogate space, something Perec encourages us to do in *Species of Spaces*.[6] Jeanne forces herself to sit still, and we are forced to sit and watch her. We notice minute changes – her ribcage moving, fingers twitching, minute changes in facial expression. The overall impression is of someone trying to be as inert and non-reactive as the objects which surround her – trying not to be alive. She fails in this attempt.

Fig. 2.4 Jeanne sits in living room

In this frame, the reflection of the wallpaper on the table balances the image above and below Jeanne, embedding her in the room. She sits in spatial alliance with the flowers in front of her, curtains behind her, gas fire and furniture. Her gaze is lowered in her attempt to keep still and to be as disengaged as possible with her own sensate being.

[6]Akerman may well have read this book, published in 1974, a year before the release of *Jeanne Dielman*. She certainly admired his work, and he was a friend of Babette Mangolte.

Fig. 2.5 Jeanne stands in corridor

Above, Jeanne is held in place between the brown wood on the left and the blue curtain on the right, the flocked wallpaper behind her a gentle reiteration of the repetitive rules which structure the apartment. Once again she remains still, hands folded to restrain physical movement, waiting for the client to hand her his hat and coat.

Fig. 2.6 Jeanne takes a bath

Jeanne always takes a bath once her client has left. In the above frame we notice her flesh is almost exactly the same colour as the wall above. This visual echoing further enmeshes her, or em-bodies her, into the mise-en-scène. The blue-green bath panels show motion in stasis, a swirling marble

pattern arrested in mid-flow. Jeanne's body moves to the sound of the water trickling parsimoniously from the tap. Even in this scene we see her restraint. There is no luxurious sinking down into the warm, erasing depths of a bubble bath for Jeanne.

The objects which populate Jeanne's life are arranged in such as way as to trap her within an invisible lattice of commitment. They hold her in place and she performs the same service for them by designating them special hooks on walls, places in cupboards, positions on shelves and in drawers etc. The entire apartment and its contents have been recruited into a singular project of coercive self-control. Through the application of a strict tempo-spatial *dispositif*, and using nothing more than the everyday objects which surround her, Jeanne has created her own deathly mise-en-scène, one which supports nothing less than psychic and sensual self-immolation.

Why does she do this? Or to frame the question another way, is it important that we know why she does this? After all, as we witness Akerman reiterating to an insistent and enquiring Delphine Seyrig in Sami Frey's documentary shot on the set[7], it is not important to know why Jeanne does things, only that she must do them in such a way and for a particular amount of time. In Frey's film we see Akerman at the kitchen table, doggedly timing how long Seyrig needs to sit still. It is an unusual way to direct actors, or at least it is within the normative paradigm of psychologically inflected Western realist drama. So does the mise-en-scène provide clues as to what is going on beneath the surface? Or are we perhaps to approach a study of these objects in an alternative way?

The expressivity of mise-en-scène in Hollywood melodrama has been well theorised. Elsaesser and others describe how mise-en-scène speaks through an 'expressive code' (1994: 51). Laura Mulvey reiterates the point in a more recent article addressing mise-en-scène in *Jeanne Dielman:*

7 *Autour de "Jeanne Dielman"* (Sami Frey 1975)

> The investment of meaning in mise-en-scène and certain privileged objects has generally been considered to be a defining characteristic of the melodrama's aesthetic. It produces a deciphering spectator, who follows clues and reads decor, light, color, framing, and so on. Crucially, this making of meaning is mute, usually unnoticed and uncommented on in the narrative itself. (Mulvey 2016: 28)

Mulvey's close analysis of the flashing neon light outside Jeanne's apartment and the soup tureen in the dining room beautifully reveals how these objects indicate mutely towards Jeanne's secret double life as a prostitute which she pursues every afternoon when her son Sylvain is at school. Mulvey suggests that the curious blue light, continually flickering across the room from an unseen source outside the window destabilises the domestic interior scene. It is, she explains, 'an exterior, complicating presence… [that] brings something unsettling into the precarious respectability of Jeanne's interior' (27). It is notable Mulvey picks these two objects, because they are the only two objects in the apartment to which one can assign any symbolic significance. (Although, as I suggest above, one can possibly recruit the beer bottle into this cluster of significant objects.) But even this has to be done with caution. While it is certainly a 'complicating presence' in the film, the flashing light also means nothing in particular. It could just as well be something Jeanne and Sylvain have grown used to living with on a daily basis, an annoying neon sign that someone has installed above a shop across the street. The soup tureen is also just a soup tureen. Meaning expands outwards from objects yet it also threatens to collapse back in to their implacability and sheer everyday-ness. I suggest another way of regarding objects in this film that does not entirely accord with a symbolically weighted mise-en-scène analysis. *Jeanne Dielman* can be located within the melodramatic mode (as a melodrama 'manqué') but it is also structured by another system of representation. The atmospheric field which imbues the work of Akerman is one I find well described by the late French writer Jean Cayrol. The way objects function in this film points towards the existence of what Cayrol defines as Concentrationary Reality. This reality coexists with the everyday but imbues it with strangeness, signaling a traumatic past which haunts the present.

Film scholars may be aware of Cayrol's screenplays for Resnais's *Night and Fog* (1956) and *Muriel* (1963), but the main body of his work has not been translated into English. However, two seminal essays forming the basis of his ideas, *Les Rêves Lazaréens* and *Pour un Romanesque Lazaréen* (published in 1948 and 1949 respectively) are translated in full in Max Silverman and Griselda Pollock's recent volume, *Concentrationary Art: Jean Cayrol, the Lazarean and the Everyday in Post-war Film, Literature, Music and the Visual Arts* (2019). After surviving internment in the Mauthausen-Gusen concentration camp in Nazi-occupied Austria (one of the most brutal camps), Cayrol saw the world as forever altered. Survivors return Lazarus-like from another realm to try to 'live again'. But the presence of the concentrationary realm persists on the same plane as the banal, everyday world as a kind of distorting double, and not only for those who survived such trauma first-hand. Concentrationary art, or what Cayrol describes as the Lazarean text, draws together these two realms. *Jeanne Dielman* can be understood as such a text. Cayrol's description of how the Lazarean figure lives in the world bears a marked resemblance to the manner in which Jeanne bears herself in the world of the film:

> A Lazarean text will first and foremost be one that meticulously describes the strangest kind of solitude man will ever be capable of bearing. This is not a solitude for which there is a way out or exit. Each one of its 'followers' envelops himself in this solitude, like a well-fitting coat, shielding himself from the cruel assaults of the outside world…
>
> He removes all that might hinder him and is on his guard against anything that might cause him to surrender. He is swiftly overwhelmed and seeks to play the role of the stone guest at gatherings. (Cayrol in Silverman & Pollock 2019: 54 & 56)

This pictures Jeanne well; her joylessness, her strange solitude wrapped around her 'like a well-fitting coat', her evenings with Sylvain when she sits like a 'stone guest' at the dinner table.

If we look at Cayrol's observations on the role objects play in concentrationary reality, we also find resonances with *Jeanne Dielman*. 'The Lazarean character' Cayrol writes, 'is perpetually at odds with his fellow humans, although he is able to involve himself intimately with things…' (2019: 57). This accurately describes the way Jeanne behaves. We cannot forget the way in which she plonks her neighbour's baby down onto the dining table in its carrycot and returns to her familiar community of objects in the kitchen. In a later scene she tries unsuccessfully to comfort the crying baby by jigging it up and down. Intimacy with objects seems easier than with humans. 'Reality is not simple for the Lazarean character' writes Cayrol:

> Indeed, the things that form part of his fragile heritage to him possess a presence and exceptional intensity and rarity that sometimes even the living do not. A knife, for example, can have a childhood, a personality and an old age. He reveres it, gives it bread to cut, and in this he almost entrusts it with life itself. A knife cuts just the right piece, brings it to the mouth, and is not oblivious to the drama of losing a single crumb of bread. (Cayrol in Silverman & Pollock 2019: 61)

Objects are central to concentrationary memory. Things survive into the present yet gesture towards an unprocessed past. 'Cayrol reworks the Proustian re-enchantment of objects through a concentrationary lens' writes Silverman. Objects become the vectors of 'memory, desire, fear and trauma' (Silverman & Pollock 2019: 135). This returns us to the beer bottle set on the dinner table every evening. If we view it as a concentrationary object which stages its own presence, then we see that it sits on the table like an object swimming up from the past.

But objects in this film also pull us into the present. Jeanne lives in a realm of objects and spends more time relating to them than to people. The gas fire she lights every morning, the knitting bag she opens every evening, shoe polishing kit, dinner plates, tablecloth, sofa bed – the list goes on. These things take up a significant share of the film's narrative economy. Traditional mise-en-scène analysis invites us to decode them. But objects in *Jeanne Dielman* resist

interpretation. They retain a certain quiddity or 'is-ness', an 'extreme density of presence' (Basuyuax in Silverman 2019: 135). Not many of the objects around Jeanne, if any, have an affective pull for her. The nick-nacks in the cabinet receive a cursory flick of the duster only because she has time to fill. Yet the scene in which she stands beside the coffee pot patiently waiting for the water to drain through is oddly affecting. The pot has 'density of presence'. Jeanne gives it time to perform its task, accepting that it cannot be rushed. Object and person work together, sharing between them what Cayrol refers to as a 'bizarre intimacy'. Roland Barthes writes that 'Cayrolian objects… produce a particular sort of affectivity; a warmth emanates from them…' (Barthes quoted in Silverman & Pollock 2019: 7).

Viewing the mise-en-scène in *Jeanne Dielman* through the concentrationary lens as theorised by Cayrol broadens our interpretation and understanding of the film. *Jeanne Dielman* shows how 'plenitude of meaning' can be present and also how it can be meaningfully absent. Akerman's mise-en-scène exists at the point at which the personal and the social fuse together. Silverman writes that 'the concentrationary reality 'has grown up clandestinely' in everyday life, so the art required to expose it must also be a secret testimony to a transformed landscape' (2019: 11). Akerman could not have brought us closer to her own life-long encounter with the unspoken and unspeakable reality of her family's history – a reality that was just as present to her as banal coffee-pot reality – other than through circumstances of extreme control. Jeanne's house neither contains nor obliterates her, as Grosz suggests houses often do to women. It serves her, and is the physical embodiment of her psychic life. Jeanne is as redeemed by her home as she is devastated by it.

The building which Hogg structures filmically in *Exhibition* is also vividly experienced by its inhabitants. Hogg met its architect, James Melvin, through a childhood friend in the 1990s and retained a strong memory of the house he designed for himself and his wife after their children had left home. 'When I was conceiving *Exhibition*' she explains, 'I thought of the Melvins' house as a perfect location for my ideas'. She continues:

> I saw the house as a sponge that could absorb my ideas about creativity and relationships – a container for all the complexity and contradiction I wanted to express. Its modernism seemed like the perfect arena for my chamber play of encounter and emotion; it's uncluttered and clear and has a theatricality about it. (Helen Sumpter, Interview with Hogg, 2014)

Hogg's fascination with the architectonics of the house and its affinity with cinema becomes particularly explicit when she discusses its windows, a salient feature of both building and film. 'It is a house of projections' she says, 'or even a house of cinema itself. It forces you to look inside. You can be looking out towards the garden, but then your gaze is forced inwards with a reflection of yourself' (Sumpter, Interview: 2014). This point is reiterated in another interview, 'I often filmed looking outside into the garden, but projected back is the interior of the house. I saw this inside-out quality as literally cinematic' (Graham Fuller, Interview: 2014). Hogg's 21st century update of the 'woman in the house' trope places the woman and the man into the house, and the house function as home and workplace. Despite this conflation of traditionally separated spheres, Hogg opens the film with a shot of D gazing out of the window. This shot inserts Hogg's protagonist into a long line of such women. In all of the films in this thesis – with the notable exception of Akerman's two films – the women gaze out of a window. 'The iconography is quite insistent' writes Doane about this image in 1940s films, 'women and waiting are intimately linked, and the scenario of the woman gazing out of a window usually streaked by a persistent rain has become a well-worn figure of the classical cinematic text (Doane 1988: 2). Andrew Britton traces the image back to 19th century Gothic Romance novels. He recalls how Jane Eyre remembers the world outside and 'goes to the window, opens it, and looks out – as women in nineteenth century novels and Hollywood melodramas so often find themselves doing' (Britton 2009: 35). Elsaesser describes the 'women waiting at home' in Hollywood melodramas, 'standing by the window, caught in a world of objects into which they are expected to invest their feelings' (Elsaesser 1994: 62). The shot of D in the window is the first of many 'window shots' in *Exhibition*. Indeed, the majority of the shots in the

film (approximately sixty-five percent) are structured around the windows and glass walls of the house.

While it is clear that in a modernist house such as this one can scarcely avoid them, it is equally evident that the emphasis upon the windows in Hogg's film invites us to view them as a meaning-making feature of the mise-en-scène. The shots divide into five predominant configurations. I list them here in order of frequency, beginning with the most common:

Type A

Fig. 2.7 Looking out from inside seeing what is outside.

These are either establishing, information-giving shots or point-of-view shots. We see what the characters could see or are seeing. These are the most common window shots in the film.

Type B

Fig. 2.8 Looking out from inside seeing what is outside and a reflection of what is inside. A 'doubled' or 'layered' image.

These shots indicate interiority. At their most extreme, they portray dream-life or memory. They represent unconscious processes at work. They are the second most common iteration.

Type C

Fig. 2.9 Interior shots in which windows frame the characters. The windows are opaque, transparent, reflective or a combination of all three.

These shots spatially display the windows in the house, luxuriating in their cinematographic, visual possibilities. The characters are framed cinematically and phenomenologically by their presence. Often the inertia of the characters is brought into relief by the panoply of possibilities on display through the windows.

Type D

Fig. 2.10 Looking inside from outside through transparent glass.

These shots relegate us to the role of an outsider peering in at the characters. A voyeurism is explicitly evoked.

Type E

Fig. 2.11 Looking from outside seeing the outside reflected upon the glass.

These shots punctuate the narrative flow. A change of mood can be reflected in the outside elements, for example storm clouds gathering. The least common window shot.

In a house like this one is always on exhibition. But when this situation is structured by the cinematic process it becomes more complicated and we find ourselves involved in a complex relay of looks. That the audience looks through the glass walls of the house is clear. It also looks at them through the glass lens of the camera, and through what it commonly perceives to be the window of the screen. This holds good to Hogg's earlier analogy between the house and a cinematic device. The film is a viewing device, as is the house. The film performs this analogy in another way. The not infrequent occurrence of shots looking down upon the characters from above calls to mind the perspective of an architectural plan in which buildings are dissected from above. We see a diegetic reference to this in the plans on H's desk. Hogg's claim that the house is 'literally cinematic' can be further unpacked by drawing directly upon architectural theory.

Spatial theorist Beatriz Colomina explains how a study of window design can reveal important social changes in the 'controlling look, the look of control, the controlled look' (Colomina 1992: 74). The windows in an Alfred Loos house for example, are not designed to be looked out of

but to be sat in front of and framed by. They are always opaque or 'covered with sheer curtains' and the 'organisation of the spaces and the disposition of the built-in furniture… seems to hinder access to them.' (74). A sofa is often set directly 'at the foot of a window so as to position the occupants with their back to it, facing the room' (75). Silhouetted against the light, the sitter can survey the room and see anyone coming in before they are themselves seen. These viewing areas resemble theatre boxes, and allow inhabitants in a Loos house to become 'actors in and spectators of the family scene' (80). These are the windows of Jeanne Dielman's world. They provide light and fresh air, but not views. Covered with net curtains, they ensure privacy and separation from the outside world. The windows in *Exhibition* however, are informed by the modernist impulse of Le Corbusier. They are sometimes partially covered by venetian blinds, but more often they stare at the world like eyes forever open. Their house is a viewing device for seeing out and in, and for its more voyeuristically inflected correlate – *looking* out and in. Colomina notes this change in the windows of Le Corbusier, an architect working later than Loos. Le Corbusier windows 'are never covered with curtains' she writes, 'neither is access to them hampered by objects. On the contrary, everything in these houses seems to be disposed in a way that continuously throws the subject towards the periphery of the house' (98). The windows in *Exhibition* prompt, even propel, inhabitants to look out through them. The majority of window shots in the film are 'Type A', 'inside looking out'. Colomina discusses the impulse behind this change. If the window is a lens, she writes, 'the house itself is a camera pointed at nature' (1992: 113). This recalls Hogg's claim that the Melvin house as 'literally cinematic'. Colomina also alerts us to the persistent spatial gendering in this supposedly modern architecture. The modernising, utopian impulse of Le Corbusier does not entirely escape its problematic inheritance. The windows invite us to gaze, like 'look-outs' at the modern world outside. Yet Colomina shows how visual archives of Le Corbusier's work reveal the woman more often portrayed inside the building engaged in activity, or looking out through the window at the man who stands outside. It is the he who stands on the balcony looking outwards and beyond, not the woman. As Doreen Massey argues: 'spaces and places … are gendered through and through' (Massey 1994: 186). It is notable that we do not see H look through the window at any point in *Exhibition*.

Le Corbusier famously proclaimed the house was a machine for living in. We can position D and H's house as their machine, and they must live according to its glassy dispositif. D gazes out upon the world, but the view is far from utopian. Their idealised life is under siege. There is a daily stream of disruption: scaffolders at invasive eye-level; random roadworks in the middle of the night; delivery vans parked in their driveway; gangs on bikes careering dangerously past to name a few. Their house is a sound recorder as well as a camera. They are equally as assailed on an aural level: police sirens; ambulances; car alarms; rows on mobile phones; people shouting in the night. Even in the opening shot, the peaceful sounds of wind in the trees and church bells chiming is interrupted by the sound of a whining siren. The house is not impermeable and while our characters proclaim love for their house, it is clear to us that they do not feel protected by it.

In his discussion of glass in modern architecture, Anthony Vidler writes, 'Modernity has been haunted – by a myth of transparency' (Vidler 1992: 217). He quotes Walter Benjamin's observations on the inevitable collapse in distinction between the interior and exterior, 'In the imprint of this turning point of the epoch, it is written that the knell has sounded for the dwelling in its old sense, dwelling in which security prevailed' (Benjamin quoted in Vidler 1992: 217). Unlike Jeanne's stolid bourgeois apartment with its deep-set windows, there is a vulnerability to D's glass house. How this affects D's ability to dwell becomes especially clear when H goes away for a few days leaving her alone in the house.

H is acquainted with the house on a practical level. We see him checking the boiler, dealing with pool room maintenance and sweeping copious rainwater on the roof into the drains. But we never see D do any such thing. She proclaims love for the house, but has no idea how it works. This leaves her prone to a profound disconnection from it and cements her further into the stereotypically gendered role of the impractical woman. She creeps around at night disturbed by strange noises. Unable to trace the source of the odd sounds she hovers outside closed doors, tiptoes along corridors and tentatively opens cupboards. Her wandering, misplaced figure is not

unfamiliar. She is found in most of the films I discuss. Like her predecessor Harriet Craig in *Craig's Wife* (Arzner 1936) D feels herself estranged and 'unhomed'. Her nighttime wanderings recall Celia's in *Secret Beyond the Door* (Lang 1947) and the second Mrs De Winter's in *Rebecca* (Hitchcock 1940). There is no ghost, ex-wife or murderous husband hiding in the fitted cupboards or crouching behind the boiler. What haunts this modern house is something far less concrete. It is the repressed self that threatens D, an estrangement from herself and from her purpose – or even from her purposeless-ness. D does not properly dwell in her house. We have the strong impression that she floats through it, like a ghost. 'All houses are haunted' asserts Barry Curtis, 'by memories, by the history of their sites, by their owner's fantasies and projections or by the significance they acquire for agents or strangers'. He continues, 'Houses inscribe themselves within their dwellers, they socialize and structure the relations within families, and provide spaces for expression and self-realisation in a complex and interactive relationship' (Barry Curtis 2008: 34).

But the glass house also offers opportunities to D. As the film proceeds, she tentatively develops an artistic project. We witness its inception early on when she becomes excited by a stool with a hole in it and explores positions of sexual arousal upon it. Later on, we watch from the pavement as D succumbs to the voyeurism the house has been mutely suggesting to her. She stands naked in her study and ruffles the venetian blinds up and down. Her body is alternately revealed and concealed and, worryingly to us, to anyone who might be standing on the street outside. D is progressing from 'seeing' (looking out of the window in the beginning) to 'being-seen'.

Fig. 2.12 D's window 'striptease'

If the house is a machine for living in, for D it functions as a mechanism for self-expression. This culminates in a scene towards the end of the film. D performatively slides the pink screen doors of her study into the slot in the wall. She does this as if opening the curtains upon a stage. Inside we see what looks like a new room. Evidently her entire desk area can also be neatly folded away. Once again, the architecture of the house has provided. D turns on a few neon lights and moves a stool in front of the mirror. She crosses to the window and, also in a performative manner, slowly pulls up the venetian blinds exposing herself entirely to the street below. The show is about to begin.

Fig. 2.13 The performance

She then dresses up. Wound round with masking tape and wearing fish-net tights, biker boots and a veil, her final manifestation situates itself somewhere between sexual bondage and quasi-religiosity. She climbs onto a revolving stool and turns herself around by pushing on the ceiling, absorbed in her reflections in the mirror and the dark window. The film cuts to show H looking up at her from the pavement below. We then cut to view her from his point-of-view. They look at each each and remain held in non-hostile confrontation. We then cut back inside as D gets down, turns around and performatively walks out. The show is over. The house, for D, is her own creative machine. But the scene is both climactic and problematic.

