

# **DEVELOPMENT:**

Opening space for New Zealand women's participation in scriptwriting for  
feature films?

by

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## Abstract

This thesis explores whether an analytical practice, combining creative writing with activism and based in academia, can help open space for more women scriptwriters within New Zealand feature filmmaking. It links autoethnography with activist and experience-based methodologies within a creative writing framework that includes a memoir, an essay, a report, diaries and emails, an essay screenplay and weblogging, to present multiple views of an investigation into state investment in women's feature filmmaking and the researcher's own experience as an activist researcher and apprentice scriptwriter. It concludes that, within an analytical creative writing practice, autoethnography's accommodation of a single researcher participant's shifting roles may help to open space for women scriptwriters to contribute to New Zealand feature films.

## Acknowledgements

I thank all those, named and anonymous, who generated the experience and writing that follows, including but not only members of the communities formally acknowledged.<sup>1</sup>

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And, finally, I thank the academic who encouraged me to think of a PhD project as just 'an exercise' rather than a life's work.

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<sup>1</sup> See below 88ff, 105ff, 111.

Research for this thesis has been published in other forms, in *Junctures*;<sup>2</sup> in *TAKE: The SDGNZ Film and Television Quarterly*;<sup>3</sup> and in *n. paradoxa*;<sup>4</sup> on the Women in Film & Television NSW website;<sup>5</sup> and in my weblog, *Wellywood Woman*.<sup>6</sup> Chapter 4 has been widely circulated and is available on the IIML website.<sup>7</sup> At the end of July 2009, drafts of Chapters 4 to 8 were submitted to the Minister for Culture & Heritage's Review of the Film Commission Act.

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<sup>2</sup> Evans 2008[b].

<sup>3</sup> Evans 2009[b].

<sup>4</sup> Evans 2009[c].

<sup>5</sup> Evans 2008[a].

<sup>6</sup> Evans 2009[d].

<sup>7</sup> Evans 2008[c].

## Abbreviations

Each term is written in full when it first appears in the text.

**ATL** Alexander Turnbull Library

**BEV** Birds Eye View Film Festival

**CAP** Creative Analytical Practices

**CNZ** Creative NZ Arts Council of New Zealand Toi Aotearoa

**Film Fund** New Zealand Film Production Fund Trust

**FWI** First Writers Initiative

**IFF** Independent Filmmakers Fund

**IIML** International Institute of Modern Letters, Victoria University of Wellington

**Kidsarus 2 Inc** Kidsarus

**NZFC** New Zealand Film Commission Te Tumu Whakaata Taonga

**NZOA** New Zealand On Air

**NZWG** New Zealand Writers Guild

**QEII** Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council of New Zealand

**SFF** Short Film Fund

**SIPF** Screen Innovation Production Fund

**SPADA** Screen Production and Development Association Waka Papaho

**SPIF** Screen Production Incentive Fund

**Te Papa** Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa

**VMS** Victoria Management School

**Weltec** Wellington Institute of Technology

**WIFT** Women in Film & Television

**Women's Gallery Inc** Women's Gallery

## **Notes**

I use an individual's (not author) full name at first reference and first name in subsequent references.

In footnotes, a reference includes a date only the first time a publication is mentioned, except where it is necessary to distinguish between multiple works by a single author.

Chapter 6 has its own internal page numbering.

The *Film References* include only films completed before October 2009.

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# *1 Introduction*

Industry diversity is not only about equal access to employment opportunities; it is also about opening space for the telling of stories that might not otherwise be told.<sup>8</sup>

...[D]ramatic structure consists of the creation and deferment of hope...The reversals, the surprises, and the ultimate conclusion of the hero's quest...in direct proportion to the plausibility of the opponent forces.<sup>9</sup>

From January 2003-December 2008, New Zealanders working in New Zealand produced at least seventy-five feature films.<sup>10</sup> Women wrote and directed nine percent. The national state film body, the New Zealand Film Commission (NZFC) and its associated charitable trust, the New Zealand Film Production Fund Trust (the Film Fund) funded the production for thirty features. Women wrote and directed sixteen percent of these.

In this thesis, as an apprentice feature film scriptwriter with a vested interest in any possible gender discrimination in the film industry, I explore why, although some New Zealand women writers and directors have achieved outstanding commercial and critical success,<sup>11</sup> and do well as television writers,<sup>12</sup> women write and direct so few of the feature films that New Zealanders produce in New Zealand. In an attempt to attempt to identify “Who benefits?” from state investment in feature films, and suggest reasons why the state invests in fewer women than men, I use autoethnography to incorporate experience- and activist-generated research techniques within my hybrid and analytical creative writing practice. Resisting bifurcation of ‘creative writing’ and its ‘exegesis’ in favour of integration of my roles as researcher, writer and activist, I look for industrial and individual behaviours that may reinforce women’s low participation in feature filmmaking. I also examine my own experience, and whether I can use techniques I am familiar with to open space for women’s screenplays to be produced, including my own.

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<sup>8</sup> Hunt 2007: 51.

<sup>9</sup> Mamet 2007: 111.

<sup>10</sup> Evans 2009[b].

<sup>11</sup> See n379 and accompanying text.

<sup>12</sup> See below 126; and n496.

Women writers' and directors' low participation in feature filmmaking is a global phenomenon and the issues are complex, partly because women filmmakers, and the contexts they work in, are diverse. At the outset, this thesis adopts evolutionary psychologist Jonathan Gottschall's findings, from his comprehensive and cross-cultural statistics-based investigation into feminist critics' claims that female characters are underrepresented and depicted negatively in folk- and fairy-tales.<sup>13</sup> He found under-representation (3:1) of prominent female folk-tale characters, that the percentage of active male protagonists significantly exceeds that of active female protagonists, and that there are almost always more references to female than male 'beauty'.<sup>14</sup> These findings provide an historical baseline against which I consider similar under-representation and characteristics within film.

I also adopt Gottschall's conclusion that 'woman' is a product of both nature and nurture;<sup>15</sup>

...while the folktale patterns are inconsistent with the constructivist notion that individuals are mere products of their sociocultural contexts, they also provide no support for the orientation that is social constructivism's equally incomplete antithesis: biological determinism...the often-considerable variability across subsamples testifies to human behavior...[which] will bend significantly...within the constraints of evolved human nature.<sup>16</sup>

Taking a position on 'woman' within which I too can 'bend' I will explore the issues without committing myself either to an essentialist or to a socially constructed view of 'woman', so that I can welcome insights from either view. For example, informants in the industry have told me that women filmmakers are "not willing to take the necessary risks". Susan Pinker's analysis of a 'backbeat' to women's motivation, that we are conservative about taking on risks for evolutionary reasons is a partial, 'essentialist' explanation for this: if a woman dies, her offspring won't survive.<sup>17</sup> 'Social construction' analysis provides another partial explanation, through an

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<sup>13</sup> Gottschall 2005.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid: 210-213.

<sup>15</sup> I take issue with one element of his analysis, below 177ff.

<sup>16</sup> Gottschall: 219.

<sup>17</sup> Pinker 2008: 211-212.

aspect of women filmmakers' experience that reinforces any hesitation we have about risktaking. Our minds are often "slightly pulled from the straight...made to alter [our] clear vision[s] in deference to external authority"<sup>18</sup>. This external authority may be a decisionmaker who views our projects, if they are a little 'different' as risky propositions because "this is the way the world is, that men control the money, and they decide who they're going to give it to"<sup>19</sup>.

In choosing to adopt these interpretations of 'woman', I also chose not to explore other theoretical debates including those that centre on language, in particular feminist work about psychoanalysis and language,<sup>20</sup> and work about the literary nature of the screenplay and its opposition to oral culture.<sup>21</sup>

This research also adopts the proposition that women's participation in filmmaking matters because so much cultural capital resides in feature films.

The NZFC is committed to contributing to New Zealand's cultural capital,<sup>22</sup> referring to economist George Barker's definition of cultural capital as something that:

...creates a shared identity which helps connect individuals. It has aesthetic, cognitive and moral dimensions. It is collectively owned and forms part of the endowments which each generation receives from the past and builds on for future generations.<sup>23</sup>

However, the NZFC appears never to have questioned whether its lesser investment in women's stories than in men's compromises this contribution. In my view it does; if women do not participate fully in filmmaking as the storytellers—the writers and directors—film's contribution to cultural capital is weaker. Communities lose a significant proportion of their cultural capital, too; and with few 'cultural grandmothers', women filmmakers' heritage is

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<sup>18</sup> Woolf 1931; 1979: 96.

<sup>19</sup> Blalock 2007; and below 128.

<sup>20</sup> For examples see inter alia Juliet Mitchell's or Julia Kristeva's work.

<sup>21</sup> For example following Ong 1982.

<sup>22</sup> New Zealand Film Commission Te Tumu Whakaata Taonga 2007[a]: 8-9.

<sup>23</sup> Idem. See also Barker 2000; and Conor 2004: 73.

compromised. Although we have some tradition behind us, as Virginia Woolf stated eighty years ago when discussing women's writing, women filmmakers have "a short and partial [tradition] that [is] of little help. For we think back through our mothers if we are women"<sup>24</sup>. As Woolf also points out "...masterpieces are not single and solitary birth; they are the outcome of many years of thinking in common, of thinking by the body of the people, so that the experience of the mass is behind the single voice"<sup>25</sup>.

Unlike Virginia Woolf, my concern is not with the 'masterpiece', with the exceptional woman writer, nor with the exceptional film with a woman writer and director. Because I believe that thinking in common is not *the same as* thinking the same, I want to hear many voices and see many vistas, each woman approaching the experience of the mass in her own unique way. I believe that women must participate fully in filmmaking so that our experiences—whether the result of nature, nurture or a combination of the two—our quests, and our hopes, become part of everyone's cultural capital.

Collectively, the following chapters aim to tell a single, multifaceted, story about the creation and deferment—and possible realisation—of my hope that stories women write for the cinema will be more often represented on that big screen than they are now, and that I will be able to participate in filmmaking as a screenwriter.

Each chapter is written in a different form and to reach a specific audience, but embraces both 'creative writing' and 'exegesis' to a greater or lesser extent. This strategy also involves "writing back' [to the dominant culture] whilst at the same time writing to ourselves"<sup>26</sup>, in a context where, while accountable to the dominant academic culture, I move among and feel accountable to activist, film and artist communities. Sometimes my commitment to these primary intentions becomes disruptive, and may appear to compromise a chapter's stated intention.

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<sup>24</sup> Woolf 1929; 1998: 98-99. See also n430 and accompanying text.

<sup>25</sup> Woolf 1929; 1998: 85.

<sup>26</sup> Smith 1994: 13. See n76 and accompanying text.

The chapters are organised as a time-based sequence from Chapter 2, starting in the early 1970s, to Chapter 7, ending in August 2009 although there is some time overlap between chapters. There are many repetitions. Some highlight the different way identical material is presented for a discrete audience, or the interrelationships between chapters and the selves who write them. Some are knots that tie together disparate threads drawn from my long experience as a woman living and working among a diversity of artists. Here, these knots aim to replicate—for readers unfamiliar with them—the repetitive and often irritating experience that accompanies many women artists throughout their practices: the ever-present, often harsh, and often irresolvable realities of gender and the economics of creative practice. Chapter 2 includes out-of-time additions made very late in the process. Between some chapters are transitions, to help the reader move from one kind of narrative to another.

Chapters 2 and 3 outline the methodology used. Chapter 2, *Memoir: A Methodology-from-experience*, explains how my activist theoretical framework developed. It follows feminist film writer B. Ruby Rich's suggestion that it is as valid to experience and then to write as it is to follow the traditional academic path, by reading and then writing. The *I* looks back from a distance, remembering the experiences that shaped and continue to inform my practices and, now, my academic work. This chapter speaks to the women with whom I shared these experiences and to our children. It is also for women academics who theorise about women's art and writing. There is I believe—as one of them wrote to me the other day—a 'breach' between members of the former women's art movement and women academics.<sup>27</sup> If, as my correspondent suggested, it is important to heal this breach, artist activists like me have to articulate our methodologies more assertively in academic fora.

In Chapter 3, *Reading Towards A Methodology: Autoethnography*, the *I* is distant, mostly implied, as I attempted to place my experience on one side. I

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<sup>27</sup> Personal communication 18 August 2009.

read and then wrote, to develop an autoethnography within a creative writing framework that embraced my methodology-from-experience and my activism. The chapter also outlines the field studies process, including an ethical position that incorporates creative writing and activist practices. It is oriented to academic readers.

Chapters 4 and 5 analyse the ‘external’ fieldwork. Chapter 4, my *PhD Report To The People Who’ve Helped Me* (my *PhD Report*) written to the New Zealand film industry, explores “Who benefited?” from state film funding in New Zealand in the few years before 2008. The report places my findings within a broad landscape that includes women’s global feature filmmaking, attitudes towards women artists generally, contextual and content issues that affect women screenwriters’ storytelling for film and my own experience. The *I* is intermittent and used to personalise the text and invite responses.

Chapter 5 *Diary & Emails* looks at “Who benefited?” in a narrower and more detailed NZFC-oriented framework. An edited diary, including emails copied into it, Chapter 5 addresses my interrelationships with individuals at the NZFC and, briefly, NZOA, after it launched a telemovie initiative. It also builds on the ideas presented in Chapter 4 about whether women tell their stories differently than men do and considers some recent research about ways to address institutional discrimination. This chapter too speaks primarily to the film industry. The *I* is present journalistically: as the shaper of the story, and as an actor within it.

Chapters 6 and 7 focus on my ‘internal’ fieldwork and analysis, as a screenwriter. Chapter 6, the screenplay *Development*, encapsulates my arguments about factors that affect the opening of space for women to develop their feature films in New Zealand and elsewhere. The *I* is implied only, but in my view this is the most personal of the chapters. As the *Development* one liner says, this chapter is “for women who want to make movies, and for the people who love them”, with the ‘them’ intended to be ambiguous. As a screenplay for an ‘essay’ film, this chapter would be the creative writing component in a bifurcated thesis; the incorporation of hard data and argument mean that the chapter is also exegesis.

Chapter 7 includes excerpts from my *Wellywood Woman* weblog and some related diary notes about *Development's* development. The *I* writes both to a friend who 'thinks in common' with and shares—or has shared, 'the experience of the mass' with me—and to everyone; and is more conventionally diaristic than in Chapter 5. It builds on both the activist researcher and the creative writer fieldwork and introduces it to a largely unknown audience.

Chapter 8 is a brief conclusion. *I*, the activist, writer, researcher, wrote it for you and me. I consider whether I've answered my research questions; address the latest NZFC development data, to June 30 2009, and point to some hopeful signs.



## *Transition 1: To Methodology*

Knowledge can be acquired and exhibited in a variety of ways. To read and then to write: that's the standard intellectual route. In the years of my own formation though, there were many other options...always searching for that magical magnetic connection that originally drew me in: the connection between self and public, between idea and practice, between the individual and the social, the ideological and the marketable.<sup>28</sup>

UNLESS someone like you cares a whole awful lot, nothing is going to get better. It's not.<sup>29</sup>

To integrate my academic, creative and activist practices, I articulated my creative practice/activism methodology (Chapter 2) and then linked it to an appropriate academic one (Chapter 3).

Chapter 2, a memoir with some contemporary interjections, shows how—through a kind of thinking in common about the experience of the mass<sup>30</sup> over thirty years—I developed knowledge, within a creative practice inseparable from activism. The discrete, practitioner, methodology presented in this chapter affected every aspect of the thesis' field studies and analysis, explicitly and subliminally.

Although not formally theorised during its development, this hybrid methodology is consonant with what cultural theorist Kester describes as a 'dialogical' art practice that facilitates dialogue among diverse communities and is process-oriented, a 'littoral' arts practice, that provides me with an "ability to think outside, and across, the parameters of existing disciplinary and professional problem solving"<sup>31</sup>. This practice often prioritises the provision of context over content, but embraces ideas about both.

In my case it demands ongoing performance, creating and reinventing myself and my ideas within a chosen context and—perhaps—affecting it. Its feminist connection then and now is to:

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<sup>28</sup> Rich 1998: 3-4.

<sup>29</sup> Dr Seuss 1971; 2009: 58. Emphasis in the original.

<sup>30</sup> See above n25 and accompanying text.

<sup>31</sup> Kester 2004: 167.

...a movement that gives people the conviction that they have the right to participate, and for me communications is the key to that...a cultural production approach—how do people come to the point where they articulate something? What resources do they draw on? What language? What sets of expectations? What happens when they intervene in a communications flow?<sup>32</sup>

It draws on practitioner theory from writers like Adrienne Rich, Audre Lorde, Tillie Olsen, B. Ruby Rich, Joanna Russ, Alice Walker and Virginia Woolf, but involves only some reading and writing, ‘the standard intellectual route’.

In outlining my experience of practical and community based techniques used to open space for women’s stories, including my own, Chapter 2 responds to Joanna Russ’ concerns:

We suffer...from the consequences of not knowing what techniques work in what situations, and our theoretical ignorance, combined with our practical lack of techniques and the psychological burden of isolation, makes us work many times as hard and as long as we would otherwise have to do.<sup>33</sup>

My experience began with the group project *A Season’s Diaries*. It continued with the Kidsarus 2 Inc (Kidsarus) project during the late 1970s and early 1980s that generated four picture books with women and girls as central characters and—for two titles—separate Maori editions.<sup>34</sup> This project overlapped with the Women’s Gallery Inc (Women’s Gallery), a gallery with many associated programmes that existed in Wellington from 1980-1984,<sup>35</sup> and with Spiral, a women’s art and writing journal, founded in 1976 by poet Heather McPherson (Heather) after she attended an arts festival event where more than a dozen poets read, all male.<sup>36</sup> Spiral became a floating imprint and now another generation uses it with me, to produce my feature

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<sup>32</sup> Aufderheide and Zimmerman 2004: 1457.

<sup>33</sup> Russ 1998: 2. See also Rich’s similarly focused statement, below n205 and accompanying text; and n432 and accompanying text.

<sup>34</sup> See Cowley 1982 (recently reprinted); Freeman 1984; Grace 1981 (winner of Children’s Picture Book of the Year award in 1982 and still in print); Smith 1983 (later published by Puffin and by Penguin in the United States, and adapted into a short film by Shereen Maloney in 1994. Briar Grace-Smith, Miriam Smith’s daughter, wrote the screenplay for 2009’s feature *The Strength of Water* with (a boy) ‘Kimi’ as the central character; I like to think that this is an example of ‘thinking back’ through a mother. For an account of Kidsarus, see Neale 1993.

<sup>35</sup> The gallery was located at 26 Harris Street and then 323 Willis Street Wellington. See brief accounts of its history in Evans 1993[c] and Evans, Lonie and Lloyd 1988: 247-252.

<sup>36</sup> See Evans 1993[b].

screenplay, *Development*. These experiences also founded my creative practice that engages with time-based work; the relationship of words to visual images; bringing my domestic and other experiences into public spaces; and a preoccupation with difference. Complex—and often unarticulated—emotions lie below the activism and the creative work.

The projects' participants developed a range of techniques: explicit commitment to women's self-determination and self-representation; integration of the concept of the 'golden boy'—the talented young man who is supported and, often, indulged at cost to women artists; attention to difference among women, including the New Zealand-specific difference between Maori and Pakeha;<sup>37</sup> asking the question "Who benefits?" and corollary questions; actions that focus on hope and resilience and on contextual transformation through multiple strategic alliances; attention to tensions between art practice and activism and between them both and academia; and welcoming the unexpected.

Consciousness-raising affected all these techniques. Joanna Russ again:

Consciousness-raising developed theory from experience, connected experience to theory, and thereby...made knowledge...Experience alone is unintelligible. Theory alone is empty. Consciousness-raising is whatever brings the two together, formally or informally, in a classroom, a house, on the street, in an apple orchard in Sonoma. It is research.<sup>38</sup>

None of the project groups I was involved with undertook formal consciousness-raising together, as far as I know.<sup>39</sup> But, they (we) constantly made connections between theory and experience, among ourselves, and in dialogue with others: actual or potential allies and opponents. We were engaged in research.

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<sup>37</sup> 'Pakeha' is often but not always used for New Zealanders of European descent.

<sup>38</sup> Russ 1998: 436, Russ' emphasis.

<sup>39</sup> Heather: Not maybe in the project grps 'formally' but definitely in our discussions @ Women's Gallery—remember [the Auckland Community Women's Video] film, & the consciousness-raising there (e.g. mine by Allie). Some of us had practice in Women's Refuge, Lesbian Feminist & Radical Feminist groups; the latter 2 groups did together as well as separately... also Women Artists group/s in 1977 etc—letter 25 September 2009, original punctuation and spelling.

In my view my fieldwork could have been based solely on these experience- and activist-generated research techniques, supplemented my more recent learning about problem solving strategies that include the use of the Karpman and Choy triangles and ethical issues. However, I developed the complementary academic methodology outlined in Chapter 3 to bridge the chasm between my experience-based methodology and the exigencies of an academic project.

As B. Ruby Rich puts it: “lives, friendships, and quarrels all inform the development of intellectual thought...journals and journeys, conferences and conversations, partying and politicking, going to movies and going to bed”<sup>40</sup>. But this is not a full or transparent account of all the activities that inform the chapter’s content. Space and the ethical constraints on an academic work preclude this; and as I become older I am more self-protective than I used to be.

Nor is this a collective account. The memoir highlights the development of a linked group of methods—or strategies—essential to my practice as I undertake a single-person activist and artist project, something a little strange to me. I gave all the individuals mentioned an opportunity to take issue with my memories, especially perhaps my use of ‘we’ where I am unable to separate myself from the others who were involved. I sent them my account of our shared experience, to comment on and to request deletions if they wish. I hope others will write their versions of the stories. If they want to.

If I look at my motivation over this period, it was based in my caring ‘a whole awful lot’; my children loved *The Lorax*, and its message of ‘caring a whole awful lot’ in the epigraph heading this transition imprinted itself on me as much as on them. I wanted, and still want—as an element of social justice—the conditions under which women develop and share their stories to ‘get better’. In 2009 there is plenty of New Zealand women’s fiction and poetry available in print. But our low participation in feature filmmaking as writers

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<sup>40</sup> Rich: 3.

and directors—and the disadvantages that we have as visual artists<sup>41</sup>—affects me strongly.

Chapter 3 montages an autoethnographical methodology that builds on the knowledge from Chapter 2. It considers social science and organisation studies autoethnography in relation to feminist methodology, women writers and fiction, and adopts the organisation studies concept of ‘native subjects’. It outlines the fieldwork undertaken before April 2008 when I transferred disciplines from management to creative writing. It then addresses possible problems with autoethnography and my strategy for dealing with them; ethics issues; and the stages of screenplay development that affected my project.

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<sup>41</sup> See Evans 2009[c]; and nn 364, 386 and accompanying texts.

## *2 Memoir: A Methodology-from-experience*

### Each thing is important

Late in 1970 my then-husband Bill MacKay, an actor and painter, and I bought my mother's holiday cottage near Seacliff, and moved from Auckland to live there, with our eight month-old son. Seacliff is a village high on the cliffs above Blueskin Bay, forty minutes or so by car from Dunedin in the South Island of New Zealand, and is best known as the site of a psychiatric hospital where the writer Janet Frame was incarcerated.

Our house had been a railway worker's house and had a large wattle-and-daub hut in the garden; this became Bill's studio. The section was surrounded by a huge macrocarpa hedge<sup>42</sup> and included an orchard of ancient apple trees and a yellow plum. From the verandah and the garden we looked out over Te Moana Nui a Kiwa, the Pacific Ocean; we often watched cargo ships as they moved across the horizon. At the orchard's edge, there was a little gate in a gap in the hedge. It opened onto the winding coast road, by the railway crossing. We imagined former occupants had popped out to stop road traffic when trains were coming, before the railway signals were automated. (But what traffic, along that country road?) Usually, visitors used the main drive and gateway on the other side of the house.

We didn't have a car, but there were regular bus and train services north and south, partly because staff from Seacliff Hospital sometimes also worked at Cherry Farm or Orokonui, other psychiatric hospitals nearby. The next year I travelled on the 7.45am railcar to and the 4.00pm railcar from Dunedin, as I started my law degree, managing my morning sickness as well as I could. I still dream about that journey, of an hour or so, along the coastline. The railcar stopped and started at little stations, ran along the edge of cliffs. The views were never less than beautiful. There was fog. There was rain. Wild sea.

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<sup>42</sup> *Cupressus Macrocarpa*.

There was sunshine. Blue sea and sky all the way to the Americas. In winter, darkness lifting as we circled Blueskin Bay on the way to town, darkness falling on the way home. Children waved. There were kowhai trees.<sup>43</sup> Cows. Mud. Tractors. Farmers waved. Wooden houses. Macrocarpa. A spire in Port Chalmers. Factory chimneys at Ravensbourne. Then Dunedin's big old Victorian station. The walk to class, sometimes throwing up on the way.

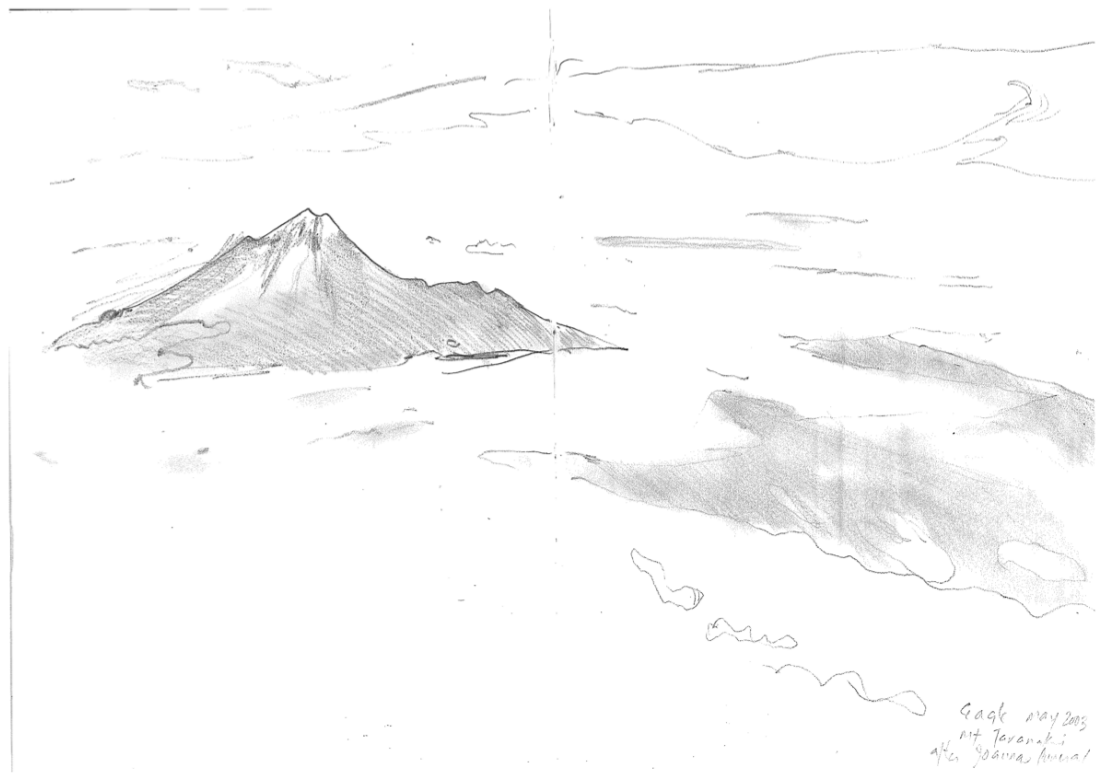
I don't remember when exactly, but sometime in 1971, I was doing something at the edge of the orchard. I think the apple tree leaves were that soft new green that they have, before everything goes darker in November. And a woman's voice called from the little gate in the hedge: "I'm looking for Bill MacKay." I couldn't see anyone, so I moved towards the voice. The next memory I have is of a hand holding out something wrapped in a tea towel. And that was Joanna. Joanna Margaret Paul, painter, poet, filmmaker. People often came looking for Bill, a 'golden boy'. But she found me, too. Wrapped in the tea towel, as on many future occasions, was—as I remember—an open metal baking tin, filled with something Joanna had baked.

Joanna lived on the other side of Seacliff with her husband, also a painter. We became friends and she also became our second son's godmother when we decided to baptise him in Seacliff's Catholic church. And then she left. We wrote to each other through her subsequent moves, the birth of her first children Magdalena and Imogen, and after our move to Wellington in 1975. A painting she made of Seacliff—cliffs, macrocarpa, dwelling, sea—went everywhere with me.

Joanna died unexpectedly on 29 May 2003. After her funeral, her dear friend and fellow artist Allie Eagle (Allie) and I flew from Wanganui together. From the plane, Allie drew me a view of Taranaki, flowing across her workbook's double page.

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<sup>43</sup> Kowhai are small, woody legume trees in the genus *Sophora* native to New Zealand. Its yellow flowers appear in winter and in spring; 'kowhai' is Maori for 'yellow'.



**Figure 1** Allie Eagle *May 2003 Mt Taranaki After Joanna's Funeral* pencil on paper 29.5x41.5 cm.

And when I was in the last stages of writing this thesis Allie came to lunch with Juliet Raven,<sup>44</sup> a box of organic dates and a brown paper bag with my name on it. “I’ve been meaning to give you this for years”, she said. The bag contained letters written to me during the 1970s. Some were from Joanna.

Excerpts from two of these letters provide Joanna’s memories of me in Seacliff, a counterpoint to my memories of her. The first remembers: “...your rapid occassional visit at Seacliff with an enormous bunch of daffodils or a jam thermometer”<sup>45</sup>.

The second, probably written a couple of years later, provides an extended reference to the other elements of my life:

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<sup>44</sup> Juliet was the primary Kidsarus editor.

<sup>45</sup> 2 February [1976]. Spelling and punctuation from original, here and in all quotations that follow. I always loved the look of Joanna’s letters. She viewed punctuation as marks, gestures, as ‘things’, like words. See also n57 and accompanying text.



Your note unnerves me, the pain in it. I can feel you jangled tired strained by all you do. Other—that mystery of domestic misery which is always so private. However I have my other vision of you, stepping thru the fence holding daffodils, silver spring sea light everywhere. , & coming from the shower with wet hair and the little leather skirt. How those luxurys told didn't they in that raw place & the struggles with money & babies—the flowers cake camembert & brief meetings[.]<sup>46</sup>

When I read these, I want to ring Joanna up, ask, "What do you remember?" Instead, I make my way again through other ways of working out how she influenced my domestic, artist, and activist life, what her influence means to methodology.

I seem to be collecting nostalgia (too much else!) we plan to paint the house green & white, & plant a plum tree remembering Barry's Big, what I meant to say was - it means still a worry, how busy that demand, when will -

- very much love. I'm  
glad you like your windows  
Joanna  
(love to Bill &  
the boys.

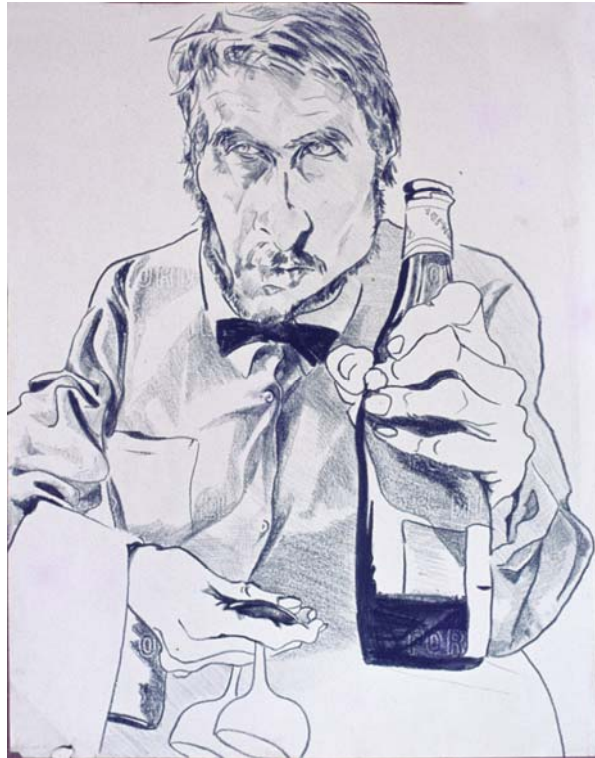
Dear Manan,

Your note, unnerves  
me, the pain in it.  
I can feel you jangled tired  
strained by all you do.  
Other - that mystery of  
domestic misery which is  
always so private  
However I have my  
other vision of you, stepping  
thru the fence holding  
daffodils, silver spring sea light  
everywhere. & coming from  
the shower with wet hair  
& the little leather skirt.  
How those luxurys told  
didn't they in that raw  
place, & the struggles with  
money & babies - the  
flowers cake camembert &  
brief meetings.

**Figure 2** Joanna Paul [1979] letter

<sup>46</sup> Undated [1979].

In Wellington I became an assistant at the Alexander Turnbull Library (ATL), a specialist research library within the National Library. Bill—a better parent for small children than I—was a househusband, a slightly strange term to me now, and a wine steward at the Royal Oak hotel; he brought ham home with him and most days I had Vogel’s bread ham sandwiches for lunch.



**Figure 3** Bill MacKay [1970s *Self Portrait As Wine Steward*] pencil [and felt-tip?] on paper dimensions unknown

As an assistant in Cataloguing, among the cataloguers for both the library and the National Bibliography, and later as assistant to the Acquisitions Librarian, I had the exciting task of unpacking green canvas ‘copyright’ bags from the General Assembly Library that carried the ATL’s copies of each week’s new publications. I first saw Michael King’s *Te Ao Hurihuri*<sup>47</sup> among the copyright submissions, and began to make connections between what he wrote and the groups of Maori men I sometimes saw going into the library’s manuscript room. Early the next year, having left the ATL, I attended

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<sup>47</sup> King 1975.

Wellington Polytechnic's first six-week intensive Maori course, taught by Wiremu Kaa, Hone Tapiata and John Clarke.

Together, these experiences opened my eyes—and my heart—to realities I'd been unaware of. They made me notice that I didn't see many Maori stories in books, or in films. At the National Art Gallery, on Sunday family visits, where I also noticed that I didn't see women's work, or images of women I could relate to, Maori work was invisible; as I remember, it existed only downstairs in the National Museum.

Meanwhile—living on Banks Peninsula—Joanna was involved in women's art movement activities in Christchurch. First, as a participant in an exhibition that Allie, then known as Alison Mitchell, co-ordinated as Exhibitions Officer at Christchurch's municipal gallery, the Robert McDougall Gallery. Called *Woman's Art; An Exhibition of Six Women Artists (Woman's Art)*, it was part of International Women's Year celebrations.

As I researched and wrote this thesis, and attempted to bring my academic, artistic and activist practices as close as possible together, I found myself returning again and again to Joanna's note about herself in the *Woman's Art* catalogue, reprinted the next year in *Spiral*, following a review she had written for its first issue:

As a woman painting is not a job, not even a vocation. It is part of life, subject to the strains, and joys, of domestic life. I cannot paint unless the house is in order. Unless I paint I don't function well in my domestic roles. Each thing is important. The idea that one sacrifices other values for art is alien to me, and I think to all women whose calling it is to do and be many things. To concentrate all meaning and all energy in a work of art is to leave life dry and banal. I don't wish to separate the significant and everyday actions but to bring them as close as possible together. It is natural for women to do this; their exercise and their training and their artistry is in daily living. Painting for me as a woman is an ordinary act—about the great meaning in ordinary things. Anonymity pattern utility quietness relatedness.<sup>48</sup>

I've concluded that the concepts Joanna's note articulates became so important to me because they came from an experience not unlike my own. I read the note then, and read it now, as a kind of manifesto. I understood the longing for an integrated life that it expressed, and its resistance to the

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<sup>48</sup> [Paul] 1975; 1976.

obsessive commitment to making art—perhaps more common among men than women—that is often costly to family life, especially when the art-making generates little money. How can a woman artist and writer provide for a life that integrates her art practice, intimate relationships and children? The five word list at the end offers clues,<sup>49</sup> and echoes the checklists often used to evaluate aspects of visual art practice, like the elements of form: point, line, tone, colour; and the principles of composition: pattern, contrast, texture, repetition, balance, rhythm. These terms filtered through to me from local teaching theory and practice of the 1950s, via the Wellington Institute of Technology (Weltec) where I taught in 1999-2001, and affect my writing and the construction of this thesis.<sup>50</sup>

Among Joanna's letters, one provides insight into how very difficult it is for a woman artist to sustain the balance between her work and the other things in her life. Joanna wrote to me:

I shall simply sit up on our green hill & enjoy having a baby. The yellow bassinette under the plum tree, knowing too that Maggie who was terribly strenuously bored will be much happier for a young one. & all will be well if I put painting & films & such nonsense out of my head more or less for a while. It's only when I sit down at a painting & Maggie awake that the clash comes. When ones so terribly directed one way, the pull when mummy come & see Polly Dolly asleep in the [?possum] room—is frustrating to breaking pt. How does Bill cope? Jeffrey has more tolerance & feeds Maggie magazines while he paints, quite happily. Anyway, Im no more a natural child rearer than Jeffery [sic] is a 'natural' bread winner.<sup>51</sup>

Whatever the realities of her daily life, I imagine that Joanna's ideas about anonymity pattern utility quietness relatedness and her knowledge of the elements of form and the principles of composition—which can be transposed from visual art to a writing practice—informed her decision to initiate a project called *A Season's Diaries*, in 1977.

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<sup>49</sup> See also below n591.

<sup>50</sup> Artist Vivian Lynn confirms their source—personal communication, 15 May 2009.

<sup>51</sup> 2 February [1976].

That year that Bill had a Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council (QEII) grant and painted the Cuba Street *Poster Shop* series.





**Figure 4** Bill MacKay [1977-79] *Poster Shop 2* oil on canvas 140x140cm (Note the 'little leather skirt' right foreground.)



**Figure 5** Bill MacKay [1977-79] *Poster Shop 1* oil on canvas 126x169cm

### *A Season's Diaries*

I can find no record of Joanna's motivation for inviting Allie, Anna Keir (Anna), Bridie Lonie (Bridie), Gladys Gurney (Gladys, aka Saj), Heather and me to join her. Bridie later wrote, anonymously, in *Diary of a Season*:

The proposal was 'to find a form to fit the changes of each day'...Three or four women to take a canvas or other surface measuring 3'x3' or 4'x4', divide the area into regular intervals...the whole to represent one month...to be filled systematically day by day with words, marks or images that conform to an inner/outer record of the maker's life. No day was to be documented except on that day, but each square was to contain at least one element that was continuous with the previous day and at least one that was new...Two women to take a canvas

surface 3'x4" or 4'x8" ...One woman to take a circle...One woman to make a poem or diary...One woman to make a montage.<sup>52</sup>

Bridie wrote "Six women took part"<sup>53</sup>: did she forget herself, or Joanna, I wonder?<sup>54</sup> And at the end of *Diary of a Season*, she quoted Joanna's "As a woman painting is not a job..." in full, attributed only to "the woman who initiated the project"<sup>55</sup>. Accompanying the notes were four illustrations: two images poet Gladys made; I remember "Today we parted and it hurt". And an image each of details from Bridie's and Joanna's diaries, photographs taken, I remember, by filmmaker Gaylene Preston, at our place in Oriental Terrace, Wellington. I think Gaylene was then living along Oriental Terrace.<sup>56</sup>

*A Season's Diaries* arguably incorporated some of the tenets of postmodernism, particularly destabilised distinctions between high and low culture, and competing narratives, none claiming any greater veracity than others. But according to what Joanna wrote later, in response to an explicit question about post-modernism [sic], that was only part of her perspective:

Complexity, plurality essential in a contemporary world where there is no common understood. No common reader. If my personal sense of relativity is in part related to autobiography (the dislocations, travel/marriage) I also feel disassociated from the rhetoric of disassociation. The sense in wh I feel connected at some points w postmodernism is in the recognition of subjectivity as the only mode of truth/ the impossibility of taking for granted a shared subjectivity/ the necessity to build in one's own perspective/hand, chair, time of day into the construct; treat words as things.<sup>57</sup>

I infer from Joanna's initiative that she also believed that women-only exhibitions in public spaces were valuable; that visual diaries are art works, including words as 'things'; that a diverse group of diaries was more likely than a single diary to generate knowledge about 'the changes of a day'; that a

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<sup>52</sup> [Lonie] 1978: 63.

<sup>53</sup> Idem.

<sup>54</sup> Bridie thinks she omitted Joanna—personal communication 19 September 2009.

<sup>55</sup> [Lonie]: 63-64.

<sup>56</sup> Bridie: [The article] was either by mutual agreement or by editorial direction created anonymously. The published text was as I recall so edited by the issue's editor Lauris Edmond that I did not feel it bore much relation to the text I had given her; I guess the archives would show whether this was a true impression! I must also acknowledge that my printing capacity was very limited and that Gaylene's excellent images were significantly damaged by this—email communication 29 September 2009.

<sup>57</sup> Paul and Eagle 1988: 95-96.

group of women who were in some ways like her (relatively privileged writers, visual artists, heterosexuals and mothers) and in some ways not would highlight difference. Each day, each moment, is different and has changes that can be recorded; and ‘woman’ is not fixed either.

I was different from the others, perhaps, because I did not identify as an artist or writer and was the only other participant who was married to an artist. But thanks to Joanna opening this space for women’s stories to be told, *A Season’s Diaries* marked the beginning of my creative practice. I can’t imagine now another context where I might have made something and shown it publicly. It was also the beginning, for me, of consciousness-raising that developed theory from experience.

The final line of Bridie’s *Diary of a Season* reads, “The women who participated hope that this exhibition will lead to others”<sup>58</sup>. And it did. We got to know one another. Anna came to help hang the show. And she, I think, put me in touch with Heather. In Allie’s paper bag full of letters, there’s one from Anna, asking me to distribute *Spiral 3* in Wellington, my first involvement with the journal.<sup>59</sup> Later, Anna and Bridie and I started the Women’s Gallery.

What did I include on my *Season’s Diaries* grid? A Maori planting calendar, and a record of my gardening activity. My children, one not sleeping well, one losing his first teeth. An outing to *Last Tango in Paris*. I wrote, I remember, “Anxiety: lest the joker at my periphery laugh his way to my heart while my mind’s elsewhere”. Myself in culture. All the elements significant for my creative practice now were there: time-based media, the relationship between words and visual images, privileging women’s stories, bringing domestic details—especially those that are food- or garden-related—to a public space.

The public space issue was also important in another way. *A Season’s Diaries* was taken down early from the Victoria University Library area where it was shown, about a hundred paces from where I am sitting now at the IIML,

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<sup>58</sup> [Lonie]: 64.

<sup>59</sup> Undated letter from 3 Percival Parade St Marys Bay Auckland. *Spiral 3* was published in 1978.



because—as I remember—it wasn’t ‘tidy’ enough according to a library decisionmaker: most of the work unframed, black (gaffer) tape attaching exhibition notes to a pillar, an exercise book where visitors could write comments. This aspect of the experience was as important for my activist self as my participation was to my creative practice. With allies, I learned, it is possible to introduce a self-determined women’s project to a public, institutional, space. But the project might so disrupt the institution—or individuals within it—that it would be removed, or future access would be blocked. Today, at a meeting within an institution where decisionmakers may help me develop *Development*, I carried this knowledge with me.

Joanna’s participation in a women’s exhibition at the Canterbury Society of Arts Gallery (the CSA show) in Christchurch, associated with the United Women’s Convention in 1977, may also have influenced her *Season’s Diaries* ideas. Heather, writing in *Spiral 3*, highlighted a desire to open spaces for women’s stories. The overall theme of the exhibition was “to transform the existing gallery spaces...[to] make a statement about our art, its processes and everyday environment, which are barely separable”<sup>60</sup>, a statement that partially echoes Joanna’s in *Spiral 1*.<sup>61</sup> The organising group “had different backgrounds, experience and training in art skills. Most had heavy domestic commitments. There were inevitable ideological differences”<sup>62</sup>. Anna too wrote about the difficulties involved, including the conflict between being an organiser and an artist: “I felt [a] lack of time to think about or work on my own contribution; a feeling of becoming bogged down in practicalities”<sup>63</sup>, issues that repeated themselves later, at the Women’s Gallery. (And now, within *Development’s* development, chief cheerleader and producer Erica Duthie (Erica) has heavy domestic duties. I feel bogged down as an activist, producer, writer and researcher-on-a-deadline and my scriptwriting is on hold. Resolving multiple role conflicts with few financial resources feels no easier than it ever was.)

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<sup>60</sup> McPherson 1978: 24.

<sup>61</sup> See n48 and accompanying text.

<sup>62</sup> McPherson: 24.

<sup>63</sup> Keir 1978: 38. See also n127 and accompanying text.

The yellow bassinette Joanna referred to in her letter to me was, I believe, for her second daughter Imogen Rose, who was born 28 February 1976 and died 9 December the same year.<sup>64</sup> Joanna documented her responses to Imogen's life and death in her first book of poems, *Imogen*,<sup>65</sup> in another book, *Unwrapping the Body*,<sup>66</sup> and in an installation, *Unpacking the Body*.

Joanna contributed *Unpacking the Body* to the CSA show, and later wrote about it being the result of being "confronted with an infant with a hopelessly malformed heart"<sup>67</sup>, and of coming to terms with Imogen's need for surgery:

I detested the intrusion of the manmade into the natural order...I worked hard to choose and to understand. I had to understand in order to accept. And having accepted I had to understand in order to share.<sup>68</sup>

The installation consisted of white-painted kitchen utensils—a colander, for example—that corresponded to anatomical symbols. Above the objects, in their flesh-coloured frames, she placed a list of the terms and their etymologies. "What was in the pink wooden CHEST was the hub and node of the exercise."<sup>69</sup> Joanna concluded, "If there is a thesis somewhere it is that knowledge and feeling must run together"<sup>70</sup>. She added "To me these lists and frames were dry bones—in respect to the splendid flow of imagery and life-blood the rest of the exhibition held. To my pleasure some people responded not simply with 'I see' but with emotion"<sup>71</sup>.

From what Joanna wrote about her participation in the CSA show, I think she may have hoped that in the sharing implicit in *A Season's Diaries* too, 'knowledge and feeling [might] run together'; to replicate a 'splendid flow of

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<sup>64</sup> See n51 and accompanying text.

<sup>65</sup> Paul 1978[a].

<sup>66</sup> Paul [?1979].

<sup>67</sup> Paul 1978[b]: 39.

<sup>68</sup> Idem.

<sup>69</sup> Idem.

<sup>70</sup> Idem.

<sup>71</sup> Paul 1978[b]: 39-40.

imagery and life-blood'; and to evoke emotional responses. This thesis too argues that 'knowledge and feeling must run together'.

A handwritten curriculum vitae in the bag of letters from Joanna reminds me of another element, my ongoing uncertainty about the continuum of my work with other women's, because women are not all the same. Having written the curriculum vitae for Bridie and me as documentation for a possible travelling exhibition of her work and Allie's,<sup>72</sup> Joanna added:

...my own work part of a possible continuum with other related womens work.  
Concerns: feminism is no more an influence than Catholicism, an obsession with the structure of language & myth, & a sense of the past[.]<sup>73</sup>

She inserted 'possible' above 'continuum'; like me, she wasn't sure about the continuum.

## Difference

Ideas about 'difference' were important from the beginning in the New Zealand women's art movement, including fluidity of practice across 'different' art forms, and may have influenced Joanna's concern with autobiography, subjectivity and difference. In the conclusion to her catalogue introduction to *Woman's Art*, Allie had cited feminist photographer Suzanne Santoro:

Each need for expression in women has a particular solution. The substance of expression is unlimited and has no established form. Self-expression is a necessity...Expression begins with self-assertion and with an awareness of the differences between ourselves and others.<sup>74</sup>

And Heather wrote a decade after she founded *Spiral*:

I worked with the material we received—that it didn't reflect our own reality didn't bother me too much, it was the idea of women working together for women's voices to be heard, positively, that was the aim, and the amalgam of arts.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> See below 46-47.

<sup>73</sup> Undated letter from 14 Beta Street Dunedin.

<sup>74</sup> Mitchell 1975: 4.

<sup>75</sup> McPherson 1988: 40.

This emphasis on ‘difference’ may have been partly because in a country with a small population, women activists have always had to work across and with difference. Aotearoa New Zealand was founded on a specific difference, through Te Titiri o Waitangi/ The Treaty of Waitangi in 1840, between the Tangata Whenua, the indigenous Maori whose rights the treaty preserved, and the Tangata Tiriti or Pakeha, those on whose behalf the representatives of the British Crown negotiated the right to govern and for settlers to live here. In addition to the difference between Maori and Pakeha, women have had to negotiate the boundaries between heterosexual and lesbian, between rural and urban, between class difference and different abilities.

Activists have also had to acknowledge, especially during the last thirty years, during the Maori puawaitanga or renaissance and Te Tiriti o Waitangi/Treaty of Waitangi negotiations between Maori and the Crown that continue today, second wave feminism, and homosexual law reform, that although there are many situations where ‘both and’ is inevitable and valuable, there are spaces—other than those where men’s voices, and those of their allies who are women, dominate—where we, or those we love, may be excluded, or we may silence our voices, or be silenced. When a women’s group works towards self-determination men may be welcome only as allies who do not contribute to decision-making. And when a Maori group is working towards a similar goal, Pakeha may need to understand and accept the limitations of their potential contributions. A lesbian group may exclude heterosexual women and gay men.

### Separatism & ‘writing back while also writing to ourselves’

Women’s separatism still pulls at me. I never lived an entirely separatist life. But after *A Season’s Diaries* I came to believe that the ideal is to maintain a commitment to ‘ourselves’ as women, while also engaging with the dominant culture. That belief sustained me through my involvement with collective activities that followed, with Kidsarus, the Women’s Gallery, and Spiral, building on what I learned from *A Season’s Diaries*, and from my domestic life. For me, still, self-determination and self-representation are best developed and sustained through a double orientation, to a world of women

storytelling peers who may also have experienced attempts to limit their self-determination and control their self-representation; and to the larger world where we are insiders as practitioners and outsiders for whom—often—few resources are available. This orientation demands a challenging commitment to dialogue, audience and accountability in both or in multiple worlds. Although in this research I am located in academia and engaged in my own creative practice, my primary accountability, still, is to women storytellers in all their diversity; and to their audiences, actual and potential.

Maori theorist Linda Tuhiwai Smith and others who build on her theories in Aotearoa New Zealand provide a model for this; their commitment to their ‘home’ culture matches their commitment to participating in academia and other dominant systems. They find ways “of ‘writing back’ [to the dominant culture] whilst at the same time writing to ourselves” <sup>76</sup>. Based within their home culture they also fight back:

... against the invasion by academic, corporate and populist researchers...carry out research on [our] own concerns...centring our concerns and world views and then coming to know and understand theory and research from our own perspectives and for our own purposes [struggling] to make sense of our own world while also attempting to transform what counts as important in the world of the powerful.<sup>77</sup>

‘Making sense of our own world while also attempting to transform what counts as important in the world of the powerful’ is never easy. At the Women’s Gallery we had some success in doing this, most notably with *Mothers*,<sup>78</sup> which—funded from a variety of sources—we opened with a substantial catalogue and associated programmes for women only, toured nationally at public galleries, also with associated programmes, and sent on to Sydney. But—of course—the negotiation of difference was hard, within and outside the group. As Bridie wrote later:

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<sup>76</sup> Smith: 13.

<sup>77</sup> Tuhiwai Smith: 39.

<sup>78</sup> 1981-1982.

Shared preoccupations with different solutions are part of the mixed loving and alienating experiences one gets, come hell or high water, in a place like this. The water is amniotic, the hell political.<sup>79</sup>

Conflict is inevitable when people struggle to make sense of their world, ‘care a whole awful lot’ and have few resources. It was intrinsic to our consciousness-raising process, normal. I observed and participated in it, within the organising collective and with contributors and visitors. When should events be women-only? When should we include men? Were we there to offer artists a safe space, where they could experiment with works that did not interest their dealers? To monitor women artists’ participation in exhibitions and publications? To sell work? To make a living? To create community? To take women’s work into public institutions? To focus on visual art, or all media, including writing? Or to do all these things?

Like Virginia Woolf, we knew that life for everyone is “arduous, difficult, a perpetual struggle... calls for gigantic courage and strength...[m]ore than anything, perhaps...for confidence in oneself”<sup>80</sup> and about the world’s “notorious indifference”<sup>81</sup> to writers [and artists] generally. We knew too that men generate confidence in themselves “[b]y thinking that other people are inferior”<sup>82</sup>, and that in general, a woman was “not encouraged to be an artist...snubbed, slapped, lectured and exhorted. Her mind...strained and her vitality lowered by the need of opposing this, of disproving that”<sup>83</sup>. Some of us had experienced, and all of us knew about, the debilitating effects of predominantly male lecturers’ behaviours at art schools and of art dealers. We recognised the effect Virginia Woolf described in relation to nineteenth century women novelists:

... a mind that was slightly pulled from the straight, and made to alter its clear vision in deference to external authority...the author was meeting criticism; she was saying this by way of aggression, or that by way of conciliation...admitting that she was only a woman or protesting that she was as good as a man. She met that

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<sup>79</sup> Lonie 1982: 29.

