

**(Re)scripting Femininity with a Female Gaze – Female Gender Representation in Neo-*noir*
Script, *The Lonely Drive*.**

By

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KEY DEFINITIONS

The Male Gaze

Laura Mulvey's male gaze theory (1975) contends that scopophilia (the basic human sexual drive to watch other humans) has been organised by society's patriarchal definition of looking as a male (activity) and that being looked at as female (passivity). The male gaze recognises the male gender and the sexuality of men as the dominant order. Therefore, any social representation of women is constructed either as a fetishized spectacle or a spectacle for the purpose of male voyeuristic pleasure.

Key Points of Theory –

- Social representations of women are constructed either as a fetishized spectacle or a spectacle for the purpose of male voyeuristic pleasure.
- Films are shot from a male perspective and for a male audience, for male viewing pleasure.
- A woman on screen typically functions as the primary erotic object for both screen characters and audience members.

Gender Performativity

The theory of gender performativity suggests that gender is constituted in the repetition of everyday acts of the body and that these performative acts constitute gender. This theory implies that gender is not the starting place but is an identity which has been repetitively constructed throughout history, and it is always constructed through the body.

Key Points of Theory –

- Gender is not, as assumed, a stable identity, but rather an identity that it is formed through the 'stylised repetition' of certain acts over time.

- The repetition of these stylised acts produces a set of behaviours and reified forms which appears as the natural configuration of bodies. Our acts feed and maintain the illusion of a core gendered self.
- Considering gender as performative allows us an opportunity to critique gender.
- There is a possibility for subverting gender by finding a different set of acts for repeating.

Film Noir

The term *film noir* (French for ‘black film’) was coined by critic Nino Frank in 1946 and was rarely used by film makers, critics, or fans until several decades later. The classic era of *film noir* is usually dated to a period between the early 1940s and the late 1950s. Typically American/Hollywood crime dramas or psychological thrillers, *film noir* has several common themes and plot devices, and many distinctive visual elements. Characters are often conflicted antiheroes who make choices out of desperation or nihilistic moral systems. Visual elements include low-key lighting, striking use of light and shadow, and unusual camera placement.

Neo-Noir

Neo-*noir* (defined as a genre in 1970) is a style often seen in modern films and other forms that prominently utilise elements of classic *film noir* but with updated themes, content, style, visual elements or media that are absent in classic *film noir* of the 1940s and 1950s.

Femme Fatale

The femme fatale’s emergence in the 1940s came as the most direct attack on traditional femininity and the nuclear family as she refuses to play the role of devoted wife and loving mother that mainstream society prescribes for women. She finds marriage to be confining, sexless, and dull and uses all her cunning and sexual attractiveness to gain her independence. She is representative of a liberated, independent woman and functions as an expression of anxiety about the shifting of power between gender roles. Therefore, a strong, independent woman is seen as a threat to male domination – a threat that needs to be returned to her patriarchal role, be

punished, or die. This manifestation of fears is prevalent within *film noir* (classic and neo-*noir*) and her fate is, often, punishment or death. In the case of neo-*noir*, she may escape, but she is portrayed as an empty, psychotic, monstrous vessel. As Doane writes, ‘the power accorded to the femme fatale is a function of deaths linked to the notions of uncontrollable drives, the fading of subjectivity, and the loss of conscious agency – all themes of the emergent theories of psychoanalysis’ (1991, p. 216).

Mainstream Cinema

A mainstream film/cinema can be defined as a blockbuster, a film rooted in the tradition of classical Hollywood cinema, a film which propagates dominant ideologies or a film that is easy to comprehend. For this thesis, the term mainstream cinema refers to a blockbuster which propagates dominant ideologies and it viewed by mass audiences. Here it is important to recognise that I am not suggesting that mainstream cinema has never produced a complex film with complex characters, but that movies of that kind are in minority within the total of films made.

Scopophilia

The pleasure in looking.

Narcissism

Self-love, or an extreme focus on the self and one’s own desires.

Castration anxiety

The presence of the female figure frightens the male, since he realizes that he, too, could be without a penis.

ABSTRACT

This creative research project consists of a thesis and neo-*noir* film script entitled *The Lonely Drive* which explores the representation of women in neo-*noir* – a largely patriarchal genre that continues to perpetuate the male gaze and endorses female objectification. It aims to challenge neo-*noir*'s stereotypical gender roles through (re)presenting female (the femme fatale) and male (the detective) character archetypes. *The Lonely Drive* specifically explores some of the ways in which we can (re)present the femme fatale to promote her agency, activity, rationality and logic. It engages with the subversion of the male gaze to create a space in which to consider the concept of a female gaze in neo-*noir*.

This thesis will use Laura Mulvey's male gaze theory (1975) in conjunction with Judith Butler's theory of performative acts (1988) as a lens through which to explore ways that we can step away from the male gaze and consider a way that affords the femme fatale of neo-*noir* a representation that is active, intelligent, logical and rational, rather than their current representation as passive, psychotic, hysterical and violent. Additionally, given that neo-*noir* is a genre, and bound by all the conventions of the genre, this thesis will look at whether it is possible to elevate the femme fatale from being an object without altering the genre so much that it is no longer considered a neo-*noir*. Moreover, if, as a result of elevating the femme fatale to driving and owning the narrative, meaning that she is not merely there to be looked at or to manipulate the hero toward his own demise, we stumble across what could potentially be described as a female gaze.

Butler's theory of gender performativity argues that gender identities are socially constructed, and that people are influenced by patriarchy to act out their gender identity in the way they have been socialised to. Butler argues that gender is not a stable identity, but that it is formed through the 'stylised repetition' of certain acts over time (reactions, gestures, movements, enactments) and that these acts are what constitutes the meaning of masculine and feminine identities. This repetition results in what Butler deems a 'performative accomplishment'. By this, Butler is suggesting that gender is constructed and not an essentialized part of

identity. Further, Butler argues that the repetitive acts are often ‘internally discontinuous’ – if examined, the acts in relation to one another are not coherent. Therefore, Butler suggests that by taking advantage of the gaps and discovering ‘the possibility of a different sort of repeating’ there is a possibility for subverting gender.

Given that neo-*noir* is an inherently patriarchal genre, its representation of femininity is also patriarchal and helps to subconsciously inform society on how women should behave and what will happen if they transgress their traditional boundaries. This is problematic as it not only denies the chance for us to subvert traditional femininity and realize a ‘different sort of repeating’, but as the femme fatale is associated with negative character traits – passivity, irrationality, illogicality, hysteria – the preservation of this representation perpetuates the belief that these traits are inherently female.

By using examples from *film noir*, classic and neo-*noir*, popular culture, and gender theory, this thesis argues for the need to investigate ways to (re)present the femme fatale in neo-*noir* to push the boundary further toward creating an active femme fatale empowered by her logic, intelligence, and rationality. This thesis acknowledges that problematic gender representations exist across all genres, yet this thesis will specifically focus on *film noir* due to its use of the male gaze and its patriarchal and exaggerated gender roles.

This research is an original contribution to knowledge as it aims to conceptualise what an active, intelligent, rational, and logical femme fatale could look like theoretically and practically in a neo-*noir* script. Moreover, as *The Lonely Drive*’s femme fatales drive the narrative and control the gaze, and we are no longer looking through a male gaze, it provides us with an idea of what a female gaze in neo-*noir* might resemble.

Student Declaration

I, Jade Bitomsky, declare that the PhD exegesis entitled '(Re) scripting Femininity with a Female Gaze – Female Gender Representation in Neo-noir Script, *The Lonely Drive*', is no more than 100,000 words in length including quotes and exclusive of tables, figures, appendices, bibliography, references and footnotes. This exegesis contains no material that has been submitted previously, in whole or in part, for the award of any other academic degree or diploma. Except where otherwise indicated, this exegesis is my own work.

Signature:



Date: 31/01/2021

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For my son, Koben Watt.

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INTRODUCTION

A female perspective in a neo-*noir* film is as elusive and controversial as feminist film theory is abundant with opportunities for research and analysis¹. However, a male perspective has historically been accepted as universal². The male gaze as a concept was initially developed by feminist film critic Laura Mulvey in her essay 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' (1975). Within feminist theory, the term 'male gaze' describes how the social representations of women are constructed as either a fetishized object or a spectacle for the purpose of sadistic voyeuristic pleasure. Mulvey argues that the film spectator alternates between these two ways of looking: sadistic voyeurism and fetishistic scopophilia. Voyeuristic looking involves a controlling gaze. This gaze Mulvey argues as having associations with sadism; punishment and/or demystification. Fetishistic looking involves turning the figure represented on screen into a fetish. This removes any danger from it and instead posits reassurance, building upon the physical beauty of the object until it turns into something which provides pleasure. This way of looking, Mulvey suggests, leads to an overvaluation of the female image and feeds directly into the cult of the female movie star. More, the male gaze depicts the world and women from a masculine, heterosexual perspective. The gaze can take many forms: imperial³, queer, black/oppositional⁴ to name a few; this thesis focuses on the male gaze and explores the possibility of a female gaze.

This research uses a creative practice research (CPR) and reflective practice approach. The

¹ Katherine Chediak Putnam writes in 'The Femme Fatale and the Female Screenwriter: Disrupting the Stereotype' (2019) 'the preoccupation toward creating a feminist version of a femme fatale is non-existent'.

² Nancy K. Miller exposed in 'Emphasis Added: Plots and Plausibility's in Women's Fiction' (1981) that notions of plot were strictly male-centered constructs masquerading as universal norms.

