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MODES OF INTERSUBJECTIVE ADDRESS IN *THE CENTRAL CHARACTER* (1977) AND *OUR MARILYN* (1987)

SHANA MACDONALD

Résumé : Le présent article examine l'emploi des formules de politesse intersubjectives dans le cinéma expérimental féministe canadien entre 1979 et 1987. Il compare *The Central Character* (1979) de Patricia Gruben et *Our Marilyn* (1987) de Brenda Longfellow, analysant les façons dont l'usage des formules de politesse expérimentales dans ces deux films brouille la frontière entre l'espace diégétique et l'espace non diégétique, sans jamais laisser le spectateur s'engourdir dans ses certitudes. Cet article prend le contre-pied de la lecture interprétative du cinéma féministe d'avant-garde de cette décennie perçu comme étant engagé dans des pratiques perturbatrices. Cependant que la dissonance et la dislocation font partie intégrante de l'histoire de l'esthétique du cinéma féministe expérimental, le présent article soutient qu'il est également nécessaire de faire ressortir des moments de résonance et d'échanges intersubjectifs dans ces films. Les expériences de Gruben et de Longfellow concernant les formules de politesse cinématographiques sont considérées comme étant des interventions importantes dans les formes dominantes de représentation qui étendent le champ de possibilités aussi bien pour l'image de la femme à l'écran que pour le spectateur féministe présent dans le public.

> [Phenomenology] can open us up to the situational and/or performative artwork as an ongoing process that continues . . . to provoke, over time, through bodily engagement . . . our optic *and* haptic nerves where they count.[1]

Over the last decade there has been an increase in feminist media criticism in both popular media and the academy.[2] This growing dialogue provides an opportunity to reflect on the innovative work of feminist artists from previous eras and to consider how their work is echoed in the present moment. Revisiting the history of feminist experimental film in Canada at this moment seems particularly relevant. The history of feminist experimental film in both the US and the UK has received considerable critical attention in the twenty-first century.[3] At present, though, there are many under-explored films and artists within the history of Canadian feminist experimental film that deserve equal attention.[4] While the scope of this essay does not allow me to address as wide a range of films as is needed, I will

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focus on the critical use of audio-visual address in *The Central Character* (Patricia Gruben, 1977) and *Our Marilyn* (Brenda Longfellow, 1987). These films are diverse in subject matter and form, however they both formally explore the tension between the personal and the political in ways that de-centre the viewer from a place of certainty. This displacement encourages important affective relations to emerge between viewer and film text. These films share an interest in re-framing modes of cinematic address through formal experimentation that are grounded in feminist politics. They are significant both for their historical impact and their relevance to the contemporary moment.[5] Through performative and phenomenological aesthetic interventions the films foreground the tenuous position of women's bodies within representation. By situating the films within phenomenological and performative mode of address, I suggest the films work against standard narrative or documentary modes of address and frame extra-diegetic space in innovative ways. This equally critical framing intervenes on the detached critical lenses, found within the historically modernist strains of avant-garde film discourse; discourses which Gruben and Longfellow worked against in their formal and political pursuits. Gruben and Longfellow eschew narrative modes of address embedded in the techniques of classical cinema such as shot-reverse-shot, as well as those employed in documentary film including voice-of-God narration or a *verité* approach to filming. Instead, I argue, they construct a filmic experience that engages with bodily experience at every level of the apparatus.

If, as Amelia Jones suggests, dominant forms of aesthetic criticism[6] work to "exclude . . . the vicissitudes of embodied human experience" by containing art within a space of dispassionate observation, then I wish to argue that the two films I examine here do something very different. Rather than separating film works from their publics or their politics, the films are instead participating in an aesthetics of "de-containing." Insofar as they refuse the "boundary making function of aesthetics," they instead extend relations, spaces and affective reach in the encounters they construct between the films and their audiences.[7] For Jones, live performance can "work to 'unframe' the messy embodiment that constitutes our relationship to spaces and things."[8] This messy unframing of our affectively charged relationship to viewing spaces is explicitly constituted in the films of Longfellow and Gruben. Such unframing is central to the formally performative and a phenomenological mode of address employed by the filmmakers. My use of the term phenomenological here signals how the films cause a heightened awareness of the role the body within the viewing experience and in its relation to the work of art.[9] This awareness creates an intersubjective experience between viewer and artwork akin to Merleau-Ponty's *chiasmus*, a concept which suggests we are "always already reciprocally engaged with the spaces and bodies around us."[10] *Our Marilyn* and *The Central Character* construct affective, engaged relations with their viewers by situating the films as reciprocal spaces between on-screen bodies and viewers. This conceptual engagement is performative, as it

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frames the formal attempts at reciprocity as a part of the film medium, pointing to the expanded ways in which film can articulate itself. In *Our Marilyn* and *The Central Character* the presence of the filmmaker's body is performatively inscribe in the *mise en scène* directly informing the way the images of women on-screen are read and interacted with and the types of investments that are incited in the viewer. This self-inscription further indexes the fluid states of bodily experience across the acts of filmmaking, projection and reception.

Together, the phenomenological and performative impulses underscoring Longfellow and Gruben's aesthetic approaches encourage a viewing experience in which the tenuousness and malleability of both the diegetic world on-screen and the viewer's lived world off-screen are highlighted. This formal approach by Gruben and Longfellow enacts what Jill Dolan calls a "utopic performative," a form of representation which encourages social re-imaginings. The emphasis on the body as a formal and structuring relationship within the films encourages further productive re-imaginings of how women are represented in cinema.

Feminist films from the 1970s and 1980s are often broadly read as engaging in disruptive and dissonant practices.[11] My comparative analysis of *The Central Character* and *Our Marilyn* focuses instead on the connections they forge with the audience through this mode of reflexive and affectively-oriented formalism. The voice-over and visual composition of the two films encourages an inter-subjective dialogue with the spectator. The films construct liminal soundscapes and visual environments that trouble the illusion, both on-screen and in the audience, of women as a coherent and static "signifier of sexual difference."[12] This troubling is made clear through the ways of women's bodies on-screen exceed the diegetic space at times to the point of abstraction. It is also found in the layered voice-over soundscapes developed in both films. The reflexive formal gestures of the voice-over and images reference an off-screen narrator and by extension the filmmaker and her intentions in palpable ways. The dual address of off-screen narrator and filmmaker hails the audience into a productively critical form of spectatorship. Through these feminist, experimental modes of address, *The Central Character* and *Our Marilyn* encourage the viewer to consider how different types of bodies (real and imagined) function within the interwoven and varied temporal-spatial layers of cinematic space. As such, Gruben and Longfellow articulate a different subjectivity of women on-screen, further opening up a wider range of spectator positions as a result.