Throughout the film the layout of the house has been constructed to invite comparison between the creative agency of its two inhabitants. Architecture 'can dictate behaviour', says Hogg, 'It actually shapes the relationship…' (Paul Dallas, Interview: 2014). D has the pink study downstairs, H the blue one upstairs. They may be London's 'posh' intelligensia, but old-fashioned notions of girls' and boys' rooms are not entirely dispelled by irony. The impression that D's creativity is less secure and possibly more narcisstic than H's is accentuated by the fact that D's room has large windows that extend to the floor encouraging distraction and voyeurism (permeability). H's study on the other hand has one small window above eye level permitting concentration at his desk (impermeability). D's study has screen doors the length of a wall that slide open gradually (unclear borders), while H's room has one simple door (borders in place). D's room is full of stuff (unfocused) and H's is empty (focused). H has a more productive career than D. He is certainly the only one who appears to be earning any money. He speaks on the phone to clients, goes on business trips and works steadily at his desk. D struggles to concentrate, engages in sexual play with various objects, writes feverishly or stares into space, masturbates, or does yoga. We cannot help but view D's activity as a struggle for self-actualisation that veers dangerously towards narcissism. When the pink doors are finally drawn back, what we see provokes ambivalence. This is intentional, as Hogg confirms in an interview: 'There's an ambiguity between whether she's actually working and whether she's exploring her sexuality' (Bittencourt, Interview:

2014). The spatiality of the house allows D to explore her own interiority, but it is not one with which we feel entirely comfortable.

In her book *Women and the Making of the Modern House,* Alice T Friedman discusses the glass house Mies van der Rohe designed for Edith Farnsworth in the years 1945 – 51 (Friedman 1998). After describing the beauty of the house with its 'seemingly impermeable membrane of glass', Freidman investigates how it feels to live inside. 'Mies's architecture' she writes, 'calls attention not only to itself but also to the physical and aesthetic experience of the occupant'. She continues, 'It is important to note that the experience is not always positive.' She quotes Mies's grandson Dirk Lohan, also an architect, who observed that, 'So unconventional is the house that every move and every activity in it assume an aesthetic quality which challenges behaviour patterns formed in different surroundings' (Friedman 1998: 128). Those who live in glass houses are required to alter their behaviour. Farnsworth's own account confirms this:

> The truth is that in this house with its four walls of glass I feel like a prowling animal, always on the alert. I am always restless. Even in the evening. I feel like a sentinel on guard day and night. I can rarely stretch out and relax… What else? I don't keep a garbage can under my sink. Do you know why? Because you can see the whole 'kitchen' from the road on the way in here and the can would spoil the appearance of the whole house. So I hide it in the closet farther down from the sink. Mies talks about 'free space': but his space is very fixed. I can't even put a clothes hanger in my house without considering how it affects everything from the outside. Any arrangement of furniture becomes a major problem, because the house is transparent, like an X-ray. (Farnsworth interviewed by Joseph A Barry, 'House Magazine' 1953, in Friedman 1998: 141)

We see how the 'x-ray' quality of the Melville house impacts upon the behaviour of its inhabitants.

Hogg's emphasis upon the transparency of the house appears to foreground visibility. Nothing is hidden and the characters are available and on show. And yet we do not see everything. Like Jeanne's apartment, there are blind spots and hidden rooms. Unlike Akerman's film however, we cannot easily create an accurate floorplan. Hogg does not provide us with a rigorous cinematographic *dispositif*. We are not even aware there is a pool until we look down upon D's naked body in the water and it is unclear where it is or how you get to it. Logic dictates there should be another room upstairs, given the diminutive size of H's study and the layout of the floor beneath it, but we never see it. There also appear to be two kitchens, and we are not entirely sure where the second one is situated. There are gaps in our knowledge and it is just so with the characters. D and H remain opaque to us no matter how much we can see of them. We glean certain hard facts: they have lived in the house for 20 years; H wishes to sell, D does not; they are well off; they work in separate rooms; they love the house. Yet personal information and past events of magnitude are withheld. We never find out their real names. They are artists but we do not know what they do. Something bad happened to H outside but we never find out what it is. They do not have children and we never find out why. This oscillation between poles of knowability and unknowability is played out in the binary opposition between the open transparency and closed reflectivity of their glass home. Indeed, it is not only played out – it is actively invoked. Sometimes we can see through the windows, sometimes we cannot and (as the second Mrs de Winter would say) the 'way is barred' to us. The characters are on full display (on exhibition) one minute, hidden from view the next. Their visibility does not guarantee their knowability, and our proximity to them does not bring intimacy. Looked at from this perspective, we realise the desire to 'get to know' the characters is not the project of the film even though the transparency of the house suggests that it might be. If Hogg feels the need to explain D's character or to narrativise her in ways which make her seem more understandable to us, it is more in response to the psychological turn of the questions she is asked in interviews. It is the unknowability of D and H which really marks the film, and the way the house shuts us out. That we are no closer to knowing the characters at the end of the film than we are at the beginning is surely the point. This is a strange mise-en-scène – one which promises but

withholds meaning from us, which allows us to watch them have sex, but then holds us at a distance by depositing us on the pavement outside.

The end of the film makes this clear. In the closing shot we are outside. Looking up into the glass living room above us we see a new family with three children playing inside. This is a surprise because aside from seeing them packing books, we have not seen D and H move out. They are simply no longer there as if 'disappeared' into the suture between this shot and the last, 'unhung' like pictures in an old exhibition. Placed on the pavement with no idea who these people are or where D and H have gone, we are exiled from narrative and house. Both have moved on without us. However, we remain curiously unmoved.

Why does this stark disappearance evoke no sentiment or sense of loss? Because we have never been close to them in the first place. Hogg understands estrangement and articulates the experience of gazing in detachedly at other people's lives. From the outset, the film evokes the alienation of living in a city. People come and go without explanation. They live in houses and move out never to be seen again, replaced by a new set of strangers. We peer into each others' lives for a short time, glimpsing snippets of dramas within. This echoes our experience as spectators in the cinema. George Toles calls up the strange promise of cinema, to briefly and intensely occupy a 'privileged enclosure' from which we will always be cast out (2001: 23). The 'interior of the dwelling is everything that film can reveal to us by way of presence' he writes, 'and the successive vanishings that are always the cost of film's forward movement' (23). We dwell in the world of a film (and the homes we see therein) and we experience loss when ejected from that world and from the cinema. If we look at *Exhibition* from this perspective, we come closer to Hogg's mise-en-scène of estrangement.

I have explored ways in which the physical architecture of the homes in these two films is restructured by the filmic process to contribute towards the meaningful mise-en-scène of both films. Through the process of mise-en-scène, Akerman and Hogg construct cinematic architectures

which are imbricated with the psychic interiority of their inhabitants. But these two film texts also resist the metaphorical dimension discerned and deciphered by traditional mise-en-scène criticism. As Turim points out in her discussion of how architecture is remoulded in avant-garde films, the unconscious 'is not a symbolic system easily deciphered' (Turim 1991: 32). Mise-en-scène works to serve a discursive universe which tells us something about itself. It also tells us something about those who create it, the world in which they live, and by extension about our own world as spectators. Despite the challenges that *Exhibition* and *Jeanne Dielman* present to a mise-en-scène analysis that responds more readily to film texts which are openly and symbolically expressive, I have demonstrated in my analysis that we can still productively arrive at a deeper understanding of such texts through this critical route.

Chapter 3

Sound:
The Invisible Space

> …the presence of a human voice structures the sonic space that contains it.
> *Michel Chion*

One of the 'spaces' that contributes to a film's overall architecture is the sonic space. In this chapter I focus on the voice of two female characters, and ask how it helps to structure what we see and what we do not. I discuss two films: *Secret Beyond the Door* (Fritz Lang 1947) and *Midnight Lace* (David Miller 1960). Both films conform to the 'Somebody's Trying to Kill Me and I Think It's My Husband' genre, also defined as 'The Modern Gothic' (Russ 1973). *Secret Beyond the Door* is a classical film of this kind, while in *Midnight Lace* the trope is reframed and brought up to date. Diane Waldman describes the Gothic Romance cycle, produced by Hollywood between 1940 and 1948, as films built upon the following formula:

> a young woman meets a handsome older man to whom she is alternately attracted and repelled. After a whirlwind courtship – she marries him. After returning to the ancestral mansion – the heroine experiences a series of bizarre and uncanny incidents, open to ambiguous interpretation, revolving around the question of whether or not the Gothic male really loves her. She begins to suspect that he may be a murderer. (Waldman 1984: 29-30)

Rebecca (1940) is commonly identified as the first in the cycle and *Sleep my Love* and *Caught* (both produced in 1948) as the last. But Michael Walker extends the cycle beyond 1948 to include – somewhat appropriately here – *Midnight Lace*, made in 1960. He cites Miller's later film as a 'linked film' and perhaps the last in the cycle (Walker 1990: 16-17). The sonic domain is the bearer of meaning in both films and provides a space for female subjectivity. The relationship of the sonic domain to the visual one is one the classical cinematic apparatus works hard to standardize. It

aligns the spectator's eyes with the camera operator's and his or her ears with the sound recordist's. But both films also reveal the inability of the image to moor sound, and the 'un-placeability' of the sonic space itself calls up notions of radical alterity and, in this Gothic context, threat.

Before I continue I shall briefly indicate the sound theory pertinent to my discussion. One might assume sound 'does not count' as a space because one cannot see it. But sound, as Altman (1980, 1992) and Levin (1984) assiduously point out, *is* material and does occupy space. 'The production of sound is… a material event' writes Altman, 'taking place in space and time, and involving the disruption of surrounding matter' (1994: 18). Theorists have worked hard to redress the perceived visual emphasis of cinema studies. 'The spectator is no longer a passive recipient of images at the pointed end of the optical pyramid' write Elsaesser and Hagener, 'but rather a bodily being enmeshed acoustically, spatially and affectively in the filmic texture' (2010: 131-2). Sound in cinema is commonly figured in spatial terms, both in its ability to occupy three-dimensional space and to suggest alternative, invisible dimensions (Doane 1980, Levin 1984, Altman 1992 Chion 1999, Sjorgren 2006, Elsaesser & Hagener 2010, Martin 2014). Sonic space in film has also been theorised in feminist terms. Doane (1980) and Silverman (1988) apply notions of female containment in the visual field in classical Hollywood cinema to the position of the female voice in the acoustic domain, stating that the voice will always be brought back under control at some point by the diegsis. 'The voice-off' Silverman writes, 'exceeds the limits of the frame, but not the limits of the diegesis; its 'owner' occupies a potentially recoverable space – one, indeed, which is almost always brought within the field of vision at some point or other' (Silverman 1988: 48). But Michel Chion also notes that the 'voice is elusive', and that it is not so easy to pin it back down to the image. Moreover, as Levin, Altman and others are keen to remind us, sound does not behave in the same way as image and is not received by the audience via the same sensorial route. It cannot be discussed in the same terms and theorised with the same critical language and assumptions. The relationship between the sound and the image in cinema is a complex one and I cannot hope to cover all of the ground here. Instead, I make the vococentric decision to concentrate upon the

female voice in these two films. As Chion observes, '*There are voices, and then everything else*' (Chion's italics, 1999: 5).

Secret Beyond the Door is a film which lends itself to analysis in this regard because of its notable use of the voice-over. The main protagonist is Celia Lamphere (Joan Bennett), a strong character and a woman who has had some experience in life. The typical Gothic heroine is shy and naïve and in the Hollywood cycle she is often (frustratingly) a bit of a 'push-over'. But Celia is open, unafraid and loving – a force to be reckoned with. On holiday in Mexico, she meets and impetuously marries an architect called Mark Lamphere (Michael Redgrave) and comes to live with him in his New England mansion. This film is also modelled upon the European fable of Bluebeard, in which a young woman marries a stranger only to discover that he keeps the bodies of his murdered wives in a locked room in the castle. Celia soon discovers that Mark keeps a series of reconstructed rooms in the basement in which historical murders have taken place. They are the actual rooms, complete with objects, furnishings and murder weapons. But they are not locked, and indeed we are given a guided tour of these rooms along with some party guests. But one room is kept locked, and Celia must use her natural guile to fashion a key. Finally inside, she draws aside the curtain to reveal a facsimile of their conjugal bedroom upstairs, in which she now realises Mark intends to kill her. These 'Modern Gothic' films commonly turn 'on a woman's desire for forbidden knowledge' writes Maria Tatar (2004: 3) and on the 'anxiety and excitement attending marriage to a stranger' (89). Tatar points out the historical context behind Hollywood's investment in dramas of this kind. 'This was, after all, a time of crisis' she writes, 'when women in great numbers were marrying men who were real strangers – soldiers going off to war who were taking vows out of a frantic need to establish intimacy and affection '(89). It is briefly but significantly mentioned in *Secret Beyond the Door* that Mark returned from the war a changed man.

In the two previous chapters I have discussed ways in which houses can become physically representative of mental states on film. The same work applies here in Lang's film. The mansion in which Celia finds herself is a strange building, and it gets progressively stranger as the film unfolds.

Celia's figure roams the Lamphere mansion like a 'restless inhabitant' trying to uncover the truth about her marriage (Elizabeth Bronfen 2004: 177). Bronfen deepens our reading of the situation to include Celia's own complicity:

> [...] all she can do is pace restlessly up and down the diverse bedrooms she finds herself in, accompanied by the ceaseless readjustments she makes to her critical judgment of her situation, or wander along the dark corridors and up the somber staircases in her new home, driven by her desire to enjoy her own peril. (Bronfen 2004: 177)

But as well as a roaming body, this film provides us with Celia's roaming voice and the two are not always connected. *Secret Beyond the Door* famously opens with a voice-over, which guides us into the narrative like an aural Ariadne's thread. The film opens with a 'pre-film', an animated sequence produced by Disney Studios. A shimmering pool appears. Single notes strike upon a xylophone, in time with drops of water falling onto its surface. The camera moves (an illusion, given that the sequence is animated), following the ripples. A woman's voice enters this hushed and magical scene: "I remember, long ago I read a book, that told the meaning of dreams". Bennett's voice is well modulated and dreamlike, with a warm, hushed tone that draws us into a sphere of confidence. "It said, that if a girl dreams of a boat or a ship, she will reach a safe harbour". As she says this we pass a paper boat floating on the water. "But if she dreams of daffodils... she is in great danger" she continues, and we see shadowy trailing daffodils above and below the surface. The total unison between what the voice describes and what we see leads us to interpet this imagery as a figuration of the voice's psyche. The voice is in effect 'speaking' or making the film. Chion describes such bodiless voice-overs as *acousmêtres* and attributes great and archaic power to them. 'When the acousmatic presence is a voice, and especially when this voice has not yet been visualised' he writes, 'we get a special being...' (1999: 21). The powers of the *acousmêtre* are four: 'the ability to be everywhere, to see all, to know all, and to have complete power' (24). Celia's voice at this point is an *acousmêtre* and has this fourfold authority. In fact, as we have not yet seen the

body (and do not know whether or not we will see it), we can call her what Chion terms a *complete acousmêtre*.

But if we ask ourselves where she might be speaking from there is no clear spatial answer. She is speaking from an 'elsewhere'. Her tone verges on the sepulchral, which bolsters its impression as a spectral voice which 'floats freely in a mysterious intermediate domain' (Slavoj Žižek 1996: 92). The term 'voice-over' is useful and ubiquitous, but not wholly accurate. Can we really place the voice as 'over' the image? 'Vocabulary in describing this kind of "space" is tricky' writes Britte Sjorgren, 'it is beyond, but also behind, within, alongside, intersecting the diegetic space' (2006: 38). Žižek suggests that the voice 'does not simply persist at a different level with regard to what we see, it rather points toward a gap in the visible, toward the dimension of what eludes our gaze… ultimately, we hear things because we cannot see everything' (Žižek 1996: 93). But what happens when Celia's body enters the picture?

"But this is no time for me to think of danger – this is my wedding day!" the voice cries, and the film cuts out of the 'dream' and into the real world, where we see a large church bell swinging back and forth. The voice (which for clarity I shall henceforth call the voice-over), gifted with all pervasive power, carries over into this 'real world'. "Something old, something new, something borrowed, something blue". On the word 'blue' the film cuts inside the church. We are placed high up behind a large crucifix statue, its stark silhouette cleaving the image in two. Either side of its divide we see figures robed in black kneeling in front of an altar far below. Weddings signify union and happiness, but this image shows us nothing of the sort. We see only division and death. But the voice-over does not register this ironic split. "Something old is this church. Four centuries old. Mark says it's a felicitous structure". On the word 'felicitous' the films cuts to a barred window high up in the wall – another contradiction. We continue to track past the sober church architecture while the voice-over relates how Mark believes this cathedral is built in perfect harmony "so that here only events of joy can happen, 400 years of joy". We see no joy, and we do not know who Mark is. On the final 'joy' the camera reveals a man in a dark suit standing with his back to us. We

accelerate towards him but come to a sudden and disconcerting stop and then a freeze-frame on the words: “And something new is Mark himself”. The freeze frame is a deliberate touch which causes a moment of odd dissonance. No joyful face turns to greet us. Instead we are brought up against the resolute back of a stranger. In the opening sequence we were immersed in a world uninflected by irony or contradiction. Now this unison is broken. We come to understand in this scene that the acousmatic voice-over is not as omniscient as we had thought. What we see does not always concur with what her words say.

This complexity develops further. The film cuts to a doorway as the voice-over says, “And love is new for me”. On the word ‘love’, a bride enters as if blown in by the word itself. At this point the film performs a crucial structural transition, and the audience makes the necessary adjustment – what Gilbert Perez calls a renegotiation of their agreement with what the work is doing (Perez 1998: 21-22). As the now physically revealed Joan Bennett stands in front of us (we do not yet know her character’s name), the voice-over whispers “My heart is pounding so… the sound of it drowns out everything”. On these words, the figure reaches up to touch her heart with her hand. With this simple gesture the voice-over transitions from a disembodied acousmatic voice-over into an embodied one. The voice no longer speaks from an unspecified place and time, but in the ‘present’ of the film. It has become what Doane calls the ‘inner lining’ of the body we see onscreen (1980: 41). The voice-over has changed into an inner voice.

Chion calls this process, in which the voice is finally given a body, one of ‘de-acousmatization’ (1999: 27). ‘*Embodying the voice* is a sort of symbolic act’ he writes, ‘dooming the acousmêtre to the fate of ordinary mortals’ (27-28). The *acousmêtre* in Lang’s film however, does not quite suffer that fate. Celia’s voice-over may now have a body, but it loses none of its ambiguity and retains an element of mystery. Tom Gunning observes that Celia’s inner voice ‘primarily reflects her uncertainties, doubts and fears, and even repressed feelings’ (2009: 350). If Lang’s original intent had been realised, the relationship of this voice to its onscreen body would have been even more layered and complicated. Lang planned for Celia’s inner voice to be vocalised by a

different actress altogether. Indeed, the original cut of the film contained a voice-over performed by an actress called Colleen Collins. 'This would have staged Lang's conviction that the unconscious *is* another', Gunning explains, one who is (and Gunning quotes Lang here) 'someone in us we perhaps don't know' (2009: 350). Following a disastrous audience response in early screenings, Universal Studios ordered the film to be substantially recut. Bennett agreed to record a new voice-over which for Lang, as Gunning relates, was a great betrayal (350).

However, the coherence imposed on the film does not wholly succeed in 'taming' its experimental impulses. This is clear in the final act of the film in which Celia's voice-over apparently disappears. The fate of Celia's inner voice as articulated by the voice-over is a point of debate amongst feminist theorists. It is commonly assumed that her voice is silenced once Celia has been ostensibly murdered by Mark, and is replaced by his voice-over. Doane for example, cites its disappearance as one which 'gives witness to the death of female subjectivity' (1988: 151). She concurs with Stephen Jenkins's analysis in which he writes, 'Any notion of the possiblity of female discourse within the text is always undercut, (dis)placed, qualified' (Jenkins quoted in Doane: 151). But Celia's voice-over actually disappears earlier, at the moment at which she realises the truth about her husband when she is in the basement. From a psychoanalytical point of view, one could interpret this sudden silencing as analogous to the way in which a shocking insight in a therapy session often renders the analysand unable to speak. But the situation is not as straightforward as any of these interpretations suggest, because Celia's voice-over does not entirely disappear. There are two sequences following her physical return to the film in which her voice is placed in a deliberately liminal zone – a new space that we have not seen or heard before in the film – before it settles back into her body.

Once she realises the awful truth Celia rushes out into the night, where she runs back and forth getting lost in the fog. She comes to a halt as bushes bar her way. The music stops like a sonic holding of the breath, and a shadowy figure emerges out of the mist. As it approaches her, the film fades to black. Out of this blackness we hear Celia utter a long, loud scream. This moment is an

example of what Chion calls a 'screaming point'; a moment in the cinema in which 'speech is suddenly extinct, a black hole, the exit of being' (1999: 79). But despite the scream, we do not believe Celia is killed. This is not only because the audience knows the film is not going to defy Hollywood convention. The discrepancy between what Celia's inner voice perceives to be the truth and what we see with our own eyes onscreen has trained us to well understand that appearances can be deceptive. Moreover, while her gaze may be 'often deficient' (Gunning 2009: 352), her character most certainly is not, and we know that she is good, brave and clever enough to survive. We also know that were she to leave, the film would effectively be over.