³ The 'imperial gaze' assumes that the white western subject is central, much like the male gaze identifies the male subject as central. E. Ann Kaplan institutionalised the post-colonial concept of the imperial gaze. She delves into what happens when whites look at non-whites and how the gaze is returned. See Kaplans *Looking for the other: feminism, film, and the imperial gaze* (1997).

⁴ The 'oppositional gaze' is considered a way of looking relation which involves a political rebellion and resistance against the repression of a black person's right to look. The term was institutionalised by Bell Hooks in her essay collection 'Black Looks: Race and Representation' (1992).

process of CPR requires the researcher to embark on a form of research before turning to the creative work. Profesor Craig Batty argues in *Screen Production Research Creative Practice as a Mode of Enquiry Hence* (2018)

A strong and recent argument made by numerous scholars and creative practice researchers is that screenplays are indeed finished creative works in their own right, regardless of the industrial (production) contexts ... This is especially true of research degrees such as the PhD, in which the screenplay functions as a major work of scholarship (pg. 68).

The CPR approach this thesis uses allowed me to formulate solid research question, then explore it through the research of relevant theories to generate a conceptual argument before writing the script. The reflective practice approach allows for reflection during and after writing the script. This approach mimics Donald Schon's theory of reflective practice, which he elucidates in *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action* (1983). Schon examines the distinction he draws between reflection during an event (reflection in action) and reflection afterwards (reflection on action). Reflection in action is the reflection on the process or event as it is occurring and deciding how to act on it at that current point in time. Schon argues that reflecting in action allows me to directly reflect on the task at hand and 'on individual contributions to it, thinking what [one is] doing and, in the process, ... evolving [a] way of doing it' (1983, p.56). Reflection on action allows me to ask myself what I would do differently, or how the new information gained during study has informed my experience or argument. Thus, this thesis combines these two methodologies to construct new knowledge toward creating a female gaze and an understanding into my own creative practice.

As Mulvey argues the male gaze presents women as objects of male pleasure. The male is the active observer who views the passive female from his perspective. The male gaze comprises three

perspectives. Firstly, there is the perspective of the man behind the camera; secondly, that of the characters within the film; and lastly, the perspective of the male spectator. The male gaze was institutionalised in film theory and practice. Where is the problem?

Society consumes film on a daily basis, be it in the form of a review, a poster, a trailer, or a conversation. Filmic narratives help shape our social, political, cultural, and economic values and attitudes⁵. Therefore, the male gaze is the dominant way of looking⁶. Furthermore, being the dominant way to look at things, the male gaze also influences the way we perceive things – for the purpose of this thesis, the way we perceive women, femininity, and female gender identity. So, is there a female gaze identified in film? The short answer is ‘no’. But how can there be a male gaze, yet no female gaze? More, is a female gaze even possible, given that patriarchy is so deeply ingrained within society that it is difficult to see outside it, let alone change it? This creative research project explores these questions. The project asks whether it is possible to (re)write the representation of the femme fatale in neo-*noir*, a genre that still perpetuates the male gaze, and if by doing so and having two femme fatales as the central characters, are we looking through a female gaze? Also, what does that looking, look like? This creative research project aims to present an active femme fatale, who is central to the narrative, and present her in a way that disconnects her association with irrationality and psychotic behaviour in a neo-*noir* feature-length film script, *The Lonely Drive*.

Wherein our everyday lives as women we are bombarded by the evidence of our increasing vulnerability and limited social power, the fatale femme’s embodied social, sexual and physical powers offer an imagined point of contact, if not simply identification – an imagined

⁵ Michelle C. Pautz writes in ‘Films can have a major influence on how people view government’ (2015) that ‘regardless of its content, film has the power to shape perceptions of moviegoers on a range of subjects from love and marriage to the work of government’.

⁶ Chloe Villanueva writes in ‘Escaping the Male Gaze’ (2017) that ‘all the looking originates from a heteronormative gaze, usually a male’s in western culture’.

momentum or venting of rage and revenge fantasies – the importance of which cannot be underestimated. (Hanson, 2007, p.1)

This creative research project uses Mulvey's male gaze theory (1975) alongside her updated works 'Afterthoughts on 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' inspired by King Vidor's *Duel in the Sun* (1946)' (1989) and 'Looking at the Past from the Present' (2004) in conjunction with Judith Butler's theory of performative acts as elucidated in her 1988 essay 'Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory' and in her book *Gender Trouble* (1990). These texts form an interpretative lens through which to examine representations of women in *film noir*, specifically neo-*noir*. The thesis explores whether it is possible to (re)present the femme fatale in a way that promotes agency and supports a feminist agenda. This thesis also explores whether this can be achieved without representing her as an object, as masculine or as sadomasochistic. It examines how *film noir's* representation of women has scripted female gender identity through iterative performative acts of femininity and explore ways we can move away from these patriarchal stereotypes. This will allow me to discover the true potential of an empowered femme fatale and create a space in which we can begin to consider a female gaze in neo-*noir*.

Emerging from this research will be a (re)presentation of the femme fatale in my neo-*noir* script, *The Lonely Drive*. This (re)presentation seeks to remove the femme fatale from the passive place usually offered, empower her with agency and drive the narrative through her experience. The femme fatale's empowerment has the potential to help (re)inform femininity through Butler's notion of repetitive performance to avoid alignment with performative acts and states of mind that are often applied pejoratively to women – passive, irrational, sadistic, psychotic, or hysterical. This research will go beyond previous examinations, which developed an awareness of Hollywood's sexist stereotypical

roles⁷, to subvert the usual male dominated narrative in neo-*noir* and (re)present the femme fatale as logical, rational, and active. This script will allow readers/viewers to recognize, identify and align with a female narrative without confining them to stereotypical ideals of femininity perpetuated in neo-*noir*; and without representing the femme fatale as monstrous, sadomasochistic, and in need of demystification, punishment, or death.

The femme fatale represented from a feminist perspective could initiate a point of departure from the powerful regulation of negative characteristics associated with femininity and female gender identity – passivity, irrationality and psychotic or hysterical behaviour. These character traits are perpetuated through the femme fatale stereotype. Judith Butler (1988) examines gender not as an expression or insight of what one is, but rather as what one does, the act of their doing. Performative acts are rehearsed acts, which people come to perform in the mode of patriarchal belief. Butler writes:

In this sense, gender is in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceed; rather it is an identity tenuously constituted in time – an identity instituted through a stylised repetition of acts. Further, gender is instituted through the stylisation of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and enactments of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self (1988, pg. 520).

If gender identity is instituted through the stylised repetition of acts, then shifting away from the patriarchal acts of femininity that align female gender identity with such character traits will enable an opportunity to construct a new epistemology for female narratives; one that is able to be perpetuated

⁷ Jocelyn N. Murphy's thesis *The role of women in film: Supporting the men -An analysis of how culture influences the changing discourse on gender representations in film* (2015) argues that film continues with its phallic representations of gender where 'women are underrepresented in film. Racial minorities are underrepresented in film. White men are vastly overrepresented in film' (pg. 5).

through performative acts to revise and (re)present femininity with an active, rational, and intellectual agency – allowing a space for the possibility of a female gaze to emerge.

The aim of this thesis is to explore the possibility of elevating the femme fatale's representation to one with activity and agency and see whether it is possible without the script losing the potential to be a part of the neo-*noir* genre. This will be driven by analysing the attempts undertaken in film at rejecting/subverting the male gaze. This analysis will allow me to see ways that did and did not work in disconnecting the femme fatale from performative acts that reinforce patriarchal representations of femininity. Using examples from *film noir* and gender theory, this thesis will argue that there is a need to present the femme fatale through a female lens, a female gaze, within neo-*noir* to (re)inform, and (re)present her with the respect such a strong female character deserves. This is needed to push the boundary further toward the rejection and subversion of the traditional male gaze; and establish a narrative with which female spectators can positively identify and align with the femme fatales.

This thesis will suggest that one way of overcoming the challenges associated with creating such a femme fatale is to examine, analyse and understand the male gaze. There is still a need to keep analysing the approaches others have taken in their attempts at subverting the male gaze, to examine what has and has not worked in relation to imagining what a female gaze might resemble, to create an active femme fatale in a genre that has long privileged the male gaze⁸, neo-*noir*. This has the potential to help shift preconceived sexist ideas of femininity through performance. When using the term 'female gaze', this thesis is specifically talking about the possibility of an individual female gaze – as theoretically a female gaze is yet to be thoroughly defined. Theoretically speaking, as it stands, the female gaze is simply defined as an opposition to the male gaze. It is seen as a reverse way of looking,

⁸ Louise Frances Alston argues in her thesis *Femme noir: a subcategory of neo-noir film* (2019): 'Traditional film noir films use gendered binaries, male gaze and scopophilic treatment of the female characters to limit and fragment women characters. This dynamic is most obvious in the binary between the 'looking' male protagonist and the 'looked at' femme fatale' (p.5).

with a woman as the default subject and men as objects. Yet, this becomes problematic when one understands that the male gaze is not a cinematic invention, but an outgrowth of patriarchal structures that objectify women to empower men. The naturalization of it, a woman turning the camera to objectively look at a man does not procure the same power and threat the male gaze procures. It becomes even more problematic when we acknowledge the differences in culture, sexuality and religion. The experience of being a white, western, heterosexual woman is different from that of a queer, coloured woman in a third world county. Thus, any film or film theory that neglects this fundamental divide fails to completely subvert the male gaze. Consequently, it becomes obvious when we begin to contend with gender fluidity and intersectionality that the possibility of a singular female gaze⁹ is unlikely. Therefore, I am not naively suggesting that this thesis will be able to initiate a point of recognition for a singular female gaze, but it will be exploring the possibility of an individual female gaze and whether it can be applied to a genre that has long privileged the male gaze. Furthermore, I am not arguing that there can never be a singular female gaze. I believe it is possible, through female writers and female directors exploring, creating and (re)creating films that offer an individual female gaze, we may identify similar elements in that representation that then become the key elements that help us to identify and define a singular female gaze.