Made a decade apart, *The Central Character* and *Our Marilyn* are situated at two critical junctures within the history of Canadian experimental film.[13] They map different points within feminist experimental film's negotiations with modernist avant-garde aesthetics, documentary realism and feminist theories informed by psychoanalysis. Filmmakers Gruben and Longfellow each respond to these discursive movements with films that refuse easy categorization and instead explore forms of hybridity that throw these discourses into question.

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As Janine Marchessault notes, there was an epistemic crisis in 1980s Canadian feminist experimental film that prompted a shared exploration of "intricate sound-image relations," through a formal emphasis on "thinking through the body."[14] Gruben's early work is a forerunner of 1980s feminist experimental film in Canada, influencing feminist artists, including Longfellow, who further explored the politics of representation via the body in the 1980s.[15] Gruben and Longfellow's emphasis on bodies at the center of their complex audio-visual experimentations provide clear examples of Marchessault's observations from either end of this decade.

The Central Character was produced during the growth of feminist political activism in Canada. It was also a moment of women's increased presence within commercial and institutional film settings nationally.[16] Upon her arrival in Toronto from the U.S., Gruben worked as an organizer for "Women and Film 1896-1973 International Festival" in 1973 and subsequently joined the feminist filmmaking collective "From Under Films" led by Sylvia Spring the following year. The collaborative model and direct political aims of the collective did not fully align with Gruben's developing approach to filmmaking, prompting her to explore other filmmaking forms.[17] Through the 1970s Gruben worked on commercial productions while fostering her own interest in a more experimental narrative form. During this time Gruben felt she was missing a sense of connection to either feminist or experimental film communities.[18] Her ambivalence toward the overt politics of feminist film and the lack of narrative exploration within experimental film is marked in *The Central Character* by the fine line between clarity and abstraction in her critique of women's confinement within textual and visual forms of representation.

The Central Character is a fifteen-minute experimental narrative that follows a woman from her orderly, pristine kitchen, into her over-grown garden, and finally into a forest space full of discarded junk, where she dissolves entirely as an autonomous subject, merging into her surrounding visually and on the soundtrack. The film's visuals are lush and highly stylized, printed on high contrast black and white film stock and altered by a vibrant green filter used at various intensities throughout. *The Central Character* positions nature and disorder against language and its attendant desire for rationality and control. The film is punctuated by an incongruence between the woman's third-person narration, and a second "voice" represented by title cards, which describes her efforts to maintain control and trace the film's inevitable "movement towards disorder."[19] The film interrogates the stability of women's image in film and explores forms of narrative that are necessarily incomplete. *The Central Character*'s purposeful undoing of the main character's self-articulation paired with a critique of dominant social scripts around nature and culture are themes also found in Gruben's films of the 1980s and 1990s.[20]

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Fig. 1: *"The Central Character"*

Our Marilyn[21] is situated at a different point in Canadian experimental film history where there was a more established community of artists working with hybrid narrative and documentary forms.[22] The film also developed within the context of a more fully realized feminist film discourse that emphasized a need to address and better articulate difference within the static and problematic category of woman (something that Gruben and her peers were calling attention to a decade earlier). In *Our Marilyn,* Longfellow questions the limited agency afforded to on-screen images of women within the psychoanalytically informed schema of the male gaze.[23] She explores phenomenological aesthetic approaches as a counterpoint to psychoanalytic conceptions of representation.[24] Longfellow was interested in how the "performing body" of the image functioned as a material within the diegetic film environment, questioning whether the image could exceed the constraints of the cinematic apparatus through experimental forms. Building on Peter Wollen's essay "The Two Avant-Gardes," Longfellow was critical of the avant-garde as not political enough. She wanted to merge formal concerns with her feminist politics through a hybrid experimental form. Her formal explorations in *Our Marilyn* are thoroughly situated within post-modernist and feminist frames of the 1980s. This is most evident in her interest in situating *Our Marilyn* as a documentary/narrative hybrid as a means of "dismantling metanarratives" and "bringing in different voices."[25]

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Fig. 2: *"Our Marilyn"*

Similar to *The Central Character*, in *Our Marilyn* women's subjectivity is articulated through a complex multi-faceted voice-over. *Our Marilyn* is an experimental documentary about a fictional narrator named Marilyn, who describes her experiences growing up with the images of Marilyn Bell and Marilyn Monroe. The film contemplates questions of identity, nationalism, the mediated construction of women's subjectivity and perhaps most importantly, offers a portrait of women's bodies as active and capable of physical endurance. The film is structured around the time-line of Bell's famous swim across Lake Ontario in 1954, culminating with her successful finish. The film weaves together multiple overlapping voices including a reenactment of Bell's internal thoughts as she struggles to swim; the fictional narrator named Marilyn; the voice of radio broadcasts charting Bell's swim; a male coach shouting encouragement to Bell while she swims; and songs written about Bell in the 1950s. The film alternates between archival footage of Bell's historic swim across Lake Ontario and Monroe's journey to visit US troops in Korea. They represent opposing poles: the virginal, athletic body of the young Bell in contrast with the seductive, sexualized body of Monroe. It is a documentary of the lives of these two historical figures, but it is also a personal reflection by the narrator on the important role of these women as icons on her own sense of self.

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Both Gruben and Longfellow's experiments with hybrid film forms can be read as engaging with a feminist spectator, a term which is more productive and broadly inclusive than the category of female spectator.[26] *Our Marilyn* and *The Central Character* were both informed by a feminist politics, which suggests Gruben and Longfellow had a specific viewer in mind—one that was open and attuned to the critiques of representation made by the filmmakers. Gruben and Longfellow's phenomenological aesthetic address clearly situates the images of women on-screen in relation to both their diegetic and non-diegetic environments. As Vivian Sobchack argues in "Phenomenology and the Film Experience," the filmmaker's perception is directly documented through the initial act of filming, an act which then becomes *the site* of the spectator's perceptual engagement.[27] For Sobchack a trace of the filmic act always resides in the viewing act.[28] This convergence between different levels of lived experience within a film is the site of the intersubjective relations forged in *The Central Character* and *Our Marilyn*. Longfellow and Gruben's formal experiments with fluid or unfixed images and spaces in each film forces a broader consideration of how bodies signify. Both filmmakers use the figures of the off-screen narrator and women's image onscreen to performatively inscribe their perceptual experiences into the film's diegesis. The traces of this lived experience in making the film echoes the formal emphasis on women's lived experience onscreen throughout both films. The ways the two films evoke a sense of the lived body within the audio-visual address undermines traditional voices of the auteur, the voice of god, and the classical narrative script. What they offer instead are contingent, fluid, at times incoherent, slippery positions of main characters caught in the chaos of psychic unraveling or the body and mind under extreme physical duress. These forms of address highlight for the viewer the unstable, shifting, and layered nature of bodies within the context of cinematic time and space. The films demonstrate how such intersubjective modes of address can usefully counter the more objectified and disengaged film-audience relationships supported by classical Hollywood and the modernist aesthetics of the avant-garde.