It is what follows this screaming point that causes controversy. The film cuts directly to Mark's room. He enters and surprisingly it is his voice-over which now speaks. "It will be a curious trial" he says, "The people of New York versus Mark Lamphere… charged with the murder of his wife, Celia". There follows a hallucinogenic scene set in a court room, populated by doubles of Mark who enact his own trial. The prompt departure and replacement of Celia's voice would seem to support Doane's assertion that once again, female subjectivity has been subsumed within the narrative and the female character 'ultimately dispossessed of this signifier of subjectivity as well' (1988: 150). She describes the common fate of the female voice-over in 1940s films thus:

> When the voice-over is introduced in the beginning of a film as the possession of the female protagonist who purportedly controls the narration of her own past, it is rarely sustained […] Instead, voices-over are more frequently detached from the female protagonist and mobilized as moments of aggression or attack exercised against her. (Doane 1988: 150)

The screaming blackness incites a rupture that is physical and, according to Doane, discursive. The vocal discourse moves from Celia to Mark, but 'the narrative also displaces its hermeneutic question from her relation to a locked door – to his (the locked door of his childhood, when his mother left him alone to go out with "another man")' (Doane 1988: 151). Various theorists offer alternative explanations. David Bordwell details how frequent and protean the use of the voice-

over was in films of this period. He describes 1940s Hollywood as a 'vast storytelling ecosystem, bursting with compulsive energy' (2017: 1). Filmmakers were opportunistic, experimental and not always consistent and it was not uncommon for voice-overs both male and female to disappear. He continues:

> If Hollywood narration were a tidy sender/receiver communication, we would expect to find boxes within boxes. An external voice might frame the film, opening and closing it with all-knowing efficiency. Character narrators would take their turns, launching and rounding off embedded episodes. As in literature, those first-person narrators would confine themselves wholly to what they witnessed or could plausibly know… But such boxed and bookended voice-over narration is rare. (Bordwell 2017: 246)

Gunning tackles Doane and Jenkins' assertion on its own terms. 'Doane and Jenkins are right that the film undercuts an authoritative female discourse' he writes about *Secret Beyond the Door*. 'But,' he continues, 'their objection to this would seem to argue for a sort of unified consciousness that their use of Lacanian psychoanalysis renders rather contradictory' (2009: 350). Gunning points out that the film does not proclaim a coherent version of subjectivity, and I would agree. *Secret Beyond the Door,* Gunning suggests, 'stages a kind of incoherence of subjectivity that bleeds across gender roles – in ways that make the tidy patriarchal reading of the film by Jenkins and Doane rather problematic' (349). Moreover, he correctly observes that in this scene Mark is talking about what he *wants* to do, not what he has already done. One cannot tidily interpret this scene as a male persona moving into a space previously occupied by a female one, because she hasn't actually been done away with. Sarah Kozloff offers another interpretation. She writes that 'voice-over is like a strong perfume – a little goes a long way' (1988: 45), and suggests that we never actually lose the impression that Celia is speaking. She quotes Eric Smoodin, who writes, 'Once the presence of the voice-over narrator has been established, the entire film serves as a sort of linguistic event, as the narrator's speech even when there is none' (Smoodin quoted in Kozloff: 47). This leads Kozloff to consider the observations of Christian Metz:

> The impression that *someone is speaking* is bound not to the empirical presence of a definite, known, or knowable speaker but to the listener's spontaneous perception of the linguistic nature of the object to which he is listening; because it is speech, someone must be speaking. (Metz quoted in Kozloff 1988: 44)

Metz suggests that it is the overall 'speech' of the film to which the audience is attentive, which leads Kozloff and Smoodin to theorise that our initial fusing of the voice-over with the overall filmic enunciation is sustained, even when that voice-over ceases to speak out loud. From this perspective, Celia's voice-over can be said to retreat or refrain from speaking out loud rather than submit to being cut off entirely. That might imply that the agency behind the voice-over is simply too busy articulating the rest of the film to speak to us directly. Such notions attribute a great deal of intentionality to the voice-over, which is a position difficult to support. Nonetheless, it is an idea taken up by Bronfen and Sjogren who reach similar conclusions about this peculiarly deceptive sequence. They suggest it is not Mark's actual voice at work here, but a phantasmatic recreation of it by the still pervasive consciousness of Celia. Bronfen writes:

> Having reached the acme of her voyage through the phantasmatic space of her marriage, Celia has appropriated Mark's fantasy, making the jury scene a part of her inner theatre. Thus she is able to enjoy knowledge of her death by virtue of the traces it has left behind in the form of her husband's confession before the law. (Bronfen 2004: 191)

Sjogren makes a similar point:

> Celia's point of view and her voice-off are still very much "present" in the scene, despite her seeming elision. If we understand the project of this part of the film as an attempt – and specifically Celia's attempt – to interpret Mark, then this voice-off responds directly to this

> effort, finally getting "inside" Mark's head and showing us what he's thinking. (Sjogren 2006: 113).

These are fairly convincing interpretations, but they do not take into consideration Lang's attempt to deceive us – or at least to taunt us – about Celia's demise. Lang's elision is deliberate and we are not meant to know what has happened. Were this really to be read as Celia's imagining of events, we might be more likely to be alerted to that fact by Lang. Moreover, Mark's voice-over enters again in a later scene in which he stands waiting for a train to take him back to New York. Is this Celia's imagination once again? It seems to rather stretch the point, particularly as she has re-entered the film physically by that point. Attributing Mark's voice-over and the dream-like episode it narrates to the phantasmic emission from the consciousness of a 'behind the scenes' Celia is inventive, but it is also a response to what is suggested by the film. Celia's voice occasionally demonstrates power over the image. For example, when Celia is looking out of the window at Mark attending to an injured dog, she remarks how she wishes he wasn't so emotionally locked away, as locked as the door to room number 7. The film makes an uncharacteristic cut to a brief shot of the locked door, before returning to the dog scene. I would suggest that Bronfen and Sjogren are able to theorise Mark's voice as Celia's creation because the experimental quality of the film encourages them to do so. But if we look more closely at what happens when Celia returns, we find that Lang has not entirely displaced her voice-over from the narrative and in fact he manages to create a space for it on the screen itself.

The scene with Mark's voice-over follows Celia's scream into the void. Tatar's thoughts on Celia's 'screaming point' are useful here, as they theorise how this scream correlates structurally to one heard earlier in the film:

> The scream is symptomatic of the passionate mix of death and desire haunting her. It echoes the scream heard at the very beginning of the film, when a Mexican woman's shriek

is heard off-screen in a tableau that brings Mark and Celia together for the first time. (Tatar 2004: 104)

The second scream rents the film violently in two. Celia's erotic fascination with the fight over a woman in Mexico is clear, and Mark recognises her repressed desires. Tatar rightly draws a connection between these two screams, and reads Celia's scream as a terrified recognition of her own drives as well as those of her husband. She writes, 'It is only after enacting her own version of the love triangle in Mexico that Celia seems able to free herself from a state of terrorised hysteria and to move in the mode of calm determination' (2004: 104). This interpretation holds good, because when Celia does reappear her voice undergoes a noticeable transformation.

Fig. 3.1 Celia stands between two worlds

Celia is thankfully not dead and re-enters the picture by drawing aside a curtain to reveal herself. She stands in a theatrically swathed doorway, framed by light. "I thought you left – last night," says Mark. "I did" she replies. Strangely however, we do not see her lips move. This is not only because she stands in an unlit space and is not in close-up. As she moves through the

darkened passage, effectively crossing over from death into life to where Mark stands surprised, her lips barely move as she continues: "I ran into Bob on the lawn. He'd come for David and lost his way in the fog. I went with him to Levender Falls". She is speaking but her voice is not in-synch with her body, in fact her mouth hardly moves at all. Instead, her voice uncannily hovers around her lips. The passage between the rooms is a transitional space through which she must process back into the narrative. As she crosses back into the film we witness a literal re-inhabitation of her body by her voice. Once she has fully entered the room it settles where it should be, within her body and issuing directly out of her mouth. "Why did you come back?" asks Mark. With a clear and definitive unison of body and voice she utters the crucial words, "Because I love you. Because I married you for better or for worse". Celia is now in full command of the situation. She knows the dark secret at the heart of her marriage, that Mark intends to kill her, and she knows Mark knows she knows. Celia's voice, far from being subsumed, disempowered or disappeared, now fully articulates psychic truth. Her voice has not been reductively contained within her body and within the diegesis. On the contrary, it has found its agency.

There follows another pivotal scene in which voices are once more curiously positioned. Mark's sister leaves the house forever, although he begs her to stay. Celia will now be alone and unprotected in the house and Mark is terrified of what he might do. So, he comes to tell Celia that he must leave for New York. The scene takes place in a darkened room. Celia stands by the window, framed by moonlight and Mark stands in the doorway on the opposite side of the room. The two talk in short, pithy utterances. Mark announces he is going to New York and urges her not to spend the night alone but to go to Levender Falls. "I'm not afraid" she replies. He tells her he loves her very much. "I know," she replies. We cannot see Mark's lips move at all, while Celia's barely move. Their dialogue is, as Sjorgen puts it, "Gently disembodied" (Sjorgen 2006: 117). It is poised in the air around them, hovering in a sonic bardo. It floats near to their lips, but 'slightly askew, slightly off'" (117). In this room Celia and Mark communicate with one another without actually having to speak. Indeed, one could suggest it is their *voice-overs* who now speak to one another. This mysterious, shadowy room has not been seen in the film before – at least not from this angle. It is

deliberately rendered strange and unfamiliar, as if it is a magic room. Given the nature of the sound in this room in which words can be spoken without lips, it seems to be a visual realisation of the offscreen-space from which voice-overs usually emanate. Mark and Celia are 'literally "in" this gap – in this "between" that the voiceover articulates so plainly…' (Sjogren: 117). The house in Levender Falls has always been a magic house, warped by psychic forces. Lang brings a non-diegetic space into the diegesis, thereby providing a room in which the voice-overs, those carriers of deep interiority, can be present.

Fig. 3.2 Celia and Mark meet in the room of their acousmêtres

This analysis of *Secret Beyond the Door* offers a different reading of the fate of female subjectivity in the Gothic melodrama to that put forward by Doane and Silverman. Celia's voice does not disappear, nor is it sequestered back into the confines of the diegesis. The sonic domain is recruited by Lang to structure the voice of the unconscious as well as the conscious Celia. The relationship between the two is not straightforward, just as what we hear does not always concur with what we see. This 'creative flex of contradiction' (Sjorgren 2006: 3) is not entirely jettisoned by Lang when Celia's scream ruptures his film in two – the event which causes her apparent silence, or de-acousmatisation. Instead, he continues to explore ways in which her voice can hover around her body and not quite inhabit it. The unconscious mind of Celia keeps on working to alert

her conscious mind of its psychic truth. Her new-found voice towards the end of the film does not represent a subjectivity brought under control. Quite the opposite, as I have suggested it portrays a subjectivity that has at last found a place from which to speak.

My analysis of *Secret Beyond the Door* has concentrated upon the non-synchronised voice of its main character. Lang's conceptual yoking of the voice-over to the unconscious – deploying one as the sonic manifestation of the other – leads him into experimental territory. It allows him to play one dimension (image) against the other (sound), and to also call up regions and spaces we will never be able to see, are radically elsewhere, and can never be wholly recuperated by the film. I shall now move on to discuss the position of the voice in another Gothic romance, *Midnight Lace*. There is no voice-over in this film. Instead, it is the synchronised voice which threatens to cut loose from its spatial moorings. Instead of a Gothic mansion, Kit Preston (Doris Day) lives in a comfortable flat in London's well-heeled Grosvenor Square. Like Celia, Kit has married a man she does not know and come to live in his house. Unlike Celia, Kit does not speak to us in voice-over. There is a curious unevenness to this film which at the time was very much attributed to Day's performance and in particular, to her voice. Yet it is precisely this awkwardness which lends the film an odd fascination and which draws me towards it. Firstly, I look closely at Day's synchronised voice and the way it behaves. Secondly, I take a comment Kit makes early on in the film and explore how it unknowingly opens up a much broader enquiry into the complex and unruly relationship between image and sound in cinema.

Kit is an American heiress who has married suave English banker Tony Preston (Rex Harrison) and moved to his home in London. It is clear from the start that she is new to her surroundings and does not fit in. We are keenly aware of the contrast between her cream-coated, glossy glamour and the stoicism of the huddled, raincoated Londoners that surround her. *Midnight Lace* reveals Hollywood perceptions of a drab and dreary England emerging from the war, not yet in the swinging sixties but on the brink of them. Day appears luminescent onscreen, clothed throughout in numerous, exquisite outfits, with perpetually shiny hair. This shininess contributes

significantly to the film's overall mise-en-scène. Kit and Tony's flat is full of reflective, expensive surfaces; mirrors, patterned glass screens, champagne glasses – even the sheets are shiny. The core creative team had worked with Douglas Sirk in the previous decade and were well used to creating a distinctive mise-en-scène. Russell Metty, the cinematographer, had worked on films such as *All That Heaven Allows* (1955) and *Written on the Wind* (1956). Day was at the height of her career and her box office popularity was soaring. Yet despite these production credentials, *Midnight Lace* was almost universally derided by critics.

The film opens in a "real London fog". Kit comes out of the American Embassy (not insignificantly) and spurning the offer of a cab she opts instead to walk home through the park. She enters a foggy gloom and can barely see the path ahead. Suddenly out of the grey mist around her, a voice calls her name. It is an odd, high-pitched voice which stops Kit in her tracks. "Mrs Pres-ton! Over here! So close I could reach out and put my hands on your throat!" "Who are you? What do you want?" she cries. "You'll know when the time comes Mrs Pres-ton – just before I kill you!" Understandably, a terrified Kit breaks into a run and finds her way out of the park. She plunges through the front door of the mansion block where she lives and into the lift, frantically searching for her key. When she eventually gets in to her flat she finds her husband unexpectedly at home, calmly mixing a drink. She throws herself into his arms telling all. When Tony presses her for details, she says the voice sounded high, 'like a puppet'. (I shall return to this comment later on.) As we watch and listen to Kit, we cannot help but notice how *audible* she is. We hear every word and breath, even when Tony holds her close. What becomes clear in this scene in particular is just how clearly and closely Day's voice has been recorded.

Day's voice has a particular quality, what Roland Barthes calls a 'grain' (1977). But it is not only this grain which sets her voice apart in this film. Every word is distinct even when she is buried in an embrace or a coat, or speaks with her back to us. We hear her inhalations and exhalations just as clearly as we do her words. At times it is obvious her voice has been overdubbed, because it could not have been rendered so clearly due to her physical position – for example, when

she is buried in her husband's lapel. But overall, her voice has been recorded in a way that sounds overly close, and this distinguishes it from other voices in the film. This tone is close to what Chion refers to as the 'I-Voice' (1999: 51). The audience will generally read the I-Voice as an inner voice, because it appears to be disassociated with the diegesis and to speak to us more directly and intimately. To achieve this effect it must be recorded in a particular way. Gunning (who attributes this same quality to Celia's voice-over in *Secret Beyond the Door*) summarises this as a 'close miking which eliminates any sense of distance between us and the voice, so that it seems to speak to us directly, and a lack of reverberation which abstracts it from any specific space' (2009: 350). Day's voice in this film does not sound as if it wholly belongs to the onscreen environment. However, it is clear that it does. This creates a sense of dissonance, which has implications for the way her voice is received by the audience. The obvious assiduousness with which Day's voice has been recorded might attest to the experience of the recordists on the set, and their investment in the task at hand. Both had worked with Hitchcock and Sirk, and Waldon O Watson went on to win an Academy Award for his contribution towards the invention of Sensurround in 1975. But the imbalance in audio levels points towards an over-exertion with regards to the star of the film and an over-attachment to the voice with which she was very much associated. It also attests to the extreme level of importance given to audiovisual synchronicity.

Sound technology had advanced in the 1940s and 50s, but fidelity to the human voice was still a top priority and vocal synchronisation was strictly adhered to in Hollywood. 'Film is a medium that presents complex perceptual experiences for its audiences by aligning the spectator's eyes with the camera operator's, and his/her ears with the recordist's' notes James Lastra, and classical Hollywood cinema attempts to provide 'a simulated perceptual experience of a real event' by using normative perceptual unity as a standard (Lastra 2000: Kindle Edition Chapter 6). Drawing on a Freudian perspective, Silverman theorises that the female voice in classical cinema is more strictly held to these rules of audiovisual synchronicity and 'holds the female subject much more fully than the male subject to the unity of sound and image, and consequently to the representation of lack' (1988: 51). Doane reminds us of the broader issues at stake:

> Sound carries with it the potential risk of exposing the material heterogeneity of the medium; attempts to contain that risk surface in the language of the ideology of organic unity. In the discourse of technicians, sound is "married" to the image and, as one sound engineer puts it in an article on post-synchronization, "one of the basic goals of the motion picture industry is to make the screen look alive in the eyes of the audience…"
> (Doane 1980: 35)

Audiovisual synchronisation puts the pieces back together. But Chion reminds us that this attachment or 'nailing down' of the voice to the body can never be wholly effective. 'So this nailing-down via rigorous post-synching' he asks, 'is it not there to mask the fact that whatever lengths we go to, restoring voices to bodies is always *jerry-rigging* to one extent or another?' (Chion 1999: 130). If we return to Day's voice, we find that its overdetermined quality actually works to dissuade us of its stable attachment to her body rather than to reassure us of it. We are perpetually reminded of its grafted-on-ness. This places Day's attempt at a realistic performance under pressure, particularly as so much of her performance in this film is based around how she is expressing herself vocally. It also renders her observation about the voice in the park as being 'puppet-like' less innocuous than it might at first appear. Her throwaway remark is significant within the context of this film. The threatening 'puppet-like' voice is recorded as we find out. But so is Day's voice, detached and then reattached to her body in the filmic process. What Kit's comment unintentionally calls to our attention is that the voice does not ever wholly belong to the body and that film, like puppetry, evokes ventriloquism.

If we look more closely at Day's performance we find that our apperception of her voice and her body as not wholly conjoined works to destabilise her performance and our relationship with it. This becomes particularly apparent in highly dramatic scenes in which her voice loses all coherence. In *Midnight Lace* there are two notable scenes in which Kit is driven into a hysterical frenzy. The first scene is set in the lift. It begins with a wide exterior shot showing Kit's building

and the construction going on in the building next door. We have already met the builders when a metal girder almost fell on Kit in an earlier scene. The site manager Mr Younger (John Gavin) rescued her on that occasion. We now cut inside as Kit leaves their flat and enters the lift. In contrast to the outside world of active men, Kit's drama happens inside the building and inside the lift – a doubled enclosure. The lift unexpectedly stops mid-floor, the lights go out and Kit is trapped. She stabs repeatedly at the lift buttons. She hears footsteps and through the opaque glass she sees a figure slowly climbing the stairs that encircle the lift. She holds her voice in check by clasping her hand over her mouth. Looking up through the lift's latticed ceiling, she sees a door rattle insistently and then a dark figure pushes it open and climbs down onto the lift. We can barely see Kit in the darkness. It is her voice which takes over. Her gasps and moans become progressively more hysterical until a torch is shone directly into her eyes. At this point she loses control and breaks into desperate screams. The film cuts to a more extreme close-up and we see only a pair of terrified eyes in the torch beam. Her body has lost all coherence and so has her voice.

In her book *Doris Day Confidential, Hollywood, Sex and Stardom* (2013) Tamar Jeffers McDonald traces the critical reception of Day's performance. It was widely reported that Day had a breakdown while filming this scene and had to be escorted off set and take a break for a few days. Neil Rau from the Los Angeles Examiner visited the set and describes how the lift really was a construction that moved up and down. Director and cinematographer were poised on beams outside and moved up and down filming a sequestered and hysterical Day inside. Rau witnessed the scene being filmed and reports with evident glee how it ended: 'When the elevator again reaches the stage floor, Doris' own husband, Marty Melcher, is there to help her off. It is obvious her play-acting has gotten the best of her, because she falls into his arms and starts sobbing' (Rau quoted in McDonald 2013: 226). McDonald notes how the tone of Rau's reporting 'undermines Day's labour and talent' reducing her work to 'an emotional outburst' (226). She highlights how this scene, reported in other papers as well, was generally framed in this way. 'Kit's hysteria' writes McDonald, 'created through Day's skills, is read as not performed but lived' (230). Might this over-

identification with Day's performance, this interpretation of it as 'real' rather than 'performed', have something to do with the way it has been recorded?

McDonald goes on to make another suggestion about the way Day plays this scene. Mr and Mrs Preston – Kit and Tony – sleep in separate beds and have not yet been on their honeymoon due to Tony's work commitments. Kit continually tries to sexually arouse her husband. Indeed, she buys the negligee which gives the film its title. But Tony postpones intimacy, offering her fetishistic, shiny objects and a trip to Venice instead. McDonald concludes their marriage is not yet consummated, and goes on to suggest that 'Day's performance of Kit's hysteria works skilfully to indicate that the outburst is both a result of and an outlet for her pent-up sexual tensions, with her audible panting echoing the deep breathing of arousal' (2013 :225). Day's heavy breathing and moans sound sexual, and the undertow of this scene with its spatial penetration is clear. But one cannot attribute this intent to Day as a conscious acting choice. What is certain is that there is something excessive about Day's voice in this scene which the audience (then and now) finds hard to accept. Is this simply because Day is speaking with her unrepressed voice and it is not easy to listen to? I suggest that it is the close intimacy of the I-Voice with which Day's voice has been imbued that brings the audience into too close a proximity with the abject and unrestrained register of her emotions. We are, to put it bluntly, having our noses rubbed in it.

The second time Day pushes her voice to uncomfortable limits occurs in a much later scene. Kit has now been exposed to many threatening phone calls from this 'puppet voice' and is beginning to unravel. She has also been severely frightened by an event earlier in the day when someone pushed her in front of a London bus as it approached the stop. She has survived, but feeling vulnerable she asks her friend to help convince her husband of the veracity of the stalker by pretending she too has heard the voice on the phone. Tony returns from work and exposes the lie when he reveals the telephone line has been down all day. Defeated, Kit retreats upstairs and her friend leaves. Kit's Aunt Bea arrives and the phone rings again. Tony asks Aunt Bea to answer and pretend to be Kit in order to trap the stalker into speaking to someone else. Kit watches from the

top of the stairs, only to hear the plan fail because the caller recognises it is not Kit on the phone. Day now begins a performance of total descent into abjection. Like Tony and Aunt Bea we watch passive and appalled as she dissolves into moaning, inchoate hysteria at the bottom of the stairs. Her descent is once again both psychological and spatial. The scene is almost unbearable to watch, but it is strangely so. Why does her voice seem so excessive? It is as if her voice is the bearer of too much abjection which because of its hyper-signification is carried too directly towards us. It is not simply that Day could be overacting – though one might be tempted to arrive at that conclusion. Her voice seems to emanate from another space entirely.