<sup>80</sup> Woolf 1929; 1998: 44.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid: 67.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid: 45.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid: 71.

criticism as her temperament dictated, with docility and diffidence, or with anger and emphasis. It does not matter which it was; she was thinking of something other than the thing itself...There was a flaw at the centre of it... She had altered her values in deference to the opinions of others.<sup>84</sup>

We thought that writer Tillie Olsen may have come to her concept of ‘telling it slant’<sup>85</sup> from these ideas, and Joanna Russ to her ideas about how to suppress women’s writing (and art).<sup>86</sup> Woolf emphasises the need for nourishment: “It is time that the effect of discouragement on the mind of the artist should be measured....Now what do we feed women as artists upon? I asked”<sup>87</sup>. We hoped that the supportive environment of the Women’s Gallery would encourage women not to alter their values in deference to others ‘from the world of the powerful’, to focus on the things that they wanted to say and to make. Very often, as elsewhere within the global second wave feminist movement the gallery was part of, these works were about the hidden, what tends to be unsaid or unshown, and therefore unheard and unseen, the “stories that weren’t being told”<sup>88</sup>. Participation was not easy for artists like Bridie, educated to work within the ‘art hierarchy’. Bridie wrote, a decade after her involvement in *A Season’s Diaries*:

In...*A season’s diaries*...I had to talk about myself (paint about myself): and for years now I’d hidden myself from my work. I used the landscape as a metaphor, timidly.<sup>89</sup>

Even Alice Walker, who generally resists separatism, writes that it is sometimes necessary “for health”<sup>90</sup>, and I saw the gallery’s separatism as

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<sup>84</sup> Woolf 1931; 1979: 96.

<sup>85</sup> See n380 and accompanying text. Heather: Does Tilly [sic] Olsen quote from Emily Dickinson? “Tell all the Truth but tell it slant—/ Success in Circuit lies/ Too bright for our infirm Delight/ the Truth’s superb surprise/As Lightning to the Children caged/With explanation kind/The Truth must dazzle gradually/Or every man be blind—” (Johnson ed. 1960: 506)—note 25 September 2009. No, Tillie Olsen refers often to Emily Dickinson, but not to this poem.

<sup>86</sup> See below 129ff.

<sup>87</sup> Woolf 1929; 1998: 68. She continues: “I have seen a dairy company measure the effect of ordinary milk and grade A milk upon the body of the rat. They set two rats in cages side by side, and of the two, one was furtive, timid and small, and the other was glossy, bold and big”.

<sup>88</sup> Aufderhide and Zimmerman: 1456.

<sup>89</sup> Lonie 1988: 168.

<sup>90</sup> Walker 1983: xi.

promoting women artists' and writers' health. Watching many women's timidity fall away was an element of the Women's Gallery experience that kept me going.

### The loss of separatism & my 'home culture'?

This is where this chapter got tricky. Painful. As I thought about and rewrote it on my own in September 2009, I 'talked' with Joanna and others who died too young: Irihapeti Ramsden (Irihapeti), Sharon Alston (Sharon), Barb Macdonald.<sup>91</sup> I wondered too about 'the others' within my women's home culture, as I realised that it is now mostly conceptual. Its thinking in common about the experience of the mass is lost, to illness and death and difference and distance.<sup>92</sup> It seems that women's separatism is dead.

One artist recently expressed a belief she had held for many years:

We have to move outside the women's ghetto, where no-one looks at our work. If it is just women talking to each other, their work is not seen. It takes guts to go out there [into the dominant culture] and to remain out there.<sup>93</sup>

It shocked me to hear it implied that in the women's ghetto 'no-one' looks at our work, and our work is 'not seen', that the most important audience—especially the male audience—exists outside a space that women organise for women. But this view may express how it is now; the other day I borrowed a university copy of *A Women's Picture Book*<sup>94</sup> to write footnotes and read a pencil note opposite an account of women-only space. "Unbelievable" it said.

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<sup>91</sup> McDonald 1988.

<sup>92</sup> However, recently two women from those years peer reviewed my review of *We Are Unsuitable for Framing* at Te Papa: Evans 2009[c].

<sup>93</sup> Personal communication May 2009.

<sup>94</sup> Evans, Lonie and Lloyd: 251.





**Figure 6** Women's Gallery collective, 26 Harris Street Wellington 1981. L.-r. front: Marian Evans, Bridie Lonie, Margaret Leniston holding Isaac Leniston-Howell, Hilary King, Anna Keir; standing: Sharon Alston, Louise Genet. *Image courtesy of Creative New Zealand, Arts Council of New Zealand*

Without those others, although I think 'we', in this context, I—in an academic project—have to write 'I'. The methodology 'we' developed is the one I am now constructing for my own purposes, piece by piece. Like working alone as an activist for this thesis' fieldwork, this construction feels daunting. I remember going to a *marae*<sup>95</sup> to talk about publishing children's books, twenty years ago. One of the contributors to the Kidsarus project also spoke. Her view of the project was powerfully articulated and more different than mine than I could possibly have imagined. When I write about these projects, I cannot claim any real authority about 'our' methodology.

Take the idea of 'the wild' for instance. During the gallery years, a Maori woman artist talked to me about her concept of the 'wild' that she believed

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<sup>95</sup> The open area in front of the *wharenui* (meeting house, big house, where guests are accommodated) where formal greetings and discussions take place. Often also used to include the complex of buildings around the marae.

Pakeha women had lost.<sup>96</sup> I relate this to poet activist Audre Lorde's ideas about the erotic as power (which I use in *Development*):

...an assertion of the life force of women; of that creative energy empowered, the knowledge and use of which we are now reclaiming in our language, our history, our dancing, our loving, our work, our lives.<sup>97</sup>

In a recent article,<sup>98</sup> I noted that New Zealand women artists have also written about the erotic and the life force: Christine Hellyar, particularly in relation to Mount Taranaki,<sup>99</sup> and Sharon about "cunt power [as] the whole woman; the life force"<sup>100</sup>. And I further connected this to academic Elaine Showalter's account of a manifesto of "some women critics" for whom:

...the wild zone or 'female space' must be the address of a genuinely women-centred criticism, theory and art, whose shared project is to bring into being the symbolic weight of female consciousness, to make the invisible visible, to make the silent speak.<sup>101</sup>

But although I think of the 'wild' as a Women's Gallery/Spiral-sourced influence, I have no idea whether anyone else in that home culture made the same connections.

And today I have some painful memories from events that undermined the culture's operation. Around 1985, for example, a woman art critic gave a paper in which she introduced ideas promulgated by French feminists, dismissed the work that separatism generated and praised the work of women who had not been part of the women's art movement, or participated only a little, but whose work had characteristics she identified as feminist.<sup>102</sup> As I remember it, after she ended her presentation with that statement that "Girls just want to have fun", influential men in the audience visibly relaxed and bantered, even flirted with her. What a relief: all that separatist nonsense was silly, just as they had always thought. They did not, like Museum of New

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<sup>96</sup> Personal communication, noted in the 1980s.

<sup>97</sup> Lorde 1984: 123.

<sup>98</sup> Evans 2009[c].

<sup>99</sup> Hellyar 1988: 123, 125-126.

<sup>100</sup> Alston 1988: 135.

<sup>101</sup> Showalter 1982: 262.

<sup>102</sup> Barrie 1986-1987 is, I believe, a version of this paper.

Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa's (Te Papa's) Jonathan Mane-Wheoki<sup>103</sup> almost twenty-five years later, see the parallels between women's separatism and Maori separatism.<sup>104</sup> We'd long been used to criticism from from women who found separatism scary and from men like the Wellington reviewer who wrote that the gallery:

...so dogmatically based on an ideology that is determined to show art that serves its own polemical ends has less to do with art than it has with politics and a form of therapy for disgruntled ladies.<sup>105</sup>

But the criticism had never before suppressed our capacity to function or affected our credibility. I now believe that the 1985 criticism could do this, however, because a *woman* art critic made it, someone who self-identified as a feminist.<sup>106</sup>

After that, the support for, and resources available to, women's projects dwindled, with the exception of projects that Maori women artists groups like Haeata and Waiata Koa initiated.<sup>107</sup> Some women from the women's art movement entered institutions where they used their skills to make a good living. Others did not, or not for long.

I understand that not all institution-based women who are not artists and who write about art or who select women's artworks for exhibition are the same. Some have written very positively about the Women's Gallery.<sup>108</sup> But I also believe that others who use institutional spaces to tell stories or to facilitate storytelling sometimes unconsciously use techniques similar to those described by Virginia Woolf and Joanna Russ, and 'lower the vitality' of

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<sup>103</sup> Then Director Art and Collection Services, Te Papa.

<sup>104</sup> See Evans 2009[c]: 54.

<sup>105</sup> Cited in Batten 1982: 28.

<sup>106</sup> In contrast, years later, when academic Judith Collard mis-identified Sharon and Jane Zusters as 'Spiral' women, her basic error only distorted much of the rest of her analysis; the consequences were minimal: Collard 2006.

<sup>107</sup> Haeata was a Wellington collective; Waiata Koa was based in Auckland.

<sup>108</sup> For example: "The richness of the emotional and professional legacy of crucial bodies such as the Women's Gallery...meant...that their legacy extended far beyond their period of operation": Peers and Kirker 1997: 131. See also Batten.

women from the women's art movement, and by extension women writers and filmmakers.<sup>109</sup>

This phenomenon is not unique to New Zealand. In *Chick Flicks*, B Ruby Rich sought, as I seek now:

[T]o recover a sense of the field before it was entirely captivated by textual analysis, theoreticism, and academic concerns; before it was recuperated into a range of specializations that today often prevent the open communication among women that once had been possible and enriching; before psychoanalysis achieved analytical dominance as the only approach of value; before nostalgia and amnesia competed in our minds to ignore a terrain that had inexplicably vanished from history.<sup>110</sup>

She was angry, I believe, when she wrote this. I too am angry, about the early deaths of activists with whom I thought in common, and about the conditions under which some women from my home culture now live and work.<sup>111</sup> And very sad. And fearful that I too, will be seduced intellectual arguments against my perceptions, and then misrepresent 'us'. If 'knowledge and feeling must run together' I have to record these feelings.

So here I am in September 2009, more than a little embarrassed because I see only now why I have found it so difficult to write this chapter and how some of it connects to my fieldwork discoveries: women do not necessarily support other women in the film industry;<sup>112</sup> I myself have a weakness for golden boys;<sup>113</sup> women are not necessarily good readers of other women's scripts.<sup>114</sup>

Here in academia I've moved from the girls' shelter shed, my office at Gender & Women's Studies where I felt protected as an honorary research associate for a decade, to the boys' shelter shed here at IIML. But until this morning I have worked with the docility and diffidence that Virginia Woolf identified as

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<sup>109</sup> See n102 and accompanying text, Evans 2009[c].

<sup>110</sup> Rich: 2.

<sup>111</sup> See below 241.

<sup>112</sup> See below 177ff, 236ff, 244.

<sup>113</sup> See below 246.

<sup>114</sup> See below 157ff, 179ff.

masking anger and emphasis.<sup>115</sup> And that anger and emphasis has been a response to the external, institutionalised, authority that some women theorists, academics, decisionmakers and curators seem to have.

My supervisor Lesley Hall (Lesley) vigorously defends women who work in institutions, as feminists or not, because in her view they are often marginalised and highly stressed as a consequence. But the cumulative effect of discovering that women artists' incomes are significantly less than men's,<sup>116</sup> that there has been almost no research done about the causes of this since the 1980s, that the women's art movement is ignored in Te Papa,<sup>117</sup> that women artists are underrepresented in the most recent survey of New Zealand art,<sup>118</sup> along with the 'filmmaker problem' makes me wonder and made me angry. Do all those women who went into institutions not consider the emotional or economic harm their decisions or writing may inflict on women artists and writers, our storytellers, and on our cultural capital? And why, when experience is a valid form of *data* within feminist methodology, I have felt that activist *methodologies* from experiences like mine—or B. Ruby Rich's, or Joanna Russ'—are not taken seriously? My grim acknowledgement of my anger and its sources links to my methodology, and to the primary method that embraces all the others within it, the question "Who benefits?"

### Who benefits? & how to harness benefits to open space for stories

Bill's father, who died while we were living at Seacliff, had been committed to Mao Tse Tung's communism. Bill himself was an ardent reader of Marxist theory and of writers like John Berger.<sup>119</sup> Although he received a QEII grant in 1977, he usually refused to negotiate the institutions and commerce of the visual arts community of the time. I learned from Bill to ask routinely "Who

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<sup>115</sup> See n84 and accompanying text.

<sup>116</sup> See n364 and accompanying text.

<sup>117</sup> See Evans 2009[c].

<sup>118</sup> See n386 and accompanying text.

<sup>119</sup> See nn 421, 435, 613 and accompanying texts.

benefits?” from an artist’s creativity (the academics they supply with data?); and “Who benefits?” from state support.

“Who benefits?” is not simple. The other night, I sat in a Courtney Place café with Erica and Meredith Crowe (Meredith) who is making the *Development* website, and Nancy Coory (Nancy C), who will play the central part of Emily. Meredith told a story about sitting on a hard plastic chair as she supported a friend at the local hospital’s Accident and Emergency reception. “It must be difficult to work there,” she said. “So much drama.” And I remembered how Bill worked there as a receptionist for years, on shifts, while I worked on various collective projects. And still brought me porridge in bed in the morning. And I thought of Erica’s husband Struan Ashby, home from work early to put their children to bed, while she too worked without payment on a collective project.

When Bridie and Anna and I went to the QEII to get support for a travelling exhibition of Allie’s and Joanna’s work, after *A Season’s Diaries*, James Mack, later Galvan Macnamara (Galvan), listened carefully and was supportive.<sup>120</sup> His close attention may have been stimulated by the recent gender and visual artist funding research made by artists Janet Paul (Joanna’s mother, based at the ATL art room) and Barbara Strathdee. They had found a ratio of three women visual artists to every seven men who applied for QEII funding; and that only one woman to almost eight men was successful.<sup>121</sup> That was my first experience of “Who benefits?” analysed through measurement of state funding patterns. (Later, at the Women’s Gallery, we also monitored women artists’ participation in exhibitions and their publications, mostly through media notices and reviews.)

Joanna and Allie decided they were not ready for the kind of exposure suggested. In Allie’s paper bag, I find a letter from Galvan. In it he thanks me

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<sup>120</sup> Years later, I re-found Galvan and made a film, *Sister Galvan*, about him. See below 56, 218-219.

<sup>121</sup> Paul and Strathdee 1980.

for my “sterling effort...in trying to get together an exhibition of Joanna Paul and Allie Eagle”<sup>122</sup>. He goes on:

I only wish that others organising exhibitions on our behalf did so with such enthusiasm and dedication. I hope in the not too distant future that another opportunity arrives whereby you might find one, two or three women artists who you feel strongly about for whom you might like to organise an exhibition.<sup>123</sup>

I cry a little over this letter, of which I have no memory at all. It confirms that I cared ‘a whole awful lot’. And reminds me again of a principle that consistently manifested itself throughout the development of this practice-based methodology: welcome the unexpected. If Joanna and Allie’s work had toured, my life might have been very different and this memoir might not be possible. Because a little later, instead, Anna, Bridie and I started the Women’s Gallery, in a central city building we found while looking for a Kidsarus office, when working from home became difficult.

The International Year of the Child in 1979 had provided Kidsarus—named after an earlier women’s collective that published counter-sexist picture books—an opportunity to open space to develop and publish picture books.<sup>124</sup> We learned in the process that we could benefit from more funding sources as an incorporated society, using a legal structure that required us to hold formal meetings and account for decision-making and funds. And I learned that we could open space for diverse stories if we used a careful strategy that positioned us within a formal structure, prioritised appropriate alliances, some of them human rights-oriented; and paid close attention to audiences and viewers who were as hungry for their own stories as we were for stories about our lives. Thus, by the time that Galvan helped Anna and Bridie and me to find funding to bring women from around the country to form the Women’s Gallery as an incorporated society, and to contribute work to and organise the *Opening Show*, I was also familiar with a method well used by marginalised groups: find an ally in an institution who will help channel

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<sup>122</sup> Letter dated 30 May 1979.

<sup>123</sup> Idem.

<sup>124</sup> See n34 and accompanying text.

resources, often an ally who has also experienced discrimination, as Galvan had as a gay man.

Carole Stewart and Nancy Peterson (Nancy) from the Auckland Community Women's Video were among the women who participated in the Women's Gallery's *Opening Show*. They came to video the process, while photographer Fiona Clark took stills. It wasn't an easy process, with a dozen women from different places geographically, personally, politically and artistically, and supporters and viewers with high and diverse expectations. Joanna, Allie and Heather were founding members, though Allie and Joanna were involved very little after the *Opening Show*.



**Figure 7** Women's Gallery collective, 26 Harris Street Wellington January 1980.

L.-r. standing: Marian Evans, Allie Eagle, Nancy Peterson, Juliet Batten, Anna Keir, Heather McPherson, Bridie Lonie, Keri Hulme; in front: Brigid Eyley, Claudia Pond Eyley. Absent: Joanna Paul and Carole Stewart. Photographer: Fiona Clark.



Later, Sharon brought her experience at the feminist *Broadsheet* magazine to the gallery,<sup>125</sup> and other women joined in as collective members who worked fulltime or who helped in other ways with management and decision-making.<sup>126</sup>

As I remember it, Nancy interviewed Anna and me towards the end of the setting up process, at a moment when she and we had been excluded from the catalogue and were feeling a little raw about that. The others appeared to have defined us as service providers rather than artists, and for Anna who identified as an artist and Nancy who identified as a filmmaker, the group's unthinking creation of an artist/non-artist hierarchy that benefited the 'artists' was hard.<sup>127</sup>

To me, one engaging aspect of the interview, viewed thirty years later, is the fluidity between Nancy as interviewer and Anna and me as interviewees.<sup>128</sup> Part way through, even though I've not used a video camera before, I swap places with Nancy so she can speak about her concerns. My enthusiasm was maybe a forerunner of my later interest in making films and in filming friends, my longing to be the one who facilitated or told the story. But now, thinking about academic contexts where the researcher and 'the participant' or 'the subject' have discrete, fixed, roles in telling a story, and about the ethics protocols Bridie and I developed twenty years later,<sup>129</sup> I love the role flexibility of that interview. Each one of us participated in setting up the *Opening Show*, participated in analysing the process and, in the interview, all of us asked questions and two of us ran the camera.

When I look at the interview I also see that in the years since I haven't changed much. My diffidence is there. But I also seem intense and raucous. I interrupt, I giggle, I carry on about my feelings. I am indignant, too,

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<sup>125</sup> 1972-1997. See Daly 1993.

<sup>126</sup> For a full list, see Evans, Lonie and Lloyd: 252-253.

<sup>127</sup> See also Anna's earlier comment n63 and accompanying text.

<sup>128</sup> Auckland Community Women's Video 1980. Wild footage. Private collection.

<sup>129</sup> See below 56ff.

complaining that Bill had to make Keri Hulme's (Keri's) plinth because no one else helped her, even though she had also to finish her poem.<sup>130</sup> And that he had to make it out on the pavement, because men weren't welcome inside while women prepared the gallery. I see someone who 'cares a whole awful lot'. And I remember again, how much I benefited, the other women benefited, from Bill's support.

We discuss the tensions between lesbian and heterosexual women, and the difficulties some lesbian participants had when staying at my house where we had what Allie joked about as our 'nuclear family fridge', no doubt analysing the cost benefit ratio of lesbianism versus more privileged heterosexuality. And when we talk about the problems Nancy has with Bill, even though he was being very helpful, I say "And I wished he would go away too": a public statement about my ongoing struggle to participate in a nuclear family life while wanting to be out in the world among women and, somewhat timidly, an artist. The next year I ricocheted between the family living in Ruatoki<sup>131</sup>—where Bill was illustrating children's books in Maori for the local school and where we were the only Pakeha family—Wellington and Auckland, where my life was with women. I flew to and from Wellington the only way then possible, via Wanganui and Rotorua; and occasionally hitchhiked.

In light of evolutionary theory about storytelling I look a little differently than I used to on the Kidsarus books, the Women's Gallery exhibitions, and the Spiral publications that came later. I now understand that we were engaged in acts of resistance against a culture that reflected Gottschall's folktale findings. Women protagonists—and antagonists—were at the centre of everything, often very active in finding ways to express and represent themselves and to reach goals, among women and in the wider community. Portrayals of women were concerned with much more than our 'beauty', and the issue of women's attractiveness was often differently addressed than in fairytales. In her *Opening Show* interview with Anna and me—for example—

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<sup>130</sup> I think this was "He Hoha", Hulme 1992: 41-43.

<sup>131</sup> A settlement in the Tuhoe iwi's (tribe's) country, in Aotearoa New Zealand's North Island.

Nancy talks about what a relief it was, during those two weeks, to find herself alone with other lesbians in the group and able to talk about a woman's attractiveness in a completely different way than in a group that included heterosexuals and bisexuals; a way that was not necessarily about sex. Later on, in the gallery's only entirely lesbian exhibition—closed to men—various lesbians told me off because my contribution was based on “O baby take off your dress, yes, yes, yes”, from a Randy Newman song, and appeared to address lesbianism as something only sexual.

## Welcoming the unexpected

And unexpected magical things happened. In 1981, Janet Garford—now Roma Potiki—and I planned the first national women poets tour. We invited Kohine Ponika, Heather, Keri, Mereana Pitman and Adrienne Dudley to take part, as representatives of a range of artistic practice. Kohine, in her early sixties, was the oldest and gave the group its name: Matariki, because the tour was planned for June, when the Pleiades rise at a particular time in the southern hemisphere. The QEII offered to fund it if the New Zealand Literary Fund, then a separate public funding entity, also funded it. Poet Hone Tuwhare supported the application. The Literary Fund refused to support Matariki partly on the basis that Kohine, Mereana and Adrienne, all Maori, were unknown to them. This was particularly insulting to Kohine, a composer and teacher with a strong reputation in the Maori world.

How was this magic? Because of the unexpected that followed. First, it moved me to make a huge mural on the wall outside the Women's Gallery at 26 Harris Street, in black and red, of poems or lyrics by Sappho, Eileen Duggan, Heather, Mereana and Keri, for Bridie's *Women & the Environment* exhibition. I loved climbing about on scaffolding with friends and painting; and lost something of my shyness about being an artist or writer. At the very beginning I wrote:<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> trans: A symbol of love for Matariki's mother (Kohine Ponika)...when you all sang/wept, we all did, greetings, greetings, greetings.

He tohu aroha  
ki TE WHAEA O MATARIKI  
and for all women poets/ all women  
who have flown up against a patriarchal wall  
and been bruised or broken  
na koutou i tangi na tatou  
mihi mai  
mihi mai  
mihi mai

And then Keri Hulme sent me *the bone people* to read,<sup>133</sup> as a consolation for the tour's cancellation. I lay in bed after a gruelling day's work at the Wellington Women's refuge and read through the night, dropping each page onto the floor as I finished reading it.

Some of us in Wellington were working on *Spiral 5*,<sup>134</sup> and were about to publish Heather's *A Figurehead: A Face*.<sup>135</sup> We also had Jacquie Sturm's (Jacquie's) manuscript of short stories *The House of the Talking Cat*,<sup>136</sup> which like *the bone people* had been rejected by several publishers. All three books were probably, as Keri wrote in a preface to *the bone people*, "too different" (Keri's emphasis).<sup>137</sup>

By then, with the successes of Kidsarus and the strong participation in Women's Gallery projects and the many art sales we'd made, we knew about the market for 'difference'. It seemed normal to become publishers of last resort, to offer to publish *the bone people*, and because Jacquie—who like Keri and Heather had read at the *Opening Show*—was also Maori, to invite Irihapeti (then known as 'Elizabeth') and Miriama Evans to join the collective to publish Jacquie's and Keri's books. We wanted to share—and with

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<sup>133</sup> Hulme 1983.

<sup>134</sup> 1982: the collective was Anna Keir, Daphne Brasell, Marian Evans, Vicki Macdonald.

<sup>135</sup> McPherson 1982.

<sup>136</sup> Sturm 1983.

<sup>137</sup> Hulme 1983: [vii].

Irihapeti and Miriama, inevitably to enhance—our knowledge gained from experience. We took all we’d learned with Kidsarus and the Women’s Gallery into a magical process of facilitating ‘writing back’ with the Spiral books. The experience culminated with *the bone people* winning the Booker Prize.

Behind *The House of the Talking Cat’s* and *the bone people’s* title pages, the lists of supporters exemplifies the mix of supporters that made the project possible, the same kind of mix I’m working on right now for *Development: Amster Reedy*; Bill MacKay; Joy Cowley, whose generous help was given “in gratitude for over twenty years of support from women writers”; Juliet Krautschun [Raven]; Kathleen Johnson; Keri Kaa and the Maori students at Wellington Teachers College; *Maori Writers Read* participants, and the series organisers, Janet [Roma] Potiki and Patricia Grace; Pauline Neale; Commission for Evangelisation, Justice and Development (Wellington Diocese); Kidsarus; Maori Education Foundation; New Zealand Literary Fund; Willi Fels Trust. As Pauline Neale later wrote about some groups’ commitments to the Kidsarus project, we often argued that “cultural deprivation is as serious as physical neglect”<sup>138</sup>, or other kinds of violence.

### Moving forward; & the Karpman and Choy triangles

In the years that followed I continued the deeply internalised public practice started in *A Season’s Diaries*, to move “without hesitation or encumbrance from the personal to the political”<sup>139</sup> in my writing and visual arts practice.<sup>140</sup> I continued ‘writing back’ to the dominant culture whilst at the same time writing to ‘ourselves’ as women, in parallel text collaborations that gave layered accounts of my legal practice and referenced visual artists and a poet;<sup>141</sup> in my account of caring for my dying mother while I edited an issue of *Spiral*;<sup>142</sup> in an examination of ‘love’; in two pieces about my own landscape

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<sup>138</sup> Neale: 470-471.

<sup>139</sup> Denzin 2005: 261.

<sup>140</sup> Evans, Lonie and Lloyd 1988; Evans 1992, 1993[a], 1993[d], 2001, 2003, 2008[b], 2009[c], 2009[d]; Evans and Mackenzie 1992; 1993.

<sup>141</sup> Evans and Mackenzie 1992, 1993.

<sup>142</sup> Evans 1992.

and lesbian landscapes, one for a journal and the other for a website;<sup>143</sup> and in *A Women's Picture Book*.<sup>144</sup>

Some of this work considered the role of the more subtle forms of psychological violence and its effects,<sup>145</sup> and during this time I learned that I could use the Karpman and Choy triangles to analyse situations where there is violence against women, including emotional or psychological violence like silencing.<sup>146</sup>

This is what happened. I had a lover who was a recovering alcoholic. The local health system provided free counselling for anyone involved with an addict, whether in recovery or not. So I went to counselling. My counsellor also led a group including various kinds of addicts and addicts' partners; we learned that addicts and addicts' partners shared similar feelings and thought processes but our responses were often different.

Joining the group involved a six-week introductory course, one night a week, then an ongoing Monday night group. I kept going on Monday nights long after my relationship with the recovering alcoholic ended. No-one had to do anything say anything or be anything to be accepted unconditionally; for me it became a substitute family at a time when I was feeling very alone. One woman came every Monday and most weeks she dropped off to sleep at the beginning and woke up at the end of the evening. The Karpman and Choy triangles were the bases for some discussions.

Karpman developed the idea of a negative triangle, where an individual takes on one of three shifting roles, as a victim, an aggressor or a rescuer. Choy developed a complementary positive triangle that supports resilience: instead of taking a victim role an individual may become a problem-solver; instead of an aggressor s/he takes an assertive, confident role; or s/he takes a supportive role instead of acting as a rescuer. Based in transactional analysis,

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<sup>143</sup> Evans 2001.

<sup>144</sup> Evans, Lonie and Lloyd 1988.

<sup>145</sup> Evans 2003; Evans and Mackenzie 1992, 1993.

<sup>146</sup> Choy 1990; Karpman 1968.

these ideas provide a method that supports both thinking and feeling and for understanding roles, dialogue and behaviour. Later, I incorporated the triangles into *7 Risks For Single Mothers; & the Art of Managing Them*;<sup>147</sup> I find them especially useful for analysing strongly emotional responses and for facilitating the capacity to think and feel at the same time; and in this thesis they provide an appropriate ‘script’ language symmetry.

My exploration of violence and resilience extended to the *Getting Free* project, 1997-2005, a response to two events: Irihapeti’s illness and the development of relatively inexpensive digital cameras capable of producing broadcast quality videotape. Realising that Irihapeti was very ill, and surprised that no-one had recorded her life in depth I suggested to Bridie that I do so as a Women’s Gallery/Spiral project.<sup>148</sup> I wanted to use digital video, to show Irihapeti’s legendary beauty as she moved through her life and articulated her ideas, with the option of turning the material generated into a documentary. Juanita Ketchel (Juanita), another old friend, agreed to help when the project became more complex.

### *Getting Free*

Irihapeti’s project led to other oral history projects, audio as well as video; they eventually became known collectively as the *Getting Free* project. Each sub-project recorded resilient individuals who had transcended the emotional effects of some kind of violence, ranging from the colonising process and verbal abuse to sexual and physical abuse, in institutional or domestic contexts. Allie’s *Getting Free* project started when I asked her to help me understand better the principles to use when framing a shot. I filmed an oral history with her and her mother that included stories about her mother’s and her own experiences in psychiatric institutions. Then a

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<sup>147</sup> I submitted *7 Risks*, based on my experiences as a single mother and when teaching contextual studies at Wellington Polytechnic’s art school (1999-2001), to only one publisher before abandoning it. Pinky Agnew—who inspired Greta in the *Development* screenplay (Chapter 6) because of her indomitableness—visited to teach the students and me about how to deal with disappointment.

<sup>148</sup> Later, Irihapeti included an autobiographical chapter in her PhD thesis: Ramsden 2003.

matakite (shaman) Wai Turoa Morgan asked me to ghost write her biography and this too became part of the project, with a long audio oral history process as well as some video recording. Her story demonstrates how her shamanic inheritance manifested itself in spite of and in some ways *because* of difficult childhood experiences including exposure to colonising processes. Juanita started her audio oral history of a group of individuals who defined themselves as resilient, working largely autonomously with support from Bridie (in the same city) and to a lesser extent from me.<sup>149</sup> And then I met up with Galvan, who had been so supportive of the Women's Gallery, and we began the oral history process that developed into a feature length video documentary, *Sister Galvan*.

After some time, Bridie and I realised that we had not fully thought through "Who benefits?" for the various elements of this project, where Juanita and I—for the first time—were working with other people's stories rather than our own. In the past we offered resources including spaces, sometimes named (for example, *Mothers*) but not usually theorised,<sup>150</sup> for women to research and tell their stories on their own terms. But now Juanita and I were the 'authors', asking the questions, and were likely to be shaping the interviews to make a film or publication from which we would benefit. In particular, once I had access to that digital camera, the excitement that I'd felt behind the Auckland Women's Community Video Inc camera seventeen years previously had more to do with me as a potential filmmaker than with opening space for others' stories.<sup>151</sup>

Juanita was using the standard National Oral History Association of New Zealand (NOHANZ) agreement. Based on principles congruent with the standard interpretation of the provisions of the Copyright Act 1994, it gives the researcher/interviewer the ownership of and the right to shape the

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<sup>149</sup> For an account of the *Getting Free* audio oral history see Ketchel 2004.

<sup>150</sup> *Women & Violence* (Heather) and *Women & the Environment* (Bridie) were perhaps exceptions but even there, when contributors offered work it was accepted unseen and regardless of content and 'artistic quality'.

<sup>151</sup> See above 49ff.



intellectual property generated and allows for research participants/interviewees to withdraw. Was this adequate, given the principles of self-determination we had long worked with?<sup>152</sup> It became our view that it was not.

Although Bridie and I were concerned that we were compromising Juanita's autonomy and complicating the processes within her project, after much discussion among the three of us we developed a protocol based on the principle that at the outset an interviewee shared ownership of the entire interview. The interviewee would share decision-making with the interviewer about—and career or financial benefits from—the interview's use, by either party, or by others in the future.<sup>153</sup> Any change of ownership had to be negotiated. The 'subject', the interviewee participant, on an equal basis with the interviewer participant, could choose to be an author of the work(s) based on the interview(s); a collaborator who jointly shaped the overall project; to use the material for an autonomous project;<sup>154</sup> or to give her or his intellectual property in the interview to the interviewer or to someone else. Use of images had to be negotiated too, rather than resolved through use of a standard release form signed at the beginning of filming; and each individual in a photograph had to be formally approached to give consent to their use.

These principles overlap with some of those behind the New Zealand Film Archive's *Mana Tuturu* document, as articulated by Barry Barclay in his

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<sup>152</sup> The Copyright Act 1994 section 5 (1) and (2) says that the author of a work is the person who creates it and is "in the case of a sound recording or film, the person by whom the arrangements necessary for the making of the recording or film are undertaken".

<sup>153</sup> Lesley: Other oral historians make similar arrangements [re] who owns the tape, the transcript (if there is one). In the UK the copyright [belongs to] the narrator—note 9 October 2009.

<sup>154</sup> Use for the interviewee's own publication purposes can be prohibitively expensive. For instance, TVNZ interviewed Galvan Macnamara many times. One of these interviews was a fine historical example of Galvan's insight and skills. We wanted to use 86 seconds of it for his film. He wanted it included in his film. At the time TVNZ filmed him, he had not signed a release form. The footage had already benefited both him and TVNZ. TVNZ got a vivid interview; Galvan got publicity for the exhibition and artist he wanted to promote. But TVNZ charged us \$4000 for a five year license. TVNZ was completely within its rights to do this under the Copyright Act as generally interpreted. And as the TVNZ Archive pointed out, it had cost TVNZ to make the recording. However, those costs would have been far less than \$4000.

eponymous book,<sup>155</sup> but were developed independently, from another reality. Our protocols echo Barclay's—and the Film Archive's—view that each person's story is a treasure now and for the future; what Barclay refers to as 'stewardship' or 'guardianship' of that story requires a kind of tenderness in recording, storage, access and use.

Inevitably this tenderness can be at odds with commercial or academic use. It demands that interviewers and interviewees negotiate and name the cost and benefit for each party before an interview or interviews commence. It demands that the negotiators avoid slippage of language, so that interviewers and interviewees share decision-making about whether interviewees are subjects (of the interviewer's story), donors (of their intellectual property), contributors (of a self-determined portion of the work), or collaborators (who will share fully in the story's authorship, in a story that is 'our story' rather than 'my story'). It demands being flexible about agreements and outcomes and welcoming the unexpected when it involves a change of role for either party. Collaboration becomes defined rigorously; instead of 'working for', where interviewees provide 'the author' with story resources so the author can shape and realise her own ideas according to her own methodology, it is truly 'working with'.

Thus, after viewing a preliminary assemblage of her oral history as a documentary, *Something For the Grandchildren To Hold*, Irihapeti consulted with her family and decided that the material needed to settle before being further developed for public viewing. She hoped that her son, the filmmaker Peter Burger, would make a documentary sometime after her death. In contrast, Galvan wanted his oral history developed into a documentary, preferably before he died, and he did not want to see it before its first public showing. The content was entirely the interviewer/producer's (my) responsibility. Galvan chose to focus on making the process as interesting as possible for all concerned.

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<sup>155</sup> Barclay 2005.

Then, the year after Joanna's death, I was accepted into the script writing M.A. stream at IIML. For nine months I explored what it might mean to be an artist who was not an activist, for the first time since *A Season's Diaries*. Later, I wrote for the Modern Letters website:

I missed out the first time I applied. Went off to do an LLM, make a feature doco, organise a women's film festival. Then, because my thesis was on parental responsibility, I went to Ken Duncum's *Cherish* (am not a theatre-going girl). Wow! I thought. I could learn so much from this writer. So I applied again. Got in.

And it was hard. I often felt undereducated: one classmate's favourite book was by Nabokov; all I knew of Nabokov was Sue Lyon's heart-shaped shades. I struggled to believe I was a writer. I wasn't used to sharing stories with men. Everyone seemed more skilled than I was, and faster at finding ideas. They'd seen every film in the world, were also actors, playwrights or novelists, had television and debated programmes vigorously (the last programme I'd enjoyed was M\*A\*S\*H).

Then we had —horrors—to write a play. What did that have to do with the story I wanted to tell? On a quick trip to a French women's film festival I typed away in airport lounges; and was re-inspired when I saw couples watching DVDs on their laptops.

Things got better. I learned how to give and receive feedback; and heaps from reading and responding to the others' work. It was easy to love my classmates, the tree outside our classroom, and our teacher. And one day I realised, as I chatted with my characters, that I was happier than I'd ever been (though I cried later, when Ken told me I'd won the class prize).

Then from a placement at Natural History New Zealand to fast-turnaround children's television at Cloud 9; writing with Cushla Parekowhai; a stunning IIML masterclass with Linda Voorhees and the joys of its Bluebird group. And now here I am again at the IIML, doing a PhD about women's low participation in feature script-writing, writing three features to develop in three different ways and a chicklick metascript about the processes. Feeling very very lucky.<sup>156</sup>

There were almost equal numbers of women and men in that group, and, I believe, in most IIML M.A. groups. But a little later, I began to wonder about why there were so few New Zealand feature films written and directed by women. I asked myself: "What's the story?" And took my activism and arts practice theory into academia to find out.

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<sup>156</sup> Victoria University of Wellington 2008.

### 3 Essay: A Methodology for Academia

Because the approaches of studio enquiry often contradict what is generally expected of research and are not sufficiently fore-grounded or elaborated by artistic researchers themselves, the impact of *practice as research* is still to be...fully understood and realised. It can be argued that the generative capacity of creative arts research is derived from the alternative approaches it employs—those *subjective, emergent* and *interdisciplinary* approaches—that continue to be viewed less favourably by research funding assessors and others still to be convinced of the innovative and critical potential of artistic research.<sup>157</sup>

This chapter will outline my search for an academic methodology that embraces the methodology-from-experience described in Chapter 2; and describe the thesis fieldwork. It will also explain how the research changed when—after eighteen months—I transferred disciplines from organisation studies at VMS to creative writing at IIML.

When I reached VMS to start this research, in September 2006, I had had informal conversations with women screenwriters and directors; and I had found very little relevant material in a thorough search through the literature.<sup>158</sup> I knew that women participate as storytellers—writers and directors—in only a small proportion of New Zealand feature films. I had learned from my reading that there were no statistics about their participation on the pathways to feature film production: making short films and television commercials and as applicants to CNZ and NZFC programmes including feature development funding. I wanted to find out the extent to which women sought and received state funding benefits. I wanted to find out what might open space for their—and my—stories that otherwise might not reach the big screen. What could I do to make change, as an apprentice scriptwriter? What difference would it make that I was working within an academic context? Could I be an activist as an individual? Would it be possible for me to use again, and working alone, the strategies that our women's collectives used, in the film industry? Would it be more difficult to

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<sup>157</sup> Barrett and Bolt 2007: 3. Emphasis in original.

<sup>158</sup> This search was recorded in Evans 2007; and is represented to some extent in Chapter 4 and *Bibliography*.

open spaces for feature films than for picture books, fiction, poetry and visual arts?

There were two initial constraints. From the informal conversations with women writers and directors I knew that gender issues, including discrimination, affected them. But, because “Discrimination...and its dynamics remain unclear, not least because of the difficulties of studying it in the field”<sup>159</sup> and because filmmaking usually requires much greater financial investment than most writing or visual art, I was not surprised to learn that they were reluctant to comment publicly—even anonymously—about gender discrimination.<sup>160</sup> Without supporting research, and public acknowledgement and understanding that it is an industry problem, it is risky for an individual to speak out. She might be labelled ‘difficult’ or a ‘whiner’,<sup>161</sup> and as a consequence lose opportunities and access to resources in a highly competitive field. Women writers and directors were not going to join me in collective action.

Furthermore, if some did decide at least to talk with me for the record, I knew my commitment to the *Getting Free* protocols probably precluded my interviewing them, because of the time involved in complex negotiations around recording, ownership and use of their stories.<sup>162</sup>

Because I did not want to study others’ experiences, because I was committed to an individual experiment rather than to the group experiments referred to in Chapter 2, because I was almost sixty and had nothing to lose, and because

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<sup>159</sup> Czarniawska and Hopfl 2002: 1.

<sup>160</sup> Marno 1997, 1998. The half a dozen women filmmakers who told me their ‘horror’ stories confirmed their need to refrain from commenting publicly because of the possible consequences.

<sup>161</sup> The ‘whining’ problem is well illustrated in a recent interview with writer director Nora Ephron. “Ephron detests whining: you can acknowledge a problem, but only in the service of solving it. ‘Nobody really has an easy time getting a movie made,’ she said. ‘And furthermore I can’t stand people complaining. So it’s not a conversation that interests me, do you know? Those endless women-in-film panels. It’s like, just do it! Just do it. Write something else if this one didn’t get made. It’s my ongoing argument with a whole part of the women’s movement...If you want to be successful and you are a woman, you have to understand that there’s all kinds of horrible stuff that comes with it, and you simply cannot do anything about it but move on’”: Levy 2009.

<sup>162</sup> See above 56ff.

I had a long history of writing openly about myself within investigations of various kinds, I decided to document and analyse my own experience in the industry. Bringing my activism, creative practice and academic work as close as possible together I would focus on the feature film development process, which begins when a scriptwriter has an idea and ends when a film goes into production on the first day of principal photography.

Through two processes, I hoped to identify where in the development space there may be gendered problems that lead to exclusion of women's stories. First, I would measure "Who benefits?" through analysis of women writers' and directors' current participation, in the NZFC's 'pathway' programmes and development programmes, to establish the relationships between women's applications for funding and their success in being allocated funds. It was possible that if I provided this information to the industry it might inspire others to 'open space'. I could also use the information as a reference point, as I attempted to 'open space' to develop my own stories, in a process where possibly there existed a mystique like the one we had addressed in publishing, obscuring a relatively straightforward process and myths about audiences.

I divided the feature film development process into three phases. Each presents specific challenges for any scriptwriter. However, the second phase introduces more variables than the first and the third even more; during these phases it may be more challenging to identify gender-related problems.

The first phase is the individual creative process, essentially solitary and often unpaid.<sup>163</sup> I imagined that the problems in this phase were most likely to be caused by personal factors: skills, the capacity to manage working alone, and access to financial support. If the writer is not also a director—an auteur—a director may also be or become attached to the project. The writer and director then develop a creative partnership.

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<sup>163</sup> See nn 325, 326 and accompanying texts.

In the second phase the writer must find, and hopes to develop a creative partnership with, a producer. If she is not herself a director, she may find a director through the producer. The producer buys the rights to exploit the intellectual property the script represents and will usually pay the writer for new drafts. In New Zealand the NZFC development programme sometimes funds at least the early stages of this development. Some writers—usually those in demand—manage to retain some of their rights, as co-producers. In this phase the producer may replace the original writer with another one. The added variables include access to and relationships with producers and with state funders. As an apprentice scriptwriter I expected to have difficulty making a transition from the first phase to the second, because I did not have a track record.

Negotiations with investors of various kinds within national and international networks characterise the third phase, advanced development. More variables result from relationships with an agency like the NZFC, or NZOA for a telemovie, with potential actors and crew, or with commercial agencies. In this phase, an original scriptwriter who is still part of the project becomes accountable to a larger group; and may have to develop drafts that meet their concerns, or may be replaced.

I decided to write three feature film scripts and take each through a different development pathway: the NZFC's development programme (as an example of a public film funder experience); development in Australia (to identify any differences); and development within the New Zealand 'shadow' industry, the essential, wild, counterpart to NZFC films, the place where anything can and does happen.<sup>164</sup> 'Shadow' is my metaphor of choice because it makes a tidy binary between films developed or otherwise funded within the NZFC's statutory framework and according to transparent and standardised policies and the other films in all their wild diversity, whether investment and audience is large or small, but with less transparent development processes. I

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<sup>164</sup> See also below 110, 113, 120, 125, 164, 168ff, 197, 206, 219 ff.

also like Jung's ideas about the shadow:<sup>165</sup> the shadow is about potential, both realised and unrealised, and a source of considerable energy and stimulus, which I think is true of New Zealand's shadow industry today.

As I define it, the shadow industry was responsible for forty-five feature films written, produced and directed in New Zealand by New Zealanders without NZFC development and production support during 2003-2008.<sup>166</sup> Shadow industry films include Screen Innovation Production Fund (SIPF) features, funded for production only, by a joint Creative New Zealand (CNZ) and NZFC programme; New Zealand on Air (NZOA) telemovies; and self-funded and private investor features that may receive NZFC post-production funding. I also include features that Peter Jackson and Fran Walsh write, direct and produce, with overseas investment and primarily for an international audience.

In spite of the overseas investment involved and the status differential between, for instance *King Kong* and a self-funded feature, defining *King Kong* (and maybe others) as 'shadow' is only a problem if 'shadow' is viewed as a pejorative term. One key element in my binary is transparency. In using public funding the NZFC's funding processes must be transparent. In contrast, although *King Kong*'s release and distribution was 'in full floodlights' for audiences, its development and production processes were not transparent. And further, from their first film produced without NZFC investment Peter Jackson/Fran Walsh leaped out of the shadows to bite New Zealand filmmakers with the idea that there is no limit to the ways filmmakers can live and work in New Zealand. In some ways their achievements cast a large shadow on the NZFC's (another perspective on 'shadow'). But their continued success is a continued inspiration.

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<sup>165</sup> Carl Gustav Jung 1875-1961, a Swiss psychiatrist who emphasised the importance of balance and harmony, integrating the conscious and the unconscious.

<sup>166</sup> Evans 2009[d].



Another key element is delivery: distribution and exhibition. Although some NZOA-funded telemovies,<sup>167</sup> produced after I wrote my *PhD Report*,<sup>168</sup> were produced with public funds and transparent processes, I categorised them as shadow films. (NZOA and telemovie writers and directors might find this strange.)

The digital technology that made it possible for me to film Irihapeti, Galvan, Wai, and Allie and her mother, has changed development and delivery of moving image for ever. Many shadow movies, unlike those the NZFC funds for production, are not finished to film. That limits their distribution and exhibition potential within the traditional cinema-oriented paradigm, but not within a new kind of film industry where there are many ways to deliver a feature, for instance via cellphones and the internet. At the same time “some of the excellent writing, directing and acting talent from...‘midlevel’ films has shifted to TV”<sup>169</sup>. Storytelling on screen is in a state of upheaval.

I was uncertain where in the shadow industry I would locate my project.

For the thesis itself, I would write a fourth script, a metascript about my experience of the development process. I also planned to be accountable to other women filmmakers and to the industry as a whole throughout the research. I hoped that sharing this information might encourage any necessary change.

To bring all this together I needed an approach that integrated my three roles, as a researcher, activist and scriptwriter. Within organisation studies, and required now to read rather than to experience before I wrote, I found a ‘*subjective, emergent* and *interdisciplinary* approach’ that I was able to retain when I transferred disciplines, to creative writing. This approach uses autoethnography as a primary structure within which I could *montage*—an appropriate option for a film-related study—other elements, including the

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<sup>167</sup> See below 170ff.

<sup>168</sup> Chapter 4 below.

<sup>169</sup> Dargis and Scott 2009: 3.

experience-based methodology described in Chapter 2 and a screenplay (Chapter 6).

## Montage and an autoethnography framework

Some contemporary researchers use *bricolage*, quilt making and *montage* as metaphors to describe how they piece together theories and methodologies to study the social world,<sup>170</sup> to embrace complexity and to “construct [an active] role for humans both in shaping reality and in creating the research processes that represent it”<sup>171</sup>. This process “refuses standardized modes of knowledge production...involv[es] construction and reconstruction, contextual diagnosis, negotiation and readjustment”<sup>172</sup>.

Within this piecing together, new creative analytical practices, or CAP, have “blurred, enlarged, and altered”<sup>173</sup> ethnographic writing and provide a range of options for activist researchers like me, who want to change the world “by writing from the heart”<sup>174</sup>. They include narrative genres like autoethnography, fiction of various kinds, poetry, performance texts and performance art, comedy and satire, visual presentations, allegory, conversation, layered accounts, mixed genres, creative nonfiction, performance writing, mysteries, memoirs, personal histories, and cultural criticism. I settled on autoethnography as a genre that could embrace other genres, within my analytical creative writing practice and my methodology-from-experience.

I will now identify key aspects of the autoethnography that informed my work until I completed my *PhD Report*. I will then explain in more detail the statistics-gathering process, before turning to the project’s changes after I transferred to IIML and developed more *montage* elements that incorporated the requirements of a creative writing thesis. The chapter ends

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<sup>170</sup> Denzin and Lincoln 2005: 5-6.

<sup>171</sup> Kincheloe and McLaren 2005: 316-337.

<sup>172</sup> Idem.

<sup>173</sup> Richardson and St Pierre 2005: 962.

<sup>174</sup> Denzin 2006: 422, citing Pelias 2004.

with a discussion of autoethnography problems and a discussion of ethics issues.

### *Autoethnography*

Autoethnography—from the Greek for ‘self’ (autos), ‘culture’ (ethnos) and ‘writing’ or ‘representation’ (graphia, including the visual as well as the written) can be broadly defined as writing about the self in culture. It is both a methodology, “a theory and analysis of how research does or should proceed”, and a method, “a technique...for gathering evidence”<sup>175</sup>. Its meaning fluctuates within and between disciplines; any one of its three root meanings may be emphasised over another.

As a methodology, autoethnography is most widely used and debated within social science, strongly influenced by experimental research and writing practices within feminist methodology.<sup>176</sup>

### *Autoethnography and feminist methodology*

In feminist methodology, as at the Women’s Gallery and in the present research, “the ‘problem’ [being researched] is frequently a blend of an intellectual question and a personal trouble”<sup>177</sup>, or troubles. Personal experiences are an asset; using them is “a distinguishing feature of feminist research”<sup>178</sup>. Emotion is part of personal experience; emotions are seen as valuable and a source of knowledge. Autoethnography joins consciousness-raising and participatory or action research as three feminist methods that value the self-determination that researchers and participants find in “being yourself, speaking for yourself, and in deciding the course of your own life”<sup>179</sup>. Feminist researchers may also experiment with methods of representation,

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<sup>175</sup> Naples 2003: 3, citing feminist philosopher Sandra Harding.

<sup>176</sup> Denzin 2003, 2005.

<sup>177</sup> Reinharz 1992: 259-260.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid: 258.

<sup>179</sup> Griffiths 1995: 141; Wolf 1996: xiii, 226.

using diaries and journals, visual images, performance, and performance art.<sup>180</sup>

Starting from and referring to their own experiences, ‘reflexive’ feminist researchers also use autoethnography as a method to provide transparency: “to specify the partiality of a particular account, both [as researcher] to take responsibility for it and to open space for other ways of knowing”<sup>181</sup>.

Alice Walker demonstrates the kind of transparency feminist methodology seeks and the emotion it values,<sup>182</sup> using a method that can in my view be defined as autoethnography, when she writes to Pratibha Parmar, the director of their film *Warrior Marks*, about female genital mutilation:

I am sending you the little script that I hope will be part of the film. I don’t know just how you’ll do it, but I think it can be worked in throughout the discussions about genital mutilation, so that I am part of the subject and not just an observer. I’ve done this in a deliberate effort to stand with the mutilated women, not beyond them. I know how painful exposure is; it is something I’ve had to face every day of my life, beginning with my own first look in the mirror in the morning!<sup>183</sup>

In my view, this is a fine example of ‘writing [and acting] from the heart’.

### *Autoethnography as a social science methodology*

As a methodology rather than a method, ‘classic’ social science autoethnography is distinguished from feminist autoethnography because the researcher is neither ‘beyond’ nor ‘with’ others who are formally defined as the ‘subjects’ of the research.<sup>184</sup> She stands alone, writing about herself in culture.

Echoing feminist hopes that researchers and ethnographers in particular would work towards social justice, social science autoethnography—like feminist methodology— is oriented to social change, to “looking at the world

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<sup>180</sup> Reinharz: 221-225.

<sup>181</sup> Pratt 2004: 185.

<sup>182</sup> Walker defines herself as a ‘womanist’ rather than a ‘feminist’; a “black feminist or feminist of colour...womanist is to feminist is as purple to lavender”: Walker 1983: xi-xii.

<sup>183</sup> Walker and Parmar 1993: 13.

<sup>184</sup> See below 90ff re ethics.

from a specific, perspectival and limited vantage point [to] ...tell, teach and put people in motion...It is...committed to creating space for dialogue and debate”<sup>185</sup>. It is “an approach to narrative enquiry”<sup>186</sup>, which “enlarge[s] our capacity to cope with life’s struggles, deepen[s] our ability to empathize with others and expand[s] our sense of community”<sup>187</sup>. Within this “blurred genre...emotions are important to understanding the relationship among self, power and culture”<sup>188</sup>.

Social science autoethnographer Susan Chase describes the goal of autoethnography and many other performance narratives as being “to *show* rather than to *tell* and, thus, to disrupt the politics of traditional research relationships, traditional forms of representation, and traditional social science orientations to audiences”<sup>189</sup>. This goal attracted me as an activist because it offers an opportunity to disrupt traditional research relationships, representations, and performances. It attracted me as an artist and writer because it embraces research as a performance narrative that *shows*.

But ‘show’ and ‘tell’, too, can be montaged because the boundary between them is fluid: statistical information presented in a bar graph ‘shows’; a story is ‘told’ in a screenplay. I could therefore adapt the framework to *tell* the story about NZFC funding pathways statistics for instance, to undermine industry belief systems and practices that disadvantage women scriptwriters, and to help open space for women’s stories.