As mentioned previously, the films also use forms of reflexivity to performatively reimagine the roles prescribed to the different players of a film text. Performative utterances are broadly understood to do something rather than simply state something (for example the utterance "I do" in the marriage ceremony).[29] What such words "do" is enact a change in the condition of how subjects are situated within the particular context they are spoken (saying "I do" in a marriage ceremony changes one's legal status from single to married). Correspondingly, the formal gestures made explicit particularly in experimental cinema are performative utterances that "do" things as well. The performative formal gestures in experimental film displace standard configurations of cinematic representation.[30] These formal interventions complicate the boundaries between spaces and bodies, filmmaker and image, spectator and screen. In the particular case of *Our Marilyn* and *The Central Character*, such formal performative gestures

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offer an image of women's bodies exceeding the systems of meaning placed upon it. For example, the intentional dissolution of the main figure's image and vocal clarity toward the end of *The Central Character* undermines the reliability of subject positions and their containment within the boundaries of the film frame and the viewing space. Similarly, Bell and Monroe's images are dissolved by the waves of water and crowds of fans that contain them, and yet they always reemerge almost triumphant against their environments and the film's formal manipulations. These formal interventions in both films construct liminal spaces on-screen that blur the distinction between diegetic and non-diegetic space and question the certainty of the spectator. These experiments with modes of address reveal the aesthetic potential of dwelling between the clear-cut spaces of cinematic representation and viewing, expanding the depth of possibilities for the woman's image on screen and the feminist spectator in the audience.

The formal politics of Longfellow and Gruben's films are in clear conversation with other feminist experimental filmmakers. The troubling of women's signification through performative reflexivity and off-screen voice-overs that address both the image on-screen and the audience are not singular to either *Our Marilyn* or *The Central Character*. Such formal interventions are found in Joyce Wieland's *Water Sark* (1965), Gunvor Nelson's *My Name is Oona* (1969), Carolee Schneemann's *Plumb Line* (1968-1971), Yvonne Rainer's *Lives of Performers* (1972), Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen's *Riddles of the Sphinx* (1977) and Sally Potter's *Thriller* (1979), to name only a few. What does set them apart are the specific ways in which Longfellow and Gruben combine hybrid forms of documentary and narrative with an experimental aesthetic of highly mediated, at times abstract images. This is seen alongside their shared emphasis on the lived bodily experiences of the women represented on-screen, which is made explicit through a complex voice-over narration. Schneemann's *Plumb Line* and Nelson's *My Name is Oona* perhaps come closest to sharing this combination of aesthetic traits.[31] My comparative analysis of Gruben and Longfellow offers two examples of how these broader set of feminist experimental traits are made manifest in the specific context of Canadian film history. The formal experiments in *Our Marilyn* and *the Central Character* are part of feminist aesthetic trajectory found in the earlier work of Schneemann, Rainer, Nelson and Wieland and others in the 1960s and 1970s. The two films equally exist as a precursor to the fluid, performative modes of address found in a range contemporary feminist screen-based projection art including the work of Shirin Neshat, Eija-Liisa Ahtila, Shary Boyle, Rebecca Belmore, Christine Davis, among others. Providing an extensive reading of these films by Longfellow and Gruben helps locate two Canadian contributions within this particular feminist experimental aesthetic trajectory based on a performative and phenomenological mode of address. I outline their place in this trajectory as a way to productively extend the dialogue on these films into the present.

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NARRATIVE LIMINALITY AND VISUAL NON-COMPLIANCE

The unfixing and reimagining of the relationship between voice-over, images on-screen, and cinematic spaces off-screen is a central aesthetic element of *The Central Character* and *Our Marilyn*. While the voice-over in both films is not synchronous with a body on screen, the voice-over narration is situated in direct conversation with the images rather than in juxtaposition to them. Each film's use of voice-over reveals complex cinematic arrangements between bodies in space and attempts to overcome the limits of the film frame. In different ways the films situate the voice-over in direct relationship to the images of women on-screen. Notably, in both films the voices are not those of the women on-screen, but are of off-screen authors who address the on-screen characters while simultaneously engaging the audience. The voice-over narrator in *The Central Character* addresses an image of herself in the third person throughout the film. While asynchronous, the film forges a conceptual link between the character's voice and body that is significant. In *Our Marilyn*, the narrator reminisces about the impact that Marilyn Bell and Marilyn Monroe's bodies had on her during early adolescence. In both, the spectator encounters a direct engagement between the narrator and the images on screen. The voice-over in the two films is neither fully detached from the film's diegesis but neither is it fully captured within its frame. It functions as an exploratory figure situated somewhere in the imaginary border between the two.

In *The Central Character* the protagonist is referred to in the film, both by herself and in the title cards, as "she." We first encounter her not through an image but through three different audio moments. In the opening scene we hear her reciting a grocery list, then through third-person narration she reads her daily tasks that we see on corresponding title cards. At first the woman dutifully follows the instructions of title cards on-screen to cook a meal or clean a floor. Increasingly, these projects are left uncompleted as she begins to traverse spatial, and perhaps psychic, boundaries in a floating, dreamlike state. What the narrator demonstrates throughout is that as she fails to control the natural world she also loses her subjective footing. A corresponding erosion of intelligible language within the voice-over illustrates this even further.

The main character's narration of her own story is a significant intervention against the traditionally male-driven narratives of Hollywood and the voice-of-God narrations of documentary. There is a split between the voice-over and the image of "herself," and yet they are intrinsically linked insofar as what the narrator describes the character performs on-screen. It is important to note that these enacted experiences are always bodily and grounded in physical actions. They are never abstracted from the materiality of the character's experiences. For instance, when the voice-over speaks an imperative such as "sweep up the dirt," the corresponding image on screen is of a broom sweeping dirt on patio stones.

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The narrator speaking to the audience about her image's actions establishes a critical relationship between narrator, image and what the audience is seeing and hearing. This is something that this film shares with the narration in *Our Marilyn* where the narrator comments on the found footage of Monroe and Bell incorporated into the film.

