Feminine Identity and Theories of the Intra/Inter National Subject: *La Vie rêvée and Anne Trister*

Jean Bruce
Ryerson University

La vie rêvée (Mireille Dansereau, 1972)

I believe that feminine artistic production takes place by means of a complicated process involving conquering and reclaiming, appropriating and formulating, as well as forgetting and subverting. In the works of those female artists who are concerned with the women's movement, one finds artistic tradition as well as the break with it.

- *Silvia Bovenschen* (1985 47-8)

La vie rêvée (M. Dansereau,1972) and *Anne Trister* (L.Pool, 1986) are significant to Québec and Canadian cinema history as they comment on some of the issues facing women in the 1970s and 80s, including the representation and greater presence of women in the public sphere. *La vie rêvée* and *Anne Trister* are in keeping with feminist filmmaking in American, European, and third cinema contexts of the period that, independent of country of origin or genre, often dealt with narratives of subjectivity, depicting attempts to map out public spaces as women's spaces. Like the films of Marguerite Duras, Ulrike Ottinger, Helga Sander, Agnès Varda, Anabel Nicolson, Sally Potter, Yvonne Rainer, and Sara Gomez, which are just some of the international examples of women's films whose concerns cross national boundaries, Pool's and Dansereau's films address the issue of female subjectivity and the public-private split which that representation often entails. Many of the films made by the above-mentioned directors reinvent or inflect established film language in order to address a specifically female spectator and to insert commentary on the representation of women in mainstream cinema; such was also the case with *La vie rêvée* and *Anne Trister*. They deploy many strategies specific to women's cinema and art cinema, but what is ignored in discussions of these films is their debt to the melodrama by way of the woman's film and the female buddy film. The manner in which these generic categories are variously invoked, upheld, and thwarted in the films represent the filmmakers' attempt to experiment with a new film language and to create a Québécoise film culture.

La vie rêvée is distinguished as the first feature-length film made by a woman in Québec. *Anne Trister* became a lesbian cult classic across Canada in the mid-late 1980s. These films, although made more than ten years apart, share the theme of an active female subject aesthetically reconfiguring the Montréal urban landscape (public space) as well as the city's interiors (both private and public spaces). The films strive to express a feminine point of view in these city spaces as they become by extension a site for positioning the subject within the domain of the nation. For their incisive commentary on sexuality and unique use of melodrama as a critical tool, these terms fit well within a study of nationalism, culture and unruly subjectivities in the Quebec-Canadian context. *La vie rêvée* and *Anne Trister* may be more explicitly related to art and counter cinema via women's cinema, but they too can be read in relation to American genre cinema, specifically the *female* buddy film [1]. Both films deploy stylistic strategies with a feminist political intent; for example, subjective point of view shots link cultural and personal memory to an aesthetics of contestation. Both films are extreme in their distanciation and identification techniques and are thus critical and engaging in a manner consistent with melodrama's visceral and moral imperatives. Melodrama, a familiar genre and mode of storytelling of mainstream cinema, becomes a means to bridge Québec and international cultures by providing a common ground to

express the difficulties of difference. Melodrama, as it is deployed in *La vie rêvée* and *Anne Trister*, becomes a hybridizing modality that retains the strange-making capacity to be critical, as well as the affective means to invite the spectator into the intimate spaces of the characters' points of view. I will explore both of these strategies within the films, after a brief plot synposis.

Synopsis of *La vie rêvée* and *Anne Trister*

Both *La vie rêvée* and *Anne Trister* were made by francophone women in Québec. *La vie rêvée*, directed by Mireille Dansereau, was released in 1972; *Anne Trister* by Léa Pool in 1985. The "plot" of La vie rêvée involves Isabelle (Véronique le Flaguais) and Virginie (Liliane Lemaître Auger), two women who work at a Montréal film production company, B & C Films. They daydream constantly about finding an ideal man. The film depicts their dreams and their everyday lives, offering a strong contrast between their fantasies and reality. However, at times the film blurs the difference between a so-called objective or omniscient point of view and individual perspectives. Most often the blur functions to validate the subjective point of view of one or both of the central female characters, and to question the motives of the other characters they encounter. Several "ideal" romance options are depicted by the film, though none of these lives up to Isabelle's or Virginie's dreams. They include: a pushy and ultimately sexist back-to-nature dogmatist; the lives Isabelle's upper middle-class family members lead in Outremont; Virginie's politically-active separatist yet chauvinistic brother; the boys who flirt aggressively with Isabelle and Virginie in their cars on the street; and Jean-Jacques, the married man of Isabelle's dreams. At the end of the film, Isabelle and Virginie tear down the 1970s "lifestyle" posters depicting happy, heterosexual couples (usually walking hand-in-hand on a beach silhouetted by the sunset) that litter Virginie's bedroom wall. The white wall that remains becomes their tabula rasa, and in conjunction with the allusive soundtrack, suggests that Isabelle and Virginie are about to take off together, perhaps to build their own dreamlife.

Anne Trister concerns the problems of identity that the central character, Anne (Albane Guilhe), experiences as a result of her complex response to her father's death. She grieves, examines and rebuilds the numerous facets of her identity which are comprised of national, artistic, historical, religious, and sexual elements. Anne arrives in Montréal from Switzerland, is warmly received by Simon Levy (Nuvit Ozdogru), an old family friend, and stays with Alix (Louise Marleau), a psychologist treating a young girl, Sarah (Lucie Laurier) who looks uncannily like Anne. Anne regularly sends and receives romantic audio tapes from her boyfriend, Pierre (Hugues Quester), but when he visits her once in Montréal, their relationship, which has already become tentative since her departure from Switzerland, finally ends when she tells him that she loves Alix. Meanwhile, Anne has been renovating a loft in Old Montreal "loaned" to her by a friend of Simon Levy. One day, Anne makes a pass at Alix in the loft and is rebuffed. Alix and her "chum" Thomas (Guy Thauvette) have a complicated romantic relationship which is ultimately not very satisfying for Alix. Later, Thomas angrily confronts Anne in her atelier for being a disruptive force in his relationship with Alix. Anne, who appears to be only a bit shaken by the experience, is clearly more distracted than we imagine; she forgets to re-set the brake on the scaffolding she is working from, and falls to the floor unconscious. While Anne is recovering in hospital, the beautiful, near complete loft is demolished to make room for waterfront condos. Anne recovers, and once released from the hospital, she and Alix go back to Alix' apartment together. Their encounter is sensual and erotic, and although there is the suggestion of sex, Anne continues her journey of self-exploration which includes a trip to Israel depicted in an 8 mm film she sends to Alix. The ending suggests that Anne and Alix have remained close in some vital way and that perhaps there is no completely clear and satisfying language to explain their connection. As with Anne's continued exploration of her identity, the ending permits us a few glimpses of her "progress" as she pauses to reflect on the movement between places.

Between Subjectivities

In "Sexual Indifference and Lesbian Representation," Teresa de Lauretis foregrounds an issue that she claims has been lurking in the shadows since feminism began dealing with psychoanalytic accounts of the subject: the "problems" of sexuality and female subjectivity. She argues that if feminist critiques of patriarchy provoked by rereading Freud and Lacan were initially confined to considering sexual difference as gender difference, and thus to a presumption of heterosexuality, "emphasis on sexual difference did open up a critical space — a conceptual, representational, and erotic space — in which women could address themselves to women" (1988: 155). However much seems to have been gained by recuperating psychoanalysis for feminism, de Lauretis points out that this initial step by feminist theorists was rightly attacked for obscuring other psychosocial forms of oppression since it still limited the discussion to woman's difference *from man* as a binary opposition, a totalising difference. This approach completely ignored any differences between women as well as those between women and men of different classes, nations, sexualities, ages, ethnicities, and so on. These are also common complaints issued against psychoanalytic theories of the male subject. Nevertheless, if the original idea is taken to its logical conclusion, according to de Lauretis, one of the ideas worth salvaging is the critical space it opens up for women to "concurrently recognize women as subjects and as objects of

female desire" (155). Rather than claiming that lesbian sexuality is the "foregone conclusion" of this linkage of psychoanalysis and the female subject, however, de Lauretis shifts the discussion away from the notion of an imperative lesbian sexuality to the paradox of sexual (in)difference.

De Lauretis later identifies this "flaw" in the "perverse" logic of female desire — and part of the trajectory towards attaining female subjectivity — as a potentially powerful analytical tool for unravelling the "problems" of sexual difference (1994) . By linking the notion of subjectivity to recognizing the subject status of other women, to arrive at lesbian sexual desire is only one conclusion of a psychoanalytic account of the female subject. De Lauretis' discussion takes a different tact than other feminist and queer theorists at this point. Within de Lauretis' terms of reference, when women address themselves to one another they can, as subjects of sexual desire, want something that is both the same as and different from men (and other women). The paradox of female desire resides in recognizing the possibilities for a non-binary logic; a desire that is neither/both and/or different/same multiplies the potential for sexual subjectivities. Desire thus amplified does not merely shift the term "woman" from its object status for "man" to being the object/subject of desire vis à vis other women. Rather, de Lauretis emphasizes that the conceptual ambiguity would probably more correctly be called a perversity; that is, she claims both an active and inherent willfulness at the core of the paradox of sexual (in)difference, which can be analysed more carefully for multiple female subjectivit*ies* rather than relegating desire to a new binary system.