In my Honours thesis, I analysed the femme fatale's construction within both classic and contemporary *film noir* (neo-*noir*) to create femme fatales that subvert the male gaze by objectifying/punishing the male character. In doing so, I found that this objectification/punishment of the male character is not what is needed to present an active femme fatale. Instead, it hinders the femme fatale archetype further, as to objectify and punish the male character, the femme fatale, even though she is active, is once again represented as irrational, sadistic, psychotic or hysterical. This thesis delves further to investigate the possibility of (re)presenting the femme fatale as active and rational,

⁹ The term singular female gaze is used in this thesis to denote to a collective or universal female gaze.

and if in writing a neo-*noir* film with an active femme fatale creates a space that allows us to consider the possibility of a female gaze. Further, what would be its influences, its constraints, its limitations, and its difference from the male gaze? This research will allow the script to demonstrate its findings through action.

Chapter One of this thesis will look at *film noir* as a genre from its inception to its shift from classic to contemporary (neo-*noir*). The chapter will examine *film noir*'s relationship to phallogocentric hegemony. It will briefly explore the beginnings of feminist film theory, Mulvey's male gaze theory and the problematic representation of violent women. Lastly, the chapter will touch on *film noir*'s representation of women and how it has negatively impacted female gender identity and the performative acts of femininity using Butler's theory of performative acts.

Chapter Two will focus on Mulvey's male gaze theory, exploring both its influence on feminist understandings of masculinity and femininity, female gender identity, female sexuality and the representations of women in *film noir*. These representations are psychoanalytically investigated and, in this research, characterised as The Mad, The Bad and The Unwanted¹⁰. The chapter will offer an insight into the genre's use of gendered acts to promote patriarchy and to construct, reinforce and constrict femininity. Further, it will analyse feminist counter cinema and the attempts other writers/directors have undertaken at male gaze subversion. What were these attempts able to achieve? What are the negative or positive effects on femininity? Which approaches did they use and what were their limitations? The neo-*noir* films chosen for analysis are *Bound* (1996), *Baise Moi* (2000), *In the Cut* (2003) and *Gone Girl* (2014). These films were chosen as they have been identified by film critics as male gaze subversive as will be discussed when analysing them later in this thesis.

¹⁰ While there are many theorists that talk extensively on these female archetypes this thesis aligns with the views of scholar Amy Gainford author of 'Mad, Bad or Sad? The Historical Persecution of Women and the Birth of Female Criminality' (2017). She argues that throughout history the notion of the 'female criminal' has become somewhat a taboo. More, a morbid curiosity to male dominant societies. This morbid curiosity has led to what she explains as 'misogynist crusades' that have attempted and still attempt to eradicate the world of independent women. Women who do not meet the criteria that society dictates. Gainford explores these women as The Mad, The Bad or The Sad.

Chapter Three will explore my approach to subverting the male gaze in *neo-noir* and the difficulties involved in (re)presenting the femme fatale within such an historically patriarchal and male-dominated genre. For example, one of the main difficulties known is asserting ownership and authorship of our own bodies, the female body. When writing the female body in what way can we look at it naked or during a sexual act that will not stir thoughts of the male gaze? How will they look at themselves? At others? What does that looking, look like? How can we describe the female body? How do we dress the female body without making it a spectacle, a visual pleasure? In this description are we objectifying it, therefore, objectifying women? This chapter explores if it is possible to look upon women in a way that can subvert the male gaze in order to create a space for a female gaze.

Finally, Chapter Four will reflect directly on my creative process of subverting the male gaze and (re)presenting a femme fatale with activity, rationality, and logic in my *neo-noir* script. It will be primarily reflective in nature as opposed to previous chapters which advanced my imagining of doing so and the possibility of a female gaze. The chapter will provide an in-depth analysis of what have I learnt, what I achieved, and what was not possible to achieve within the context of a patriarchal society.

CHAPTER ONE

This chapter will look at *film noir* from its inception in the early 1940s to its shift from Classic to Contemporary (neo-*noir*) in the 1960s.¹¹ The chapter will examine *film noir*'s relationship to phallogocentric hegemony and explore the evolution of feminist film theory with an emphasis on Laura Mulvey's male gaze theory and Butler's theory of performativity. Additionally, the chapter will explore the problematic representation of violent women. This chapter will also begin to examine *film noir*'s representation of women, particularly its negative representation of femininity and the impact this performance of femininity has had on female gender identity.

Traditionally, *film noir* helped endorse patriarchal family values, particularly during and after WWII, when women were given new-found independence and agency within the workforce (Blaser, and Blaser, 1994). Malu Barroso (2019) writes:

The balance of the home that women had when they joined the labour force during World War II was quickly swept away when the patriarchal social order tried to reinstate itself when the war was over. Within the stylistic norms of the noir genre, the rough lighting and the gloomy visual clues of danger reflect the unsettling, broken domestic order, highlighting to the audience the tension in the home and the women's role in triggering the narrative. The disturbance in the domestic space is caused by the rebellion of female characters, typical of *film noir*, which is not taken lightly by the male characters on the verge of losing their power, much like the reality of the misery of the heteronormative patriarchal order losing its control of women.

¹¹ Jean-Luc Godard is considered the primary forerunner of neo-*noir* with his revisionist crime films such as *Breathless* (1960).

Film noir not only explores this fear, the fear of patriarchal order losing its power, but conquers it by dominating the women who threaten this power by the film's conclusion. Consequently, *film noir* indirectly informed the female spectator that they would suffer, by either being represented in a derogatory way or punished, if they did not return to their traditionally feminine, subservient roles. Feminist film theory is the product of second wave feminism and the development of women's studies in the 1960s and 1970s. It is an amalgam of different theoretical frameworks. While the representation of women in film, especially in *film noir*, has always been a prominent topic of scholarly discussion even in contemporary times, the first to propose a feminist perspective on film analysis and criticism was feminist film theorist Laura Mulvey. Mulvey formulated male gaze theory in her 1975 essay and argued that viewers watch a film from a male perspective and female characters are treated as objects for visual pleasure. The two masculine articulated positions Mulvey identifies are Voyeurism and Fetishistic Scopophilia. Mulvey's work led to an exploration of subversive tactics against Hollywood's male-driven representation and objectification of women in film. The hope was that from the subversive tactics explored, one could potentially enable gender representation equality within film.

Therefore, Mulvey argued for a more complex approach to film and the way a film is formed – she argued for a feminist counter-cinema. As counter-cinema's values are counterposed to those of dominant, mainstream cinema, the counter cinema suggested by Mulvey was to create a space for the spectator to break free from identifying with the male character, allow a new engagement, on which involved more attention to the camera. Mulvey, co-directed with Peter Wollen, developed the film *Riddles of the Sphinx* (1977) which was offered as the embodiment of counter-cinema as it introduced a 360-degree camera movement, providing the spectator with a novel sense of autonomy. Mulvey's explains this herself:

The 360-degree pans were useful because the circular camera movement finished itself and

excluded any questions of editing. Later, we thought of its elegant resonance with an idea of femininity theorised by Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray: the circular, the cyclical, claustrophobia, domestic space; comfort, something womb-like... I think, at first, we were thinking more cinematically, and then the cultural resonances struck us (Another gaze, 2018).

Counter cinema has progressed to include ‘a plethora of film genres, camera angles and shooting techniques, script-writing, inclusion of cultural and racial aspects’ (Admin, 2014). This cinema now focuses on incorporating a wider audience and puts emphasis on the non-western cultures and minorities within white majority contexts. Counter cinema creates films in which conscious efforts are made in their depictions of women, culture and situations that aim to give the film a greater sense of realism. While it cannot be denied that counter cinema has positively revolutionized cinema, why is it that we still have the same issues in representing femininity and the female decades later? Why is it that we still see the same roles for women in film perpetuated over and over?

Mulvey argues that ‘the gender power asymmetry is a controlling force in cinema and constructed for the pleasure of the male viewer, which is deeply rooted in patriarchal ideologies and discourses’ (pg.441). By this, Mulvey means that the male spectator is the target audience and that this problem stems from patriarchy. Unlike counter-cinema, mainstream cinema is a popular media of mass consumption. Due to its mass audience, it plays a more integral role in moulding opinions, constructing images, representing gender, and reinforcing dominant cultural values than counter-cinema¹². Therefore, while other forms of cinema, like counter-cinema are important to acknowledge and are influential when it comes to the representation of women, this thesis concerns itself with mainstream

¹² Amy Hall writes in ‘The Effect of Contemporary Cinema on American Society’ (2002) that ‘film, as a main component of the popular [mainstream] arts, is portraying and reflecting certain values of the culture it was created in, which can lead to certain dangers. As films engage viewers, these cultural norms are infiltrating their minds. And while at times it may be obvious, usually this process of formulating one’s worldview by way of the assumptions about life being portrayed in the movie is being absorbed unconsciously’ (p.5).

cinema, specifically the mainstream genre, neo-*noir*.