In *The Central Character*, we do not see an image of the woman until six minutes into the film. It is important to note that when the woman is shown she is framed in close-up floating in a shallow pool of water in a darkened, undecipherable space. This first image provides an early visual indication of her liminal state; she is not, nor will she ever be grounded in her surroundings. From this point in the film the character moves into her garden. Once in the garden the woman begins the task of sweeping patio stones and sets out in search of more containers to "hold the uncontrollably growing plants" around her. Here, the garden can be read as an exterior space, but also a deeper interiority. Gruben notes that in the movement from kitchen to garden to forest, "it's as though the character keeps waking up into a deeper and deeper dream."[32]

In the final section of the film, the figure of 'she' enters into the third space of film indicated through a transition from the garden into the forest. The title cards note that she never returns from this search because the trail of seeds she left to find her way back are eaten by birds. The emphasis on being lost at this point of transition within the film is significant. Not being grounded or fixed by her surroundings allows the film to refuse the character a sense of locatedness. Relying on the fairy tale trope of birds eating the trail linking her back to her home illustrates the textual reframing of dominant cultural narratives made by Gruben within the film. The loss of a link back to the more legible audio-visual space of the film's opening unravels a sense of certainty in the viewer's experience of the body on-screen and her environment. This by extension reveals to an extent an uncertainty for the viewer that the film frame can adequately contain the narrative on screen. On symbolic and affective levels the dissolution of fixed subject and spatial positions on screen undermines film's capacity to function as a container, spilling the audio-visual forms toward the perceptual borders of the audience. This uncertainty across multiple sites of the film apparatus is a productive consequence of the films' representational politics.

The forest space represents a deeper level of interiority, where language and boundaries break down. Here, there is a merging of subject and space. The voice-over and the character on-screen are brought together in their position *against* the "objective" tone of title cards. At a certain point, these title cards disappear as they no longer hold any function or power to name or contain the subject as the film moves deeper into the character's interiority. The character is left to explore her sense of self at the margins of functional language. While the voice also ceases to speak with any coherence, unlike the absent title cards, it is still a significant part of her journey. The lack of title cards in this section signifies

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the end of rationality. The remaining minutes of the film are increasingly abstract. The high-contrast stock creates a starkly polarized image of deep blacks and overexposed white highlights. At this point in the film the woman raises herself from the ground slowly. Her white shirt reveals a series of dark stains, which Gruben refers to as resembling a "gestalt ink-blot." The high-contrast stock causes the image to no longer hold a concrete form. Instead, it wavers and jumps around in the frame, never static. The boundaries or outlines between body and environment seem to shift and bleed into each other. The woman's figure moves in an elusive, strangely fluid, yet frantic manner; it refuses to be pinned or fixed by the camera. The woman stares directly at the camera and then spirits away into the dark background of the forest. In this gesture, she slips by the camera's gaze and chooses an alternate path into the deepest space of the forest.

As noted above, once the character is lost to the forest, she also becomes lost to coherent linguistic expression. In this space, we begin to hear her speak differently. She is no longer speaking the list of imperatives "sweep up the dirt, put it in the pot, take it to the plants." Instead she struggles to articulate herself beyond the mundane tasks that up to this point have defined her. In one of the most compelling moments in the film, the character begins to repeat over and over "that I would like to say, that I would like to say, that" continuously for several minutes. The soundtrack is a dominant and structuring force in this section of the film. The phrase is presented as an open-ended sentence whose meaning shifts depending on where you place the punctuation and emphasis—something that the repetition of the phrase refuses. Do we interpret her to mean "I would like to say that. . ." or "That I would like to say. . ."? What is it that she would like to say? What is she trying to express? There is a refusal at this point in the film to communicate through logical linguistic forms. The repetition of the phrase "that I would like to say" holds a sense of both potential and non-compliance. Audiovisual forms of non-compliance within women's representation are found across a range of feminist experimental films since the 1960s. When language (visual and verbal) becomes incoherent it offers a "formally productive" challenge to dominant forms of representation.[33] In *The Central Character* this non-compliance both refuses clarity while also setting out a desire. The phrase indicates a desire to communicate, even if this desire is challenged by the endless circularity and repetition of the utterance. It also represents a shift from third-person to first-person—it is not "that she would like to say," but rather "that I would like. . . " Voice and image meet within this space of interiority; it is a tentative meeting between seemingly disembodied elements. The repetitious articulation of the character's desire to speak includes within it a gesture to connect with the audience. The voice gives us a sense of the character's body as we hear, but do not see, an image of her for most of the last third of the film. Her speaking body makes itself present in our minds as an image, which is not yet (nor may no longer be) present on screen.

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The woman's entrance into the third space addresses its audience more directly than in the previous two spaces. Up to this point the viewer maintained a rather distanced position, however, this transition towards incoherence and non-compliance undermines that distance. This is a key moment of catharsis in the film. Here spectators begin to lose their bearings as the dialogue that has anchored them begins to fall away. Viewers are positioned in a space that lacks clear boundaries and distinctions. This experience is compounded by the increasing abstraction of the images. Where all these forms of language falter, anything becomes possible. This locates spectators in a space of possibility as much as in a space of loss. The two notions of possibility and loss co-exist, encouraging spectators to rethink their relationship to the diegetic space and their own physical viewing space because they are no longer held by a coherent or predictable narrative or textual address.

The film confronts its audience with a central character who voices a desire that is not fully articulate and an image we cannot clearly identify. The impression it provides is of a dynamic body, unfixed and fluid, opening the relation between bodies on-screen and off-screen to their respective environments as a point of exchange. Laura Levin describes this relational aesthetic experience through the concept of "performing ground" whereby "the body co-mingles with or is seen as a direct extension of its setting."[34] Within *The Central Character* this co-mingling on-screen and in the audience draws attention to how we are embedded in space, complicating Cartesian models of subjectivity and the binaries that constrain women's bodies in representation.

For Kaja Silverman the voice-over in feminist film often blurs the "distinction between diegetic interiority and exteriority" effectively redefining "the relationship between spectator and spectacle."[35] Silverman reads this feminist use of the voice-over as working within the threshold between body, language and the social.[36] The modes of address used in *The Central Character* illustrate how the off-screen voice interacts not only the images on-screen but with the

Fig. 3: *"Our Marilyn"*



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position of the viewer as well. The voice-over exists in an undefined space beyond the frame while still being intimately connected to it. The dual address of image onscreen and spectator off screen is found in both films. In *The Central Character* and *Our Marilyn* this dual address contributes to the sense of a narrator existing in the threshold between viewer and screen. This uncertain positioning of the voice within ambiguous cinematic space evokes a sense of uncertainty in the viewer but also a new type of locatedness. The spectator is never fixed by the audio or the visual address; rather her position is constantly refigured, challenged and reimagined.