It is a perverse desire and paradoxical trajectory that is operating as the central narrative problematic of both *La vie rêvée* and *Anne Trister*, and precisely the unstated threat at the centre of the buddy film: the lure of female friendship. Both films are allegories for the attainment of subject status for women against the varied attempts to contain their disruptive potential, an idea that in the films is directly linked to sexuality, creativity, and the cultural and historical context of the nation. The changes that the characters undergo in the films include considering other women as objects of desire however differently desire is expressed. As this is linked with other developments concerning the characters' emotional and psychological well-being, the films suggest that lesbianism is a viable, positive component of female subjectivity, though both films are careful not to depict sex explicitly. However, the films' achievements are not limited to embracing lesbianism — even theoretically — as a new form of coupling. More than simply socially and politically progressive, *La vie rêvée* and *Anne Trister* pose the question of lesbian desire in a complex context that unravels "normal" Oedipal narratives by not confining their discourses on female subjectivity to sexual-gender difference, an accomplishment which I will argue is attained in large part through the melodramatic mode. Both films examine the complexity of the oppression that each of the women depicted faces, as well as to link the issues they encounter to other historic cultural representations, including the imperative of heterosexuality. Thus, in the case of these films, while sexuality and gender may be central sites of contention, both films insist that intersubjective experiences of language, class and ethnicity must be equally dealt with since they involve traditions or conventions that contribute to a heterosexist, misogynistic norm. Thus, while each film suggests that the cultural heritage of patriarchy affects all women negatively, and both films isolate the father-daughter relationship as the immediate basis of this antagonism as well as a metaphor for phallic power, the analysis and subsequent contestation of women's subjugation arises from other specifically located cultural connections [2].

As *La vie rêvée* and *Anne Trister* operate along a parallel narrative course to the "popular" films of female friendship, the moments of female intimacy that they depict include making social and political issues relevant to their personal lives. The affective mode of melodrama ensures that the centrality of the issues is never lost and that they do not become disconnected from the dailiness of life. Both films depict the central female characters engaging in meaningful intimate conversation with one another in which "true communication" seems to occur. These moments are marked by the melodramatic conventions of intimacy such as the tight close up and the two-shot, and are sometimes accompanied by romantic music. This contrasts strongly with the female-male interactions in which communication is depicted as difficult with both parties often occupying different planes within the mise-en-scène, accompanied by music that undermines the connection, for example, or where their emotional distance is emphasized by cuts between individual images of the "couple" while they are talking. In *Anne Trister* these conversations are fraught with tension; in *La vie rêvée* they become an opportunity for the men to deliver monologues. Female friendship is a staple element of the melodrama that in the buddy film vies for top billing with the heterosexual couple's romantic liaison. In the buddy film, the heterosexual romance ensures that the same-sex socializing never gets out of hand. Conventionally, this scenario expresses the underlying tension that the "other couple" inserts into the narrative at the same time as it reassures the viewer that these same-sex relationships are only supplementary. This narraitve suggest that while *somewhat* gratifying emotionally, the new couple could never occupy centre stage as economically or sexually powerful unions.

While *La vie rêvée* and *Anne Trister* start out as female buddy films, and they adopt some of the same strategies that "straight" buddy films do, they don't do so in order to contain the threat posed by the female to female relationship. Rather, keeping the "girls" in their places is revealed for the unspoken tactic that it is: a means to affirm the heterosexuality of the players and the heterosexual couple as the power centre and zenith of the social order. The attempt at keeping the women separate at the expense of their friendship is a strategy that in both films fails. Instead,

the films present the “perverse” logic of lesbianism as an alternative discourse, a signifier of self-evaluation and pleasure that permits the films to pause the heteropatriarchal discourse for examination. “Lesbianism” is deployed as an implicitly critical strategy that enables other possible voyages of discovery that the characters take and is not intended as a replacement for the heterosexual couple as such. While “arriving” at the lesbian conclusion is part of the journey, these destinations are at the same time points of departure aimed at questioning a variety of identity formations that the characters, as well as perhaps the audience, have previously been taking for granted. The films depict “problems” of subjectivity in a manner unique to the melodrama. As in the woman’s film, female subjectivity is foregrounded as an intricately patterned web of constraint and possibility, not as a fixed site of class, ethnicity, language, gender or sexuality. The “problem of female subjectivity” is represented as a tension between the fantasies imagined and realities experienced by the central characters. These are filaments that push and pull the web in different directions, and depending on the movement across it, provide new perspectives on sexuality, which effectively disrupt the other threads as well.

The ideas associated with subjectivity and desire in cinema have tended to revolve around a discussion of the look. As Mary Ann Doane has pointed out:

Western culture has a quite specific notion of what it is to be a woman and what it is to be a woman looking. When a woman looks, the verb “looks” is generally intransitive (she looks beautiful) — generally, but not always. When the woman looks in order to see, the trajectory of that gaze, and its relation to the otherwise nonproblematic opposition between subject and object, are highly regulated. (177)

It is useful to extend Doane’s discussion of the look and narrative/desire that are part of the tradition of the woman’s film of the 1930s and 40s to the issues that women’s cinema has dealt with in recent years. *La vie rêvée* and *Anne Trister* deploy the strategies of counter cinema as well as melodrama in particular ways to create a critical space for the spectator, which engages us in a discourse on female sexuality. For example, the fantasy sequences of both films are just as often *clearly* bracketted as insert shots or subjective point of view shots as they are *unclearly* marked regarding the point of view from which they emanate. The purpose of this strategy is to wrench the spectator from a complacent position as a passive consumer of film images, generally by disrupting patterns of viewing, and to debunk certain assumptions about looking, specifically as it relates to “what women want.”

What links these images discursively to the other images within the films, and one film to the other, is the sustained use of melodrama to address the position the female characters occupy in relation to power and desire. The social and aesthetic “constraints” of cinematic melodrama, such as muteness, gesture and non-verbal communication conveyed through close-ups and reaction shots, become some of the cinematic techniques that in *La vie rêvée* and *Anne Trister* help to complicate subjectivity and address. Foregrounding visuality and non-diegetic or explicitly stylized use of sound often involve the spectator in intimate or at least private moments, addressing the spectator within an idealized site of communication “as though” s/he were “sympathetic.” The actual identity of the individual spectator is deemed inconsequential as a result of the strategic use of identification techniques, which are by turns playful, uncomfortable and erotic.

Central to this destabilisation process is editing, and in particular, shifting points of view; in other words, through the power of looking and being looked at. But voyeurism requires distance; the clear objectification of images is conducive to maintaining this ideal distance and for wringing the most pleasure from the scopophilic drive. Doane argues that in the woman’s film the psychic premise of these moments is the slide into a pathetic overidentification with the image that invites the female spectator to consume herself and the other woman as objects of desire (177). The implied loss of subjectivity — for which the melodrama is famous — is interrupted and redirected in *Anne Trister* and *La vie rêvée*, however, so that this moment is not merely filled by the overall desire to consume. It becomes a value associated with the women’s ability to communicate with one another. Thus the interruption acts as a would-be process of self-other examination, which is achieved, in part, by combining identification and distanciation strategies.

André Loiselle makes similar claims for the style of *Mourir à tue-tête* (Poirier, 1979). Loiselle argues that the film relies on the disjuncture between counter-cinema and melodrama to articulate its strong political message, a surprising achievement, he suggests, that cannot be attained through the conventions of women’s cinema alone. Loiselle observes that distancing devices associated with women’s cinema, such as the sequences depicting the discussion of the film within the film by the editor and director, are by themselves insufficient to disrupting the scopophilic gaze which seeks to acquire the most pleasure possible from this film’s otherwise disturbing images (30). Loiselle claims that it is in the very centre of such desire — the intense emotional affect of the melodrama — that the film reaches its goal. Spectators, Loiselle suggests, are seduced by the masochistic melodrama’s conventions of pathos generated by alternately occupying the victim’s and the rapist’s point of view. In the end, we are invited to agree with the film’s political message in part because it helps to ameliorate our problematic access to the image, and in part because it offers us

the salvation we have so far been denied (39). Loiselle argues that despair becomes a complex aesthetic strategy we all must "work through" on our bumpy journey through the conventions of counter-cinema and melodrama to arrive at political consensus.

Scaling the walls of the fortresses of art history, religion, and advertising, dismantling or dissolving generic boundaries — these are all presented as part of the "plot" of both films; the active deconstruction-reconstruction process of looking is provoked by displacing the hetero-logic of the gender-sexuality link. In both films, the boundaries that inform the normative gender-sexuality container also include national borders, and whether these are implied or explicit, the films' aesthetic treatment of such borders make it clear that the *ménage-à-trois* of gender-sex-nation could hardly be deemed a discrete and coherent identity category. Like the discourse on sexuality and female subjectivity, in which the characters find themselves grappling with the status of gender relations, the nation is comprised of what Sherry Simon, et al. call *fictions de l'identitaire*. These "fictions" help create a normative nationalism counter to what Simon refers to as *la pluralité forte* (45). This discursive regime obviates the untidiness of multiplicity and the possibility of multiple points of entry for the subject into discourse.