It is important to acknowledge here that it is outside of the scope of this thesis to look at the representation of women across other mainstream genres. Yes, there have been films that do highlight women's independence and empowerment in other genres, films such as *Frozen* (2013) and *Suffragette* (2015) that are not concerned with appeasing the male gaze. Then there are films in other genres that do not, for example the box-office hit *The Dark Knight* (2008) where in one scene Maroni's mistress (Sarah Jayne Dunn) turns to him and asks, 'Can't we go someplace quieter?' which Salvatore Maroni (Eric Roberts) replies with 'What makes you think I want to hear you talk?'. This kind of chauvinistic treatment of women continues throughout the film. Therefore, although the male gaze is subverted or still present in other genres, this thesis looks specifically at the genre of *film noir* as it still perpetuates the same patriarchal representation of women in neo-*noir*. Moreover, as I will discuss when analysing the selected neo-*noir* films, the genre has not offered a different way in which women can be represented or viewed. Due to neo-*noir's* perpetuation of the male gaze, Mulvey's theory on how women are represented and portrayed in film is just as prevalent today as it was in 1975 and just as in 1975 when she wrote her critical analysis of film, mainstream cinema is still a male-dominated industry. Journalist Kelsey McKinney argues in her article 'Hollywood's Devastating Gender Divide Explained' (2015) that mainstream cinema is 'still an old boys club' and that 'women still only accounted for 15 percent of leading roles. On top of that, only 30 percent of speaking roles in movies went to women. And those characters too often are placed in positions of inferiority or submission. They do not make their own decisions or control their own destinies'. Subsequently, the narrative structure of cinema is moulded by men which leads the ideologies and characters within film to be seen through a heterosexual male gaze – a gaze through which women are still represented as objects of male desire. Spectators are still forced to view women from the perspective of a heterosexual male, alienating heterosexual women and homosexual men.

Unlike classic *film noir* where femme fatales were either an inciting incident¹³, a prize or an object of visual pleasure, neo-*noir* created powerful yet problematic femme fatales. These femme fatales have agency and in the beginning of many films do serve as examples of the ability for women to be independent and strong. Yet the agency afforded them either is quashed by the film's conclusion or comes in the guise of a masculinised female – driven by a male gaze and still created for male viewing pleasure. This point is demonstrated in Paul Verhoeven's neo-*noir* film *Basic Instinct* (1992), which positions a psychotic femme fatale, Catherine Tramell (Sharon Stone), alongside an edgy male character, Detective Nick Curran (Michael Douglas). Curran, who is presented as emotionally unstable, had previously been accused of killing two innocent people while stoned on cocaine. Trammell is a crime-writer and suspected serial killer, who writes her murders into her novels. After she murders a boyfriend Curran is set to investigate her innocence, or lack of. Trammell knows of Curran's incident, and of his addictions and weaknesses – his basic instincts. Trammell uses this knowledge to manipulate him. He is repeatedly used and seduced by Tramell, yet she survives without the usual punishment or death suffered by most classic femme fatales for violent or seductive behaviour. Moreover, Tramell exposes herself on many occasions, using her body to get what she needs and treating homosexual relations as a device to manipulate men – making her a very unstable, unlikeable, character. However, Tramell's narrative is underpinned by Curran's sexual lust and possessive need. At the film's end, Tramell is demystified and domesticated; indeed, Curran even proposes they raise some children. Therefore, Tramell's representation as a powerful femme fatale is not only overturned in conclusion but it is delivered through her performance of being misogynistic, psychotic, irrational, monstrous and deviant. Hence, the femme fatale's agency in this role is illusory – another tale of a psychotic female

¹³ The inciting incident in a script is the event that attempts to hook the audience into the story, and it is the moment which propels the main character into the plot. Robert McKee writes in *Story: Substance, Structure, Style, and the Principles of Screenwriting* (1997) 'it is a single event that either happens directly to the protagonist or is caused by the protagonist. Consequently, he's immediately aware that life is out of balance for better or worse'.

driven through the guise of male fantasy; a masculinised female character, empowered by a male gaze.

Judith Butler's essay 'Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory' (1988), although not concerned with cinema, argues that 'gender identity is a performative accomplishment compelled by social sanction and taboo' (p.520). By performative, Butler means that an act is an act by the very fact of it happening; that gender is a performance constituted through a series of repetitive acts. Gender is an identity that is repeatedly constructed through time. We are not born into gender, but rather we are born into the discourse of gender. This perspective of gender aligns with social constructionism. Social constructionism suggests, as Butler does, that gender is constructed within social and cultural discourse. In contrast, essentialism suggests that gender is a function of biological sex. Butler also argues that even though 'performativity' uses a theatrical metaphor it is not the same as 'performance'. Performance implies that gender is merely a costume for one to use one night and change the next, an actor playing a male role one day and a female role the next. The term 'performative' describes an act that creates an identity, not just communicating it. One of the prime examples of performative speech is a person saying 'I do' at a wedding, therefore becoming a spouse. Like performative speech, performative acts of gender are the same, they help communicate an aspect of one's individual identity, but, in turn, they also construct that identity. But unlike performative acts of speech, gendered performative acts, in reality, inform the spectator as to what is and what is not an acceptable way for their gender to be performed. Thus, further confining gender identity through performance to its patriarchally scripted place through repetition. Butler conceptualises gender as being fluid. One is not born a man or woman but one, simply put, acts as a man or woman is expected to act. Therefore, gender is constituted through performance, and it is its performativity that governs gender division.

To be female is, according to that distinction, a facticity which has no meaning, but to be a

woman is to have become a woman, to compel the body to conform to an historical idea of ‘woman’, to induce the body to become a cultural sign, to materialize oneself in obedience to an historically delimited possibility, and to do this as a sustained and repeated corporeal project. The notion of a ‘project’, however, suggests the originating force of a radical will, and because gender is a project which has cultural survival as its end (Butler, 1988, pg.522).

Moreover, gender division, for Butler, is a consequence of the binary system which governs us and reveals the power struggle evident in the gender binary: the female ‘performance’ is subordinate to the male ‘performance’, again, the male the actor and the female acted upon. Yet, the binary system and its binary oppositions have transitional spaces between them. It is within these spaces that subversiveness is possible.¹⁴ Butler argues that gender identity is the result of social constitution or construction facilitated through acts, therefore, these gender specific acts can in turn be used to challenge the same social constructions. The acts that we perform are informed and constricted by social expectation and taboo – a boy is to wear blue, have short hair, ride bikes and play in dirt, a girl to wear pink, her hair long, play with dolls and stay clean. In order to undermine constricting social normalities such as these, they need to be challenged. Therefore, performativity, as Butler views it, and as I argue in this thesis, is not merely a perfect position for gender oppression but a potential platform for not only gender resistance but emancipation. Our biology does not determine gender difference; society and culture does. Gender has been woven so tightly into our social fabric that it seems we would be at a loss without its reality. Moreover, to many people, gender is a reality rather than a product of history. We have not invented these roles for ourselves, they have been invented for us, and are perpetuated and instituted through a repetition of acts – a ‘phenomenon that’s being produced all the time and reproduced all the time’ (Butler, Big Think, 2007). Thus, Butler’s theory on performativity

¹⁴ See, Judith Butlers ‘Subversive Bodily Acts’ in Chapter Three of *Gender Trouble* (1993).

helped to begin reframing and problematising social categories, specifically gender identity; her concept of performativity affords us a new framework for theorising gender in new ways.

This thesis draws on Butler's theory of gender and grounds itself as a work which argues that gender is socially constructed. An essentialist view of gender denies any shift in boundaries and borders between males and females. It is rigidly confined by its very own terms, the biological terms 'male' and 'female'. Therefore, there is no room for change. The sex that we are born into is the sex that one must abide by and perform. Why is this view problematic? If we take an essentialist perspective and apply it into our everyday lives, there are many who do not fit into the two categories. For example, there are individuals born with fully functional male and female genitalia or women born with penises. How is that these people, biologically born, are defined? Therefore, when applied to the real world, the essentialist view of gender, fails. 'We act as if that being of a man or that being of a woman is actually an internal reality or something that is simply true about us, a fact about us, but actually it's a phenomenon that is being produced all the time and reproduced all the time, so to say gender is performative is to say that nobody really is a gender from the start' (Butler, 2011). By this, Butler means that gender is not an internal reality but a phenomenon that is maintained through performative acts.

Therefore, this thesis argues, following Butler, that gender is performative. We are not born into gender nor into identifying with masculinity or femininity, but that gender identity is created, nurtured, and perpetuated within culture and society, a performance constituted through acts of the body. This argument has allowed her theory to become an advocate for change and a chance to shift the gender binary. Butler's theory creates a space for us to rewrite, to reimagine and most importantly to reconceptualise and rescript gender in a way that does not relegate women to passive and subordinate positions. This thesis will step into this space and explore whether Butler's theory can be applied to a neo-*noir* film script and what that would look like. As scriptwriting does not allow for

heavy description, how much can we actually describe a scene in order to suggest the thought behind what the performance or performative act is attempting to do? For example, in the bar scene when Annemette is acting seductively to seduce Chump, I have her in a skin-tight black dress, smoking cigarettes, with her long legs exposed – thus making her a source of visual pleasure. My aim for this classic representation was to highlight the contrast of the opening scene where a raw and realistic Annemette sits waiting for her father to awake, creating awareness around the unrealistic beauty standards set by the male gaze styled femme fatale of neo-*noir*. Her performance also differs, as in the opening scene we see Annemette flustered, distressed but in control of her emotions to shield her dad from any worry that her appearance may cause. This differs from the usual performance given by the femme fatale as in most scenes they are set up as the attractive lure, then act cold and mysterious to get the male characters attention – tempting them in before letting out their psychotic intentions for personal gain.