Through unconventional narrative address both of these films reconfigure the potential uses of women's voice in cinema against its traditional position of silence or compliance. Silverman argues that an "enormous conceptual and discursive range" can be found in the female voice "once it is freed from its claustral confinement with the female body."[37] I would add that exploring the terrain between women's bodies and voices in feminist experimental cinema offers an equally compelling discursive range of representational possibilities. In *Our Marilyn* the fictional off-screen narrator who is guiding the film's trajectory provides an important sense of intimacy throughout the film. Longfellow scripted the narrator as a semi-autobiographical figure drawing on conventions used by Chris Marker in *Sans Soleil* (1983). For Longfellow the narrator in *Sans Soleil* represented an attractive "fictional device," a "phantom narrator" who is both "personal but . . . completely invented." It is through the narrator in *Our Marilyn* that we view the factual fragments of the film. This relatedness of the narrator's voice to both the filmmaker's autobiographical life and the audience stands in marked contrast to the notion of a distanced voice-over. With her, we are situated in the realm of memory, reverie, and personal reflection. As Adam Dickinson notes, the narrator carries a "subjective presence" as well as a real sense of "proximity."[38] When we hear the narrator at the opening of the film she first confesses that she was named after Marilyn Bell. She recounts that while her mother was in labour for fourteen hours with her, "a ten-pound baby," she saw Bell as a figure of hope. Her mother decided: "If Marilyn could make it, so could she." This introduction to the narrator is located immediately in an experience of a body pushed to its physical limits. This entry point in our connection to the narrator (and the film), privileges subjective experience over the objective documentation of events; never letting us escape the capacity and stamina of the body.

At the start of *Our Marilyn* and at two additional points throughout the film, the narrator repeats an observation that is integral to the film as a whole. She states: "Growing up between your bodies, never one without the other, I keep moving, watched your moving and dreamed of another story." In all three instances the narrator does not address the audience directly, but rather speaks to the two Marilyns onscreen. The film is like a letter to the two women as

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witnessed by an audience. She describes how as a teenager she quit swimming, grew breasts and bleached her hair—moving from the figure of the one Marilyn to the other. In other parts of the film the narrator asks Bell and Monroe questions about their life experiences. This form of address offers a dimensionality and historicity to the iconic, canonized images of both women. Suddenly, they are invited to speak (whether they do or not) and the materiality of their experiences, their perspectives and their everyday life is validated as a subject of interest. This marks the images not as empty signifiers but as figures in and of the world beyond the documentary frame that captures and freezes them as images. Through the narrative address the corporeal traces haunting their images is made tangible to the viewer. The narrator often compares the two Marilyns through stories of bodily experience. In one example, the narrator recounts Marilyn Bell's specific struggles swimming in "dangerously" cold water. This is quickly connected through montage to a story of Monroe insisting on wearing a sleeveless dress and open-toe shoes despite the cold while performing for US troops. The women are linked in the narrator's mind through their bodily experiences of performing for others, or more specifically for their nations, despite physical discomfort. The film's emphasis on material, physical experience embedded within the narration, never lets us escape the trace of the lived body.

In a second layer of address, the struggles Bell faced in her historic swim are revealed through an interior monologue that appears sporadically throughout the film. The inclusion of Bell's inner thoughts adds depth to her story of her young body in action. What is significant about Bell's monologue is how successfully she expresses her fears through her whispered voice. This voice makes evident her exhaustion, as well as her physical struggle against the waves, in a way that is immediate and personal. In contrast, the corresponding image of a beautiful blue lake and sun sparkling on the wave tops does not show a body. This absence in the image further reinforces the voice as holding a form of corporeal presence for the viewer.

Like the visual breakdown of the woman in *The Central* Character, *Our Marilyn* offers a similar dissolution of a body in space that is punctuated by an abstracted, destabilized image of women. This is most clearly seen in the recreated images of Bell swimming in an endless body of water whose waves fill the frame and threaten to spill over. In researching Marilyn Bell for the film, Longfellow discovered a lack of archival accounts of Bell's actual swimming experience in the official history of the event.[39] There is no mention in these accounts of the physical difficulties or psychic challenges Bell faced throughout her arduous and lengthy swim. For Longfellow, the significant feat of Bell's twenty-hour swim represents an image of woman not often found on screen. What Bell's accomplishment represents—that of a woman's body in action—is underplayed or marginalized in historical accounts. As a corrective to this unrecorded history, Longfellow filmed herself swimming in Lake Ontario with

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Fig. 4: *"Our Marilyn"*

Super 8 film, and used this as her source material. Longfellow's insistence on showing a woman's body swimming responded to the standing argument at the time that "women cannot take place in representation because she will be objectified by the patriarchal gaze."[40] Rather than remove women's bodies from film altogether, Longfellow decided she would "foreground the body in a different kind of a way."[41] She succeeds in doing this by creating footage where none existed. The footage explicitly foregrounds a struggling body working against a seemingly insurmountable challenge. The audio-visual components of the film contribute to this sense of physical labour and the desire to overcome the constraints of the environment Bell is presented with during her swim.

The footage of Bell's swim reenacted by Longfellow during filming is further manipulated by hand in post-production. Her involvement as image on-screen and in post-production provides a second form of performative address in *Our Marilyn*, that is tied directly to the physical imprint and intentions of the filmmaker in meaningful ways. Longfellow notes she was inspired by feminist performance art while making the film.[42] The inclusion of her own body, both in the swimming footage and her optical printing illustrate a performance on her part. As the filmmaker, but also the swimming body, and the semi-autobiographical voice of the narrator, Longfellow articulates her own subjectivity as a subject, a feminist, and a filmmaker within these multiple layers of address. This again is a further example of the notion of performing ground reference earlier.

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The subtle relations between disparate elements of the film's address come together in the intentions of Longfellow as filmmaker, narrator and performing body. The connections between image, author and voice-over made by Longfellow's presence alongside the images of Bell and Monroe destabilize any sense of a singular, coherent subject, offering instead a more polyvalent vision of women within the film. A similar act of refusing a single subject position is found in *The Central Character* where the woman's voice is not tied to a body on screen. The voices used to narrate the films stand outside the diegetic action, complicating and enriching it, and ultimately extending its reach beyond the film frame. They are situated in-between the image and the audience, commenting on the image as a means of forging a dialogue with the viewer witnessing the manifold filmic formations that unfold.