In *La vie rêvée* and *Anne Trister*, both Québec nationalism and internationalism are first identified as male and represented by the absent father figures in the films. In both cases, the weighty metaphors for a history of patriarchy are invoked by references to "fatherly" ghosts: Jean-Jacques and M. Trister. *La vie rêvée* and *Anne Trister* present the recognition of sexual difference as linked with national difference, but access to this discourse is achieved through an implicitly melodramatic treatment of the films. These issues are muted, rather than strictly unrepresentable, finding circuitous expression within the discourses of Québec nationalism that refer us instead to a highlighting of class — Isabelle's brother in *La vie rêvée*, and ethnicity — Simon Levy in *Anne Trister*. And, by suggesting that these discourses have historically been associated with the constitution of the male subject, and thus at least theoretically to a more coherent and stable position, the films begin by exploring the nation-gender-sexuality nexus of female subjectivity as fundamentally different; that is, lacking in class or ethnic division. With respect to ideas like cohesiveness and unity, community and separation, the films extend the analysis well beyond the condition of the women in the films. Following the logic of psychoanalysis, which suggests *that female subjectivity is firstly "incoherent" and hysterically adjunct*, the position offered to the spectator by the films is interposed with female subjectivity as both separate from and connected to multiple sexualities and nationalities.

La vie rêvée and *Anne Trister* disrupt the masculinist, hegemonic logic of subjective coherency and cultural identity woven into their own identification strategies. If identification is made difficult under these conditions, it is to suggest the near impossibility of a coherent or discrete fiction of identity, and to reveal the work of creating a "sympathetic" spectator who thinks otherwise. Whereas the ideological and psychic force of the Hollywood woman's film was supported by alignments with what Doane refers to as "an entire array of extracinematic discourses" (178) that helped to define and direct womanhood and motherhood in very specific ways, the critical force of *La vie rêvée* and *Anne Trister* comes from confronting rather than subsuming these extracinematic discourses of identity: nation, class and ethnicity.

La vie rêvée

La vie rêvée, is directed by a heterosexual woman [3]. It is a film that at once offers sexuality as a utopia for women at the same time as it argues strongly against its own utopic view of sex. The topic of sex — of heterosexual sex — is one of the film's main focal points, but sex is so pervasive in *La vie rêvée*, that the idea itself becomes excessive. This excess is one of the ways in which the film critiques gender relations. The two main female characters, Isabelle and Virginie, discuss the topic constantly, and are often presented in situations in which sex and gender roles are at issue. The film's loose narrative revolves around their discussions of sex, relationships, and their fantasies about men, although there is nothing like a conventional plot structure in *La vie rêvée*. Male sexuality, as seen through their eyes, is made strange; this functions as a critique of heterosexuality as male sexuality, and, as Brenda Longfellow has pointed out in her discussion of *La vie rêvée*, it inverts the classic psychoanalytic question, "what do women want? [4]" (153). The film implicitly asks "what do men want?" although this remains a question that it never really answers.

La vie rêvée (Mireille Dansereau, 1972)

If “the woman looking” occupies a different relation of power between subject and object than the “male gaze of classic Hollywood cinema” that alternative may be described as the desire to desire. According to Doane (1987: 1), in the woman’s film this is as much as the female subject can hope for; her desire for the cinematic image marks her excess, her rapture, her naiveté. In *La vie rêvée*, however, the looks of Isabelle and Virginie suggest that looking, wanting and having cannot be completely separated as they often are in the woman’s film. In La vie rêvée looking is overtly associated with fantasy. A moment’s glance generates a rich fantasy life that both Virginie and Isabelle indulge in. However, the film’s discourse on female sexual desire is examined, in part, through the film’s dialectical structure. Simply put, its combination of aesthetic collisions invites comparisons among the ideas it presents. Specific examples of this structure can be detected in the pre-credits portion of the opening sequence. Here slow motion followed by normal speed imagery is used as a means to explore the relationship of fantasy to reality. This establishes a comparative premise that extends beyond this sequence and informs other kinds of arbitrary divisions the film examines such as the split between mind and body, the personal and the political, the public and the private, and the hetero and the homo.

The first image or “establishing shot” is a medium close up of a man and a woman on a downtown street (later identifiable as Montréal) depicted in slow motion. They look like tourists posing for a photo anywhere, an idea that is conveyed by their friendly direct smiles and kitschy Hawaiian leis. This image is replaced by the disturbing home movie-like shot of a little girl lifting her nightgown and eventually exposing her genitals, also presented in slow motion and with her direct address gaze. Next, two young women (soon identified as our protagonists) are depicted twirling around, laughing and playing with young men outdoors; the sound and image track are out of sync. Finally, one of the woman is seen running up some stairs and then beating her fists against a closed door at the top of the staircase. Since all of these images have been presented in slow motion without a clear establishing shot as such, their status as imaginary is highlighted. As spectators, we are thus invited to try to make sense of the relationship between images perhaps in a more overt manner than if the sequence was presented in a classic realist fashion with its location in time and space (and its narrative purpose) more firmly established. Only later do these images become clearer as the possible mindscreen of Isabelle, but their status is never completely clarified as to whether they are her memories, her fantasy or dream projections, or some combination of all of these.

A close up shot of a toilet flushing in the women’s lavatory at B&C Films (the film company where Isabelle and Virginie are employed) is one of the first images in *La vie rêvée* presented at a normal speed, but it is still a rather unusual way to introduce the film’s “real” setting. In any event, this does not turn out to be the case, since not much time is spent at this location. The actors acknowledge the presence of the camera-audience by introducing themselves in a direct address manner, and the sequence ends. This brief sequence is noteworthy partly because it is in many ways quite unconventional; its placement as the second sequence with credits along with the choice of elements to be depicted don’t serve any immediate narrative function. The sequence is repeated once more as though to emphasize its markers of stylistic difference. Upon closer examination, however, its purpose is more than simple scatological or self-reflexive “excess.” It underscores the public-private blur that the preceding images have first suggested about the relationship of fantasy to reality (as well as to documentary and fictional filmmaking) which will later be more overtly linked to sexuality.

The credit and opening sequences may not contribute much to the establishment of “setting” per se, but they do clearly establish the film’s point of view on spectatorship as an exercise in voyeurism, a relationship to film images that is here

subtly contested. The excessively close view, underscored by the two instances of direct address, emphasize the act of looking. By implicating the spectator in looking at private moments, a strategy that finds its real home in melodrama, *La vie rêvée* disrupts the voyeuristic pleasure that might otherwise be offered by a more classic play between distance and proximity. These strategies are both dislocating and confrontational, and ironically, it is their very ordinariness that exposes the spectator's basic scopophilia while begging the question of what usually constitutes a "narrative event."

The opening suggests that the film intends to deviate from the voyeuristic norm to the extent that it will get closer to the characters' subjective points of view, rather than farther away, and furthermore it will not mislead us into thinking that these scenarios emanate from nowhere. From the opening sequence onward, spectatorial complicity is attached to cultural critique, an idea that is foregrounded by linking two kinds of transgressive looking: sexual (inappropriate and potentially incestuous with the little girl's lifting of her nightgown) and confrontational (in conjunction with her direct address gaze), with the digestive or scatological (the flushing of the toilets). The blurring of public and private spaces is achieved by making visible the invisible of private bodily functions and connecting them to the spectator's look which is complicated further by the film's refusal to situate itself firmly as either documentary or fiction. The clearly marked boundaries of the public and private continue to be blurred at a number of junctures within the film and they demonstrate, among other things, the melodrama's adeptness at "transgressing" viewing contexts and genres.

The "function" of social and ideological border controls, conversely, becomes more apparent as the women grapple with their own personal and social relationships including the discourse on the relationship of feminine (and masculine) behaviour to appearance developed throughout the film. Social and cinematic conventions become particularly evident when "propriety" is transgressed. What the women say and do is often at odds with the film's position on the topics it deals with: *La vie rêvée* uses cinematic point of view to underscore ideological critique. There are numerous examples of this strategy throughout the film. Typically, when the two women enter into a social situation where they are compelled to make some kind of small talk with men, both "real" and "imaginary" moments convey an alternative version to the plot as it is presented. These scenarios are depicted from their subjective points of view to convey their disagreement with the social conventions, which function to keep them in their places as little ladies, and to suggest they understand one another implicitly. By depicting several possible takes on an issue, cinematic point of view becomes a discursive strategy that encourages debate on the topic of sexuality and gender in a patriarchal society. This is perhaps what Seth Feldman is referring to when he describes *La vie rêvée* as an exploration of the relationship between "the subjective experience and the larger social context" (149).

The most striking effect of the blurring of boundaries is the film's tendency to destabilise sexual identity with its implicit invitation to renegotiate the relationship between film and spectator. Nowhere in the film is the notion that Isabelle and Virginie are or might be lovers mentioned. In fact, they spend considerable time fantasizing about men. Yet, as I suggested in the introduction, in La vie rêvée, one could say that lesbianism becomes the disruptive discourse that dares not speak its name. Its eruption may be achieved, in part, through the recognition of the subject status of the women for themselves and thus for one another, as well as the excess of sexual desire circulating in the film with no appropriate object to fix upon. It may also be that the circulation of desire is partly due to the erotic charge of the suppressed — but not unarticulated — lesbian subtext of the film which is available to the film's "readers" independent of their sexual orientation.