### *Autoethnography, organisation studies and the ‘native subject’*

Within organisation studies, where creative industries research is often located, autoethnography has no explicit connection to feminist methodology and is not based in arts forms. Organisation theory adopted a gender

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<sup>185</sup> Jones 2005: 763.

<sup>186</sup> Chase 2005: 660.

<sup>187</sup> Tillmann-Healy 2002: 340, citing Bochner 1994.

<sup>188</sup> Jones: 765, 767.

<sup>189</sup> Chase: 660.

perspective somewhat belatedly compared with other disciplines.<sup>190</sup> Once scholars recognised that organisations are cultural entities, they borrowed approaches like ethnography from cultural sciences,<sup>191</sup> although autoethnography is used as a method or methodology in the crossover of gender studies and organisation studies.<sup>192</sup>

Organisation studies research on autoethnography and native subjects—researchers who have historically been studied by ethnographers from a dominant culture—provides another approach to an examination of women within creative industries.

Native subject autoethnography is a variant genre of ‘gone native’ ethnography. A researcher who is not a ‘native’ may aim to ‘become’ one of the natives,<sup>193</sup> to experience the culture at the most authentic level possible. In contrast, a ‘native subject’ *is* one of the natives.<sup>194</sup> One powerful example of native subject autoethnography is a sex worker’s use of fiction to explore complex issues in the sex industry.<sup>195</sup> It seemed to me that as I entered the New Zealand film industry as an activist, a researcher and an apprentice woman scriptwriter I too was undertaking a variant of ‘going native’.

According to organisation studies autoethnographers Prasad and Prasad, native subjects foreground the graphia, or representation, in autoethnography. They seek:

...to represent themselves in ways that *engage with* the colonizer’s own terms. If ethnographic texts are means by which Europeans [men, or heterosexuals] represent to themselves their (usually subjugated) others, autoethnographic texts

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<sup>190</sup> Martin and Collinson 2002: 245-246, citing Gherardi 2002.

<sup>191</sup> Czarniawska and Hopfl.

<sup>192</sup> For examples see n270; and Wambura Ngunjiri 2007, Adams 2007, Taber 2005.

<sup>193</sup> Examples of the ‘gone native’ genre include Carlos Castaneda who apprenticed himself to a Mesoamerican nagual: Castaneda 1972, 1973 and feminist Barbara Ehrenreich became ‘poor’ and then wrote about it: Ehrenreich 2001.

<sup>194</sup> Prasad and Prasad 2002. A native ethnographer, in contrast, attempts to represent his or her own people from their own point of view, gaining legitimacy and political awareness but giving up distance and objectivity.

<sup>195</sup> Frank 2000.

are those that others construct in response to or in dialogue with those metropolitan representations.<sup>196</sup>

In Prasad and Prasad's view, as native subjects "become participants in the drama of the research process [and] raise fundamental new questions about the goals and practice of ethnography"<sup>197</sup> they begin to 'take over' and disrupt ethnographic texts. They demand that:

...organisational ethnographers convert their awareness/self-consciousness of their own and organisations' embeddedness in a world system into objects of inquiry [and] examine organisational processes that constitute native subjects within institutional fields of power and meaning.<sup>198</sup>

Prasad and Prasad's emphasis on representation is helpful because of the way women have been represented, as articulated in Laura Mulvey's celebrated work on 'the gaze': Mulvey proposed that cinema (a metropolitan representation) is constructed to meet men's psychological needs and in effect colonises women while giving men pleasure.<sup>199</sup> Filmmakers—women and men—often represent women as 'native subjects'.

Furthermore, women's self-representation—not necessarily in dialogue with or in response to 'metropolitan representations'—may be seen as disruptive, as Frank's account of the sex industry may have been. Women as native subjects take a risk when we tell our stories; women and men may 'snub' or 'slap' us for our attempts.<sup>200</sup>

Prasad and Prasad's view of autoethnography as disruptive is similar to Chase's,<sup>201</sup> but its positioning of the disruption explicitly within institutions made it seem particularly relevant as I sought to disrupt institutional belief systems about women storytellers, in academia and in the film industry. It was important to me that I found an autoethnographic reference point for

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<sup>196</sup> Pratt 1992: 110.

<sup>197</sup> Prasad and Prasad: 196-197.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid: 203.

<sup>199</sup> Mulvey 1975.

<sup>200</sup> See above 39ff and below 129ff for practices historically used to suppress women's writing.

<sup>201</sup> See n189 and accompanying text.

understanding our position, when I explored the progress of women's scripts—including my own—during the development process. But as an activist and a creative writer I also needed precedents among women writers, including scriptwriters, to place alongside the research described in Chapter 2.

### *Autoethnography and women writers*

Some women artists and fiction writers, working outside academia and for a general audience, have used autoethnography—though not categorised as such—to examine themselves in their culture and to voice their desires for social justice. For instance they have examined their working conditions and the relationship between their work and the 'rest' of their lives for a long time, since Virginia Woolf's classic *A Room Of One's Own*<sup>202</sup> to the present,<sup>203</sup> although in the last twenty years it has been less usual to explore the role of gender in this context.

In film-related work, cinefeminist B. Ruby Rich uses autobiography, in *Chick Flicks*.<sup>204</sup> I view her methodology as autoethnography, for two reasons: it functions primarily to structure a group of her own writings on women's film from the 1970s to the 1990s, to locate herself in culture; and it aims to disrupt and create change, to counter 'historical amnesia' about the history of cinefeminism. She believes that knowledge of this history would help "[avoid] the repetition of certain errors, [learn] how to negotiate across difference, and [reconcile] the personal with the professional—if not always the political"<sup>205</sup>. Joanna Russ echoes some of these concerns in *What Are We Fighting For? Sex, Race, Class, and The Future of Feminism*,<sup>206</sup> where autoethnography is one of her primary methods.

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<sup>202</sup> Woolf 1929; 1998.

<sup>203</sup> For example Bain 2004, Walker 2007.

<sup>204</sup> Rich 1998.

<sup>205</sup> Rich: 1.

<sup>206</sup> See for instance Russ' view n33 and accompanying text.



Women artists and writers have also written ‘autoethnographies’ about other aspects of their lives. Poet Audre Lorde wrote *Zami, a New Spelling of My Name: A Biomythography* and her *The Cancer Journals* was a forerunner of many autoethnographic texts that deal with the writer’s own illness or involvement with others’ illnesses.<sup>207</sup> The artist Orlan’s practice is an outstanding example of autoethnography; critiquing ‘beauty’ she ‘writes’ on her body by permanently altering it through various surgeries, as both the sole research participant and the protagonist.<sup>208</sup>

Men who write feature scripts often write about their working lives.<sup>209</sup> But as far as I can ascertain, Alice Walker and S.E. Hinton, who both also write other fiction, are the only women scriptwriters who have written about their script work.<sup>210</sup> Nora Ephron has practised ‘autoethnography’—work apparently intended to disrupt, oriented to social change—on other subjects, like her ageing.<sup>211</sup> Russian filmmaker Marina Goldovskaya’s memoir tells of her life as a Russian filmmaker at a time of great cultural change, who has taken risks in documenting that change often from a personal perspective, and of her life as a woman filmmaker.<sup>212</sup> Some women scriptwriters have given interviews and other women working in film have written short pieces, for various books.<sup>213</sup> High-profile women producers provide other examples.<sup>214</sup>

### *Autoethnography and fiction*

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<sup>207</sup> Lorde 1982, 1983; Leibovitz 2006; Millett 2000.

<sup>208</sup> Busca 2003.

<sup>209</sup> For example, Eszterhas 2004, 2006; Goldman 1983, 2000; Grant 2006; Mamet 2007. New Zealand writer Mike Riddell has a comprehensive blog about the development of *The Insatiable Moon*, a feature film he adapted from his own novel: Riddell 2009.

<sup>210</sup> Walker 1996; Walker and Parmar; Hinton 2007.

<sup>211</sup> Ephron 2006.

<sup>212</sup> Goldovskaya 2006.

<sup>213</sup> For example McCreadie 1983, 1994, 2006; McDormand, Cholodenko and Mortimer 2004; Seger 1996; Weibrecht, Boorman and Donohoe 2004; Wexman 1999; French 2003.

<sup>214</sup> French; Phillips 1991; Vachon and Edelstein 1998; Vachon and Bunn 2006.

Perhaps inevitably, at least one qualitative researcher has now considered how ‘literature’—other than fiction consciously written as part of a creative analytic practice—may also be ‘qualitative social inquiry’.<sup>215</sup> Although many writers may rely on theoretical frameworks that deprivilege the author,<sup>216</sup> in my view creative writing outside social science or organisation studies may sometimes be deeply autoethnographic. It is about the self in culture, and is disruptive.

I found three writers’ analyses of the role of the fiction writer’s ‘autos’ especially useful as I considered fiction and autoethnography. Script expert Stephen Cleary had this to say, at a seminar about script development:

It doesn’t matter if you’re writing a personal memoir of your childhood for cinema exhibition or a 12-part TV series, if the writer doesn’t search within themselves and translate their discovery into drama then the work will have an emotional poverty at its centre... the artist’s search within themselves is at the heart of any examination or conversation about technique in writing.<sup>217</sup>

According to the novelist Zadie Smith, a writer has a single duty, which seems very similar to ‘writing about the self in culture’: “to express accurately their way of being in the world”. She writes, “...this matter of understanding-that-which-is-outside-of-ourselves using only what we have inside ourselves amounts to some of the hardest intellectual and emotional work you’ll ever do”<sup>218</sup>. She argues:

We like to think of fiction as the playground of language, independent of its originator...fiction writers know different. Though we rarely say it publicly, we know that our fictions are not as disconnected from our selves as you like to imagine and we like to pretend.<sup>219</sup>

And when an interviewer asked her: “Is it a disappointment that writers are never in person who they are on the page?” Smith’s response reinforces her view of the nature of the creative process:

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<sup>215</sup> Brinkmann 2009.

<sup>216</sup> For a brief discussion of this in relation to women filmmakers, see n432 and accompanying text.

<sup>217</sup> Cleary 2007[b]. See also below 141.

<sup>218</sup> Smith 2007: [5]-[6].

<sup>219</sup> Ibid: [4].

No, but they *are*...I just had dinner with [two] comic book artists. I love their comic books. And in a very particular way they *are* their comic books. You can see their comic books in them. And I think it's beautiful—the connection between writer and text. I'm never disappointed that way.<sup>220</sup>

Celebrated lesbian cartoonist Alison Bechdel explains the autoethnography of her writing, about lesbians' worlds within American culture as follows, very precisely:

Actually, all my characters are based on me. Mo is my guilt-ridden, liberal superego. Lois represents my secret desire to be one of the cool girls. Clarice is my driven workaholic side; Toni the flip domestic side. Sparrow is the part of me that wonders if maybe my charkas are blocked, and Ginger the part of me that alternates between thinking I'm a genius and thinking I'm an utter fraud, all while procrastinating hopelessly. A comic strip, like life, is a novel that never seems to get anywhere. But it's precisely this getting nowhere that's part of the appeal. Comic strips are the exaltation of the commonplace, the routine, the everyday.<sup>221</sup>

Her work reflects a desire for social justice that is inherent in autoethnography; and can also be viewed as disruptive. But 'comic strip' is the form she uses to describe it. Other creative writers are less explicitly—if at all—concerned with social justice and use the standard 'literary' terms for genres that may have autoethnographic elements: memoir, autobiography, portraiture, diary, essay, and correspondence. However, collectively Cleary, Smith and Bechdel gave me confidence that it is possible to extend autoethnography into fiction, including screenplays.

One film producer, Don Boyd, uses the term an 'essay' film for highly personal films:

'Pictures are for entertainment, messages should be delivered by Western Union', was Hollywood mogul Sam Goldwyn's apocryphal verdict on movies with a motive. Now, however, we appear to be on the verge of a spectacular renaissance of the 'essay' film: last month's London film festival screened four powerful films made by directors with profoundly creative, individual visions of the world: Terence Davies' *Of Time and the City*, Steve McQueen's *Hunger*, Ari Folman's *Waltz With Bashir*, and Alex Gibney's *Gonzo: The Life and Work of Dr Hunter S Thompson* are all highly personal, highly visual works, without traditional narrative structure—and they have been given the green light without having to conform to the petty exigencies of an unimaginative executive's guidelines.<sup>222</sup>

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<sup>220</sup> Dodero 2003 np.

<sup>221</sup> Bechdel 1998: 62-63. Compare Joanna's ideas of the significance of 'the commonplace, the routine, the everyday', n48 and accompanying text.

<sup>222</sup> Boyd 2008: np.

To Boyd's list of filmmakers, particularly Steve McQueen and Ari Folman, I would add women filmmakers Sally Potter (for *The Gold Diggers* and *YES* for example), Marina Goldovskaya (*The House on Arbat Street* and *The Shattered Mirror: A Diary of the Time of Trouble*) and Agnes Varda (*Vagabond*; *The Gleaners and I* and *Agnès' Beaches*).

At the end of this survey I asked, foregrounding the methodology as a way to address problems of discrimination within the creative industries: How might autoethnographic processes influence practitioner performance and activism within the development process? How might practitioner performance within the film industry as a script writer, activist and autoethnographer contribute to academic theory and praxis in relation to women's participation in a creative industry? Where were the conflicts between the three autoethnographic roles: academic, activist, artistic?

I was also considering how to address the problems associated with autoethnography, and had applied for and received ethics approval to talk with people in the industry, including people I engaged with at the NZFC as I gathered statistics. But because the problems and the ethics issues changed when I transferred to creative writing, I will first turn to the fieldwork I undertook before the transfer, and analysed in Chapter 4 and in part of Chapter 5.

### *The field work to April 2008*

The New Zealand Film Commission Act 1978 does not require the NZFC to address gender issues. Nor does CNZ's legislation, the Arts Council of New Zealand Toi Aotearoa Act 1994.<sup>223</sup> However, New Zealand ratified the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1985. So, as a state, New Zealand—and its agencies, like the NZFC—must encourage the participation of women in public life on equal terms with men (article 7). Telling stories on the big screen is one way to participate in public life, and arguably both the NZFC

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<sup>223</sup> For NZOA's legislation, see below n410 and accompanying text.

and CNZ, as state entities, must encourage women's access to state-funded programmes. In contrast, commercial agencies and producers—including those to whom the NZFC devolves programmes like the Short Film Fund (SFF)—and other individual investors are unregulated. They may depend on brokerage and possibly stereotypes and biases for their decisions, although perhaps the NZFC intervenes in the decision-making of those to whom it devolves public funds, if it deems this necessary.

The NZFC's annual reports record the names of all writers, directors and producers attached to projects it funds. However it makes no formal record of the gender of writers, directors or producers attached to project applications and makes no gender analysis. CNZ makes no gender record or analysis of those applying for or receiving funding, from any of their programmes.

With help from development assistant Jeremy Macey (Jeremy) at the NZFC, I went through its records to isolate some gender data.<sup>224</sup> A staff member at CNZ went through their records and emailed me what she found in the SIPF records.<sup>225</sup> I did not investigate NZOA because it then had no telemovie programme of its own. It provided additional production funds only, for features that already had NZFC funding and a broadcaster commitment. I did have a couple of brief conversations with people within the television industry that confirmed that women writers were strongly represented in television drama.

I continued to meet informally with writers and directors. I also met with a committee at Women in Film & Television (WIFT) in Auckland, and with Lindy Monson, then president of WIFT New South Wales who organised a meeting with two groups of filmmakers in Sydney.<sup>226</sup> I counted gender participation at every script-related event I went to and established that women were always at least forty percent of participants.<sup>227</sup> I presented the

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<sup>224</sup> Chapters 5 and 8 record aspects of this process.

<sup>225</sup> See n566 and accompanying text.

<sup>226</sup> See nn 273, 463 and accompanying text.

<sup>227</sup> These records' details are not included because they are unreliable; sometimes I had to guess at gender when I sat behind an individual, or at a distance; and people came and went.

issues and the statistics to film students, gender and women's studies students and art students—and their lecturers—at Victoria University, at the University of Otago and at Otago Polytechnic's School of Art; and with staff at Victoria's College of Education. I gave a presentation at VMS.

In many conversations accompanying my presentations, I encountered resistance to the idea that the problem that interested me was a problem. Some people, women and men, believed that if there was a problem, it was the fault of women who want to write and/or direct feature films.<sup>228</sup> Some pointed to New Zealand women's success as producers, and found it difficult to differentiate producers' functions from those of writers and directors;<sup>229</sup> others in the industry claimed that the powerful New Zealand producers are mostly men. And, when I talked about autoethnography, I was surprised by the interest in it.

I was also writing screenplays. Cushla Parekowhai (Cushla) and I had written a short film together in 2006 and had started to develop a feature, *The Red Dinghy* (*Red Dinghy*). In April 2007 IIML—where I had studied with Michael Hirschfield Director of Scriptwriting Ken Duncum (Ken) for my M.A. in Creative Writing (Scripts)—brought script surgeon Linda Voorhees<sup>230</sup> to take a two week masterclass and I started a new script, *The Lost Boy* (*Lost Boy*). We planned to take *Red Dinghy* through the NZFC development process, and *Lost Boy* is an Australian story, for development there. However, the literature search, the formal PhD proposal, the statistics, the presentations, and my *PhD Report* were demanding and time-consuming. The script development lagged and I was aware I needed more help with my writing. I was also becoming increasingly interested in how I might myself

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<sup>228</sup> See discussion below 125ff.

<sup>229</sup> One international industry informant stated there are more women producers because producers are enablers. They help and support the director—which fits in with traditional female roles—personal communication 2008.

<sup>230</sup> Linda Voorhees has taught scriptwriting at UCLA for many years and worked with or for most major studios in the United States.

sabotage the development process; taking my own work out into the world was very different than taking others' as I had done in the past.<sup>231</sup>

### *From the VMS to IIML*

In April 2008 I transferred from VMS to IIML and Ken replaced Deborah Jones as my primary supervisor. At IIML I had to modify my thesis questions. In this process the original research questions, the organisation studies material and the *Red Dinghy* and *Lost Boy* script development experiences were reduced to traces, best described as a kind of subtext. And because Cushla and I did not enter the NZFC development process with *Red Dinghy*, and I did not go far with *Lost Boy*, I did not expose myself to possible discrimination, as I had planned.

By early 2009, I had merged my third script and thesis metascript into a single script, *Development*. It's a different kind of metascript than I originally planned, an 'essay film'<sup>232</sup> and a kind of 'chick flick'<sup>233</sup> about what I learned as an arts practitioner in the past and relearned in a new context during my research process.

I also had to adjust my view of the problems with autoethnography and with ethical issues.

Creative writing theses, like those about other 'studio-based' practices, are usually divided into a piece of creative work and an exegesis, designed to answer the question "What new knowledge or understandings did the enquiry and methodology generate that may not have been revealed through other research approaches?"<sup>234</sup> This is perhaps because 'studio-based' practices—like creative analytic practices, which tend not to require an

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<sup>231</sup> See below 125, 170.

<sup>232</sup> Boyd.

<sup>233</sup> I had become interested in reclaiming and redefining the term as something useful for women filmmakers like me, who want to increase the quantity of women's features: see Evans 2008[b].

<sup>234</sup> Barrett and Bolt: 1.

exegesis—struggle for legitimacy as research.<sup>235</sup> But the role of the exegesis is debated.<sup>236</sup> For instance, two writers ask:

[W]hy should we be expected to move between creative and academic: analytical, critical or theoretical, modes of writing? Why should we have to prove ourselves in both, when writers of conventional theses are not expected to include a creative component?<sup>237</sup>

In contrast, creative work produced or published without an exegesis counts as ‘research’ for university staff.

I switched then from an organisation studies environment where creative analytic practice including autoethnography requires justification, to a creative writing environment where creative writing is the central practice, and the exegesis is the theory, a division I found difficult after developing a single autoethnography framework to embrace both theory and practice.

One creative writer, Sandra Burr, identifies the need for creative writing researchers to repair “the interface between theory and practice”<sup>238</sup>. As well, New Zealand film researchers Vanessa Alexander and Larissa Marno both identify the need to privilege the practical or ‘active’ component of their subject matter—and mine—to “dismantle the perceived boundaries between [the academic and the practical]”<sup>239</sup>. In my view, the ‘active’ component of my project is equally the activism that the statistical analysis and associated dialogue represent, the autoethnography and the creative writing; I did not want to separate the exegesis and the creative writing, but bring them—like my activist, writer and researcher selves—as close as possible together.

I decided that, since the boundary between ‘show’ and tell’ is fluid, it was possible ‘to repair the interface between theory and practice’, to blur the

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<sup>235</sup> See the statement that heads this chapter and Balkema and Slager 2004, Barrett and Bolt, Carter 2004, Kester, and Sullivan 2005.

<sup>236</sup> See for example Fletcher and Mann 2004, Arnold 2005, Barrett 2004, Bourke and Neilsen 2004, Dawson 2005, Nelson 2004, and Perry and Brophy 2001. As an Australasian PhD candidate, I limited my ‘exegesis problem’ literature search to Australasia.

<sup>237</sup> Perry and Brophy: 89.

<sup>238</sup> Burr 2007: 1.

<sup>239</sup> Alexander 2000; Marno 1997: 130.



boundaries between creative writing and exegesis. I decided to link autoethnography with activist and experience-based methodologies within a creative writing framework and to integrate the thesis as an autoethnographical hybrid, so that each chapter—even the so-called ‘creative work’, the screenplay—included elements of creative writing and exegesis. With each chapter presenting a different aspect of the problem and for a specific primary audience I could blend the research and creative writing within parallel texts. Creative writing’s feeling, showing and telling, sketching, intuition, open-endedness, ambiguity and suggestion—incorporating ‘Joanna’s’ elements of form and principles of composition<sup>240</sup>—could go up against the thinking, argument, logic, analysis and conclusion of formal academic writing. I aimed to provide readers with multiple opportunities to think and to feel and to share the questioning process, the opening up of possibilities that cannot be immediately resolved. This blend also echoes the ‘argument in the alternative’ I’ve used in legal writing and practice: there’s *this* argument, *and* there’s *this*—completely separate—argument.

Stephen Cleary, Zadie Smith, Alison Bechdel, Don Boyd and the essay filmmakers collectively provided me with justification for writing my own ‘essay’ screenplay (*Development*, Chapter 6) as both creative writing and exegesis, alongside other CAP genres: memoir (Chapter 2); essay (this chapter); an autoethnographic report (Chapter 4); a diary and letters/emails (Chapter 5); and a weblog (Chapter 7). The researcher, the artist and the activist could all influence and disrupt one another through tiny things, like the use of ampersands imported from Joanna’s practice, and the bleed of statistics into Chapter 6.

My research question became: Can an analytical creative practice [in contrast to a social science creative analytic practice] that links autoethnography with activist- and experience-based methodologies reveal ways to open space within the development process for women scriptwriters to tell their stories?

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<sup>240</sup> See above 28.

I also asked: Does it help an investigation if activism, creative writing and academia are brought as close as possible together?

I now turn to problems with autoethnography in this context, and how I developed a *montage* to address them, building on the knowledge generated through my methodology-from-experience.

### *Problems with autoethnography: & possible solutions*

The use of creative analytic practice in social science and organisation studies shares some problems—like legitimacy—with creative practice, as already mentioned. As one scholar puts it:

Researchers would be well advised to be persistent in their autoethnographic intentions, and be prepared to face rejections and critiques of their chosen genre. Resilience and conviction are required to pursue this methodology.<sup>241</sup>

As ‘participants in the drama of the research process’, native subjects—like some social scientists and feminist researchers—force an acknowledgment that ethnographies are convincing ‘fictions’ and highlight the role of personal and institutional interests in shaping the final document:

[E]thnographers rooted in the subjectivist position can see the value of researcher immersion and identification [but] the overwhelming logic of positivist science sees knowledge about the natives as being possible only through maintaining an objectivity implied by professional distance.<sup>242</sup>

My organisation studies questions reflected the need to address this problem, which became less important when I transferred disciplines and integrated the creative component and exegesis as a single autoethnography.

However, a native subject researcher who is both an insider and an outsider has to manage conflicts of loyalties and interests when shifting between roles within institutions and roles within their communities. Although as insiders in a field we have ease of access, reduced resource requirements, increased ability to establish trust and rapport and reduced problems with translation (of language, and implicitly of behaviour), these strengths can be undermined

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<sup>241</sup> Holt 2003: 19.

<sup>242</sup> Prasad and Prasad: 195-196.

by the challenges: difficulty in maintaining critical distance and ongoing role conflict.<sup>243</sup>

Aotearoa New Zealand theorists have developed indigenous models for managing research as an insider, as a woman who is a 'native subject'. Developed by Maori researchers, these models demand humility and high standards of the insider who researches her own community, to ensure that the research is:

...as ethical and respectful, as reflexive and critical, as outsider research [which] also needs to be humble. It needs to be humble because the researcher belongs to the community as a member with a different set of roles and relationships, status and position.<sup>244</sup>

Marge Wong developed one of these models from Linda Tuhiwai Smith's work; it is based on a careful and ongoing cost benefit analysis for all parties, not unlike the *Getting Free* protocols' negotiations.<sup>245</sup>

As native subjects we also need our own community's support as we untangle and address the pain that those who have (mis)represented us in the past have caused us and that we may currently experience within institutions because we are marginalised and/or experience role conflict.<sup>246</sup> If we do not, this pain may cause our minds to be 'pulled slightly from the straight' and affect the content and quality of our work, our ability to access resources and our capacity to 'write back whilst...writing to ourselves' and 'make sense of our own world while also attempting to transform what counts as important in the world of the powerful'.<sup>247</sup>

As a native subject attempting to transform what counts as important in the world of the powerful my position was complex. I was be(com)ing native in the dominant culture as a scriptwriter developing a creative practice, a

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<sup>243</sup> Karra and Phillips 2008: 549-553. It is possible that these organisation scholars, who appear not to incorporate 'writing to ourselves' in their 'writing back' to academia, risk recolonising those 'at home' as they focus on engaging with the coloniser's terms.

<sup>244</sup> Tuhiwai Smith: 139.

<sup>245</sup> Wong 2006: 56-58 in particular.

<sup>246</sup> See above 44ff.

<sup>247</sup> See also n77 and accompanying text.

colonised native subject who wished to engage—to some extent—with the coloniser’s terms. But I wished to retain my place as an activist, a woman committed to self-representation that aimed to communicate with women as much as to engage in a dialogue with or a response to ‘metropolitan representations’. I was also an academic researcher, a participant in the ‘drama of the research process’, ‘going native’ among scriptwriters and bureaucrats.<sup>248</sup> I carried memories of past conflicts between artist and activist roles<sup>249</sup> and was uncertain that transferring to IIML would resolve my problems with moving scripts through the development process. Finally, as a native subject whose historical world had been invaded by women academic researchers,<sup>250</sup> I had to acknowledge and resolve tensions between academic expectations and my methodology-from-experience with its related practice of ‘writing to ourselves’.

Managing this complexity—inevitably—generated pain, for example when my scriptwriting self learned during the fieldwork that women readers and decisionmakers might prefer to support men’s film projects, and when my activist self had to argue that my methodology-from-experience was not merely ‘background’.<sup>251</sup> Or when I was invited to write about *We Are Unsuitable for Framing*, a Te Papa exhibition of women artists that made the women’s art movement invisible, and was reminded that women in institutions tend to misrepresent or ignore activist women artists: in my review I wrote: “I hated writing this article. I was late writing it, unusually for me. Did I know it would be hard and painful work?”<sup>252</sup>

Remembering pain and pleasure is intrinsic to creative writing but the issue of an autoethnographer’s personal pain—as something that may compromise

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<sup>248</sup> In contrast, Georgina Born investigated IRCAM (Institut de Recherche et Coordination Acoustique/Musique) as a ‘primitive tribe’, “to work out whether my earlier intuitions about the institutions of serious music were accurate, and if so, why”, focusing on “interrogating power in relation to cultural forms and their social and institutional bases”: Born 1995: 6-10. Some people there knew her as a musician but she was there as an anthropologist.

<sup>249</sup> See nn 63, 127, and accompanying text.

<sup>250</sup> See nn 102, 106 and accompanying text.

<sup>251</sup> This happened on several occasions.

<sup>252</sup> Evans 2009[c]: 49.

‘objectivity’ in creative analytic practice—is debated within autoethnography partly because private pain is difficult to transform into public and political acts,<sup>253</sup> although it may also work as a catalyst for change.<sup>254</sup> According to autoethnographer Carolyn Ellis:

Being emotional helps you become a better autoethnographer, since so often the subject matter as well as the process is emotional...[but] being too emotional may overload your senses and prevent you from looking at situations from multiple frames.<sup>255</sup>

To avoid this, while dealing with the complexity of my position, as a native subject, a researcher and as an activist working alone, I decided that when faced with a role conflict I would focus on the creative triangle’s options as Choy developed them. However, I would use autoethnography to locate and remember any personal discomfort or pain, and would search for a model beyond the Karpman and Choy triangles to reinforce my focus on the resilience required.<sup>256</sup>

Portraiture’s ideas about resilience brought me back to Mamet’s view of script structure as being about the creation and deferment of hope, and ultimately its realisation or termination.<sup>257</sup>

Sarah Lawrence-Lightfoot developed portraiture or ‘people’s scholarship’ as a methodology because of social science research’s continued focus on “pathology and disease rather than health and resilience” among African Americans.<sup>258</sup> Portraiture serves as “a counterpoint to the dominant chorus of social scientists whose focus has largely centred on the identification and documentation of social problems”<sup>259</sup>. It provides a native subject ‘write back’ alternative to the language and conventions of ethnography where:

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<sup>253</sup> Naples: 43-45.

<sup>254</sup> hooks: 215.

<sup>255</sup> Ellis 2004: 110.

<sup>256</sup> See n146 and accompanying text.

<sup>257</sup> See n9 and accompanying text.

<sup>258</sup> Dixson, Chapman and Hill 2005: 18.

<sup>259</sup> Idem, citing Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis 1997: xvi.

...the portraitist hopes to be able to capture the raw hurt and pleasure of her or his protagonists *and* works to embroider paradoxical themes into the inquiry and narrative. Portraiture admits the central and creative role of the *self* of the portraitist... [T]he *person* of the researcher—even when rigorously controlled—is more evident and more visible than in any other research form.<sup>260</sup>

It is a theory of hope, “a search for goodness... that looks for the strengths of particular sites...[examining] the ways in which subjects meet, negotiate and overcome challenges”<sup>261</sup>. All these elements, the focus on resilience, the central and creative role of the self even when rigorously controlled, the search for goodness, particularly support my scriptwriting practice.

I also had to address other problems that might compromise quality. Although autoethnography as an individual experience is a means to demonstrate “the subjective and situated nature of identity, fieldwork and cultural interpretation”<sup>262</sup>, some see it as a methodology that provides opportunities for a researcher to engage in narcissism, self-absorption, exaggeration and self-indulgence, to move the emphasis “away from participant experiences and/or the central focus/topic of the research”<sup>263</sup> and to compromise its quality as research.<sup>264</sup> I argue that in this research, as the primary participant who creates an integrated series of autoethnographic writings to animate the data, I intensify the interrelationships between my experiences and the focus of the research. However, to reduce the potential for self-delusion and to help resolve the other problems outlined, it was necessary to find ways to interrogate the process and its outcomes.

Some problems can be addressed through ongoing rigorous assessment—from academic supervisors in particular—including self-assessment. Richardson and St Pierre believe in holding creative analytic practice to “high and difficult standards; mere novelty does not suffice”<sup>265</sup>, and have developed a group of criteria that I found useful. They ask whether the work contributes

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<sup>260</sup> Lawrence-Lightfoot 2005: 10-11.

<sup>261</sup> Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis: 23.

<sup>262</sup> Jones: 770.

<sup>263</sup> Foster, McAllister and O’Brien 2006: 46.

<sup>264</sup> Sparkes 2002.

<sup>265</sup> Richardson and St Pierre: 964.

to an understanding of social life, succeeds aesthetically, is reflexive enough for the reader to make judgments about the point of view, and has impact, moving the reader emotionally or intellectually, perhaps to some kind of new question or action. These criteria can also be used to assess literary genres, with the possible exception of the reflexivity criterion; although fiction also requires a point of view, some would argue that this is constructed by the writer and does not require the kind of self-exposure that is necessary in autoethnography, although self-exposure may be implicit.<sup>266</sup>

But at least one influential writer argues that artistic quality is not necessary in creative analytic practice: “I am far more impressed with, and find great artistry in, experiences of passion, communion and social responsibility”<sup>267</sup>. I sympathise with this view; Gladys’ “Today we parted and it hurt” image in *A Season’s Diaries* had these qualities,<sup>268</sup> as did many works that women who weren’t ‘artists’ presented, at the Women’s Gallery or in *Spiral*. Other artists felt the same about this issue. For example, when Bridie wrote a decade afterwards about *A Season’s Diaries*, she referred to Joanna’s views on work by women who weren’t artists, including mine:

That was the first time I'd seen anything Marian had done: she seemed to find no difficulty in bringing herself openly and explicitly into the chart she wrote, with its references to the moon, to Greek poetry and to her garden. I saw that as her particular gift: I remember Joanna pointing out that it was the women who weren't 'artists' who made the most direct and effective statements (Gladys Gurney was the other). I still had too much belief in the art hierarchy to see the point.<sup>269</sup>

To complement supervisor interrogation and Linda Voorhees’ ongoing mentorship, I developed two interrogation methods to address autoethnography-specific problems. The first was a community to interrogate external manifestations of my beliefs and actions as I performed the various roles required in the research, including the writing; and to provide various kinds of support. The second was counselling, to interrogate the inner workings that affected, or might affect, the work.

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<sup>266</sup> See above 74ff.

<sup>267</sup> Finley 2003: 294.

<sup>268</sup> See above 30ff.

<sup>269</sup> Lonie 1988: 168.

## *Community*

Even when it works towards social justice, academic research by and about women—whether or not ‘feminist’—is in my view often compromised because its primary accountability is to the dominant culture’s institutional mores; it also receives its primary benefits within the institutional culture.<sup>270</sup> As I ‘wrote back’ as a native subject, I wanted to write to and talk with ‘ourselves’, my home cultures outside academia, to whom I felt accountable and from where I expected to receive any future benefit. These communications became a variant of consciousness-raising as defined by Joanna Russ,<sup>271</sup> and, with its inherent separatism, necessary for my own health as a native subject within academia and within the industry.

My montage of home cultures incorporated a core community of scriptwriting friends from IIML Megan Ritchie and Mandy Hager from the M.A. year (who have read all my scripts) Mandy, Desiree Gezentsvey and Lynda Chanwai-Earle from the Bluebirds. These women, trained to critique scripts carefully and thoroughly, and themselves practising scriptwriters, each with different strengths, were invaluable readers of my scripts. Their detailed analyses were a fine complement to those from Ken and Linda. Cast members—some of them individuals who inspired characters—also interrogated the script and its ideas.

As well as providing a ‘technical’ interrogation, members of this core community provided stimulus and emotional support for the wider project,

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<sup>270</sup>However, academic autoethnographers, too, may both ‘write back’ to academia and ‘write to ourselves’ as women, for example Ronai 1995, Pruin De Francisco, Kuderer, and Chatham-Carpenter 2007, Feder-Alford 2006. There is also a subset of organisation autoethnographies where researchers address their ‘home’ audience of academics as they explore their discomfort within their institution’s organisational culture, because of illness, a gender issue, or disappointment: Brewis 2004, Grafton-Small 2003, Hearn 2004, Holt 2003, Pelias 2003, Road 2007, Sharifi 2003. Although here grouped with organisation research, Riad’s article could equally be categorised with ‘writing back’ to academia or with Turner’s autoethnographic work on childbirth: Turner 2002. The work on illness fits comfortably with other autoethnographic works about illness. One autoethnographic metanarrative enacts the relationship between a doctoral student and his adviser: Chawla and Rawlins 2004. Each study’s culture and its audience converge and collectively they provided some precedents for my research.

<sup>271</sup> See n38 and accompanying text.



alongside filmmaker informants and women writers and artists from my historical home culture, which had otherwise become more conceptual than real: Allie, Anna, Bridie, Cilla McQueen, Heather, Juanita, Keri Kaa, Lose Miller-Helu, Lynnsay Rongokea, Marg Leniston, Maria MacKay, Nancy, Miriama Evans, Tilly Lloyd.<sup>272</sup> “Remember when you/we did this?” one or other would ask, or command, from time to time. “Remember when you/we did/saw/read that. Have you tried...?” These interrogations often kept me on track with the activism. People in the industry I was (becoming) part of helped. Activist Jackie McAuliffe helped when she responded to a chapter over a cup of tea at Kenny’s Café in other ways. Erica has critiqued my work for almost a decade and continued to do so. In 2009, Joanna’s daughter Magdalena Harris, herself completing a PhD, became a valued correspondent.

Cushla, as a co-writer, was a central source of challenge and support who linked the ‘technical’ and historical communities.

Individuals from my presentations joined in the phone calls, emails and cups of tea and the discussions and critiques of Chapter 4—I especially remember Harriet Margolis here—and of Chapter 7’s *Wellywood Woman* weblog.

Interactions with Debra Zimmermann of Women Make Movies in New York, during her New Zealand visit in 2006, with Melissa Silverstein of the *Women & Hollywood* blog and others whose blogs or tweets I link to, with Australian filmmakers courtesy of Lindy Monson,<sup>273</sup> and with Jane Campion via Kate Richter, all helped me become—in a small way—part of an international community which shares my concerns.

Other PhD candidates at VMS, IIML and at Gender & Women’s Studies, where Dr Alison Laurie and Prue Hyman also helped, provided an academic community of support.

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<sup>272</sup> See above 40ff.

<sup>273</sup> Evans 2009[d]; and see nn 226, 463.

I was a little surprised when people at the NZFC also became intermittently a kind of ‘community’, especially Jeremy, and that Ruth Harley’s (Ruth’s) interrogation, as recorded in Chapter 5 and in the transition to Chapter 7, was very helpful indeed. I welcomed this unexpected benefit wholeheartedly, although the NZFC was never a home culture.

I listened to members of these communities very carefully: they are all part of my intended audience.

### *Counselling*

Following a surprising experience shifting between myself as researcher and myself as script writer<sup>274</sup> I realised that I had to find a further kind of interrogation, a method for better understanding the ambit of my own responses to people and situations in academia and in the film industry, and their responses to me. I took advantage of the free Student Health counselling to ask two questions. “If I am pitching to people in the industry and am rejected, how will I know whether my perceptions and feelings arise from my past experiences of rejection or from the present experience?” And “How might I self-sabotage during my projects’ development?” I attended for ten sessions before withdrawing.<sup>275</sup>

### *Autoethnography and ethics*

An autoethnographical framework—as distinct from autoethnography as a method—based in feminist, social science, native subject and creative writing disciplines raises complex ethics issues for research with activist, academic and creative writing elements. For this project, their early resolution, within the VMS, provided a strong foundation for resolving any issues that followed. However, my transfer to creative writing, and new information about autoethnography and ethics practices in the United States, raised new issues and tensions as I attempted to integrate various kinds of ‘literary’ writing

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<sup>274</sup> See below 125.

<sup>275</sup> See below 166ff.

within the thesis, all regulated by the ethics approvals given to an organisation studies research project.

Before my PhD proposal was accepted, I had to apply for research ethics approval to the Victoria University Pipitea Human Ethics Committee. I was attending public meetings with gender or film development content (sometimes both) and taking notes; I was talking with people in the industry who gave me useful information; and I was collaborating and conversing with various other individuals, for instance Cushla. I wanted to protect those I was engaging with; and my work. The documents approved divide the people concerned into three groups.<sup>276</sup>

The first group is actual and potential co-workers—writer(s), director(s), producer(s); the researcher's supervisors. Members of this group could possibly be identified even if reported anonymously, so were entitled to see what I wrote within the thesis, comment for publication within it, or to negotiate other changes, including deletion, within a month. Institutional informants, within the NZFC and NZOA were included in this category, which provided the most protection. The records of our interactions would be destroyed within two years of thesis publication or deposited at the Alexander Turnbull Library if both parties agreed to this. Later, the NZFC asked me to sign a confidentiality agreement.

Unidentifiable informants within the film industry, whose opinions expressed during informal interviews were recorded as examples without attribution, belonged in the second category. I was to provide them with any written record of our conversations and the opportunity to make corrections. This record would be destroyed two years after thesis publication.

The third group included attendees at private meetings, in person or electronically, for example between industry organizations and government agencies. At those meetings I could ask to take notes and those at a meeting could veto my note-taking and request copies of the notes afterwards.

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<sup>276</sup> See Appendix.

The introduction to the *Information Sheet* introduces me and the project, with autoethnography mentioned in the second sentence: “I am researching how useful autoethnography—the study of my own experience—is to understanding how a writer’s gender affects film script development processes in New Zealand”. The implication is that although I am studying my own experience others will need protection.

In the past, when I wrote or performed about myself in culture—amongst others—in various arts and gendered contexts, my ethics were self-regulated and sometimes I made mistakes. Very often, I protected those who were in some ways involved in the story, by not naming them, or disguising the context of our interactions and—usually—giving them the almost final text to approve. But when I wrote about my experience caring for my mother while she was dying, with intermittent references to my interactions with family members,<sup>277</sup> one family member objected strongly. I argued that I was writing about my experience, not about other members of the family and certainly not speaking for them; my argument was not acceptable. That experience, along with the experiences that led to the *Getting Free*-generated protocols,<sup>278</sup> probably contributed to my desire to write fiction, screenplays.

However, two of the three screenplays I chose to develop were based on historical stories. Neither would have been included in my organisation studies thesis, though a story of their development would have been. *Red Dinghy* is based in some gaps in an historical record in the public domain, but like my story about my mother and me, included some identifiable individuals. The other, *Lost Boy*, is based on a television programme to which I purchased rights, including the approval of some but not all of the people who appeared in the programme. Looking back, I feel embarrassed, slightly stupid. How did I miss the possibility that writing these screenplays could attract the same kinds of problems that arose in the *Getting Free* project?<sup>279</sup>

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<sup>277</sup> Evans 1992.

<sup>278</sup> See above 55ff.

<sup>279</sup> Idem.

Could these screenplays attract the same potential problems as my autoethnography, but remain unregulated?

When I transferred to creative writing, I was in an environment where advice to writers may include “Write as though everyone’s dead”; “Write a story (about identifiable individuals) and then do the research”; “Write about what you know and what you don’t know”. Ethics approvals were often not an issue.

But I found it increasingly difficult to write *Lost Boy* and to contribute to *Red Dinghy*, in spite of excellent support and advice. I found it hard to write about one *Lost Boy* character who was still alive. I found myself worrying about some other living, secondary, characters; neither the television channel nor I had approached them for permission to use ‘their’ story. I tried to contact them, without success. I then changed the names of all characters and was able to move forward, a little. And I had some related difficulties with *Red Dinghy*. It took me a long time to understand that all these problems were because in some ways these screenplays were transitional, located between my own autoethnographic writing and the *Getting Free* documentaries about others, and ‘pure’ fiction. This mattered, for ethical reasons, even though I eventually concluded for the purposes of this thesis that fiction is also likely to have an autoethnographic element.<sup>280</sup>

When I wrote *Development*, based on work I had done according to the autoethnographic framework described in this chapter, within the parameters of my ethics approvals, readers with whom I had and had not communicated earlier found it reflected their own experiences. I made one change for a reader with whom I had discussed—and recorded—her experience, according to the ethics agreement. However, some readers who had not provided data were concerned that someone else had told me ‘their’ story. I did not feel obliged to make any change, because I had invented these stories, but decided to reinvent some small things to protect those

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<sup>280</sup> See above 74ff.

individuals.<sup>281</sup> Who knows though, those reinventions may bring the stories closer to those of other individuals, unknown to me.

About this time, I received notifications of a group of North American arts-related autoethnographic PhD theses, few of which, when I read them, discussed ethics issues. For example, Scott William Gust wrote intimately about his parents within his *A Performance of Identity* thesis.<sup>282</sup> He writes carefully about his ethical views, and states that he:

...has come to believe the issues of quality and tone of writing and the representation of others are the fundamental ethical challenges for scholars of automethods...I have sought to match, to the best of my ability, the tone and quality of my writing to how I understand my relationships with the individuals portrayed in each of my narratives. I explicitly wrote my narratives of home and family in a way that I believe to be very different than I wrote my narratives of friends and adventures...When a scholar of automethods knowingly or unwittingly casts any person as a scapegoat, he or she risks what might best be described as the implosion of her or his scholarly intent.<sup>283</sup>

I found this passage stimulating and inspiring: I want to talk with Mr Gust. But he appears not to have had to gain ethics approval for his research. Another creative practice autoethnographer PhD candidate, Berneking Kogut, gained ethics approvals only for interviews and questioned whether she could exploit herself in an autoethnography.<sup>284</sup> ‘Exploit’ can mean ‘to use well’ as well as ‘to use unfairly’: for autoethnography means that I use every bit of myself. And I am uncertain about the point where using myself as fully as possibly (well) falls over into being unfair to myself, though at the outset I acknowledged that I am now more self-protective than I once was.<sup>285</sup>

I emailed Carolyn Ellis and asked whether autoethnography research had to go through ethics approvals in the United States. She responded, in part:

Usually in the US, students do ethnography of which autoethnography is a part so they get IRB<sup>286</sup> approval for ethnography which includes reflexivity. Almost all our

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<sup>281</sup> “Aah, but where did the idea come from? Interesting question”, asks Lesley. “My observation, experience and imagination”, I answer.

<sup>282</sup> For example, his parents’ sleeping habits: Gust 2005: 136-137.

<sup>283</sup> Gust: 141-143.

<sup>284</sup> Kogut 2007, Stacey 1988: 340.

<sup>285</sup> See above 20.

<sup>286</sup> Institutional Review Boards.

students doing theses have gone through an ethics process though some don't discuss it in their theses. It has become more a requirement to do so now than before. And now also autoethnography articles are being scrutinized more closely by ethics boards, though ours still make the decision that autoethnographies do not have to come through them since autoethnography is not 'really research' by traditional definition.<sup>287</sup>

This email shocked me.<sup>288</sup> It seemed to me that if autoethnographers were serious about autoethnography being 'legitimate' research, it worked against their interests to argue that it was not 'really research' and therefore ethics approvals were unnecessary. This would also be true for a creative writing researcher who might otherwise 'write as though everyone is dead'. And then I realised that having adopted literary conventions in the way they write,<sup>289</sup> autoethnographers may also claim an immunity to regulation similar to that claimed by artists and writers.

Does this mean that if autoethnography and creative writing are both accepted as 'research' they must accept ethics regulation? This view has some support within Estelle Barrett's Appendix to *Practice as Research: Approaches To Creative Arts Enquiry*. There, Barrett lists, under *Ethical considerations*: nature of representation; permission of subject to use material in research; appropriation of materials and copyright issues; permission to tape record conversation; invasion of privacy; confidentiality; and 'other?'<sup>290</sup>

Almost contemporaneously with Carolyn Ellis' email I received a document from the insurer I had asked to quote for the *Development* production.<sup>291</sup> It lays out the rigorous requirements for insurance of a film production. To obtain cover, the production's lawyer must, inter alia, ensure that the script contains no material that is defamatory, invades privacy, or is otherwise

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<sup>287</sup> Email communication 1 April 2009.

<sup>288</sup> I have also struggled with some of Carolyn Ellis' own autoethnographic writing, which I believe sometimes objectifies those about whom she writes. She herself acknowledges her ethical dilemmas in Ellis 2009[a] and 2009[b]. (She states too, that "ethical issues are complex and no simple mandate or universal principle applies to all cases": Ellis 2009[a]: 307.

<sup>289</sup> See n215 and accompanying text, and above 86ff.

<sup>290</sup> Barrett and Bolt: 193.

<sup>291</sup> Aon Risk 2009: 8-9.

potentially actionable; a copyright report must be obtained; the origins of the work must be checked for theft or infringement of another party's rights; and a title report should be obtained. Whether the script is fictional or factual, it should be made certain that no names, faces or likenesses of any recognisable living person are used unless written releases have been obtained, unless someone is in a crowd scene or shown in a fleeting background. A living person is defined as including "thinly disguised versions of living persons or living persons who are readily identifiable because of identity of other characters or because of the factual, historical or geographic setting"<sup>292</sup>. Releases can only be dispensed with if the applicant "provides the insurer with specific reasons, in writing, as to why such releases are unnecessary and such reasons are accepted by the insurer"<sup>293</sup>. Releases are also necessary for language use, juxtaposition of fiction with actual events, use of music, buildings, businesses, personal property or products. And the author's sources for actual events must be independent and primary.

While an argument can be made for writing a strong script and launching it into the development process where any problems become the producer's, and the producer's lawyer, and that any writer can make changes to meet legal requirements, these restrictions also arguably support the use of research ethics within creative writing research. Like research ethics they are based on concern for individual rights to the autonomy 'found in being yourself, speaking for yourself, and in deciding the course of your own life'<sup>294</sup>.

At this point I re-read Marge Wong's article about research methodology. "It must...honour the research subject appropriately," she writes, "especially if he or she is from a culture which differs from that of the researcher."<sup>295</sup> Later,

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<sup>292</sup> Ibid: 9.

<sup>293</sup> Idem.

<sup>294</sup> See n179 and accompanying text.

<sup>295</sup> Wong: 46.



she states: “The lack of culturally-specific expertise in research methodology can cause a great deal of emotional harm”<sup>296</sup>.

I am a native subject, as an activist, a filmmaker, and—in creative practice including feature-filmmaking-as-research—as a woman. Researchers from different and better resourced cultures—publicly funded academic and cultural institutions, the media, or the mainstream film industry—may not ‘honour the research subject appropriately’. And we, I, or anyone at all as a research subject, whether or not within a creative writing project like this thesis, may suffer emotional harm. When I considered this project as a whole and my multiple, shifting, positions I had also to accommodate Linda Tuhiwai Smith’s concern that an ‘insider’ researcher be “humble because the researcher belongs to the community as a member with a different set of roles and relationships, status and position”<sup>297</sup>. I have suffered emotional harm from being a native subject in others’ research; a formal ethics framework offers me a structure within which I can attempt to honour, and to avoid inflicting emotional harm on, those I refer to within or outside my home cultures.

Essentially, this means that even in my memoir, Chapter 2, any mention of an identifiable individual falls into the first category of individuals as identified in my ethics approvals; each had the opportunity to ask for amendment, deletion and to comment for inclusion.

### *Moving through development stages with Development*

You can adapt to lean times and still make stuff...stripped back to something simple and direct and profound about human interactions and communication...going back to what’s enriching about film: seeing the soul of another person, the richness and the glory that lies behind the human face.<sup>298</sup>

In the final element of the fieldwork I started to explore how to engage with the digital age’s opportunities to open space for the second and third stages of *Development’s* development as a ‘shadow’ feature.

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<sup>296</sup> Ibid: 49.

<sup>297</sup> Tuhiwai Smith: 139.

<sup>298</sup> Mayer 2009: np.

The second phase of development always involves finding a producer. Erica is a public artist who has managed many projects, including some in the United States with corporates like Disney. We taught together at Weltec and she knows my strengths and weaknesses well. I was delighted when she became ‘chief cheerleader’ as she describes herself, or producer, which describes her in film industry terms, for *Development*’s development. To match her, I have become the drum major.

Working more slowly than either of us is used to, we commenced the second and third development phases as a carefully considered performance piece, based on my methodology-from-experience and taking account of Gotschall’s view of the global situation for women storytellers and in the film industry specifically, as identified in this research. We were not concerned to make money. But, using the elements of Choy’s creative triangle: problem-solving, assertiveness and (mutual) support,<sup>299</sup> we wanted to provide investors with benefits, to ensure that the cast and crew would be paid, and that *Development* reached its audience, and to create a sustainable model that other New Zealand women can also use with confidence.

This is not easy. Recouping all investment in a feature film is unusual. For example, historically—and with some exceptions—the NZFC and the Film Fund do not recoup their investment in its (our) features.<sup>300</sup> The state invests money in individual writers and directors and producers who are not expected to provide a financial return, although there are processes in place that are designed to reduce risk. (Since the likelihood that the NZFC and the Film Fund will recoup their production investments, even over a long period, is already so small, I wonder, perhaps there’s more space than everyone thinks to experiment with opening space for more women’s projects.)

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<sup>299</sup> See n256 and accompanying text.

<sup>300</sup> The NZFC projects that during 2010-11 it will recoup—from all its productions—about 7.75% of the amount it invests in film production during that period, not including its investment in feature development but including the SFF investment which includes a development component—New Zealand Film Commission Te Tumu Whakaata Taonga 2009[b]: 18; and the Film Fund’s report which explores some reasons for its generally low recoupment: New Zealand Film Production Fund Trust 2009.

As well, internationally, where there is a glut of independent films, financing has dried up.

[E]ven well-regarded films have struggled to make a profit...The huge financial returns on a tiny number of films out of the...thousands of independent films over the past few decades have blinded many people to the realities of how difficult it is to recoup investments and actually make money in the movie business.<sup>301</sup>

As well, on many New Zealand film projects, cast and crew reduce or defer their fees;<sup>302</sup> anecdotal evidence is that films often do not make enough money to pay them so a deferral is likely to be permanent.