There is perhaps a further reason why Day's performance and her voice in particular sticks out so awkwardly from the film's shiny mise-en-scène. *Midnight Lace* holds the sonic dimension up for examination in a broader sense. Kit is after all stalked by a voice, which she refers to as high-pitched, "like a puppet" – a throwaway comment on her part as I have already pointed out, but one with significant connotations. But it is the 'grafted on-ness' of the voice at the heart of puppetry which is also evoked by this puppet voice and by the film in general. On her first visit to Scotland Yard, Kit is asked to listen to an audiotape of various 'telephone talkers' or 'heavy breathers' the Yard has compiled. Some of the comments would, as the Inspector says, "make Freud sit up and blink." Once she puts on the headphones and plugs herself into the tape machine she is effectively cut out of the conversation. The men study her while she sits in the chair, attached to the tape machine by wires. They discuss her over her head; any enemies she may have, her physical health, and finally (inevitably) her mental health. The overly large headphones Kit is wearing emphasise their infantilisation of her. The inspector suggests Kit may be making all this up to gain attention. The apparatus stops and Kit is released. She has not recognised any of the voices. As they get up to leave the Inspector makes a shocking comment. Asked by Kit if her stalker might call again, he replies that perhaps there will be a next time, "if he enjoyed your gasp enough". Day's voice once again becomes over-emphasised and problematised.

Fig. 3.3 The phone rings in Midnight Lace

The sonic dimension in this film is the bearer of meaning. The phone is central to the film and Kit is terrorised by its ring. Kit's phones are pink or white, a nod to 1960s luxury but one which contrasts with the menace or 'filth' which Kit says flows down the receiver. We see the stalker's phone once and it is old-fashioned and black. The white phone finally reveals to Kit who her husband really is, as he places his finger over it to stop her ringing the police and remarks "I wouldn't do that if I were you Kit". We are not scared by Kit's pink phone. Nor are we scared by the tape recorder, revealed towards the end of the film to be the source of the voice. But we are scared by the puppet voice. It has no body and no breath. One thing we can say about Day's closely recorded breath and voice is that they are signs of her vitality, a warrant of her hapto-sonorous corporeality. Tracing the development of audio technology after the second world war, Steven Connor tells us that, 'the most important aspect of the new talking machines was the substitution of electricity for breath as the motive power for producing and transmitting voice' (Connor 2000: 377). A voice without breath cannot be trusted, it is a voice issued from beyond. This updated Gothic romance recruits the invisible, electrically transmitted sonic domain as its conduit of threat. The detachability of the voice is the source of its fear.

Non-human modes of communication and operation, i.e. telephonic communication, electrically operated machines and audio-technology are, this film suggests, not to be trusted. The film constructs a spatial metaphor to support this premise. It is the building work next door that accidentally cuts off the electricity to the mansion block in which the Prestons live, causing the suspension of the lift and the break in the telephone lines. Mr Younger (the site manager) is therefore responsible for interrupting this invisible flow. Not only is he 'younger' than Tony, but he is a builder – a good, honest profession unlike Tony's dubious (and crooked as it transpires) work at the bank. He is also American, something we can tell by his voice. His wholesome voice is in contrast to Tony's overly-refined English one. Furthermore, as we find out, Tony is the source of the fake, puppet-like voice. It is revealed in a climactic scene in which Tony fights with an intruder that the source of the puppet voice is a tape recorder. The murderous caller who has stalked Kit throughout the film is suddenly compressed into an innocuous little rectangle and we are somewhat disappointed. But if the object is small, its implications are sizeable. The voice has been recorded, but how and by whom? Initially we think it is the man Tony fights with who now lies unconscious on the floor. But we then find out the inevitable – that it is Tony who recorded the voice. But how did he do this? Did he sit down at a desk sometime late into the night, in the office perhaps, and 'speak funny' into the microphone? Did he use some kind of distortion effect so as to disguise his voice and make it sound, as Kit says, 'like a puppet'? And what of the 'filth' Kit says he spills out on the phone? Did Tony Preston really say all that? And in this peculiar puppet-like tone? And if so, what on earth did he say? To hear a stream of distorted obscenities issuing directly from the mouth of a debonair Rex Harrison would be disturbing indeed. But none of this is shown or made hearable to the audience. It is all withheld. This is, I would suggest, also where the film fails to support Doris Day's performance and why it seems so 'outside' the rest of the film. *Midnight Lace* withholds its true terror from us. It never manifests for us the hidden, hideous truth that Kit has been dreaming all along. Tony is in fact a puppet – a psychopathic puppet man with a murderous heart. This is what Kit intuits about her husband and what her unconscious self has known from the start. But we never see Tony speak with the puppet voice, and therefore never experience the full horror of his real incarnation. At the end of the film Tony calmly leaves the flat

escorted by a polite detective while making a fond quip about how one must never underestimate the English policeman. His psychic disfigurement is not admitted into the sphere of the film's shiny diegesis. But it is what haunts Kit Preston and is what Day is trying, unsuccessfully and on her own, to get us to hear. Day struggles against the systematic confinement of her work on many fronts and her boundary-crossing performance is cast adrift.

There are notable parallels between *Midnight Lace* and *Secret Beyond the Door* even though they differ hugely in style. Each film features a lively American woman who marries a sinister, repressed European. Tony Preston, never seen without a carnation in his lapel, refuses sex with his wife. Mark Lamphere does not avoid sex (at least not at first), but it is obviously problematic and his portrayal as a sexually compelling figure does not convince. Swinging into an uptight boardroom full of men with her shopping bags to surprise her husband, Kit expresses a vitality which the dour English characters do not possess. Celia is similarly full of vim and vigour. Celia and Kit also have their own money, another challenge to the old-world order. The foggy London in *Midnight Lace* and the gothic mansion in *Secret Beyond the Door* represent something of the 'old world', and the bright, sparky and well-dressed American women represent a new, post-war optimism. Lang's film suggests a happy ending, in which Celia and Mark begin their marriage anew. Miller's film ends on a spatial metaphor, as Kit climbs out of the window onto the scaffolding of a new life.

This close analysis of these two films has shown that the uneasy relationship that obtains between the voice the body plays out in cinema by way of the communication between the image and the sound tracks. The voice is both organic and foreign to the body it inhabits. It 'never quite belongs' writes Žižek, 'to the body we see, so that even when we see a living person talking, there is always some degree of ventriloquism at work' (Žižek 1996: 92). This ventriloquism is evoked by the cinematic process, in which the voice may be detached and reattached to the body but is never wholly at one with it. The female voices also partake in the films' metaphorical spatialisation of the mental realm. The voice-over or non-synchronised voice emanates from and calls up an 'outside

space'. But the embodied, synchronised voice also speaks from elsewhere in *Midnight Lace*. Celia's and Kit's voices mark what Sjorgren calls a 'creative flex of contradiction' that runs through each film (Sjorgren 2006: 3). They are never successfully brought under control, sequestered or disappeared. On the contrary, they remain insistent and all-pervasive. Celia and Kit are always physically well presented onscreen, and are well-adjusted to the social performance of femininity. But their voices point towards a different performance altogether, resistant to stereotype or troping and even carrying with it the threat of dissolution. In both films the women scream, and this departure from rational discourse threatens to rupture coherence. The voice 'shouldn't stray away from words' observes Renata Salecl, 'as soon as it departs from its textual anchorage, the voice becomes senseless and threatening, all the more so because of its seductive and intoxicating powers' (Salecl & Žižek 1996: 17). And yet it is their partners who pose the real threat. Day's performance is not well supported by the filmic apparatus as I have explored here. But the failure of this apparatus to adequately moor her voice to her physical body through synch-sound and to create instead a kind of 'hybrid' voice – an I-Voice masquerading as a synchronised one – allows Kit's unconscious to express itself more directly. Her cries and moans uncomfortably threaten to spoil her well-groomed body, and to exceed the film's well-groomed diegetic space. But they are more in tune with the film's sub-surface dealings with unconscious territory and Kit's entanglement within it. Spatial metaphors abound in both these Gothic melodramas. Lang provides his male protagonist with a set of rooms which structure his subjectivity. Upstairs we find his work room – a highly organised, neat and linear space. Downstairs we have the 'murder' rooms – architectural reifications of his sequestered and murderous drives. Between them we have a labyrinth of seemingly endless corridors and stairways. Apart from the feminine spaces provided for her by Mark and his sister (full of curves and soft furnishings), Celia has no onscreen space of her own (although thankfully she manages to 'mess up' the neat bedroom she has inherited from Mark's ex-wife – another reason we believe her to be indestructible). Instead, her subjectivity is given the borderless and and suggestive sonic space to inhabit and this space has no visible architecture with which it can contain her. It is a place which remains unreachable and untouchable – even when the film attempts to place Mark's voice inside it. We experience this as a

temporary aberration and a falsity – just as we know the event itself (Celia's murder) is a lie. The voices of Celia and Kit are not wholly moored to their bodies, in much the same way as their bodies are not wholly held in the spaces in which they find themselves. Both women break free from the Gothic structures they are deceived into calling their home.

Chapter 4

Editing:
Radical Reconstructions

> The walls of this room are solid except right there. That leads to something. I've got to get it open because through there I can go through to someplace instead of leaving here by the same way that I came in.
>
> *Maya Deren*

Maya Deren wrote the words above in 1955 in a letter to film archivist James Card, to whom she was sending prints of her films. She was referring to a scene in her first film *Meshes of the Afternoon* (1943) in which one version of herself advances upon another, brandishing a large knife. As Deren advances from the table towards her sleeping double in the armchair we see her sandalled feet take five separate strides. Each stride has its own shot: the first is on sand, second on earth, third on grass, fourth on pavement and fifth on the carpet back in the room. She moves the short distance between table and armchair, yet travels through different realities to get there. Deren explains this pivotal sequence thus, 'that you have to come a long way – from the very beginning of time – to kill yourself…' (2019b: 192). She describes how, when rewatching the film with others, this short montage always 'buzzed a buzzer' in her head. 'It was like a crack letting the light of another world gleam through' (192). She frames her fixation in spatial terms; as a room with walls that are solid 'except right there'. This 'room' is not only the room we see on the screen. It functions as a synecdoche for a series of related enclosures; the film frame, the film as a whole, and the filmmaking process. The 'crack' through which Deren suspects she can travel, taking us along with her, is opened up in the invisible hinge between shots – a hinge which is both a cut and a join.

The analagous connection Deren intuitively draws between physical and mental space ('You have to come a long way – to kill yourself') is germane to my enquiry into the spatial depiction of

subjectivity in the cinema. Deren perceives how film syntax can articulate film space, and – in a broader sense – how it can be used to express how her position in the film room and as a female artist in the 'room' of filmmaking are both subject to entrapment. She draws a correlation between physical and psychological space and understands – or certainly has an initial insight into – how this relationship can be iterated on film through the editing process. I begin with a close reading of the editing in this film. I then go on to discuss two more recent films which subject the trope of 'the woman in the house' to renewed interrogation: Peter Tscherkassky's *Outer Space* (2001) and Eija-Liisa Ahtila's *House* (2002). Different editing methods are used to the same common end: to dematerialise concrete space and to reshape it into a space which more accurately represents a figural expression of interiority. All three films invoke the reciprocal relationship between what Alison Butler summarises as 'cinematic syntax, architectural space and subjective experience' (Butler 2012).

These are avant-garde films, screened in art galleries and museums rather than mainstream cinemas. This distinguishes them from the films discussed in previous chapters, in which the editing is more conventional. There are several points to make about this development. Firstly, at this stage in a thesis rooted in materialist enquiry I am drawn to discuss films working at the threshold of what is possible in the editing process. Secondly, these films are not as differentiated from their classical and more mainstream counterparts as one may think. They are invested in the same trope, and wish to tell a story. A woman approaches a house, opens the door, goes inside, and what happens then is unpredictable. These experimental works still react to genre, and interweave with it. Where can one draw an effective and definitive line between them? In my research practice (discussed in the following chapter), I interweave footage from all ten films together. Generative connections, resonances, formal echoes and crossovers abound between them all.

It is worth clarifying what I mean by 'editing' before I proceed. This is pertinent when we consider the fundamental distinction between editing and *découpage*, the latter being a concept and process I took time to elucidate in Chapter 1. In Barnard's book *Découpage,* we find this simple

statement from the late French writer and filmmaker Roger Leenhardt, 'I have recently defined editing as being carried out after the fact on the exposed film and *découpage* as being carried out before the fact, in the filmmaker's mind, on the subject to be filmed' (Barnard 2014: 37). This is a basic yet accurate description, and if things were so straightforward no one would bother to write much more on the subject. But the theoretical literature on editing, and on its sister term 'montage', is vast and full of nuance. We know that joining two shots together creates a meaning that is greater than the sum of its parts. We also know, and Aumont reminds us in his book *Montage* (published in the same series as *Découpage*), that the instantaneous switch from one shot to another corresponds to a 'look that jumps through space in the wink of an eye' and that the decision to either accentuate this shift or to cover it up is one of the fundamental issues at the heart of the editing process (Aumont 2014: 4). 'In the end' Aumont asserts, 'the entire history of film has consisted in choosing between two paths: emphasising and making use of editing's shock and sensational value, or trying to bridle or attenuate it' (10). In this chapter I take the conscious decision to concentrate on three films in which the editing is *not* trying to cover its tracks. On the contrary it is prominent, engaged and – in the final analysis – important. What Aumont suggests as his monograph on the subject draws to a close is that in this world flooded with a ceaseless flow of unrelated images, the discriminative power of editing has begun to lose its hold. 'If 'montage' can be said to be reaching the end of its reign' he writes, 'it is not as a tool to concatenate or even to structure, but as an intellectual, aesthetic and even ethical principle' (2014: 52). The cinematic works of Ahtila and Tscherkassky refute such despondent claims and are entirely ethical in their stance, while Deren's film remains compelling and innovative to this day – even if it is now easy to view via the indiscriminate flow of imagery on YouTube. Annette Michelson makes it clear that Deren's project, evident in both her theoretical writings about film as well as her films themselves, demonstrates a conviction 'that it was the artist's role, even morally encumbent on the artist, to confront and address the forces threatening a generalised *anomie'*. Deren's artistic practice, Michelson writes, is 'the most powerful antidote to what she sees as an atrophy of consciousness' (Michelson 2001: 29).

Meshes of the Afternoon is set mainly inside the modest bungalow Deren was renting at the time (a short period of three months) with her first husband Alexander Hammid. The house is a 'California Bungalow', a style common to early 20th century suburban development and to Los Angeles in particular. These bungalows are usually one to one-and-a-half storey buildings, designed to be simple and streamlined, well-built and affordable. They offered a new way of living for an upwardly mobile and booming population. Turim and Rhodes draw our attention to their frequent appearances in Hollywood films of this period. 'If we but list the number of films that feature the word *bungalow* in their titles' writes Rhodes, 'we get a sense of the degree to which the bungalow figured as something of a representational object across the first three decades of Hollywood filmmaking' (2017: 65). With particular reference to the bungalow in *Mildred Pierce* (Michael Curtiz 1946) both theorists note how despite the idealist attempt at spatial modernism, marital tensions and gender relations still found a way of spatially playing themselves out. Deren's film might be an independent and avant-garde piece, but it is set in a home and generates feelings around that home that many in its audience would recognise.

One notable characteristic of the California Bungalow is that it has no hallway. This was intended to inculcate a more open-plan, democratic way of living. But the loss of the hallway is not without consequence. Hallways are useful places, in real life and on film. On film, they provide an invaluable, in-between space for characters to reveal something about themselves. Time obeys slightly different rules in a hallway, as if it were paused for a moment. In her article 'The Ins and Outs of the Hall' Céline Rosselin describes hallways as crucial spaces of transition, providing a 'marginal or liminal' zone which is 'protective and neutralizing' and which eases the 'transition from the public to the private world' (Rosselin 1999: 54-54). Examples of hallway 'moments' can be found in most of the films I discuss. *Craig's Wife* ends with Harriet standing in hers caught in an 'in-between' moment of psychic revelation; Celia's hallway is the domain between the conscious life upstairs and the unconscious life in the basement; Mabel's hallway in *A Woman Under the Influence* provides a spatial truce between over-charged rooms; Jeanne Dielman's hallway provides the impersonal space in which her clients can pay her for sex; even Elisa's *House* has somewhere

coats get hung up and boots taken off before the walls start to melt down. In Maya Deren's bungalow there is no such space. She is either in or out. On film this direct entrance can become 'crucial and more powerfully cathected' (Rhodes 2017: 73). Usefully to my work here, Rhodes draws an explicit connection between this abrupt transition and the process of cutting from one shot to another. 'To think along the lines of a cinematic metaphor' he writes, 'the bungalow makes every entrance or exit from the house a jump cut, a brusque edit, more jarring than the stately lap dissolve performed by the entrance hall's mediation of inside and out, public and private' (2017: 73). Cuts can *perform* as thresholds, thresholds as cuts. Deren realises this, showing in the montage sequence described above how she can not only open a door but travel between worlds in a cut. There are other ways in which Deren employs what she calls 'creative cutting' (Deren 2019c: 139) to conjoin the physical interior of her home with her own interiority.

On Deren's first entrance, we are gifted with a point-of-view – or subjective – shot of the bungalow's interior. Her gaze travels over the living room, moves past the stairs to arrive at a table and chairs set into a dining area on the right. In the same shot, Deren's gaze moves closer to the table where we see a cup of coffee and a loaf of bread with a knife sticking out of it. Suddenly this shot is interrupted and we cut to a close-up of the bread. The shot is as sudden as a flinging open of a door. As it happens, the knife jumps out of the bread onto the table. Dirk de Bruyn writes about this moment, 'Through a jump cut in close-up the knife jumps out of the loaf' (2014: 88), implying that the cut itself causes the knife to jump – and he is right. The knife seems shocked to be seen and responds. Deren realises the potential of editing to perform what Rhodes calls a 'kind of modern 'magic'' (Rhodes 2020: 10). We have already seen this editing magic in the first sequence of the film, in which the mannequin's arm which lays down the flower on the road suddenly disappears. But does Deren's use of this trickery achieve anything more complex than just a magic surprise?

Due to the subjectivity of the camera we read this 'magic' activity as being set in motion by the consciousness behind the film's narration. It is of course Deren on the Moviola, but also the

Deren in the film itself, who causes these surprising events to occur. In her essay 'Moving the Dancer's Souls', Ute Holl writes that in this film, 'every subjective sensation of the protagonist corresponds to an objective film trick' (Holl 2001: 160). Deren moves through a home which is constantly on the move, but which is at the same time activated by her. Butler writes, 'the animation of the home and the objects within it evokes the mischief of the sorcerer's apprentice: in a world in which the woman controls the look, any object might be instilled with agency' (2002: 66).

What complicates things is that the Deren we see in the film is as surprised as we are that the house and its objects are moving around. Each time she opens the front door she has no idea what she might see. These magical cuts perform a series of provocations which seem to come from nowhere, as well as to emanate from the protagonist herself. Therefore, we can theorise that the film is acting out the complex relationship between the knowing and the unknowing self. We can trace this 'hide and seek' effect by looking more closely at the journey of the objects in the film. Each time Deren re-enters her bungalow, things are more elaborately disrupted. Objects move about in a kind of 'spot the difference' game. This game is not entirely random however. Objects move 'up one' in each visitation and become more insistent. The bread knife which jumps out of the bread upon her first entrance is at the bottom of the stairs on her second, replacing the telephone which was there on her first. Deren steps past it to go upstairs to the bedroom, where the knife reappears under the bedcovers. She covers it up, and places the telephone receiver (now beside the bed) back on its cradle. On her third visit the knife is in the bed, but this time the bed has moved. It is now downstairs, nearer to the armchair in which the first Deren lies asleep. The third Deren goes to the window to watch her fourth iteration enter the house. She takes the front door key out of her mouth as she watches which – via a cut – turns into the knife. The fourth Deren then enters the house holding the knife instead of the key, as if magically passed on to her by the intentions of the third. The knife is fully taken up and used by the fourth Deren to attack the first ignorant Deren sleeping in the armchair. This progressive relay of objects is not entirely linear, but it does have an ultimate direction and aim. It is more of a zigzag 'snakes and ladders' affair, in

which objects slowly make their way up a ladder of significance – or in this case, the stairs. The journey taken by the cluster of objects in this film is one which plays out, as Turim relates, a 'montage of displaced being, a multiple quest riddled with chutes and ladders, falling away from forward progress, then, paradoxically, an unexpected sliding forward' (2007: 160).

It is not only the objects that the editing can move around. The physical space of the bungalow can also be altered. As with the objects, the space undergoes a series of changes which slide up a scale of significance. When Deren first enters, the downstairs appears spatially normal. She goes up the stairs and looks around the corner at the top towards the bedroom. From her position at the top of the stairs, she sees a flowing black net curtain in the bedroom window beyond. Once in the bedroom and having lifted the arm of the record player off the record, her gaze turns to look back out of the bedroom door. As she turns, the subjective camera tracks over the flat surface of the bed, but suddenly cuts to the flat surface of the wall of the stairway. We find ourselves – all too quickly – on the staircase. This is a spatial 'trick cut', the most obvious one so far in the film. We are also a little too high up the stairs for a person of Deren's height, very close to the arch above the stairs. We appear to float down under this arch and into the living room below. The second more radical spatial warping occurs on Deren's second entrance. As with the gradual 'ramping up' of significance in the objects' movements, Deren's space becomes more mutable the further into this filmic dream she travels. This time, Deren takes longer to get up the stairs. This is mainly achieved through slow-motion in camera, but it is ameliorated by the editing which prolongs the event by cutting in-between shots to effectively add more stairs. Once she reaches the top, the editing instates another impossible spatial move. This time, rather than look round to see the curtain in the bedroom beyond, the film cuts to show Deren pushing her way through this flowing veil. We have no idea where she is at this point because there is no bedroom around her, just white space. This shot is also in slow-motion. As Deren flows off screen-right, the film cuts back to the bedroom window into which Deren flows from screen-left. She is therefore flying through the window from the outside – an impossible feat. After noting changes within, she then arches back out of the window to flow down (via a cut) to the staircase. The house is being

disassembled and reassembled directly, by splicing spaces together while showing Deren moving between them. There then follows an elaborate series of shots which completely disorientate the viewer as well as Deren herself. She is at the mercy of the film's editorial manipulations. In seven shots we see her twist and turn through a Piranesi-style staircase nightmare, in which she does not know whether she is up, down or sideways and neither do we. Finally, she emerges suspended at ceiling height out of the arch at the bottom, clinging on to the walls for dear life. This magical manipulation of space has occurred both in camera and with simple editing cuts, working together with one another. These specific examples show how Deren and Hammid evoke the power of the mind to travel instaneously from one place to another and from one thought to another by yoking it to the cinematic apparatus.