The sequence that best raises the issue of the lesbian subtext occurs when Isabelle has just been told that her contract with the company will not be renewed because of a lower demand for the Montréal company's services based on the uncertain political climate in Québec. Isabelle is introduced almost literally as "a piece of ass": she appears as a fragmented image with her buttocks and upper thighs forming the establishing shot of the sequence. The next shot adopts the point of view of her Anglo boss. He tells her, partly in English, and partly in very poor French, that "for a woman this is not so important...", and that she "...should have no trouble finding a man to marry..." her. As Isabelle storms out of his office and races down the hall, images of her crying are replaced by her smiling and having sex with Jean-Jacques, the man of her dreams. Her ideal man, it appears, will rescue her from economic crisis and provide satisfying sex to boot. This rêve is abruptly interrupted by a low angle shot of a woman, presumably J-J's wife who breaks the spell of Isabelle's fantasy fuck by saying, "he always comes back to me [5]." Isabelle is left alone on the bed jolted from her reverie (as are we by the abrupt cut), and as though caught in the act, she quickly covers her genitals with her dress in what now appears to be her masturbation fantasy. When, at this point, a disembodied female voice-over whispers, 'You have to go all the way,' Isabelle sits up on the bed, and says — or rather thinks, in voice-over, "I would not have gone near this far without her."

Another ambiguous reference is made in a highly sexually-charged context. We can assume that Isabelle is probably referring to Virginie since the voice-over/mindscreen is followed by a medium close-up shot of her. It also raises the very question the film has so far been suppressing: if heterosexual romance and the (hetero)sexist context of work

have so far provided unsatisfying experiences for Isabelle and Virginie, lesbianism (and escape) must be the logical next step. And, although patriarchal economic and social structures, rather than heterosexuality, are ostensibly critiqued throughout the film, they have become blurred by the excess of attention devoted to sexuality and female friendship, and they are connected through the cinematic techniques I have mentioned. This signals the film's duplicity or ambivalence about heterosexuality even though our identification figures express a stalwart belief in heterosexual romance until the film's end. The sequence both raises and suppresses the psychic coincidence between the recognition of women as subjects *and* as objects of (female) desire that de Lauretis has identified.

This ruse of 'protesting too much' occurs again in a different form at about the three-fourths point in the film, when the two women conspire to get Isabelle's love object to meet her for an afternoon tryst. A series of still photos of the couple engaged in "lifestyle activities," which are echoed in the posters on Virginie's bedroom wall, provides the evidence that the image of heterosexual romance is important. The myth that these images carry is soon overburdened by the impossibility of the image becoming a reality, however, when Jean-Jacques is unable to maintain an erection. The film reasserts heterosexual sex as male-active, with the object of the penis entering the vagina as the defining feature (at least for J-J) of a "complete" sexual encounter.

La vie rêvée organises its discourse on the relationship of gender and sexuality to the social and political problems it raises throughout. Cinematic point of view and the film's dialectical structure offer several complex narrative entry points for linking the dilemmas in which Isabelle and Virginie find themselves to the social structures of the family and politics, to personal and cultural memory, and to rampant consumerism. In short, the film "levels" the competing and complementary discourses on female sexual subjectivity. This is achieved largely by excessively replaying the familiar subject matter of the woman's film: the trials and tribulations of heterosexual romance and its antipathy to women's autonomy. Cinematically, this is accomplished by introducing a series of multiple short stories from the everyday lives of Isabelle and Virginie, similar to what J-F Lyotard has in another context called, "petits récits," which are dialectical and impure. According to Lyotard, the complexity of exchanges in a story-telling matrix is made more problematic, and harder to nail down ideologically, with the introduction of multiple narratives typical of postmodern texts (132-3). Andreas Huyssen has also discussed such story telling strategies, but has argued that mere multiplicity does not equal ideological subversion. Huyssen maintains that " [i]t is certainly no accident that questions of subjectivity and authorship have resurfaced with a vengeance in the postmodern text. After all, it does matter who is speaking or writing" (64).

That the two women in this film, together, cooperatively attempt to recreate their subjectivities in relation to the image-stories that comprise their personal and cultural histories is both aesthetically and politically significant. Their courage is exemplified by the fact that they reject some mythic images and reclaim others. The closing of the film has them tearing down the lifestyle posters and advertisements from the wall in an almost manic montage sequence. Isabelle claims that she is now free, but of what? These images suggests that the "dreamlife" of patriarchy provides no real options since it is based on romantic promises which are meaningless, impossible to achieve, or exploitative. La vie rêvée rejects patriarchy as an unfinished history of women's struggles, and in so doing, underscores the limitations of representing that struggle on film. This is signified by the shot of the plain white wall that once held the posters, accompanied by the layering of sounds that signals the end of the film. The image and soundtrack connect the women to a more complex history with an ending that, like much of the preceding film, blurs the distinction between fantasy and reality by referring to off-screen spaces aurally that cannot be confirmed visually as diegetic in origin. We hear references to Québec cultural history (the musical spoons), as well as perhaps to women's biological history (the joyful sound of children playing). We also hear the sound of the girls' VW bug as they drive off into an open future. Altogether, the ending confirms what the opening epigraph by Silvia Bovenschen has claimed: that conquering and reclaiming are equally a part of a women's aesthetic revolution.

The Shock of Dislocation: Body, Aesthetic, Subject

It might be useful to briefly consider *La vie rêvée* and *Anne Trister* in a manner relative to other emergent alternative cultural expressions; Stuart Hall's discussion of Afro-Caribbean cinema in the context of the black diaspora, for example. Hall argues that "instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished historical fact" it might be more fruitful to "think, instead of identity as a 'production' which is never complete, always in process, and constituted within, not outside representation..." (68). If cultural identities are not fixed, then the images that contribute to a cultural image bank are never frozen in their meanings. This condition helps subjects to manage the slippery slopes of subjecthood; the shifting relations of power and subordination do not depend on replacing one form of oppression or liberation with another, stereotyping for the burden of representation. In both *La vie rêvée* and *Anne Trister* the characters produce their own identities which are, in part, constructed from ideas associated with the representation of women in the long history of Western art practice and consumer culture. They rework these languages to include their own correctives and interventions.

Without abandoning conventional film language altogether, then, the films refer suggestively to a new language, an alternative women's cinema that while retaining certain elements of melodrama attempts to disrupt the relationships among conventional signifiers of gender. By emptying the sign-vessel labelled "woman" and draining it of certain meanings regarding femininity — in which class and ethnicity are inevitably entwined — new associations become possible, new ideas are "emphasized" or "made public," new signifieds are deployed. The films' aesthetic strategies directly address the selectiveness of representations of women. By highlighting the gaps in these representations, the films cleverly deploy sexuality as a bridge to other aesthetic and political possibilities. A central issue in the contestation of the heteropatriarchal status quo that signals the emergence of a desiring female subject is also the destabilisation, resignification and eventual collapse of the "already accomplished historical fact" of the modern (male) subject.

Reconsidering subjectivity as an incomplete process or an unfinished history permits a different approach to the unruly subject of Canadian cinema. This is perhaps the approach that Martin Allor is suggesting when, in the context of Québec cinema and television, he describes the new Québecois/e subject as "both a people (le sujet-nation)" as well as exceeding "the limits of this national-subjectivity: to not be identical with it" (1993: 70). As with any approach that poses differences against one another, the issues surrounding subjectivity are never more clearly held in relief than when assumptions about what is culturally revered, or held as "true," "standard," or "normal" are overdetermined. Allor and Michelle Gagnon describe this in Foucauldian terms as "a 'particular ordering of things' which then becomes structuring of the knowledge we have and hold about ourselves" (38).

In addition to the political and historical references within the films and their social contexts, *La vie rêvée* and *Anne Trister* also include the historical confinement of women to objects of the gaze as part of the cultural epistemology they analyse. However, these "classic" scenarios are re-staged and presented ironically and confrontationally in the films to challenge the order of things, and thus to make new statements about female subjectivity. In *La vie rêvée*, for example, the main characters, Isabelle and Virginie take a trip to the graveyard on Mont-Royal. They pack a picnic and eat it in the nude. This image appears to be a direct reference to *Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe* (C. Monet, 1883) in terms of its framing and the "narrative event" it depicts. What is noteworthy about *La vie rêvée* is not only its similarity to the Monet it quotes, but also the modifications Dansereau has made to her film. Its differences make a meta-comment on the tradition of Western art by implying that critical representational strategies must be continually reinvented. In particular, this is conveyed by the jump cuts which jarringly draw attention to the image's construction. Also significant is the absence of the two male figures in the foreground of the mise-en-scène of the Monet painting. In Dansereau's version we as spectators are invited to occupy their position as acknowledged voyeurs.