Delivery was also problematic. At first, I thought that alternative delivery strategies, through streaming and DVD internet sales, might ensure that we could recoup money for donors/investors. Several people told me that Australian Rachael Lucas had been very successful in doing this, with a strategy that brought together surfing culture and the Japanese and Australian markets.<sup>303</sup> But many films delivered through alternative systems don't recoup their costs.<sup>304</sup> Piracy can be an issue; filmmakers who hope that free internet delivery accompanied by a conventional or social media campaign will generate an audience and be followed by increased DVD sales, may be disappointed.<sup>305</sup> As one distributor lamented to me at the NZFC's *Smashing the Window* seminar,<sup>306</sup> "How is anyone going to make any money?" from alternative delivery modes.

Among possible 'shadow' projects that appear to have been financially viable are *The Age of Stupid*, which used crowd funding, where many individuals bought a tiny share in the film which they may or may not recoup,<sup>307</sup> and the Paul Fraser/ Shane Meadows *Somers Town*, a low budget feature paid for by Eurostar. *Somers Town* is variously described as an act of 'unbranding', of

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<sup>301</sup> Dargis and Scott: np.

<sup>302</sup> Butcher 2008.

<sup>303</sup> Lucas 2004.

<sup>304</sup> Elberse 2008.

<sup>305</sup> Potter 2009[d].

<sup>306</sup> Auckland, 3 October 2008.

<sup>307</sup> Barnett 2009.

corporate citizenship,<sup>308</sup> and as a way to control a company's image: "with new digital technologies it is cheaper to make a low-budget film than to pay for product placement in a blockbuster"<sup>309</sup>.

Rather than use either of these models as a beginning experimental filmmaker in a small country and the present industry environment, I searched for a strategy to mirror those I'd used to open space for other kinds of stories. First, find a legal structure for fundraising that would provide some benefit to donors and ensure that we have the money to pay cast and crew. Women Make Movies in New York provided a model. It acts as an umbrella charity for United States women filmmakers, through which donors can channel funds and receive tax benefits.<sup>310</sup> Victoria University's Victoria Foundation offered to be *Development's* umbrella charitable trust, so donors can get tax benefits in New Zealand, the United Kingdom or the United States.<sup>311</sup> This meant we could pitch internationally, to audiences and to donors, who can receive financial benefit, and opportunities to contribute to global cultural capital and to see a good film.

Sally Potter's *The Gold Diggers* production provided a helpful precedent for paying participants;<sup>312</sup> we decided, like her, to pay all cast and crew the same daily rate. With a commitment to a small, 'no-trucks' production, to locations both public and private that were situated in a very small geographical area, and a \$100,000 budget in place, the familiar search for a mix of individual, institutional, arts and human rights funders could begin. And a search for cast and crew.

Using the internet to help raise money and an audience, and for film delivery, seemed the obvious way to go. As I studied it, I began to participate in web-

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<sup>308</sup> Brand Republic 2008.

<sup>309</sup> Aftab 2008.

<sup>310</sup> Women Make Movies 2009.

<sup>311</sup> Victoria University of Wellington 2009.

<sup>312</sup> BFI Screenonline 2009.

based fora like *Women & Hollywood*,<sup>313</sup> and set up the *Wellywood Woman* blog and the <devt>Twitter account, the *Development* Facebook page, and then, with help from Meredith, a website.<sup>314</sup>

While the website and Facebook page encourages donors to support us it is also there to create awareness:

Creating awareness of a film, marketing it and making it an event, is the key to success in capturing attention and getting people to take a chance and commit time to it. With the seemingly limitless number of films now available, it appears that most people watch films they already know about.<sup>315</sup>

But, however well we could promote what we are doing, there was no guarantee that people would pay to download *Development*. Did we actually want to make money from it? Would we need to, once cast and crew had been paid? We decided that we would have a gala cinema premiere and then make *Development* available for free on our website, as a contribution to the international debate about women's rights as storytellers. We most want people to take time to view *Development* and to discuss the issues. And then to take action, to support women filmmakers in general and to try our model in particular.

Finally, as a filmmaker I am aware that "the aesthetic and economic consequences of ...new ways of watching [cell phone, computer screen etc] are not yet apparent"<sup>316</sup>. I hoped that *Development* would experiment with small screen aesthetics, with a strong emphasis on voice, and on the cinematic potential of the human face; and that some of the actors might also each choose to direct a single location.

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<sup>313</sup> Silverstein 2007-.

<sup>314</sup> Spiral 2009.

<sup>315</sup> Dargis and Scott: np.

<sup>316</sup> Idem.

## *Transition 2: To Report*

My *PhD Report* summarises what I learned from reviewing the literature about women's participation in feature filmmaking, from my analysis of NZFC investment in women writers and directors, and from conversations, seminars and workshops about my academic work. It also draws on the experience-based methodology and knowledge described in Chapter 2, to place the gender and film oriented material in a wider context. And it starts to explore how and why women might write 'differently', as I moved along with my own screenplays.

The *I* of my *PhD Report* is an *I* for a particular audience: people in the industry. It was a carefully considered autoethnographic *I*, a record of myself in academic culture and as an activist, trying to come to terms with the issues and to communicate them beyond academia and other activists. I hoped that an autoethnographic account that acknowledged my uncertainties, and the strength of my engagement as a 'native subject'<sup>317</sup>—a woman who wants to write feature films and has a lot to gain from a changed industrial environment—would help readers feel that they were engaged in a conversation; and encourage them to reflect on and discuss their own experiences, similar or different. I hoped that the informal writing style would help readers make their way through unfamiliar material. I hoped that providing questions rather than answers, here as elsewhere, would encourage readers to become active, to think about the questions for themselves, and to ask further questions. Most of all, I hoped that the report would help bring about change. On reflection, fifteen months later, I believe that the comment of one reader encapsulates the most significant barrier to this disruption, a New Zealand-specific paradox that reinforces resistance to change:

I am one of those women who have said 'Discrimination in NZ? But what about Jane Campion etc'... But I wasn't intending to name the exceptions... I thought the list of women film directors was long, equally as long as men's ... The women have

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<sup>317</sup> See above 69ff.

been in the forefront of my mind, because more of their films have been significant to me... I have thought it was women who lead the way in NZ.<sup>318</sup>

Jane Campion, Philippa Boyens and Fran Walsh, Niki Caro and Christine Jeffs, have given New Zealand women writers and directors such a high profile internationally that it's hard to believe that there may be any discrimination within the state funding system. These women, too, may resist the idea that discrimination exists. During the Cannes Film Festival press conference for her *Bright Star* Jane Campion referred to New Zealand as the first place in the world where women got the vote and stated that that emancipation lay at the core of New Zealand culture. She then went on to say:

We've been very very lucky because some of our cinema has been state sponsored and they have to be fair to men and women. It's part of the expectation.<sup>319</sup>

In September 2009 a quantitative researcher pointed out that the sample size provided in the NZFC decision-making is often too small to provide enough data to draw conclusions. However, I argue that overall there is enough data—especially in the First Writers Initiative (FWI) and produced features categories—to establish whether or not there is an overall gender balance in NZFC investment and that this argument is supported through the qualitative data. State funding has not been fair to women.

This chapter and the next refer generally to information gathered from conversations with individual filmmakers, recorded in my thesis diary as they occurred.<sup>320</sup> It is impossible to provide direct quotation from individual stories, even unattributed; my informants feared being identified, being identified as victims, and the professional consequences of speaking out publicly. But I refer to them for a group of reasons. The stories I heard and the actions I observed and recorded in my thesis diary were an integral and significant part of that aspect of my research, which I feel obliged to report, albeit obliquely. The themes in the stories I heard and recorded confirmed my perception that the conditions under which contemporary women

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<sup>318</sup> See n379.

<sup>319</sup> Festival de Cannes 2009: Timecode not available

<sup>320</sup> The diary and associated emails are about 80,000 words in length.

filmmakers work have much in common those that women artists have historically experienced. The stories also added to my understanding of the operation of contemporary contextual mechanisms and belief systems that affect women writers and directors, whose lived experiences—I believe—influence the statistical record. Furthermore, I believe that if I record the stories' general content here, women filmmakers may feel encouraged to speak out publicly about their individual experiences and to expect to have their concerns taken seriously. Finally, stories from my own history and from people who talked with me for this project provided material for Chapter 6.

I have chosen not to amend the report in any way, except to standardise the references; it reflects my research and thinking at that time only.



## *4 PhD Report For People Who've Helped Me*<sup>321</sup>

### Introduction

Over the last eighteen months, on a PhD scholarship funded in memory of filmmaker Di Oliver-Zahl, I've been measuring New Zealand women's recent participation in feature filmmaking, excluding documentaries, and comparing it with men's participation. I've focused on scriptwriters but have paid some attention to directors because there are so many writer/directors. The results of this measurement will provide reference points for my thesis fieldwork, as I explore how autoethnography might generate information about women's experiences when they write scripts for feature films.

I've also talked informally with about ninety people in the industry in New Zealand, Europe, Australia and the United States and promised to keep them informed about my progress. This is the first instalment of the promised information. It's taken a long time to finish because while working on the statistics I've had to read a lot across several disciplines for my PhD proposal (my PhD will be in Management), and worked on some scripts. A big thank you to all of you who've talked with me. Some exchanges have been very brief, and only by email. Others have been complex and have continued intermittently over two years or so. But each one has been helpful and I've appreciated all of them.

I also acknowledge the strong and warm support of my supervisors at Victoria University of Wellington: Dr Deborah Jones of the Victoria Management School and Dr Lesley Hall of Gender & Women's Studies.

There's so much I don't know and don't understand. This report is just a beginning. I hope it will lead to more discussion with you. Please feel free to phone or email me any time. And a special thank you to those of you who've

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<sup>321</sup> April 2008.

read an earlier version of this report and pointed out some gaps I hadn't noticed and some possibilities for future reference.

According to the theory I'm using (autoethnography's use and meaning is vigorously debated) autoethnography is based on the experience of a single research participant, the researcher herself, within a specific culture. In my case, the culture is the film industry in New Zealand. (Autoethnography may generate information that would be unavailable to a researcher whose experience in and commitment to the culture being studied is as a researcher only.)

I will present my thesis, due for completion in late September 2009, as a feature-length script about the creation and deferment of hope for a woman engaged in script development processes.<sup>322</sup> It may end in realisation of her (mostly my) hopes for a script, or in her (my) disappointment. Either way, I hope interested people in the film industry will read the thesis script and find it useful.

In the next stage of the research, the fieldwork, I'll enter three different kinds of development pathways, each with one of my own feature scripts, one written in collaboration with Cushla Parekowhai, to discover how the experiences affect me and whether I feel or observe that my gender affects those experiences.

This informal report is in two parts. The first is an outline of possible ways to make a feature film in New Zealand, a summary of statistics about women writers' and directors' recent participation in feature filmmaking, and the questions I have about these figures. Full statistical details based on data up to June 30, 2008 will be available in my thesis.

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<sup>322</sup> I loved reading David Mamet's: "...dramatic structure consists of the creation and deferment of hope...The reversals, the surprises, and the ultimate conclusion of the hero's quest... in direct proportion to the plausibility of the opponent forces", Mamet: 111, because it can apply to women's hopes of participating in feature film writing and to my own voyage through the PhD process, as well as to a script. One reader responded to Mamet's statement with "Hope deferred makes the heart sick, desire fulfilled is a tree of life" Proverbs 13:12. And I agree that hope and desire have an interesting inter-relationship; one definition of hope is that it is desire combined with expectation.

The second part considers two larger frameworks that may affect the statistics: aspects of the contexts women scriptwriters work in, and of the content we produce within those contexts. I'll keep these frameworks—and the questions I have about them—in mind as I work on my scripts. The footnotes provide both references and some information about where I'm going as I complete this report, a kind of subtext.

This year's Writers Guild of America West statistical report examining trends in film and television employment and earnings is entitled *Whose Stories Are We Telling?* It encapsulates my motivation better than I can. I am involved in this project because scriptwriting is:

...a definitive phase of the production process... [T]he importance of [the stories scriptwriters tell] and of the people telling them cannot be overstated. These are the stories through which our society defines what it is, what it is not, and what it hopes to be. [The scriptwriters] are the people whose experiences shape the underlying reservoir of ideas. In other words, industry diversity is not only about equal access to employment opportunities; it is also about opening space for the telling of stories that might not otherwise be told.<sup>323</sup>

I am more interested in industry diversity that opens space for “the telling of stories that might not otherwise be told” than in equal access to employment opportunities which may not open that space.

Of all New Zealand arts practitioners, writers have the lowest median income from their principal artistic occupation;<sup>324</sup> we arrange our lives accordingly though it isn't easy. An (ungendered) film artist who seems to be a writer told CNZ researchers a story that's very familiar to me:

Money is one of the main problems writers have. Another problem is getting things published. Constant rejection takes up a large portion of your life and you don't earn a thing. You lose faith in yourself and you have to live virtually on no income. Support from my partner keeps me going financially.<sup>325</sup>

As well, for scriptwriters, “being ‘in development’ or to use its more technical definition ‘being unemployed’ is your natural state”<sup>326</sup>. For me, the only

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<sup>323</sup> Hunt 2007: 51.

<sup>324</sup> Creative New Zealand 2003: 51.

<sup>325</sup> Ibid: 54.

<sup>326</sup> Cleary 2007[b]: 2.

reason to write scripts is that my desire to tell a story that might not otherwise be told is stronger than my desire for an ‘employment opportunity’ whether or not the opportunity is a storytelling one.

When I started this project, because state subsidies are central to the New Zealand feature industry, I wanted to establish the extent to which women writers, as storytellers and taxpayers, benefit from these. Where women are underrepresented, it is important to consider why this might be so, and how we might participate more fully in various programmes. Because self-funded feature filmmaking and alliances with commercial entities that are independent of the state are also options, I wanted to know what these might mean for women, too. Fortunately, since New Zealand is so small, it is easier here than in other countries to find information about the various possibilities. But I have gaps, of course.

## Part 1: Statistics

### Background

For many New Zealand filmmakers, the ideal is to make a feature that has global distribution. To do this, (except for Peter Jackson and those associated with him, or those based outside New Zealand) filmmakers usually engage with government-subsidised programmes, all somehow connected with the NZFC, as well as seeking investment from other sources.

The Film Commission’s latest *Statement of Intent* was developed in the context of the Labour government’s focus for the decade on economic transformation, families, and national identity. It is “to have a leadership role in developing New Zealand’s national cinema within the wider screen production industry”. It will realise this vision through producing “cultural and economic outcomes within commercially-disciplined processes and practices”<sup>327</sup>. Feature filmmaking is fundamental to the vision: “Quality audience-focused feature films which contribute to New Zealand’s cultural

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<sup>327</sup> New Zealand Film Commission Te Tumu Whakaata Taonga 2007[a]: 4.

capital are the culmination of all the NZFC's outputs"<sup>328</sup>. New Zealand film will reflect "a vibrant image of this country's diversity, talent and technical excellence"<sup>329</sup>. However the *Statement of Intent* does not define diversity and the only explicit commitment to promoting diversity is one to the development of Maori films "to ensure that tangata whenua cinema is a dynamic constituent voice within New Zealand film"<sup>330</sup>. Gender is not mentioned.

Although some producers self-fund feature film development, the NZFC tends to be seen as the 'one door' for development finance. And although many producers develop and use their own international networks, most also develop relationships with international producers and distributors through the NZFC, which takes equity in any project that it funds.

For beginning filmmakers the traditional pathway to making a first feature is to write and direct a short film as a kind of calling card, funded through the NZFC short film programme. Very often this film is written and directed by the same person. If it does well on the international 'A' list festival circuit (i.e. is selected for festivals like Cannes, or Venice or half a dozen others), development of an NZFC-supported feature script may follow.

In the next step to making a feature a writer or writer/director writes a feature script and finds a producer, or is invited by a producer to submit a script. The producer then applies to the NZFC for early development funding, then for advanced development funding. When the project is almost fully developed, probably with some cast, and distribution and international investment attached, the producer applies again—or for the first time if development has all been funded 'in-house'—to the NZFC for production funding.

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<sup>328</sup> Ibid: 6. The statement footnotes George Barker's definition of cultural capital (2000): "[It] creates a shared identity which helps connect individuals. It has aesthetic, cognitive and moral dimensions. It is collectively owned and forms part of the endowments which each generation receives from the past and builds on for future generations."

<sup>329</sup> Ibid: 5.

<sup>330</sup> Ibid: 11.

Once made, these films often premiere in prestigious international film festivals and are released in local cinemas and internationally. In addition, there are a few relatively inexpensive features made within targeted NZFC programmes, the Signature and Headstrong films.

Over the last five years, the NZFC has also had an annual programme called the FWI that aims to identify a small group of new feature writers and support a project from each of them. Jonathan King's *Black Sheep* was the first completed feature from this programme.

An increasingly common alternative is to participate in the 'lo-budget' or 'shadow' industry,<sup>331</sup> largely invisible to the public because most of these features are not distributed in cinemas or shown on television.

Options for financing a lo-budget or shadow feature include:

- Self-funding, probably with help from cast and crew, private investors and/or community organisations;
- Self-funding development and then applying to the CNZ-managed and partially NZFC-funded SIPF for production costs (up to a maximum of \$25,000);
- Applying to the NZFC for post-production funding only.

Some of these features appear in local and international film festivals; this year at least one had a limited, local, cinema release. Those who make this kind of feature may then enter the NZFC development processes for their next, instead of taking the successful short film route. I will refer to these features as shadow films because I like the idea that at any moment one of them might jump out of the shadows and bite us.

The material that follows refers to eight categories of activity that relate to feature filmmaking: features released into cinemas between January 2003 and December 2007; produced features in the same period; features NZFC-

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<sup>331</sup> Cleary 2007[a]: 1.

funded for development July 1, 2004-June 30 2007; short films over the last decade; FWI; NZFC Writers Award; the SIPF; and the *48Hour* film competition.

I want to thank chief executive Ruth Harley and her staff at the NZFC, especially Jeremy Macey. When I first told Ruth what I wanted to do and asked her for access to unpublished data her immediate response was “We will help you”. They’ve more than helped; they’ve been generous, offering warmth, challenge and ideas. I’ve appreciated their patience, too (I’m slow with numbers). I also thank Linda Halle at CNZ for her generosity as she engaged with the statistics and me.

### *Features released into cinemas*

Twenty-four NZFC-funded features were released into cinemas between January 2003 and December 2007. Of these, women wrote and/or directed only two (8 percent, or one in twelve): Niki Caro wrote and directed *Whale rider* and Gaylene Preston wrote and directed *Perfect Strangers*. Fran Walsh and Philippa Boyens co-wrote *King Kong*; this takes the total for women writers on all New Zealand films released into cinemas to 12 percent (one in eight). The lowest percentage of women in other professions measured by the Human Rights Commission is 7.13 percent for directors of the top 100 New Zealand Stock Exchange companies.<sup>332</sup>

Women’s recent participation as writers and directors of feature films is measured differently from study to study and country to country, sometimes by individual films (how many films had women writers or directors) sometimes by actual numbers participating (taking account of co-writers and people credited on more than one project).

One study found that in 62 British films released into cinemas in the United Kingdom in 2007, women directed only four, 6.5 percent.<sup>333</sup> Women wrote only eight, 12.9 percent, a lower figure than in findings from a study of a

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<sup>332</sup> Human Rights Commission and New Zealand Centre for Women & Leadership 2006.

<sup>333</sup> Millward 2007.

random sample of 40 films certified as British in 2004 and 2005 and theatrically released. In this study, of 63 screenwriters credited 12, or 19 percent, were women, only one film, less than 2 percent, was written by a woman and only 17.5 percent of the films had women writers.<sup>334</sup>

In the United States, in 2006, 7 percent of all directors and 10 percent of all writers on the 250 top grossing feature films were women. In 2007 6 percent of the directors were women (continuing a decline from 11 percent in 2000). And, again, 10 percent of the writers were women, with 82 percent of the films having no women writers at all.<sup>335</sup> The figures vary between 12 and 33 percent for four European countries—Austria, Finland, Germany and Portugal.<sup>336</sup> In Denmark, between 1992 and 2002, 20 percent of directors and 17 percent of screenwriters were women.<sup>337</sup>

In a snapshot prepared for WIFT NSW, the Australian Film Commission (AFC) tracked women writer and director participation in feature films released during the five years between January 1 2003 and December 31 2007. This comprehensive list of one hundred films includes government-funded, not government-funded, and low-budget (under \$500,000) features if they screened at a festival or had a cinema release. It shows that women wrote 16 percent of these features and directed 13 percent. They co-wrote a further 10 percent and co-directed another 1 percent.<sup>338</sup>

I've heard, but been unable to confirm, that in France, because of a massive state investment in film to help preserve the language, women writer/directors are attached to about half the feature films produced. I've been unable to find statistics for other parts of the world, yet.

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<sup>334</sup> Rogers 2007: 33. See also Sinclair, Pollard and Wolfe 2006.

<sup>335</sup> Silverstein 2008[a]; Lauzen 2007.

<sup>336</sup> Cliché 2005: 32.

<sup>337</sup> Knudsen and Rowley 2004.

<sup>338</sup> [Australian Film Commission]. 2008. The AFC reports on the sex of applicants to film development, but unfortunately the statistics group together all core members of creative teams when recording gender: writer, director, producer; if a project has a writer and director of one gender but a producer of another, it is placed in the mixed gender column and this obscures writer/director gender proportions: Australian Film Commission 2007: 91.



### Produced features and low budget feature making

New Zealanders in New Zealand produced, but did not necessarily release, at least 53 feature films in the five calendar years ending December 2007. As far as I can establish, 25 were low budget films, made with no NZFC funding at all.<sup>339</sup> Of all 53, women wrote and directed four (7.5 percent).<sup>340</sup> Just one of these, Athina Tsoulis' *Jinx Sister*, was a low budget feature, making 4 percent of the low budget films. The other three were NZFC-funded: *Perfect Strangers*; *Apron Strings* written by Shuchi Kothari and Diane Taylor and directed by Sima Urale, a Signature film made for television and a small theatrical release and *The Strength of Water*, written by Briar Grace-Smith and directed by Armagan Ballantyne. *The Strength of Water* is the first feature written by a Maori woman since Riwia Brown wrote *Once Were Warriors* in 1994, an adaptation. The last feature a Maori woman wrote an original script for and directed was Merata Mita's *Mauri* in 1988. In the previous five years, before low budget films were common, women directed seven out of 37 features (18 percent); I have yet to analyse the writer figures for this time.

Between 2003-2007 mixed gender teams co-wrote five films (9.4 percent). These include *King Kong* from New Zealand's most successful writing team of all, Peter Jackson, Fran Walsh and Philippa Boyens, currently with *Lovely Bones* in production, and *Garage Sale/Second-Hand Wedding*, written by Nick Ward and Linda Niccol and directed by Paul Murphy. Women also co-directed three of these, all shadow films: *Gupta vs Gordon* (Jitendra and Promila Pal), *Invitation to a Voyage* (Victoria Wynne-Jones and Daniel Strang, SIPF-funded), *Down by the Riverside* (Marama Killen and Brad Davison).

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<sup>339</sup> This list is based on an NZFC list and information from other sources such as *Onfilm's* production listings and *The Big Idea* arts website. One more low budget film was made with CNZ funding and four were made with NZFC funding for 'small' features through the devolved NZFC Signature and Headstrong programmes. Several of the twenty-five received NZFC post-production funding once selected for festivals or when they found a distributor.

<sup>340</sup> *Whale Rider* was produced outside this period.

### *Questions*

Why is women's participation so low? Why has women directors' participation decreased over the last decade? Why are women not making low budget features? Are women resisting using the new technology to make features because of perceived distribution problems, as so few low budget films reach cinemas? Or are we uncomfortable with the new technology (I don't think so)? Do we fear 'having a go' and possible failure? These two possibilities could also be why women's participation is said to be very low in the *48Hours* film competition, another 'short' way to develop a track record and gain a profile in the industry. Given these figures, will the NZFC's signalled reduction in debut films, in its latest *Statement of Intent*, discriminate against women directors and writers?<sup>341</sup>

### *Features NZFC-funded for development*

In NZFC feature development funding figures in the four years ending June 30 2007, women writers were attached to 27.5 percent of project applications and 28 percent of approvals. Not all projects had a director attached, but of project applications that did, women directors were attached to 31 percent; and to 29 percent of the approvals. Women producers were strongly represented, attached to about half of applications and approvals. I do not have figures for applications to the Signature and Headstrong initiatives, which were devolved projects, managed for the NZFC by external producers.

### *Questions*

Why do comparatively few women apply—as writers and directors—for development funding? Would it help if the NZFC *Statement of Intent* referred to the importance of women's stories for creating cultural capital and a national identity and was explicit about women writers' and directors' potential contribution to 'culturally specific' films?<sup>342</sup>

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<sup>341</sup> New Zealand Film Commission Te Tumu Whakaata Taonga 2007[a]: 15.

<sup>342</sup> New Zealand Film Commission Te Tumu Whakaata Taonga 2007[a]: 8-9.

Why is the women writers' and directors' share of development funding larger than their share in the films actually produced and released over the last five years? Are more women's projects than men's falling over between development and production as they come up against international preferences? Or given that "If you're writing feature scripts anywhere in the English-speaking world then statistically 90 percent of your scripts will never get out of development"<sup>343</sup> are projects with women writers and directors attached in fact doing well, with a higher production/release rate than 2.8 percent?

Do women producers prefer to work with male writers and directors? Why? (I haven't talked to many producers; I felt ambivalent about approaching them because I knew that I might later want to find a producer for one of my own scripts and couldn't work out how to manage the conflict of interest most effectively.)

Women writers and directors are well represented in projects the NZFC funded for production in mid-late-2007. *The Strength of Water* and *Apron Strings* should be in cinemas in 2008, when the long-awaited *Vintner's Luck* written by Niki Caro and Joan Sheckel and directed by Niki Caro goes into production. What has caused this little group of films to appear all at once, when other features also written by women have fallen over within the NZFC development process? Is it possible that what is observed changes, i.e. has talking about the issue over the last year or so drawn attention to it and possible resolutions? Or is the higher successful participation just a 'blip'?<sup>344</sup>

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<sup>343</sup> Cleary 2007[b]: 2.

<sup>344</sup> Of course, all these films had been in development for some time before I started work. However I'm also aware of particular difficulties for women's projects like these, at the stage of advanced development when decisionmakers choose whether to take a risk and invest in a project's production. All kinds of beliefs feed into that judgment call, about a script, a director, audience; the quality of advocacy on behalf of the project and who advocates strongly for it also affect a decision. In my experience in other contexts, beliefs that inform advocacy and influence decisionmakers are often subliminal and unarticulated and when these beliefs are even subtly altered by new information, change can occur very quickly, at any stage in a long process. To give a very straightforward and *un*subtle example: when I learn that the box office returns for films women write are slightly higher than those for films men write (see below n390 and accompanying text) I'm more likely to fund production of the next project with a woman writer attached. But I understand that this little cluster is indeed a

### Short films

As noted, making a successful (usually NZFC-funded) short film is an established pathway to feature making. Analysis of the director information in the NZFC's *Review of NZFC Short Film Strategy*<sup>345</sup> shows that over the last decade fewer women (37 percent of the total) than men directors make NZFC-funded short films. However the women directors make a proportionately higher share of films accepted for 'A' list film festivals (42 percent of all accepted) than the men; and as individuals are significantly more likely to make an 'A' list film: 60 percent of women-directed short films get accepted for an 'A' list festival, but only 48 percent of those with male directors. I don't know whether women from other countries use short films as stepping-stones to features more or less successfully than New Zealanders.

### Questions

If women do so well with short films, why are they under-represented in the features statistics? I have no idea what 'A' list festivals look for when selecting short films, other than presumably 'high quality', but one reader of a draft of this report suggested that perhaps women's short films suit the (perceived?) art house bias of festivals, but their features tend not to suit the commercial criteria applied when evaluating feature ideas. Or do motherhood or livelihood issues sometimes kick in at this stage in women's careers?

### FWI

Women's experiences when they participate in this initiative over the last five years partially support the idea that there are institutional and attitudinal factors that hinder the advancement of women feature scriptwriters' projects.

The initiative has three stages. The submitted scripts are read 'blind', without the reader having any indication of who the writer is. From these, about twelve scripts are shortlisted and, with the names now attached, about six

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'blip' and that there will now be a gap similar to the one after *Whale Rider* and *Perfect Strangers*.

<sup>345</sup> New Zealand Film Commission Te Tumu Whakaata Taonga 2007[b].

writers are selected to participate in a workshop. From those who participate in the workshop a small number receive further funding and enter the NZFC development stream. There is a range of decision-makers along the way.

There were 104 applicants to the FWI the first year, and 64 in 2007, with a variety of numbers in between. Over the five years about 40 percent of applicants were women (this figure excludes the half dozen or so people with ambiguous names and includes some people—men and women—who applied several times over the years). Women writers make up 34.5 percent of the individuals shortlisted; 29 percent of workshop participants chosen from the short list; and 18 percent of those who receive further funding.<sup>346</sup>

These figures are especially interesting because the FWI selection process is blind at the beginning and takes place within a very contained timeframe. Women moving to another industry or having children, and other variables that affect longer processes do not affect its outcomes.

### *Questions*

What characteristics of some women's scripts (or readers' responses to them) mean that they are eliminated in the first cut?

I completed an M.A. in Creative Writing (Scriptwriting) at the International Institute of Modern Letters at Victoria University (IIML) in 2004<sup>347</sup> and took part in a Linda Voorhees master class group of twenty (nine women) selected from past M.A. students, in 2007.<sup>348</sup> Some women who have completed the M.A. (ten participants each year, almost always about half men and women), and some who also took part in the master class, have applied to the FWI over the last five years. But, unlike the men from these groups who have applied, these women have all been unsuccessful in reaching the short list.

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<sup>346</sup> This data comes from NZFC files.

<sup>347</sup> See below 145ff.

<sup>348</sup> A stunning learning experience for me, enhanced by membership of the ten-person Bluebirds group.

It is my belief that the work of women from my M.A. year, and from the Voorhees class, is as accomplished as that of men from these groups whose work I know and whose names are among those shortlisted. Their scripts made me laugh, cry and think. Because of this knowledge, I feel confident in asking: What ongoing internalized cognitive biases about content inform the selectors—women and men—and result in under-representation of women’s scripts in this programme? Is there now, or will there be, a ‘feedback’ effect operating so that fewer women apply?

What happens between shortlisting, choice of workshop participants and further funding that doesn’t work for women? What happens in the workshops that fails to advance women’s work? What can be done to ensure that more women apply, every year, to prevent a negative feedback effect?

### *Writers Award*

In 2007, the NZFC decided “to refresh and expand the development pool” through the Writers Award with applicants required to have “at least one screenplay credit on a New Zealand feature film”. Seven men applied and two women (22 percent). Four men and one woman (20 percent) received awards.

### *Questions*

Because the established paths to screenwriting credits are not working for women, they were largely excluded from application. In view of the FWI figures, the figures for produced and released features, for the applications and approvals for development funding and the short film figures, was the NZFC Writers Award discriminatory?

The outstanding local and international success of our women scriptwriters and of women who make short films justifies an argument that we may at the moment have a significant pool of unrealized female feature scriptwriting and

directing talent.<sup>349</sup> Could the NZFC refresh and expand the development pool by creating programmes designed to increase women's participation in feature scriptwriting? In Austria, the number of female screenwriters of feature films has more than doubled in the last decade following the establishment of programmes for women.<sup>350</sup> I have heard arguments that the development of this kind of programme would result in excluding women from applying to other programmes, or supporting scripts simply because they were written by women. But it should be possible to avoid these things through careful planning and allocation of resources.

### SIPF

Women made three of eight applications for feature production funding in 2005 (37.5 percent), five of 17 applications in 2006 (35.71 percent) and none of nine applications in 2007. SIPF funded one feature film in 2005 (with a male writer and director and a woman producer). None has been funded since, perhaps because of the projects were not sufficiently developed.

### *Questions*

Why have women stopped applying to SIPF for feature projects? Are they more likely to apply for short films and documentaries?

### 48Hours *film competition*

I have only anecdotal information about this competition and I haven't yet asked for statistics. I'm told that few women seem to participate as writers and/or directors in this annual event where participants have a weekend to complete a (genre) film that's between two and seven minutes long. Lots of

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<sup>349</sup> Of only three NZFC-funded films that have earned more than \$6 million, two were written by women, *Once Were Warriors* (Riwia Brown) and *Whale Rider* (Niki Caro), both adaptations of men's fiction. The third is *The World's Fastest Indian*. The next nine most highly earning films were all written by men: New Zealand Film Commission Te Tumu Whakaata Taonga 2007[c]. New Zealander Jane Campion is one of only three women who have won Oscars for an original script in the last eighty years and the only woman ever to have won the Palme d'Or. Fran Walsh and Philippa Boyens' scriptwriting Oscars for an adaptation were also rare for women, who have been members of winning teams only five times since 1955.

<sup>350</sup> ERICarts 2005.

women are involved in other roles. I understand that women also find their participation problematic in a similar Australian event, Tropfest, but the only statistics I've seen show that women directed only 129 of 611 entries in 2002.<sup>351</sup>

### *Questions*

Is this a microcosm of feature participation? Why do few women writers and directors take part? Are there alternative ways to build women's skills, experience and confidence?

## Part 2: Discussion

These statistics show that women scriptwriters'—and directors'—participation in feature filmmaking is problematic. As in other industries, however, it is possible to present an optimistic or a pessimistic scenario. Each depends on anecdotal information so I'm pleased to have as many statistics as possible about state-funded and shadow features to complement this, and would welcome any further statistics from producers.

Only one general proposition seems uncontested: making a feature film is hard for anyone. Peter Jackson says this: "You have to be relentless, really. That's what my story is. You just have not to give up"<sup>352</sup>. A group of women filmmakers in the United Kingdom use similar language: "Perseverance," "Determination," "Focus," "Obsession," "Persistence"<sup>353</sup>. Do many women lack these traits? What are the variables at work that either open space for women to tell stories that might not otherwise be told or restrict their potential?

At the moment, I think of the variables in two main groups: context and content. In general, the context includes all the variables other than the

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<sup>351</sup> Chapman 2002. Three women were finalists and Emma Freeman won the competition with *Lamb*.

<sup>352</sup> Cardy 2006: E2.

<sup>353</sup> Kellaway 2007: 3. For a range of women director views see also Hankin 2007.



content of a script: cultural background(s), skills, attributes and reputation; and access to resources. These include money to buy time to develop ideas and networks, allies and mentors to provide support, including access to audiences. Whether a woman chooses to be a writer or a writer who also directs and/or produces is also an important part of the context. As a writer, I focus on the processes that affect the development of a script; a writer with directing and/or producing responsibilities also has demanding commitments that continue through pre-production, production and post-production.

Context and content crossover: women's life experiences and experiences within various industry contexts may affect the content of their scripts (choice of theme, genre, structure) and the content of their scripts may affect their experiences in industry contexts (as possibly, for example, in the FWI processes and when the scripts are being considered by potential investors).

### *Context*

I've divided this section into five parts: background; the obstacles—internal or external; contextual mechanisms and belief systems; the effects of belief systems in the film industry; addressing the obstacles.

### *Background*

Almost fifty years ago, a group of accomplished women who wrote fiction and poetry also wrote about problems specific to women writers. All also acknowledged and addressed issues of differences among women writers.<sup>354</sup> In *Silences*, as Virginia Woolf had done a generation earlier,<sup>355</sup> Tillie Olsen, one of these writers, discussed women's lack of time, money and space and how this limits our ability to write, and the difficulties caused by responsibilities for children, all compounded by such accidents of birth as class and race.

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<sup>354</sup> Those whose work I've found particularly useful are Adrienne Rich, Alice Walker, Audre Lorde, Joanna Russ and Tillie Olsen.

<sup>355</sup> Woolf 1929; 1998.

Of writers taken seriously enough for their books to be reviewed, used in university courses and included in reference books and anthologies, Tillie Olsen estimated that only one out of twelve was a woman. This is about the same ratio as for New Zealand films written and directed by women and released 2003-2007. Tillie Olsen also cited another researcher's figures showing that only one out of five British books published between 1800 and 1935 were written by women.<sup>356</sup> This ratio is similar to gender ratios for writers of feature films in some countries today, for scriptwriters with features in development with the NZFC and for successful projects in the FWI and the recent Writers Award. It seems that women's contemporary public participation in storytelling, on film, is comparable to our historical participation in print. Does this (rough) correlation mean that in some respects the position of women storytellers is not much better than fifty or even two hundred years ago? And if so, why? Do women still lack time, money and space to tell stories on film for the same reasons they once lacked time, money and space to write books?

When I started reading, I expected to find that contemporary practitioners and academics had closely analysed the changing contexts within which women scriptwriters and directors work. But since the early 1980s, little has been written about the private as well as the public material conditions that affect women artists and writers, including women filmmakers, although some Australian filmmakers explore the meaning of gender in their careers in one book. Other filmmakers do this in a fragmented way in books of interviews or based on interviews.<sup>357</sup>

One academic, also a filmmaker, Laura Mulvey, identifies political reasons, in Britain at least, for this "break or fissure...that makes any relation of continuity or conceptual dialogue across the decades...harder and harder to maintain," between feminist film theory and practice of the 1970s when "...the cinema doubled as a major means of women's oppression through

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<sup>356</sup> Olsen 1978: 24.

<sup>357</sup> Francke 1994, French, McCreddie 2006, Weibrecht, Boorman and Donohoe, Wexman.

image and as a means of liberation through transformation and reinvention of its forms and conventions” and the present. However, without any reference to statistics, she is optimistic because “in the worlds of art and film...women’s presence as makers, curators, and critics has expanded enormously over the last two decades [and] new horizons have opened up with new technologies”<sup>358</sup>. Her article is not about the ideas explored by Tillie Olsen and others but supports the view that there has been a break in conceptual dialogue on issues that affect women filmmakers.

Another academic, Kelly Hankin, believes that feminist film scholars (she does not define this term) have not focused on conditions within the industry or outside it, particularly on the role of motherhood, including the desire for motherhood, because they are uneasy with essentialist ideas about women.<sup>359</sup> This fits with many women’s understanding, as expressed to me, of gender as something fluid and their preference for being known as filmmakers rather than as women filmmakers.

Another academic writer, Rosalind Gill, focuses on new and old gender inequalities that she finds largely unarticulated and undertheorised in discussions of new media and challenges the idea that new media work, in some ways very similar to film work, is egalitarian.<sup>360</sup>

Larissa Marno’s New Zealand research into gender imbalance in the film industry was perhaps compromised by participants’ self-censorship and most New Zealand research into women and film has focused on other issues, for example Deborah Shepard’s work to reframe women’s contributions to the film industry.<sup>361</sup>

When I realised that the fissure identified by Laura Mulvey exists and extends to dialogue about the conditions within which women filmmakers work, I decided to see if the ideas of the women writers from the seventies

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<sup>358</sup> Mulvey 2004: 1286-1287.

<sup>359</sup> Hankin: 72.

<sup>360</sup> Gill 2002.

<sup>361</sup> Marno 1997, 1998; Shepard 1992, 1998, 2000.

and early eighties would help me understand the context around women's participation in writing and directing feature films. And they have done this.

Some information indicates that women as storytellers are now very successful. In addition to the A-list festival successes of women short film makers, the high proportion of the most commercially successful New Zealand films written by women, and the prestigious international awards won by our women writers of feature films,<sup>362</sup> the top 'go-to' writers for television in New Zealand—producers' writers of first choice—are about half women and half men, according to one industry informant. Two out of three of the novels that appeared most frequently in the New Zealand best-seller lists in 2007 were by women.<sup>363</sup> On the other hand, CNZ research shows that for all women artists, including writers and filmmakers, our median income from our principal artistic occupation is less than a third of the income earned by men from their principal artistic occupation. From all arts work, our median income is just over a third.<sup>364</sup>

What happens for women who want to write and direct features, in the gap between some women's exceptional success—whether measured by a feature's earnings or by critical acclaim and awards—and the realities reflected in the NZFC's statistics and the CNZ research? Why is the proportion of women 'go-to' writers for television equal to that for men? Do women who write well and want to see their work produced on screen choose to write for television so that they have regular and regularly paid work, because making features is so hard and nine out of ten of features in development never get made? If so, does this commonsense decision-making

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<sup>362</sup> See above n349 and accompanying text.

<sup>363</sup> New Zealand Booksellers Association, 2008. The two women's novels, Jenny Patrick's *Denniston Rose* and Keri Hulme's *the bone people* have been around for some time; they appeared on the lists half as often as Lloyd Jones's *Mister Pip*.

<sup>364</sup> Creative New Zealand 2003: 50-55. I haven't been able to find any policy response to these figures. I wondered if they show the greatest income differential by gender within any occupation. I also wondered about the current breakdown of applications and funding by gender at CNZ and if women's share of allocations are any better than in 1980, when artists Janet Paul and Barbara Strathdee found a ratio of three women visual artists to every seven men who applied for funding to the Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council (CNZ in an earlier form); and that for almost eight men whose applications were successful only one woman succeeded: Paul and Strathdee.

extend to our reluctance to participate in the shadow feature industry, where a film usually has a tiny audience and may be less likely than a successful short film to lead to NZFC support for a feature?

Why do women producers participate in feature making more than women writers and directors do? Is it because, although a producer is an integral part of a creative team, the skills required are not storytelling skills and involve very different processes? Some people have suggested to me that women are successful as producers because they are highly skilled at nurturing and multi-tasking.

Do women who want to write or direct feature films have specific gender-related obstacles to overcome? Are these obstacles internal or external?

*The obstacles: internal or external?*

When I first started asking questions for this project, many women identified the obstacles as internal, referring to attributes that may restrict our potential as feature writers and directors. Some women told me that women lack confidence, or that men have a sense of entitlement and women don't.

Other women said that we need to be more courageous, more competitive, and as energetic in advocating for our work as men are. And I've noticed that I lack some of these attributes. When I accessed the NZFC's data I focused almost entirely on the research and tried to forget I was also a scriptwriter. But one day, at the end of a meeting, I asked one of the staff for some specialist information (not directly relevant to the NZFC's work) about a script I'm writing. When the staff member asked a question about the script itself, which I hadn't expected, I became hesitant. I stooped. I fiddled. The tone of my voice changed. I flushed. I wanted to run away. And this wasn't a situation where I needed courage, was competing, or had to advocate for my work.

Some women said we also need to be more willing to work as writers and directors-for-hire for television, theatre, and commercials;<sup>365</sup> and perhaps more willing to write adaptations, especially as New Zealand women writers have had critical and commercial success with adaptations.

One director outside New Zealand has attributed the small numbers of women directors (globally) as due to “women’s reluctance to bullshit”<sup>366</sup>. Other informants told me that if women really want to make features and work strategically, we can do it: that is, we have to take a problem-solving approach.<sup>367</sup>

Motherhood factors in their rich diversity may also create obstacles, particularly for writers and directors who want to delay having children until after their first features or do not have family and other domestic support.<sup>368</sup>

It seems that motherhood, the gendered hierarchy of care, and other domestic factors that both Virginia Woolf and Tillie Olsen identified may generate both internal and external obstacles, because women often want intimate relationships, children *and* satisfying work but resources available to support their choices are less readily available than for men.<sup>369</sup> Some

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<sup>365</sup> Some women feature producers, writers and directors do work in various roles in television. For example in the award-winning series *Being Eve*, credits in the first season (2001) included Vanessa Alexander (who wrote and directed the feature *Magik and Rose*) as producer, Niki Caro and Briar Grace-Smith as writers and Armagan Ballantyne as a director.

<sup>366</sup> McFadyean 1998.

<sup>367</sup> One reader of an earlier version of this report wrote to me: “This is what some women have told you? That it’s up to individual initiative? Sounds... very neo-con; does NOT sound feminist.” In this context, I’m not sure what feminist means, but I do know that women develop strategies to solve problems all the time, especially as we manage the demands of paid and unpaid work. From the statistics, New Zealand women producers do this particularly well. We also do this when engaging in other activities, such as playing sport, or bridge or chess or computer games; and in caring for children and the elderly. As writers we also develop strategies to survive, from careful gardening to mutual support networks. Why not strategies for getting our stories to the world?

<sup>368</sup> My understanding is that there may also be an insurance problem for women filmmakers who are pregnant, if they are essential to the film. After I read that Gurinder Chadha’s *Dallas* had been delayed because of her pregnancy a local insurance agent told me that an insurer may have some reticence to provide essential elements cover for a director because the cover goes right through to the end of post-production and with the length of time involved, pregnancy becomes a risk for the insurer.

<sup>369</sup> Looking for something else on the internet—as you do—I found details about *Who Does She Think She Is?* a feature-length documentary in progress that “explores the lives of five

people have told me that parenting issues continue to affect women artists more than men because we continue to have—and often want—primary responsibility for children. I’ve also heard that women are more likely than men to care for elderly parents and that it is easier for men who are artists to find partners who support them economically and emotionally than it is for women. Might having children and managing domestic responsibilities make it more difficult to write and direct features than to produce them? Is the kind of support necessary to sustain focus different for a woman feature writer or director than for a woman producer?

Niki Caro is one prominent example of those who believe that women are responsible for their own success, or lack of it. Niki Caro said at the beginning of her career: “I don’t feel as a woman I have any less to offer. The time’s long past where your gender makes a difference”, seeming to imply that a woman has as good a chance of success as a man if she ignores gender difference (in context if not content), is competent and believes in her own abilities.<sup>370</sup> Niki Caro’s own achievements appear to support this view.

And there is a belief that in time, any gender imbalance will work itself out. Riwia Brown, who wrote *Once Were Warriors*, says this in relation to Maori women filmmakers “The onus isn’t on the [NZFC]. I sit on that board and they do everything within their power to promote Maori work... It’s a very competitive industry to be in and it’s just going to take time [for Maori women writers, directors, producers]”<sup>371</sup>.

But Jane Campion expressed another view at the 2007 Cannes Film Festival. As the only woman who has won the Palme d’Or, she showed a fantasy short film about a lady bug—a woman dressed up in an insect costume, who gets

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women artists who are also mothers. In the film, each of the women sustains the competing claims on her heart despite financial hardship, institutional disinterest, and lack of support. Historically, women have not been able to mother and make art—neither pay. So how do these women do it? And why should it matter to us? *Who Does She Think She Is?* tells the story of ordinary women who pursue their calling—at a price—but for whom art has the power to transform their lives, and perhaps ours, into a deeper experience of living. The film is being produced by Mystic Artists in collaboration with the Wellesley Centers for Women”.

<sup>370</sup> Marbrook and Pradhan. 1990. Timecode reference not available.

<sup>371</sup> Perkins 2000: 155.

stomped on in a movie theatre. She identifies the problems as external, describing her film as a metaphor for women in the film world: “I just think this is the way the world is, that men control the money, and they decide who they’re going to give it to”<sup>372</sup>, she said, explaining why so few women get films made. She is also reported as saying: “It’s strange to be here with a big football tea[?m], like this. I’m making the best of it. It is sad. All of us would like to see more movies about how women see the world”<sup>373</sup>. A Spanish filmmaker, Iciar Hollain, has expressed a related view: “In reality, the doubts appear when they see our tits”<sup>374</sup>. That is, those who make decisions, who may be women, tend to have a fixed view of what gender means and what stories films may tell (a possible content problem), and deny women a chance to participate. I’ve heard women in New Zealand and Australia say similar things.

And I’ve heard them talk about concerns like some additional ones articulated by Spanish directors: “The works of women directors are less appreciated...our efforts at experimentation get cut less slack”<sup>375</sup> (Josefina Molina); “I always skip on the question of whether it is more difficult for women to direct films... But today I will dare answer it...yes it is more difficult... I would dare say that twenty years ago it was easier. At that time there were so few women in my profession that they always considered you a curiosity, an oddity, you were someone who was tolerated — a demonstration of their liberal character. Now we’ve gone from being curiosities to being the competition. And that’s as far as we have been able to get”<sup>376</sup> (Patricia Perreira).

The existence of external difficulties is confirmed in the regular Writers Guild of America West reports on equity issues. The 2005 report states:

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<sup>372</sup> Blalock 2007.

<sup>373</sup> Thompson 2007.

<sup>374</sup> Perez Millan 2003: 55.

<sup>375</sup> Idem.

<sup>376</sup> Idem.



The industry... provides few points of access for writers traditionally denied the chance to demonstrate their skills and gain experience. Until this basic structural truth is addressed, and until a norm of inclusion is enacted by industry gatekeepers both large and small, it is unlikely that the familiar story told in this report will change in any dramatic way. Without meaningful interventions targeted at the industry status quo, the industry will fall further and further behind a changing America.<sup>377</sup>

This industry status quo extends to other countries where, like New Zealand, filmmakers rely on complementary funding from international (usually male) investors to augment investment by state agencies. However, it's my belief that gender imbalance in New Zealand features is partly because the NZFC has no policies to address gender imbalances and only a quarter of its board members are women (though women are not always our own best allies). I also think that belief systems and the mechanisms they generate cause the external obstacles women face. And that it helps to talk about these and how they may work.

### *Contextual mechanisms and belief systems*

Joanna Russ, from the group of fiction writers and poets who addressed gender issues for writers in the 1970s and 1980s, identified common mechanisms used to underestimate women writers [and artists] and to undermine them in *How To Suppress Women's Writing*.<sup>378</sup> These mechanisms include ignoring women writers completely. They also include dismissing women's work because they write about the 'wrong' things, condemning them for writing in the wrong genre, blaming them for what others have deleted from their work, or simply joking about them. I have noticed the use of all these mechanisms as I talk with and about, and read about, women scriptwriters and directors. I've also noticed another one. People have often said to me "There is no problem, look at Niki Caro, or Jane Campion, Gaylene Preston, Merata Mita, Christine Jeffs, Philippa Boyens, Riwia Brown, Linda Niccol, Vanessa Alexander, Alison Maclean, Fran

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<sup>377</sup> Hunt 2005: 8.

<sup>378</sup> Russ 1983.

Walsh”: they focus on the exceptions without acknowledging that they are exceptions, implying that because the exceptions exist there is no problem.<sup>379</sup>

The effects of mechanisms used to underestimate and undermine us may affect the content and quality of our work as well as our ability to access resources. Tillie Olsen again:

[P]ressures towards censorship, self-censorship; toward accepting, abiding by entrenched attitudes, thus falsifying one’s own reality, range, vision, truth, voice, are extreme for women writers (indeed have much to do with the fear, the sense of powerlessness that pervades certain of our books, the ‘above all, amuse’ tone of others). Not to be able to come to one’s truth or not to use it in one’s writing, even in telling the truth having to ‘tell it slant’, robs one of drive, of conviction; limits potential stature; results in loss to literature and the comprehensions we seek in it.<sup>380</sup>

And Joanna Russ’ mechanisms remind me of belief systems that justify a person or group’s right to exert control and to impose on others their understandings of reality, motivations, responsibility and status. The belief systems may be explicit or covert, conscious or unconscious. They may be generated by fear of the unfamiliar or different and rely on fixed ideas about the meanings of gender, ethnicity, age, sexuality, ability, resources, appearance, role or what a script or film is or should be. The diversity of belief systems that lead to abusive behaviour, “an act of omission or commission that is judged by a mixture of community values and professional expertise to be inappropriate or damaging”<sup>381</sup> is well represented in New Zealand statutes that recognise the potential for inappropriate acts of omission or commission, within public or private spheres, and provide remedies for those who have been abused.<sup>382</sup> Outside legislation a specific

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<sup>379</sup> One reader wrote to me: “I am one of those women who have said ‘Discrimination in NZ? But what about Jane Campion etc’... But I wasn’t intending to name the exceptions... I thought the list of women film directors was long, equally as long as men’s ... The women have been in the forefront of my mind, because more of their films have been significant to me... I have thought it was women who lead the way in NZ.”

<sup>380</sup> Olsen: 44.

<sup>381</sup> McDowell: 88. McDowell argues that because the emotional/psychological harm from abuse is often the most difficult to heal, physical and sexual violence are a subset of emotional/psychological abuse.

<sup>382</sup> I’ve just read Dr Kim McGregor’s (director of Rape Prevention Education) epilogue to *Louise Nicholas; My Story* and learned that “since the 1980s the enormous problem of sexual violence [has] fallen off the public and political agenda”: Nicholas and Kitchin 2007:

term, like racism, homophobia or sexism is used to describe some of these belief systems.

To complement the ideas of Tillie Olsen and Joanna Russ when reading a statement like Jane Campion's "I just think this is the way the world is, that men control the money, and they decide who they're going to give it to", I refer to the MANALIVE list of controlling behaviours familiar to me from my legal practice and study.<sup>383</sup> The list specifies the kinds of harmful things people do when they have the power to make decisions that adversely affect others. It refers to the control of time, space (including controlling intellectual or spiritual space by belittling ideas, beliefs or capacity); controlling material resources ("We can't risk resources on a film that doesn't stick to the rules"); controlling speech, body language and gesture ("You can't have a character/behaviour like that in a script"); controlling reality and motivations by making someone responsible when they are not ("It's your fault your film can't get funding"; "You're not competitive enough"; "You aren't successful because you're not prepared to be a writer-for-hire"); or by assigning status ("Most women can't write films that sell").

This kind of control tends to be subtly expressed in creative industries decision-making. It may also be strongly defended through reference to (possibly unfounded) artistic or commercial judgments. Those adversely affected by this kind of control tend not to articulate it as a problem or challenge the judgments behind it, sometimes because they fear the consequences if they do. Many women filmmakers I spoke with, or read about, insisted that although women's participation in the industry was low, they did not want to talk publicly about it, often because speaking out might jeopardize future opportunities. Most of all they did not want to be seen as victims.