The editing mimics the complex movements of consciousness in another notable way. The film's form is often compared to a dream. The fact that the first Deren falls asleep in an armchair and we see a 'fuzzy' effect over the lens as she closes her eyes is not in itself definitive. The oneiric sensation is more fundamentally impressed upon us by the volatile and multilayered relationship Deren has with her screenspace. She often walks into what we have already interpreted as a subjective, point-of-view shot. As well as providing Deren with a way to interrogate female self-expression and positioning in the cinema, this moving 'in and out' of the film gifts her with a dreamlike fluidity and mobility. This smooth physical 'passing through' works in conjunction with direct switches in perspective performed by editorial cuts. For example, on her first entrance we watch Deren's feet go up the stairs. We then switch to a subjective view from the top of the stairs as the camera now looks through to the bedroom. Cutting into the bedroom, the subjective shot takes in the record player on the floor, the record still playing on the turntable. Deren's arm then reaches into this subjective shot to turn the record player off. This same 'reaching arm' reoccurs at other points in the film, real-life versions of the reaching mannequin's arm with which this film began. Part of the film's attraction is its playful recognition of the way the spectator is reading the film. But this oscillation between subjective and objective positions also enables Deren to replicate cinematically the psychological experience common to us all – that odd feeling of having a dream

and being in a dream at the same time. This is the film's most oneiric feature, and one which the editing actively instates.

Deren's editing strategy also creates what is commonly described as the film's spiralling structure, in which repeated homecomings that are slightly different from one another circle around an event that eludes the protagonist. Each time Deren enters, she appears to know her space and yet see it for the first time. Someone lives there, and this person is apparently herself. Yet this person cannot be found and is always just out of sight. Turim attributes Deren's repeated homecomings to the desire 'to enter, to find this other, to know the self, to inhabit the home' (Turim 2007: 155), which returns us to the analogy between the home and the self. The editing pattern constructed by Deren on the Moviola thus stages the self's search for that most elusive of objects – the self.

One can trace a direct link from this film through to the Austrian filmmaker Peter Tscherkassky's film *Outer Space*. There are notable resonances between them: the black and white image; the grainy quality of the film; crude splices between shots; hands opening doors; visual repetition and reiteration; and a wide-eyed heroine coping with an interior space which warps around her.[8] The two photos below show how similar Deren and Tscherkassky's films are:

Fig. 4.1 Barbara Hershey opens her front door

8 Interestingly, Tscherkassky attributes his decision to become an avant-garde filmmaker to a lecture by P Adams Sitney which he attended in 1978, in which Sitney discussed Maya Deren's work.

Fig. 4.2 Maya Deren opens hers

Deren takes a thematic trope familiar to Hollywood melodramas and film noirs of the period and reworks it. Even the ending, in which her dead body lies in the armchair with blood trickling from her mouth, calls up a classic film noir murder scene. Tscherkassky performs a similar reworking, but materially. He literally forges a new film out of the footage of an older one.

Before I discuss his method, I will explain its effects by describing the opening scene of *Outer Space*. It begins in a primordial darkness, out of which images and sounds stutteringly appear. Agitated, partial images of a house at night flicker into view at different moments and in different positions on the screen. Sometimes these images briefly coalesce, as if trying to cohere but not quite succeeding. The spectator, confused at first, has the impression that the film is trying to take shape before them – as if its elements are coming together. A woman gradually appears, standing with her back to us facing the house. A door number stands beside her on the lawn, number 523. This detail stands out firmly amid the restless fits and starts onscreen, like a singular detail in an otherwise unstable dream. The soundscape is also restless. We hear electronic buzzes, the odd strain of music, fizzing crackles – like a radio trying to tune itself. The woman walks towards the house and opens the door, reaching for the doorknob like Deren does as the photos above show. Then, as Matthew Levine pithily observes, 'As soon as she enters the home – a metaphor for the cinematic realm – everything breaks down' (Levine 2018: 20).

Tscherkassky creates these effects by working directly upon analogue, photochemical film. To create *Outer Space* he used a 35mm copy of the 1982 Hollywood thriller *The Entity* (Sidney J Furie) as his source material.[9] His method is worth describing in detail. He takes a strip of unexposed 35mm film stock and lays it along a carefully measured piece of cardboard. He continues:

> The unexposed film is held in place by small nails with which the cardboard is outfitted. I place one meter of found footage on top of my unexposed film stock. The nails of the cardboard protrude through every fourth perforation hole, so I can keep track of the frame lines: 35mm film has four perforation holes per film frame, each pair of nails holds one frame in place. Subsequently I copy the found footage onto the raw material by exposing it to light. (Tscherkassky 2012)

Focusing the beam of a laser pointer pen onto single frames of found footage, Tscherkassky imprints visual fragments from each frame down onto the unexposed film strip below, thereby creating what James Leo Cahill artfully describes as 'shimmering pools of exposed images against completely unexposed, pure black fields' (2008: 95). He repeats this process, exposing multiple images from the same frame as well as images from other frames down onto single frames below, thus creating multiple exposures. 'In this way' describes Tscherkassky, 'I can mix details from entirely disparate sequences and each individual frame becomes an intricate optical collage. Parts of *Outer Space* include up to five multiple exposures' (Tscherkassky 2012). *The Entity* was shot on CinemaScope film. Tscherkassky realised that the CinemaScope film strip could be made entirely visible, i.e. that the projector perforation holes and the optical soundtrack along the side could be revealed. This technical region is usually unseen, kept secret from the film audience. (Tscherkassky describes it as the 'outer space of the film strip', which perhaps informed the title of the film.) This inspired him to make a conceptual film 'using the filmic material as the main actor, represented

9 Furie's original film generated two other works from Tscherkassky; Dreamwork in 2001 and a one-minute trailer for the Viennale *Get Ready* in 1999

mainly by the sound strip of the optical soundtrack, the perforation holes, and the celluloid itself' (Tscherkassky, Interview: 2017). His source material (*The Entity*) portrays a woman under attack in her home by an invisible entity. Tscherkassky draws an analogy between the invisible attack in Furie's original film, and the invisible attack of the cinematic apparatus upon the woman in male-dominated cinematic representation. This is where his film departs from Deren's film, which is one made entirely from a woman's point of view.

Tscherkassky watches his source material repeatedly until 'the original story starts to crumble'. (He claims to have viewed *The Entity* 100 times). At this point he feels able to rebuild his new film from the elements which remain. Once the 'homogenising forces' of narrative, character and representation (Levine 2018: 9) have been stripped away, the underlying drives, sensations and intensities which form a film's deeper structure can rise to the surface. All that is left, writes Levine, 'is the bare, beating heart of the moving image' (9), or what Tscherkassky describes as the 'essential elements of cinema – darkness, light, silence and sound' (Bachmann 2018: 28). Tscherkassky sees and remembers details, actions, and images from the original film which stand out. Once he has reached this stage, he sets to work with the process described above. Significantly, he frames this process in psychological terms, drawing an explicit parallel between his work and Freud's conception of '*Dreamwork*'. 'The main elements of a dream to create meaning is by the use of displacement and condensation' he says. 'You take something from somewhere and remove it and put it somewhere else and there you condense it. That's how dream works – and I do basically the same'. He goes on to be more specific:

> I take something like found footage, scenes from a totally different film and take it out from that film, replace it by moving it onto my work table in the dark room and then the condensation takes place by double, triple, quadruple, quintuple exposure at the same time, in the dark room, so I get the layers and the condensed, displaced situation…
> (Tschkerassky, Interview: 2015)

Let us look more closely at *Outer Space* itself. Furie's original film *The Entity* tells the story of Carla Moran (Barbara Hershey) who is terrorised by an invisible entity which assaults her in her home. Typically, nobody believes her because the 'thing' cannot be seen. Others are eventually persuaded of its reality and the entity is forced into a laboratory in an attempt to destroy it. Carla is liberated and leaves forever with her children. But as she walks around her empty, shattered home one last time, the front door slams shut and we hear the entity's one and only verbal utterance (shocking even now), 'Welcome home – cunt.' Tscherkassky dives headlong into this misogynist ferocity, which undergirds Furie's film. His new creation does not retell the original story, but seeks to redraw the drives and intensities that structure it to create what Adrian Martin calls a 'sympathetic *critical intensification'* of the original (2018: 72). In the original film a fictional character is attacked by an invisible entity. In *Outer Space,* this narrative is stripped away. The woman 'behind' Carla – the actress Barbara Hershey – is now under attack by the sadistic drives of the film, which Tschkerkassky firmly locates in the misogynist tendencies of the filmic process itself. 'All fans of *Outer Space* agree' writes Martin, 'that it says, underlines, or reveals something that *The Entity* cannot: that violence is gendered, and that cinema is complicit in this assault' (2018: 68).

As Hershey enters the house and goes into her bedroom, a new phenomenon occurs. We see a kind of restless mottling of the image, as if the film is 'doing something' to the surface of what it sees. On the soundtrack, a crackling replicates the mottling as if vocalising it. We begin to understand that 'something' behind the scenes is 'doing something' to Hershey, watching and responding to her as she paces nervously around her home. Hershey is right to suspect that she is being watched and that she is not in full control. Her 'box within a box' is not safe (Basinger 1994: 216). She and her world are being manipulated by a greater 'something' that overarches them – the entity of the cinematic apparatus.

This 'box within a box' structure obtains in *The Entity*, and is one reason why Tscherkassky found the film so generative a source. Mirrors, reflections and recursive patterns proliferate in a

series of reiterated motifs and mise-en-abymes. The scientists build a double of Carla's house in order to entrap the entity. This 'double' is built inside a set of glass walls which is itself housed inside a laboratory – one house encased inside another, and another. Carla is watched on video by the scientists from a viewing box suspended above her in a facsimile of a projection room. They wait for the invisible entity to begin its assault, in much the same way as they might wait for a film to start.

Deren gravitates towards the bedroom in *Meshes* and it is the conjugal bedroom which is revealed behind door number 7 in *Secret Beyond the Door*. The bedroom is surely the most intimate space in the house, the site of Freud's 'primal scene'. It is the space in the home where one is the most private and the most vulnerable. It is no surprise that the attack on Hershey begins in the bedroom. The restless mottling intensifies and Hershey is aware of it. Her watchful eyes resemble those of Deren in *Meshes* and Elisa in *House* (as we shall see); three wide-eyed, wary women in woefully unstable spaces. She sits up and becomes trapped in a maddening, repetitive gesture. Her head turns back and forth quickly and she cannot stop it. Her head divides into two heads, and this other self suffers the same fate.

Fig. 4.3 Hershey splits into two

The soundtrack becomes violent; a mechanical screeching shot through with a scream that is repeatedly stifled as it tries to escape from Hershey's mouth. Both the sound and image tracks are manipulating Hershey's figure. The whole room is then triumphantly split into two, three and

four in gestures of cinematic bravura. Hershey fractures into many selves, diced up into kaleidescopic pieces along with everything else. Things accelerate quickly as windows implode, glass shatters, matter explodes, and chaotic energy is unleashed. Amy Taubin summarises Tscherkassky's motivations here, describing these frenzied spatial fragmentations as 'powerful correlatives for the psychical processes Tscherkassky wants to evoke' (Taubin 1993). After several minutes of this intense chaos, Tscherkassky makes the attacker's identity clearly visible. As Hershey cowers against the wall, jagged lines begin to dissect her, which we see are shreds of film stock. Gigantic 35mm sprocket holes punctuate and pierce the image in vibrating vertical lines, and the skeletal signature of the optical soundtrack joins in, zigzaging maniacally across the screen. Finally, Hershey is obliterated and the film strip reigns supreme on the screen.

Fig. 4.4 Film strip and optical sound track complete the attack together

In the original film, Carla tells her therapist that the bruises on her ankles were caused by two smaller entities who she describes worryingly as being 'like children'. These held her down while the larger entity (in a grotesque parody of a parent) raped her. Tschkerkassky's film echoes this structure. The film completes its assault and an unexpected calm descends. The screen fades to black and goes quiet. The house flickers back into view, at a distance. It gets larger as if being slowly approached. We have the impression we are seeing through a different set of eyes. This new 'entity' has more gravitas than the last. Its movement and voice (image track and sound track) are less frantic and more assured than the chaos that went before. Tscherkassky is playing with a common trope in horror films. Just when you feel it's all over, something worse happens. This

adult 'thing' draws closer to the windows and reveals its presence. Two huge pillars of film strip appear on the screen, fusing together then drawing apart. At the same time, we hear its 'voice', a deep-throated, mechanical thrumming from the soundtrack. The window is split in two, and then forcefully drawn apart. This action precedes the onscreen rape of Hershey and can be seen as a visual representation of the forcing apart of Hershey's body. Tscherkassky is spatially representing the urge to rape. Cahill also observes Tscherkassky's sexualisation of space in this scene, writing that, 'Mirrored images of bay windows look from inside onto the exterior of the house, suggesting an impossible, invaginated space where interior and exterior fold into each other' (Cahill 2008: 90). Significantly however, when Hershey is raped the image is more straightforward. This editorial decision might suggest that Tscherkassky judges this too crucial a scene to manipulate. We have no choice but to witness its unadulterated brutality – as indeed we are forced to do in the original film.

Fig. 4.5 Hershey is thrust against the mirror and raped

Through his 'darkroom interventions', Tscherkassky makes it seem *as if* the film is the entity in his film. By revealing it as an apparatus driven by sadistic and misogynist desires, he alerts us to the tendencies of male-dominated cinema and – in a wider sense – of patriarchy. He does not exempt himself from this troubling process. In his later film *Dreamwork*, he makes his complicity quite clear. He exposes his editing tools onto the film strip, interspersed with images of himself at work in the darkroom. In *Outer Space* Hershey is profoundly unsafe in her home. Every

part of her body and her space down to the tiniest detail is in Tscherkassky's hands, frame by frame. How then, is this any different from the imposition of violence upon women which underpins the original film? As Martin recounts:

> Tscherksassky did not escape the reprimand – directed at him within a film conference by no less an avant-garde luminary than Yvonne Rainer – that *Outer Space* merely reproduced, in another way and for another crowd, the violence inflicted upon women by the entity … and by *The Entity*. It is a charge Tscherkassky answers in this way: in his film, Barbara Hershey not only fights back – but also wins. (Adrian Martin 2018: 73)

Tscherkassy is fully aware of his power in the editing room, and this enables him to problematise the act of making and watching film. 'Looking in cinema' he asserts, 'watching film, should not be so cheap'.[10] At the end of *Outer Space*, Hershey emerges as the winner (according to Tscherkassky), although her cinematic house is totally destroyed. She is attacked by the cinematic apparatus as embodied by the image and sound tracks, but she fights back. She stares out defiantly at us from a hole in the silenced darkness that now surrounds her – a hole which represents her own carved out space in the cinematic apparatus – with her subjectivity intact.

In *House* Ahtila subjects the notion of house and home to another set of questions and editorial interventions. *House* is the fifth and final episode of *Love is a Treasure* (2002) a feature film shown as a multi-screen installation in art galleries and museums. This was developed from an earlier work called *The Present* (2001), originally presented as 'one-to-two minute segments on monitors for gallery/museum exhibitions and as thirty-second spots screened with movie trailers in cinemas and broadcast during commercial breaks on Finnish television' (Jane Philbrick 2003: 34). *House* has also been screened as a stand-alone three-screen installation.

10 Both the above quotes from Tscherkassky are taken from a recorded workshop held at the Jihlava International Documentary Film Festival in 2014, viewable on the following link (accessed on 23/09/2020): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qlW3ZHZSrVQ&ab_channel=Mezin%C3%A1rodn%C3%ADfestivaldokument%C3%A1rn%C3%ADchfilm%C5%AFJi.hlava

For those lucky enough to see the film spread out across on three large screens (which at the time of writing does not include me), the experience is memorable. As Butler writes:

> Encountered in darkened rooms, her work transports us to strange worlds in which the power of the imagination holds as much sway as the laws of nature, in which words, images, colours and sounds govern the shapes of time and space.' (Butler 2012)

House can however be viewed on a single screen, for which Ahtila (and editor Tuuli Kuittinen) created an alternative edit. This works in a more traditional mode, one shot following another. While this version is more accessible (it is available on DVD), viewing the film in this way is a substantially less immersive experience. The three-screen installation in an open gallery space creates a new form of what Jenny Odell defines as 'attention-holding architecture'. This architecture, Odell suggests, 'holds open a contemplative space against the pressures of habit, familiarity and distraction that constantly threaten to close it' (Odell 2019: 6). The provision of such an experiential space for the audience has ethical implications of which Ahtila is fully aware.

Fig. 4.6 'House' in three-screen projection (reprinted with permission from Crystal Eye)

Ahtila wrote her script after a period of research into psychosis and interviews with women who experienced this condition. The image of the mad woman in a house is a troublingly familiar one. But Ahtila, like Tscherkassky and Deren before her, interrogates this particular trope. As Mieke Bal writes in her study of Ahtila's work, 'psychosis is taken literally, or authentically' (Bal 2013: 50). The film begins in the same way as the previous two films, with a woman going into a house. But it ends with a re-envisioning of what that home may mean. Ahtila challenges our habitual view of subjectivity as a coherent 'four-walled' entity which must keep its borders intact and others out. Through the radical lens of psychosis, we are invited to question what normality is and our habitual perception of subjectivity as something that needs to be kept in tact.

Although Ahtila's two versions (single screen and three-screen) of *House* diverge, their objectives are the same. I call attention to the difference between these two edits only when it is instructive to do so. Ahtila works with intriguing material and skilful cinematography but it is to the editing that I turn here, and to the way Ahtila yokes it into the service of her theme. I shall focus my discussion upon how Ahtila reconfigures the home – spatially and notionally – with her editing, while exploring how her film makes meaning as a spatial montage over three screens.

The film begins with a car, filmed from above, winding its way along a country road in a verdant Finnish landscape. We then cut to a position in front of the car and see a young woman (Elisa – played by Marjaana Maijala) behind the wheel. We enter a forest, and after a while a house appears on the right. Elisa gets out of the car with her shopping and walks towards the house. As she does so, a female voiceover begins: "I have a house. There are rooms in the house. There is a terrace outside the front door. After the terrace you walk up three steps to go inside." Elisa does this at the same time, and cinematic convention leads us to attribute the voiceover to Elisa. Vision and sound are in accord. Once inside, her voiceover continues: "After that there is a hallway where I take off the clothes I wear outdoors. Opposite is another door that opens directly eastwards". The film cuts to this door, through which we see an expanse of blue water. In the three-screen version, Ahtila has more space upon which to spread her story – she can show the forest on either side of

the house. But Ahtila emphasises unity by installing the same subtitles on all three screens. Elisa enters the kitchen and her voiceover continues its hyperliteral description of what we see. She eats some cereal, reads the paper, and we hear the television in the other room. Her voiceover declares, "All this is routine" and we would agree. What Elisa says happens, happens. And yet, this overdetermined verisimilitude invokes a subtle tension in the spectator. If everything is 'just so' then at some point we know it will not be. Like Tscherkassky and Deren before her, Ahtila is aware of cinematic conventions and particularly of melodramatic tropes. Films set in unstable houses always begin with an emphasis on normality. Everything is always 'just fine' until it isn't. As Curtis notes in his study of haunted houses on film, 'Houses are characteristically first encountered in the full daylight of rational decision-making' (2008: 179).

Ahtila cuts to the living room where Elisa stands looking out of the window. Suddenly and unexpectedly, Elisa talks out loud. Having become accustomed to her voiceover, this shift is a surprise. She describes the movement of sunlight from the back of the house to the front. The film cuts to the outside and we see what she describes. Her voice reverts to voiceover, as we would expect. This happens in both versions of the film. You cannot be in two places at once. Or perhaps you can. The three screens have already shown us that Elisa can in fact do this. We have seen her enter the house from outside on the left screen at the same time as she comes into the hallway in the middle screen. She has walked away from us into the kitchen in the middle screen, and walked towards us into it on the right. We enjoy this mutability and travel between screens, it is discursive. But we are not unsettled. We still know where we are, Elisa's vocal narrative clearly describes what we see and her voiceover unifies these visual splits. Back inside, Elisa speaks out loud again. She describes the trees outside, and when we see them the voiceover returns. "Seen from here, the trees are right in front", Elisa explains. We return inside to Elisa. Contrary to expectation, her voice now remains in voiceover. Ahtila is gradually 'undoing' the stable spatial position of Elisa's voice. It is attached to her body one moment, detached from it the next and we cannot be sure when this might happen. In this early sequence Ahtila show us how she will gradually and precisely disassemble her cinematic elements. She is allying Elisa's voice to the rules of audiovisual

synchonicity, and then disturbing it. The sonic space in this film is highly significant. Aural hallucination is a feature of psychosis: in psychosis, sounds may not stay attached to their sources. Cinema is formally equipped to depict this process.

The cinema can also choose what to make visible, as can we. Elisa remarks that if she moves her body slightly to the right, she can no longer see the trees outside. "When I take a step to the right, behind the armchair, the curtain is in the way…". Bal suggests that Elisa is 'thinking in film' in this scene (2013: 93). We see Elisa move in the central screen, while on the left a point-of-view shot moves to the right and the curtain blocks the view of the trees. On the right we see a different angle of the room entirely, without Elisa in it. The film is sharing in Elisa's thinking, and Elisa is thinking filmically. The film moves outside, while Elisa's voice-over talks about the untrimmed clumps of spruces. A shot of the car suddenly appears. This is unexpected. Elisa's voice is notably absent. Last seen parked outside, the car is moving oddly back and forth, its headlights on. It turns sideways and continues to veer out of frame and back again. The film then cuts to a closer shot, and we see there is no driver. The car is moving on its own. This is the film's first venture into fully-fledged hallucinatory experience. Ahtila's step-by-step dislocation of audiovisual elements reflects what is happening with Elisa as her psychotic delusions become more apparent. Continuity editing is traditionally deployed to support narrative coherence, to smooth over gaps and to repress any anxiety caused by the audience's awareness of the cinematic apparatus. Audiovisual synchronicity is aligned to our normative perceptual readings of the world, and used as an analogue to support their integrity and stability. Ahtila provokes this coherence by diassembling and fragmenting sound and image. Continuity editing – like the unified self – is, in one profound sense, a reassuring lie. As Bal writes, 'the solidarity between the medium and the mental state of the figure converge, enriching our "thinking in film" about both' (2013: 93). By working to free sound track from image track, and by spreading her image between three screens and her sound around the gallery space, Ahtila can make her medium function metaphorically. She can, as Bal writes, deploy '*psychosis as a medium*, with the triptych installation form and its discrepant sounds as its literalizing metaphors or embodiment' (2013: 90).