AN ENCOUNTER WITH GESTIC ADDRESS

In relation to feminist uses of voice-over in experimental films of the 1980s Peggy Phelan asks, "if presence is registered not through a visible body but through a voice . . . how are the models of identification between spectators and their screen surrogates challenged?"[43] What is clear in the descriptions of *The Central Character* and *Our Marilyn* is that despite the formal disjuncture between women's image and voice, neither film completely marks a break between the two. Both films critically counter women's silencing by dominant and cinematic language via a voice-over narrator that resists easy alignment with image onscreen, while still evoking a sense of intimacy with the image and audience. Both films broach the threshold between the voice and the image through their emphasis on bodily experience and mundane tasks. This echoes performance studies scholar Elin Diamond's belief that a particular type of embodiment is present in artwork that indexes the trace of bodily materiality within their form. Embodiment for Diamond is "haunted" by the material body it encounters within the visual.[44] Diamond is interested in the relationship between seeing and feeling that is present in the aesthetic experience of catharsis. For Diamond such an experience "situates the subject at a dangerous border" where she can be "seized by her shuddering body, which mars her rational vision." This embodied response to a cathartic aesthetic experience causes one's body to be felt within one's consciousness. Materiality and signification collapse as the felt body is thus consciously recognized as a site of meaning making within the act of viewing.[45]

This notion of embodiment reveals how aesthetic experience can index the presence of our often-overlooked bodily materiality within the act of spectatorship. For Diamond, within Brechtian theatre viewers situate their bodies alongside the bodies of the artist through both their critical and sensorial experience of an aesthetic text. This situated embodiment is located within the gestic moment of a text, the formal points that reflexively open it to the social and discursive

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ideologies that inform its production.[46] Gestus here refers to "an action" that makes "visible" for the spectator the prevailing "social attitudes" of a work.[47] In theatre, the "gestic moment" both "explains . . . (and) exceeds the play," illustrating for viewers the "ideologies that inform its production."[48] An important effect of the gestus in feminist theatre is that it "undermines the stability of the spectatorial 'self,' for in the act of looking the spectator engages with her own temporality."[49] Similarly, in reading the gestic moments found in *Our Marilyn* and *The Central Character*, I want to illustrate how the films make visible prevailing social attitudes within cinema by exceeding the traditional constraints of the medium, and as a result challenge the position of the spectator.

The specific formal interventions into diegetic and extra-diegetic space in the two films ultimately cause the binary divisions between spectator and artist to move toward an experience of intersubjective exchange. This is most clearly seen in the simultaneous address of the image and viewer in *The Central Character* and *Our Marilyn*, a mode both films employ in order to engage the spectator's personal sense of temporality, blurring the line between the diegetic space of the film and the viewers' position in relation to it. In both, the filmic gestus evokes a sense of liminal space, revealing how the presence of such spaces exceeds the frames and limits of the apparatus and its gendered ideologies. By exceeding these frames and cinematic constraints, the filmic gestus, "asks us to consider the author's inscription"[50] and what it reveals about the possibilities and constraints of the medium. Gruben and Longfellow evoke a similar set of questions through the performative inscription of the author within the camera's frame. The filmmaker's "performing" of the framing makes visible traditional codes of representation. As Diamond argues that "the female performer, unlike her filmic counterpart, connotes not "to-be-looked-at-ness". . . but rather "looking-at-being-looked-at-ness,"[51] I would extend Diamond's reading by suggesting that the performative presence of the filmmaker and off-screen voice-over in *Our Marilyn* and *The Central Character* equally connotes a reflexive "looking-at-being-looked-at-ness,"[52] revealing the intersubjective address of the audience as a feminist intervention against the apparatus.

As I have noted earlier via Sobchack, the camera records the filmmaker's perception, which informs and engages the spectator's own act of perception. Within this schema, Sobchack views the film and the spectator as both being engaged in performative actions.[53] The cinematic performative action is found in the entanglement between the filmmaker and spectator's different acts of perception, both of which are grounded in the film image. The film retains a trace of this lived perceptual experience in its material form and translates this "liveness" through signification. This performative element of signification enacts a change; it translates an absent act of perception into a form of presence within the viewing experience. As such it transforms the relationship between the spectator, filmmaker and the film into a dialogue of intersubjectivity.[54] This inter-

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subjective address encourages an embodied viewing experience that unsettles the spectator's position and calls into uncertainty the practice of viewing cinema more broadly. In the two films considered here the camera articulates a meta-critique of women's absence in dominant cinema through the use of framing. Like the sense of liminal space produced by the embodied off-screen voice-over, the visual address in these films also evokes an affective experience of liminal space for the viewer. In *Our Marilyn,* this is seen in the seemingly endless body of water that the figure of Bell struggles within and against throughout the film. In *The Central Character* it is found in the dense overgrown forest that functions as the visual site for the woman's subjective collapse. In both, this indeterminacy within the frame leaves the spectator searching for the main character within the filmic spaces.

This double sense of liminality within the audio and diegetic space is central to each film's formal construction. In *The Central Character* and *Our Marilyn* the use of high-contrast film stocks pushes the image almost to the point of visual incoherence, blurring the lines between women and their environments. In *The Central Character,* the framing purposefully dissolves the boundaries between environment and body. Onscreen, the camera frames the body and space as they shift, interrupt, and deteriorate into one another alongside the deteriorating coherence and struggles of the bodies articulated through the voice-overs. The visual dissolution of the woman's image in the frame is both gripping and unsettling. The reenactment of Bell's swimming journey is notable for how it confronts the omnipresence of the water on the screen. The choice to frame these segments in close-up and on hand-manipulated high-contrast stock reveals how her body felt threatened as it was overwhelmed by the vast expanse of water she swims in. A feeling further emphasized by the voice over narration expressing Bell's exhaustion and uncertainty as she moves forward. In both films the *mise en scène* reveals a critically reflexive attentiveness to the parameters and function of the visual frame, this highly visible approach to framing further emphasizes the dialogue that is being forged with a specifically feminist spectator critical of existing cinematic conventions.

As Teresa de Lauretis notes in her discussion of feminist film aesthetics, Chantal Akerman's formal focus in *Jeanne Dielman* is on "woman's actions, gestures, body and look" as they successfully "define the space of our vision, the temporality and rhythms of perception, the horizon of meaning available to the spectator."[55] Gruben and Longfellow's different engagements with the gestures of the camera framing the bodies on screen influence the affective pull found within the spectator's experiences. The visual address in the two films tests the boundaries between different spaces of embodiment, determining a new set of possibilities for spectator-film relations.

Importantly, the filmed bodies in *The Central Character* and *Our Marilyn* are not static or frozen onscreen but rather are bodies in motion. These bodies

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move within noticeably malleable spaces, which, above all, do not constrain the characters. There is a visual blurring of the division between the bodies on screen and what surrounds them. These blurred bodies in liminal spaces highlight the mutually constitutive nature of bodies and their environments. They reflect the vulnerability and permeability of these bodies, but also their potential, as they are both fluid and in motion, never ceasing despite the threats of their environment to swallow them whole. We see this in the physicality of Bell's body fighting against the waves and the chaotic movement of the central character in the forest, moving deeper beyond language and into the excessive and imaginative spaces of the film. For Amelia Jones this type of body in representation indexes the uncertainty of the viewer. Jones argues that if the representational body is "marked as contingent, so is the interpreter."[56] Since the bodies on screen are contingent upon that which surrounds them, these environments are central to critical readings of the films and their intentional address of the viewer. The bodies on-screen persevere beyond the struggles of these liminal environments and so do we as viewers in our affective linking to them.