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243. Perhaps because institutions like Women's Refuge seem thoroughly established and I recently worked on a sexual violence project I had thought there had been no rupture in dialogue about—and action to prevent—sexual violence against women. Now I understand that the contemporary silence about the suppression of women writers has its parallels in silences about and lack of action to address other kinds of violence against women.

<sup>383</sup> P. Evans 1993: 33.

However, “[the] unnamed should not be mistaken for the non-existent. Silence often speaks of pain and degradation so thorough that the situation cannot be conceived as other than it is”<sup>384</sup>.

I thought of Joanna Russ and the MANALIVE mechanisms recently when I saw New Zealander Hamish Keith’s book—accompanying a television series that I did not see—*The Big Picture; The Story Of New Zealand Art Since 1642*.<sup>385</sup> The publicity about *The Big Picture* emphasises that it expresses a personal view. But because a series like this with an accompanying publication is rare and because the title claims to be *the* story it is likely to influence our national sense of identity, what children and students learn, and to affect artists’ sales and opportunities.

The final two chapters are mostly about art by living practitioners. They include 74 images, from a period when the numbers of women art students and practitioners have at least equalled those of men. Only nine of these images—around 11 percent—are of women’s work (one of them not a New Zealander). The only images included *of* women are made by men, although over this time many women explored how women look at and portray women differently from the way men do. (I saw the book on my way home from seeing some extraordinary, powerful, portraits of women by Fran Marno, and after a discussion of how and why she and fellow painter Linda James convey new things about women’s experiences and how women look at and paint women.)

To some extent, because it has reached a wide (New Zealand) audience, the ideas expressed or implied in *The Big Picture* are likely to control what happens in the spaces where contemporary art is taught and shown and discussed and bought in New Zealand. This will adversely affect women artists. Although I doubt whether Hamish Keith intended to do this, by almost ignoring contemporary women artists, he has belittled us and assigned us a status that is ‘less’ than men’s. He has probably contributed to a

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<sup>384</sup> MacKinnon 1979: xii.

<sup>385</sup> Keith 2007.

continuing differential between the incomes of women and men who are artists, thus indirectly controlling the money—and time to make art—available to us. He is implying to children of both genders, and to women students, that women artists and the way we see and portray women do not matter. This is ‘just the way the world is’ when men—and women who do not question their views—control resources including space, like a television series and book.<sup>386</sup>

And, I believe, very similar to what happens with film, although over a longer series of processes.

### *The effects of belief systems in the film industry*

I don’t know enough about how beliefs about economic efficiency, gender and audience affect decisions to invest in feature scripts, or about the relationships between actual and potential film audiences and commercial realities. However, they seem likely to affect decision-making and taking risks with content, especially for agencies whose decisions—unlike the NZFC’s decisions—do not have to take into account factors like our national identity. And I do know that in the United States at least, women participated most fully in filmmaking before it became commercially significant.<sup>387</sup>

Outside New Zealand, where scriptwriters are more often employed by studios to write—or rewrite—feature scripts, than initiators of their own

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<sup>386</sup> *The Big Picture* is, I believe, also just one example of the effects of the ‘fissure’ between the women’s art movement of the 1970s and the present, identified by Laura Mulvey (see n358 and accompanying text [and above 14]). My impression is that far less work by women artists from the period covered in Hamish Keith’s last two chapters reaches auction rooms; and when it does, it sells for much less than works by their male contemporaries. The silence and amnesia that the fissure has created has also disrupted women artists’ historical continuity, as men’s work becomes the ‘normal’ point of reference. In 2007 I helped moderate marking for film students at a tertiary institution and saw a film that reminded me strongly of experimental films by Joanna Margaret Paul (1945-2003), relatively easy to find through the New Zealand Film Archive. When I asked the student about the relationship of her ideas and imagery to Joanna Paul’s she had not heard of her. Her teachers were familiar with Joanna Paul’s work, but had not thought of referring the student to it; nor to Georgia O’Keeffe’s, which might also have been helpful as she developed her conceptual framework and aspects of her imagery.

<sup>387</sup> Mahar 2001.

projects, there is some evidence that beliefs about the economic viability of women's scripts and women's films work against their employment.

Martha Lauzen is reported as saying that "the unproved notion that men won't watch them" is chief among the complex web of factors that work against women's films.<sup>388</sup> This idea is based on a stereotype about women's stories and a misapprehension that (white, heterosexual) men are the primary audience for films. Martha Lauzen also believes that economic fear in the industry causes the situation for women to worsen because "When people are frightened they fall back on established patterns"<sup>389</sup>, that is, on choosing (white) men to write and direct scripts.

Jane Cussons, Executive Director of Women in Film and Television (WIFT) U.K. has said: "Film financing is high-risk venture capital, and somehow women are considered more risky"<sup>390</sup>. This may be the case whether men or women are making decisions: Abramowitz noted that even with three female studio heads in Hollywood, studios were still unwilling to entrust a \$50m movie into the hands of a woman as director.<sup>391</sup> In her view, the situation in the independent sector—particularly relevant in New Zealand—is not much different.

Liz Francke, in her celebratory book on women script writers, points out that women's scripts tend not to be associated with the kinds of films that generate high incomes from merchandising and are therefore not as attractive to large studios.<sup>392</sup> Today, merchandising opportunities may be even more important than when Francke was writing, just over a decade ago. This connects context and content, as a way for women to write 'the wrong thing'.

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<sup>388</sup> Pepper and Barchfield 2004: 62.

<sup>389</sup> Idem.

<sup>390</sup> Idem.

<sup>391</sup> Abramowitz 2000.

<sup>392</sup> Francke.

Producer Christine Vachon of Killer Films, like the Spanish women filmmakers, identifies financing entities' gender—and image-oriented beliefs—as problematic:

[They scrutinize] your project for marketable elements that will distinguish it from the morass of independent films...they want a director about whom good copy can be written... It helps if they're attractive. And it helps if they're male. I'm usually reluctant to spout stuff like: "If you're a female it's so much harder, if you're a male it's so much easier" —I hope it's a *little* more complicated than that. But I do think that the machine works better with boys. People are more familiar with the whole idea of a male director, especially when he's a maverick who's kicking the system. We did, however, get lots of ink for Rose and Guin from *Go Fish* because they are extremely presentable and very articulate.<sup>393</sup>

Script readers and producers, women and men, are part of this machine. They may have internalized some of these attitudes, the residue of many centuries of attraction to the wild, beautiful and sexy boy-genius-as-artist, and be influenced by them when reading women's scripts. They too may make exceptions for women who are 'extremely presentable and very articulate'.

The recent United Kingdom Women Screenwriter Study, however, found a good economic argument for including women's representation in the screenwriting role. In what appears to be a world first, the study found that United Kingdom films written by women were dollar for pound slightly more effective than those written by men. The box office return for films with a woman screenwriter was \$1.25 per £1 budget, compared with \$1.16 for films with all-male writers.<sup>394</sup>

The authors of the study found that people who commissioned—or presumably, were approached to fund—stories, perhaps unconsciously, believed that women did not write stories that would sell. They appeared to believe that the main audience for films was young men and that women could not write action and horror movies that appealed to this group. However, the data shows that overall cinema audiences were roughly equally

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<sup>393</sup> Vachon and Edelstein: 129-130.

<sup>394</sup> Sinclair, Pollard, and Wolfe: 19. The New Zealand experience may to some extent reflect this, especially in relation to the films Fran Walsh and Philippa Boyens write with Peter Jackson.

balanced between men and women, women over 35 are the largest single part of United Kingdom cinema audiences and for many individual films female audiences are in the majority. Comedy, not action, is the most financially successful genre and women like men can and do write a broad range of genres including comedy.<sup>395</sup> The authors argue that increasing women's representation—and reflecting the diversity of the United Kingdom society—may increase the strength of the film industry: economic realities support the encouragement of women writers.

Financing entities' age-oriented beliefs may also be relevant. According to one analyst, in the United States the 50 plus age group is the fastest growing segment of the population with a net worth five times greater than that of other Americans. This group controls 48 percent of all discretionary spending and includes more women than men.<sup>396</sup> As well, people over 50 control 80 percent of the United Kingdom's wealth.<sup>397</sup> Yet financing entities still seem to see the 'youth'—and male—market as the most important one. A recent Writers Guild of America West report noted that the employment rate of older writers had declined steadily over the study period and that this was "particularly troubling because it is out of sync with an America that is graying by the minute"<sup>398</sup>. I have been unable to find any research on feature marketing research and strategies for the 50 plus group, which may become more significant in the digital age.

### *Addressing the obstacles*

Within the film industry I suspect that the (often subtle and sometimes hard to recognise or believe) use of the MANALIVE and Joanna Russ mechanisms influence an individual's capacities to be confident, and to advance her own work and interests. I think that it is important to talk about these

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<sup>395</sup> Men *do* go to 'women's movies'—musicals, romantic comedies—which may or may not be written by women: Harris, Hoekstra, Scott, Sanborn, Dodds and Brandenburg 2004.

<sup>396</sup> Sanders 2002. I was reminded of this market when in an airport lounge filled with middle-aged couples watching DVDs on their laptops; I felt a little out of place with my book.

<sup>397</sup> Armstrong 2008: 28.

<sup>398</sup> Hunt 2005: 48.



mechanisms and develop a counter belief system that understands them as harmful. Exchanging stories about experiences can be part of this, providing an opportunity to form alliances for support that enhance individual resilience and the potential to resolve individual problems.

Addressing obstacles involves more than monitoring decisions about financial investment, whether the investor is a state agency or a purely commercial entity. The United Kingdom study of women feature scriptwriters advocated more research to clarify the nature and extent of the barriers women screenwriters face *and* beginning to take action to mitigate these by:

...encouraging decision-makers to be more conscious of their decisions; equipping women with the skills to survive in the profession; realigning the profiles of women screenwriters; and highlighting the extent of the under-representation of women and the need (social and business cases) for improving representation.<sup>399</sup>

An ERICarts (European Institute for Comparative Cultural Research) study, while identifying some recent increase in the participation of women feature screenwriters in some European countries, reached similar conclusions.<sup>400</sup>

Skillset United Kingdom appears to believe that training and networking are the main solutions.<sup>401</sup> However, this may not be enough. According to the 2005 Writers Guild of America West report:

In the past, the Guild has found value in the establishment of access programs and many such programs have been implemented by our employers. However... we must seriously consider whether access can be truly provided by programs or if it is people who provide access. Ours is a business based on personal relationships and social contacts. Work is distributed most fundamentally on the basis of a hiring party's personal knowledge of a writer's talent, commitment, character, work ethic, and overall appeal. This requires a social integration within the professional community and a personal access to company decisionmakers that is too often lacking for our colleagues who happen to be neither male nor white... It is abundantly clear to me that diversity in hiring requires a firm commitment on the part of decisionmakers...to actively seek out and read the work of writers who are women and people of color.<sup>402</sup>

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<sup>399</sup> Sinclair, Pollard, and Wolfe: 90.

<sup>400</sup> ERICarts.

<sup>401</sup> Skillset, and United Kingdom Film Council 2005.

<sup>402</sup> Hunt 2005: 4.

I think that any commitment on the part of decisionmakers to seek out and read the work of writers who are women and people of colour may also require those readers to be aware of the effects on readers and writers of entrenched mechanisms that contribute to cognitive bias.

Very often transparency about the existence and consequences of unacceptable behaviour helps make change, simply by raising awareness of a problem that can be fixed, although this has not worked in the United States. This transparency may include the consistent provision of statistical information as a basis from which to advocate and measure change.

Problem-solving strategies may include taking legal action. In the United States a group of 150 television scriptwriters has taken 23 class actions against networks, studios, talent agencies and production companies, for discriminating against them on the grounds of age. The writers contend that the entire industry and all the businesses within it have a common practice of age discrimination. Paul Sprenger, the lead attorney, has had considerable success in other age discrimination cases and says:

This is far and away the best case on the merits that I've had. No-one in Hollywood would say publicly "I don't hire women" or "I don't hire blacks" but they will say "I don't hire older workers".<sup>403</sup>

Scriptwriter Nora Ephron expressed a similar view in conversation with Marsha McCreadie:

Though I have experienced some blatant examples of ageism, there's never been a moment when I heard someone say, "Let's get a guy writer".<sup>404</sup>

Women's organisations can also help. Outside New Zealand women's non-profit-making organisations have provided and continue to provide opportunities to address issues that affect decision-making, audiences and resources as well as to provide networking and training. The Sydney Women's Film Group is a powerful historical example;<sup>405</sup> Studio D in Canada

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<sup>403</sup> Basler 2005: 1.

<sup>404</sup> McCreadie: 193.

<sup>405</sup> Chapman.

is an example of historical affirmative action resulting from activism.<sup>406</sup> Contemporary organisations include Women Make Movies (New York); some chapters of WIFT (I found one analysis of a WIFT chapter useful for evaluating the activities of others);<sup>407</sup> Guerilla Girls and Alice Locas; First Weekenders and POWER UP! (Los Angeles). And there are the festivals: long running festivals in Paris, Seoul, Ankara, Taipei and elsewhere and the more recent Birds Eye View festival and associated programme in London. In the United States, SWAN Day (Support Women Artists Now Day) is a new international holiday that celebrates women artists with all kinds of events including some that are film-related.<sup>408</sup>

I've been told off for suggesting that lobbying would be a good idea in New Zealand, and for not acknowledging that women here have lobbied to advance women's interests in film for some time. However, the lobbying could only have been informed by anecdote, the policies that affect state agency decision-making, and the number of released features directed and produced by women. I'm not convinced this could ever be adequate unless accompanied by a detailed analysis of where and how women writers and directors attempt to participate in the various feature making activities and programmes, and isolating specific problem areas (like the FWI). Anecdotes about women's difficulties in the film industry can easily be matched by anecdotes about men's difficulties and, in my opinion, are best used when they complement hard data. Lobbying may have been successful with NZOA which funds television programmes; these may include films but as I understand it only those already with NZFC investment and a commitment from a broadcaster.<sup>409</sup>

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<sup>406</sup> Burgess 2003.

<sup>407</sup> Nolan 2004.

<sup>408</sup> The first will be Saturday, March 29, 2008: <http://www.womenarts.org/swan/>.

<sup>409</sup> April 20 2008. After I completed this report, the *Sunday Star Times* reported that New Zealand on Air had just funded a feature film for television written and produced by two women, Donna Malane and Paula Boock: Anonymous 2008[b]. This may signal a new direction following the termination of the NZFC/ New Zealand on Air Signature programme.

Unlike the NZFC and CNZ, NZOA has to consider the interests of women. Legislation requires NZOA “to reflect and develop New Zealand identity and culture by promoting programmes about New Zealand and New Zealand interests and by promoting Maori language and culture” and “to ensure that a range of broadcasts is provided that reflects the interests of women, youth, children, persons with disabilities and minorities (including ethnic minorities) and also the diverse ethical and spiritual beliefs of New Zealanders”<sup>410</sup>. The NZOA statements of intent and annual reports reflect the requirements of the legislation. Could this legislation be one reason why women are so strongly represented as scriptwriters for television? Would legislative change help advance women’s interests, within CNZ and NZFC?

From conversations, from the New Zealand and international statistics, and my reading, I have concluded that there may be some internal obstacles for some women who write feature scripts (including me). Some of us do need to be more confident, to bullshit better, to be more competitive, more courageous, to feel entitled, and maybe be willing to work as writers and directors-for-hire. But there is also the internal/external problem of motherhood. And significant external, systemic, problems. Some women develop careful and individualised strategies to accommodate or bypass these problems. Sometimes these work and sometimes they don’t. Many of these problems will continue to exist without institutional changes including, for writers, “a firm commitment on the part of decisionmakers... to actively seek out and read the work of writers who are women”<sup>411</sup>. But what if decisionmakers start to do this and the content does not appeal to them, because women’s scripts are too different, and not marketable?

### *Content*

I struggle for clarity about the content issue, even more than with the context, perhaps because women scriptwriters I know—and their scripts—are so diverse. Are women’s scripts sometimes different from men’s? How? And do

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<sup>410</sup> Broadcasting Act 1989, section 36 (a)(i), (ii) and (c).

<sup>411</sup> See above n402 and accompanying text.

these differences make a woman's script less attractive to readers? Are the differences, for instance, why few women's scripts make the short list in the FWI? When people have talked with me, or emailed me, the variety of opinions about the content of women's scripts matched the variety of opinions about the contexts affecting women scriptwriters. I've divided this section about script content into process and product. Process and product overlap; and overlap with context. Like the contextual material, this information is fragmented, because I find it difficult to isolate the significant factors; and the information available to me seems to indicate that others find it difficult too.

### *Process*

In many ways, the writing process is similar for everyone. According to the novelist Zadie Smith a writer has a single duty: "to express accurately their way of being in the world". She writes, "...this matter of understanding-that-which-is-outside-of-ourselves using only what we have inside ourselves amounts to some of the hardest intellectual and emotional work you'll ever do"<sup>412</sup>.

Edmund White, another novelist, puts this idea in another way: "To find the psychic energy to pursue a long career...a writer must juggle between a vigorous, recording curiosity about the world and the ongoing process of self-creation"<sup>413</sup>. The poet W.B. Yeats described the process in another way, referred to in a recent Arista development workshop: "...Now that my ladder's gone, I must lie down where all the ladders start, in the foul rag and bone shop of the heart"<sup>414</sup>.

And we all have to come to terms with regular failure. Zadie Smith again:

We like to think of fiction as the playground of language, independent of its originator... [F]iction writers know different. Though we rarely say it publicly, we know that our fictions are not as disconnected from our selves as you like to

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<sup>412</sup> Smith 2007: np.

<sup>413</sup> I have yet to relocate the source of this reference.

<sup>414</sup> Cleary 2007[b]: 1, slightly amended thanks to a poet reader.

imagine and we like to pretend. It is this intimate side of literary failure that is so interesting; the ways in which writers fail on their own terms: private, difficult to express, easy to ridicule, completely unsuited for either the regulatory atmosphere of reviews or the objective interrogation of seminars, and yet, despite all this, true.<sup>415</sup>

In my experience this intimate side of failure has many facets. Here's just two examples I know about.

Sometimes it's related to a failure of craft and identifying my work too closely with myself. Recently, at a script group, all women that night, we read the first six pages of my new script—which I could see, hear and feel very vividly. The unanimous response of the group was more or less “Marian, *what* is it about?” And this was my beloved shadow script about a therapist with depression after two clients suicide, and paedophilia and murder in Oriental Bay. Somehow, I'd got it wrong, and the bits of me in the characters and my love of the place were hurt for a moment, until I started to think about how to resolve the problems.

Sometimes I've felt that I fail as a human being because I can locate unpleasant aspects of some characters within myself without too much difficulty: the charming paedophile; the apparently devoted mother who places batteries in her three-month-old daughter's vagina; the prison guard who insists that all prisoners use the same blade to shave with. A friend asked me “What does this do to your head?” My head can cope, but my heart struggles sometimes. It struggles even more when I write about the creation, deferment and loss of hope for a child and the creation, deferment and bittersweet realization of hope for a woman.

Although the process may often be similar for men and women it may also be different. And it's no surprise that ideas about women and their writing processes vary. I'm a little uncomfortable with an essentialist view of women, such as that articulated by Jane Campion in an interview at Cannes in 2007: “When I think of what's fantastic about women, it's their generosity, their intuitiveness, their capacity to trust emotions, to be emotional, to nurture, to

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<sup>415</sup> Smith 2007: np.

promote peace, to care about the planet's environment so their children can inherit it. Those qualities aren't sexy for guys, but quite natural for women"<sup>416</sup>. I believe that women (and men) are diverse. How could I not, as Cushla and I work on our conflicting thoughts and feelings about the emotions and behaviours of the women characters in our script, some of whom have no natural inclination or capacity to nurture and to promote peace? And as we discuss the emotions and behaviours of the men, some of whom do have a natural inclination or capacity to nurture and to promote peace?

On the other hand we—and therefore the characters—are also shaped by incidents that are more common for girls and women than for boys and men, including experience of the conditions described by Tillie Olsen and the mechanisms described by Joanna Russ. And Joanna Margaret Paul's well-known statement about her working process has also influenced me:

As a woman painting is not a job, not even a vocation. It is part of life, subject to the strains, and joys, of domestic life. I cannot paint unless the house is in order. Unless I paint I don't function well in my domestic roles. Each thing is important. The idea that one sacrifices other values for art is alien to me, and I think to all women whose calling it is to do and be many things... I don't wish to separate the significant and everyday actions but to bring them as close as possible together. It is natural for women to do this; their exercise and their training and their artistry is in daily living. Painting for me as a woman is an ordinary act — about the great meaning in ordinary things. Anonymity pattern utility quietness relatedness.<sup>417</sup>

Does feature filmmaking require a persistence that will undermine my efforts to reach this ideal, even though the writing process, for me, and perhaps for some other women, *is* about 'daily living', exploring 'the great meaning in ordinary things', and the layers of meaning in 'ordinary' things?

Over and over again, script expert Linda Seger's interviewees told her that women did not need to and should not tell stories the same way as men do. They emphasized character, behaviour, emotions and relationships, alongside a deep interest in both the human experience and the transformation of women. Angelica Houston, director of *Bastard Out of*

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<sup>416</sup> Anonymous 2007.

<sup>417</sup> [Paul] 1975; 1976.

*Carolina* put it this way: “I’ve got a great story. It’s about people. I’ve never been interested in special effects, in explosions, except human explosions”<sup>418</sup>.

Any emphasis on emotions can present problems for a scriptwriter. Linda Seger quotes Robin Laing, then Gaylene Preston’s producer:

When you don’t tell an action story, you have to find the connections of events by digging deeper. Emotion is harder to write down than action. If we have to see emotion, we need to turn it into some kind of physical event for the film. But we have to value it and trust it.<sup>419</sup>

This viewpoint echoes Zadie Smith’s claim that ‘understanding-that-which-is-outside-of-ourselves using only what we have inside ourselves amounts to some of the hardest intellectual and emotional work you’ll ever do’.

One woman, a script professional, told me: “Women scriptwriters tend to start from an emotion rather than an idea and often cannot express the essence of their script in a single sentence”<sup>420</sup>. Another script professional, equally experienced and authoritative, said: “If anything, the women I know can be more analytical and more focused on exploring ideas than some of the male writers I know”. Do these statements conflict? Is it possible that exploring more than one idea makes it more difficult to express the essence of a script in a single sentence? And how might starting from an emotion otherwise affect a script?

From my limited experience I think that some women may be more likely than many men to work with several ideas at once; and be reluctant to prioritise one of them. Is this part of a tendency to ‘tell it slant’, because our voices have been undervalued, or to bring the significant and everyday as close as possible together? Or is to some extent characteristic of an attribute identified by Philippa Boyens when speaking on a Wellington WIFT scriptwriter panel in 2007: “Women don’t instinctively try to own/shape/move forward an idea... at some point you have to confront the truth of moving forward for yourself” —because having multiple ideas means we don’t have to

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<sup>418</sup> Seger 1996: 119.

<sup>419</sup> Idem.

<sup>420</sup> Others have also told me that women are not good at writing loglines for their own work.



commit ourselves fully to any of them, and experience the consequences of that commitment? Or is it that we tend to multi-task more than men do in daily life and may attempt to write scripts that multi-task?<sup>421</sup> Are we also more likely than men to work with more than one protagonist and point of view and a long timeline, and is one reason some women prefer to write for television rather than film?

At the moment my own experience is the only one I can refer to and draw any tentative conclusions from.

I applied for the IIML M.A. course after I saw a play called *Cherish*, by the IIML scriptwriting director Ken Duncum. Ah, I thought, this is wonderful, I can learn from him. And I did. The year transformed me, and my writing. I didn't just learn on the M.A. course. I loved it, and the people on it. We were expected to be diverse, to find and strengthen our own voices. We learned how to read and respond to other people's work in a way that was useful for them, and I found learning how to read and respond to other people's writing very useful for my own writing. It was especially helpful to learn to read a script twice before writing a response; to pay equal attention to what worked for us as readers and to what did not; and how to ask questions about the script's intentions.

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<sup>421</sup> As I finished this I received a parcel of second hand shirts from the man—a painter and a gifted op-shopper—who long ago introduced me to John Berger's work (nn117, 431, 604) along with an ancient copy of *Camera Obscura*, probably from an op-shop too, for my birthday. And there was an article about Sally Potter's *The Gold Diggers* (1983). It contained a list of the 25 films Sally Potter chose to present with *The Gold Diggers* and texts she wrote about the film, including: "I see this film as a musical describing a female quest. Making it has demanded asking the same questions during the working process as the film endeavours to ask: about the connections between gold, money and women; about the illusion of female powerlessness; about the actual search for gold and the inner search for gold; about imagery in the unconscious and its relationship to the power of the cinema; looking at childhood and memory and seeing the history of cinema itself as our collective memory of how we see ourselves and how we as women are seen": Rosenbaum 1984: 128. This seems to me to describe a script and film that multitasks superbly but the only trace I've been able to find of *The Gold Diggers* is a short clip downloadable at <http://www.7digital.com/stores/productDetail.aspx?shop=286&pid=78495>. I long to see the entire work, and then to look at the films she chose to present with it, some familiar to me, some not. Maybe twenty-five years after *The Gold Diggers*' release is a good time to re-release it so we can think about its aesthetic, intentions and themes?

I'd never completed a script before that year, and had read only one, *Chinatown*. But I had a film, *Mothersongs/Chansons Maternelles*, in my head, generated by my ongoing low-grade obsession with mothering and its dramas, how the mothering a woman receives affects the way she is a mother, and how social context—a war, feminism, or other kinds of civil unrest—affects mothering processes. As is probably obvious by now, I'd also participated in many debates about how to manage children alongside commitment to other work and a central intimate relationship. And concluded eventually that all three together were possible only if the 'other' work paid well or an intimate partner earned well and was prepared to subsidise the household. For a woman, being a writer, or another kind of artist, in the conditions already described adds a fourth element because a woman's income from a principal artistic occupation is usually so small, especially if she is a writer.<sup>422</sup>

My mother used to tell me that when I was born she “turned her face to the wall” because she didn't want me, didn't feel she could cope with another child. This story permeated our relationship and may be the source of my fixation on mothering. From my late teens I loved participating in every aspect of the magic of the biology of motherhood: conception, birth, breastfeeding. But because I also love lots of time alone *and* being out in the world, often doing things that do not generate an income, and had not been well mothered myself, I was intermittently a neglectful and ineffective mother. I wrote *Mothersongs* with multiple protagonists: “Mothers. One's physically absent because she's terrified. One's emotionally absent because she's ambitious. The other two think they have it sussed. Political struggles and their children's choices change everything, for each of them”.

Towards the end of the year by chance I came across the concept of absent motherhood and realised that I had been an absent mother, in a different way than my own mother, and that *Mothersongs* was about absent motherhood.

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<sup>422</sup> Over the summer I've read Sylvia Ashton-Warner's memoir *I Passed This Way*; it provides a fine, New Zealand, illustration of these difficulties to complement the work of Tillie Olsen and others.

I'd written *Mothersongs* to explore a question that troubled me both intellectually and emotionally: "What does it mean to be an 'absent' mother?" Knowing that helped me to write a (sharper) third draft.

A script professional told me a little while ago that sometimes, when being given notes on a script, a writer struggles and cries, as s/he is forced to 'go deeper', beyond where the story appears to be, and write about what s/he really wants to write about, which is where the story actually is, (I was shown the tissues on hand). It happens with men as well as women and I imagine that it is part of the emotional hard work Zadie Smith refers to.<sup>423</sup> My experience with *Mothersongs* taught me a little bit about this. When I understood about the question underlying my desire to write *Mothersongs* it was very hard to talk about it in class. It was typical of the acceptance and support available in the group that (as I remember it) after I'd stumbled through my explanation, there was a short silence. Then one of the guys said "Plenty of absent fathers." And another added "Ain't that the truth."

The memory of this process helps me understand, to some extent, the "understanding-that-which-is-outside-of-ourselves using only what we have inside ourselves." But as I resist the idea that gender is fixed and know that many of the issues around motherhood are similar for men who parent, I'm no closer to understanding why and how some women's scripts may be very different from men's. How—if at all—do ideas about the role of the writers' emotions in their work relate to women 'telling it slant'? To women's starting from an emotion rather than an idea? To taking ownership of an idea and moving it forward? To being able to express the idea behind a script in a sentence or two? To working with multiple or conflicting ideas?

Linda Seger is concerned to find 'the woman's voice', and that it may be compromised by the conditions like those that concern Tillie Olsen and Joanna Russ. She writes, from within the United States:

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<sup>423</sup> When I read Sylvia Ashton-Warner's *I Passed This Way* I decided that her key vocabulary concepts may help me to get to what I'm *really* trying to write about, see especially 417-419 where she describes how a strong, unacknowledged, image can 'jam the mechanism'; and am now re-reading her *Teacher*.

...the woman's voice has not yet clearly emerged in the art of screenwriting. Finding the woman's voice in storytelling can be just as difficult as finding her voice in management. The woman first has to create the story. It seems simple enough, yet often women have few other films as models about how to tell their stories and express themes that have not been shown before.<sup>424</sup>

Seeger found that many women writers wanted to discuss the woman's voice. She supported this, because not talking about it: "...makes it harder to find, to acknowledge, to value. Women do have a point of view, just as men do. Dismissing it, pretending it doesn't exist, or devaluing it doesn't negate it, but it does mean that a large realm of experience is not up on the screen"<sup>425</sup>.

However, finding a voice may bring contextual problems: "If she's found her voice, even if it's considered by most to be a great script, she knows that many of the executives will probably consider it not commercial because it's unlike other films on the market"<sup>426</sup>.

According to Linda Seeger, the writer's need to adapt her voice to meet investors' demands, whether the investor is a state funder (in New Zealand) or a purely commercial entity "often removes originality and authenticity... [The work] begins to look derivative, predictable, and all the same. It also limits the kinds of films that are made—another voice never emerges". Linda Seeger quotes Roseanne Barr as saying "Today you can't tell the difference between something produced by a woman and things produced by a man...and that disturbs me. When women's voices sound like men's, then women have effectively been censored"<sup>427</sup>. Do we censor as we write? And does that censorship compromise the quality of our work? If we don't self-censor, will our work ever be produced?

However, Seeger concedes that discussing the woman's voice can be problematic: "Looking for the woman's voice can remove women from

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<sup>424</sup> Seeger 1996: 112.

<sup>425</sup> Ibid: 121.

<sup>426</sup> Ibid: 112.

<sup>427</sup> Ibid: 121, 114.

opportunities to do action-adventures, thrillers, science fiction. It can also stereotype men, leaving relationship stories as woman's domain"<sup>428</sup>.

And it may be difficult to experiment with 'women's voices', even when resources are available. Seger introduces Sara Duvall as the producer of *Fried Green Tomatoes*, described in 1996 as one of the one hundred most successful films of all time, among both female *and* male filmgoers. At that time Duvall had obtained financing to do two to four films a year, written, directed, produced and in a large part crewed by women. She wanted to help 'the women's voice[s]' emerge, but knew it would not be easy. She said:

I'm going to have to cultivate the writers of these scripts... I'm going to have to convince the women writers that I really mean it, about the women's point of view. Women have written so long for the male audience that for them to believe I really want a script with a woman's point of view is going to take a lot of work... These are the scripts that agents wouldn't even send to the studios because they don't think they're commercial. Or they are scripts that women have written just for their own satisfaction and put away five years ago, knowing that no studio would ever buy them.<sup>429</sup>

From information available on the imdb database, Duvall appears to have been involved with no film since *Fried Green Tomatoes*. What happened?

Whether or not there is a 'woman's voice', or are 'women's voices', every script is unique and the writing process may be affected by the source of the story. Because some New Zealand women write adaptations, and these have often been very successful in various ways, I wondered whether the adaptation process was different from writing an original script and especially suited to the way women work. I tried a little experiment with a Texan detective story that captivated me when I read it.

When I finished the adaptation my sense was that for me an adaptation *might* not be 'the hardest intellectual and emotional work you'll ever do' (at least for this kind of simple story). I tend to find it difficult to develop a

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<sup>428</sup> Ibid: 121. A reader's note here: "Lo these many years ago Molly Heskell noted that European films about relationship stories have not been denigrated in the way that Hollywood did in referring to them as weepies. In both places these films have been directed by men (probably often by the same men) but the attitude is different. So the problem may be with Anglo-Saxon approaches to the material".

<sup>429</sup> Ibid: 123.

logical and linear structure and having a structure already in place helped me. And because the characters were already developed within the story they did not surprise me and subvert my planned storyline, as happens when I write an original script. I could focus on replicating, for a different medium, the feelings I had when I read the book. Starting from an individual's already recorded life story may also in some ways be less demanding (for me) than starting from an emotion or an idea; one of the scripts I'm working on is based on a true story. As with the adaptation, it helps to have the story arc already in place, although getting the characters right is a challenge.

My own view about women's scriptwriting processes, in New Zealand and elsewhere, accords with ideas expressed by filmmakers Raida Haines and Barry Barclay. In response to a question about what a 'women's film' is, Raida Haines said: "Until women directors [and writers] can offer the public a much larger body of work, there is no answer to that question"<sup>430</sup>. Barry Barclay has said something similar about Maori films: "We shall get to know what a Maori film is when we get a chance to make more films"<sup>431</sup>. We may better understand women's writing processes once more women's scripts go through development, and we've heard more of the women's stories that wait to be told.

### *Product*

Academics don't write much about differences between men's and women's writing processes. And in recent years, if addressing the products of the writing process, writers on gender in film have tended to focus on how films construct and perform gender. Kelly Hankin thinks this is because of "...certain theoretical tides, particularly structuralism, poststructuralism, and psychoanalysis, which de-privileged the 'author'"; this meant "it was

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<sup>430</sup> Gregory 2002: 368-369.

<sup>431</sup> Barclay 1990: 20.

considered theoretically unsophisticated to focus on the female filmmaker”<sup>432</sup>.

Linda Seger doesn't have this problem. Nor does Debra Zimmerman, executive director of Women Make Movies in New York, which continues to operate as a training organisation, distributor and production umbrella for women, and to adapt to technological change. Zimmerman is unequivocal that:

...[B]ecause of socialization and experiences, women see the world in a completely different way than men. And their films reflect that. Even in the most simplistic terms women see themselves as central in their own lives, and in their films they are the ones in control of the gaze.<sup>433</sup>

Another woman, from the National Film Board of Canada's Studio D, a woman's filmmaking group that no longer exists, describes a woman's film as one that:

... puts a woman's story front-and-center of the frame... Whether the subject is racism, pornography, sexuality, or humor, our films look at it through women's eyes and experience, and we look for stories that we don't find in mainstream media. We've tried to challenge stereotypes and assumptions about our lives...<sup>434</sup>

There are many debates around the contrasting ways that women and men look at the world that I won't address here. I learned most, as a visual artist, from John Berger's *Ways of Seeing*.<sup>435</sup> Others I know have been influenced by Laura Mulvey's writing about 'the gaze'.<sup>436</sup>

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<sup>432</sup> Hankin: 64.

<sup>433</sup> Aufderheide and Zimmerman: 1457.

<sup>434</sup> Seger 1996: 115.

<sup>435</sup> Berger 1972. On Sally Potter's website I found this reference to John Berger's most recent work *Hold Everything Dear* ([http://www.versobooks.com/books/ab/b-titles/berger\\_j\\_hold\\_everything\\_dear.shtml](http://www.versobooks.com/books/ab/b-titles/berger_j_hold_everything_dear.shtml)) which “‘meditates on the state of undefeated despair’ that is shared by those violently excluded from power. In the first essay, “Wanting Now”, he concludes: ‘Not all desires lead to freedom, but freedom is the experience of a desire being acknowledged, chosen and pursued. Desire never concerns the mere possession of something, but the changing of something. Desire is a wanting. A wanting now. Freedom does not constitute the fulfilment of that wanting, but the acknowledgement of its supremacy’: <http://www.sallypotter.com/node/125> (no longer accessible). A good place to stop footnoting and send this out.

<sup>436</sup> Mulvey 1975.

In her thesis on New Zealand women filmmakers, Larissa Marno reports Niki Caro's views, influenced by producer Bridget Ikin, who showed her that "Girls didn't have to be just girlfriends or lovers or mothers or daughters. They can move into the centre, and not have to look beautiful to occupy that space." Not surprisingly then, Caro also says "I've always been talking about intimate relationships, family relationships, a female perspective, always". And adds: "I'm convinced that the future of narrative film making is in hard core female experience... Because it's simply more interesting than your traditional kind of genre milarky"<sup>437</sup>.

In one of many crossovers between context and content Liz Francke notes that women's scripts—other than those written in partnership with men—are more likely to be made when films about relationships are in fashion because women tend to write films about relationships. There may be times when women write about the 'wrong' thing, in Joanna Russ' terms. And it's true, many women scriptwriters I know do write about primarily about relationships, and the genre is secondary, whether they're writing an action film, a romantic comedy, or horror.

Another academic, Marsha McCreadie, is more romantic about women's writing. Referring to the well-known work of Carol Gilligan,<sup>438</sup> and to an excerpt from Robin Swicord's script for *The Perez Family*, McCreadie claims that it has:

...a filigree of delicate description that perfectly fits the format of film: simultaneity perhaps being a natural mindset for females... women see the world differently from men, using a language of interconnectedness and interpersonal continuity... to think of others, to envision scenes occurring at the same moment, by cross-cutting, may be natural for women.<sup>439</sup>

Filigrees 'of delicate description' that perfectly fit the format of film may or may not be characteristic of women's writing; I feel uncomfortable with this

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<sup>437</sup> Marno 1997: 76, 79.

<sup>438</sup> Especially Gilligan 1982.

<sup>439</sup> McCreadie 2006: 8.



description and with some strange errors in McCreadie's book.<sup>440</sup> But I think that McCreadie's ideas about the consequences of women seeing the world differently, as manifest in women's scripts, may relate to what I perceive as 'multi-tasking' in some of our scriptwriting processes.

Linda Seger's take on structure also helped me understand this. She states that the (United States) standard, relatively direct and linear structure of a script may not suit women writers, several of whom have similar ideas about climaxes in film and relate these ideas to gendered orgasms. Men may write one conflict, one climax and one denouement. Women may write many conflicts, multiple climaxes and many endings, which may be why very often we are good at writing series for television. The process is as important the arrival.

According to Seger, it is possible to abandon a strict linear structure through use of a circle, a spiral, or a helix, a ripple, a mosaic, a quilt, or other kinds of layering, of both character and complexity. Some linear narrative must remain, to move the story forward, but action is de-emphasized, and the proportions of emotion and psychology becomes greater. This way of working carries risks:

... [S]ome women...may not yet have the craft to make these different models work. Although these kinds of stories can be done for a much lower budget than the more action-oriented models, if they fail, women know they usually don't get another chance. If they compromise, they feel they aren't truly telling their stories.<sup>441</sup>

Seger does not claim that these models have never been used or that men do not or cannot use non-linear models. Nor does she advocate non-linear models for all women's films. She is not an essentialist. However, her discussion gave me a sense of permission to break 'the rules' and to feel

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<sup>440</sup> She states that "Even today, if you visit New Zealand, you will see proudly displayed in numerous bookstore and coffee-houses the series of photos of the three perfectly matched red-haired actresses who played [Janet] Frame at various intervals in her life" (12); refers to Niki Caro as 'Nikki Karo' (142); says that women's film festivals are "at very least an annual staple in...New Zealand" (143); refers to "director Peter Walsh's *Lord of the Rings*" (140); credits Jane Campion as director of *Angela's Ashes* (2). Most puzzlingly she claims that women write 38 percent of New Zealand features; Sinclair, Pollard and Wolfe 2006 used this statement as evidence that conditions for women scriptwriters are better in New Zealand than in the United Kingdom.

<sup>441</sup> Seger 1996: 141.

entitled to experiment. It also offers something authoritative to refer to when the results of our experiments are challenged for their ‘quality’.

Because they will be challenged. Long ago, when I read Keri Hulme’s *the bone people* and couldn’t understand why publishers had rejected it, I rang the publishers. “What’s the problem?” I asked each of them, men and women. “She won’t edit it,” they said. And that was true. She’d spent twelve years writing it and the structure especially was complex, in Linda Seger’s terms probably best described as a spiral structure. It didn’t need editing.

When the late Irihapeti Ramsden read the manuscript, she identified the book’s structure and rhythms as being closely aligned to her familiar, Maori, oral history tradition. And when I inquired more closely about the changes the publishers wanted made, they all wanted different changes because, I think, the structure was unfamiliar and they didn’t understand its workings. (They were also uncomfortable with some of the ‘difficult’ subject matter.) I concluded that the publishers feared the unfamiliar in the book, and that they used the Joanna Russ/ MANALIVE type mechanisms to justify their discomfort, refusing to publish unless Keri changed *the bone people* to suit what they (or their English principals) thought literature should be.

Editing would, I am sure, have damaged *the bone people*’s careful structure and reduced the book’s overall impact. We (Irihapeti, Miriama Evans and I) published it with only one tiny change and although readers tend to love or hate it, it continues to be read and to sell well, twenty-five years after publication. The point of this little story? That I believe, because of this experience, that there may be women’s scripts written in unfamiliar ways (and including ‘difficult’ content) that will make commercially successful films. If women script writers find ourselves wanting to use one of the structures described by Linda Seger, or another unusual one, it may be important to hold fast against experienced readers who are uncomfortable with this. And necessary to be extra obsessive about finding ways to turn the script into a film.

I have questions though, about how best to develop the craft to use alternative structures well, relating more to the process than the product. Where do the challenges of these structures fit within the more general issues about women's scripts? How do they relate to 'telling it slant'? Is 'telling it slant' an integral part of a layered structure? Might 'telling it slant' even be a useful way to create a subtext?<sup>442</sup> Does the use of an alternative structure make it more difficult to express the idea(s) behind a script in twenty-five words? And how can we find appropriate support for experimental work? How can we find informed readers to help with development; and producers, investors and eventually audiences?

Many women scriptwriters and filmmakers agree with Gillian Armstrong and don't wish to be 'ghettoized': "I'm proud to carry a woman's vision but I don't like that label at all. It's like putting women in the ghetto. It limits women because it says, 'Oh, you can make women's films, but you can't make other films'"<sup>443</sup>. A friend who read this comment wondered whether Gillian Armstrong would have made it if women's films were not subject to the kinds of mechanisms that Joanna Russ identified or included in the MANALIVE list.

Robin Swicord sometimes writes with her husband Nicholas Kazan and presents another view:

In all honesty, I'm not sure if a woman *can* write a woman's part better than a man. I hate it when something arrives at the door with a note appended, "You write the girl's role and Nick can write the guy's part". We call it pink and blue thinking... Sexism is not as bad for writers in the business as corporate thinking.<sup>444</sup>

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<sup>442</sup> I've just found a reference to a suggestion by Doris Lessing in *The Golden Notebook* that the impulse to turn life into fiction is a form of evasion—and means that the writer wants to conceal something from herself. That makes me think again. I'll track down a copy of *The Golden Notebook* and see what else Doris Lessing says. Or there's yet another view that people use art to confront rather than to evade. Fred Vargas, a crime writer, says she has a theory of art that goes back to Neolithic times: "I think art emerged as a sort of medicine to deal with the fact that we are afraid, alone, small and weak in a dangerous world. But we are not like all the other animals and cannot live with just a pragmatic and realistic life. So we invent a second reality, similar but not identical to ours, into which we escape to confront these perils": Wroe 2008.

<sup>443</sup> Seger 1996: 120.

<sup>444</sup> McCreadie 2006: 4.

The potential for stereotyping might be overcome by writers who work at the kind of authenticity advocated by Zadie Smith. On the other hand, some men writers struggle with women characters. Riwia Brown says of her invitation to write *Once Were Warriors* that “the reason I was approached to write... was because I could write Maori women and that was a point of reference. No one believed I could write Maori men, or a whole screenplay, probably least of all me”<sup>445</sup>.

And the desire to address stereotyping can be oppressive for writers. New Zealander Judy Callingham told Linda Seger:

Political correctness is killing us. It's gagging us as storytellers. You can't write a story about a woman who isn't a feminist. You can't write a story about Maori women or about victims. You can't write stories about bad women, which are often the most fascinating because they open up those areas we've never been allowed to explore. You can't show violence of any kind, even though the violence may be absolutely essential in order to show a character transforming.<sup>446</sup>

Deidre Pribram, a filmmaker and academic, notes Mathia Diawara's distinction between 'oppression studies', which seek to identify and specify the exclusion of blacks, and 'performance studies', which focus on how blacks create and reinvent themselves within the context of American culture.<sup>447</sup>

Pribram writes:

This shift is occurring in women's projects, too. There is less of a concern (although the concern is ongoing) to delineate patriarchal structures, and more emphasis on depicting women's lives, relationships, perspectives, desires and truths. The dominant project is no longer to solely explain how groups are oppressed or forever argue against that oppression, but rather to portray and understand one's own experiences. Less energy is spent convincing a dominant other, and more attention is devoted to one's own community and its meanings. The question is how does this approach, centered on one's own concerns, coincide with an industry still representing its dominant members and their modes of thought.<sup>448</sup>

Pribram's article aims to persuade the independent film industry to embody diversity, where the variety and complexity of communities and the variation and range of their experiences must be understood as “a concept with *implications*, including audiences who must be actively sought and reached,

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<sup>445</sup> Perkins 2000: 55.

<sup>446</sup> Seger 1996: 159.

<sup>447</sup> Diawara 1992.

<sup>448</sup> Pribram 1993: 5.

and films that are ‘hard sells’ in part because their meanings vary for different cultural groups”<sup>449</sup>. Her question about interactions between an industry representing its dominant members and their modes of thought and filmmakers who focus on telling the stories of their own communities is fundamental to what I’m attempting to do with my scripts and my thesis.

I’ve already tangled with the different meanings for members of different cultural groups, with *Mothersongs*. Women outside the M.A. class in general did not like it. One external examiner’s report came from a woman producer whose report focused on the script’s shortcomings, though, because of the way I’ve been influenced by Joanna Paul, I was entertained that she called the script a ‘domestic epic’. I felt she hadn’t read the script twice, as our class had been taught to do; nor thought about what worked as well as what did not, and why. So I gave the script to an academic who teaches film. Hmmm, the same imbalance: a focus almost entirely on—different—shortcomings. (One of these readers is not a mother; I don’t know about the other one).

A writer friend who’s a mother gave me a more balanced and useful response. The second external examiner, a scriptwriter and a man, a script writer whose work I admire, was almost entirely positive and awarded me the class prize (I’d have liked to know a little more about what didn’t work for him and why). After all this, I paid a woman classmate to give me a detailed critique, which carefully addressed strengths *and* weaknesses and asked good questions, wonderful. But then I moved on because I stopped caring about *Mothersongs* (I’d learned what I needed to know); and wanted to try something new.

Now I’ve read and written more, I’d probably be less confused by diverse responses to a script from experienced readers, and better able to sort through them and move forward. But as with the six pages of my script that I read with the scriptwriting group, I may still be challenged when trying to work out whether responses from readers from outside my communities that I write about are because I’ve failed as a writer or because the meaning of what I write is different for them as ‘outsiders’.

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<sup>449</sup> Idem.

Recently, Rachel Millward, director of the United Kingdom Birds Eye View film festival since 2002, describes the sensibility of *Away From Her* and *Stephanie Daley* in the 2007 festival as having ‘startlingly frank ambivalence’:

[The films] wrestle with doubts and leave questions unanswered. There are no bad guys here, only human beings who try and fail. Conflict arises when two people are trying hard to reach each other. The gaze is scrupulous and penetrating, yet its judgment is light. Is this the woman’s touch? ...It is my belief that as more women make films, the more impossible to categorise their films it will be. We have to hold lightly to any notion of a feminine type.<sup>450</sup>

She believes that women’s films “run the gamut of theme and mood, just as men’s films do” but wants more diversity in women’s films:

The important thing is to explore diversity and to relish the creativity it brings. Many of the subjects approached by our filmmakers can be painful... I can’t wait for the day when more women start making raucous comedy. But the triumph of these films [*Away From Her* and *Stephanie Daley* are among those she discusses] is that they do not leave me in despair at the world we live in.<sup>451</sup>

Some of that diversity relates to themes. I’ve heard one script professional claim that a high proportion of women’s scripts are about looking for a home. That idea might fit some local women’s scripts I’m familiar with; they address family relationships a lot more than the men’s, too. The script professional also identifies a high proportion of men’s as being about looking for redemption. But I’m familiar with scripts (written by both genders) about women looking for redemption and men looking for a home.

Another theme, explored in the recent *Red Road* (written and directed by Andrea Arnold), *Stephanie Daley* (written and directed by Hilary Brougher) and *Away From Her* (written and directed by Sarah Polley) is how women approach pain. One scriptwriter recently suggested to me that some script assessors for the FWI—women and men—are uncomfortable with scripts that examine women’s pain, perhaps because they remind assessors of the now less fashionable local *cinema of unease*.

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<sup>450</sup> Millward 2007: np.

<sup>451</sup> Idem.

Other discussion about diversity relates to genre. I know I'd love to write a musical comedy and I have a mate whose big dream is to write historical drama. I know women whose comedy scripts I love and admire. But I've also witnessed two women script professionals arguing passionately about whether women can write genre movies, or want to. Does some of the diversity that interests Rachel Millward involve more participation in writing genre, and perhaps subverting it?

Somewhere, I read about a man—a producer—who has supported women filmmakers. And the writer or director who mentioned him repeated his advice. It went something like this: “A film can be about *anything*, so long as there's a hook that the marketing people can use.” Genre can offer a useful shorthand when writing and as a hook. But perhaps it doesn't matter too much if there's another hook for the marketing people.

Academic Lucy Fischer explains genre as a fundamental organising principle that allows makers and audiences to classify films, although it cannot be rigidly defined. Fischer's interest in the dynamics of gender and genre relates to the broad question of how narrative and cultural forms imply a specific sexual politics. Arguing that because too neat a classification “tends to calcify forms and to mask their potential interactions”, she attempts to establish interrelationships between genres and argues for a more fluid classification of genre.<sup>452</sup>

Seeger, Francke and McCreadie identify some gendered relationships to genre, while acknowledging, yet again, the diversity of women scriptwriters. Women are less likely to write action scripts or horror. But they do write them. And they may share the writing on action scripts with men, and enrich them. Some writers, like Robin Swicord who write with men emphasise that they are not necessarily going to be the ones ‘writing the women’; others may ensure that the women's parts are improved.<sup>453</sup>

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<sup>452</sup> Fischer 1996: 4-7.

<sup>453</sup> For instance see Seeger 1996: 80-86.

Philippa Boyens told McCreadie that she and Fran Walsh were conscious about trying to bring ‘female energy’ to the roles they created from Tolkien’s characters in the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy. “We have a lot of differences between our female characters. They are very, very different from each other which is wonderful as well. And the female energy in the film[s] is very strong”<sup>454</sup>. ‘Female energy’ is undefined. Perhaps Philippa Boyens is referring to a strong, multifaceted, female presence.

Kirsten Smith, who wrote *Legally Blonde*, describes chick flicks as a developing genre:

It seems like the chick flick got to be a larger genre. There’s the female action movie and the romantic comedy and the weeper and the woman-in-jeopardy movie. The genre that we’ve been working in we’ve named the ‘girl-power’ genre. The female character starts without any acceptance. She spends the movie gaining that acceptance. But at the same time she’s redefining the parameters of that acceptance. *Erin Brockovich* is a great example of that.<sup>455</sup>

Other examples are Niki Caro’s *Whale Rider* and *North Country*. Caro has said of the parallels between Josey Aimes in *North Country* and Pai in *Whale Rider*: “Obviously they both faced tremendous opposition but they go about creating change in not a crusading heroine way but in quite a gentle way and they are both so unlikely”<sup>456</sup>.

OK. That’s as far as I can get on the longest day of 2007. I’m going to work on those scripts now. I’ll be in touch again later on. And thanks again for your help.

[Table of Contents, List of References and Contact Details deleted.]

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<sup>454</sup> McCreadie 2006: xviii, 142.

<sup>455</sup> Ibid: xviii.

<sup>456</sup> Bailey 1999: 1.



### *Transition 3: To Diary & Emails*

The *PhD Report* established for me—and, I hoped, for readers— that as in other areas of the arts, and as in other parts of the world, women who want to write and direct feature films in New Zealand are likely to meet gender-related problems. These may arise because of the context they work in. Some of the problems exist on state-funded pathways and may affect content. I started sending out the report in January 2008 and made the last changes in April 2008.

The response to the report varied. Individuals read it and commented and I incorporated some of their comments. The Screen Directors Guild of New Zealand—eventually, after a friend’s prompting—asked me to write an article for their magazine.<sup>457</sup> After the article appeared, Dara McNaught at the New Zealand Writers Guild (NZWG) followed the link to the IIML website, read the *PhD Report* there and sent me a lovely email.<sup>458</sup> And then, at the head of the next *Writers Guild e-bulletin*—more than a year after I finished the report—there were a couple of paragraphs about it, a link, a brief extract and an endorsement:

These comments...are part of a comprehensive and thought provoking examination of the attitudes and stereotypes that dominate the feature film industry both here and internationally. Marian’s observations are applicable not only to women and Maori—Barry Barclay once said, “We shall get to know what a Maori film is when we get a chance to make more films,” and other minority voices—but to men wishing to make a career in the New Zealand film industry.<sup>459</sup>

So, the industry’s directors and writers have access to the information. What about women in the industry who don’t belong to these guilds, but are WIFT members? I had spoken with Auckland WIFT’s lobbying and research sub-committee in June 2007 and sent the WIFT office a link to the report. But, as when I later sent a link to my blog,<sup>460</sup> the link did not appear in either the

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<sup>457</sup> Evans 2009[b].