Theoretically, as mentioned earlier, the female gaze is loosely defined as a reverse to the male gaze – setting men as objects and women as subjects. Yet, as journalist Millika Khanna writes: ‘Women objectifying men has neither the power nor the menace of the male gaze’ (2019). Consequently, in *The Lonely Drive* I have not objectified men or treated them as objects to employ a female gaze or subvert the male gaze. Instead, I explore a female gaze and a subversion of the male gaze through (re)presenting the stereotypical gender performances found within neo-*noir*. The opening scene, between Annemette and her father alludes to this aim, as it adds respect, compassion, and strength to her character. I wanted to align spectators with Annemette on an emotional and personal level from the very beginning, in turn, subverting the initial sexual objectification of neo-*noir*’s femme fatale.

Moreover, this scene provides an insight into Annemette’s backstory and provides motive behind her current situation and the story that is about to unfold. The male gaze represents women as objects. Therefore, the woman must have no history, inner world, emotion, or agency. This

representation is synonymous with the femme fatale of neo-*noir*. *The Lonely Drive* aims explore the femme fatale's experience and emotional journey within a neo-*noir* setting. I argue that it is necessary to do so, for as it stands her representation now is insidious. Her representation is naturalised through the camera, which serves to obscure the forces of society which seek to make the characteristics of these in-active, sexualised women seem like products of femininity rather than products of patriarchy.

Significantly, if gender is instituted through acts which are internally discontinuous, then the appearance of substance is precisely that, a constructed identity, a performative accomplishment which the mundane social audience, including the actors themselves, come to believe and to perform in the mode of belief. If the ground of gender identity is the stylised repetition of acts through time, and not a seemingly seamless identity, then the possibilities of gender transformation are to be found in the arbitrary relation between such acts, in the possibility of a different sort of repeating, in the breaking or subversive repetition of that style (Butler, 1988, pg. 520).

When applying Butler's theory of performative acts to a film like *Basic Instinct* (1992), what we see is a series of acts that on the surface seem to be performed by a strong, intelligent femme fatale. A femme fatale who at times controls the gaze, as is evident in the interrogation scene where Tramell opens her legs to reveal her absence of underwear to a room full of detectives – using her sexuality to throw the detectives off their line of questioning. But the same acts that explore her intelligence reveal her to be psychotic, manipulative, sadomasochistic and severely violent. Therefore, Tramell's performance implies that the only space an active femme fatale can inhabit is one that coincides with violence and mental illness. This performance is maintained by the femme fatales of neo-*noir*, as will be explained later when analysing the selected films. As this performance is perpetuated and the

backstory of how the femme fatale came to be is never explored, films like *Basic Instinct* rely on her gender as an explanation for her monstrous behaviour. So, 'if the ground of gender identity is the stylised repetition of acts through time' (p520) neo-*noir* films suggest that agency is only obtainable for women through psychotic acts. This thesis aims to challenge neo-*noir*'s representation of female agency and possibly create a different performance that presents female agency through a series of rational and intelligent acts.

The Lonely Drive aims to create the same kind of disruption to the binary view of gender as Butler suggests – a shift in the arbitrary relation of gendered acts. Through depicting an alternative performance of femininity, there is a possibility of breaking the repetition of neo-*noir*'s gender essentialism and sexism. *The Lonely Drive*'s main characters, both females and both femme fatales, represent an alternative to their submissive cinematic predecessors. They are not passive, irrational, psychotic, or hysterical. They are active in their own experience. They are rational and use violence as an escape. They drive the narrative, and control the camera, which in turn, means they control the gaze.

This research is a necessary contribution to knowledge as it will analyse how women are represented in *film noir*, specifically neo-*noir*, and move beyond it by creating an alternative method of presenting femme fatales with agency, rationality and intelligence. This (re)presentation will give the femme fatale of neo-*noir* an agency that is not achieved through her representation as psychotic. This representation aims to present positive characteristics, usually only afforded the male character of neo-*noir*, as products of innate femininity. *The Lonely Drive* explores the femme fatale's experience it is through her gaze in which we see the world and the people around her. Subsequently, this shift in representation creates a space in which to consider the concept of a female gaze. It is important to acknowledge that this thesis is not arguing that there can be one singular female gaze, as the experience had from a western, heterosexual woman from a first world country will differ greatly from that of a

coloured, queer woman from a third world country. This thesis explores the possibility of an individual female gaze. More specifically, it depicts an individual female gaze in a genre that perpetuates the male gaze. Therefore, when using the term female gaze, this thesis terms it in an individualistic way, not denoting to a singular vision that represents how every woman looks and what her looking means. There is a possibility that if we continue to create and analyse films from a female gaze perspective, we may stumble across key ideas of what a singular female gaze could appear as – framing the bare bones of what it would look like from a creative and theoretical standpoint. However, this framing is obviously outside of this theses scope. Additionally, *The Lonely Drive* explores the intimate relationship between two women. This exploration, specifically in the genre of neo-*noir*, is not only scarce but is not available without some aspect of threat to the female for her deviation from heterosexuality.

Butler argues that:

to guarantee the reproduction of a given culture, various requirements, well established in the anthropological literature of kinship, have instated sexual reproduction within the confines of a heterosexually based system of marriage which requires the reproduction of human beings in certain gendered modes which, in effect, guarantee the eventual reproduction of that kinship system (Butler, 1988, pg. 525).

By this, Butler means that heterosexuality is the dominant kinship system within society and one that will continue to be guaranteed. An example of the effects this kinship system has is taken from the film *Bound* (1996), where gangsters threaten to remove one of the main femme fatales, Corky's, phallic objects, her fingers. By threatening to remove her fingers, the film maintains the dominance of the heterosexual kinship system, even in a homosexual kinship, as it alludes to a heterosexual mode of pleasure being the only mode of pleasure. This is discussed in depth later in this

thesis. *The Lonely Drive* embraces Annemette and Laroux's homosexuality and their queer kinship. Further, it explores their experience and their pleasures in that relationship.

The Lonely Drive aims to create a femme fatale role that is autonomous. Her power is her rationality, strength, intelligence, and prowess. She is not just a beautiful object to gaze at on screen; instead, she has depth. The world around her we get to see through her gaze, we align directly with her perceptions and her desires. *The Lonely Drive* aims to leave the female spectator feeling comfortable with the representation of her own gender, and perhaps feeling empowered by it. Ultimately, it seeks to challenge patriarchal femininity; roles, stereotypes, sexuality and attitudes, and instead, put forward a representation that transcends identity; creating 'a spectrum upon which human beings choose their places without regard to propriety or custom' (Heilbrun, 1974, p.143). In order to do this, it is important to first examine the origins of *film noir* as a genre.

FILM NOIR

In *Paint it Black: The Family Tree of Film noir* (1974), Raymond Durgnant argues that *film noir* is not a genre, but rather the mood, style, point-of-view, or tone felt throughout a film. Many critics have followed Durgnant's thesis and have argued that the genre labelled *film noir* could only be authentically applied to a cycle of post-World War II Hollywood films¹⁵. These limits were fixed within the timeframe of 1941 (John Huston's film adaptation of *The Maltese Falcon*) to 1958 (Orson Welles' *Touch of Evil*). However, the terms increased acceptance and popularity brought about a much more flexible use of the term, a broadening of the genre to sufficiently expand its generic characteristics to include *film noir's* contemporary counterpart neo-*noir*. This expansion led to an iconic argument in film theory, that is: how does one classify a *film noir*? Raymond Borde, Etienne Chaumeton and Paul Hammond

¹⁵ See *Film Genre Reader II* (1995) as Barry Keith Grant provides a good selection of articles devoted to what he considers to be proper genres (p.495-559).

argue that *film noir* is not a genre but a cycle of films that aimed to ‘create a specific alienation’ (1955, p.25) for the viewer. Andrew Spicer (2002) shared the same view by defining *noir* as a cycle of films that ‘share a similar iconography, visual style, narrative strategies, subject matter and characterisation’ (p.4). Yet if *noir* is not a genre, what is? Foster Hirsch (2008) wrote that ‘a genre ... is determined by conventions of narrative structure, characterization, theme, and visual design...’ (p.72). *Noir* is driven by the conventions Hirsch outlines. Hirsch goes on to say ‘the *noir* canon constitutes a distinct style of film-making ... it conforms to genre requirements since it operates within a set of narrative and visual conventions’ (2008, p.72).

This thesis also argues that *film noir* is a genre, and that the contemporary adaptation of its constant themes is symbolic of the responsiveness and adaptation to change found within any creative context. The revolutionary transformation within the genre to encapsulate neo-*noir*, has helped to clarify some of the stereotypical, recognisable elements of classic *noir*’s vision. One of the most important of these elements is the moral ignorance of the male character and the oppression/punishment suffered by the genre’s femme fatales. To a degree, this shift has occurred, alleviating the femme fatale of her purely visual oppressiveness and overtly harsh punishments. Yet a gender binary still exists within neo-*noir*.

NEO-NOIR

Neo-*noir*, as a genre, is a logical extension of classic *noir*’s investigative themes. Foster Hirsch writes in *Detours and Lost Highways* (2004) – a book which sets out to map the continuity of the *film noir* genre – that ‘while there have been many local changes, *noir*’s basic narrative moulds have remained notably stable’ (p.14). The narrative moulds that Hirsch describes include the male ‘hero’ character and the object of desire – the femme fatale.