Ahtila's edits are economical, paratactic and assured. Elisa's world becomes unhinged, nothing stays where it belongs, her car comes inside and drives along the walls, and borders between the outside and inside melt down. When Elisa returns from her third shopping trip, Ahtila makes a significant editorial move. Elisa walks through her living room and glances to her right. We cut to a shot of a television and see a black and white cow on the screen. The film cuts again, and the cow's body now occupies the whole frame. In Aumont's 'wink of an eye' it has crossed over from the television into the film by way of a cut, in much the same way as Deren could step off her carpet onto the beach. In a third cut, the cow walks nonchalantly through Elisa's living room. The logical progression in this series would be for the cow to walk through the art gallery in front of the spectator. Improbable of course – but the inference is deliberate. It hints at a merging of worlds or melting of borders which the installation is keen to encourage. Elisa's world extends into our own, 'across the threshold suggested by the installation's form and the camera's agency as narrator' (Bal: 2013: 95). The single screen edit shows these border crossings sequentially, which makes the threshold-crossing cow more cathected. The three-screen installation enables a more gradual, overlapping dissolve between worlds to occur.

Fig. 4.7 The Cow walks into the living room and into the film (reprinted with permission from Crystal Eye)

We can say that these editorial cuts set up a new way of seeing reality. Given that Ahtila's work is a cinematic triptych, Bernhard Siegert's analysis of the *Mérode Triptych* by 15th century Flemish painter Robert Campin, is of interest. In 'Door Logic, or The Materiality of the Symbolic', Siegert analyses how Campin's triptych operates as a visual mechanism in order to foreground revelation. The painting is full of foldable objects and hinges (doors, books, tools, candleholders, fabrics, screens). It is also a foldable object, with real hinges joining each of its three screens – and

scenes – together. 'In highly conspicuous and tangible ways' Siegert observes, 'the very process of visual perception is here connected with the opening and closing of various media: turning pages and panels, opening doors and books, "unfolding" the triptych itself' (2015: 198). On the left panel, a pair of donors outside look through a door into the visionary scene within. The painted door opens on the join between panels, its painted hinge located where the real hinge is attached. Siegert positions the triptych as a revelatory device, designed to foreground the act of 'Seeing'. He theorises that cinema can use the editorial cut in a similar manner – as a hinge in a revelatory mechanism which changes the way we see things. In *Meshes* Deren uses the editorial cut to cross between worlds. But we also see these crossings iterated in concrete ways, with repeated door openings, journeys up stairs and flights in and out of windows. The objects and beings around Elisa can travel over borders without need of physical devices. Their thresholds are entirely introjected. It is Elisa's mind which is dissolving the borders between outside and inside. In Ahtila's film, the thresholds have become entirely virtual, and can be virtually – or digitally – crossed.

Ahtila's film invites us into an encounter with alterity and formally reiterates her theme of the 'unfixed, transferable identity' of the self (Philbrick 2003: 34), particularly when viewed as a three-screen installation. Things get progressively worse for Elisa. Or, as the film suggests, one could say more enlightened. Drawing upon Heidegger's concept of humans being 'thrown into the world', Bal observes that:

> The point of this installation is not to make us all feel tortured by psychotic delusions. Rather, if we are to be affected by Elisa's forceful Geworfenheit ("throwness into the world"), we must, like her, grasp the diversity of perspectives that make up the "being" of others who are there, with or even inside us. Psychotic behaviour is an effective metaphor for this engagement with the world. (Bal 2013: 113)

Towards the end of the film Elisa and the audience hear things which have no diegetic source. We see her making something on her sewing machine, and then hear seagulls. One by one the screens

turn to abstract squares of colour, red, blue and then green, obliterating the diegetic image on all three screens. We hear a large boat moving in the water, its horn blowing. “The ship you see on the horizon is the same ship as all the other ships” her voice tells us over the colours, “and this ship is full of the refugees who come to every shore. The ship is a red ship, a blue ship and a green ship”. We cut back to see Elisa looking out of the window at the lake behind the house, where there is neither ship nor busy harbour. “This ship emits the sound of all ships. The ship has been here and is only just arriving here and that is why I know the ship.” She is speaking of all ships, at all times. Ahtila is performing the same broadening gesture with the free sounds and abstract squares of colour. The unity of time and space has been completely disbanded. It is at this point in the film that Ahtila calls up notions of the movement and migration of people over borders. Elisa has made blackout curtains which she now hangs up on all the windows. All three screens are plunged into darkness as she pulls these curtains down, and we are now like Elisa, “where the sounds are”. We hear ships, the sea, people on the move, stations, airports, footsteps in echoing corridors, boat horns calling, trains moving, seagulls calling. Ahtila has released sound from its moorings and with this ‘emancipation’, writes Bal, ‘both the unity of time and space in which stories are usually set […] and the unity of vision and hearing in perception that holds the subject together finally explode’ (2013: 105).

The film’s final sequence is an elegant laying out of this correlation between psychic and geo-political permeability. Elisa’s face appears in the darkness looking directly at us. “I meet people” her voiceover relates. “One at a time they step inside me and live inside me. Some of them only for a moment, some stay”. This directly reflects our own position as spectators, and the film has now repositioned itself to involve us more directly in its conceptual thinking. We too ‘inhabit’ Elisa. We wander into the gallery, encounter Elisa, inhabit her world, decide whether to sit or stand (“They set up wherever they want…”), or even whether to stay or go. Elisa describes the odd physical sensations of people inhabiting different parts of her body, and Ahtila cuts to a series of empty, white rooms. This is a departure into a new space. It is unfurnished, unplaceable, and open. Ahtila invites us the spectator to become an editor and to make their own creative joins and

associations. These rooms can be interpreted as spatial evocations of the empty spaces inside Elisa's head. "They fill all the empty space…". But they are also reminiscent of empty gallery spaces, as yet unoccupied homes, images of open hospitality.

Fig. 4.8 The empty spaces (reprinted with permission from Crystal Eye)

In his essay 'Home as Region' cultural geographer T S Terkenli quotes spatial philosopher Yi-Fu Tuan on the subject of rootedness. Rootedness is defined as the long habitation of one locality. But it can also be 'a state of being made possible by an incuriosity toward the world at large and an insensitivity toward the flow of time.' (Tuan quoted in Terkenli 1995: 325). Ahtila's film encourages us away from such incuriosity. To be open to the alterity others, and to the alterity within ourselves, is not as frightening as it might seem. Instead, as Elisa closing words suggest, it can feel "good, really good."

Tscherkassky's attack upon the home and the woman inside it is a frenzied one. He attacks the house (literally) with his bare hands in the editing suite, totally destroying it, but the woman manages to fight back and to stay in tact in the midst of the rubble. Athila's film is more of a precise, slow deconstruction of a house in order to construct a new, more utopian one. She went on to build a series of house sculptures after making this film. As the sculpture below invites us to consider, one's house can be both open and closed.

Fig: 4.9 Ahtila's sculpture 'The Tent House', made 2 years after her film 'House'

(reprinted with permission from Crystal Eye)

Ahtila's film functions best as a three-screen installation. But the creation of a single-screen version allows her film to have a wider reach. As I have indicated in my discussion, the difference between the two edits is primarily determined by the overlapping and discursive complexity offered by one over the other. But the single-screen version is still highly effective. It is the film's immersive nature when presented as a spatial installation that cannot be replicated. The three screens are set in a slight arc, the central screen winged on either side by two others which curve slightly inwards, creating a welcoming spatial embrace for the spectator. Sounds travel all around the space, extending this sensorial embrace, and more fully impressing upon the spectator the affective nature of the aural hallucinations which the film so beautifully strives to recreate. In the following chapter, I discuss issues of spatial representation in more detail as I reflect upon my own three-screen installation, *A Woman's Place: Home in Cinema*.

Chapter 5

Videographic Installation: Building a New Room

> The "essayist" approach is not to impose a definitive meaning to the images, but to create an opening.
> *Thomas Tode*

This thesis includes an element of practice as research. My intention from the start was to produce a piece of videographic work, and for it to contribute in an alternative way to the written thesis as a piece of *cinécriture*. This research took final shape as a video essay installation on three screens entitled *A Woman's Place: Home in Cinema*. It was first shown in the Bulmershe Theatre in the Department of Film, Theatre & Television at Reading University in December 2019. It is available to view online at https://vimeo.com/449584296 (password 'Domains').

So far, I have brought two (or in the case of the Editing chapter, three) films into focus in each chapter. Discussing similarities and differences between them through the lens of materialist film processes has generated insight into the practical and creative ways in which filmmakers imbue home architectures with subjectivity and meaning. In this new videographic way of 'discussing' the films, i.e. using film to discuss film, I have been able to take a broader sweep. I could bring all ten films together and weave them into a new intertextual and intertextural videographic structure. I could highlight thematic and stylistic patterns that played out between them, as well as dissonance and points of departure. But it was not simply that resonance and dissonance could be drawn out. After all, this I could also do with writing. What I discovered actively was that this work allowed communications between films to be actually *shown*, or *performed*, and therefore *experienced* in a different way by the spectator, particularly when presented as a three-screen installation.

A Woman's Place: Home in Cinema is a found footage videographic essay presented as an installation. It is, in one sense, a hybrid object. One of the key features of the essay film, as theorised by Laura Rascaroli, is its reflectivity (2017). Timothy Corrigan describes the essay film as 'a testing of expressive subjectivity through [...] experiential encounters in the public arena [...] the product of which becomes the figuration of thinking or thought as a cinematic address and a spectatorial response' (2011: 30). I did not consciously set out to apply these notions to my work on *A Woman's Place*. But my responses to the material are as woven into the overall texture of the piece as the found footage itself. The resulting piece of work is a relationship between these films and my thoughts about them, expressed and performed in audiovisual terms. The audience that came to see it in the Bulmershe Theatre were not only experiencing the way these films spoke to and related with each other. They were also reading the patterns of my thought processes. The research was an attempt to grasp something about these films that my writing had perhaps missed, or indeed something it had been unable to capture.

There were a series of basic questions I sought to answer with this research. Firstly, in what way would placing films into comparative relationships with one another contribute to the spectator's understanding and experience of the material? Secondly, would this interweaving into new forms encourage a new way of seeing or responding to the characters that would contribute to my overall aim to intervene with the trope? In other words, by juxtaposing these women from different times and spaces, could I further emphasise the ambivalence and heterogeneity beneath its surface? Thirdly, would this videographic interweaving generate new knowledge about any of the films and if so, in what way? Fourthly, to what extent would this video essay be an analytical and academic exploration of the films or an artistic and expressive response towards them? And finally, how would the essay's spatial presentation as a three-screen installation work upon the original films and upon the spectator?

A Woman's Place: Home in Cinema is divided into parts like movements in a musical composition and each corresponds to a different aspect of 'dwelling' as suggested by the films. These parts are aligned to the four conceptual axes of *Boxes*, *Rooms*, *Dreams* and *Thresholds*.

Boxes (Part 1) opens with three lift sequences set next to each other. The appearance of a lift, like many architectural features in these films, is never insignificant. It is an enclosed container (another 'box within a box'[11]) that moves up and down the vertical axis of a building. Originally operated manually and once called 'rising rooms', lifts were signs of opulence and were first installed in large, urban hotels[12]. The invention of push-button technology in the early 20th century changed that, but introduced an element of anxiety into the experience as one could no longer see how the lift worked. This anxiety has never entirely dissipated and lifts on film are often sites of charged or tense encounters. Moreover, lifts in private dwellings transport us from public to intimate space, but along the way one is in neither one nor the other. On film these liminal, claustral aspects become exaggerated, and emotions become amplified.

Fig. 5.1 Part 1 Boxes

[11] A reference to Jeanine Basinger's phrase: 'The woman's world on film is a box within a box' (1993: 216).
[12] There is a fascinating book on the subject by Andreas Bernard called *Lifted: A Cultural History of the Elevator* (2014 NYU Press)

By placing three women and their lifts together I create a cinematic 'rhyme' that is experienced as well as intellectually apprehended. On the left, Kit Preston (Doris Day) becomes trapped in her lift. In the centre, the young Akerman (she plays herself) calls the lift but runs up the stairs to beat it. On the right, Jeanne Dielman (Delphine Seyrig) waits patiently for the lift to arrive. The textural contrasts between their worlds become clear: the luxury of Kit's 'posh' lift with its bevelled glass, shiny wood and substantial buttons (and its suggestion of old-world 'English-ness'); the post-war, brutalist functionality of Akerman's metal-doored lift set into concrete walls; the faded grandeur of Jeanne's wood-panelled lift that takes its stately time. The contrast between two colour films on either side of a black and white one is deliberately positioned. All the films vary in colour, texture, frame size and resolution, and this mixed aesthetic had to be recognised and incorporated into the edit.

What also becomes clear as these three excerpts run alongside one another is how differently *time* is presented and experienced in each cinematic box. In the space of time it takes for Kit to become trapped, hysterical, collapse and be rescued, Jeanne stands quietly waiting for the lift to descend from the top floor, gets into it and slowly ascends. Melodramatic time is directly contrasted with attentuated everyday time. Akerman's energetic dash upstairs flies in the face of each, which is also why I placed her in the middle. This accentuates the way she is flouting convention. She will not rely on the machinery of a lift or upon the *dispositif* of social convention to control her movements. Why be trapped or passively wait forever? One could describe these scenes separately in words, as indeed I have attempted to do here. In so doing, I have to describe them sequentially, and the reader must hold on to the memory of one as they read about the other. But that can never fully replicate the palpable experience – the phenomenological impact – of seeing these scenes running simultaneously. As Catherine Grant succinctly puts it, placing the films together in this way creates a spectatorial situation in which 'we can *feel,* as well as know about, the comparisons these videos enact' (Grant 2013a: 7). Comparisons can be more precisely seen, felt and understood by watching the scenes in this way – no matter how accurately we describe them with words. Grant theorises upon this when discussing *True Likeness: On Peeping Tom and Code*

Unknown, her early 'mash-up' in which she enacts a comparison between scenes from Michael Powell and Michael Haneke films. She clarifies how this work enabled her to 'extract comparisons that were more *precisely illuminating* with regard to their form *as films* than comparisons performed purely in a non-audiovisual format might be' (Grant 2013a: 2). This opening sequence of three lifts addresses my first question, which asks in what way placing films into comparative relationships with one another might contribute to the spectator's understanding and experience of them. Placing these three sequences side by side allowed knowledge about them to be experienced directly, in their form *'as films'*.

Boxes closes with Jeanne sitting immobile at her kitchen table in the central screen. On the left-hand screen (behind her back), Elisa from Eija-Liisa Ahtila's *House* appears, flying through a forest. The sound of birds and the wind in the trees overtakes the quiet sound of simmering potatoes in Jeanne's kitchen. The magical mobility in this flying scene is in stark contrast to the frozen posture 'next door' to it, and calls it into question. This final sequence proposes a different relationship between screens, one based on dissonance, rather than resonance. It therefore suggests another answer to the question originally posed – what happens when scenes from films are put next to one another? By highlighting dissonances between images, as opposed to similarities, the possibility of a dialectic or generative dialogue between films can be opened up.

Rooms (Part 2) concentrates upon kitchens, a room with particular significance for women, which allows me to address the ambivalence of the trope. Jeanne goes into her kitchen to unpack her shopping. I place this scene centrally and let it run until the end, while placing other scenes to the right and left. This performs two functions. Firstly, it emphasises the simple, basic and time-consuming nature of housework. Secondly, by keeping it running in the centre, I can interrogate it with images that appear either side. I am therefore continuing the work begun in *Part 1,* in which I explore what kind of knowledge can be generated and performed by placing extracts side by side. This sequence reaches a climax when I place an extract from *Saute ma Ville* next to *Jeanne Dielman*. Jeanne has continued throughout to unpack her shopping bag and distribute its contents

around the kitchen. Everything has its place and nothing is rushed. As discussed in Chapter 1, Akerman's concern is not to show how long things actually take, but how long they *feel* like they are taking. Set against Jeanne's household activity, we can see clearly how Akerman's actions next door are a kind of furious, absurdist version of housework. Jeanne and Akerman both open cupboards, and from the same direction. Yet while Jeanne carefully places packets onto its shelves, Akerman takes out a raincoat and puts it on. I then set up another contrast on the right-hand screen. D from *Exhibition* is shown lying curled around the top of the stairs, a posture which I interpret as another esoteric response to the space of the home and an echo of the oddity of Akerman's gestures on the left. Akerman's loose attempts to wash the floor become gradually more anarchic and comical. All the while, Jeanne continues to perform her daily tasks. 'House and home are deeply ambivalent values', writes Iris Marion Young (2005: 123). At its worst, she suggests, housework lives out 'a time with no future and no goals' (138). Young quotes de Beauvoir, who states: 'The housewife wears herself out marking time: she makes nothing, simply perpetuates the present' (Young: 136-7). Young's concern is to reposition housework as a non-trivial activity. She writes, 'Habitual human activity reveals things as meaningful and through dwelling among the meaningful things people have a place for themselves' (125). Her point is valid, but none of these films land firmly in that position. Ambivalence towards 'house and home' winds through them like a common thread. Some women do no housework at all; Kit Preston, Celia Lamphere and Harriet Craig have domestic staff. For others, playing the role of Hestia (Goddess of hearth and home) is a struggle. In this section we see Mabel contort herself into the role of a good mother, Elisa disturbed by a fridge that emits strange sounds, D who relates to her house sexually, and Akerman who does the housework as if she were an alien with no idea how it should be done. Even Jeanne finds unpacking a string bag a little too absorbing. Women in these films are cast into a role they question, resist and feel alienated by. Housework does not help them 'have a place for themselves' as Young suggests. These characters engage with a fundamental strangeness that lies at the heart of their home and their placement within it. Indeed, as Rhodes suggests, 'We might think of domesticity itself as the practice of forgetting the house's fundamental strangeness…' (2017: 19).

There is more general feature of these films to which *Part 2* responds. I ask the viewer to observe more closely *how* the women move. I found myself drawn to gesture as I worked. Normally films move onwards relentlessly, and while we may register singular things as they pass, we always have to bring ourselves back to the flow of narrative. Maya Deren writes that as we watch a film, 'the continuous act of recognition in which we are involved is like a strip of memory unrolling beneath the images of the film itself, to form the invisible underlayer of an implicit double exposure' (Deren 2019d: 116). In this digital domain, as all videographic practitioners discover, you can stop the flow and look again, and again, at something that catches your attention – at the film that is 'unrolling beneath the images of the film itself'. The researcher's fascination is inseparable from amd entwined into the process of exploration. The women in these films express themselves with their bodies in idiosyncratic and eloquent ways. They do not display what Doane describes as the 'image repertoire' of 'classical feminine poses' we find in the woman's film, even if they are doing the housework. These 'classical feminine' gestures fail to 'provide us with an access to a pure and authentic female subjectivity' (Doane 1988: 4). This is what I am trying to access in this work. By elevating the gestures of these characters up into significance through my process of re-framing them, I hope to resist what Doane calls 'the process of troping' (Doane 1990: 61). The installation is my 'elaboration of a new process of seeing and remembering' (62) these women, one that is more in tune with the 'actual division, instability, and precarious nature of subjectivity' (51). I invite us to view them in ways unconfined by essentialism or cliché by probing at the overly-familiar and signalling instead towards what Lucy Bolton describes as 'an appreciation of women as cinematic thinking beings' (Bolton 2015: 8).

I also discover how gesture travels over time and space. A woman from 1936 looks through the venetian blinds and so does a woman in 2013. 'Gestures are performed individually' observes Lesley Stern, 'but they are not possessed by individuals' (2002). She continues:

> They acquire force and significance through repetition and variation. They are never simply signs — of a singular emotion, or identity, nor an expression of the soul (or to put this less

> quaintly, of individual subjectivity), but a charting of relations, imagined as well as real, interdiegetic as well as between films and audiences, stars and fans, characters and actors. (Stern 2002)

I shall move on to *Dreams (Part 3)*. This section formally considers the collusion between the cinematic house and the mental realm. It addresses the third question posed above, in which I ask how videographic interweaving between films might generate new knowledge about them. I fuse together two films made in the 1940s by taking a visual sequence from *Secret Beyond the Door* and cutting it to the musical soundtrack of *Meshes of the Afternoon*. There are notable similarities between these two films. They each portray a house which is structured by the unconscious realm. The Lamphere mansion loses spatial logic and becomes a dream house, and this oneric transformation also structures Deren's film. As discussed in Chapter 4, *Meshes* is an avant-garde film yet it is in dialogue with the domestic melodramas and Modern Gothic films made in Hollywood at that time. *Secret Beyond the Door* is a prime example of a genre film of this kind, yet it is also an experimental film. There are parallels between the way Celia roams through the corridors in search of the dark truth behind her marriage and the way Deren voyages around her bungalow, circling around a mysterious series of events for which she has no answer. Deren yokes the psychological realm to the cinematic apparatus in order to create her experimental narrative. Lang's film is more of a straightforward narrative. But it is not as coherent a narrative as its classical editing might wish it to appear, as my investigation into the film's sonic realm has found in Chapter 3. In *Dreams (Part 3)* I draw closer to what I sense is the more psychologically compelling 'film behind the film' in *Secret Beyond the Door* and bring it out with the help of Deren's film. Drawing upon the work of Tscherkassky discussed in the previous chapter, his observations on classical film are apposite here. 'Behind the power of the imaginary reality of classical film' he suggests, 'one can find the symbolic discourse of the Other (the author/filmmaker) in which the power of film as imagined reality is revealed' (Levine 2018: 15).