Insofar as these films are situated at a series of thresholds or margins between genres, forms, histories and languages, they still remain avowedly "inside the visible."[57] They successfully incorporate "material traces and fragmentary histories" into aesthetic "convergences" which, when "recombined . . . produce new meanings." These convergences are grounded within "the specificity of the encounter between work and viewer."[58] It is this foregrounding of the relationship of cinematic bodies to space and the audience that is so compelling in these films. They enable a dialectic relationship between spectator and film to occur, a relationship that in the case of *Our Marilyn*, includes the embodiment of the filmmaker in compelling ways. They offer new formal possibilities for exploring the relationship between image, voice and audience by refiguring women's bodies as subjects (rather than objects) *in motion*. This re-figuring of women's bodies and voices in the two films foregrounds a different mode of articulating women's subjectivity as unfixed and incomplete.

In concluding my reading of these two films I wish to return to that key statement from *Our Marilyn*, where the narrator states: "Growing up between your bodies, never one without the other, I keep moving, watched your moving and dreamed of another story." In both films the experimental, hybrid modes of address offered confirm this transitory sense of women's image as holding the potential to be figures in motion. They reflect the narrator's (and perhaps the feminist spectator's) desire to also be a body in motion, a subject who is always moving, or as Julia Kristeva puts it, a subject in process.[59] Ultimately it is these images of bodies in motion that enable the narrator and us to dream of another story for ourselves. These bodies in motion reflect a very specific desire to *not be fixed* by the traditional image of woman on screen. The relationship between images, soundscapes and narrative address in the films offers important spaces

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to imagine possible futures where the historical roles ascribed to Bell, Monroe and Gruben's "central character" are subverted and are turned open to alternate possibilities. These cinematic women successfully move, as the narrator in *Our Marilyn* suggests, "beyond naming, beyond the myths" made of women in dominant modes of representation. Where they move into is "the space between images" where "the vertiginous soaring of" a woman's "body in motion" can ultimately be found. This is the significant aesthetic intervention that both films afford the viewer—the chance to see women on screen in unbounded scenarios where they, and we, are free to move and explore at will.

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NOTES

1. Amelia Jones, "Performance: Time, Space and Cultural 'Value'" in *One Day Sculpture*, eds. David Cross and Claire Doherty (New York: D.A.P., 2008), 36. Thank you to Melanie Wilmink for drawing my attention to this article.
2. Within popular discourse there is a notable rise in critical feminist voices across news media, social media, and the blogosphere where conversations on the lack of women's parity in media production, and the continued propagation of rape culture within representational media are (among other topics), widely discussed. Further, the prominence of feminist discourses have been supported in high profile media campaigns including the two recent album's released by Beyoncé (*Beyoncé*, 2013, *Lemonade*, 2016) and in the UN Women's HeforShe campaign, that uses actress Emma Watson as its spokesperson. Within the academy, feminist discussions of representational politics in visual culture are readily found in academic journals established since the early 2000s including: *Feminist Media Studies*: *thirdspace: a journal of feminist theory and culture*: *S+F Online*; *MP: An Online Feminist Journal*; *Journal of Feminist Scholarship*; *Ada: Journal of Gender, New Media and Technology*, *Feminist Media Histories*. See as well anthologies such as Amelia Jones ed., *The Feminist Visual Culture Reader*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge: 2010); Whitney Chadwick, *Women, Art & Society*, 5th ed. (London: Thames and Hudson: 2012); Angela McRobbie, *The Aftermath of Feminism: Gender, Culture and Social Change* (New York: Sage, 2008); Rosalind Gill, *Gender and the Media* (Cambridge UK: Polity, 2008); Mary Celeste Kearney, *The Gender and Media Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2011); Yvonne Tasker and Diane Negra, eds., *Interrogating Postfeminism: Gender and the Politics of Popular Culture* (Durham N.C: Duke University Press, 2007).
3. See for example, Robin Blaetz, ed., *Women's Experimental Cinema: Critical Frameworks* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007); Corinn Columpar and Sophie Mayer, eds., *There She Goes: Feminist Filmmaking and Beyond* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2009); Alexandra Juhasz, *Women of Vision: Histories in Feminist Film and Video* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001); Jean Petrolle and Virginia Wexman, eds., *Women and Experimental Filmmaking* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2005); Patti Gaal-Homes, *A History of 1970s Experimental Film: Britain's Decade of Diversity* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2015); Sophie Mayer, *The Cinema of Sally Potter: A Politics of Love* (New York: Wallflower 2009); Jackie Hatfield ed., *Experimental Film and Video: an anthology* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2006).
4. *Gendering the Nation: Canadian Women's Cinema* (1999) and *The Gendered Screen: Canadian Women Filmmakers* (2010) are the central sites that house this history within a Canadian context. A survey of the specific history of feminist experimental film in Canada would provide a useful extension of this existing body of work. See Brenda Austin-Smith and George Melnyck, eds., *The Gendered Screen: Canadian Women Filmmakers* (Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 2010) and Kay Armatage, et al., eds., *Gendering The Nation: Canadian Women's Cinema* (Toronto: U of T Press 1999).
5. As Longfellow notes, "we were looking for a form that could mix pleasure, history, politics [with a] reflexivity about the representation of the body." Email correspondence with the author, 1 June, 2011. These explorations both challenged cinematic traditions and importantly addressed feminist debates around representation that were actively being debated at the time (such as the question of "positive images" and theories of é*criture feminine*).

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6. By this she means contemporary aesthetic criticism that is derived from Kantian and modernist definitions of art. See Jones, "Performance," 31.
7. Jones, "Performance," 31-32.
8. Ibid, 32.
9. For an extensive discussion of how art affectively and performatively engages the viewer see: Allan Kaprow, "The Legacy of Jackson Pollock," in *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*, ed. Jeff Kelley (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003) 1-9; Maurice Berger, *Minimal Politics: Performativity and Minimalism in Recent American Art* (Baltimore: University of Maryland Press, 1997); Michael Fried, "Art and Objecthood," *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1998).
10. Jones, "Performance," 35. For an expanded discussion of chiasmus see Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible: Followed by Working Notes*, trans. Alfonso Lingis, ed. Claude Lefort (Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 1968).
11. This disembodied female voice was rarely used in classical Hollywood cinema because it made woman inaccessible to the gaze, thus displacing the male protagonist from his position of authority. It is argued that in feminist experimental film this separation of voice and body does not merely re-position itself in the role of male mastery but rather disallows the illusion of a coherent, unified cinematic subject altogether. See Kaja Silverman, *The Acoustic Mirror: The Female Voice in Psychoanalysis and Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 140.
12. Brenda Longfellow helpfully suggested this particular phrase in an earlier draft of this text in May 2011.
13. Both films are part of a historical moment when a large number of women filmmakers entered experimental film communities across Canada. An increase in funding opportunities for women and a greater presence of women in film festivals, the film industry and the academy fostered a rise in women's presence across these different arenas. Kay Armatage's early advocacy through the feminist film journal *Take One* and the groundbreaking women's film festival in Toronto in 1973 drew filmmakers like Patricia Gruben and Brenda Longfellow into the developing area of feminist film. The filmmakers I consider in this paper were both initially oriented around the experimental film community in Toronto and were connected to various organizations such as CFMDC and the Funnel. The Funnel was run early on by David McIntosh, the board and staff included at various times Anna Gronau, Michelle McLean, Midi Onodera and Cindy Gawell among others. Longfellow and Gruben both cite the presence of women peers within this community as vital for their development as filmmakers. Brenda Longfellow, personal conversation with author, May 15th, 2011; Patricia Gruben, email correspondence with the author, April 29th, 2011.
14. Janine Marchessault, "Feminist Avant-Garde Cinema: From Introspection to Retrospection," in Armatage et al., 143.
15. Longfellow explicitly cites the work of Gruben (alongside Kay Armatage) as having an influence on her filmmaking. Personal conversation with the author, May 15, 2011.
16. See for example Canada's first women's film festival "Women and Film 1896-1973 International Festival" and the development of NFB's Studio D in 1974. For more information on women's history in Canadian cinema see Armatage. et al.