In classic *film noir* the male character or the ‘hero’ is victimized by the femme fatale, yet her

malicious actions lead to her downfall, or in some cases, her demise – the punishment for her manipulations, evil intentions and schemes. While the female figures of neo-*noir* share common characteristics with the femme fatales of 1940s-1950s *noir*, all of these characters aim to mislead and entice the male character. Neo-*noir* has seen the femme fatale shift to achieving a sense of empowerment through psychotic and sadistic behaviour. In the 1980s, neo-*noir* filmmakers titillated audiences with this sadistic, psychotic representation of the femme fatale and a sexuality that often borders on softcore pornography. This can be seen in films such as *Body Heat* (1981), *Black Widow* (1987), *Shattered* (1991), *Final Analysis* (1992) and of course *Basic Instinct* (1992). This sexuality, to some, is seen as a liberation of the female body, a moment for the femme fatale to control herself. Anita Harris (2004) identifies this sexualisation and the women who present it as ‘winners of the new world’ (p.14) and describes them as ‘girls with the world at their feet’ (2004, p.14). I argue that this overtly visual sexuality through scenes that border on soft core pornography only feeds further into the male gaze. Germaine Greer (1999) and Angela McRobbie (2009), respectively, classify women in roles who use their sexuality to get to a goal or what they want, such as the neo-*noir*’s femme fatale, as misguided women that result in the titillation of heterosexual men who ultimately risk danger and disgrace upon themselves. In contrast, Zoe Kurland (2020) writes that when the femme fatale ‘fully exposes herself, [she is] taking the power away from her image. The strip, the sacrifice of her own bodily privacy to the ends of illuminating everything, is perhaps the only way for her to achieve autonomy’. Moreover, since Mulvey’s male gaze theory there has been criticisms that she has ignored not only the view from a homosexual perspective, but the fact that some women enjoy being looked at (beauty contests etc) and that when they are seen as sexual objects, they feel liberated and dominant (Harris, 2004).

I argue that whilst there is liberation in outwardly owning our own bodies and power in choosing who we expose ourselves too, the femme fatale of neo-*noir* exposes her body to be consumed by a heterosexual male viewing audience, it is a scopophilic pleasure. The femme fatale, and whatever

depth she has accrued throughout the film, if any, is abolished the moment she is rendered a mere sexual image. An example of this can be found in the *Basic Instinct* scene where Tramell is framed by the camera with open legs, exposing her genitals. I disagree that this sort of representation is empowering. I argue that the power does not lie in the spectator getting to see her exposed body parts, but the power lies her choosing to do the act – her owning her body and being able to do so. The spectacle created in her revealing herself to a room full of men, alongside spectators, further perpetuates the male gaze by feeding it exactly what it needs, a voyeuristic and visual pleasure. More, these damaging representations of the autonomy that a femme fatale can achieve help strengthen the negative gender binary that underpin western culture's conceptualized reality of what it means to be male and female – rational/irrational, strong/weak, intelligent/intellectually inferior, logical/illogical and active/passive. In her paper 'Psychological Perspectives on Gender: An Intellectual History' (2018), Alexandra Rutherford writes:

Women and men differed in complementary ways on a number of psychological traits. These differences were congruent with the 'doctrine of separate spheres' which stated that men excelled in the public worlds of politics and work, while women were best suited to the private realms of family and home, and of course, to nurturing children. Men were agentic and independent, while women were passive and dependent. Men were vigorous and passionate, while women were weaker and more emotional. While women were moral, virtuous, and intuitive, men were rational, intellectual, and strong-willed (pg. 3).

As mentioned, the narrative in many neo-*noir* films revolves around the male character and presents the femme fatale as either an object to save, conquer or fight for. She is a pawn who does not have enough agency or power to carry the narrative and if she does, she will be presented as psychotic

or cold and be styled in revealing outfits. Additionally, at many points in the film, she will be outwitted by her male counterpart¹⁶. Once again, the male character is more intelligent and rational than the femme fatale.

In *Personality Disorder and The Film noir Femme Fatale* (2001), Scott Snyder writes: 'Feminist authors have viewed femme fatales as energized, intelligent, powerful, and able to elicit strength from their sexuality, cinema portrayals usually reserved for men' (p.157). While the neo-*noir* femme fatales exhibit self-composure and control, the key which allows them to successfully deviate from *noir*'s male-dominated social order, they are directly aligned with irrationality and demonstrate severe symptoms and conditions of psychosis and sadistic behaviour. Her fetishized appearance is offered for male viewing pleasure; her punishment restores patriarchy and quashes any phallic anxiety her independence has generated. This fetishization is evident in many *noir* films such as Nikita in Luc Besson's *La Femme Nikita* (1990), an assassin equipped with heels and a short dress, who is offered as a fetishized object. *Gear* magazine's review of Besson's *The Transporter* (2002) writes: 'Besson knows better than most how to make a beautiful woman even more beautiful: arm her to the teeth' (Dawson, 2002, p.7). Hence, Nikita's power is represented by objects – a gun, knife, etc. She is not in a genuinely empowered position; she is merely a fetishized object that is controlled by men to carry out assassinations. By the film's end, Nikita is forced to go into hiding for her crimes, by the men she is controlled by, and to leave the only lover she has ever known. In this way, the femme fatale within neo-*noir* is still an object for either the male producer or male character to play with and gaze at, she is still defined and presented for male viewing pleasure.

Thus, the femme fatale of neo-*noir* can be a powerful figure for women and, through representation, an influential character for femininity. The problem this thesis identifies is that the

¹⁶ See, for example, Quentin Tarantino's *Kill Bill* (2003) a film whose femme fatale and former assassin, awakes from a four-year coma, amid being raped, then seeks to wreak vengeance on the team of assassins who betrayed her. She is ultimately somewhat successful but is outwitted many times by men and is dressed for male viewing pleasure.

femme fatales of neo-*noir* are presented as powerful icons of femininity yet as this thesis has explained, it is illusory. They are still stylised and perform for voyeuristic male, heterosexual viewing pleasure. This thesis explores the possibility of creating an active femme fatale that challenges her previous male gaze orientated representation and alignment with negative psychological/character traits and explores her sexuality, not expose it to appease the viewing audience. I argue that it is in her representation that we can truly create a powerful icon for femininity and female gender identification in mainstream film.

FEMINIST FILM THEORY

A brief introduction to feminist film theory is essential before analysing the role Mulvey's 1975 essay plays within it. In her essay 'Feminist Film Theory' (2016), Anneke Smelik writes: 'Feminism is a social movement which has had an enormous impact on film theory and criticism. Cinema is taken by feminists to be a cultural practice representing myths about women and femininity, as well as men and masculinity' (p.1). Feminist film theory concerns itself with elevating the representation of female characters to a position of equality. This thesis aims to do something similar by representing the femme fatale in neo-*noir* as active, intelligent and rational. Stemming from the woman's movement of the 1960s, feminism was influenced by texts such as Simone De Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1962), Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics* (1969), and Germaine Greer's *The Female Eunuch* (1971). The foundation for feminist examinations of film, Karen Hollinger (2012) writes, was 'De Beauvoir's concept of women as 'other', Friedan's discussion of the social mythology that works to bind women to a 'natural' female role of passivity and maternal nurturing under a dominant patriarch, and in particular Millett's examination of how the ideology of femininity is instilled in women through many forms of cultural texts from scientific theories to literary works' (p.7).

All theories that call themselves feminist share a goal; a passionate analysis of gender in

material social relations and in discursive and representational structures, especially theatre and film, which involve scopic pleasures and the body. (Diamond, 1988, p.26)

Elizabeth Adams (2000) argues that ‘women are usually on the wrong side of binaries and at the bottom of hierarchies [because of this] feminist theorists have troubled the structures that brutalize women’ (p.447). Feminists have argued that the first term in binaries such as culture/nature, mind/body, rational/irrational, subject/object is male and privileged, and the second term is female and disadvantaged. These binary distinctions are then preserved through varied forms, particularly within film. More, they are perpetuated via the depiction of woman as monster, as well as through the mythology of witches, mermaids, vampires, and Eve the temptress.

Feminist film theorist, Barbara Creed, writes in ‘Horror and the Monstrous Feminine: An Imaginary Abjection’ (1986): ‘All human societies have a conception of the monstrous feminine, of what it is about woman that is shocking, terrifying, horrific, abject’ (p.37). Creed argues that as a result of these conceptions, the binary of man/woman grew more oppressive as women have been associated with evil (leading to punishment) and men with good (truth; justice).

The femme fatale is always associated with evil and the male character as a symbol of truth and justice in *neo-noir*. They are judged by the male character, then condemned for their irrationally psychotic, selfish behaviour. Thus, the man presented as good and the woman as evil. The man as intelligent and trust seeking and the women as irrational and manipulative. *Neo-Noir*’s ideologically encoded message is clear – a good woman benefits a man and allows him to be prosperous, while a selfish and barren woman, such as the femme fatale, one only concerned with self-gain, is destructive. While the former is considered a patriarchal necessity, the latter must either be destroyed or reinscribed within patriarchy. Therefore, the femme fatale, being independent, infertile, self-orientated and

manipulative is a symbol of phallic panic¹⁷.