Before I discuss *Dreams* in more detail, I want to pause at a single frame. Film scholars seek out 'moments' in films. As Mulvey writes, 'delay is the essential process behind textual analysis' (2006: 144). With the advent of digital technology, as Mulvey and many others have pointed out, this 'fragmentation of film has become easier to put into practice' (144). By being able to stop, slow down, rewind and replay films digitally, the cinephile-scholar can discover or 'unearth' things difficult to register or even previously unseen behind the flow of the narrative. Sometimes micro-discoveries can be made in a single frame, and these can contribute towards our knowledge of the film as a whole.

Fig. 5.2 A dissolve from Secret Beyond the Door

For example, in the freeze-frame above (Fig. 5.2) one can see two 'eyes' at the top left of the frame. Watching the film at normal speed one cannot see them. They alert us by causing a flash in the corner of the image – which is why I stopped to take a closer look. They are in fact the base of two lamps on the ceiling chandelier. They appear at a moment of transition, in which Celia finally summons up the courage to go down to the basement and unlock the door to Room number 7. "If I don't do it now, I'll never dare!". This is the scene I go on to disassemble and reassemble in *Dreams*. Armed with torch, key and resolve, Celia ventures forth into nothing less than the psychotopological terrain of her husband's haunted psyche. The house *is* her husband's mind in

physical form. As she makes her way towards the 'eye-opening' truth, the screen becomes alive with signs and eyes are everywhere. The two 'eyes' flashing briefly in the above frame participate in a complex homology of visual shapes that concentrates in this pivotal scene. These eyes functioned as a literal 'eye-opener', alerting me to this deeper level of signification. They led directly towards one of my favourite pieces of videographic invention in *A Woman's Place*. Earlier in the film, Celia's friend Edith (Natalie Schafer) senses the secret behind door number 7 and tries to open it. I interweave a short clip of this scene into the start of *Part 3*. We note her large hat, which casts an eye-shaped shadow upon the door. Lang specifically shows us this in close-up. This symbolically indicates that Edith too wants to *see,* to find out. Because the editing tools allowed me to do so, I was able to audiovisually *perform* a connection between the two women and their desire to find out the truth by superimposing this shadow shot upon the searching Celia, as shown in the screen shot below:

Fig. 5.3 Celia's friend and Celia both converge upon Door number 7

This is an example of how prising the filmic material open in a digital editing programme, disassembling and reassembling it to make new forms in order to reveal how it works, 'dismantling and reconfiguring the once inviolable objects' as Victor Burgin puts it (Burgin 2004: 8) offers us an innovative way to *get in touch* with it more directly.

My third question asks how *interweaving* films might generate new knowledge about them. *Meshes* presents a series of compulsive repetitions, displacements, superimpositions and significant objects. It circles back to and around events and images, like a mind trying to work something out. Celia is trying to do the same in Lang's film. I rework this crucial scene from *Secret Beyond the Door* by videographically 'infusing' it with the circular and obsessive work in Deren's film, and I also use the music which accompanies Deren's film as a guidetrack. In both films, we have the singular and very pointed image of an open hand holding a key – and in fact also a hand opening to show a key. In *Meshes* Deren repeats the action, while in *Secret Beyond the Door* it occurs once. I fuse the films by causing Celia to open her hand repeatedly and I place this 'key' shot in the central screen. Both women open their hand slowly to reveal the key and once it is there, they hold it open like a display. In Lang's film it is an arrested moment. Brigitte Peucker writes, 'A surplus of significance is accorded to objects and things in Lang's work – more is always at stake' (Peucker 2015: 292). Peucker calls such shots, in which either a stilled hand displays an object or hands are shown performing specific tasks in detail, as 'the most enigmatic of Lang's signature images' (299). Such images frequent his German films but Peucker points out that they continue to appear in his work 'through the American years' (296). On either side of this repeating shot I place other shots of Celia's hands performing a series of closely observed actions as she works out how to obtain a copy of the key. I create a tripartite show of hands across the screens, foregrounding what Peucker calls the 'Langian fixation on the hand' (297).[13] There is something about the materiality of the work with which Celia is involved that leads her to succeed in her struggle against invisible forces at work in the house. She works with things and realities, while her husband has ceased to build real buildings and now works with obsession and fantasy. I perform Lang's fascination while remembering how Deren also shows her own hands in *Meshes*. I use Deren's film as a kind of lever with which to prise open the surface of Lang's film. In this way I hope to come closer to the compelling narrative that lies underneath the narrative and to expand my knowledge about it.

[13] Peucker also points out that Lang trained as a sculptor, and that the hands shown in his films are often his own (2015: 297 & 299).

Fig.5.4 Celia's hand with key

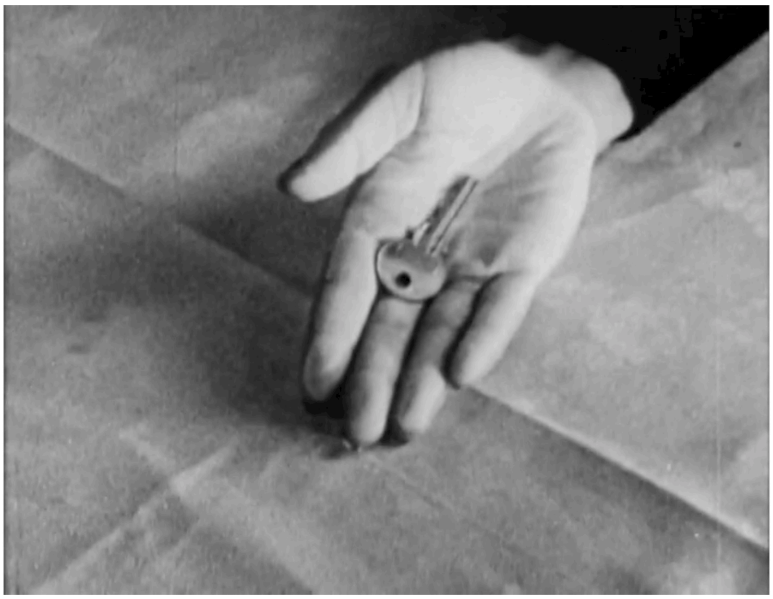

Fig. 5.5 Maya Deren's hand with key

Physical thresholds in these films visually depict psychological ones, and are not crossed lightly. Geography, as David Schulman puts it, 'is a visionary business, rife with consequence' (Schulman 2020: 37). *Thresholds (Part 4)* is an audiovisual meditation upon this theme. The work in this final section can also be seen to address the fourth question, which is to ask to what extent a video essay can be said to be an artistic or subjective response to its material or an analytical and

objective analysis of it. This may of course be a false opposition. Keathley envisages the videographic practitioner on a spectrum, located either at or somewhere in between two distinct modes of video essay – the explanatory or the poetic. 'Film studies' he continues,

> has long been almost wholly dominated by the former critical method, one in which the critic produces, through the explanatory mode, some knowledge about the film at hand. But the incorporation of images into the explanatory text – especially moving images and sounds – demands an acknowledgement that such images, themselves quite mysterious and poetic, do not always willingly subordinate themselves to the critical language that would seek to control them. (Keathley 2011: 190)

A Woman's Place is situated in the poetic mode. But does my subjective response and enjoyment of the material also contribute towards the generation of new knowledge about it? *Part 4* has a videographic moment of exploration which points towards an answer. I begin with an excerpt from *A Woman Under the Influence* in which Mabel returns home from the mental institution, a scene I discuss in Chapter 1. Mabel must cross a series of physical thresholds. She must come out of the asylum and back into the world. She must also come back into her house, her marriage and all that entails. In this excerpt, Mabel has to leave the room in which the children she has so passionately missed are waiting for her and join the adults who placed her in the institution in the first place. I found this scene moving and compelling, although I was not entirely sure why. On the timeline I also had other clips from films in which an anxiogenic threshold was being crossed. In an experiment, I transposed some music from *Rebecca* onto this scene to see what might happen. This musical extract 'narrates' the scene in which the second Mrs de Winter enters Rebecca's room for the first time. I connected the two tracks – the aural one from *Rebecca* to the visual track from *A Woman Under the Influence* – and found that Max Waxman's orchestration matched the rhythm of Mabel's gestures precisely as she takes off her coat and steps forward into the living room. This generated a new experience of this scene for me, and a greater appreciation of the magnitude of the task for Mabel. She is not just crossing a room. We have seen how Deren explores this idea in

Meshes of the Afternoon. In his study of the haunted house on film, Barry Curtis is unequivocal about the significance of thresholds and what can be at stake when we cross them. 'The negotiation of thresholds is anxiogenic' he writes, 'symbolizing the liminal border between life and death' (2008: 44). In Nathan Platte's article '"Regeneration" in *Rebecca*: Confronting Compilation in Franz Waxman's Score' we discover that Waxman spoke about his composition in similar terms. 'Rebecca, the really dominant character of the story, is dead' he writes, 'in actuality she never appears in the scenes, yet the entire drama revolves around her… it was up to the music to give Rebecca's character life and presence"' (Waxman quoted in Platte 2012: 169). Waxman wrote a score that would carry a woman from the underworld into the land of the living. As Mabel ventures across the beige carpet of her 1970s front room, his music performs a similar function.[14] As we know from Cassavetes's film, Mabel is crossing back into a family life that is far from sane – whatever 'sane' might be. The film's ending is bitter-sweet. Its resolution is, as Bronfen writes about such endings, 'aporic, for these narratives inevitably also render visible the fissure written into any notion of recuperation of home' (Bronfen 2004: 25). Any informed viewer appreciates how hard it is for Mabel to return. But I allowed myself to respond intuitively in the editing suite and created an audiovisual event which vivified the scene for me in a new and instructive way – it made me feel the scene more *keenly*. At what point then, does a video essay become an arena for one's own questioning – and one's own playfulness?

There are other such moments in *A Woman's Place*. The Bach soundtrack over *Rooms (Part 2),* for example, has no direct link to the films themselves and cannot be supported by any academic argument. I chose it because I liked it – it seemed to *fit*. The intervallic nature of the music reflected what I perceived as the gestural stateliness of each woman and the choreography of their everyday movements. In *Dreams (Part 3)* I take a single image and spread it out wide over all three screens.

14 There is another 'border-crossing' to note, between myself and Waxman. According to Platte, excerpts from nine other film scores, composed by Waxman and others, are attached to no less than eighteen passages in Rebecca. I re-purpose his score, but find out his work on Rebecca involved the same.

Fig. 5.6 Spreading the image wide

I did this because it looked good and is pleasurable to watch. After having watched 'cut up' bits of Celia running back and forth between screens – there was something releasing about opening out the image. My pleasure in doing this may have felt intuitive, unplanned, unthought. But it was a recognition of what is actually going on in this scene. Terrified by what she has discovered, Celia pulls open the front door and runs outside – escaping at last. I have videographically performed Celia's release, and in so doing enabled it to be understood in a more active way by the spectator. Celia is finally out of her 'box' and I have set her free to run over all three screens.

'Videographic work' writes Jennifer Proctor 'cannot escape the affective value of image and sound' (2019: 472). Letting the material 'be' and allowing oneself to respond to its affective pleasure is not an exercise of narcissistic indulgence. It is an essential response to the cinematic experience and is deeply imbricated with the meaning-making activity of films. *A Woman's Place* engages with the poetic potential of the images and sounds in the films, without, as Keathley notes in his discussion of a poetic video essay by Paul Malcom, 'totally abandoning the knowledge effect that we associate with the essay form' (2011: 182). There is no explanatory voiceover and no text onscreen, apart from titles announcing each part and the credits. Initially I placed salient quotes at the beginning of each movement. I imagined these would work in three ways. I like words onscreen and feel they impart their own form of sensuality to a dark screen. Secondly and more importantly, I felt the need to explain what I was doing. Finally, I felt they would bring intellectual authority to my film, acting as what Grant calls 'signifiers of weightiness' (Grant 2013b). As the film took on its own shape, I took a leap and removed them. Their presence inflected the piece too heavily. I wanted to leave the spectator free to make their own connections with the piece, and to leave gaps

and spaces for their thoughts and emotional responses.[15] Elsaesser and Hagener describe these kinds of spaces as 'moments of hesitation that invite new openings that need to be activated and performed by the spectators'. They also describe them as 'so many passages or portals through which energies circulate that implicate the spectator and respond to his/her particular input', a spatial description which resonates with my own concerns (Elsaesser & Hagener 2010: 46). I also leave space between images and sounds. There are times when two screens are dark and only one has an image, as when Jeanne floats alone in her lift. At other times, all three screens are 'full'. At the beginning of *Dreams (Part 3)* Celia's voice asks a question while all three screens remain dark. It was a pleasure to pluck her voice out of its diegesis and give it the power of the *acousmêtre*. As discussed in Chapter 3, the female voice in these films often speaks from unseen and un-seeable space, and the omnidirectional nature of sound makes it seem as if she is speaking from somewhere else beyond the screen. I also spaced the introduction of each character carefully so as to give their 'presence' time to arrive. This was, in part, a cinephiliac response. It could also be interpreted as a gesture of personal feminism (to borrow a phrase from Gillian Rose[16]), one which designates time, space and respect to the female figure. But perhaps more than anything it was a practical response to a basic concern: How could I bring material from all ten films together without producing a diluted mess? I realised that by creating rhythms, intervals and spaces between images, sounds and screens I could enable knowledge and feelings to emerge out of those gaps, rather than being quickly overtaken or subsumed by a constant stream of audiovisual information.

I now discuss in more detail how this research took shape as a three-screen installation. My overall aim was to stage a different way of seeing these characters. I wanted to build a new kind of cinematic 'house' for them, one which would discourage any assocations the trope might suggest. I edited images and sounds together with this spatial aspect in mind. I took the view that two screens

15 However I took these quotes and put them into a set of 'program notes' – which one could call an explanatory document – and made this available on a table at both the Bulmershe and Tate screenings.
16 A good summary of this feminist geographer's work by Minelle Mahtani can be found in *Key Thinkers on Space and Place* eds. Phil Hubbard & Rob Kitchin, 2013 pp. 329-336

would set up a binaristic and oppositional situation rather than a suggestive, mutually informative and resonating one. I worked with three image strands, thereby creating a kind of cinematic 'plait'. The three-screen format is a spatial form of representation not uncommon to contemporary moving image installation. I had seen several examples of video art presented in this way (notably a Bill Viola exhibition at the Royal Academy and a Joan Jonas retrospective at the Tate Modern) and found them to be moving and stimulating experiences. Cinematic triptychs are a contemporary iteration of the traditional form of the triptych in art. But as Butler observes in her study of Ahtila's work, one can also trace multiscreen work back to the expanded cinema of the 1960s (2005: 3). Butler provides a useful account of the history and development of multiscreen presentation, and draws attention to the theorisation of such work by Lev Manovich. Manovich describes the 'compositional organisation' of multiscreen works as "spatial montage" and argues that this new form is actually a re-emergence of a repressed artistic tradition. The 'tradition of spatial narration in Western culture' explains Butler, 'from fresco cycles to narrative paintings, was suppressed by Fordist modes of production that instead emphasise sequential organization' (2005: 7). Cinema, writes Manovich, 'followed this logic of industrial production' and replaced other modes of narration with an 'assembly line of shots that appear on the screen one at a time' (Manovich quoted in Butler: 7). It was important to me that these characters, who all occupied different homes and films, should appear not one after the other but side by side. I could experiment with how they would inflect and resonate with one another – and with us – across time, space and screens.

At home, I was working online with the edit. At the same time, I was working on how to structure this new kind of viewing architecture. I had three mock-up sessions in the theatre over the space of a year to experiment with spatial set-ups and I include photographs of these stages below. I discovered the experience was more immersive if the screens were configured into a shape resembling the three walls of a room than if they were set laterally side by side. This structure called up the idea of a room, echoing the spatial nature of my enquiry and the rooms in the films themselves. But it was claustraphobic if the screens formed three sides of a square. This would be valid, but did not suit my aim to preserve space for thought and reaction. In the end, the final

placement of the three screens was modified for technical reasons, but the configuration preserved the suggestion of an enclosing space but a space that remained open at the same time. The two side screens curved inwards to hold the audience in a mild embrace but they did not overwhelm.

I suspended the screens so that they hung above the floor – as if floating in space. I also left gaps between the screens. The space was dark, lit only by a few domestic lights I had set up. I arranged items of furniture around the space; chairs, two tables, a wooden coat hanger, a few low lights. I set out some simple white wooden chairs, and in front of these I provided two other seating options; a bright orange armchair and a rocking chair with a small table beside it and a low hanging lamp. Interestingly, these were largely avoided by those who came in to watch the film. They were perceived as part of the installation and therefore as special in some way. It was as if they were granted a role in the proceedings, and existed in a liminal space between the screen and the audience. People were happier to sit in the row of white chairs behind them. This was something I had not predicted would happen. People's behaviour in cinematic installations is unpredictable. It is not a cinematic architecture they are used to, where options are clearly set out. In her examination of 'gallery films' Catherine Fowler writes that such work forces 'a reexamination of the boundaries between moving and still images, cinematic apparatus and gallery space' (2004: 326). She continues:

> What the exhibition of films in gallery space immediately offers is a solution to the problems of the linear experience of the cinema auditorium. The removal of such normal cinema conditions as a set beginning and end to the programme, a strict seating plan, and a single autonomous screen allows an experience that extends from the linear towards collage, comparison, simultaneity, reinforcement and opposition. (Fowler 2004: 329).

I took advantage of the surround sound system installed in the Bulmershe. I could use this system to explore sound's ability to suggest invisible and imagined spaces – spaces that were not on the screens at all. Once I had completed the edit in Final Cut, I reworked the sound tracks in Logic Pro

so that different tracks would 'appear' at different times and in different locations around the theatre. In this way I could materially explore the ideas discussed in writing in Chapter 3 – the affective, omnidirectional, elusive potential of sonic space. Rather than simply write about how it sounds when a voice is behind you, I could make it happen.

Fig. 5.7 Early try-out with three screens

Fig. 5.8 The three final screens up for the first time

Fig. 5.9 Items for the set

Fig. 5.10 The mise-en-scène taking shape

Fig. 5.11 The video essay Part 4 - Thresholds

Fig. 5.12 The video essay Part 2 - Rooms

The video has since been shown in two markedly different contexts. In February 2020 it was shown at the Tate Modern as part of Reading University's annual participation in Tate Exchange. I screened it on a large monitor instead of across three separate screens and the sound was channelled through headphones, providing the audience with a private way of listening to the film. As you can see from the photo below, the film was screened in a light and open space surrounded by other exhibits and ongoing activity. The concentrated, spatially accentuated experience in the Bulmershe is replaced here by a far more diffuse and dispersed one, and the audience can choose how long they wish to watch the film for, or indeed whether they wish to watch it at all.

Fig. 5.13 The author at Tate Exchange

The third showing was at the JAM conference (Journeys Across Media) held at Reading University in September 2020. We had originally planned to show the film on three computer monitors set up in a 'black box' in the department – a smaller and more intimate space than the Bulmershe Theatre. My intention was to place these screens on tables and to surround them with a collection of household and personal objects. I wanted to see what kind of effect this new, less formal iteration would have on the audience. But this experiment could not take place due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The conference took place virtually, and the film was online for participants to view prior to my presentation. In this online form *A Woman's Place* becomes a video essay, rather than an installation. Viewing the film in this way cannot replicate that larger, spatialised and more physical spectatorial experience. Instead the viewer watches a miniaturised version on a split screen, with the three image areas set within black space. The thought processes behind the film have not changed.

This research has involved me in new kind of learning process. It was generated by my fascination with the films, and my desire to enter into an alternative way of experiencing and understanding them. I have brought images and sounds which capture me together into meaningful clusters. These new formations are then open to being experienced by the spectator,

and to being re-thought by them. The work became what Grant calls a 'material thinking-through' of the filmic material (2014). But it was also an act of making something out of them, with my hands and my thoughts – a 'transformative re-working' of the material I analyse in writing (Grant 2016). Often, I was not sure quite why something fascinated me, or just why I was prompted to bring two films together – and what would happen when I did. But Keathley and Mittell helpfully observe in 'The Videographic Essay: Criticism in Sound and Image' that 'one learns by doing' (2016: 5). The result of this 'material thinking-through' is a new construction; an assemblage (as opposed to an assembly line) of images and sounds organised into a series of performed and experienced connections with one another. I have been able to break apart the 'once inviolable objects' in order to find out more about is inside them and what kind of relationship they have with the audience.

Conclusion

Can it be in the contract even, to say, you know, they won't pull the building down?
I don't ever want it to be pulled down…
D's plea to her estate agents in 'Exhibition' (Hogg 2013)

My project in this thesis has been to engage with how real-life structures are taken apart and rebuilt through various creative processes to form new structures onscreen that are shaped by interiority, subjectivity and alterity. The films I discuss invite us to view the familiar trope of a woman in a home in ways which are far from fixed, stable and sequestered. I have explored how ten films made between 1936 and 2013 take this figure as a starting point and a provocation, and subject it to complications, interrogations and reworkings.

In my close analysis of these texts I have discovered a series of nested analogues. There is a chain of spatialised correspondences which the figure of the house energetically draws towards itself. Filmmakers transform external sets and real locations into onscreen homes that echo, articulate and interject with the internal psychological structures of their female inhabitants. The women also live in the filmic structures themselves, visually and aurally. The built structures onscreen lead us into mental spaces, one opening into another like a series of boxes within boxes. Women move through these interconnected psychogeographies with the intent either to preserve them at all costs or to challenge and even destroy them.

'Like a film' writes Bruno, 'the house tells stories of comings and goings, designing narratives that rise, build, unravel and dissipate' (Bruno 2016: 183). I have described how the women in these films travel between rooms, down corridors, up stairs, through windows and over door thresholds as if through landscapes, regions and dimensions. For them, the house is not the static point that marks the start and end of an adventure into the world. This particular mytho-narrative, as De Lauretis (1984) and Bruno (2002) have pointed out, places the woman perennially

at the beginning and the end of the journey and keeps her there, in a state of fixity in the *oikos*. My aim has been to reposition these films as ones which portray the space of the home as a physiological and psychological landscape (or as Bruno would say a 'homescape') through which the female inhabitant can voyage. She maps, investigates, discovers, and even structures it physically to support her psychic needs. The home offers us a space within which to build a sense of ourselves, as many spatial theorists remind us. 'Home is the site of the construction and reconstruction of one's self' writes Young (2005: 153). The home serves this function in these films, and its architecture is never passive. The architecture of the cinematic home transcends the limitations of its physical counterpart, and becomes an expressive, mutable space shaped by emotion as well as bricks and mortar. I have asked *how* filmmakers achieve these transformations and explored what it is about the practical art of filmmaking that enables them to make space expressive and eloquent. The deep correspondence between architecture and film has underpinned my enquiry.