At other times, this process of critical analysis occurs through disruption and reversal; for example, by replacing male "actors" with female agents of desire, the prerogatives of male subjectivity are closely scrutinized and "the order of things" is revealed. In *Anne Trister*, this slippage between subjects and power (actors and agents) is perhaps most explicit in the scene in which Alix' boyfriend confronts Anne while she is working on her atelier. Although he does not refer specifically to the sexual advance that Anne has earlier made on Alix, he is there to reassert his territoriality over Alix vis à vis domestic/private space. This means keeping Alix in the newly renovated space of his apartment and away from Anne's atelier. At the end of both films, it is most emphatically suggested that female sexual subjectivity is migrant, or in any case, does not or cannot really exist "here." The spectator is thus invited to explore other subject positions, forms of subjectivity and desire that now include the knowledge of possible movements between fixed points of nation and sexuality.

In his essay, "Cultural Métissage," Allor discusses the complexity of issues concerning identity and cultural discourse including the public discourse on issues of ethnic and linguistic identities (1993: 70). According to Allor, this complex structure or web of ethnic and linguistic identity includes the "pragmatic and public" as well as the "affective and personal" (70). He asks: "...(am I, are we, fundamentally American or something different; neither traditional nor simply modern or postmodern, something different; *étranger à nous-même*)" (70). While Allor is describing what I would call the experience of the postnational — to be both the nation and not identical with the nation, to be an outsider, an other, a stranger to ourselves as well as to each other — his ideas also describe the historical conditions of emergent subjectivities. The postnation is a complicated designation that refers to a real or imagined terrain comprised of newly-formed or dismantled national boundaries. The instability of the boundaries continues to challenge the idea of an original or authentic nation-state based solely on claims to a land mass. It signals a shift in imagining the nation as a community and includes subjects who re-define nationhood not just in terms of country of origin or migration, but those for whom the nation is a metaphor; as Allor puts it, national identity can be comprised of many components — public and pragmatic, personal and affective. The meaning of national subjectivity is therefore extensive; it is an imagined repository for Other identity formations like ethnicity, gender and sexuality, and potentially much more or much less than we imagine as signifiers of identity migrate between public and private discourse, nation and subject. The postnation is thus a kind of conscious unconscious, with its subject always coming into subjectivity but never really arriving at the appointed destination.

The shifts in identity formations signalled by this new relationship between the nation and the subject that Allor identifies have tended to make the "ground" beneath the national unconscious precarious; the tectonic plates shift continuously to accommodate new "national" alliances. The figure of the woman, especially the trope of motherhood, has been historically deployed to consolidate many *anciens regimes* or to provide the metaphorical and actual foundation for subjects in the "new land," an idea so entrenched in Québec literature that it is susceptible to a sustained postnationalist critique [6]. Yet the tremulous relationship between nation and subject also suggests that citizenship can be reconfigured and home redefined. It is perhaps one of the effects of migration, which according to Iain Chambers, destabilises all kinds of boundaries so that what was formerly "out there" is now located "in here" (2). Home is self-authorized, or as Chambers puts it, it is "a mobile habitat" (4). *Home*, so defined complicates identity and magnifies de Lauretis' notion of sexual in/difference by dislocating the body of the subject, especially if that body refuses to conform to the metaphors that service the nation. Like the postmodern, when it is deployed as a critical strategy of modernity, the "state of the postnational" provides an opportunity to re-read or reframe the discourses of the national, not from outside or above but from within. If the national body is haunted by the fiction of a single nation — certainly a common *fiction de l'identitaire* — the displaced postnational "body" becomes indifferent to location; the competing and complementary discourses of gender-sex-nation work to dissolve cohesive boundaries of habitation rather than resolve identity issues [7].

Anne Trister

Following from the above discussion on gender, sexuality, and nationalism, I want to now address the ways in which *Anne Trister* sets up an experience of cinematic dislocation as an allegory for a national identity without clear origins or foundations. This is one way of considering the consonance of de Lauretis' and Allor's theories of identity in/difference that permits a critical "interference" of gender and the nation. *Anne Trister* presents several issues surrounding the personal problems of identity which de Lauretis and Allor might claim as complications of subjectivity. Specific examples of these complications are evoked within the film's narrative and mediated through Anne's experience of shock and grief, but they also have much larger cultural implications. The film suggests that a state of trauma is a central condition that affects the terms of address for a "becoming-Québécoise," the central issue of national-sexual subjectivity. Jim Leach has described this condition in terms of national cinema in Canada as part of the "fragmentation of the other [that] opens up new perspectives on the problems of Canadian cultural identity which go well beyond the familiar binary oppositions: Canada/USA; English/French" (3).

To consider national identity as a process, as Stuart Hall suggests, or merely as an effect of dislocation, is an implicit critique of traditional discourses of nationalism. Following Hall, if we look at the ways in which national and sexual identity are related to one another from the perspective of a "becoming-subject," this opens up another means of analysing the ways in which gendered nationalism helps to highlight the trauma of subjectivity and signals a change in conceptualizing the subject of nationalism [8]. In *Anne Trister*, migrancy is linked directly with a variety of moments of being and becoming. Being "in between" is sometimes depicted as a self-imposed and ultimately liberatory component of migrancy. At other times, a migrant subject is also more than who Anne is becoming; as the film proceeds, migrancy signifies the others whom she represents. Anne is also a reminder of other exiled or diasporic non-subjects, she is a sign that forms an articulated relationship with the expulsion of the other: the Jewish, the lesbian, the woman.

Pool, herself a Swiss Jewish immigrant living in Montréal, often portrays women "in transit;" they are sometimes literally depicted en route from one location to another, or they are somewhere "in-between" more clearly identifiable portraits of traditional womanhood. *La femme de l'hôtel*, (1984), "Rispondetemi," Pool's contribution to *Montréal vue par...* (1991), and Mouvements du désir (1995) are among the examples of this tendency in her work. In a statement that could aptly describe any of her films, Pool refers to *La femme de l'hôtel* as "a study of 'rootlessness, not belonging and internal exile,'" (quoted in Clandfield 81). Without immediate paternal or geographic claims to identity, the film poses the question: can Anne ever be a subject, or is she so completely distanced from traditional signifiers of subjectivity that even a fragmentary sense of self is beyond her grasp? The temporary and liminal space that she occupies in Montréal represents an attempt to grapple with the possibilities and limitations of a diasporic or migrant subject position. Not only is Anne experiencing grief, but this traumatic condition echoes her position as a migrant non-subject displaced by the shock of non-identity, a state which the film links to mourning.

Constant movement, through both exterior and interior landscapes, is part of Anne's immediate experience of the world. She is disoriented. However, her disorientation is recuperated as an aesthetic strategy of trauma; for the spectator it is one of the dislocating identification techniques designed to shock her/him out of complacency, a strategy I identified in respect to *La vie rêvée* that is chosen from the lexicon of melodramatic language, but deployed in a new context. In *Anne Trister*, this strategy operates reflexively to provide commentary on some of the processes of cinematic identification as well as national identity. In other words, as spectators, we are "moved" to experience altered states similar to Anne's post-traumatic condition of grief, and through her eyes we are invited to reassess the ways in which

identity is linked to origin. For Anne, as for the spectator, this is a redemptive process of self-discovery and recovery which mobilizes different kinds of subject positions.

If *Anne Trister* employs strategies of disruption or "dislocation" in order to resist the stabilizing effects of more classic identification techniques of cinema, one of the ways in which this is accomplished is by managing the psychic play between distance and proximity for the spectator; that is, the spectator's relationship with images, including identification with the characters onscreen that sutures her/him to the text (Aumont in Silverman 1983, Silverman 1983, Hansen 1987). In *Anne Trister* the play in these stitches that manipulate proximity and distance between screen and "skin" is both foregrounded and heightened in a classically melodramatic manner: it is offered boldly through subjective point of view and intensified through the visceral effect of movement between over-identification and disidentification. Consequently, we are invited to shift rapidly between greater or lesser degrees of coherent subjectivity, agreeing, in part, to engage in Anne's confused desires as part of the pleasure-pain of identifying with her grief and trauma.

L'étranger te permet d'être toi-même, en faisant, de toi, un étranger [9].

Edmund Jabès (in Chambers 9)

The ongoing process of renegotiating identification/disidentification with the narrative events is echoed by the tension we may experience through our attachment to Anne's point of view, which we know is troubled. Her state of mind is tentative, and the narrative reflects this through its fragmentary style. Yet, the film nonetheless moves in a recognizable, if not linear, trajectory which takes the form of "the journey." The relationship between the narrative and Anne's point of view is complex; sometimes it is smoothly subjective, at other times jarringly so. Much of what this relationship between narrative and subjective points of view conveys about identity and subject positioning occurs through its discontinuous editing style and the placement of objects in the mise-en-scène. These ideas are introduced in the film's opening and linked to the question of female subjectivity and nationalism.