<sup>458</sup> I am an NZWG member, an Australian Writers Guild member, and a WIFT student member.

<sup>459</sup> McNaught and Mamea 2009.

<sup>460</sup> 16 April 2009.

WIFT Auckland or Wellington newsletters. Other links, to statistical information and other member-generated information, appear regularly. Do they not want their members to have access to the information? The lack of interest mystifies me.<sup>461</sup>

In contrast, in November 2007, when Cushla and I were in Sydney researching *Lost Boy*, the WIFT New South Wales president, then Lindy Monson, organised meetings with two very diverse groups of women filmmakers—not all WIFT members—to discuss the issues. Their welcome warmed me; the range of strategies use to advance their interests impressed me. After that, Lindy asked me to write something for their website, with help from Rosemary Curtis, Research and Information Manager at the Australian Film Commission and then, until recently, at Screen Australia;<sup>462</sup> and later added a link to the report.<sup>463</sup> And what about *OnFilm*, the monthly industry magazine, as a general catch all? When I emailed Nick Grant *OnFilm* offering to write an article based on my research, in November 2008, he did not respond. I was not surprised, because he did not respond when I sent him an article about the celluloid ceiling for consideration back in 2006.

It is impossible to know more than this about whether the activist *I*, as a native subject, an academic providing information, or a writer, in any way disrupted ideas about the industry, made the report accessible enough or made change. But I realised that if I was going to expose myself as I wrote and then receive a mixed response, and was diffident about my own scripts,<sup>464</sup> I needed to become clearer about my own responses to real or perceived rejection. About the time I transferred from the VMS to IIML in April 2008, I started counselling at the Student Health Services, to sort out a little more about the *I* doing this research.

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<sup>461</sup> 30 July 2009: I email WIFT to ask for clarification. We were going to talk after their awards ceremony the next month, but never did.

<sup>462</sup> Evans 2008[a].

<sup>463</sup> Evans 2008[c].

<sup>464</sup> See above 125.

The *I* of Chapter 5 draws on my thesis diary to speak within an academic context about my interactions within unfamiliar cultures, as I attempted to establish reasons why I and other women feature film scriptwriters are or may be unsuccessful in accessing public funding.

This chapter attempts to deepen the discussion of content and context issues referred to in the last chapter, with continuing reference to stories women filmmakers told me, noted in my diary. The chapter is also based on my interactions with individuals within state funding bodies, primarily at the NZFC but also at NZOA, once it became involved in its own telemovies. It responds too to the replacement of the NZFC/CNZ SIPF programme with the Independent Film Fund (IFF), which excludes emerging filmmakers like me. It notes changes in NZFC Board decision-making, in favour of women.

The inclusion of an awards list about commonalities in the content of films women wrote, shown at the International Film Festival in 2008 gestures back to similar exercises undertaken within the women's art movement. It highlights the *I* at work, like B Ruby Rich engaged with 'Journals and journeys, conferences and conversations, partying and politicking, going to movies and going to bed'. It speaks directly to those who shared my earlier history, and to whom I feel accountable in every chapter.

Unlike Chapters 3 and 4 this chapter is only about my fieldwork and is based only on documents—the thesis diary and emails copied into it—that recorded activity as it happened. It summarises what I know about the pathways that I might have explored with *Lost Boy*, or that Cushla and I might have taken with *Red Dinghy*.

It surprised me that this is a relatively unemotional record until I understood that the enquiring, academic, activist and scriptwriting *I* had nothing to lose by the activities it records. And I see now that I set it up that way as the *I* who wants to make feature films, warned that criticism of public funders would be 'suicide'. While I worked on the NZFC statistics, to avoid the complications of my own emotional investment in NZFC decision-making, I—with Cushla—

chose not to find a producer and apply for development funding for *Red Dinghy*, nor to apply for the FWI.

And, at the back of my mind, I think I knew that I was most interested in making a ‘shadow’ film. My background predisposed me as an artist to engage with a human rights-oriented strategic option,<sup>465</sup> rather than to journey along the public funding pathway.<sup>466</sup> So I felt little fear or anger, or joy, though in one place I have included the second part of an email that, when I looked at it, reminded me that I was often very stressed during this period; and sometimes cranky.

By now, I preferred to write scripts rather than to engage with activist or academic activity, and perhaps my stress resulted from the marginalisation of my script writing. I realised how much the activist and academic had taken over from the writer when a woman who asked me, at the NZFC *Smashing the Window* distribution seminar<sup>467</sup> “How’s your project going?” I responded “Great.” Then, “What about you?” After she told me about her problems developing projects while earning a living I realised that her picture of ‘[my] project’ was different than mine. She thought I was engaged primarily in script development. I was not.

At the end of this period, I re-read Virginia Woolf’s *A Room Of One’s Own* and this gave me another idea about my lack of strong emotion as I engaged with the NZFC statistics. I had two rooms of my own, one at the university and one at home, and \$20,000 a year; I had only to ensure that this thesis—eventually—met academic requirements. With money, according to Woolf, hatred, bitterness and the need to flatter go. There were no “pressures towards self-censorship”<sup>468</sup>, or to “tell it slant”<sup>469</sup>. So it was unsurprising that

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<sup>465</sup> See above 47ff and 100.

<sup>466</sup> I did however apply for and attend an NZFC workshop, taken by Wendall Thomas, on dialogue, which I found very rewarding (11 June 2008); and eventually did apply to SIPF for funds for my thesis script, *Development*, see below 220, 240.

<sup>467</sup> 3 October 2008.

<sup>468</sup> Olsen: 49.

<sup>469</sup> Ibid: 44.

anger and fear were largely missing from my diary and emails. I explained their lack of joy on the stress of managing multiple roles and knowing that the \$20,000 a year was finite.

It was only much later that reading Virginia Woolf also alerted me to my subliminal anger about the academic requirements, when I realised that this thesis was ‘slightly pulled from the straight’<sup>470</sup>, by my experience of the behaviours of some institutionally-based women and by the exigencies of the work’s academic context.<sup>471</sup>

This chapter and the transition that follows it are for my peers, especially fellow women apprentice scriptwriters, fellow activists, fellow autoethnographers. The *I* is me telling them, “This is what happened. What might it mean?” It is also the scriptwriter, preparing to use the hard data, as she invents.

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<sup>470</sup> Woolf 1929; 1998: 96.

<sup>471</sup> See above 44ff.

## *Chapter 5 Diary & Emails*

By the end of 2008 my determination to welcome the unexpected was severely tested: by my responses to the counselling; NZFC CEO Dr Ruth Harley's departure from the NZFC; awareness of the significance of the NZOA Sunday night telemovie series; and changes to the SIPF that prompted me to consider the SFF in more detail.

### **Counselling**

The counselling, intended as a tool to enhance the rigour within my autoethnographic process, had become therapy. I struggled to function effectively between sessions.

In retrospect, if I'd allowed myself to cry in an early history-taking session I might have grieved in and between sessions and released some old pain. And it didn't help that I no longer cry at the movies, though the meditative space I now enter when watching films did help relieve the ongoing tension. Every so often a film elicited joy, because it was satisfying; *Irina Palm* is the one I remember best from this period. My laughter after one potential tear-jerker also helped. I arrived late at *Nights in Rodanthe* and assumed that the woman along the row and I were the only audience. Then, as the credits rolled, from out there in the darkness I heard sobs and many many sniffs and noses being blown. Unmoved by the film itself, I laughed all the way out to the late afternoon sunlight in Courtenay Place.

I wanted to stop work on everything and enter into the therapy process for whatever time it took to investigate the old wounds fully and begin healing, a full-scale breakdown/break through. But I couldn't afford to do this; I withdrew from the therapy in November, with regret. However, what I learned there provided me with valuable insight into some of my own previously unconscious responses to rejection and discrimination, and an additional dimension for integration into my thesis script. The skin over the

wounds closed and formed scars again, till the next opportunity to examine them.

## Ruth Harley's departure

The consequences of Ruth Harley's imminent departure following her appointment as the CEO of Screen Australia were also disruptive, as I had to analyse the statistics for the year to June 2008, nine months before I had intended. In October 2008 Ruth signed off my analysis of the arc of her two-year response to my project.

### *The beginning*

When we first met to discuss my research, Ruth said immediately: "We will help you"<sup>472</sup>. I was not surprised. I knew of Ruth's longstanding interest in equity issues in the arts;<sup>473</sup> and that the Film Commission Act requires the NZFC to support research.<sup>474</sup> Ruth continued to be helpful and direct throughout the process. For example, she put me in touch with others interested in the 'gender' issue.

Ruth then believed that there was no gender problem in the NZFC. She told me that there'd been only one instance of sexism during the time she worked there and that a reference to gender was not included in the NZFC *Statement of Intent* because she "takes [consideration of gender issues] for granted". As an example of this consideration, she referred to the recent NZFC feature script rewrite workshops that included four women and six men, because she and her staff had identified a gender imbalance and looked for two more women. Ruth thought that maybe women don't want to do the "long obsessional haul" of making a feature film.

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<sup>472</sup> 29 September 2006.

<sup>473</sup> Ruth was an advisory officer at the Queen Elizabeth II Arts Council (which later became Creative New Zealand) in the late 1970s when I was part of the Kidsarus collective.

<sup>474</sup> The Film Commission Act 1978 section 17(1) lists the Film Commission's functions. Section 17(1)(d) reads: "To encourage and promote, for the benefit of the New Zealand film industry, the study and appreciation of films and of film making."

After she read a draft of my *PhD Report* Ruth wrote a useful response:

I like your style and mix of types of information - especially the mix of analysis and personal experience. And I really like the footnotes. It is a rich mix. I hope you are allowed to continue that way. I think it is incorrect to say that the reason for the Niki Caro, Sima Urale, Armagan Ballantyne projects getting up is a result of your work [I hadn't meant to imply this and subsequently added a footnote confirming that I did not claim to have had any effect on these projects]. If that were true it would be really easy to sustain. And I don't think it will be. All of those projects had been in development for years and been on the financing track for quite a while before you started work. I can only think of one project by a woman writer/director which is anywhere close to financing at present. I think there will be another gap as there was after *Rain*, *Whale Rider* and *Perfect Strangers*. But your work did lead to [a single example of gender-related decision-making deleted for privacy reasons<sup>475</sup>].<sup>476</sup>

By the time she left for Australia Ruth was less sure that there would be a gap after *Apron Strings*, *The Strength of Water* and *The Vintner's Luck*.<sup>477</sup>

Later, when I developed a spreadsheet of NZFC development- and production-funded and 'shadow' films she continued to respond. "I have some questions" she wrote "And I think categorising *King Kong* as 'shadow' is very odd indeed"<sup>478</sup>.

### A change

After I circulated my *PhD Report* in early 2008, one of my informants told me that she'd heard Ruth say "The younger women say there is no problem. We (the NZFC) say there is no problem. But the statistics say we have a problem." Ruth later acknowledged that she had said something like this and when we met before she left, she emphasised that she had been shocked by the statistics.<sup>479</sup> She didn't know why it is so much harder for women to make features and speculated that it is a 'pathway' issue. She asked: "Does it help to make commercials as well as an 'A' list festival short film? Do women who make 'A' list short films need a different kind of support than men to develop

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<sup>475</sup> See also n502 and accompanying text.

<sup>476</sup> Email communication 12 February 2008.

<sup>477</sup> Personal communication 21 October 2008.

<sup>478</sup> Email communication 10 July 2008. See above 63ff for my decision to group feature films either as NZFC films or from the 'shadow' industry.

<sup>479</sup> 19 September 2008.



their first features? Does it make a difference that there are few half-hour/one hour TV drama opportunities [providing an alternative pathway to a cinema feature]?” (We didn’t discuss the shadow options because the focus was on NZFC programmes.)

*Does it help to make commercials as well as an ‘A’ list festival short film?*

I had been interested in this when researching my *PhD Report*. Many film directors—including writer/directors—gain skill and experience for use on feature projects when making television commercials. However, informants estimate that women direct only 10 percent of commercials made in New Zealand, and some women report that they have a hard time when they put themselves forward as directors. In my view, anyone who comes to feature film making after a few years directing commercials comes from a strong position. The well-paid work allows the accumulation of some capital as well as skills and experience. Someone who approaches a feature film after several years of living intermittently on an unemployment benefit or doing work that is unrelated to filmmaking is in a less strong position. This view is supported in a recent interview with Armagan Ballantyne, director of *The Strength of Water*:

[Directing commercials] has meant that I have been able to afford to live while working on the film! Also I was able to experience working with large crews and exercise some craft skills—so it was helpful.<sup>480</sup>

I have also heard Sima Urale, director of *Apron Strings*, speak about the benefits to her of directing commercials. The income helps and the producers say things like “Like a crane?” because money is no object.<sup>481</sup>

*Do women who make ‘A’ list festival short film need a different kind of support than men to develop their first features?*

I suggested to Ruth that some extra ‘mothering’ might be helpful: explicitly affirming the value of diverse women filmmakers’ work; mentoring; asking

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<sup>480</sup> Howe: 21.

<sup>481</sup> 28 July 2008.

the women filmmakers themselves what would work for them; supporting them to find new ways to develop their own pathways. Ruth implied that she had other thoughts, and we moved on. These meetings were always comparatively brief, and I had a lot to cover.

*Does it make a difference that there are few half-hour/one hour TV drama opportunities [providing an alternative pathway to a cinema feature]?*

I knew nothing about this, so did not comment. Later I became interested in ‘cinema for the small screen’, how to provide a cinematic experience not only for television—which may now be on a comparatively large screen—but for viewers like me, who use their computers to download video-on-demand (VOD) for laptop viewing. But then, without a television, I wasn’t much interested.

But I was interested in testing how much more easily I talked about my own projects, whether I could more easily shift between roles whenever I wanted.<sup>482</sup> So I asked Ruth to let me know if she met a producer who might be interested in my Australian script *Lost Boy*—about a boy, a league player, a paedophile and a cop. As I remember it she said that *Lost Boy* was a ‘TV’ project. And I didn’t explore the response as it felt more important to focus on a useful research conversation, though I wondered how she knew enough about the script to be so sure. Was she saying that *Lost Boy*—which she hadn’t read—was not a cinematic script? Or was she saying that any script I had could only work as a ‘pathway’ project to a cinema feature, because of my lack of experience? Or was there a third option? Perhaps she had a single-minded view of my role: I was an academic researcher, not a scriptwriter.

There appear to be tensions between the NZFC and NZOA in relation to television drama opportunities, and I had missed them, although I had known about their joint Signature initiative.<sup>483</sup> The Signature initiative, devolved to producer Trevor Haysom of THE Films, generated two films that

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<sup>482</sup> See above 125.

<sup>483</sup> See above 113ff.

were released to cinemas in 2008, before appearing on television: *Apron Strings* and *Show of Hands*. It was then terminated. This initiative had not been fully supported within the industry. For example, SPADA (Screen Production and Development Association Waka Papaho) wrote to Ruth:

SPADA does not support this initiative being funded by the NZFC. One of the justifications for Signature Television is that it constitutes talent development for practitioners working towards feature film production. SPADA believes these objectives will be met through a commitment to funding digital films. Signature Television also muddies the waters of contestable and direct funding for TVNZ for local content and unsettles the television industry because it does not believe that the NZFC is necessarily equipped to understand television network needs in drama.<sup>484</sup>

(The NZFC devolved its digital initiative to Headstrong: “Headstrong went looking for kiwi cine-mavericks wanting to break down every barrier to tell their unique stories. And we’re here to support them 100% of the way”<sup>485</sup>. Headstrong made two films before the NZFC terminated the initiative.<sup>486</sup>)

Meanwhile, back in May 2007, as I focused on the NZFC data, the forthcoming visit of Linda Voorhees<sup>487</sup> and getting through the winter, I missed a significant opportunity for women writers and directors, an NZOA/TVNZ Request for Proposals (RFP) for four 75- to 90-minute telemovies. NZOA wanted a wider range of television drama, and sought a local drama presence in a key TV One slot. According to the RFP, the initiative was:

...designed to complement TVNZ’s existing 8.30 p.m. Sunday Theatre strand and provide viewers with a stimulating, local drama experience created by the best New Zealand talent. The projects need to be high quality, innovative drama and while individually unique should reflect aspects of New Zealand culture. They may be original stories, adaptations from New Zealand literature, or the dramatisation of real life events. It is envisaged that at least one project of the four will be Maori; involving at least two of either a Maori producer, director or writer... A budget range of \$1,000,000 to \$1,500,000 is envisaged which may be extended by third party funding.<sup>488</sup>

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<sup>484</sup> SPADA 2004.

<sup>485</sup> Headstrong 2009.

<sup>486</sup> *The Devil Dared Me To; A Song of Good*.

<sup>487</sup> See above 78, 117.

<sup>488</sup> New Zealand On Air 2007: 3. These budgets are comparable to the \$1.1 million Signature initiative budgets.

According to Megan Richards, a TVNZ spokeswoman, this initiative was a response to viewers' enjoyment of films like *Whale Rider*, *The World's Fastest Indian*, and *In My Father's Den*. The telemovies were intended to be more mainstream than the Signature initiative and the initiative was not intended to provide an auteur pathway for people who wanted to make feature films:

Signature's focus was for new directors, with some experience in film, short film and commercials, to create original films [or] auteur works, for television... Sunday dramas [sic] is different because it has been designed with a specific audience in mind and for a particular timeslot. Also, it is open to all and we are looking for strong, recognisable New Zealand stories.<sup>489</sup>

It is not clear, with this budget and on a small screen, how these dramas would provide a viewing experience comparable to *Whale Rider*, *The World's Fastest Indian*, and *In My Father's Den*. I remain unconvinced by Megan Richards' distinctions between the telemovies and the Signature initiatives; regardless of the experience of writers and directors they sought to attract, each seems to have similar budget limitations and each seems aimed at a very similar audience.

Jane Wrightson, CEO of NZOA, conceptualised the telemovies a little differently:

The dramas may be feature length, but they are not a feature film. TV drama has different creative disciplines—and lower budgets—and a more demanding commissioning environment. Feature film people are often not at all interested in making television—and the reverse is also true... TV drama experience is gained in different ways, usually as part of the team on series production like *Shortland Street* or *Outrageous Fortune* or with lower profile ideas (e.g. Maori Television's *The Table Plays*, half hour dramas from new regional writers, funded by us last year and screening now).<sup>490</sup>

Some women writer and director crossovers between mediums weaken Jane's argument about filmmaker involvement in television;<sup>491</sup> and Ruth later

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<sup>489</sup> Wakefield 2007[b].

<sup>490</sup> Email communication 7 November 2008.

<sup>491</sup> See n365 and accompanying text.

supplied a long list of feature filmmakers who had made television; this was “why [she] cared that the pathway was no longer there”<sup>492</sup>.

Jane also distinguished the NZOA’s processes and role from those of the NZFC:

We are different to the NZFC (and our processes are far simpler) because we are an audience-focused broadcast funding agency without the industry-support mandate of the NZFC. Thus we do not consider applications without broadcaster support (unlike the NZFC which I think can enter development etc often without a distribution support). It is the broadcaster that is charged with commissioning and creative oversight – the Broadcasting Act specifically precludes NZ On Air from editorial intervention. We only deal directly with producers because they are the ones who receive our public funding and are accountable for its expenditure. Television producers are generally the ones who pull together the production team and ‘talent spot’ emerging writers and directors...A producer must secure interest from a broadcaster before approaching us. If we are concerned about a market gap it will be a programme-related gap, not an industry support-style one. (For example we’re unlikely to say—we need more programmes made by women. We may well say—we need a wider variety of styles or voices in a particular genre.)<sup>493</sup>

Perhaps this is an understandable differentiation from a producer’s perspective although, because the NZFC often will not fund a development project without a producer attached, the role of producers is also key there.<sup>494</sup>

And while it was ‘open to all’ to propose projects, Jane emphasised that the RFP was “pitched at experience[d] programme makers...[a] knowledge of the TV marketplace is pretty important—it’s not for the faint-hearted! It would be very unusual for lesser experienced people to break through with this kind of prime time drama initiative”<sup>495</sup>.

By June 2009, two telemovies had been produced and broadcast: *Until Proven Innocent* written by Donna Malane and Paula Boock, both television writers and producers, and directed by Peter Burger, who had already directed one feature film, television drama episodes and commercials; and *Piece of My Heart*, written and directed by Fiona Samuel, a television writer,

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<sup>492</sup> See n579.

<sup>493</sup> Email communication 7 November 2008.

<sup>494</sup> There is “generally a[n NZFC] pathway for established feature writers without a producer”: Ruth Harley handwritten note July 2009, including a list of filmmakers who have accessed it, made from memory.

<sup>495</sup> Email communication 7 November 2008.

and based on a novel by Renee. *Life's a Riot*, written by Dean Parker who writes for theatre and television and directed by Ian Mune, a feature film director had been produced but not broadcast. A fourth project, *The Plot To Subvert Wartime New Zealand*, producer/director Simon Bennett, writer—and playwright—Dave Armstrong, was in production. Three more projects were in development.

Arguably this mix of creatives from theatre, television and film supports Jane's statement, that feature filmmakers are often not interested in television, though I wonder about the people who submitted proposals. Did many frustrated feature filmmakers who do not write for television apply? The high participation of women in this initiative may reflect the reality that women writers already participate much more fully in television than in feature film writing. When I discussed this, one influential person in the industry named "a few standout female writers—Donna Malane, Kathryn Burnett and Rachel Lang"; another counted the television 'go-to' writers for me and concluded that they were half men and half women.<sup>496</sup> Have Donna Malane, Paula Boock and Fiona Samuel no interest in making cinema features? Or have they tried and been unsuccessful and then focused on television? What happens in the gap between the mediums? Does it matter?

And, again, where were the Maori women's projects?<sup>497</sup> Ella Henry's PhD research-in-progress shows that women run a much higher proportion of substantial Maori television production companies—with turnover over \$1 million—than men do.<sup>498</sup> My understanding from an industry informant is that Maori women producers tend to prefer to work for television because the economics for television production are much more attractive. (This may be true for other women producers, too.)

Because women participate more in produced television writing than as produced feature writers, they seem more likely to participate in any

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<sup>496</sup> Personal communication 13 June 2007. See also above 125.

<sup>497</sup> I understand that there is one Maori women's telemovie in development, June 2009.

<sup>498</sup> Email communication 5 November 2008.

opportunity to make feature-length work for that medium. So, in spite of the arguments against telemovies being defined as feature films, I concluded that they were and included them in my list of features made in New Zealand. (And although I had no desire to write for a television series, I did begin to consider how I might in future find a television producer to work with.)

NZOA supported two NZFC-funded features in its October 2008 round, Taika Waititi's *The Volcano* and Gaylene Preston's *Home by Christmas*. Not surprisingly, in its October newsletter NZOA, acknowledging that these two features were the third and fourth to be funded in this financial year stated that "it is unlikely that we will be in a position to support additional feature film applications until the 2009-2010 financial year"<sup>499</sup>. With the telemovies, the numbers of features NZOA invested in 2008 exceeded those the NZFC funded.

In my view, the NZOA telemovie project would be a useful source of future research data for someone interested in feature film pathways and gender, or in crossovers between mediums.

### *'Keeping an eye on' gender as a strategy?*

At our 19 September meeting, Ruth acknowledged that "it's necessary to 'keep an eye on' [diversity]". Before she saw the statistics she "thought that having women readers/assessors/decisionmakers would ensure that women writers' and directors' interests were protected. It does not". This puzzled her, because "having Maori involved in the assessment and decision-making process works for Maori".

We did not discuss the evidence for this, nor whether Maori involvement in assessment and decision-making works as well for Maori women as for Maori men. On reflection, after Ruth had left for Australia, I realised that all the produced Maori feature writers and directors I know of are men: Gregory King, Peter Burger, Taika Waititi and Michael Bennett. So perhaps Ruth's

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<sup>499</sup> Wrightson 2008: 3.

perception of what “works for Maori” in fact works only for Maori *men*. As already noted, Briar Grace-Smith’s script for *The Strength of Water* is the first by a Maori woman to go into production since Riwia Brown adapted *Once Were Warriors* and Merata Mita’s *Mauri* was the last feature written and directed by a Maori woman.<sup>500</sup> As far as I know only one Maori woman producer, Ainsley Gardiner, is engaged with the short film-feature NZFC pathway. However, Maori producer choices do not explain the gender imbalance in features Maori write and direct; not all recent features Maori men wrote and directed have Maori producers.

On the other hand, emerging Maori director Paula Jones has stated “of course the NZ Film Commission...have been nothing but supportive of me through the few years that I have had dealings with them”<sup>501</sup>.

As I understand it, the NZFC Board received copies of my report, but after reading the statistics did not advocate consideration of gender issues. Ruth herself however reminded staff to consider gender; and knowledge of the statistics affected one decision in favour of a woman on which Ruth could not comment for privacy reasons.<sup>502</sup> As well, men and women were equally represented on the 2008-2009 FWI shortlist because someone ‘kept an eye’ on the process.<sup>503</sup>

Ruth acknowledged that if there is nothing written into the NZFC’s legislation, statements of intent, or the policies it uses in its decision-making, ‘keeping an eye’ on gender parity will work only if and when there are individuals within the institution who are committed to doing this.<sup>504</sup>

Ruth also agreed to bring the issue before the Board again during her last meeting with them as CEO, and asked me to ask Jeremy—who helped me measure the statistics—to make a one-pager of this year’s statistics. I had

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<sup>500</sup> See above 113.

<sup>501</sup> Jones 2009: 23.

<sup>502</sup> See n475 and accompanying text.

<sup>503</sup> Personal communications 19 September, 21 October 2008.

<sup>504</sup> Personal communication 19 September 2008.



hoped to hear about the Board's response (if any) but Ruth reported later that she was out of the room when the Board looked at the one-pager.<sup>505</sup>

*Why don't women support women's projects?*

Another question Ruth asked was "Does it make a difference that women producers do not prioritise working with women writers and directors?" I can see her now, our September meeting over, suddenly appearing in front of me as I sat with Jeremy, looking at the data on his computer screen. I blinked, slightly startled, and from somewhere deep inside came a response that shocked me. "Well," I said, "if I were a producer I'd choose a man's project, because it would be more likely to succeed." Months later I feel exactly the same and wish I didn't, although a few weeks after my final meeting with Ruth I was able to place my response in a wider context when Melissa Silverstein published Julia Jordan's introduction to a New York meeting on gender equity in playwriting in her *Women & Hollywood* blog.<sup>506</sup>

Julia Jordan's introduction was a response to finding that women were participating and succeeding as professional playwrights on every level except in numbers of productions, where at the current rate of increase it would take women another hundred years to achieve parity. This introduction—like my own response to Ruth's question about women producers—helped me understand how deeply a male gender preference is engrained in many of us, women and men. It also returned me to an aspect of Jonathan Gottschall's analysis, where he addresses an "editorial manipulation hypothesis"<sup>507</sup> that the characteristics he identified in storytelling across cultures exist because

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<sup>505</sup> Personal communication 21 October 2008.

<sup>506</sup> Jordan 2008. A later *Women & Hollywood* entry, from director Ela Thier who was having difficulty finding investors for her project, told me I was not alone in having higher expectations of men. She wrote: I teach screenwriting and consistently notice the different regard that I feel for my male and female students. No matter how 'enlightened' I think I am, I find myself having higher expectations of the guys. I just assume that they have more experience, more confidence, more intelligence...? I've recently noticed that when I receive quality work from a woman, I feel a sense of surprise. When I see amateur work from a man, I think "hmm... for some reason I had him pegged as an experienced writer. For some reason".—Thier 2009: np.

<sup>507</sup> Gottschall: 218.

men edit collections of folktales and are biased towards ‘men’s’ stories.<sup>508</sup> In his view, this would mean that female-edited collections would have a different bias, but in the data he analysed this did not happen. He concluded, partly because of this that editorial manipulation did not exist. If, however, women’s own biases towards men’s stories are taken into account, he may be mistaken.

These biases may also have to do with women’s competitiveness with other women. Susan Pinker refers to subtle, indirect and covert strategies that women use in competition with one another. These include “[social] exclusion, mean remarks, trying to win over a competitor’s friends and allies...Women who are targets...are more likely to slink away than to fight back”<sup>509</sup>.

Julia Jordan referred to United States orchestras, the American Psychology Association, the American Economic Review and the Swedish Medical Council as organisations where both men and women “rated the quality of men’s work higher than that of women when they were aware of the gender of the person being evaluated, but not when the gender was unknown”<sup>510</sup>. Of her examples, the orchestras are closest institutionally to the NZFC, as arts organisations, and their story affirms the potential of legal action. Over twenty years ago, in response to a gender discrimination suit most major United States orchestras began auditioning new members blind, using screens to hide the identity of the musicians, and sometimes rolling out carpets to muffle the click of women’s heels that would give away their gender. This helped the orchestras achieve gender parity and the practice continues today.<sup>511</sup>

My first response to the possibility of blind reading and consideration of feature scripts at the NZFC was that unfortunately blind readings had not

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<sup>508</sup> See above 11.

<sup>509</sup> Pinker: 221.

<sup>510</sup> Jordan: np.

<sup>511</sup> Goldin and Rouse 2000.

worked for women entering the FWI.<sup>512</sup> Furthermore it could not work in most funding processes at the NZFC, where project applications are inseparable from the human beings that comprise their creative teams. And I remembered a conversation I'd had with another woman filmmaker, which seemed to encapsulate the problem:

Woman filmmaker: Men can't read women's scripts/ don't read them well.

Marian: Nor do women.

Woman filmmaker: What if they read them blind?

Marian: What if they don't?

While I was thinking about why blind readings had not worked for women in the FWI, I found a blog written by Susan di Rende, founder of the Broad Humor Film Festival. In one posting, she supports the idea that women's scripts are written 'differently' and she sees this as manifesting a "fundamental worldview divergence". Describing herself as "someone who reads a ton of scripts every year"<sup>513</sup> she started the festival after a comedy competition featured in the Writers Guild magazine where:

Not one of the finalists was a woman. Since submissions were blind many felt the contest was objective proof that women just don't write the stuff of movies. Many people, men and women feel that women writers should stop whining and start writing better. Period.<sup>514</sup>

She then refers to feminist philosopher Carol Gilligan:<sup>515</sup>

...whose research into the field suggested that women operated on a different scale, one based on maintaining a web of relationships rather than a ladder of individual attainment...My experience with the festival and reading all the scripts that come through illustrate this difference perfectly.<sup>516</sup>

Many of the scripts Susan di Rende gets are about shifts in the way that characters fit into a particular world. This is "contrary to the entertainment

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<sup>512</sup> See above 116ff.

<sup>513</sup> di Rende 2008[b].

<sup>514</sup> di Rende 2008[a].

<sup>515</sup> Gilligan.

<sup>516</sup> di Rende 2008[a].

biz wisdom of making a script about one character's journey"<sup>517</sup>, where that character's actions at the climax lead to a resolution and that character changes by the end of the story, and the scripts are perceived as weaker because they do not deliver the same monumental single climax that men's scripts do.<sup>518</sup> Of all the opinions about women's scripts I've read or heard during this research, this is the one that I find most useful. In my view, three films first shown in New Zealand in mid-2009 provide good examples of this kind of script: Jane Campion's *Bright Star*, Briar Grace-Smith's *The Strength of Water* directed by Armagan Ballantyne, and *Sunshine Cleaning* by Megan Holley, directed by Christine Jeffs.

Virginia Woolf presented another view. As well as the lack of nourishment, of tradition, and of thinking in common available to women,<sup>519</sup> Woolf refers to the limitations of men who write:

It is useless to go to the great men writers for help, however much one may go to them for pleasure...[they] never helped a woman yet, though she may have learnt a few tricks of them and adapted them to her use. The weight, the pace, the stride of a man's mind are too unlike her own for her to lift anything substantial from him successfully.<sup>520</sup>

This has certainly been true for me when I read men's scripts and watch films they have written. And this links to another possible problem for a woman writer, and perhaps in other ways for an artist, with structure, because "A novel [and a screenplay] is not made of sentences laid end to end, but of sentences built, if an image helps, into arcades or domes. And this shape too has been made by men for their own uses"<sup>521</sup>. I agree with Woolf when she writes, "For though men sensibly allow themselves great freedom in these respects, I doubt that they realise or can control the extreme severity with which they condemn such freedom in women"<sup>522</sup>.

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<sup>517</sup> Idem.

<sup>518</sup> Idem. See also above n441 and accompanying text.

<sup>519</sup> See nn 24, 25, 87 and accompanying texts.

<sup>520</sup> Woolf 1929; 1998: 99.

<sup>521</sup> Ibid: 100.

<sup>522</sup> Woolf 1931; 1979: 62.

In another essay, Woolf describes the experience of women affected by this condemnation, which in my view survives in the film industry because making films requires so many more resources and so much more competition than writing and publishing novels or poems. I cried when I first read this passage, which expanded my knowledge of the restrictions and responses discussed in Chapter 4:<sup>523</sup>

She was letting her imagination sweep unchecked round every rock and cranny of the world that lies submerged in the depths of our unconscious being. Now came the experience, the experience that I believe to be far commoner with women writers than with men... Her imagination had rushed away... And then there was a smash. There was an explosion... foam and confusion. The imagination had dashed itself against something hard. The girl was roused from her dream... in a state of the most acute and difficult distress... [S]he had thought of something, something about the body, about the passions... The consciousness of what men will say of a woman who speaks the truth about her passions had roused her from her artist's state of unconsciousness. She could write no more. The trance was over. Her imagination could work no longer.<sup>524</sup>

According to Joanna Russ, responses to content change when a reader knows the gender of a writer. In *How To Suppress Women's Writing* she includes a chapter on the double standard of content, using the reception of Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights* as an example of a novel first published under a male pseudonym.<sup>525</sup> When its authorship became known reviewers distorted the content of the work so it 'fitted' with their expectations of a woman's concerns. "Not only," writes Russ, "is female experience often considered less broad, less representative, less important, than male experience...[but a]s Carol Ohmann puts it 'there is a considerable correlation between what readers assume or know the sex of the writer to be and what they actually see or neglect to see in 'his' or 'her' work'"<sup>526</sup>.

It is impossible to know what might change if NZFC assessors and decision-makers were unaware of the gender of the writers and directors attached to projects seeking funding. Do they have an unconscious bias towards a project

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<sup>523</sup> See above 129ff.

<sup>524</sup> Woolf 1929; 1998: 61-62.

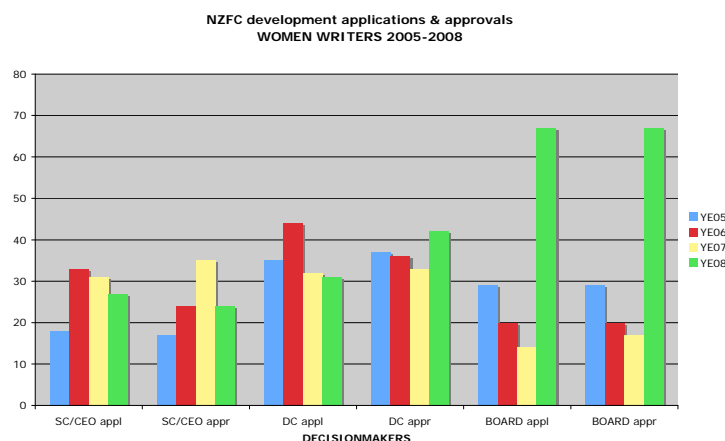
<sup>525</sup> Russ 1983: 8.

<sup>526</sup> Ibid: 43 citing Ohmann 1971. See also Jordan; and Emily Sands' 2009 research into readers of United States theatre scripts: Jodisc 2009.

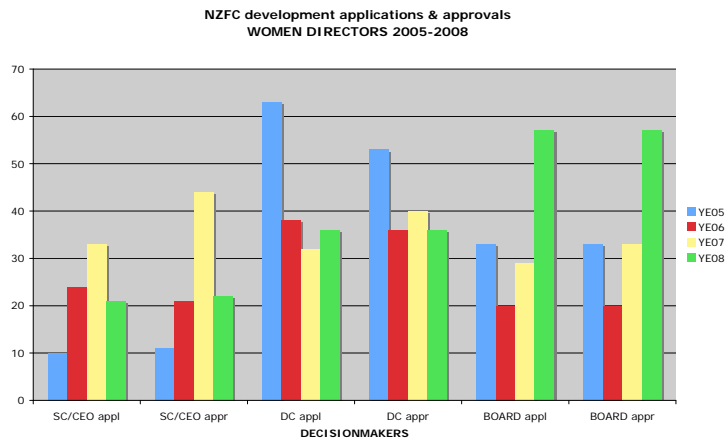
with a golden person's name attached ('who')? Or specific and perhaps unconscious expectations of a script written by a woman, or no interest in some kinds of subject matter ('what')? Or biases about structures ('how') that interest many women? When I received the development statistics for the year ending June 2008 I could not resist speculation.

## The NZFC development statistics for the year ending 30 June 2008

When Jeremy sent me the July 1 2007-June 30 2008 development application and approval statistics, I placed them alongside the development statistics for earlier years.<sup>527</sup>



<sup>527</sup> 12 October 2008. The tiers of funding and the decision-makers responsible for allocating the funding at that time include: Staff Committee (SC) – three people from a pool of four at least of one of whom is the Head of Development or CEO with the others being development executives. A group of senior staff members who consider applications for early-stage projects up to a cumulative maximum of \$40,000 and generally not exceeding \$20,000 per application. Development Committee (DC) – A group consisting of two industry professionals, a Board representative and CEO Ruth Harley, with Development Department in attendance, who consider projects with genuine production potential up to a cumulative maximum of \$110,000. Board – The NZFC Board who consider applications for advanced development, packaging and financing for projects nearing production, up to a cumulative maximum of \$150,000 total development funding; New Zealand Film Commission Te Tumu Whakaata Taonga 2009[c].



**Figure 8** Percentages of NZFC feature development applications from and approvals for projects with women writers and directors 2005-2008, by decisionmaker.

These statistics show that in 2008 there was a decrease, for the third year running, in early development applications to the NZFC's Staff Committee for projects with women writers attached; and fewer approvals than for the previous two years. Of the early development projects with directors attached, a much smaller proportion of applications than in 2007 had women directors involved. And, again unlike 2007, these projects had only a slightly higher success rate than the rate of applications. Had it become more difficult for women directors to move along the established pathways to a feature project, or had there been changes within the development staff, who encourage applications and make decisions about the applications once made?

Although the proportion of applications to the Development Committee for projects with women writers attached was the smallest for all four years studied, these projects received over 40 percent of the total approvals, the highest for all four years. At this level, the proportion of applications with women directors attached was the second lowest over the four years and the proportion of approvals was the lowest. Does this indicate that women writers who are not directors are becoming stronger participants?<sup>528</sup> Or does

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<sup>528</sup> See below 200ff re writers for the SFF.

it, taken in conjunction with the Staff Committee figures, perhaps support the view that women directors' participation became weaker?

After three years when the proportion of applications from and approvals of projects with women writers attached dropped consistently at Board level, there was an unprecedented increase in both applications and approvals. The pattern for projects with women directors attached was less consistent from 2005-2007, but their number too increased considerably in the 2008 year, though there were only five projects involved in seven decisions.<sup>529</sup>

A more marked change took place in the FWI decisions in 2008: the long list of twelve and the short list of six were both half women, half men. Of the final two projects selected one was a woman's and one a man's. This symmetry was unique in the six years the FWI had operated.<sup>530</sup>

If gender statistics were kept consistently it would be possible to analyse them rigorously, and follow through on individual projects, asking questions like: "What are the causes and effects of very marked changes, like the Board applications and approvals in 2008?" "How can improvements be made and sustained?" "What is the comparative investment in stories written and directed by women and men?" In my initial response to the statistics, written at short notice, and forwarded to Jeremy for tabling at Ruth's last Board meeting I asked some obvious questions:

Women's percentages of applications and approvals to SC/CEO remain consistently low over four years, and this year have dropped: What might lift the numbers? Women's DC applications have dropped but their percentage of approvals has risen [a misreading: this was true for women writers only]. What's changed? How can this positive change be sustained? Women's percentage shares of Board applications and approvals have hugely increased. What's changed? How can this positive change be sustained and translate into productions?

I also wondered about the effects of changes in staff and/or decisionmakers, and speculated on some general reasons for change, within and outside the NZFC.

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<sup>529</sup> *After the Waterfall* (wr/dr Simone Horrocks); *Bollywood Boys* (wr Matthew Saville, dr. Peter Salmon); *Cousins* (wr Patricia Grace) two approvals; *Home by Christmas* (wr/dr Gaylene Preston) two approvals; and *Untitled project* (wr/dr Robert Sarkies).

<sup>530</sup> See above 116ff.



*Possible reasons for positive changes, from within the NZFC*

Did the positive changes result from Ruth Harley asking her staff to be aware of gender issues? Were the Board more aware of gender issues, or of its decision-making being analysed from a gender perspective? And if so was it easier than Ruth had expected to make change, especially as by October 2008, Ruth was less certain that there would be a ‘gap’ after *The Vintner’s Luck*?<sup>531</sup> Was it just chance? It was impossible to tell, without a record of the Board’s response to the statistics, Ruth’s instructions, and of the individual beliefs and attitudes of the NZFC staff and Board members.

In my response to the figures I asked whether decision-making had been affected by increased NZFC awareness of the ‘who’, ‘what’ and ‘how’ of gender issues and described them as I understood them. It helped me summarise my thinking at the time; and I hoped that it might create some dialogue within the NZFC if these were not issues the individuals there consider anyway. But again, who knows?

*‘Who’ a writer or director is*

The effects on decisionmakers of writers’ and directors’ gender capital (the golden boy syndrome and the golden girl syndrome) matter.

Over the last couple of years I’ve heard enough stories about golden boy-dom and girl-dom to identify practices that disrupt the careers of women who write and direct, and to learn that these practices are very similar to those I remember in the arts world during my youth. In the New Zealand film industry, from what I’ve heard, it helps men and women to be young and beautiful as well as smart. However, golden girls have problems with their male peers and with potential mentors that golden boys don’t and I now see this as more important than I used to, when as a younger—and slightly golden—woman I was familiar with golden boys who were artists and writers.

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<sup>531</sup> See above nn 476, 477 and accompanying texts.

I've been surprised and saddened by some of the stories and the consequences.

As Audre Lorde identified, creativity, even making a bookcase, can be erotic.<sup>532</sup> Collaborating on a film project is perhaps more erotic than making a bookcase; the erotic elements of creativity become easily transformed into sexual desire. When men who support women filmmakers become sexually attracted to them and are rejected, however gently, not only do these men commonly then belittle the women's work, they also badmouth them in the industry, according to my informants. In such a competitive environment, where the biases identified in the last section already exist, this has severe consequences.

Alternatively, where the sexual attraction is mutual and both parties are filmmakers—or artists of another kind—the woman may put her own filmmaking ambitions aside and/or expend more energy supporting her partner's work and their children than focusing on her own work.<sup>533</sup> This of course suits some women. In the past it suited me. But I wonder if some women make this choice because they believe—and their partners believe—that their partner's creative work has greater value than their own. And whether some women believe with Joanna Margaret Paul that "The idea that one sacrifices other values for art is alien to me, and I think to all women whose calling it is to do and be many things. To concentrate all meaning and all energy in a work of art is to leave life dry and banal."

Making feature films, the 'long obsessional haul' that Ruth Harley referred to in our first meeting may require women to sacrifice other things, especially at early and early-mid career stage when the financial returns are minimal. Delaying child-bearing and child-raising is an obvious one. Taking a

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<sup>532</sup> Lorde 1984: 57.

<sup>533</sup> The partnership between Peter Jackson and Fran Walsh seems to be globally unique, and in my view only one other arts partnership in New Zealand in recent history, between theatre group Red Mole's Alan Brunton and Sally Rodwell, matches its enduring creative and personal combination and influence.

supportive role in the career of a man or a woman you love, and whose work you love, may be an attractive compromise.

*'What' (content)*

What some women write about—or want to direct—may make a difference to whether their films get made. Some women writers—and some men writers of course—choose a genre and subject matter that is oriented towards an audience of women. *Second-Hand Wedding*—co-written by a woman—is an excellent example of this: an older woman as central character; a mother/daughter relationship; a local take on shopping; a wedding.

After 2008's New Zealand International Film Festival, where I chose to view only films with women writers/directors, I made up the following award list for an (unpublished) piece I wrote, tongue in cheek, as a way to highlight some of the commonalities I saw across diverse films written by women. This can be seen as a salute to essentialism and it is of course possible to list films written and/or directed by men which have similar themes and portray similar behaviours to those I identified.<sup>534</sup> But it is also noticeable in retrospect, having read Susan di Rende's views, that many of these films (*Mataharis*, *Caramel*, *Frozen River*, *Apron Strings*, *Water Lilies*, *Mamma Mia*) are about shifts in the way a group of women fit within a world rather than about a single character's journey.

RELATIONSHIPS and GIRL/WOMAN POWER— Best portrayals of a spunky girl: *Persepolis*; *Fighter*; *Buddha Collapsed Out of Shame*; Best portrayal of a dead relationship: *Mataharis*; Best portrayal of sexual attraction between women: *Caramel*; Best portrayal of relationships between mothers and sons: *Frozen River* and *Apron Strings*; Best portrayal of a revived relationship: *Mataharis*; Best portrayal of relationships between mothers: *Frozen River*;

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<sup>534</sup> For example: *Sex And The City*; *Four Months, Three Weeks And One Day*; *Irina Palm*. This list also echoes Juliet Batten's list of women artists' themes, often challenged in the intervening decades, see for example Barrie 1986-87: political work; domesticity; sexuality/spirituality; search for identity; female heritage; relationships between women; personal revelation; collaborative/collective work, Batten 25. Here I am speaking—with a smile—to women in my historical home culture, acknowledging their ongoing presence as readers and influences, and my ongoing gratitude and responsibility towards them.

Best portrayal of cross-cultural relationships: *Frozen River*; Best portrayal of women's relationships with the elderly: *The Savages* and *Caramel*; Best portrayal of sibling relationships: *Jinx Sister* and *The Savages* FOOD & BODIES— Best meal scene: Popcorn and Kool Aid dinner in *Frozen River* for its utter authenticity (the money-for-gas scenes were pretty good too); Best food preparation scene: *Apron Strings* for image of oil flowing over a big stainless steel bowl of flour; Best sport stories: *Water Lilies* and *Fighter*; Best nail painting scene: *Mamma Mia* for the amazing tenderness of the scene where Donna paints her daughter Sophie's toe nails (this wasn't in the festival but I loved the scene); Best body fluid scenes: a tie between *Caramel* (menstrual blood) and *The Savages* (faeces on the wall)— I'm putting a bloodied condom scene right back into one of my scripts; Best body or facial hair removal scene: a beautician using caramel to depilate the thighs of her lover's wife in *Caramel*.

(I remember asking Ruth the first time we met about my PhD project: "Who is making films for people over 50 with disposable income?" And her response: "No-one, as far as I know." I'd now add "And for the second and fourth quadrant as a whole?"<sup>535</sup>) The success of *Twilight* has highlighted the power of these audiences, and this year has also been remarkable for the earnings of *Sex and the City* and *Mamma Mia*, also made for women.<sup>536</sup>

### *'How' (content)*

Some women writers tend to write 'differently', as already described, and readers, who may already be biased for the reasons also described, may struggle with this difference.

I struggle to write a 'classic' script though I'm getting better at it, thanks to the help I've had. I'm constantly reminded that writers like me, who prefer less conventional script models have the problem identified by Linda Seger:

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<sup>535</sup> The four quadrants are: 1. Women aged under 25; 2. Women aged over 25; 3. Men aged under 25; 4. Men aged over 25.

<sup>536</sup> For Meryl Streep's take on studio executives and women's films see n598 and accompanying text.

[We] may not yet have the craft to make these different models work. Although these kinds of stories can be done for a much lower budget than the more action-oriented models, if they fail, women know they usually don't get another chance. If they compromise, they feel they aren't truly telling their stories.<sup>537</sup>

And the 'how' of our writing may affect our progress through the development processes.

There are many possible explanations for the way I and other women may write. Do we write for a specific audience or specific audiences or for a male director? Or because, as Susan Pinker believes, we tend to like games—and by extension writing and films—that involve talking and turn-taking (i.e. multiple protagonists) rather than a goal that includes the opportunity to defeat an opponent?<sup>538</sup> What we watch also makes a difference; my own natural writing inclinations may also be connected to Jean Renoir's thesis about the difference between European and American filmmaking tendencies: an American/ New Zealand film usually moves smoothly in a direct way towards its goal while a European film goes indirectly, in a roundabout, unpredictable way to get wherever it's going.<sup>539</sup> I like roundabout and unpredictable.

### *Possible reasons for changes among women writers and directors*

It is of course possible that women did better when they took their projects to the NZFC Board in the 2008 year because they themselves changed their behaviours.

When I took a summary of our conversations into Ruth for her to sign off, she recalled one recent application for a 'women's' project where the quality of the producer's advocacy affected the decision positively.<sup>540</sup> Was it possible that over the last couple of years, women increased their skill levels and/or improved advocacy of their projects? Early on in my research one practitioner in particular strongly contended that women filmmakers had to learn to

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<sup>537</sup> Seger 1996: 141. This 'knot' continues into the next chapter, the script for *Development*.

<sup>538</sup> Pinker: 198-199.

<sup>539</sup> Chandler 2004: 276.

<sup>540</sup> Personal communication 21 October 2008.

compete.<sup>541</sup> Was it possible that in a comparatively short space of time writers and directors and producers had become more competitive?

### *Women and competition*

Around this time I found an article on gender differences in competition that persuaded me that women do compete differently and that it was unlikely that women filmmakers' behavioural changes had caused the change in development application and approval proportions.

Economists Muriel Niederle and Lise Vesterlund investigated differences in the competitive behaviours of men and women and concluded that negotiating in a highly competitive environment may prove particularly challenging for women.<sup>542</sup> In one setting, where women and men performed at similar levels in single-sex competitions, men outperformed women in mixed-sex competitions. In a mixed-sex setting where the researchers found no gender differences in performance, many more men than women chose a compensation scheme in which they had to compete against others.

In a third study, perhaps the most relevant for filmmaking, Niederle and Vesterlund examined an institutional intervention that may encourage more women to compete. They found that: "...a quota-like affirmative action environment in which women must be equally represented encourages many more women to compete"<sup>543</sup>. They argue that the change in women's willingness to compete in this context does not necessarily lower the performance requirement for women and result in reverse discrimination towards men. Women's significant response to affirmative action— including those who were high performers—"implies that it may not be necessary to lower the performance requirement for women in order to achieve a more diverse group of winners."<sup>544</sup>

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<sup>541</sup> See above 125.

<sup>542</sup> Niederle and Vesterlund 2008.

<sup>543</sup> Ibid: 447.

<sup>544</sup> Ibid: 459-60.

While, given Ruth's comment, at least one New Zealand woman producer may have changed—or maintained—her way of competing, I am doubtful whether women applicants' behaviours caused the increase in Board decisions favourable to women writers and directors in the NZFC's 2008 year.

## FWI again

On 15 May 2008 I joined 34 women and 43 men, to listen to a panel talk about the FWI: Matt Saville (writer of *Bollywood Boys*, a FWI project) Ken (chair), Briar Grace-Smith (writer) and Hone Kouka (NZFC Development Executive). I sent Cushla an email afterwards. Here it is.

Hone Kouka said that he had read 96 scripts last year and the quality is not lifting. The best scripts [are] either the ones with a very good idea or written by a craftsperson. Practice is important and playwrights get practice. It's important that writers use film as a visual medium; dialogue-heavy not good. Tell one person's story and tell it well. Briar Grace-Smith talked about the importance of writing being cinematic, of things unfolding. I asked Hone Kouka about the stats. He said he just didn't know why 40 percent of the applicants but only 17 percent of the successful applicants over five years are women. Last year when the shortlist was six men he asked the people making the shortlist about 'a woman's voice' and they were adamant that there wasn't one that was good enough. Then he—and others on the panel—went on to say that the important things are to have one (person's) story only, told well (ignoring the bleed now between telly so...we have *Sex and the City* as a movie with four protagonists, as well as *Water Lilies* just out in the States about three young women who are synchronised swimmers etc as well as Altman); plus keeping dialogue minimal: they didn't talk about no chit chat (which we know from Linda) [but] didn't refer to *Before Sunset*, or *Two Days in Paris*, or even *Annie Hall* and *When Harry met Sally* which I've watched recently and are FULL of dialogue, or the bleed between documentary and fiction which brings more dialogue with it; plus 'cinematic' which none of the panel could define (and I find Nancy [C]'s face cinematic and could watch a whole movie of just her but don't think they could).<sup>545</sup> Hone also said 1. They look for a good idea [that] can be transformed into a movie through help with the craft of expressing it and/or 2. A craftsperson-like script [that] can be taken forward. I think their idea of 'idea' may be limited and their whole paradigm is faulty. In which case it won't help to have women readers (which Hone mentioned) if they have taken on a faulty paradigm.<sup>546</sup>

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<sup>545</sup> Nancy C inspired Emily in *Development*, Chapter 6 below; and agreed to play her in the film.