I have gone about this research in two ways – in writing and in video. I have structured my written enquiry around the four, constructive decision-making processes of *découpage*, mise-en-scène, sound and editing, and looked at how different pairs of films are shaped by these processes. This critical journey has been complemented and enhanced by my videographic research. I shaped this videographic research into a spatial installation, which allowed me to perform rather than explain some of the deeper themes I explore in these films. It also allowed me to discover more about how their meaning is generated. By recreating a three-screen installation, I could stage an encounter between the films that performatively discussed their complex approach to interior space. I could also open up a space for the films to engage with the spectator in ways that were suggestive rather than linear, took poetic routes rather than explanatory ones, and worked with spatial rather than sequential montage. I wanted the spectator to relish the way that film affects us and speaks to our unconscious as well as our conscious minds. After all, it is inner psychic spaces which ultimately structure the outer spaces we see in the films themselves.

I initially constructed my video essay *A Woman's Place: Home in Cinema* as a three-screen installation. The reader of this thesis will be able to view the piece online. This practical, creative way of researching film is supported by a body of rich and discursive theory. I am indebted to the theorists and filmmakers who work in this area – not only for the joy of watching their films but for what they have to say about making it. The following joint statement from Grant and Keathley provides a good summary of my own experience:

> Videographic film studies has a special potential to show something about our relationship with our cinematic objects of study, for it enables us to explore and express, in a particularly compelling way, how we use these objects imaginatively in our inner lives; and it can also be used to present something shareable about those objects – some attained knowledge or understanding – however surprising its content or unusual its form. (Grant & Keathley 2014)

My discussion of the *découpage* in *Craig's Wife* and *A Woman Under the Influence* in Chapter 1 has shown how illuminating a study of this filmic process can be, and how useful a critical tool. It leads us into a deeper and more appreciative understanding of how *découpage* generates meaning. Gavin Lambert's comment is apposite: 'Until we know how a film is speaking to us, we cannot be sure what it is saying' (Lambert quoted in Gibbs and Pye 2005: 7). A closer look at how the camera is placed and how shots work successively together in *Craig's Wife* reveals how Arzner uses her form of systematic *découpage* to serve a purpose. It visually replicates Harriet's slow and steady progression towards psychic awakening. Arzner's shot structure takes us steadily to the point where all structure suddenly falls away. The film moves processively towards the finale, in which Harriet faces the psychic void that is her home. We find an alternative form of *découpage* at work in *A Woman Under the Influence*, which can be described as reactive and 'actor-led'. This too serves a purpose. It allows Cassavetes to remain responsive to the actors and their reactions on the day. In this way the film can more accurately achieve its project to faithfully depict the rawness of

our inner lives. The Craig and Longhetti homes are polar opposites, but Cassavetes's messy house is no less expressively rendered through *découpage* than Arzner's preternaturally tidy one.

In Chapter 2 I have discussed how the mise-en-scène in two films articulates psychic interiority through its arrangement of objects and people within the frame. My analysis of *Jeanne Dielman* has considered the film's *dispositif*. I have explored how Akerman uses a *dispositif* for purposes of creative restraint and how it structures the mise-en-scène of the entire film. Jeanne uses her strict regime to keep her repressed trauma out of sight from herself and others. Akerman portrays this process – this development and upholding of a personal *dispositif* – through the film's formal and spatial *dispositif*. But as we have seen, she also installs gaps – and these things allow stuff to happen and life to emerge. The objects in *Jeanne Dielman* do not perform symbolically in any straightforward way. My task has been to enquire into how they *do* speak – or why it is they remain mute. My reading suggests we regard these objects through the lens of Jean Cayrol's conception of an 'Everyday Reality' co-existing with a 'Concentrationary Reality'. *Jeanne Dielman* shows us a woman living in a domestic world structured by strangeness, in which past trauma lives on into the present. In Joanna Hogg's film *Exhibition* we encounter a couple on the verge of selling their home, even though they have grown into and around it as if it were the genetic foundation of their relationship. Discerning how mise-en-scène works in this understated art film presents another critical challenge. There are no obvious symbols, and few signs or symptoms that point the way. D and H use their home to structure themselves and their relationship, but they also use it to hide themselves from each other and from us. How then to proceed? Like *Jeanne Dielman*, this film does not engage with the metaphorical power of mise-en-scène. Both films work with the surface of the everyday. But close analysis reveals that Hogg uses the architecture of the house to generate meaning. D's plea to the estate agents quoted at the heading of this chapter is not only a desire for personal permanence. It raises the spectre of property privilege. Having a home is something Jeanne must pay deeply for and struggle to maintain. But it is a luxury this couple take for granted.

In Chapter 3 I have discussed sonic space in *Secret Beyond the Door* and *Midnight Lace*. The female voice in both films performs in distinctive ways, one in voice-over and one in a curious hybrid of synchronised voice and I-Voice. Drawing upon theory which recognises how sound works differently from the image in cinema, I have discussed ways in which sonic space contributes to complexity and even unruliness in both film texts. Celia Lamphere's voice wanders through geographical and semantic domains. The alterity of sonic space allows Lang to explore how we are not always aware of why we do things. The splitting can be performed by film's ability to materially detach the voice from the body. I have discussed the disappearance of the voiceover at a critical point in the film, and offer another reading to that which positions this event as another attempt to bring female subjectivity back under diegetic control. I have explored moments in the film in which the voiceover is neither in nor out of the body, and how Lang provides it with an onscreen, shadowy room in which both Mark and Celia speak to one another with psychic directness. In *Midnight* Lace we find the Gothic trope of a woman in peril in a house buckling under the pressure of modernity. Kit Preston does not have as much 'derring-do' as Celia, but she gets it right in the end. The film updates the threat by threading it into the telephonic realm. I have shown that the film's diegesis is inadventently buffeted around by the instability of the sonic domain. Kit is stalked by a puppet-like voice, while her own voice is over-recorded and hyper-signified. Neither voice is firmly attached to the bodies which produce them, and this calls into question not only how reliable the voice is as a source of subjectivity, but how stable the audiovisual contract in film actually is. Day's voice is so closely recorded that it resembles an I-Voice, which places it into too great an intimacy with the audience. This destabilises our reaction to her screams and cries and ultimately undermines Day's attempt at a serious performance. Furthermore, the 'thing' that actually causes her horror is one that is never shown by the film. Had it been, we might have been more able to tolerate her reaction. Identifying how a disturbance in audiovisual synchronisation can distort a film text is useful. It can deepen our understanding of how actively sound works upon the spectator in the cinema. It also raises issues of the ventriloquistic nature of the cinematic medium itself.

In Chapter 4 I have discussed editing in three avant-garde films. Through the process of editing these films subject the analogous structures of house, psyche and film to a more radical series of pressures and manipulations. At the end of *Outer Space* Barbara Hershey emerges as the winner (according to Tscherkassky) although her cinematic house is totally destroyed. She is attacked by the cinematic apparatus as embodied by the image and sound tracks. But she fights back and stares defiantly at us from a hole in the darkness with her subjectivity intact. Elisa in *House* also stares out directly at the audience from her cinematic room, which at the end of the film is no longer a house but simply the dark space of the frame. This film reconstructs the experience of a woman having a breakdown in her house by manipulating the image and sound tracks, thereby disrupting what cinematic convention usually keeps well aligned to perceptual norms. Elisa hears voices, sounds become detached from their moorings, and the outside comes into the inside. Ultimately however, *House* encourages us to remember ourselves as collective beings. We are invited to consider the wider implications of creating borders around ourselves. Ahtila tells her story on three screens in a gallery space, which invites the spectator into a more open, spatially aware encounter with her film. The film's message chimes with recent spatial reflection on the concept of home. 'Home as a place is a porous, open, intersection of social relations and emotions' write feminist geographers Blunt and Dowling. 'As feminists have pointed out, home is neither public nor private but both' (2006: 27). *Meshes of the Afternoon* shows a simple home transfigured by dream, memory and desire. In a process not unlike that of Tscherkassky's editorial interventions, Deren subjects the structure of her home to a series of radical reformations via the process of editing. Deren appreciates the power of what she calls 'creative cutting' and I have shown how Deren uses the cut as a bridge to cross between spatial, temporal and psychic domains. Through the power afforded her by the editing process, her home becomes a magic space which no longer obeys architectural laws, and in which objects are free to move around by themselves. Deren used the space of her own home as a springboard for a creative exploration of the inner life and the Moviola enabled her to travel deeper into this realm.

One film I have not closely analysed in writing but which contributes significantly to my research is Akerman's early short film *Saute Ma Ville* (1968), made at the age of 18 after she had quit film school in Brussels. It is a furious, funny film which acts as a lively and informing presence behind the whole thesis. As one can see (and as I have discussed in Chapter 5 in my reflection upon this research) images and sounds from her film appear in *A Woman's Place: Home in Cinema.* I bring this audiovisual collage (as it is called in the credits) to an end by cutting to black on the sound of Akerman's explosive gesture as she turns on the gas in the kitchen and sets her bunch of flowers alight. Akerman finally blows it all up; the home, domesticity, our role, our housework, opening and closing of cupboards, floor washing, shoe polishing and so on.[17] Such errant, comic and ferocious subjectivity is often how women feel but seldom how they act in the cinema. We see glimpses of it in all of the films I discuss, but it is only in this film that it is given free reign. As such, it is a foundational and releasing film text for me.

In the final analysis, is the home recuperable? Or should we (the women who are primarily associated with the home) just leave it altogether and strive never to be shown inside it onscreen again? With the possible exception of *Saute Ma Ville,* none of these films offers a definitive answer. If we look at them diachronically, we see no particular progression. *Craig's Wife* sets the stage for the others, and ends on a question rather than an answer. In *Meshes of the Afternoon* we find a 'beached mermaid' (Turim 1986: 88) in the armchair at the end of the tale, but it is the film's fascination with opening the front door which stays with us – like a dream circling around an unsolved problem. As Turim so well observes, 'the key is falling still…' (88). In *Secret Beyond the Door* the Lamphere mansion goes up in flames and the couple move on. Lang takes them back to Mexico where they began. Celia and Mark's 'Aztec' garden is an alternative space, a shadow home as architect Lars Lerup might describe it (2012: 305). But it is a hotel not a real home. Moreover, 'Mexico' in classical Hollywood is yet another trope, signifying an 'otherness' which is not entirely to be wished for. 'I still have a long way to go' says Mark. 'We have a long way to go' replies Celia.

17 Gestures which are all brought back to life and placed on exhibition in her later masterpiece *Jeanne Dielman.*

When Kit climbs out of her bedroom window in *Midnight Lace* she literally steps out onto the metaphorical scaffolding of her new as yet un-built life. But what happens as she clings to a pillar four storeys above ground? A man comes up to rescue her in a lift.[18] *A Woman Under the Influence* offers the most realistic ending, as Cassavetes insists, in the sense that nothing much changes. Mabel and Nick make their bed, a symbolic gesture, and life carries on. Jeanne Dielman's life is over, at least in its present form. Her son will soon come home from school and his life as he knows it will also be over. They will both, no doubt, be un-homed. There is no handy resolution, no blue flashing light of a police car outside before we fade to black – although perhaps this is the significance of the flashing neon light that shines through the window throughout the film. What stays with us is the psychic truth that has finally managed to make itself felt. D and H disappear into obscurity, despite D's plea for permanence. How strange it is then, that in 2016 the house was indeed demolished. 'It is fully acknowledged' says the rather bald report from Historic England, 'that 60 Hornton Street, designed by James Melvin in 1969, possesses local interest as a house designed by a prominent architect for himself, but in this instance the building does not have the high levels of significance required for listing' (Quote from HE report, July 2016). Property – as Rhodes reminds us – is fungible.

Home may be a material dwelling but as these films show, it is also 'an affective space, shaped by emotions and feelings of belonging' (Blunt and Dowling 2006: 22). In these films the material and imaginative aspects of home are materialised by virtue of cinema's ability to manipulate and animate architectural space. Through a close look at the processes of *découpage*, mise-en-scène, sound and editing, I have shown how filmmakers reconfigure material space so that it more closely resembles the way their characters feel about it. I have focused upon the nexus of a well-known trope in cinema, the woman in the home, and explored its generative possibilities. The clichés and associations with which this trope is clothed have only served to camouflage the complexity and ambiguity that obtain to it. I have drawn upon spatial and architectural theory as

18 This was a scene I tried endlessly to incorporate into my audiovisual collage. I still regret that I could find no place for it.

well as feminist geographical theory in order to further explore issues of sexuality and space. Far from being confined or reduced by sequestration within the four walls of house, room and frame, these characters live in worlds that vibrate with meaning, mobility, intention and poetic depth. Moroever, as Deren reminds us, they can go anywhere they like in a cut.

This study has the potential to open onto a wider field of enquiry. The homes I look at here exist in a particular cultural corner of the world. Whether they actually like their home or not, in the main these films show women that expect to have a home that constitutes and supports their selfhood. It would be illuminating to look at how the home has been and continues to be represented in the cinema by other cultures and in other social contexts. The incidence of the Covid-19 pandemic during the final year of my thesis has meant that I spent the best part of a year at home. Issues of safety, borders and permeability have come to the fore and it remains to be seen how these might initiate changes in the way we think about the home, and how we ponder over such matters in the cinema.

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Filmography

Primary Films

Craig's Wife, dir. by Dorothy Arzner (Columbia Pictures, 1936)

Meshes of the Afternoon, dir. by Maya Deren (Maya Deren, 1943)

Secret Beyond the Door, dir. by Fritz Lang (Universal Pictures, 1947)

Midnight Lace, dir. by David Miller (Universal Pictures, 1960)

Saute ma Ville, dir. by Chantal Akerman (Chantal Akerman, 1968)

A Woman Under the Influence, dir. by John Cassavetes
(Faces International Films/Cine-Source/Cassavetes 1974)

Jeanne Dielman, 23 Quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles, dir. by Chantal Akerman
(Paradise Films Bruxelles/Unité Trois Paris/Janus Films, 1975)

Outer Space, dir. by Peter Tscherkassky (Sixpack Film/Light Cone/Canyon Cinema, 1999)

House, dir. by Eija-Liisa Ahtila (Crystal Eye, 2002)

Exhibition, dir. by Joanna Hogg (Artificial Eye, 2013)

Secondary Films

Rebecca, dir. by Alfred Hitchcock (The Selznick Studio, 1940)

No Man of Her Own, dir. by Mitchell Leisen (Paramount Pictures, 1950)

Strangers When We Meet, dir. by Richard Quine (Columbia Pictures, 1960)

Autour de "Jeanne Dielman", dir. by Sami Frey (Agnès Ravez/Chantal Akerman, 1975)

Appendix

Programme Notes for Installation

I include here a copy of the set of programme notes provided at the Bulmershe Theatre and Tate Exchange. The image on the front page was designed by Dimitar Spasov, a typography student in the Department of Typography & Graphic Communication at the University of Reading.

A WOMAN'S PLACE

the home in cinema

An audiovisual installation
by Louise Radinger Field

Architecture is never passive on film. As Hans Dieter Schaal writes, 'Film architecture is never a silent shell, standing there indifferently, every façade, every building is involved and has something to say.'

This installation weaves together footage from films explored in my written thesis. It forms a discrete chapter in videographic form. The characters and their locations are drawn together into a different form of textual – and textural – communication with one another. It is a process of audiovisual collage making in which I am at liberty to create places of encounter and intrasubjectivity. The plaiting together of cinematic spaces and rooms teases out meanings from them that are brought to light when they are set side by side. It enables comparisons, repetitions, variations and vibrations between worlds to occur.

My overall aim is to bring fresh critical perspective to the culturally reiterated relationship of the woman in the home. The choice of films is personal and each is compelling in its own way. They span nearly eighty years, from **Craig's Wife** (1936) to **Exhibition** (2013). I want to disturb theoretical positions regarding women in the house and women on film, the totalising natures of which I do not recognise as representative. By using three screens, I am playing with the familiar mechanics of single-screen representation. I situate this work within what Mary Ann Doane describes as 'the elaboration of a new process of seeing and remembering.'

The four parts

Boxes

Like a series of nested Chinese boxes, figures are housed in films, in houses in films, in rooms and lifts in houses in films and so on.

Rooms

Each room is a territory with its own laws, contingencies and atmosphere. In contrast to Jeanne's psychogeographic grid are scenes from other interiors. There is no singular kitchen, no singular woman in a kitchen.

Dreams

Cinema invites comparison with dreamwork and the unconscious. Here I re-edit scenes from **Secret Beyond the Door** (1947) into a dreamlike structure which lies nestled unseen, yet suggested, inside Lang's film like an unconscious.
Lang's images are synthesised with music from Maya Deren's oneiric masterpiece **Meshes of the Afternoon** (1943).

Thresholds

Physical thresholds in these films embody psychological ones, and are experienced in a phenomenological way by the characters – as are all the architectural features surrounding them. The women inhabit a kind of living architecture.

'HOME IS THE SITE OF THE CONSTRUCTION AND RECONSTRUCTION OF ONE'S SELF.'

Iris Marion Young, 'House and Home: Feminist Variations on a theme'
(On Female Body Experience 'Throwing like a girl' and other essays)
Oxford University Press, 2005, p. 153

Meshes of the Afternoon

Maya Deren wrote, shot and performed in this short experimental film with her husband Alexander Hammid in 1943. The location was their own home in Los Angeles. It was originally a silent film shot on a budget of around $275. Deren added a musical score in 1959 which was composed by her third husband Teiji Ito.

Saute Ma Ville (Blow up my town)

Chantal Akerman directed and acted in this, her first, short film after dropping out of film school at the age of 18. It was filmed in the kitchen of her own flat on 35 mm. The young woman Akerman plays – herself yet not herself – performs a series of dull household chores in an increasingly burlesque and frenetic way, while taking breaks to tape up the door and windows to prepare for her final explosive gesture.

House

The woman in **House** (Marjaana Maijala) experiences her home as a territory with porous borders. The house becomes a dreamlike environment in which nothing is stable. The film was directed by Finnish visual artist Eija-Liisa Ahtila after research and interviews with women who had suffered periods of psychosis.

Midnight Lace

Kit Preston (Doris Day) has married suave English banker Tony (Rex Harrison) and come to live with him in a well-heeled duplex apartment in Grosvenor Square.
Day's onscreen presence is luminescent, her hair perpetually shiny, her clothes impeccable. This glossiness is echoed in the lighting and décor of the set which is full of reflective, expensive surfaces – even the sheets are shiny. Surfaces are deceptive of course. Apart from the director, the creative team had worked extensively with Douglas Sirk hence the high quality of the mise-en-scène.

Secret Beyond the Door

Celia (Joan Bennett) marries architect Mark Lamphere (Michael Redgrave) on impulse while on holiday in Mexico and comes to live in his New England mansion. There, she discovers Mark's collection of rooms in which famous murders have occurred. There is one room she is forbidden to enter. Undaunted, she determines to track down Mark's murderous obsession. House becomes emotional labyrinth.

Exhibition

D (Viv Albertine) lives and works in a modernist house in West London, along with her husband H (Liam Gillick). The location used in the film was designed by British architect James Melvin, an acquaintance of the director Joanna Hogg. Hogg described it as the perfect container for her ideas. Hogg uses the deceptively transparent topology of the building to expose characters who fail to recognise themselves, each other, and their privileged position.

Jeanne Dielman

Jeanne Dielman (Delphine Seyrig) is a widow living with her teenage son in a Brussels apartment. She observes a strictly maintained household routine, while supplementing her meagre income with prostitution. She sees one client a day at exactly the same time, in between preparing potatoes for supper. The film's location was a real apartment in Brussels, filmed with an equally as strictly maintained cinematic precision by Akerman and her crew.

A Woman Under the Influence

Mabel Longhetti (Gena Rowlands) is married to blue-collar construction foreman Nick (Peter Falk), they have three young children and live in a small old-fashioned Los Angeles villa. Nick works long hours, leaving an increasingly frustrated and lonely Mabel at home alone or with her children. She is an energetic, eccentric woman who in the narrow context of her life appears as socially inept and even mentally imbalanced. Director John Cassavetes (husband and long-time collaborator with Rowlands) looked at over 150 houses in LA before he found one with the right spatial qualities for the film. The film crew lived and worked in the house.

Craig's Wife

Harriet Craig (Rosalind Russell) is married to Walter (John Boles), they have no children and live in a large Colonial-style suburban villa along with two servants and Walter's aunt. At the end, alone at last in the immaculate house with which she is obsessed, Harriet is overwhelmed by a sense of strangeness. It is a surprising film, full of ambivalence, directed by one of the only women directing features in that period, Dorothy Arzner. The set was a 10 room interior built at Columbia Studios.

Images and sounds from the following films:

Craig's Wife (Dorothy Arzner 1936)

Meshes of the Afternoon (Maya Deren 1943)

Midnight Lace (David Miller 1960)

A Woman Under the Influence (John Cassavetes 1974)

House (Eija-Liisa Ahtila 2002)

Rebecca (Alfred Hitchcock 1940)

Secret Beyond the Door (Fritz Lang 1947)

Saute ma Ville (Chantal Akerman 1968)

Jeanne Dielman, 23 quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles (Chantal Akerman 1975)

Exhibition (Joanna Hogg 2013)

Quotes above from:

Hans Dieter Schaal
Learning from Hollywood: Architecture and Film Edition Axel Menges, 2013, p. 54

Mary Ann Doane
'Remembering Women: Psychical and Historical Constructions in Film Theory'
Psychoanalysis and Cinema Ed. E Ann Kaplan, Routledge, 1990, p. 62

Louise Radinger Field,
PhD candidate, Department of Film, Theatre & Television, University of Reading