Switzerland, though differently organized, is a multicultural nation like Canada that presents a complex idea of national identity. The film's first settings are places of transition and any cohesive sense of identification as it relates to location in *Anne Trister* is thus a bit tentative. In both the credits and the opening sequence, the location is difficult to ascertain because cinematic point-of-view or conventional establishing shots are either not clearly presented or are absent altogether. The very first image is of Anne's back and we can hear her crying. Conventionally, in a more classic narrative film, a scene, especially one from the opening sequence, might be "broken down" into small, more clearly connected bits in order to provide the details of setting and their significance for the narrative events as they unfold. This sets up a tonal quality to the film that mimics Anne's emotional state. In *Anne Trister*, the unravelling of information is continually deferred, and our knowledge as spectators is gained slowly in an inductive process. Ideas are raised which may or may not be dealt with later on in the film. This has an uncanny effect, in part because by the time they are dealt with, it is almost after we have forgotten about them. When the issues resurface, they are not always clearly resolved but linked to other ideas.

In the case of this film's opening sequence, for example, the funeral procession begins in the midst of the event, occurring in an unidentified desert landscape with characters to whom we have only just been introduced, and only in the vaguest way. Spatially, this situates us as mourners: we are connected to the family as well as the familiarity of the burial rite itself while our emotional proximity to the events maintains a certain (perhaps safe?) social distance. The sequence foregrounds the fact that the funeral is a ritual which oscillates between the private and the public event. It does so by managing the play between proximity and distance for the viewer in relation to the funeral. The setting might also be considered both social and intimate in the sense that we, as spectators, are not provided the details of place; we are expected to know the desert and understand its significance, or not, as the case may be. Thus, in this example, location is very much tied to identity; the spectator is addressed in the opening credits sequence as both an insider and an outsider of the rituals of the classic cinema narrative, as well as the Jewish burial rite.

The details of location and the viewer's ability to make sense of the mise-en-scène are equally important in the Swiss airport later in the opening sequence. The "real" setting is established by a small Swiss flag flapping in the background on the right side of the image. Dislocation, and its significance for the relationship between identity and cinematic identification, is modified somewhat but continues to be a factor with this second "establishing shot." Together, these images very slowly — and only if we are paying close attention — locate us as spectators in a familiar space (the airport), if not an immediately recognizable place (Switzerland). They are in this way similar to the images which open *La vie rêvée* in that they do not function in the manner of conventional establishing shots; both films confuse rather than clarify location, in part, for the purposes of establishing the characters' subjective and selective points of view.

Establishing shots conventionally tend to conflate space and place in the interests of introducing cinematic point of view and the narrative's enigma. Instead what we are confronted with cinematically — dislocation — also refers to a kind of paradox of identity-identification; the migrant national subject has no clear origin, and the burgeoning female subject is only just establishing her status. The film underscores this notion by redoubling various signifiers of nationality — language, and cultural or religious rituals: to be an ideal Swiss is to speak French, English, Italian, and German, and in the case of the Tristers, an additional language: Yiddish. Cinematic point of view is linked to Anne, but it takes on multiple perspectives so even if it can be established as hers, the point of view seems to flit about from one place to another especially in the opening. In other words, if the ideal cinematic point of view is typically one which moves fluidly between that of the protagonist as the spectator's personal guide, and an omniscient point of view to reestablish "objectivity," these models do not operate conventionally in *Anne Trister*. Neither one is fixed in its purpose. There is no sense of security to resituate the spectator that might come from returning occasionally to an omniscient point of view when Anne's point of view waivers as it often does.

Furthermore, the images are comprised more often of fleeting glances rather than intense gazes, lasting an insufficiently long period for the spectator to feel well-situated or completely comfortable. These strategies can be accounted for somewhat by the personal nature of the journey narrative, but it is also here aligned with a mobile sense of national, religious or cultural and gender identity in which a woman is in transit between Switzerland, the desert, and Canada. Her fragmented gaze or glance is a look that lacks the authority conventionally bestowed upon a main character. Anne is, after all, a tourist [10]. The very issue of authority, including authorizing a point of view, and the real power struggles that occur in the narrative become part of the film's investigation. Dislocation and fragmentation are responsible for mobilizing other meanings, other positionings; they are strategies that pose the question "who is speaking thus?"

Anne Trister rebuilds spectatorship by dismantling the possibility of a coherent subject position for the spectator. Its discontinuous identification strategies as well as the uneven relationship between time and space together create little shock effects for the spectator; so moved by Anne's desire s/he experiences both (mis)recognition and indifference to the competing forms of engagement the film offers. The spectator is invited to occupy an unfixed position that oscillates erratically between proximity and distance (as concerns identification). This is a general characteristic of what Miriam Hansen has identified as the experience of shock. Hansen links "culture shock" specifically to the cinema in her reading of Walter Benjamin. According to Hansen, the cinema's double photographic register as mimetic/indexical and representational is exemplary of the too-distant and too-close "object" which problematizes the relationship between the real and the illusory. The cinema is thus implicitly "shocking" because of its uncanny relationship to the real, and anxiety-provoking in the duality reflected by the statement: yes, this is real; no it is not.

Anne Trister exploits the uncanniness of the cinematic experience by directing these shocks. In this way, the film speculates on a number of possible points of identification for the subject of its address; it is a motif that is repeated throughout the film. Indeed, repetition, mirroring, and doubling are all features deployed in a number of ways in *Anne Trister*. Overall they suggest that a fixed identity is elusive, and, like so many airline schedules, identity is entwined in a complex network of far-ranging arrival and departure points; sometimes it depends less on who you are than where you want or expect the trip to take you. Chantal Nadeau argues that this is in fact the film's greatest flaw: refusing, as she suggests, to acknowledge its strategies of sexual indifference occurs at the expense of sexual subjectivity and a clear position on the social differences of power that women occupy vis à vis men. Nadeau claims, following de Lauretis, that this maintains the woman's position as the eccentric, as it relegates the woman as other to the space of ultimate indifference, "an impossible and indefinite position" (13). For example, the film sets up expectations about Anne's sexual identity and the future of her relationship with Pierre, her Swiss boyfriend, specifically through the exchange of audio tapes, and in the sequence depicting Pierre's surprise visit to Montréal. At the same time, however, the connection between Anne and her new friend, Alix, is being depicted as both friendly and erotic, but by introducing other forms of desire the film renders identification with Anne more complex rather than less so. Moreover, it is through Anne that the film's romance narrative develops. In both cases, romance as a signifier of personal or narrative desire is thwarted because sexual identity is left open and unstable, rather than represented as a simple shift in the relationship between object and subject of desire. Neither is romance presented as the central goal of the narrative, a fact that is made explicit by Anne's brief sexual encounter with a stranger outside Simon Levy's bistro.

These examples are implicitly counter to the ideological function of heterosexual romance in Hollywood cinema which typically idealizes the male-female couple. In *Anne Trister*, however, romance and sexual pleasure are not always equated. When Anne and the unknown man from Simon Levy's bistro get together in the alley outside the restaurant, it is clear from their repeated playing of the theme song, "Ridiculous," that they simply want each other as substitutes for those absent lovers whom they truly desire, and the scene ends in a suggestion of mutual masturbation. The form the coupling takes as idea — sex versus romance — and practice — masturbation versus intercourse — is not presented as a foregone conclusion, but a momentary respite from their longing. This strategy suggests that Anne is an autonomous sexual subject, as well as functioning overall in the manner suggested by Elspeth Probyn: "to emphasize that images work not in relation to any supposed point of reference but in their movement, in the ways in

which they set up lines of desire" (9). Probyn has discussed subjectivity in terms of the relationship between place and space as a "be-longing;" the state of "being" and "longing" to be part of the place, a country or sexuality you can inhabit. Anne herself later comments on the mutability of sexual subjectivity and the perverse trajectory of desire when she tells Pierre simply, "I can't explain it. I love Alix."

In two important essays, "Beyond the Pleasure Principle" and "The Uncanny," Freud discusses shock as an experience that is common to the fetishist and the melancholic. I will discuss shock briefly here in an effort to link them to Anne's traumatic subject position and by extension to the processes of cinematic affect that occur as a result of decentring the spectator. In the first essay, Freud develops a theory of trauma out of the experiences of veterans following the first world war. In the second, he discusses the notion of transference and substitution which the fetish object represents. In both cases, the shock of experiencing loss is minimized by the fetishist and/or melancholic individual in attempting to internalize the lost object. For the fetishist, the new object creates a sense of well-being. The fetish object is embued with both erotic pleasure and provides a trace of the lost object which is usually related to the phallic mother. The subject gains an albeit illusory sense of control over that primary object through substitution; the new object diminishes the fear associated with the original loss and the fetishist is thus able to substitute pain for pleasure. For the melancholic, the lost object can never be retrieved because the slippage between substitute object and the real loss is impossible, and so "he" is destined to repeat the moment of loss nostalgically, in an often painfully obsessive manner with another, substituted, object.

For Freud, the social dimensions of shock could not be independent of its psychic or personal effects. Shock is in itself ordinary in the sense that is a part of living in an urban, industrial society. It is only a matter of cultural context as to how its deployment will be affective. For example, Freud relates fetishism to both his observations of his grandson's game of fort/da and to the feet of the Chinese woman ("Beyond" 29). The repetition of the shock moment is part of mastering objects in the world. It is directly linked to attaining subjectivity, acquiring language and managing the unmanageable/everyday events of one's life. The Surrealists called shock "convulsive beauty," and for them it was bound up with a notion of l'amour fou and the dismantling potential of conventional associations between objects and ideas (Foster). As the subject is always in the process of self-protection, or what I would suggest is an attempt to construct a coherent identity, "he" is constantly hedging "his" bets, always aiming to produce/ward off the uncanny moment of déjà vu/imprévu. The relationship between shock and identity is that there are any number of traumatic events that can be conjured up to decentre the subject. Identity thus takes on the dimensions of a fetish object; it becomes a way to manage or salvage the trauma of its own loss.