From the mid-1400s to the late 1700s, due to phallic panic, large scale witch hunts occurred where if a woman appeared too pure it would be perceived as a disguise for her true evil nature, yet ironically if she appeared 'bad' she would immediately be seen as a witch. Both were punished by public burnings. An estimated total of 40,000-60,000 women were executed during this period. Joseph Campbell notes that 'there is a motif occurring in certain primitive mythologies ... the so-called 'phallic mother' ... a motif perfectly illustrated in the long fingers and nose of the witch' (1969, p.73). In Arthur Miller's play *The Crucible* (1953) the female characters occupy the lowest rung in the male-dominated town of Salem and are offered one of two choices, a lifestyle which conforms to the role of the mother within a traditional family¹⁸ or death. Therefore, when a young girl, Abigail, begins making accusations of witchcraft and devil-worship, she is empowered and immediately commands the attention of the court: the court representing the phallic. The fact that Abigail is of such a young age reflects (as there is no other explanation given) that she is deceptive due to her gender. This further enforces the demonization of women as villainous, manipulative criminals willing to do anything for male attention. Consequently, Miller's play explores women as symbols that can be 'analysed as a structure, a code or convention. [Representing] ... the ideological meaning that woman has for men. In relation to [themselves] she means nothing ... women are negatively represented as 'not-man' (Smelik, 2016, p.353).

This ongoing representation of women is perpetuated in neo-*noir* through the femme fatale. This is what has led and continues to lead me to attempt to expose the male gaze. By exposing the

¹⁷ Barbara Creed's main argument in *Phallic Panic* (2005) is that the horror film centres around the knowledge that civilisation is a myth. 'This raises an uncanny form of anxiety that she terms 'phallic panic'' (Smelik, 2005). Therefore, it 'discloses a fundamental anxiety about phallic masculinity in contemporary society' (Smelik, 2005).

¹⁸ The rejection of stereotypical family structures and values is the crux for noir's key themes and style. It is the notion of the traditional family, one that is situated within a capitalist economy, that has operated both objectively and subjectively as the position of women's particular oppression. The internal relations found within the family have produced ideological entities: daughters, wives and mothers; the familiar model of the conservative nuclear family.

male gaze, we get an understanding of how to subvert it, subverting it creates a space for us to create new discourse that separates femininity and female gender identity from patriarchal gender stereotypes and representations that seek to remove power from the hands of women.

THE MALE GAZE

There is a scene in *The Shawshank Redemption* (1994) where Andy Dufresne (Tim Robbins) meets Ellis Boyd 'Red' Redding (Morgan Freeman) during a screening of *Gilda* (1946). In this scene, Gilda (Rita Hayworth) is on-screen being looked at by a crowd of rowdy men greeting her with whistles and catcalls. 'This is the part I really like. This is where she does that shit with her hair,' Red whispers to Andy, excitedly anticipating her appearance. This apparent objectification of Hayworth is emblematic of Mulvey's male gaze theory. Hayworth is presented as an object to be gazed upon by men for their own viewing pleasure.

Mulvey's 1975 essay uses psychoanalysis as a tool through which to understand the fascination with Hollywood cinema within society. This fascination can be defined as scopophilic. The term 'scopophilia' refers to the desire to see, watch and observe. Mulvey borrowed the term 'scopophilia' from Freud, who defined it as a fundamental sexual drive¹⁹. Mulvey argues that Hollywood narrative films²⁰, such a *film noir*, use women as an object to provide the pleasurable visual experience. She suggests that narrative film structures its gaze as masculine and directly aligns the viewers with the male plot and that the woman is always the object of the gaze, being phallic, not the bearer of it.

Mulvey argues:

¹⁹ See, Freud's Three Essays on Sexuality (1905) introduces scopophilia, or pleasure in looking, as a fundamental sexual drive.

²⁰ A Hollywood narrative has a set of guidelines that the films tend to follow and the story is told chronologically in a cause and effect relationship with a happy ending.

The determining male gaze projects its phantasy on to the female figure which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote 'to-be-looked-at-ness' (1975, p.439).

In this, Mulvey suggests that women in film are represented as objects of visual pleasure, primarily for this purpose and this purpose only. Mulvey argues that this is a conscious act by men and refers to this act with her use of the word 'coded'. The men that create these films intend to draw attention to their films via sexual objectification of the female character. Their sexual appeal and visual objectification create a chance for scopophilic voyeurism on behalf of the (heterosexual) male viewer.

Additionally, Mulvey states, 'the presence of woman is an indispensable element of spectacle in normal narrative film, yet her presence tends to work against the development of a story line, to freeze the flow of action in moments of erotic contemplation' (1975, p.439). In short, although the woman is the attractive lure framed by the screen, she is just that, a lure. Viewers are misled. They are baited by her enticement, then offered a plot which employs a male gaze to sexually objectify her. Therefore, these women's significance in the film depends solely on how much they mean to the male character.

Mulvey claims that pleasure and looking is split between the active male and the passive female (1975, p.439). The combination of the objectifying of the styled woman and the male's alignment with the spectator defines women as merely the image and men as the bearer of the look. The power that the classic femme fatale embodied was an aesthetic appeal – a visual pleasure that spectators could consume. Yet this attraction, this power found in attraction, is perceived through the spectator being aligned with, identifying, inhabiting, the male character, feeding on his desires, his lust and voyeurism. Therefore, her power is her visual appeal which she can use persuasively. Ultimately, she is either

punished or killed for using this power.

Mulvey concludes by describing how the audience is positioned to view the woman through the male character's eyes 'traditionally, the woman displayed has functioned on two levels: as erotic object for the characters within the screen story, and as erotic object for the spectator within the auditorium, with a shifting tension between the two looks on either side of the screen' (1975, p.440). The woman becomes the spectacle, the sexualised image that attracts viewers, alongside holding the attention of the male characters within the film. Mulvey argues that this connection between the male characters and the audience breaks the illusion that film is supposed to maintain. Mulvey writes: 'One part of a fragmented body destroys the Renaissance space, the illusion of depth demanded by the narrative; it gives flatness, the quality of a cut-out or icon rather than verisimilitude to the screen' (1975, p.441). In short, she suggests a film that uses a woman as a lure to attract spectators breaks the illusion of the film, and the confusion/lack of coherence that her presence brings to the plot of the film. Moreover, that the femme fatale's presence is what drives the promotional side of the film and builds the spectators excitement to view it. Yet, when the film is viewed there is confusion from how little or insignificant her role is within the film. This feeling of confusion is what motivated me to begin research into why the femme fatale was always rectified, punished or killed. This is why the power I felt when observing her independence and strength was always quashed, in some way, by the film's conclusion.

Like Mulvey, Claire Johnston (1973) uses psychoanalysis as a tool through which to expose the ideological implications of Hollywood narrative cinema. Johnston theorizes a women's counter cinema based on the deconstruction of its codes. By making society aware of Hollywood's production and opposition of sexist ideologies, Johnston believes 'films written by women, about women, could propose an alternative' (1973, p.33). This, Johnston argues, means that such films could create a space to move away from the kind of sexist diegesis Hollywood narrative cinema offers. Johnston argues

that this counter cinema has the potential to posit an alternative to Hollywood films both in rejecting its content and means of production. Mulvey suggested that cinema viewing ‘free[s] the look of the camera into its materiality in time and space and the look of the audience into dialects and passionate detachment’ (1989, p.26). Mulvey believed that counter cinema²¹ would abolish the objectification of women for male viewing pleasure and that female viewers would not mind as the decline of the Hollywood narrative film would issue no more than a ‘sentimental regret’ (1989, p.29). What did feminist counter cinema look like? Early works, such as Chantal Ackerman’s *Jeanne Dielman, 23 Quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles* (1975), Mulvey’s own work, Peter Wollen’s *Riddle of the Sphinx* (1977) and *Amy!* (1979), and Sally Potter’s *Thriller* (1979) aimed to explore new ways to (re)present women in film, both in documentary and narrative cinema. While it is possible to argue that such feminist counter cinema offered a new way of looking in terms of ideology and dominant cinema, Smelik notes that the problem with feminist counter cinema is that there is a ‘theoretical contradiction of feminism ... while feminists need to deconstruct the patriarchal images and representations of ‘Woman’, they historically need to establish their female subjectivity at the same time’ (2016, p.353); to redefine what it is to be woman. But how is it possible to redefine what it is to be woman when there are countless factors to consider e.g., religion, ethnicity, sexuality, and class? Even Mulvey’s work did not consider these factors. Mulvey’s most common criticism being, due to her use of Freudian psychoanalysis (only being able to account for male spectatorship), a failure to accommodate the female spectator and assuming the male spectator as heterosexual (denying an interpretation for queer spectatorship).

Furthermore, counter cinema’s targeted audience is comprised of people with similar interests: feminists, feminist film makers and feminist film critics, leaving mainstream cinema as the dominant cinema. Moreover, the film’s narratives were criticised as unable to ‘give rise to any such suspense’

²¹ In film theory, the term ‘counter cinema’ refers to films which oppose the mainstream formalistic and ideological domination of Hollywood cinema by offering alternative modes of representation.

(Smelik, 2016, p.353). I argue that the main factor for feminist counter-cinema's inability to attract a large-scale-audience is that we live in an inherently patriarchal society. Furthermore, the films are driven by a plot that focuses more on ways of looking more than action, the sensory more than the intellectual and the emotional journey of the woman, rather than her experience. Therefore, how can feminist cinema target a wider audience?