<sup>546</sup> Email communication 18 May 2008. Reproduced in full as an example of contemporary crankiness. The last part of the email reminds me why: "IIML presentation and Linda [Voorhees on Skype, advising re *Red Dingly*] in the same week is OK, just slightly complicated because I'm in the middle of reconceptualising the reasons why the 'grassroots' First Writers Initiative (as Hone Kouka called it the other night) doesn't work for women. It's no worse than any other week than I can remember in recent history: prioritise, stay focused,

The outcome from the FWI round that followed was to date unique, FWI selection of one woman's and one man's script. Both writers had been on the IIML M.A. course. "Is the course getting better?" I asked Ken, who taught it when I did it and still teaches it. "Yes," he said.

However, one friend had feedback from the NZFC re her entry to the FWI that renewed my interest in 'what' and 'how' issues. Although she would be the first person to acknowledge that her script needed work, it had been shortlisted for the highly competitive Moondance script competition and she entered the FWI to get help with its development. In my view, the 'what' of the script has a lot going for it. An adaptation of a New Zealand young people's novel that won a prestigious award, it has a group of young people as primary characters, like the groups in *Wild Child* (2008) written by Lucy Dahl and Gurinder Chadha's *Angus, Thongs and Perfect Snogging* (2008) both in cinemas while the FWI decision-making was in process. For me it is a very good idea, with the advantage of being an adaptation<sup>547</sup> and for a potential audience within all four quadrants; its group of young people might also make it attractive to NZOA for a young audience.<sup>548</sup>

The letter my friend received from the NZFC read as follows:

This script pursues gutsy material through competently written scenes and serviceable dialogue but needs a more emotionally engaged approach. Characters and relationships need to be explored in greater depth. Perhaps you need to think about moving the story forward beat by beat, and to make decisions about who are the primary and who are the secondary characters. What is the story you want to tell?<sup>549</sup>

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say no to other stuff, and make sure to have some time out. Do qi gong. Know I'll make mistakes. Eat well. Tonight kidney and bacon at Nancy [C]'s."

<sup>547</sup> Stephen Cleary, from Arista, says this about adaptations: "[N]ot only are there lots of adaptations made (approximately half of all films distributed are adaptations) but they often tend to be the better films. The reason for this is probably that the characters in the range of non-film sources tend to be, on average, better and fuller than the average original script character and great character make great films. So the rewards, or potential rewards for the adapted screenplay are great, which means the opportunities are definitely there for writers and directors and producers who learn how to master this significant area of the film and television storytelling business": Cleary 2007[a]: 62.

<sup>548</sup> See n410 and accompanying text for the audiences NZOA is required to consider.

<sup>549</sup> Unpublished letter, 23 September 2008.



Reading this, I wondered about both the ‘how’ and the ‘what’ foci that lay behind it. Did the NZFC’s assessors miss a good idea “which can be transformed into a movie through help with the craft of expressing it”<sup>550</sup> because they were looking so carefully for a ‘classic’ script with a single protagonist? Were they so fixed on a limited range of ‘what’ that they were unable to see that the writer knew very well the story she wanted to tell: the script was about a *group* and within a specific genre? About shifts in the way that characters fit into a particular world?<sup>551</sup> Did they consider the potential commercial value of a film about young people, an adaptation, which also addressed a carefully identified potential audience?

Of course, there may have been lots of excellent scripts this year and my friend would have had to develop hers much further to be in with a chance. This is of itself useful to know. But my sense, from having read her script and now the letter from the NZFC, is that it is possible that there’s a particular kind of subjectivity among assessors that relates to the Writers Guild of America West report statement: “Industry diversity is not only about equal access to employment opportunities; it is also about opening space for the telling of stories that might not otherwise be told”<sup>552</sup>. Who am I to second guess the NZFC assessors? But I remember also that the NZFC funded only at post-production another film carefully pitched to particular audiences, *Second-Hand Wedding*, now the seventh highest grossing New Zealand film ever. Could it be that, like the studio executives who were surprised by the success of *Mamma Mia* there’s a complex interrelationship among ‘who’, ‘what’ and ‘how’ that is further complicated by perception of audience?

In a *Pitch Engine* interview that appeared during this time, Hone also described “common mistakes that stop a project dead”:<sup>553</sup>

...there are things that can slow the process down, and there are very common things that most of us are aware of. Such as —sometimes a writer will try to make

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<sup>550</sup> See n546 and accompanying text.

<sup>551</sup> See above 179.

<sup>552</sup> See nn 8, 323.

<sup>553</sup> Anonymous 2008[a].

sure that everyone is happy—all the characters, and we lose track of who we are watching, who or what the film is about. It sounds like a simple thing but point of view is very important and it comes up again and again.<sup>554</sup>

Because of his public statements I met with Hone—and Head of Development Marilyn Milgrom—to ask them about the multiple character issue.<sup>555</sup>

Hone reiterated that for beginners it's important to learn to tell one story, focusing on a single character, using a single point of view, and to tell it well, like learning to juggle with a single ball before trying multiple balls.

Everyone has lots of ideas about lots of things that they want to say when they start out. He and Marilyn both believed that men and women like to write multiple protagonists and story lines, and men perhaps more often. Hone also told me about taking writers through each separate story thread to make sure the script worked; NZFC has a project with multiple protagonists in advanced development, written by a man,<sup>556</sup> and of course *Apron Strings*, written and directed by women, also had multiple story lines.

When I talked about this with Ken, he told me that in his experience women were more likely to write multiple protagonists. Who knows? I tend to support Susan di Rende's and my own perceptions from my own writing struggles.

And as always, from this meeting I received little snippets of ideas that I incorporated into my thinking. Looking back at B Ruby Rich's list of 'Journals and journeys, conferences and conversations, partying and politicking, going to movies and going to bed' as alternatives to the 'standard intellectual route' of 'to read and then to write'<sup>557</sup> from this series of meetings at the NZFC, I can happily add my experience of 'meetings' to her list. At one meeting, for instance, someone spoke about people "writing what they watch" as the "standard creative route". I thought later "Oh, that may be true sometimes—or 'writing what we read' if making an adaptation". But what about the

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<sup>554</sup> Idem.

<sup>555</sup> 26 November 2008.

<sup>556</sup> Michael Bennett's *Matariki*, in post-production July 2009.

<sup>557</sup> Rich: 3.

relationship to writing about what we have experienced, analogous to developing theory from what we've experienced?

My experience has been that I write what I don't see when I watch moving image, writing what I want to see: that's a prime motivation. And my experience of other women writers' work is that some of them, too, hunger to create a script and or a film that presents and illuminates what has been invisible and unspoken in our lives. It is possible that a belief about people "writing what they watch" does not fully take into account the reality and the challenges of trying to write what has been unseen and unheard.<sup>558</sup> I think it is possible too that men and women, if they limit their concept of what writers write to "writing what they watch", lose opportunities to nurture writing that attempts to access the invisible and unspeakable and films that would appeal to audiences who, like the writers, hunger for them. This goes far beyond the 'body' scenes I identified in my mock award list.

The other snippet I treasure from this meeting was an explanation of the difference between stories about groups written for television or film. In television there does not need to be a theme, other than an environment in which the group plays out its lives, like a hospital. In a film there has to be a theme beyond the environment that links the characters.

Two months later, Hone Kouka and I continued the conversation with a phone call.<sup>559</sup> He had had four years involvement in the FWI; felt in 2007 there was an anomaly, knew there was usually a woman's voice there. But that year, where was it? Quality and numbers had dropped. This year he went through all the scripts, around 100, keeping an eye on gender, nothing formal. He didn't think there needed to be anything formal. Quality had lifted, perhaps because he'd been around the country giving workshops.

In Hone's view, in general women writers tend to dominate early on in the development process. Women's scripts are the best then, really strong,

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<sup>558</sup> See n88.

<sup>559</sup> 27 February 2009.

although they may not apply in great numbers. But once their projects go up the ladder to financing, they fall away. According to him, also a writer, this has always been the case in theatre and film. Often women's scripts have a lot more detail and less craft than men's; their technical side is not as developed. There's a strong heart to the story but women don't know how to articulate the story and when women's scripts advance and their craft increases, the voice dissipates. Men are more likely to be willing to write to meet the market and have a lot more dialogue. Women's scripts have more big print and scene setting, are more visual.<sup>560</sup> Sometimes, when reading FWI scripts blind, Hone goes back to see if he has guessed right that a script is a man's or woman's and is sometimes wrong but often right.

### More deferment of hope?

I was ambivalent about Ruth Harley's departure. She had been generous, helpful and informative to me. Anyone who followed might not be. But although she had come to appreciate the difficulties women face in making feature films and was 'keeping an eye' on gender issues herself and encouraging her staff to do the same, I came to believe that she did not support any structural change to support women filmmakers. The Goldin and Rouse, and Niederle and Vesterlund, research highlights the possibility that it is important both to formalise a policy that addresses built-in gender biases, so that 'keeping an eye' on decision-making is not dependent on individual staff members' goodwill, and to consider quotas. Without a written policy, 'keeping an eye' on gender balance and any positive consequences of this for women scriptwriters and directors are dependent on whether whoever followed Ruth as CEO is inclined to do the same and to encourage staff to do the same.

The combination of decision-maker preference for men's work for whatever reason—the way it's read as a script, the golden boy syndrome, the belief that

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<sup>560</sup> Cushla and I included broad beans in our script. Ken questioned this, and we resisted taking them out. I finally understood why they were a problem at a workshop on *mise en scene* where I learned that, even though broad beans had layered symbolic meanings for me and for Cushla, this kind of detail was best left to a director and art director.

the script is more likely to get through the development process and into production, the perceptions of potential audience—and the lack of formalised and consistent procedures for ensuring gender parity within taxpayer funded institutions does not inspire hope for change within the film industry any time soon.

Then I learned of another change that appeared to diminish hope further: the SIPF was to be replaced by the Independent Filmmakers Fund. As I researched that change, it became important to look again at SFF investment.

*The SIPF becomes the Independent Filmmakers Fund (IFF)*

The woman who told me about this change expressed a mixture of anger, sadness and frustration, because she saw it as closing off her best opportunity—as an emerging filmmaker—to access public resources for a feature project, or for another project on her pathway to making a feature. She inspired me to look into what was being lost; and I came to believe that her judgment was right, given the FWI and SFF statistics.<sup>561</sup> As an emerging filmmaker myself, I then moved quickly to complete my thesis script, *Development*—which I wanted to make as a shadow feature—so I could apply to the last SIPF round.

As already noted, the SIPF was managed by CNZ and jointly funded by the NZFC and CNZ.<sup>562</sup> It funded a diverse range of projects: experimental films, documentaries, features, dance films, animation and shorts, with a maximum investment of \$25,000. Its purpose was: “...to provide grants to emerging and experienced moving-image makers for innovative, experimental and non-commercial moving-image productions”<sup>563</sup>. The SIPF provided a good beginning for those who wanted to experiment with filmmaking on a comparatively small scale. Many grants were under \$15,000, and the maximum available for a digital feature was \$25,000. It was also possible to

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<sup>561</sup> See above 116ff for FWI statistics; below 200ff and 238ff for SFF statistics.

<sup>562</sup> See above 64.

<sup>563</sup> Creative NZ Arts Council of New Zealand Toi Aotearoa 2008[b].

apply for post-production costs to the NZFC if an SIPF film was selected for a festival.

Overall, women were relatively successful in accessing investment from this fund.<sup>564</sup> From 1 January 1999 to 1 March 2006, 1807 applications were received for SIPF consideration. Of those 1807, 487□clients were women. From these applications 206 projects were offered grants. 107—over half—of the successful projects were women's.<sup>565</sup> It has not been possible to update these figures because CNZ does not routinely record names of project application writers and directors and their gender.

It was impossible to assess the reasons for this success. The decision-making process seemed 'normal': applications were read and processed by the SIPF administrator who copied and sent them out to the SIPF's five assessment panel members, people from the film sector and a member of the CNZ Arts Board. The panel read all of the proposals and made preliminary artistic assessments prior to a meeting held over two days. I wonder whether the pool of people on the selection panels was very different than, say, the NZFC Development Committee pool. Were there more artist practitioners and fewer commercially-oriented producers? If so, would that make a difference? Why? To pursue these questions requires a discrete project, addressing complex issues like the meaning and significance of 'commercially-oriented'.

Women's participation in the SIPF as feature filmmakers appears to have decreased from the years ending June 2005-June 2008. Unfortunately CNZ records on its database only the names of applicants, whether an individual,

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<sup>564</sup> Day one [of the selection process] was primarily devoted to viewing support material, including the videos accompanying applications. On day two the panel discussed the applications and made its decisions. A representative from both CNZ and the New NZFC also attended the meeting in an advisory capacity: Creative NZ Arts Council of New Zealand Toi Aotearoa 2006.

<sup>565</sup> Personal communication, Linda Halle, administrator SIPF 2006. Where two clients were listed as□co-applicants Linda Halle counted the projects where the 'primary' client was□female. Organisations listed were not counted. There is a margin of error because some grants may have□been retired and may not show up.

organisation or company; it does not record gender data, or the names of individual directors, writers or producers.<sup>566</sup>

A manual search showed that women writers and/or directors were associated with three of eight applications for feature production funding in 2005 (37.5 percent), five of seventeen applications in 2006 (35.71 percent) and none of nine applications in 2007. Of individuals associated with sixteen applications in the 2008 year, eight were men and two were women, with two more men and two more women associated with organisational applications and two more applications having applicants whose gender was unknown.

SIPF funded just one feature film in 2005, with a male writer and director and a woman producer, and one in 2008, with a male writer/director, in my understanding because of the low quality of the scripts submitted.

The IFF replaced the SIPF from February 2009. Its purpose is: “...to invest in exceptional, innovative, high quality, non commercial projects by experienced film and moving image makers striving to engage audiences throughout New Zealand and beyond”<sup>567</sup>. On its face, this seems a welcome change, because it allows for greater investment, up to \$30,000 in one category and \$70,000 in another, except for one thing: ‘emerging’ filmmakers are no longer funded.<sup>568</sup>

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<sup>566</sup> Email communication from Emma Ward administrator SIPF email 27 November 2008.

<sup>567</sup> Creative NZ Arts Council of New Zealand Toi Aotearoa 2008[a].

<sup>568</sup> Category One applications must demonstrate that they have achieved a high degree of success in their field to be eligible for a grant of up to \$70,000:

International and national distribution/exhibition of previous film and moving image projects (e.g. to have exhibited work at film festivals/exhibitions, to have work presented at recognised commercial and/or non-commercial venues); International and national recognition (e.g. reviews, awards, references); A substantial professional body of film and moving image work. Category Two applicants are eligible to grants of up to \$30,000 per project for film and moving image makers, who must demonstrate that they have a significant track record and that they have achieved:

National distribution/exhibition of previous film and moving image projects (e.g. to have exhibited work at film festivals/exhibitions, to have work presented at recognised commercial and/or non-commercial venues); National recognition (e.g. reviews, references); A body of work; Achieved success in their field independent of a training institution: Creative NZ Arts Council of New Zealand Toi Aotearoa 2008[a].

A woman writer or director who wants to make an IFF feature and is an experienced documentary maker or has written or directed a short film funded by the SFF may not be identified as an ‘emerging’ filmmaker. But because established state funding pathways have not ‘worked’ for women feature writers and directors in the past they are less likely than men to have moved beyond an emergent status, so this change is significant. For an emerging woman writer, it appears that it will be necessary either to attach herself to an experienced director for an IFF or SFF project, or apply to the FWI. For a woman writer/director the FWI or the SFF become the state-funded entry points.

Three executive producer groups or pods are appointed annually to manage the SFF. Each funds at least three short films with budgets of approximately \$100,000 each. The groups accept submissions from filmmaking teams directly, sometimes a single writer or writer/ director at the beginning; and assist with the development, production and the delivery of the films to the NZFC.<sup>569</sup>

I was myself not interested in writing or directing a short film as a pathway to writing features. It was also beyond my resources to research beyond the NZFC to the executive producers to whom it had devolved its decision-making powers. Producers responsible for feature-making initiatives like Headstrong or Signature<sup>570</sup> or for a pod within the SFF are not required to record the genders of their applicants or answer for the equity elements of their processes.

However, when I realised that I would be ineligible to apply to the IFF for feature funding, and that the SFF had become more significant for every woman in my position, I decided to measure recent NZFC investment in short films written and directed by women. Again, whose stories get told?

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<sup>569</sup> New Zealand Film Commission Te Tumu Whakaata Taonga 2009[d].

<sup>570</sup> See above 110, 113ff, 170ff.



### *The SFF*

Each year the NZFC invests about \$100,000 in each of nine short films, three from each executive producer pod. In early 2008, in my report, I identified the SFF as a programme that does not work for women; and I questioned why women are underrepresented in NZFC-funded feature statistics when they do so well on the short film pathway.<sup>571</sup> I now question the under-representation of women writers and directors in the films generated through recent short film pods.

Although SFF films written and directed by women have a better record of 'A' list festival successes than those written and directed by men, it appears that women writers' and directors' successful participation in the pods, and the NZFC's investment in women filmmakers' development on this pathway, dropped steadily in the three years to June 2008. Without figures for applications, I could not measure women's participation in the SFF opportunities as fully as I measured the NZFC development processes. However, between 2006-2008 I attended the annual SFF meetings in Wellington where potential participants met the SFF executive producer groups (pods), and I recorded the gender of audience participants. Women and men were more or less equally represented. From this measurement, and from conversations I've had, I have no doubt that many women want to participate in the SFF programme.

I analysed the gender of writers and directors over three years ending 30 June 2006-2008, for applications made 2005-2007. As in other calculations, I ignored the role of women producers.

For my purposes the most important statistic is the one that measures films that are written and directed by women because these can only be stories women choose to tell, unlike films where women are co-writers or co-directors with men, writers of scripts directed by men, or directors of scripts written by men. Of the twenty-two films with writers and directors of the

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<sup>571</sup> See above 116.

same gender six had women writers and directors, 23 percent. Of the twelve films—44 percent of all twenty-seven—with the same writer/director, three had women writers/directors. (In terms of the SFF providing a pathway for aspiring feature writers/directors, this proportion of films with a writer/director attached may show that writers who are not also directors are more significant participants than in the past.)

Women wrote the scripts for three shorts in 2006, two in 2007. That is, they wrote five out of twenty-seven stories, 19 percent. A woman co-wrote a script in 2008; if that is included as a half script, the proportion rises to 20 percent.

Women directed four funded films in 2006, two in 2007 and two in 2008, a total directing participation in eight out of twenty-seven films, 30 percent in contrast to the 37 percent over the decade covered in the NZFC's *Review of NZFC Short Film Strategy*.<sup>572</sup> A woman co-directed one film in 2007, which increases the proportion to 31 percent.

Over the three years I've analysed, at \$100,000 per film NZFC has invested only \$600,000 in short film projects written and directed by women, compared with \$1,600,000 invested in projects written and directed by men. The amount invested has dropped annually, from \$300,000 in 2005 to \$200,000 in 2006 to \$100,000 in 2007.

In 2008—for projects announced in 2009—the pods' executive producers stated at the Wellington meeting that they welcomed individual applications from writers whose projects did not have a director or producer attached.<sup>573</sup> Because of this more women writers may have submitted projects without seeking a director or producer; this speculation has some support from the shortlist information. Three out of seven of the women-only projects shortlisted do not have a director attached (42 percent), in comparison with six out of seventeen of men-only projects (35 percent). As I've already stated, I've heard that it is more difficult for women scriptwriters to find a woman

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<sup>572</sup> NZFC 2007a.

<sup>573</sup> See below 238ff for outcome of this round.

director, partly because they tend to prefer to direct their own scripts, or a producer, and as a producer I'd prefer to produce a man's script because it is more likely to get funding.<sup>574</sup>

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<sup>574</sup> See above 177.

## *Transition 4: To Screenplay*

My conversations with Ruth Harley and others at the NZFC, the NZOA telemovies, the SIPF and its replacement of the SIPF with the IFF, and the SFF statistics, did not inspire me with hope for women filmmakers, including me, in spite of the spike in NZFC Board decisions favourable to women. But as I moved into writing Chapter 6 *Development*, my thesis screenplay, I took several useful conclusions from Chapter 5. Perhaps the most significant is that women—as readers, assessors, decisionmakers—do not automatically support other women. Like men, we may not read women’s scripts well; Susan di Rende’s characterisation of women’s scripts helped me to do this better in a way that the discussions recorded in Chapter 4 did not. We may, as I had discovered, be biased towards men’s projects even when we are feminists and even when we long, as audience members, for more—and more diverse—films that women write and direct, with women as central characters. Women also compete differently, and that’s useful to know about, as are the experiments with blind reading.

In relation to the NZFC decision-making, I concluded that individuals ‘keeping an eye’ on decisions may work, but only temporarily without formal appropriate gender-based legislation or regulation in place. Until then, a strategic approach to women’s projects seems to be essential, to build on the successes of established New Zealand women writers and directors. Most importantly, now that a gender imbalance in investment is established and the NZFC appeared to have moved to rectify it, it seems unwise for decisionmakers to advance projects simply because they have competent women writers and directors attached. I do not advocate experiments with methods like blind reading, to separate gender from the work. Instead, in my view, it is necessary to pay close attention to possible gender differences, to establish more effectively how to identify and develop a diversity of ‘women’s’ scripts and ‘women’s’ voices; and to take some risks with projects selected for advancement, with room to make mistakes. This should be done in conjunction with analysis of women’s projects in relation to women-as-

audience, even when the project is not obviously a ‘women’s’ one or requires rethinking about what a ‘women’s’ project might be.

Neither Ruth Harley nor the NZFC asked me for substantive alterations to Chapter 5 and Ruth Harley’s response provides a fine example of a contributor’s continued generosity.<sup>575</sup> People sometimes ask me about whether—as an autoethnographer and creative writer—I find it tiresome, restrictive, onerous, to adhere to my thesis’ ethics requirements. I respond that I like having their structure, the discipline they offer. Like a three act structure for a screenplay, they sustain and challenge me. And because I view everyone who takes part in my research—named or unnamed—as generous donors or contributors, I welcome their responses.

On the front of one of the chapters that returns in the mail, Ruth handwrites notes about the things she likes. There’s some crossover, but I can place each note within a category that affirms the performance of one of my three roles. The academic things: the amalgam and range of external reference, personal experience, alert questioning. The writerly things: the informal writing style, my voice; the text is a rich rewarding world, a page turner, a journey. The activism: Ruth “engages” with the scholarship and intelligence, with the ideas, “whilst relating to [her] own experiences, observations & questions”. She especially likes “the idea of ‘opening spaces where different stories can be told’. It’s a powerful idea and I will borrow it to interrogate some of the more ‘offcentre’ projects we are currently looking at—all three by women writers”.

Within the chapter’s text, there are equally valuable responses. Ruth suggests, twice, people I might speak with “to round this out”. (I wish I could but, accompanied by two ticking clocks, I’m unlikely to have time to do this. Maybe if some money comes through for post-doctoral time.) She instructs: I’ve omitted someone’s full title and must correct; I must delete something “wrongheaded” that is unfair. (I’m a little ashamed at my lack of precision;

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<sup>575</sup> Undated notes, July 2009. The NZFC itself gave me three very small notes, one amending information I had taken from its website.

and that I've been mean-spirited: my thoughts return to Scott William Gust's concern not to 'scapegoat' anyone.<sup>576</sup>)

And Ruth continues to challenge me about my concept of the shadow industry. She does not view 'shadow' as a pejorative term. She still thinks that categorising *King Kong* as 'shadow' is very odd indeed. *King Kong* was "in full floodlights" and doesn't fit within my own definition in the *PhD Report* of "something that might jump out and bite you"<sup>577</sup>. She refers to Florian Habicht's SIPF and self-funded work as more appropriate examples. I think of the success of *Second-Hand Wedding* (2008) that received NZFC post-production funding only and was released after my *PhD Report*.

I spend a couple of days thinking about Ruth's resistance to the shadow concept and my resistance to modifying or abandoning it. I conclude that our views are about pronouns. I should have stuck with 'I' rather than 'we' in relation to the shadow industry. A binary works for me, as I spotlight NZFC investment in women writers and directors, women as storytellers. And for me my extended definition, where the jumping and biting is a single element only, works better; it emphasises the strengths and potentials, realised and unrealised, of the diversity of shadow films.<sup>578</sup>

Ruth also expands on some of her earlier comments. She explains that she cared that the television—voice-driven—pathway remained because so many successful film directors had engaged with it; and she provides a long list of individual names.<sup>579</sup> She was delighted that NZOA/TVNZ became involved with the Signature initiative, and to know about their telemovie series. She provides examples of women who have made features after directing commercials. She points out that there is an NZFC pathway that established feature writers access without producers.<sup>580</sup> She agrees that women

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<sup>576</sup> See n283 and accompanying text.

<sup>577</sup> See above 110.

<sup>578</sup> See above 63ff.

<sup>579</sup> See n492 and accompanying text.

<sup>580</sup> See n494.

applicants' behaviours were probably not the cause of the increase in NZFC Board decisions favourable to women writers and directors in the 2008 year.

So, to return now to the ethics question, how could I not find this process absolutely invaluable?

'Ghosts' from Chapter 5, and from the other chapters, reappear in the next chapter, the *Development* screenplay. Like the scripts Susan di Rende gets, it is about shifts in the way that characters fit into a particular world.<sup>581</sup> It is also affected by my receiving an ancient pirated version of Sally Potter's *The Gold Diggers* in the mail, from someone I'd met at one of my presentations.<sup>582</sup> Watching the film supplemented Sally Potter's intriguing 'female quest' statement and her articulation of her filmmaking aims:<sup>583</sup>

...asking how can I build/find characters and images of women that will serve our intelligence and mirror the complexities of our struggle...Ultimately my own desire was and is to give pleasure; to heal the 'pleasure time blues' of the opening song.<sup>584</sup>

With this fragment of useful film tradition, I was ready to write my own female quest story, where the *I* is implied only, with information from all the previous chapters on my back and in my head and heart.

The screenplay is both an essay film<sup>585</sup> and an essay, like each other chapter. At the more 'narrative' end of the essay film continuum, alongside works like *Waltz With Bashir*, *Persepolis*, and *Hunger*, *Development* plays with the idea of 'essay', as a "trial, a test, an experiment"<sup>586</sup>. In *Development*, the implied, integrated, *I* draws on the preceding chapters to show a general audience something of women filmmakers' complex experiences, about which there is often silence. It attempts to to explore how fiction might name, understand,

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<sup>581</sup> Above nn 514-516 and accompanying text.

<sup>582</sup> "Sally pulled [*The Gold Diggers*] out of circulation...there was just so much animosity around [it]": Aufderheide and Zimmermann: 1462. It is now available in a remastered version with many extras: Potter (2009).

<sup>583</sup> See above n421 and accompanying text.

<sup>584</sup> Rosenbaum: 128-129.

<sup>585</sup> Above 75.

<sup>586</sup> Brown: 851.

and suggest resolution of challenges that face women filmmakers, as a simple ‘feel good’ entertainment with subtexts and disruptions that mirror those in the other chapters of this thesis. Beneath the entertainment, it adopts Sally Potter’s argument that:

For women the most important decision is often a deep and interior one: to give up being a victim now and forever. Don't wait for 'support'...it may not come in the form you long for. Instead try to remember that as a woman you hold up half the sky and that the world of imagination comes free of charge, is infinite and is yours.<sup>587</sup>

Through Frederique’s interviews with Viv and the character of Louise and her journey, *Development* also argues that remembering—including public remembering in a feature film—is an essential component of cultural capital, of the “endowments which each generation receives from the past and builds on for future generations”<sup>588</sup>. Without shared and public stories about their struggles—however painful it may be at times to tell them— women artists might as well not exist; and it becomes less easy to move beyond victimhood.

*Development* also intends to ‘bleed’ between genres that incorporate hard and soft data—essay, documentary, docudrama and narrative fiction—through the documentary that Frederique makes within the film and the dialogue.

This is very much a script-as-blueprint, the bones: many documentary and experimental aspects of the film will rely on its visual elements, including the actors.

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<sup>587</sup> Potter 2009[g].

<sup>588</sup> Above n23.



## *Chapter 6 Development*

DEVELOPMENT

(an essay film)

by

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NZWG Reg 09/020

## *Transition 5: To Weblog & Diary*

Finally, with the blog *I*, the creative writer and collaborator, move into the second and third stages of development. This chapter is here to show the very public overlap of my three autoethnographic roles; and how the activism and academia leach into the development process.

I wrote *Development*, like *Lost Boy*'s first draft, quite quickly. And was happy when Ken—who had encouraged me to go wild this time—was very positive about the result. I now believe that the many many drafts of *Red Dinghy*, my regular critiques for and from other scriptwriters and the movies I've watched as a scriptwriter rather than for entertainment have affected my capacity to feel the 'rhythm' necessary to structure screenplays as I write. This does not necessarily make other aspects of the process any easier, but it does help when writing a first draft.

While I still had an income I had to move forward very quickly.

Readers as usual gave me useful responses. I addressed some of their concerns and integrated the changes for the draft in Chapter 6. I am still working on others: how best to differentiate the Queen Bees and whether I need to develop further Meryl's and Frederique's characters and stories.

Like various readers, the actors I approached—each of them a writer as well as an actor, and some also directors—gave me wonderful responses. All agreed to take part subject to availability. One actor wrote:

I very much enjoyed your script, as tricky as lace and that was part of the pleasure. I would like to be involved and thank you for considering me. But there are some things you should know. What you have written in the script mirrors experiences I have had in film over the years...

Another suggested a structural change, to shift Louise's memorial service sequence to the beginning of the script. I had reservations about doing this, because it delayed the first major conflict to page 14. Then I thought again, and realised that conflict is expressed in the memorial sequence and in the others that precede page 14, as for example when Frederique tries to film and her children's presence compromises her work.

Transposing this sequence was the only structural change I made; *Development* is my third multiple protagonist script and as one demanding reader noted, I had now ‘got the structure down’.

The actors also helped me by giving a reading of the ‘Emily’ sequences for an audience of writers,<sup>589</sup> and later, a filmed performance of the sequence from pages 62-66 of Chapter 6.

We film in Oriental Bay on a narrow strip of sand—an inherently unstable surface—between the mutable sea and the rigid seawall. Jessica Latton, Lynda Chanwai-Earle, Madeline McNamara, Pinky Agnew and Michele Amas transform the script. Their presence and performances, and the location’s colours and textures, add everything I hoped for.

Madeline as Viv performs her simple explanation of story structure to Jessica as Tui the Masseuse and to Lynda as Frederique. And in doing this she also shows that she believes that every woman is a hero; and her internal conflict about her own story: Can I, will I, choose work (symbolised by Frederique) over love (Tui)? Can I accommodate both?

The appearance of Greta, and Viv’s recognition of her as an ‘ally’ tells the audience that their friendship has mutual benefits, something not until then clear and perhaps a revelation to Viv as well. This alliance is reinforced by Pinky’s performance of Greta’s compassionate recognition of the subtext in Viv’s explanation: ‘There are other ways to tell a story’. Yes, the single protagonist script isn’t the only option. But underneath that—Greta tells Viv—Viv’s own story can change; and maybe Greta doesn’t have to stick with hers either.

Viv refuses to join Greta in a visit to Emily and Iris because she’s going home to work. But then pursues Tui along Oriental Parade. Her internal conflict may or may not be resolved. Can she manage work and a relationship? The

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<sup>589</sup> See below 227ff.

story's not over. And seeing Madeline hurry along the Parade somehow communicates that ongoingness.

And then Michele as Louise—who later drowns herself, while she can still remember enough to choose death rather than life without her memory—decides to hurl the storytelling stick into the sea. This isn't in the script, but extends the subtexts about memory and storytelling, and about welcoming the unexpected: the role of the surprise, of disrupting expectations.

We don't film the script's interwoven conversation between Emily and Iris, across the road in Emily's place watching the women on the beach—overtly a conflict over Louise, with a subtext about the ideas of personal sovereignty and responsibility that underlie Emily's actions throughout the script. But it becomes obvious that the domestic represented by Emily's house will add a valuable dimension to the public beach performances, with Iris' disruptive blasts of Emily's whistle, the figures in 'home's' lighted window.

This exercise—within the second and third stages of development of *Development*—convinces me that collaborations with actors, a director, an art director, sound technicians, and a director of photography will introduce layers that move *Development* beyond a simple feel-good story. I now better understand that the resolution of a script happens off the page.

In other components of development and collaboration, Jane Campion has offered advice and support, and has provided a statement to use on our website, Facebook page and elsewhere.<sup>590</sup> Poet laureate Cilla McQueen has also given us a statement to use:

*Development* is an important initiative to advance women's contribution to filmmaking. These able practitioners of perspective take the long view of cultural development in Aotearoa.

Some of the blog posts included in Chapter 7, where the *I* addresses my writing, artist and activist peers and an unknown global audience, continue the story of my response to NZFC funding decisions. At the same time I

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<sup>590</sup> See n640 and accompanying text.

continued my diary-keeping. Diary entries to complement the blog are in *italic*.

## *Chapter 7 Development's development: Weblog & Diary*

*From the edge of the harbour, Te Whanganui-a-Tara, Aotearoa, also known as Wellington, and Wellywood 11 November 2008*

Movies didn't help. Architecture books and atlases in bed at night didn't help. Even the quince and then the apple blossom-- Even finding tomato volunteers that had survived the winter tucked up against the compost heap-- Even the return of the bumblebees and each day a solitary honey bee among the blossom and flowering sage and borage and calendula-- Even sowing marbled round beans that someone's soldier uncle smuggled back to New Zealand in the toe of his sock at the end of the Second World War--

Nothing helped. After two years working on my PhD I was desperate.

Yes, I could have partied for a week or two. Got over it. But I wanted my daily life to be as Virginia Woolf describes the novelist's life:

...to proceed with the utmost quiet and regularity... so that nothing may disturb or disquiet the mysterious nosings about, feeling round, darts, dashes and sudden discoveries of that very shy and illusive spirit, the imagination.<sup>591</sup>

If I stopped to party, I might never regain the apprentice script writer equivalent of what Woolf called:

...the novelist's chief desire... to be as unconscious as possible.<sup>592</sup>

And then one day I turned onto the wharves from Oriental Parade, on the way to a quiet and regular session at the public library. And thought "O, I've forgotten to get dressed". I looked down and saw that WHEW I wasn't in my night clothes. And realised that I'd overdone the unconscious bit, had lost the plot.

Ten minutes later, in the library, I found Norman Mailer's *The Spooky Art*.<sup>593</sup> Mailer was 80 when he wrote it but his voice reminds me of a child's voice,

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<sup>591</sup> Woolf 2008: 143.

<sup>592</sup> Idem.

<sup>593</sup> Mailer 2003.

testing how words can best convey the magic of his world. He also articulates my own problems: fear; and the monotony of marking down words:

There is always fear in trying to write a good book [or script]. That is why there are many more people who can write well than do. And, of course, many can't take the meanness of the occupation. There's nothing so very attractive about going into a room by yourself each day to look at a blank piece of paper (or monitor) and make calligraphic marks. To perform that act decade after decade punishes through the very monotony of the process.<sup>594</sup>

Forget the 'decade after decade' I thought: this PhD, its autoethnography and scripts and activism, its quietness, its regularity, feels like a prison already. And moved on to the next paragraph.

And went HEY THANK YOU OLD MAN. This is what he wrote:

The act of writing itself, taken as a physical act, is less interesting... than painting, or, certainly, sculpture, where your body is more exercised in the doing.<sup>595</sup>

And of course, less interesting than making a film. AHA. I needed to exercise my body in the doing.

So I borrowed a son's camera. And started. With a pic of a container boat outside the window. And a tug.

### *Apron Strings & Mamma Mia 28 November 2008*

I was excited: two films made by women and about motherhood, showing at the Embassy Theatre, just down the road. *Apron Strings*, a New Zealand film written by Shuchi Kothari and Diane Taylor and directed by Sima Urale (with mothers who cook for a living) and *Mamma Mia* (with a mother wearing a carpenter's apron).

That was my second photograph. With a mother crossing the road and people sitting at the celebrated Deluxe cafe next door to the Embassy. And yes, it's the same Embassy Theatre where *The Return of the King* had its premiere in the era when Wellington became known as Wellywood because Peter Jackson and Fran Walsh made the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy here.

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<sup>594</sup> Ibid: 127.

<sup>595</sup> Idem.

I've been trying to find out why *Apron Strings* is the first New Zealand film written and directed by women since Gaylene Preston's *Perfect Strangers* (2003).

Does the New Zealand Film Commission, the state agency that develops and supports our film-makers and feature films prefer to support men who want to make feature films?

Or is it women filmmakers' own fault? Do we have to learn to write better stories? Be better directors? Be more competitive? More courageous? As energetic as men in advocating for our work? More willing to work as writers-and-directors-for-hire? Over the last couple of years I've heard so many people, women and men, say that if we're good enough and do the 'right' things, our films will be made.

Jane Campion or Meryl Streep might not agree. Getting the money to make a film is a problem for every filmmaker. But according to them, it's harder for women.

When Jane Campion presented a short fantasy film, *The Lady Bug*, at the 2007 Cannes Film Festival—about a woman dressed up in an insect costume, who gets stomped on in a movie theatre—she described *The Lady Bug* as a metaphor for women filmmakers:

I just think this is the way the world is, that men control the money, and they decide who they're going to give it to.<sup>596</sup>

And when Meryl Streep was in Australasia promoting *Mamma Mia* she too talked about studio executives' lack of support for 'women's' projects.<sup>597</sup> They don't think women's projects are marketable and are surprised when they are successful:

M.S. *Devil Wears Prada* took [studio executives] completely by surprise. *Mamma Mia* had a budget about this big. [She demonstrates a tiny budget.]... A musical is

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<sup>596</sup> Blalock 2007.

<sup>597</sup> Rodger 2008: timecode reference unavailable.



expensive. We did it on a diet... I'm hopeful that they'll learn that there's a market for these entertainments but they seem to need to learn the lesson every year.<sup>598</sup>

On the days when I hear "We have so few films written and directed by women because women just aren't good enough", as I often do, I hold on to what Jane Campion wrote in support of the Gender & Women's Studies programme at Victoria University of Wellington:<sup>599</sup>

Women may be 50% of the population but they gave birth to the whole world, why wouldn't we want to know what they think and feel?

### 8 January 2009 Sister Galvan

Galvan's on YouTube, almost five years after we finished making *Sister Galvan*, soon after he died.

Gary-the-editor did it. His email heading: late Xmas gift. Wonderful Gary. A clip of Galvan in his shower talking about his life as an ageing and castrated gay man. Another one where he talks about Holocaust gay artist Richard Grune. And one where he talks about New Zealand artist Colin McCahon. And the clip where he talks about what makes gays gay, what being gay means to him.

So now, just before he would have had his 68th birthday ("more than likely I'll live till I'm 86," he says in the film, how I miss him) I'm asking friends to translate the tags into French and Spanish (there's a Spanish DVD) and monitoring viewer demographics on Insight. New Zealand viewers I can understand. And California. But why are most other viewers in North Carolina, Texas and Saudi Arabia? Korea, Ireland? And how can I get more viewers?

[On June 10 2009 Youtube sent this email:

*The following video(s) from your account have been disabled for violation of the YouTube [Community Guidelines](#):*

Sister Galvan - Takes a Shower (Contains Nudity) - (sistergalvan)

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<sup>598</sup> Idem: timecode reference unavailable.

<sup>599</sup> Email communication.

Your account has received one [Community Guidelines](#) warning strike, which will expire in six months. Additional violations may result in the temporary disabling of your ability to post content to YouTube and/or the termination of your account.

*I asked whether there was any appeal and whether they could check another sequence in case it too violated the guidelines, rather than wait for someone to flag it and maybe lose YouTube access. No response.]*

### *Driving a truck? 10/1/09*

Women script writers don't often write about their working lives for publication: one reason I went back to re-read Virginia Woolf about women writers.

But men do.

And Joe Eszterhas' *The Devil's Guide to Hollywood; The Screenwriter as God!* gave me a helpful slogan, among his advice about laptops, and masturbation, and writing six pages of script a day, in a chapter called "Slit a vein and drip it on the page!" (He seems to like exclamation marks, and ... though one teacher told me that scriptwriters don't use them: Use <--> she advised.)

Joe Eszterhas heads one piece of advice "If you don't feel like writing today..."

And on the next line: "Comedian Rita Rudner: 'People don't want to get up and drive a truck every day either, but they do—that's their job and this is my job'."

I have stuck a sign above my desk, for when my mind's wandering and I'm tempted to escape: I AM A TRUCK DRIVER.

### *Feature statistics, Jinx sister, the shadow industry 16 January 2009*

I've been writing an article about women New Zealand women who write and direct feature films (not docos). Lots of statistics.

New Zealanders based in New Zealand produced at least 75 features during the six years ending December 2008, some not yet released.

Women wrote and directed seven of these films (about 9%): *Perfect Strangers*, *The Strength of Water*, *Apron Strings*, *Jinx Sister*, *Vintner's Luck*, *Piece of My Heart*, *Home by Christmas*. Women were directors or writers or co-writers or directors in nine more (12%) but I don't categorise these as 'women's' films because what men think and feel, including what they think and feel about women as an audience, will have been more influential than in features that women write and direct (though I don't like 'pink & blue' thinking about writing and like to write interesting male characters myself).

There are 97 writer credits on the 75 films and 20 (21%) are women's. There are 82 director credits and 13 (16%) are women's.

The New Zealand Film Commission and Creative New Zealand are the primary sources of state investment in features. But 45 of the 75 films were funded entirely elsewhere, within what I call the 'shadow' industry[...]in my view[...] as essential to the growth of New Zealand film as the Film Commission. It inspires me because it's where filmmakers experiment and take amazing risks, with Hollywood features, Dogme-type films, features made primarily for distribution on the net. It provides significant training. Its relationship to the state film institutions' work is a bit like the relationship between yin and yang.

So where do shadow filmmakers get the money? International and local investment and self-funding. Or now from New Zealand on Air, which often invests in Film Commission films and has recently funded at least four telemovies on its own. Women have 60 percent of the total writer credits on these four, and directed one: 25 percent. (Women writers seem generally more successful in television, perhaps because women are pragmatic and television can provide more regular paid employment, because women like writing series, or because New Zealand on Air has to consider women as an audience.)

Athina Tsoulis (pictured) made *Jinx Sister* in 2008, the first shadow feature a woman has written and directed. I loved taking her pic in front of the *Jinx*

*Sister* poster, right next to the poster for one of my favorite recent films, *Frozen River*, at the Paramount, my favorite movie theatre, down in Courtenay Place.

After studying the Film Commission's statistics and the pathways the state provides for writers and directors who want to make feature films, I've come to believe that these pathways don't work for women, for complex reasons. We do want to participate in feature filmmaking, and to tell our stories. But (no surprise, it's the same in other countries) there are obstacles.

And now I'm writing an 'essay' script,<sup>600</sup> also a kind of chick flick—in the term's most generous sense—about four fictional Wellywood women who want to make features. Who live and work near the Paramount and the Embassy and in Oriental Bay, use the sauna round the corner, shop at Chaffers Street New World and Moore Wilsons, the supermarkets nearby. It's a lot of fun to write. And I'm going to call it *Development*.

#### 29 January 2009

*Cushla & I Skype with Linda Voorhees, about Red Dinghy. She tells us that M.O.S. is from the German "MIT" for "WITH"; Mit Out Sound—I asked if it was maybe a Billy Wilderism and L said "maybe".*

#### 4 February 2009

*I send off an application to the New South Wales Film & Television Office's Aurora development programme, to get some help with Lost Boy.*

#### 13 February 2009

*Jury duty over (inspired an idea for a play, amazing group of fellow jurors) I run down The Terrace with Erica's and my application to the SIPF in a file box, arrive at CNZ just in time.*

#### 4 March 2009

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<sup>600</sup> Boyd.

*I apply to the Binger Film Lab, with Lost Boy and Development.*

17 March 2009

*Aurora has not shortlisted Lost Boy. Too many applicants to give reasons: suggest getting an assessment through the Australian Writers Guild (AWG). I join, but their assessment programme is not yet up and running.*

2 April 2009

*I send Lost Boy to a well-qualified reader who says he'd really like to read it. [30 July 2009: I see him @ Out Takes. It felt 'authentic' & he is going to read the rest & get back to me as soon as he is less busy. I need to follow up.]*

6 April 2009 Harvest time

Waiting for some quinces to heat. They drop to the ground outside my window: THUMP. It seems no time since they and my poppies were in full bloom.

And this year I've been using Elizabeth David's recipes from her *French Provincial Cooking*, a book I love to read before going to sleep.<sup>601</sup> Marmelade de coings (quince marmalade—the word 'marmalade' reached French and English via the Portuguese name for quince, 'marmelo', according to Elizabeth D) and Pate de Coings, quince paste. Lots and lots of it and I've run out of people to give it to.

The other thing I've been doing in the evenings is watching Charlie Rose. I think his interviews are magic, with film writers and directors as well as lots of others. My favorite so far is the episode with three Mexican filmmakers, including Guillermo del Toro,<sup>602</sup> who's here in Wellywood working on *The Hobbit* right now. Their love and support for each other just shone and provided a great model for generosity among artists.

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<sup>601</sup> David 1960.

<sup>602</sup> Rose 2006.

I thought of this interview when I read a *Women & Hollywood* post from a young woman in the industry (her story is so familiar to me from my own research, could fit right into my thesis script, *Development*).<sup>603</sup> Do women filmmakers love and support one another in the same way? I have my wonderful mates from my classes at the Institute of Modern Letters but we haven't yet supported one another right through a film project. Well, in another *W&H* post, here's news of a support group of US women screenwriters: the Fempire.<sup>604</sup> Made me smile. Gave me ideas.

*Jane Campion on fearlessness and commonsense 10 April 2009*

After a couple of months there, I'm used to my little office at the Institute of Modern Letters, no longer feel so awkward. I'm familiar with the machines, know that the toaster takes the same time to brown the bread as the photocopier takes to print a 90 page script. And the flowering cherry tree's right outside (leaves just starting to shrivel) if I glance up from the computer. I can see people going into the gym next door or down the stairs at the side of the building. Sometimes they glance in and smile at me and I smile back, wave. Sometimes, unnoticed, I watch passersby and eavesdrop. Sometimes, perhaps, unnoticed by me, people look through the window and see some tomato slide off the toast as I lift it to my mouth. When I'm reading.

Almost everything I've read for the PhD is now in my server-based bibliography—621 items—creative industries, autoethnography, ethics (complicated because of the continuum from social science to creative writing to film production—those insurance issues), women's feature making, scriptwriting, writer/activist/theorists Virginia Woolf, Tillie Olsen, Audre Lorde, Adrienne Rich.

And best of all, just before the Easter break, a wonderful supervision session. I can't wait to do the next *Development* rewrite. The slight trembliness that's

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<sup>603</sup> Anonymous 2009.

<sup>604</sup> Silverstein 2009.

always there is there. But I'm trembling more from excitement than from fear.

So on Maundy Thursday I closed the office door and ran down Allenby Terrace's long run of steps and into the city. Easter eggs and hot cross buns at New World Metro with a couple of newspapers, across the road into Unity for a quick look, then on into the library. And there was a new book about Jane Campion, *Jane Campion*, by Deb Verhoeven, an Australian.<sup>605</sup>

In it is a long, rich, interview where Jane Campion talks about her approaches to filmmaking. In the middle of it she discusses the qualities that she believes distinguish her from others. Fearlessness is one.

[...]

I went "AH", because Greta, one of my filmmaker characters in *Development* spends a lot of time talking about her fear to Jasmine-the-shrink. And she overcomes her fear. And as I've said, there are days when I'm pretty scared myself, especially when I'm about to take a script to pieces.

The second quality Jane Campion identifies is common sense.

[...]

Jane Campion's new feature *Bright Star* will be released later this year (June, in Australia first, according to imdb).

### Twittering & Writing 15 April 2009

Last week, the lovely script whizz Linda Voorhees invited me to Twitter. And having followed her through her stunning exposition of master scenes, taglines and page 60, I'd pretty much follow her anywhere (and am thrilled she's now got a channel on YouTube—Voorgreen, and is teaching online). So I joined.

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<sup>605</sup> Verhoeven 2009.

But I'm ambivalent about Twitter although I love watching the character countdown: 140, 123, 81, 2, 1. It could be a lot of fun, getting the most out of those 140 characters. But I'm feeling a bit of keyboard overload: scripts, thesis, three email addresses, txt, and now Twitter--

And I've just read a 2003 interview with novelist Zadie Smith (pictured) that helped me understand why. I can't wait for her new book *Fail Better*, about writers, due this month;<sup>606</sup> I read her stunning "Fail better" article in the *Guardian* ages ago, and it helped me understand my writing process, but the link no longer works. According to her, writing is a wonderful job:

...but it's not always a wonderful job to wake up every morning and face a computer, and there's nobody to talk to, and there's nobody around. It's not always the cheeriest job in the world. It's an odd job when the work's not going well, which happens to me quite a lot. Then, it's just a lot of sitting around and sadness... When I'm writing properly, that's my life every day. You forget to eat, you forget to do anything. And it doesn't feel completely healthy.

Q (Camille Doderro) : After those periods of isolation, do you find it hard to relate to people?

A: Yes. If I'm let out to go to a party, say, and I haven't been out for three or four weeks, I don't realise that most people have colleagues and they know how to smooth things over [in conversation]. You don't always have to tell the truth, for instance, about how you're feeling every second of the day.

When I finished *White Teeth* and had to start doing press, I would always say the wrong thing. I didn't know how to be a person with other people. And there's all kinds of linguistic things, ties, to make a conversation smooth and natural, and I really didn't know what I was doing because I never saw anybody... I think [writing] sometimes has a bad effect on your social skills.<sup>607</sup>

I never forget to eat. I enjoy it too much, and my brain fails if it's not well fed. But when I'm writing most of the time, I do sometimes forget how to be a person with other people. I say the wrong thing. I do the wrong thing. So I've learned to make sure that I sit at a kitchen table with a real live person or two, and a cup of tea, regularly. And I cook for a friend twice a week, who's very understanding when, sometimes, I can't sustain a conversation. Twitter, like email and txting, takes time from being with people-in-the-flesh. On the other hand it's a great way to stay in touch with people like Linda who live far away.

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<sup>606</sup> Now called *Changing my Mind* and not yet published, August 2009.

<sup>607</sup> Doderro: np.



So I've decided to Twitter, a bit.

16 April 2009 *Finally, I'm brave enough to press the "PUBLISH" tab & let friends know the blog is up.*

*Aren't blogs wonderful? 16 April 2009*

I'm thrilled. All these responses.

Two quince-related requests. I'll drop the paste in town when I'm passing, carry some jam up the coast to Otaki on the bus, soon, on a sunny day .

An experimental tweet from a non-Twitterer:

My turnips are like white balls of black pepper. Wilt the greens too, gloss with extra virgin and taste the time of year. alexmackay.com

137 Characters, he said. Do the spaces count? (Yes.)

And someone's asked me: What do I think about the review of the New Zealand Film Commission, being done by the Ministry of Culture and Heritage?

There's lots I have no idea about, and I haven't read much about what others think since John Barnett's piece in *OnFilm*.<sup>608</sup>

But I have some ideas—of course—about how the Film Commission could improve women writers' and directors' participation in feature making.

The present 'pathways' to making a Film Commission-funded feature are not working for women. We're well represented as documentary makers I think, though I haven't measured the statistics. As producers we do well. And as writers for television.

But our 'pathway' representation as writers and directors is otherwise really low, for example in the *48Hours* contest (registration closes in 13 days).<sup>609</sup>

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<sup>608</sup> Barnett 2008.

<sup>609</sup> V48Hours Furious Filmmaking 2009 [sic] 2009.

Last year for the first time there was a prize for an all-women team, which Gaylene Preston Productions sponsored. This was great, because Muriel Niederle from Stanford University and her co-researchers have shown that women and men compete differently; affirmative action programmes where women compete among other women can be very useful in making change.

And I suspect that one factor that influenced the strong participation of women writers in New Zealand On Air's recent telemovies is that NZOA has to consider women as an audience. It has to "to ensure that a range of broadcasts is available to provide for the interests of women and youth and children and persons with disabilities and minorities within the community including ethnic minorities", according to the Broadcasting Act.

Could the Film Commission try some affirmative action? Could it be required to consider women as an audience (and the other groups NZOA has to think about)? I'll write more about this topic when I have more time.

(& I've changed the settings to simplify making comments.)

*22 April 2009 Sally Potter & money: & John Berger*

Sally Potter's last blog entry was her stunning *Barefoot Filmmaking* manifesto.<sup>610</sup> I'm not going to quote from it. It deserves to be read as a whole.

Her latest response to a comment on her site is about money, money, money and films.<sup>611</sup>

Her clarity and her courage make me cry.

(Her *The Gold Diggers* (1983) was an inspiration for some bits of *Development*. And I can't wait to see her latest film, *RAGE*. Here's a still from it, of Judi Dench.)

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<sup>610</sup> Potter 2009[a].

<sup>611</sup> Potter 2009[b].

When I saw the picture of Sally Potter's boots that seemed an ideal way to show her. These two recent postings are so generous; I can now imagine a little of what it means to stand in those boots (while filming barefoot).

And then, still looking at photographs, I found this article about her, in *Vertigo*, by John Berger, another of my all-time heroes.<sup>612</sup>

So I'm sitting here in the twilight thinking that these gifts may be a sign, just when I need one.

Tomorrow some amazing actors will read 34 pages of *Development* for a little audience of writers. At the moment I'm excited and curious and expecting to learn. But if I get scared or anxious I'll remember to think "What would Sally Potter do?" "What would John Berger say?"