The idea that identity allows one to present a coherent and cohesive self to the world is a fiction constructed over time, from the remnants of several lost objects, primarily home and mother. The fetishist/melancholic lives in fearful anticipation of the return of the shock moment, and in some ways is indicative of any subject's inability to heal, to transcend the shock moment through a substitute object, analogy or metaphor. This "mémoire involontaire" alters time and space because it returns the shock victim (subject) to the site of the trauma, to a rift in coherent subjectivity. If the lost object cannot be replaced somehow, the subject cannot move from experiencing shock to employing its trace — the traumatic-uncanny object — as a means of re-presenting him/herself in the world as a subject of discourse, and not merely as its object.

These ideas of shock, melancholy and the uncanny apply to the "identity under construction" or the migrant subject suggested by both Léa Pool and Iain Chambers, in the figure of the homeless stranger who is implicitly a shocked or split-subject. Pool and Chambers are careful to specify the individual dimensions of this kind of trauma, yet both admit that homelessness, with its attendant trauma, is a very common way of being in the world. *Anne Trister* addresses identity as a process, as a movement which is sometimes jarring — or shocking and traumatic — as well as lulling and calming. Thus, if shock is not inherently one thing or another, then it can theoretically be deployed for progressive aesthetic purposes. Arguably then, along with the experience of the "shock of identity" posed by the mémoire involontaire, a more distanced aesthetic strategy is produced: a restaging of the components of shock for redemptive purposes, a mémoire volontaire that is suggested by both Walter Benjamin and Miriam Hansen [11]. The deployment of shock as a critical strategy might operate as a means not to reduce the play of voluntary recollection, but rather, by intervening in the spatial and temporal relations of the mechanical relations of the cinematic apparatus, to redirect the shock effect. *Anne Trister* contributes to an understanding of the relationship between shock aesthetics and migrant identities by "embodying" a process of female subjectivity as mourning and construction.

The clearest example of an aesthetic strategy which engages the spectator in a kind of mémoire volontaire is the repetition of certain visual motifs in the film. There are several examples of repetition, but the most "memorable" of these are the many ways in which the film invites us as spectators to compare Anne to Alix' patient, the child Sarah. They are often compared to one another physically through graphic montage (editing) techniques which underscore their visible similarities. Pool employs elements of the mise-en-scène such as lighting, figure placement, and costume

to aid the visual comparison. Likewise, the two characters can be compared to one another in terms of the film's "plot." Both of them come to Alix as "troubled children" looking for answers or ways of coping in the world of absent or problematic parents. They use the safe spaces of the clinic and the atelier as therapeutic places to play out the aesthetics of trauma in order to communicate their point of view to the world.

The film is obsessed with the construction and repetition of images of personal and cultural memory, which form an aesthetics of trauma. Anne's ongoing renovation of the Montréal warehouse, given to her by Simon Levy, is a central motif of the film reflecting her own personal metamorphosis. It is significant that the changes occur on the inside of the atelier since Anne effectively creates a trompe l'oeil, typically an illusion created by making a temporary outer "skin" or façade for a building undergoing major reconstruction. Anne's interior and exterior states of being are blurred, and sometimes confused; she must continually resituate herself in relation to other people and her status as object-becoming-subject is played out on the adjustments and modifications she makes to the trompe l'oeil. As this space is so connected to Anne's shifting sense of self, it is an appropriate metaphor for the changes that occur within her which are both distinct from and connected to her parents, her boyfriend in Switzerland, and her developing relationship with Alix.

This could also well describe the condition experienced by Sarah, Alix' young patient. Sarah refuses to allow Alix the "privilege" of remaining detached; she cannot retain her position as "scientific" observer of Sarah's behaviour, but must engage with her "up close and personal." Sarah confronts her with the materials of her own reconstruction by hurling paint at the glass observation booth that separates them. However, when Sarah's proximity to Alix becomes sexual and she touches her own lips, then Alix's, and then attempts to touch Alix' breast, Alix imposes a boundary, and restricts Sarah's actions. When Sarah reacts by curling up in the corner, Alix sits near her and extends her hand to her in a gesture of affection, thereby re-directing Sarah's compulsive behaviour.

This gestural scene is immediately followed by the sequence in the loft in which Anne and Alix communicate without words. The melodramatic techniques of muteness and gesture are in both cases deployed to cancel what Peter Brooks calls "the bar of repression" (19). It is an example of the melodrama *striving* to express the inexpressible, *longing* to make central the abject, and *pleading* to destigmatize the taboo. All of these repressed elements are perhaps only briefly revealed for the purpose of reevaluating them, but they can never be completely overcome. The non-verbal melodramatic communication only manages the alternate discourse. The sexual taboo of child-adult sex is articulated and its impulse is eventually redirected, but it is not made into a metaphor nor limited by a simplistic comparison to the relationship developing between Anne and Alix. In short, the melodramatic enables certain discourses that might be otherwise excluded from our attention without making the point a "merely obvious" melodramatic tactic in order to return it to its place in the moral occult. This gestural, intimate moment also sets up the otherwise inexpressible lesbian undertone to Anne's and Alix' exchanges, an excess that spills over into the therapy sessions between Alix and Sarah. The sexual elements of each encounter are raised and then dropped, setting up and magnifying the suppressed eroticism underlying them. Later, when Sarah embraces the new teddy bear (the old one having been painted and bandaged practically beyond recognition), the link to Anne's own personal renovation project in the atelier is made most explicit. Anne stages a kind of ongoing subjectivity-in-process through painting and projecting imagery. Sexuality is only one colour in her palette of positionings. The illusory notion of a fixed and stable identity is linked to sexuality in this film, as I have so far discussed, but sexuality itself is part of a constellation, a fragment of other possibilities.

This idea is perhaps best expressed by one of the later sequences in *Anne Trister*, after Anne has decided to finish the renovations in spite of her more recent losses (her failed romance with Pierre, and the rebuff from Alix). It is in this sequence that she argues with Alix's boyfriend when he visits her onsite. A close-up on the brake of the mobile scaffolding foreshadows Anne's fall; in her anger and distraction she fails to reset the brake and falls from the platform to the cement floor below. Anne is discovered unconscious some time later by Simon Levy, who has likely arrived to tell her she must now give up the atelier. Later, as Anne lies in her hospital bed, Simon and Alix discuss the building's forthcoming demolition. These images are intercut with slow motion shots of a wrecking ball crumbling the building, so that Anne, Simon and Alix, and the atelier are visually connected through editing. The significance of the sequence is underscored by the slow-motion crumbling of the almost finished renovations from the point-of-view of someone situated inside the building. As this space has become so closely associated with Anne, this marks a transitional moment in relation to her as well, possibly even signaling her death. It is thus more than a bit ironic that these images are so cinematographically sumptuous and the overall effect is so exhilarating considering that we are witnessing the end of Anne's dream space atelier. Perhaps this effect is produced, in part, by the fact that, as spectators, we are placed amidst the destruction of the atelier in a dark and claustrophobic low-angle shot. When the wrecking ball strikes, the sun streams in, and the result is an opening up of the space (which I personally experience as a huge relief). Being placed in the "middle" of several of Anne's desires — in this case, for her wish to recreate the atelier space — disrupts the coherency of our own desires, both as spectators and as social subjects. This is another example of how cinematic and narrative identification strategies seem to compete with one another. That these strategies are directly connected to a project of shifting cultural and sexual positionings is not insignificant.

Likewise, real settings and realistic situations are also important to *Anne Trister*. For example, Simon and Alix speak English, the language of commerce, when they discuss the building's demolition to make way for a condo development. This may also be one of the many ways Pool reflects on both the appropriateness of conventional language and metaphor, as well as its limitations for representing experiences. These representational caveats exist in the film whether the mode of expression is cinematic, recorded on tape, viewed on video, heard as music and lyrics, or spoken directly in French or English. As I argued earlier, the film's "language" relies on its audience understanding the cinema as a popular cultural form and on this film in particular as an example of counter-cinema that challenges the heterosexual romance of Hollywood narrative. In *Anne Trister*, language is presented as both expansive and limited, either too abstract and elusive or too literal to express experience. Language is linked quite explicitly to identity and personal experience, but it is in the interpretation of identity that language becomes one of the willful ways to respond to the "inadequacies" of expressing the fullness of experience; it is another way in which other meanings are mobilized.