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17. Patricia Gruben, "Sifted Evidence," in *Inside the Pleasure Dome*, 2nd ed., ed. Mike Hoolboom (Toronto: Coach House Press, 2001), 35.
18. Gruben, "Sifted Evidence," 38.
19. Kathleen McHugh, "The Films of Patricia Gruben: Subjectivity and Space," *Jump Cut* 35 (April 1990): 110.
20. See *Sifted Evidence* (1982), *Low Visibility* (1984), *Deep Sleep* (1990), *Ley Lines* (1993).
21. A digital version of the film is available at: https://vimeo.com/105520959 , courtesy of the artist.
22. See for example the work of Kay Armatage, Midi Onodera, Phil Hoffman, among others. For an historical overview of the Funnel see Katarina Lagace and Elysse Leonard, "The Funnel: An Experiment in Collaboration" https://localfilmculturestoronto.wordpress.com/alternative-exhibition/funnel-experimental-film-theatre/.
23. Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Screen* 16.3 (Fall 1975): 6-18.
24. Longfellow engaged with the work of B. Ruby Rich and French feminist writing on *écriture feminine* while developing her aesthetic in *Our Marilyn*. As Longfellow notes she was influenced by the way *écriture feminine* asserted the value of women bodies as a potential alternative system of representation within discourse, but like many others at the time was also actively negotiating with the forms of essentialism that it enabled. Personal conversation with the author, May 15, 2011. See B. Ruby Rich, "In the Name of Feminist Film Criticism," in *Chick Flicks: Theories and Memories of The Feminist Film Movement* (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 1998): 62-84.
25. Personal conversation with author, May 15, 2011.
26. See Jill Dolan, *The Feminist Spectator as Critic*, 2nd ed. (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 2012).
27. Sobchack, "Phenomenology and the Film Experience," in *Viewing Positions: Ways of Seeing Film*, ed. Linda Williams (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1995), 41.
28. Ibid.
29. See J.L. Austin, *How To Do Things With Words*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975).
30. I am not suggesting that performativity as a formal trope in film is the explicit domain of either experimental film broadly or the work of Gruben and Longfellow specifically. I believe notions of the performative in a cinematic context are an important and largely underdeveloped area that requires further investigation across all film forms and genres. My use of theories of performativity in my analysis of *The Central Character* and *Our Marilyn* intends to add to this arena of film studies research in a brief but suggestive way.
31. See Shana MacDonald, "Voicing Dissonance: Resistant Soundscapes in 1960s Feminist Experimental Film," *Feminist Media Histories* 1.4 (Fall 2015): 89-107, for a close reading of these films by Schneemann and Nelson.
32. Patricia Gruben, email correspondence, April 29, 2011.
33. MacDonald, "Voicing Dissonance," 93.
34. Laura Levin, personal correspondence April 10, 2010. See also Laura Levin, *Performing Ground: Space, Camouflage and the Art of Blending In* (New York: Palgrave, 2014).
35. Silverman, *Acoustic Mirror*, 142.
36. Silverman, *Acoustic Mirror*, 144.
37. Silverman, *Acoustic Mirror*, 186.

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38. Adam Dickinson, "The Rhythm of Happening: Antagonism and Community in Brenda Longfellow's *Our Marilyn* and *A Balkan Journey*," *Canadian Journal of Film Studies/Revue canadienne d'études cinématographiques* 12.1 (Spring 2003): 47.
39. The press did not focus much on Bell when she began her swim across Lake Ontario, because the Canadian National Exhibition (CNE) had sponsored American swimmer Florence Chadwick. There are some initial images of Bell entering the water but no footage of her swimming the long-distance. This is contrasted by the swell of footage of Bell once she was the remaining contender in the competition.
40. Longfellow, personal conversation, May 15, 2011. See Peter Gidal, "Against Sexual Representation," *Screen* 25.6 (Fall 1984): 24-30.
41. Longfellow, personal conversation, May 15, 2011.
42. Ibid.
43. Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 71. Phelan's question is specifically directed at the film work of Yvonne Rainer, but I feel it is equally applicable to a broader range of feminist experimental film practices from the 1970s onwards.
44. Elin Diamond, "The Shudder of Catharsis in Twentieth Century Performance" in *Performativity and Performance*, eds. Andrew Parker and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (New York: Routledge 1995): 154.
45. Ibid.
46. Elin Diamond, "Brechtian Theory/Feminist Theory: Towards a Gestic Feminist Criticism," *TDR* 32.1 (Spring 1988): 90.
47. Diamond, "Brechtian Theory," 89.
48. Ibid, 90.
49. Ibid.
50. Ibid.
51. As Diamond argues, "this Brechtian-feminist body is paradoxically available for both analysis and identification, paradoxically within representation while refusing its fixity." See "Brechtian Theory," 89.
52. Ibid, 90.
53. Sobchack, *Address of the Eye: A Phenomenology of Film Experience* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), 42. This notion follows J.L. Austin's definition of the performative utterance, which implies that the very actions of expression and perception engender a change in their situation, produce their own contextual conditions. See Austin, 5-7.
54. Sobchack, *Address*, 42.
55. Teresa de Lauretis, "Aesthetic and Feminist Theory: Rethinking Women's Cinema," *New German Critique* 34 (Winter 1985): 154-175.
56. Amelia Jones, *Body Art/Performing the Subject* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 9.
57. Catherine de Zegher, *Inside the Visible: An Elliptical Traverse of 20th Century Art in, of, and from the Feminine* (Cambridge: MIT Press 1996), 20.
58. Ibid.
59. Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art,* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980).

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