You can buy Sally Potter scripts and films here.<sup>613</sup>

#### Development reading 27 April 2009

It was a bit messy at the beginning. I had to hand round my ethics forms, give a quick update on the progress of my PhD (the larger context for *Development*), assign some small parts. I struggled more than I'd thought I would in a room filled with people I knew; I was clumsy. Too many days alone at the table, tapping away on my laptop.

But I enjoyed it. A little. And it was lovely to be able to say that the Victoria Foundation will be our charitable umbrella,<sup>614</sup> so donors—here and in some overseas countries—get tax benefits. To be able to mention Women Make Movies and fiscal sponsorship, that we're experimenting with a model that may also work for other women filmmakers here.

Then the actors read. It was just like Monday, when two of the actors practised. The 34 pages I selected—the arc of Emily's story—took on a life of

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<sup>612</sup> Mayer 2007.

<sup>613</sup> Potter 2009[c].

<sup>614</sup> Victoria University of Wellington 2009.

their own. Again. Wow, I thought. These actors, all of them also writers and/or visual artists and/or directors, will do it extra specially well, add so much. They are wonderful. And they all live in Wellington: they know the city, the seventh main character, intimately. This matters, to me anyway.

Then at the end, as I was thinking, Will that end work? How will it work? there was this sudden noise. People clapping. With enthusiasm. I love to clap, almost as much as singing *Happy Birthday To You*. Am often the first to clap, with delight. But I had to will myself to clap. What was that about, after that beautiful reading?

And then, as the audience spoke up, something more astonishing happened: the range and generosity of the responses told me (among some other stuff) that there's an audience for *Development*. I was so glad Erica was there, the producer and shining anchor, taking copious notes and then chatting with everyone after the reading, because I was stunned.

So on Saturday, the first rainy day for a very long time, I put on my green boots decorated with stars and lightning, unfurled my umbrella and went down to Oriental Bay to get a newspaper. Stood on the seawall, looked at the people hurrying along the footpath, at the waves and the seaweed. And ran the promenade & beach scenes through my head.

Looked up at the art deco apartment-for-sale that I imagine is Emily's apartment. Would the owner let us use it—no trucks, a very small cast & crew—as a location, before it changes hands? Or would Iris at the window—blowing Emily's rape whistle—be invisible from the beach? Obscured by that big pohutukawa tree?

Stop it, I thought then. We've got enough ticking clocks; that apartment will be sold and occupied in no time at all.

Went home.

And slept.

*(It was especially wonderful when a man in the audience asked why I didn't just tell one woman's story. I didn't have to say a thing. The actors and the women in the audience shifted in their chairs. One by one they began to speak, to explain. Though of course the action centres around Greta, Development's about a shift in a world, a world where the others are also very important. Some men also struggle with what they view as some 'didacticism' in the script. But not the women readers & other men.)*

### Twittering

I'm still uncertain about Twittering. I like sending little messages when I can't manage a full blog post. But other people's tweets frustrate me. What about cooktips' fondued leeks? What was he eating them with? What's the best bread for his Sunday chicken and mayo sandwich? What about melsil's dog Duke?<sup>615</sup> What does he look like? Do people in New York ever have big dogs? And what about all those voorgreen messages about *Standing Woman*? If I send emails every time I wonder at a tweet, I'll be emailing for ever[...]

### Twittering (cont'd) & Blogging: & A Parallel Universe for Women's Filmmaking 27 April 2009

As for the blogging, I'm still getting these lovely responses. And some nice serendipitous things. One of my favorite scriptwriters sent me a link to writer Stella Duffy's blog (I don't think he knows I'm blogging too.) Stella Duffy's *The Room of Lost Things* was long-listed for the 2008 Orange Prize and won her Stonewall Writer of the Year. I haven't read it but I love her Saz Martin crime series. She writes on the maleness of the British BAFTA awards.<sup>616</sup>

[...]

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<sup>615</sup> <melsil> is Melissa Silverstein's Twitter name.

<sup>616</sup> Duffy 2009.

And I love the comments that follow, including one from filmmaker Campbell, whose blog masthead reads: "When the lioness can tell her story, the hunter no longer controls the tale"<sup>617</sup>. WOW.

And today's email encouraged me that the parallel universe of women's filmmaking is gathering in strength. Here's some of Rachel Millward's blog about the statistics from the latest Birds Eye View (BEV) festival, the fifth, which took place about a month before the BAFTAS, also in London [...] where [...]

Our box office stats show an average of around 90% capacity - the majority of events through festival week selling out. The average audience rating across all films and events was 4.5 out of 5. And, demonstrating fresh outreach, 83% of the audience were new to Birds Eye View this year, 98% said they would come again. This is a huge compliment to Birds Eye View, to the strength of our programming, the appeal of the brand and the success of our grass-roots marketing campaign. Three cheers to team BEV! It is also a huge vote of confidence in female talent. There is a clearly strong and ever-increasing market demand for a better balance of content on our screens.<sup>618</sup>

From far away, on the other side of the world, I believe there's always been a demand for a better balance of content. In the past, the demand hasn't been heard. But activities like the ones BEV organises are making change. I hope that the influence of BEV's keen audience will affect what happens at the BAFTAS. Or, that in future what happens at the BAFTAS won't matter, because the parallel universe of female talent has all the exposure it needs.

*Gender & the Terms of Reference for a Review of Film Commission Act 1978*  
*28 April 2009*

Often, New Zealand feature filmmakers want some version of this New Zealand Film Commission (NZFC) logo (pictured) in their credits. It signifies investment from our state-funded film agency, which may also have helped the producer(s) find other investment. Over the last 30 years the NZFC has developed, funded, marketed and sold most New Zealand films that are well known internationally—*Heavenly Creatures*, *Once Were Warriors*, *Whale Rider*. And many other movies that New Zealanders love to watch. The NZFC

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<sup>617</sup> Campbell 2009.

<sup>618</sup> Link no longer available.

also provides 'pathways' to making features, programmes like the Short Film Fund and the First Writers Initiative.

But, as I showed in my *PhD Report* and discussed in a recent interview in *TAKE*, the Screen Directors Guild magazine, the NZFC's programmes tend not to work well for women.

### *Women filmmakers' low participation in state-funded programmes*

Between 2003-2008 women wrote and directed only 16% of features the NZFC funded for production, although in 2008 NZFC investment in women's films in advanced development showed an unprecedented spike. Women scriptwriters also fared a lot better in the First Writers Initiative than in the previous five years.

But our position on the pathways to making a feature worsened in other ways, for complex reasons. One reason may be that decision-makers have increasing expectations of applicant experience (see for example Big Shorts' call for short film submissions).<sup>619</sup> Women have historically sometimes been less able than men to meet these expectations.

Between 2006-2008 the Short Film Fund invested \$1.7m in projects men wrote and directed and only \$500,000 in projects women wrote and directed. In the same period, women's participation in short film projects with mixed gender writer/director teams dropped, and in 2008 not one Short Film Fund short had a woman writer and director (though two had women directors and one a woman co-writer).

In addition, the Independent Filmmakers Fund (IFF)—with increased funding for low-budget feature films—has replaced the Screen Innovation Production Fund managed by Creative New Zealand, where women's participation was traditionally strong, except as low-budget feature filmmakers. Unlike the Screen Innovation Production Fund, the IFF excludes

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<sup>619</sup> Big Shorts 2008.

emerging filmmakers, a group where women are disproportionately represented.

After almost three years of close study I'm certain that women writers and directors want to use the relevant state-funded pathways to feature filmmaking. But the cumulative effect of NZFC programmes and practices, in association with external factors, is that few women writers and directors reach the end of a pathway, with a feature film up there on screen.

So, because of all I've learned, I was very interested to learn that the Ministry of Culture & Heritage is preparing the terms of reference for a review of the Film Commission Act 1978. Will the terms of reference include a direction to consider gender?

### *Gender & the Film Commission Act*

The Film Commission Act does not mention gender. (New Zealand on Air's legislation, in contrast, at least requires it to consider women as audiences, which may be one reason the participation of women writers and directors in its recent telemovie series has been comparatively high.)

The NZFC's recent statements of intent, which describe its current goals within the statutory framework, ignore gender too. The latest one makes reference only to 'diversity' without giving a definition, and without providing for programmes to encourage diversity. In contrast, the UK Film Council is committed to an Equalities Charter<sup>620</sup> and "to create ways of working that support equal opportunities and diversity in the film industry"<sup>621</sup>, though there is no evidence that this commitment has resulted in more UK features with women writers and directors. Maybe gender's got a bit lost there, too; a catch-all 'diversity' may not be enough to ensure gender equality.

The latest NZFC *Statement of Intent* does record an intention to measure participation by Maori key creatives each year, a system that could be

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<sup>620</sup> UK Film Council 2009[b].

<sup>621</sup> UK Film Council 2009[a].



extended to measure Maori women writers' and directors' participation, currently much lower than Maori men's. But at the moment, any consideration of gender issues depends on the uncertain goodwill and commitment of individual policy- and decision-makers, who come and go.

And those individuals come and go uninformed by gender statistics, as the NZFC does not have to record or publish statistics about the gender of writers and directors who apply for and receive funding (though it has helped me to record them over the last few years). Nor does it require those to whom it devolves funds and decision-making powers to keep gender statistics—CNZ for the IFF; three executive producer groups annually for the SFF; and the Devolved Development Fund and Producer Overhead Funds for experienced producers who develop feature projects independently of the Commission.

Without transparency through publication of all relevant gender statistics, including the amounts invested in each programme by gender, it is impossible to analyse which Film Commission programmes redress or reinforce the present gender imbalances.

### *Why the review's terms of reference should include gender*

For me, the imbalances I've described make it imperative that the terms of reference for the review of the Film Commission Act direct the review to consider gender issues. It is necessary to identify how to remedy the present situation through legislation. It's a human rights issue. It's a cultural enrichment issue. And in the contemporary global environment it's also a commercial issue.

### *The human rights argument*

New Zealand ratified the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1985. So, as a state, it must encourage the participation of women in public life on equal terms with men (article 7). Telling stories on the big screen is one way to participate in public life, and the Film Commission's status as a state entity means that the review must consider, because of CEDAW, how to encourage women's

access to state-funded filmmaking programmes. Women's participation in public life as feature filmmakers matters in principle.

### *The cultural enrichment argument*

And it matters because the whole community misses out if women filmmakers don't participate in our storytelling. As a Writers Guild of America West report puts it:

The importance of the stories scriptwriters tell and of the people telling them cannot be overstated. These are the stories through which our society defines what it is, what it is not, and what it hopes to be. The scriptwriters are the people whose experiences shape the underlying reservoir of ideas.<sup>622</sup>

(And of course the way directors and everyone else involved bring these stories to the screen is equally important.)

If we continue to have few films written and directed by women, New Zealanders miss out on a broad, rich, vision of who we are, who we are not, and all that we might be. And opportunities to convey that vision to the world.

### *The commercial argument*

The international context provides a commercial argument for more equality in state investment. Gender's important in the global industry. It divides the market into quadrants: women over and under 25, men over and under 25. And after the recent commercial successes of *Mamma Mia*, *Twilight*, and *Sex and the City* worldwide—echoed here by *Second-Hand Wedding's* outstanding success last year—the industry is increasingly attracted to the market represented in the women's quadrants.

If the Minister for Culture and Heritage includes gender issues in its terms of reference for the review of the Film Commission Act, that would help fulfill the nation's CEDAW obligations. But it would also be a first step towards a legislative structure that, through its awareness of the significance of

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<sup>622</sup> Hunt 2007.

women's stories and of women as a market, would help enhance New Zealand's reputation for astute development and use of its cultural capital.

(For a wider view of New Zealand women's participation in public life, see the Human Rights Commission's New Zealand Census of Women's Participation 2008.<sup>623</sup>)

*4 May 2009 Simone Horrocks After the Waterfall & A special day*

A lovely day!

A new feature with a woman writer/director starts production! Have put a little button on the sidebar and will add more links when they're available.

*After the Waterfall* is Simone Horrocks' adaptation of Stephen Blanchard's *The Paraffin Child*.

And there's an historic moment to celebrate. The NZFC site lists fourteen recent features—including docos—it has funded, either in production or released. Six have women directors (a seventh is in pre-production). This is a long way from a comment I heard from a woman filmmaker almost three years ago: " 'They' can only cope with one of us at a time."

Another filmmaker said then: "If the NZFC knows there is a gender problem, the decision-makers will fix it." Has this happened? Has it made any difference, measuring and writing about the NZFC gender statistics? I may never know. When I started, probably all of these films were already in development. But now, as I write up my thesis, I have a lot more hope than I used to have.

But I'm still convinced that there should be legislation for ongoing transparency about, and accountability for, NZFC's investment in women's stories. So that this positive trend is monitored and acknowledged. And any future counter-trend is identified and addressed.

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<sup>623</sup> Human Rights Commission, and New Zealand Centre for Women & Leadership. 2008.

6 May 2009 A short master class... & women as producers and decisionmakers

Love this Clare O'Leary *ScreenTalk* interview with the versatile Vanessa Alexander (producer, writer, director, academic, one of two women on the eight-person NZFC Board).<sup>624</sup> Writer/director of the female buddy film *Magik & Rose*. Producer of the multi-award-winning *Being Eve*, nominated for an Emmy. And so on.

The interview's like a short master class about what's worked for her as a filmmaker. She talks about:

- Being persistent;
- Taking risks; and
- How men helped her early on.

The help from men especially interests me at the moment. One of my research findings (to be written up for mid-September) is that women producers, and other women decision-makers, are often not interested in films written and directed by women, or in helping develop women's scripts with women as strong central characters. It's the same in other parts of the world.

I learned a little bit about how this happens last year. I was concentrating hard on a challenging left-brain task. And someone in the industry interrupted me with a question: "Does it make a difference that women producers don't prioritise working with women writers and directors?" I blinked, slightly startled. And from deep inside out flew a spontaneous response that shocked me. "Well," I said, "if I were a producer I'd choose a man's project, because it would be more likely to succeed." I knew immediately I'd told the truth.

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<sup>624</sup> NZ On Screen 2009.

Now I know about my own ingrained bias I'm less judgmental of women producers and other women decisionmakers who prioritise projects that men write and direct. And even more supportive of women writers and directors who want to tell stories about women. And very appreciative of the men who support my work, like my wonderful supervisor who's been right there for me over the last few years as I slowly learned to write a story with a single protagonist—which I found hard—and experimented with other ways of writing that suit me better.

Sometimes, women producers, who are strongly represented in the film industry in New Zealand and elsewhere, are grouped statistically with women writers and directors to show that women's participation in the industry is high. However, because women producers so often prefer projects that men write and direct, I think it's essential to keep the storytellers separate from the producers, however creative the producers are, though some film writers and directors are also producers of course.

*10 May 2009 Tweet tweet tweet, or as an NZer might say Tui tui tui*

OK, I'm sold. Twitter's got my big gold star, because it's giving me more than enough useful info to make it worthwhile.

...

And tui, tui, tui? In Maori—te reo—with long vowels, it's the name of a bird, native to New Zealand, that sometimes imitates other birds.<sup>625</sup> You can hear its call [...] at our place, most days.

Here's a pic of a tui, on harakeke/flax plants, like the ones in our garden.

With short vowels, tui means to sew, or thread, and that's how I think of Twitter now, as I am threaded into a network that includes new feminist videos from New York.

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<sup>625</sup> Te reo: the language.

And then there's Tui beer, and the Tui beer billboards, but they're another story—[and the overseas examiner won't have a clue, notes Lesley.]

*11 May 2009 Topp Twins: Untouchable Girls (cont'd)*

After four weeks in New Zealand cinemas, *Topp Twins: Untouchable Girls* has taken \$1 million. That's a big audience for a country with a total population of around 4 million and takes it almost into the dozen all-time top grossing New Zealand films (domestically).

In comparison, last year's big hit *Second-Hand Wedding* reached \$1million after seven weeks. And back in 2003, after four weeks, *Whale Rider* had grossed around \$1.5 million. I'm fascinated by what will happen next, especially as I've got lots of mates who haven't yet seen *Topp Twins: Untouchable Girls* and really want to go. Will it sell into the United States and other countries at Cannes? I hope so.

And now the Topps have a YouTube channel.<sup>626</sup> Lots of great clips.

*14 May 2009 Short Film Fund decisions: NZ Film Commission opts to fund men and women equally?*

It's that logo again! And more great news for women filmmakers.

Every year, the New Zealand Film Commission appoints three executive producer groups to select and manage a total of nine projects funded through the Short Film Fund. Over the last few years, this programme has invested much less in projects written and directed by women than in projects written and directed by men (see 28 April post).

In this year's short list, of twenty-seven films, twenty-four had only male or only female storytellers (writers and directors). But just seven of these single gender projects (29%) had only women as the storytellers. Seventeen single gender projects had only men. So I sighed, and thought, oh, nothing's changed.

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<sup>626</sup> The Topp Twins 2009.

But the Film Commission has now announced eight of the nine greenlit projects—the ninth due shortly—in its latest newsletter.<sup>627</sup> And YAY women wrote and directed four (57%) of the single gender projects selected and a woman will direct a fifth project, that she co-wrote with men. Here's the list:

*Hitched* writer Branwen Millar... director Katie Wolfe, producers Rachel Lorimer and Felicity Letcher

*Amadi* writer/director Zia Mandviwalla, producer Owen Hughes

*Sweetness* writer/director Suzy Jowsey Featherstone, producer Annelise Yarrell

(Do they know about writer/director Rachel Davies' *Sweetness*, one of my favorite short films ever? A classic: here's a still. View *Sweetness* here.<sup>628</sup>)

*The Winter Boy* writer Kylie Meehan, director Rachel House, producer Hineani Melbourne

As well, Jane Shearer will direct *Bird*, one of the other selected projects, which she co-wrote with Greg King and Steve Ayson.

And it's great news for us scriptwriters that two of the four women's projects are written by women who are primarily writers, always good to see that.

It seems that the Film Commission may be moving towards equal funding for men and women writers and directors in all their programmes, and that's wonderful. The Commission may be the first state-funded film agency in the world to do this. But, because the changes have been so rapid, I have a few questions, & would be interested in yours:

1. Will the new balance of representation be sustainable without appropriate legislation? (I doubt it, and so does a gender expert/public servant I spoke with the other day.)

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<sup>627</sup> New Zealand Film Commission Te Tumu Whakaata Taonga 2009[a].

<sup>628</sup> Davies 1992.

2. Is the Commission thinking strategically? Does it have a coherent gender plan? Is it thinking about women as film audiences or only women as storytellers? Are some women writers and directors going to be encouraged to experiment? Are they (we) going to be allowed to fail—artistically and/or commercially—and then get another chance, as some men have done in the past?

3. What about Maori women? An older, highly-networked, Maori woman told me yesterday that Pakeha women writers and directors who want to make features may face a glass (or celluloid) ceiling, but Maori women writers and directors face a heavily steel-reinforced concrete wall.

4. Has the Commission considered how to advance the careers of women writers and directors in their thirties and early forties who missed out over the last decade or so when the Commission could 'only cope with one of us women at a time' as feature writers & directors? There's a large cohort of these talented, skilled, women, who've made their successful short films and—I imagine—have feature scripts ready to go. I want to see their stories up there on the screen soon, along with those of the younger women now making shorts.

14 May 2009

*On the way home from writing this blog entry I clear my mailbox: CNZ declines to fund Development. Following Pinky Agnew's instructions for artists dealing with disappointment Erica and I give ourselves ten minutes to get over it. Later, Erica and I ask for reasons:*

Unfortunately SIPF was not able to support your application. This was due primarily to the high pressure on this round. As you'll be aware there is always huge pressure on the available funds. It may be heartening to know that your application was pretty well ranked, falling in the first band of applications as part of the initial ranked list (the ranked list forms the starting point for discussion at the meeting). I have captured some brief notes from the panel's comments that the script felt slightly at odds and would be re-worked. As a side note, the panel would [have] been interested to see electronic support material of previous work.<sup>629</sup>

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<sup>629</sup> Email communication 15 July 2009.



[There was no expansion, when we asked for it, of the ‘slightly at odds and would be reworked’ note, to let us know more precisely what elicited this comment. It was therefore unhelpful for use within further development of the script.]

15 May 2009

*A message from the Binger Lab: not successful with application for script development programme. I email Ken: Ah well, having my little development programme here at home.*

25 May 2009

*Ages ago I agreed to write an article for n.paradoxa, the international feminist art journal, about Te Papa’s exhibition of women’s work We Are Unsuitable for Framing. I get the deadline wrong and have to write it fast, angry because I believe that Te Papa has shortchanged women artists and women as audiences, in all their diversity. Like looking at Hamish Keith’s The Big Picture,<sup>630</sup> the exhibition fills me with grief. I write, among a series of greetings at the beginning: Greetings to the New Zealand women artists and writers whose work is not represented in *We Are Unsuitable for Framing*. Especially to the older ones who were part of the women’s art movement, who on this very cold morning (like me) wear many layers of clothing, hats, gloves and scarves as they work in unheated rooms, and to those of them who are chronically ill, who care for elderly relatives and for grandchildren, live in penury, live under leaky roofs, search the garden for a few leaves of silver beet to add to this week’s lunchtime soup. And keep on working. This review is for you, hoping that Te Papa will buy, and ‘preserve and present’ your work, too, as ‘taonga (treasures) of New Zealand’s peoples’. I hate writing the review, and say so at its beginning. Flake’s anger in a blog keeps me going;<sup>631</sup> I can’t help seeing the parallels between women artists as storytellers and women who want to make features.*

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<sup>630</sup> Above 132ff.

<sup>631</sup> [Wells, T.] Flake 2009.

26 May 2009

*I sigh after explaining 'the problem' to a woman who didn't believe (maybe still doesn't) that it exists in New Zealand. Erica says "You know, this resistance to the idea that it's difficult for women who want to write or direct features? It reminds me of The Emperor's Clothes. You're the little child saying LOOOOOOOOKK!" And I sigh again recalling someone saying that \$100,000 is a large budget for a low budget feature. Yes, we are calling in favours. Massey University has offered us so much in the way of equipment and studio space. But no, we are not going to ask women, actors or crew, to work for free. \$15 an hour for everyone except us—we're not being paid—seems the absolute minimum. And plenty of good food. For all of us.*

27 May 2009

*I talk with Ken about Lost Boy now that the AWG assessment service is at last up and running. He calculates that the assessment will cost NZ\$625. I'm torn. I'd love the assessment but would have to put it on my credit card. I'm getting very poor and I may not find a job when my scholarship ends in September.*

27 May 2009 New Zealand women playwrights

The latest issue of the Playmarket magazine has an article by playwright Branwen Millar.<sup>632</sup> (She also wrote one of the Short Film Fund films I wrote about the other day, and we both did the scriptwriting MA with the wonderful Ken Duncum at Victoria University's Institute of Modern Letters, but in different years, so I don't know her.)

In her article, Branwen starts: "As an emerging playwright, I'm excited by the huge talent and diversity of our writers. As a woman, I'm disheartened".

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<sup>632</sup> Millar 2009.

She acknowledges that she has "a massive amount of support for my writing" but is "at a loss when I look at the landscape I'm entering". She provides some grim statistics about women playwrights' representation in productions and awards and writes:

Where are the female voices in our theatres? Is it that men are better writers? Do men write faster and therefore have more plays? Receive more support? Are women one-hit wonders? Why do they stop writing?

This is so like the questions I have about women who write films. And the statistics surprise me, although I'd read some posts about women playwrights having problems in the States, on *Women & Hollywood*.<sup>633</sup>

I'd thought that because it is so much cheaper to stage plays the 'gender problem' doesn't exist for women playwrights here—I have a mate who writes film scripts and plays and talks about the advantages of the difference between a potential budget of hundreds of dollars rather than hundreds of thousands, or millions. I'd grouped plays with novels and poetry, where New Zealand women just do it if that's where their interest lies and there are few problems connecting with an audience.

And why is it important to have female playwrights? "This isn't the eighties," a friend said to me when I told her what I was writing, "feminism's done."

(Oh Yes! Almost exactly the response I've now heard many times when I've talked about my film statistics.) She continues:

Yeah right. I'm not arguing for women writers for equality's sake (though I could). I'd advocate for all writers to sit down and write good plays regardless of gender or anything else; this is about all people being deemed worthy of having a voice worth listening to. It's striving for the richest and most vibrant arts industry we can have, and that comes from a multitude of perspectives.

And she's curious to know more about what others think. What answers does anyone have, to her questions? This morning, as I work on another thesis chapter, I worry a little that even though I know more than I did, I have lots and lots of questions I still can't answer.

2 June 2009

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<sup>633</sup> For example Jordan, Silverstein 2008[b].

*Linda Voorhees sends a link to her YouTube endorsement of Development.<sup>634</sup>  
I'm really touched by it.*

10 June 2009

*A long time, astute, reader sends her analysis of Development. It is so good. And she identifies two useful things. One is the anger running through the screenplay. The other is that I have used one of 'her' stories. I think back to Virginia Woolf, her description of anger as the 'black snake'.<sup>635</sup> I work to change the story my reader recognises, immediately; & think about other changes, particularly to the Frederique/Meryl threads, longing to have some script writing time, for the thesis to be done. Then receive an email from one of the actors. Later, when we meet, she shows me the Development page with 'her' story, totally from my imagination. Then Nancy Coory, Emily in Development, tells me that she remembers similar Queen Bee stories from her broadcasting experience in the 1940s. I need to differentiate the two Queen Bees more effectively. AND, especially after the We Are Unsuitable for Framing review, I want to be sure that the black snake of anger doesn't pollute the script.*

12 June 2009 Returning us imaginatively to the event of violation, & allowing it to affect us

Thank you Yoko Ono. I found details about this exhibition on her *Imagine Peace* website.<sup>636</sup> *Off The Beaten Path* will open [...] in Oslo next week. (And thanks, Twitter, for pointing me to *Imagine Peace*.)

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<sup>634</sup> Voorhees 2009.

<sup>635</sup> Woolf 1929; 1998: 40.

<sup>636</sup> Imagine Peace, Act Peace, Spread Peace 2009.



**Figure 9** *Off The Beaten Path: Violence, Women and Art.*

[...]

The curator, Randy Jayne Rosenberg, writes:

When we encounter violence against women, we often experience a kind of blindness... The stories that underlie these artworks by 32 artists from around the world return us imaginatively to the event of violation and allow it to affect us.<sup>637</sup>

I've just been reading a report on my second draft of *Development-the-movie*, and trying work out what I still need to change. I want the audience to be deeply engaged with and moved by the story and the characters who live in it. And part of that means I have to make sure that the story returns the audience's imaginations to the 'event(s) of violation' that affect women who want to make feature films. So I'm thrilled to be able to walk around *Off The Beaten Path*.<sup>638</sup>

12 June 2009

*My computer has a problem, is overwriting files. I've made a basic Endnote error in my bibliography. My cell phone has died. I avoid landline calls because the room is so cold where that phone is.*

4 July 2009

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<sup>637</sup> Art Works for Change 2009[a].

<sup>638</sup> Art Works for Change 2009[b].

*My sons have given me a new phone to carry round the house. One of them has also given me his old cell phone, with camera, but I can't work it and texts do not reach it. I've spent too much time helping golden boys recently. I can't get Chapter 2 right. I lie in bed, reading James Lee Burke's Burning Angel.<sup>639</sup> I think I read it when I was finishing my law thesis, but I've forgotten most of it; and I revel in Dave Robicheaux's world. I have two hot water bottles and the heater is on. The phone rings. It's an old friend. We talk a while then she tells me that she dreamed of me in the snow, and describes a landscape that reminds me of The Gold Diggers. I tell her how I've been feeling very cold, in every way, haven't had a warming conversation for a while, have become a hermit. We laugh. I warm up.*

*Jane Campion's agent emails us a statement Jane has written for us to use:*

I am stunned when journalists ask, 'Why do you make films about women?' It's like asking me, 'Why do you speak English?' To know what it's like to be a woman, as unjust, as undervalued, as maligned as it can be, none of this, though it is wrong, can alter the extraordinary wonder of being female, where despite the disempowerment, there is so much love, so much creativity, so much power. We are women, we are only half the world, but we gave birth to the whole world. No one on this planet should be ignorant of our views or our voices.<sup>640</sup>

*I cry.*

*6 July 2009*

*I take a dear friend to a WIFT fundraiser for the Megan Holley/Christine Jeffs Sunshine Cleaning screening at Park Road Post, for her birthday. The place is packed and my mate and I recognise many women from other contexts. There's a lovely sense of occasion. And I wonder if I could have brought some fliers, seeking donations. A WIFT representative speaks. She refers to 'statistics' including some recently from Canada,<sup>641</sup> that prompt the question "Where are all the women directors?" She runs through the list of films directed by New Zealand women, currently in production, post-production and release, including the one we are about to see. Then the*

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<sup>639</sup> Burke 1995.

<sup>640</sup> Email communication 7 July 2009.

<sup>641</sup> Link no longer available.

*punchline: "Where are all the women directors? In New Zealand." The audience loves it. I want to stand up and shout "So how come only 9% of the features made here 2003-2008 had women writers and directors and only 16% of those the NZFC funded?" Why is it not possible to celebrate the very real achievements of New Zealand women script writers and directors AND to acknowledge there's a long way to go before women's participation in feature filmmaking matches men's? Why this weird split between the stories many women in the industry tell me in private and what they say in public? Do they realise that 'keeping quiet' means that they lose some opportunities for support (as well as for disapproval)?*

10 July 2009

*Erica and I have another meeting to pitch Development. Another meeting where we end up spending two thirds of the time talking about 'the problem'. I resolve to develop a pitch about the stats that will be more efficient. The resistance is so difficult to address from scratch, among individuals who believe that gender is not an issue for women who want to make feature films in New Zealand. Aaaahhhhhh. I just want to get on with Development's development.*

29 July 2009

*A supervision meeting with Ken and Lesley. Ken is waiting for my 'conclusions'. And he wants me to end on a hopeful note.*

*There are buds on the flowering cherry outside my IIML office. Today some sun shines on its bare branches.*

## Chapter 8 Conclusions

[Women] must put on their coats of armour and get going because we need them.<sup>642</sup>

What can autoethnography, within an analytical creative practice, reveal about ways to open space within the development process for women scriptwriters to tell their stories? I'm not sure. Because I did not take my scripts through the separate pathways I originally planned, and because I do not know what I may have disrupted for others, or where I may have opened space, my first question cannot be answered fully. In time, perhaps women will write and direct more New Zealand feature films. Or perhaps one filmmaker will be enough encouraged by this research to move forward in a new and rewarding way. Or, perhaps, this autoethnography has changed something for you, stirred you to action, the way autoethnography is meant to?

Does it help an investigation if activism, creative writing and academia are brought as close as possible together? I think that the *Development* screenplay answers this. I would not, could not, have written it without the project's activist and academic elements. However I believe that the academic part of the research, the analytical reading, writing and thinking, undermined my immersion in the creative practice and the activism, the feeling, and the observation and the writing. I feel prepared only now to take three scripts through the various processes, with clarity about the relevant contexts.

But it helped me to observe my struggles to reconcile conflicts between my activist, academic and creative writing selves. From those conflicts I learned that I am a woman...who "operate[s] on a... scale...based on maintaining a web of relationships rather than a ladder of individual attainment"<sup>643</sup>. I can

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<sup>642</sup> Higgins 2009.

<sup>643</sup> di Rende 2008[a]. This view is supported by a story actor/director Liv Ullmann tells in her memoir: "I ask Sam Waterston, who is playing Helmer [in *A Doll's House*] if he would be willing to give up his profession for a woman if for some reason doing this were essential for a continued relationship. Sam doesn't think so and asks if I would. 'Yes, I could.' I think about it. 'I believe many women do, because we have such belief that love is important.' 'But



only function as a writer within this community, for this audience to whom I feel accountable. This is what lies behind my interest in the ethics of analytical creative writing practice; and as I read individual responses that come in with the ethics forms I feel this web strengthened, in many ways, just as it is through interactions with actors, supporters, and directors. This is why, too, my 'female quest' script, *Development*, is an ensemble piece.

Whether or not I have answered my research questions, in this time of great changes within the film industry around the globe I am hopeful.

Hope: As I write this, the 2009 Toronto International Film Festival is almost over. One woman film blogger has "a strange feeling burrowing into my gut: **hope**... Might we see [in future] more solid, big buzzed-about films come from female directors and have female casts without them being niche films?...the tide seems to be changing". Melissa Silverstein of Women & Hollywood commented: "I second you on the hope feeling. I am feeling it too, especially related to women [directors]"<sup>644</sup>.

Hope: At the recent Qantas Film & Television Awards in Auckland films women wrote and/or directed were strongly represented. Women wrote two of the three works nominated for best television dramas, both telemovies: *Until Proven Innocent* (the overall winner for Donna Malane and Paula Boock the writers/producers, and winner of various other categories) and *Piece of My Heart* (which Fiona Samuel wrote and directed, and winner of best actress and best supporting actress); and a woman co-wrote the third. And in the film awards, women writers took two of the three best feature film script nominations: *Apron Strings* (also a nominee for best film over \$1 million) and *Strength of Water*. *Topp Twins: Untouchable Girls* won the award for best feature under \$1 million.

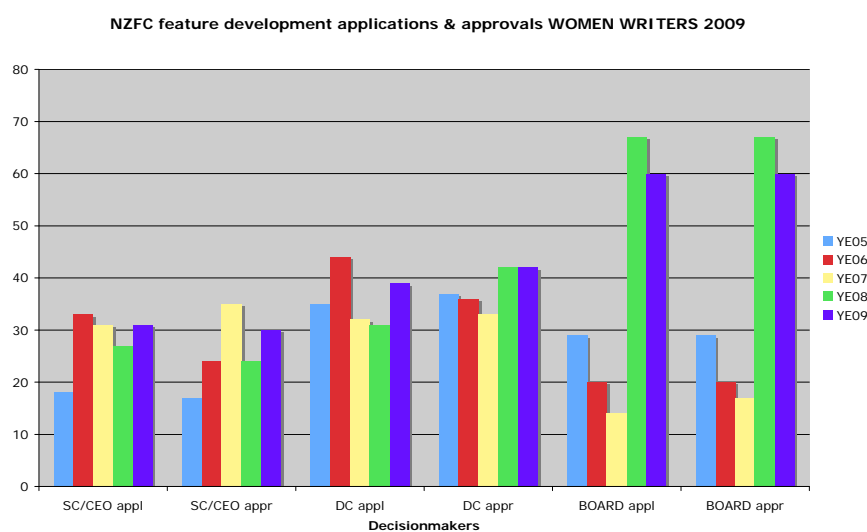
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don't you value yourself more?' Sam asks. 'That is what we do. We can give up our profession because we value what we *are*.' Ullmann 1978: 206.

<sup>644</sup> Bartyzel 2009.

Hope: Jeremy, now Development Co-ordinator, gives me the development data to 30 June 2009. In conjunction with the SFF statistics,<sup>645</sup> Jeremy's new data seems to show that the gap Ruth predicted back in February 2008 and then in October doubted seems no longer to exist;<sup>646</sup> New Zealand may become the first country in the world where women write and direct half the movies that the state funds.

Here, then, are the development tables for this year, added to the tables for previous years.<sup>647</sup>

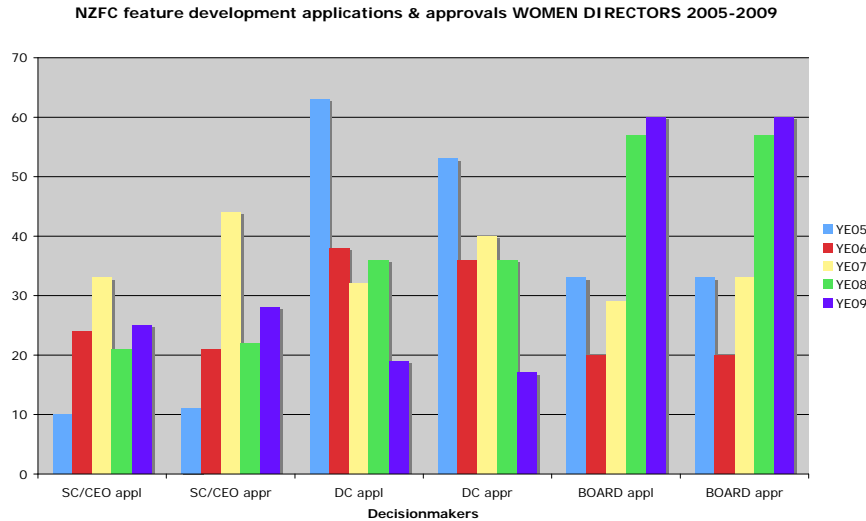



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<sup>645</sup> See above 238ff.

<sup>646</sup> See nn 344, 477, 531.

<sup>647</sup> See above 182ff.



**Figure 10** Percentages of NZFC feature development applications from and approvals for projects with women writers and directors 2005-2009, by decisionmaker.

By now, you can ask “Who benefits?” and the corollary questions as well as I can. (You’ll also be familiar with the decisionmakers: the Staff Committee (SC) or Chief Executive Officer (CEO), the Development Committee (DC) and the Board.<sup>648</sup>)

Firstly, are the numbers of applicants high enough for a formal statistical analysis? Maybe not, especially at Development Committee (DC) stage where women’s participation has fallen. Of a total of only eighteen applications, five projects have a woman writer, three with women directors attached and two without a director yet. One has a mixed gender writing team.

The proportional increase of Board level development applications from and approvals of projects with women writers and directors has now been sustained over two years. In conjunction with the Board’s unprecedented conditional production funding these figures interest me. Remembering that Ruth was out of the room when the Board discussed my response to last

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<sup>648</sup> See n527 and accompanying text.

year's statistics,<sup>649</sup> I wonder again what has changed at that level. Ruth could not instruct the Board to 'keep an eye' on gender.

Then I look at the latest NZFC *Statement of Intent*. And there's an interesting list of 'potential risks' to the NZFC vision "to ensure the continuing momentum of New Zealand's national cinema within the wider screen production industry"<sup>650</sup>. One of the risks named is legal action, including judicial review, the very expensive legal action available to those who question the fairness of a government agency's decision-making processes. Strategies listed for managing this risk include "clear procedures consistently applied and fair dealing"<sup>651</sup>. Did the Board decide that there may be a legal risk if decision-making does not take gender issues into account? Did it import a gender element into its own decision-making processes and instruct Ruth to keep an eye on gender? I hope so. But if its decisions and instructions reflect risk management only, it's unlikely that the Board has a coherent gender-oriented plan: that may answer my question of a few months ago.<sup>652</sup> And that creates another risk, for women filmmakers. But whatever the reason(s), collectively these figures encourage me as a woman screenwriter to find a producer and apply for development funding. The odds are great.

My sense that something has changed is reinforced by conditional production funding—the stage just beyond development. Again, these are Board decisions and these involved only nine projects; three with women writers and directors. Of the six successful projects, again a tiny number, three are women's. An all-time record.

Then there's the 2009 FWI: 89 applicants in 84 applications: 25 women: 28 percent. Three men and three women in the short list for the second year in a row. Sounds good. But the average for women applicants over the previous six years was 42 percent. Why so few this time? Why is the percentage of

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<sup>649</sup> See n505 and accompanying text.

<sup>650</sup> New Zealand Film Commission Te Tumu Whakaata Taonga. 2009[b]: 17.

<sup>651</sup> Idem.

<sup>652</sup> See above 239ff.

applicants to the FWI, where no producer is necessary, this year similar to the percentage at the SC/CEO decision-making stage, where a writer usually needs a producer?<sup>653</sup> Does this support the view that women lack the courage and competitiveness to compete? Does it mean that the ‘problem’ of women producers is not as significant as I thought?<sup>654</sup>

Collectively, with the SFF decisions this year,<sup>655</sup> all this data seems to indicate that some change has happened. But so many questions still. I hope that New Zealand will be the first country in the world where state film funding is allocated equally between men and women writers and directors. And I hope that from my beginning other researchers with statistical skills will take over.

Hope: Allie and Heather email me about ‘their’ chapter, Chapter 2. I explain that I’ve changed it, because I was ‘telling it slant’. Heather writes back: “Good good good! Wonderful in fact...Do you feel a good clean clarifying anger? I hope so. Strength again”<sup>656</sup>. In the letter that accompanies Heather’s ethics form she refers me to an Emily Dickinson poem.<sup>657</sup> Suddenly, I can conclude that bringing the activism into the academic research alongside the creative writing is good. I feel hopeful that this work will lead to more creative industries research by practitioner native subjects.

Hope: I think about listening to Philippa Boyens talking with Ken, as part of the IIML Writers on Mondays series at Te Papa.<sup>658</sup> Philippa talks about the next generation. Her daughter has just finished making a feature in London. Hearing this warms my heart. I imagine that she’s benefited from the endowment of the women’s cultural capital that Philippa and Fran Walsh provide.

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<sup>653</sup> See above nn 494, 580 re exception.

<sup>654</sup> See above 177.

<sup>655</sup> See above 238ff.

<sup>656</sup> Email communication 11 September 2009.

<sup>657</sup> See n85.

<sup>658</sup> 31 August 2009.

And then I talk with two directors I like, and whose work I admire, about *Development*, each in a different café. One, who is working outside the NZFC pathways with considerable success, tells me she feels disempowered by the script. She doesn't understand why Frederique wants to make a film about Viv. I explain that I didn't write the script to empower anyone; I wanted to make people think, but am worried by her responses. I'll think more about what she says. The other director says the script doesn't need Viv's 'didactic' bits; it's complete without them. I try to explain why I want to give Viv—and Madeline who will play her—a chance to rave. I could rewrite Viv's part of course but she would not then be Viv, and I'd be back writing something that is not 'me'. I tell this director too that I'll think about her responses. And I will.

Desiree identifies a scene I've 'worried at' as still being problematic. Suddenly, I find I can fix it. And then, two of the actors come to dinner and express reservations about the last act and Emily's and Viv's engagement with Greta's project. Time for another draft, outside this thesis, where it serves a different purpose, in isolation from the other chapters.

Finally, a director of multiple features tells me that I should direct *Development* myself: "Directing offers the opportunity to go more deeply into the script". How could I resist that?

Welcome to *Development's* development, phases two and three. The chief cheerleader and I help each other make our armour, with chinks, and with Velcro for easy removal. We put it on and we move forward.

## *Appendix—Ethics documents*

### Information Sheet ‘Deferment of Hope’ project: Group 1

*(The researcher's actual and potential co-workers - writer(s), director(s), producer(s); the researcher's supervisors)*

My name is Marian Evans and I am a PhD student at Victoria University of Wellington. I am researching how useful autoethnography—the study of my own experience—is to understanding how a writer's gender affects film script development processes in New Zealand. For my study, I have divided script development into three activities: the process of writing; developing and maintaining creative partnerships with a co-writer, director or producer; and external relationships with funders and others. Little research has been done on women's scriptwriting, in New Zealand or internationally, and I hope that a detailed record and analysis of one woman scriptwriter's journey will provide useful information both for academics and for people in the film industry, especially women.

As part of the research, I write up interactions between and among and opinions from my writing peers, co-workers and supervisors, and keep these records confidential, as notes or from emails.

Victoria University required me to obtain ethical approval for this research and the Pipitea Human Ethics Committee has given its approval.

I may want to use records of our interactions when writing up the thesis and in associated publications and if appropriate to name you. Sometimes it will be obvious, even without attribution, who the source of the information or person with whom I interact is. Because of this I will provide you with copies of any draft chapter or article where you are or may be identified, and the opportunity to respond to this orally or in writing within one month. If you respond, we will then discuss whether you wish your response to be included in the final version of the chapter or article and/or changes to be made to the text. These changes may include deletion of your name, identifying context, or an opinion attributed to you. I have prepared a consent form that outlines

the terms of our agreement and if you decide to participate we will each sign and keep a copy.

The results of my research will be published in my thesis and possibly in academic or professional journals. I may also attempt to disseminate aspects of the research findings through the general media. When the thesis is published, probably in 2009, I will let all participants know that it is available. The records of our interactions will be destroyed two years after my thesis is completed unless we jointly decide to deposit them in the Alexander Turnbull Library or similar public research institution, with access arrangements that we agree on.

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NEW ZEALAND

Te Whare Wananga o te Upoko o te Ika a Maui

Pouaka Poutapeta 600

Te Whanga-nui-a-Tara

AOTEAROA



## Consent form Group 1

I have been provided with adequate information relating to the nature and objectives of this research project. I have understood that information and have been given the opportunity to seek further clarification or explanations.

I understand that the notes of dialogue and interactions and correspondence with me will be kept securely and are confidential.

I understand that and that if the researcher wishes to write up this material in an attributable form or in a context where I may be identified I will be given a copy of any draft chapter or article where I am or may be identified, and the opportunity to respond to this within one month; and that this response can be included in the final version of the chapter or article and/or result in changes to the text, including deletion of the information.

I understand that the information I have provided will be used only for publication in this thesis and in any publications associated with it (academic, trade etc) and that any further use will require my written consent.

I understand that the information obtained will be destroyed two years after this research is completed unless deposit at at the Alexander Turnbull Library or similar research institution is negotiated between us and with the institution about issues of access.

Signed (participant)

Date

Signed (researcher)

Date

Participant Name:

Address:

Email:

Phone:

[Supervisors' and researcher's contact details, as given above, deleted.]

## Information Sheet 'Deferment of Hope' project: Group 2

*(Unidentifiable informants within the film industry whose opinions, expressed during informal interviews, will be recorded as examples without attribution)*

[Introductory paragraph as for Group 1, deleted.]

As part of the research, I want to record dialogues and other interactions with and among and opinions from individuals who I believe have the capacity to contribute to the story of my experience, in association with publicly available information.

Victoria University required me to obtain ethical approval for this research and the Pipitea Human Ethics Committee has given its approval.

I would like to talk with you informally in order to gain information that I will place alongside other information from informal conversations and publicly available data, without attribution. After our conversation, I will give you any written record I make of it and the opportunity to make any corrections. The agreed record will then be stored securely and be available only to me and to my supervisors. The record will be destroyed two years after my thesis is completed.

I have prepared a consent form that outlines the terms of our agreement and if you decide to participate we will each sign and keep a copy.

The results of my research will be published in my thesis and possibly in academic or professional journals. I may also attempt to disseminate aspects of the research through the general media. When the thesis is published, probably in 2009, I will let all participants know that it is available.

[Supervisors' and researcher's contact details, as given above, deleted.]

## Consent form Group 2

I have been provided with adequate information relating to the nature and objectives of this research project. I have understood that information and have been given the opportunity to seek further clarification or explanations.

I understand that the researcher will provide me with any written notes made of our dialogue and that I will have the opportunity to make changes to them.

I understand that notes of any information or opinions I provide will be kept securely, are confidential and will be reported only in a non-attributable form.

I understand that the information I have provided will be used only for publication in this thesis and in any publications associated with it (academic, trade etc) and that any further use will require my written consent.

I understand that the information obtained will be destroyed two years after this research is completed.

[Signature details, as for Group 1, and supervisors' and researcher's contact details, as given above, deleted.]

## Information Sheet 'Deferment of Hope' Project: For Group 3

*(Attendees at private meetings, in person or electronically e.g. between industry organizations and government agencies)*

[Introductory paragraph as for Group 1, deleted.]

As part of the research, I want to chronicle contextual events like this meeting where issues possibly related to my research may be discussed. I would like to take notes and draw on them in a general way when writing up my research, without making any attribution to an individual.

Victoria University required me to obtain ethical approval for this research and the Pipitea Human Ethics Committee has given its approval.

If anyone at this meeting wishes to veto my note-taking, I will not take notes. If anyone is happy for me to take notes but wants me not to record anything she or he says, I will refrain from this. If any of you would like to read my notes, if you request them within one month of this meeting I am happy to supply them within three months and to note any response you may have. The record will be stored securely and be available only to me and to my supervisors. The record will be destroyed two years after my thesis is completed.

The results of my research will be published in my thesis and possibly in academic or professional journals. I may also attempt to disseminate aspects of the research through the general media. When the thesis is published, probably in 2009, I will let all participants know that it is available.

[Supervisors' and researcher's contact details, as given above, deleted.]

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*Angus, Thongs and Perfect Snogging* (2008) wr/ Gurinder Chadha & Paul Mayeda Berges and Will McRobb & Chris Viscardi, dr/ Gurinder Chadha

*Annie Hall* (1977) wr/ Woody Allen & Marshal Brickman, dr/ Woody Allen

*Apron Strings* (2009) wr/ Shuchi Kothari & Dianne Taylor, dr/ Sima Urale

*Away From Her* (2006) wr/dr by Sarah Polley

*Bastard Out of Carolina* (1996) wr/ Anne Meredith dr/ Anjelika Houston

*Before Sunset* (2004) wr/ Richard Linklater & Julie Delpy & Ethan Hawke  
dr/ Richard Linklater

*Black Sheep* (2006) wr/dr Jonathan King

*Bondi Tsunami* (2004) wr/dr Rachael Lucas

*Bright Star* (2009) wr/dr Jane Campion

*Chinatown* (1974) wr/ Robert Towne dr/ Roman Polanski

*Down by the Riverside* (2007) wr/dr Marama Killen and Brad Davison

*Erin Brockovich* (2000) wr/Susannah Grant dr/Steven Soderberg

*Fried Green Tomatoes* (1991) wr/ Fannie Flagg and Carole Sobieski dr/ Jon Avnet

*Gonzo: The Life and Work of Dr Hunter S. Thompson* (2008) wr/dr Alex Gibney

*Heavenly Creatures* (1994) wr/ Fran Walsh & Peter Jackson dr/ Peter Jackson

*Hunger* (2008) wr/ Steve McQueen & Enda Walsh dr/ Steve McQueen

*Gupta vs Gordon* (2003) wr/ Jitendra Pal & Lucy White dr/ Jitendra Pal

*In My Father's Den* (2004) wr/dr Brad McGann

*Invitation to a Voyage* (2007) wr/dr Victoria Wynne-Jones & Daniel Strang

*Jinx Sister* (2008) wr/dr Athina Tsoulis

*King Kong* (2005) wr/ Fran Walsh & Philippa Boyens & Peter Jackson dr/  
Peter Jackson

*Last Tango in Paris* (1972) wr/ Bernardo Bertolucci and Franco Arcalli  
(French dialogue Agnès Varda) dr/ Bernardo Bertolucci

*Legally Blonde* (2001) wr/ Karen McCullah Lutz & Kirsten Smith dr/ Robert  
Luketic

*Lord of the Rings trilogy* (2001-2003) wr/ Fran Walsh & Philippa Boyens &  
Peter Jackson dr/ Peter Jackson

*Magik & Rose* (1999) wr/dr Vanessa Alexander

*Mamma Mia* (2008) wr/ Catherine Johnson dr/ Phyllida Lloyd

*Mauri* (1988) wr/dr Merata Mita

*North Country* (2005) wr/ Michael Seitzman dr/ Niki Caro

*Of Time and The City* (2008) wr/dr Terence Davies

*Once Were Warriors* (1994) wr/ Riwia Brown dr/ Lee Tamahori

*Perfect Strangers* (2003) wr/dr Gaylene Preston

*RAGE* (2009) wr/dr Sally Potter

*Red Road* (2006) wr/dr Andrea Arnold

*Second-Hand Wedding* Linda Niccol screenplay Nick Ward idea and original  
script dr/ Paul Murphy

*Somers Town* (2008) wr/ Paul Fraser dr/ Shane Meadows

*Stephanie Daley* (2006) wr/dr Hilary Brougher

*Sunshine Cleaning* (2008) wr/ Megan Holley dr/ Christine Jeffs

*The Age of Stupid* (2009) wr/dr Franny Armstrong

*The Beaches of Agnès* (2008) wr/dr Agnès Varda

*The Devil Dared Me To* (2007) wr/ Matt Heath & Chris Stapp dr/Chris Stapp

*The Gleaners & I* (2000) wr/dr Agnès Varda

*The Gold Diggers* (1983) wr/ Lindsay Cooper & Rose English & Sally Potter  
dr/ Sally Potter

*The House on Arbat Street* (1993) wr/ Marina Goldovskaya & Masha Zvereva  
dr/ Marina Goldovskaya

*The Lady Bug*, segment *Chacun son cinéma ou Ce petit coup au coeur quand  
la lumière s'éteint et que le film commence* (2007) wr/dr Jane Campion

*The Perez Family* (1995) wr/ Robin Swicord dr/ Mira Nair

*The Shattered Mirror: A Diary of The Time of Trouble* (1992) wr/dr Marina  
Goldovskaya

*The Strength of Water* (2009) wr/ Briar Grace-Smith dr/ Armagan  
Ballantyne

*The Vintner's Luck* (2009) wr/ Niki Caro & Joan Scheckel dr/ Niki Caro

*The World's Fastest Indian* (2005) wr/dr Roger Donaldson

*Topp Twins: Untouchable Girls* (2009) dr/ Leanne Pooley

*Two Days in Paris* (2007) wr/dr Julie Delpy

*Vagabond* (1985) wr/dr Agnès Varda

*Waltz With Bashir* (2008) wr/dr Ari Folman

*Whale Rider* (2002) wr/dr Niki Caro (book Witi Ihimaera)

*When Harry Met Sally* (1989) wr/ Nora Ephron dr/ Rob Reiner

*Who Does She Think She Is?* wr/ Will Dunning dr/ Pamela Tanner Boll and  
Nancy Kennedy

*Wild Child* (2008) wr/ Lucy Dahl dr/ Nick Moore

*YES* (2004) wr/dr Sally Potter