As with *La vie rêvée*, the blurring of fantasy and reality in *Anne Trister* is an entry point, or a small port in which ideas such as the impossibility of representing experiences such as shock can be analysed. However, where blurring occurs, the ideas conveyed are not so fantastic and marvelous as they are metaphoric and uncanny. The above sequence ends with a shot of a mourning dove that has appeared before with Anne in the atelier. The bird is caught in mid-flight, desperate to "escape" from the façade created within the building while the image is framed to reveal only the shadow of the bird as it leaves with the sound of its wings flapping still discernible after the image of the bird and its shadow have left the frame. This creates an uncanny sound-off effect; as an aural metaphor for the persistence of vision it also underscores the illusion upon which cinematic images rest. As with the trompe l'oeil, the atelier is only a temporary skin-space for Anne to occupy. It is both a chiaroscuro and a mock-up: it tentatively suggests that she herself is a construction, an image from which it might later be necessary to "escape" in order to survive. Because we have seen the dove with Anne earlier, and because the images are continually reconnected to Anne in hospital, the status of these images is also deliberately unclear. Like Anne, they hover between consciousness (or reality) and subconsciousness (or fantasy), and thus can be seen as emanating from her imagination as metaphorical projections of her semi-conscious mind, as well as existing "in fact." In either case, the images ultimately remain illusory, and however strongly they resonate outside in the "real world," the dove remains a chiaroscuro, a play of shadow and light.

It is significant that it is Alix's screening of Anne's 8 mm film within the film — the self-reflexive "reframing" of the event — that clarifies the location set out at the film's opening while it implicates Anne in its/her process of self/re/presentation. This bracketting device is another mediation of the already reflexive strategies of the film which permits us to reconsider this journey as part of a larger cultural phenomenon; Anne's film is a memorial for her father and herself; it is a metaphor for the migrancy of subjectivity, nation, gender, and sexuality, and an acknowledged self-representation. Cultural memory, the memorial, and autobiography link the historical and personal journeys. In the case of Anne, the journey is explicitly a voyage of discovery but unlike the history of her Jewish ancestors, the exile is self-imposed; the film returns to its own beginning by recalling once again the nomadic history of Jews through Anne's journey. The difference between a fixed identity and the position of the subject in the discourse of identity is once again linked with the various departures and arrivals that the film depicts, and in this instance the idea that travel is more significant is underscored. The final "destination" is thus perhaps unclear — death being the only sure arrival/departure — but it is the movement from there to here and back again that is prioritized; the only real (narrative) destination is the accomplishment of Anne's healing process.

The subject of *Anne Trister* has no fixed address. S/he is not exactly provisional or contingent, but occupies an in-between place that troubles les *fictions de l'identitaire*. *Anne Trister* employs destabilising strategies of cinematic identification in order to disrupt coherent subject positions. The film chronicles Anne's experience of shock and traces the healing process as a re-evaluation, and literally, a reconstruction of her life. It also connects the personal situation which has prompted this process (the death of her father) to the condition of the diasporic subject and the shock of non-identity/identity. Her own subjectivity is partly relational, partly reconstructed. It is linked to but not contained by history and memory. As a migrant subject Anne comes face to face with her own relationship to issues of identity and (self) representation exemplified by the note that Alix reads after viewing the film. Anne has left Alix a different kind of love letter, which she has "modified" from Pierre's earlier note to her. Anne, as a stand in for the female artist-subject, "erases" or "crosses out" Pierre's words to form her own message, to create her own meanings. Likewise, the migrant subject is also a palimpsest of sorts. In being constructed within a culture subject to its rules, and by necessity reinventing the self for survival, Anne must modify or displace the notion of a coherent identity in order to make a space for herself.

Conclusion

Our bodies become other bodies, that is, objects on the screen, further signs...

As with Allor's national-cultural citizen (1993: 7), the migrant female subject represents a "state" that exceeds the limits of (sexual) subjectivity; as de Lauretis might put it, she queers it, or to put it another way, by virtue of her same/different relationship to male subjectivity, she is not 'identical with it.' If we look at the historical relationship between nationalism and the female subject in Québec, this is more than a theoretical notion. There are many overlaps, mutual theoretical interests and connections between feminism, theory and politics with the two films I have been discussing. Central to this is women's writing in Québec from the early 1980s onward that works across media, as well as linguistic, ethnic, class and theoretical and creative divisions. *La vie rêvée* and *Anne Trister* are both significant to representing the difficulties of the female subject in relation to Québec nationalism and Canadian federalism. Although feminist political action and sovereignty have by no means always been connected, their paths often cross. The post-1980 PQ government was, for example, the first to develop policies specific to women's issues, yet, for example, abortion rights versus paternity rights in Québec were still contentious as recently as 1989. Feminism in Québec was also influenced by not only continental feminism, but also by English-Canadian feminism, yet the connection is not always direct. For example, The Royal Commission on the Status of Women, begun in 1970, was a powerful voice for women's rights in Canada, and as with many women's groups in Québec, it was interested in class and race issues — in particular women and poverty — that have not always held a sustained and progressive interest for all separatist or non-separatist political parties.

Just as *La vie rêvée* makes direct references to the political climate in Québec, it also suggests that the separatist agenda was often at odds with the complete emancipation of the Québécoise; the male characters who represent separatism couch their sexism in separatist rhetoric, but are, with the possible exception of the Anglo boss at B&C Films, the most sexist of all the male characters in the film. Even though *Anne Trister* takes political issues into the specific realm of the female ethnic outsider, and Anne's loft represents an attempt to meld artistic, domestic and national spaces, in the end the building's demolition suggests this is an impossible space, incompatible with economic "progress." While Thomas, as Alix' carpenter-renovator boyfriend, attempts to take over the domestic sphere by recreating it in his image, he does nothing to resignify the politics of this space; he merely adds it to his domain of power. Both *La vie rêvée* and *Anne Trister* deal with the historical conditions of subjectivity by connecting gender to class, sexuality and ethnicity and by depicting the protagonists' attempts not merely to insert the feminine into public, semi-public, and institutional spaces, but to change the meaning of that space as a result. The filmmakers thus attempt to experiment with a new film language and to create a Québécoise film culture, to render problematic the assumption that spaces — especially the fraught notion of home — traditionally associated with women must forever contain them as subordinate subjects. *La vie rêvée* and *Anne Trister* make room for renegotiating the position of women in Québec cinema as objects of analysis, as well as unruly social subjects of national and sexual discourse, and in doing so they "reterritorialize" that relationship.

Notes

[1] Hereafter, I will refer to the genre as simply the buddy film, unless I am trying to distinguish it from the "male buddy film."

[2] For a discussion of this issue in the Québec context of the novel, see Patricia Smart, *Écrire dans la maison du père. L'émergence du féminin dans la tradition littéraire du Québec.* Montréal: Amérique, 1988.

[3] I think it is important to say this only because Mireille Dansereau has publicly insisted that although her film is about women and that some people have recently interpreted it as lesbian they are wrong since she herself is heterosexual. (See my essay, "Querying/Queering the Nation," in *Gendering the Nation: Canadian Women's Cinema*, Kay Armatage, et al, eds. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), pp. 274-290.) In this rather simplistic and literal-minded defence of the film she claims she does not understand how anyone could fantasize about the possibility that Isabelle and Virginie could become lovers.

[4] See also, Longfellow's brief discussion of *Anne Trister*'s appropriation of melodrama in "The Melodramatic Imagination in Quebec and Canadian Women's Features," *CineAction!* 28 ((1992), pp. 48-56.

[5] Even though this woman resembles the one in the family photo on Jean-Jacques desk, which we have glimpsed briefly near the beginning of the film, it is also significant in relation to the film's references to "lifestyle imagery" that she looks suspiciously like a model. Independent of whether she actually is Jean-Jacques' wife, or some other "ideal" woman, her image haunts their encounters.

[6] To delve into this in greater depth would take me too far afield from my immediate project, however, Michel Tremblay's plays, in particular *Les Belles Soeurs* (Montreal: Holt, Rinehart et Winston, [c1968] 1972) are excellent examples. Antonine Maillet's, *La Sagouine* (Toronto: Simon & Pierre, 1979) refers to a francophone and is located in New Brunswick yet it too serves as good example of a text that is critical of class inequities of francophone women across Canada and provides wry if not parodic

representations of mother figures in keeping with the other examples. Mainstream Québec cinema made by men in the same period tends to characterise almost all women as mothers, bitchy girlfriends, or waitresses.

[7] Identity in movement and *fictions de l'identitaire* are concepts that run throughout Québec literature and culture. A more in-depth discussion of these themes and theories would take me too far away from my current cinema project.

[8] This idea, which I have argued elsewhere, is always present as a tendency in Canadian cinema. It becomes more foregrounded in the 1980s identity discourses and is most pronounced in the 1990s.

[9] The stranger allows you to be yourself, by making, of you, a stranger. (My translation.)

[10] This point is underscored a bit later when Anne arrives in Montréal and looks through the pay-as-you-view binoculars on Mont-Royal. The image mimics the position of the disoriented tourist. The camera duplicates the jumpy movements of Anne trying to manage the unwieldy binoculars, and in conjunction with the telephoto lens, produces an almost nauseatingly visceral effect.

[11] See also, Antonin Artaud's writing on the theatre. His ideal theatre is remarkably melodramatic in terms of its attempt to circumvent language to produce a moral and affective aesthetic. See *The Theatre and Its Double*. Trans. Mary-Caroline Richards. (New York: Grove Press, 1958).

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