The Lonely Drive aims to step outside of feminist cinema's avant-garde umbrella to combine feminism with a suspense-driven Hollywood narrative²² to widen the net of spectators who can then align with 'all points of identification (with character, image, camera) as female, feminine or feminist' (de Lauretis, 1987, pg.133). This creative research project creates not only a new representation of the femme fatale in neo-*noir* that depicts her as rational, logical and active; it also creates a space in which we can begin to see what a female gaze could look like in the genre of neo-*noir*. *The Lonely Drive* equips two active femme fatales with agency, rationality, and intelligence. They are motivated by their desire for a better existence, one free from the restrictions placed on them by the male characters. Similar to the classic femme fatale, these women actively fight against male objectifiers. Their fight differs from that of the classical femme fatale as they are purely driven by a need to be free from oppression, not just boredom, lust, or revenge. They seek to better their lives without using sadistic, emotionless violence but a more, if one can say, rationalised violence, necessary violence, necessary for their survival. Adrienne Rich, an American essayist, poet, and feminist wrote that 're-vision—the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction—is for women more than a chapter in cultural history, it is an act of survival' (1979, p. 30). Neo-*noir* films attract a mainstream audience; broadening the audience of a film created from a feminist perspective,

²² Hollywood narratives are found in most mainstream films. The characters in these films are often physically and psychologically defined. They take form of either the clear-cut hero or villain. Both have set goals. At the beginning of the film the good and bad characters are separated, but as the plot unfolds to its climax, they will face each other directly. In the film's conclusion, the hero's goal is achieved, a balance is restored, and the heterosexual romance is brought into realisation. The happy ending generally follows.

a film taking a different approach – other than masculine or psychotically violent – fighting for an active femme fatale. Rich argues the need to continue exploring female experience to re-write or re-vision, together, what it is to be a woman. This cannot and will not be achieved through feminist analysis, criticism, and theoretical debates alone. It needs to be written, re-written, presented and re-presented in film, over and over again, within mainstream cinema from different perspectives, experiences, and cultures. It is as naïve to argue that one female writer or filmmaker can fix the problem of the male gaze, as it is to believe that a few privileged women in powerful career roles will fix the problem of patriarchy. This thesis does not claim to ameliorate the problem of the male gaze, but rather to challenge it and create a different representation of femininity that will add to the fight against patriarchal representations that define and confine women. This thesis argues that spectators need to be exposed to female activity and agency repeatedly in film, to experience and encouraged to identify with it, until, eventually, it becomes normal viewing in mainstream narratives.

REPRESENTATIONS OF WOMEN

There are many meanings of what it is to be male and female based on a person's culture. The view this thesis analyses is that of the West²³ and its binary of masculinity and femininity. As discussed earlier in this chapter, because of patriarchy there are many false and misleading binary distinctions, and these include the binary distinctions proscribed to gender. The term 'nonbinary' in relation to gender is now widely discussed, creating problems for researchers taking on any study to do with gender troublesome due to terminology. Therefore, I want to make it clear that this thesis is solely

²³ Western culture or Western civilization equates to the Western world, Western society, and European civilization. It adopts the traditional customs, belief systems, social norms, political systems, ethical values, artifacts and technologies that originated in or are associated with Europe.

looking at the masculine and feminine gender binary²⁴ – one that is still prevalent within neo-*noir*. The male is still represented as independent, just, strong, confident, active and dominant, the female as dependant, unjust, weak, insecure, passive and submissive. This negative binary, born from the gendered roles portrayed in Hollywood, is consistently maintained through performances of gender in neo-*noir*. Why?

Traditionally, as scholars such as Mulvey have argued, mainstream narrative films revolved around phallic pleasure and displeasure experienced when viewing. The formations of this experience lie in scopophilia (the pleasure derived from sexually objectifying women) and the ego libido²⁵; the process that formed the objectification. The femme fatale of *noir* uses her sexual attractiveness and ruthless cunning to manipulate men to gain power, safety, or money. She rejects the conventional roles of wife and mother that mainstream society prescribes for women. Mary Anne Doane (1991) writes that the femme fatale is ‘the figure of a certain discursive unease, a potential epistemological trauma. For her most striking characteristic perhaps is the fact that she never really is what she seems to be’ (p.209). Doane argues that this unease creates a transformation of the threat a woman poses to patriarchy into a secret. Although the femme fatale is enthralling in her secrecy and is at times a commanding presence, her limited narrative is not a form of feminist heroism but as Doane writes ‘a symptom of male fears about feminism’ (p.210). Therefore, it becomes necessary for the male character to, often aggressively, unveil, unmask, or discover the secret of woman for the spectator to view. This can be seen in *film noir* as the femme fatale is swathed in secrecy, which aligns her with the shady, criminal underworld and implies that she is not to be trusted – with the overall suggestion being that women, in general, are not to be trusted. This sets the male character on a quest to unmask or discover

²⁴ See journalist Daniel Bergner’s article ‘The Struggles of Rejecting the Gender Binary’ (2019) which argues that there are ‘an abundance of labels, with subtle distinctions, in play ... another complication is that many nonbinary people also call themselves transgender or trans ... an umbrella term, encompassing all kinds of self-definition, all sorts of physical transformation and transgression of the norms of F and M’.

²⁵ Mulvey (1975) psychoanalytically describes ego libido as a concentration of the libido on the self, self-love, and narcissism.

her lie. Once she is unveiled, and she must always be unveiled in order to comply with patriarchal ideology, her power is stripped, and her independence is quashed. It is then that a resolution is necessary, 'through [either of] the two traditional endings which are made available to women: she must either die (as in e.g., *Psycho* (1960)) or marry (as in *Marnie* (1964))' (Smelik, 2016, p.354). Ultimately, her transgression of social norms leads to her own destruction, punishment or containment.

For this thesis I will be discussing the three dominant character archetypes found in *film noir*. These three archetypes were initially explored by John Blaser in 'No Place for a Woman: The Family in *Film Noir*' (2009). Blaser identified the female archetypes in *film noir* as being the femme fatale, the nurturing woman and the marrying type²⁶. For this thesis I would like to build on these archetypes and add to the knowledge already existing about them. Moreover, seeing that they differ from the archetypes that Blaser has defined in *film noir*, I have retitled them. This has allowed me to incorporate the shift in the representation of femme fatales since Blaser's work in 2009 and to further define and explore their experience. The first of the archetypes I will be exploring is the Mad Woman. The Mad Woman is a woman who allies with or is/can be characterised as a femme fatale. She uses insanity and her hysteria as a weapon and therefore, is seen as illogical and irrational. She complies with masochistic perversion, is often involved in sadistic and irrational killing, yet in resolution can still be forgiven for her actions if she reverts to comply with patriarchal femininity. The second archetype is the Bad woman, or the femme fatale. This archetype takes on a monstrous form which embodies the witch, the temptress, the lure, sexual icon, the whore, and the promiscuous woman. She eschews patriarchally constituted femininity and enjoys criminality. While both archetypes explore the femme fatale, I believe it necessary to separate the two as they have distinctly separate characteristics. Lastly, there is the

²⁶ There are many variations, yet Blaser writes that 'noir films divide women into three categories: the femme fatale, an independent, ambitious woman who feels confined within a marriage or a close male-female relationship and attempts to break free, usually with violent results; the nurturing woman, who is often depicted as dull, featureless, and, in the end, unattainable — a chance at conventional marriage that is denied to the hero; and the 'marrying type', a woman who threatens the hero by insisting that he marry her and accept his conventional role as husband and father. Each type of film noir woman functions in a way that undermines society's image of the traditional family' (2009).

Unwanted woman: an un-sexualised woman who adopts the patriarchal feminine role of mother, carer, or nurturer. She is Blaser's nurturing woman and the marrying type. The Unwanted woman perpetuates patriarchy, and presents women as childbearing home keepers, dependant and needy – a phallic construction of femininity. In resolution, the unwanted women avoid punishment because of their 'good' behaviour.

Cultural anxieties surrounding women gaining autonomy in the home, workplace, and society, alongside the history of gendered mental illnesses such as hysteria and neurasthenia, play out in *film noir* in the form of the mad woman. Hysteria is synonymous to women and femininity, and its dark history is what has led society to align femininity with insanity, with madness. Far into the 17th century Greek physician Claudius Galen influenced western medicine. He argued that the fix to female problems was to get pregnant as he believed that a woman's unfertilized seeds rot inside of her and become toxic²⁷. Then again, in 1883, French physician Auguste Fabre wrote 'all women are hysterical, and every woman carries with her the seeds of hysteria' (Showalter, 1993, p.287). Molly Langill writes that the 'stigmatization of the '[mad] woman' has become ever-present in our society and can be seen as embodied by the countless female antagonists ... whose ontological confusions lead to destruction' (2014, p.22). Langill describes these women as unable to 'distinguish themselves from others, good from evil, and the physical from the metaphysical' (2014, p.22). These 'mad' women lack independence, and are portrayed as sadistic, violent, and unable to make rational judgements. Due to having no backstory, the mad woman is seen to be that way due to her gender, further reinforcing the constructed gendered stigmas in-built within society that help frame femininity as insanity. This demonstrates the societal tendency to label a woman's behaviour as mad when it does not fit within the patriarchal mould of how a woman should behave or when the woman deviates from the behaviours that define

²⁷ See Vivian Nutton's 'Galen' (2020) in Encyclopedia Britannica.

‘appropriate’ female behaviour²⁸.

Adrian Lyne’s *noir* thriller, *Fatal Attraction* (1987) received six Academy Award nominations, including Best Picture and Best Actress. This film was particularly controversial due to its sexual politics, which quickly became a theme of discussion for feminism and feminist film theory. The crux of this discussion centres around the character Alex Forrest (Glenn Close). Michael Douglas (Dan Gallagher) is a successful lawyer, happily married to Beth (Anne Archer) and has a 6-year-old daughter, Ellen (Ellen Hamilton Latzen). Beth and Ellen leave town for the weekend and Dan has a wild affair with Alex, who is an editor for a publishing company. At first, the unmarried Alex appears confident and independent, yet this appearance fades after the first fifteen minutes of the film. Upon his family’s return Dan explains to Alex that it was a one-time thing, Alex refuses to believe him and therein lies the conflict to drive the narrative. It is here that we begin to see the mad woman appear. Alex’s mental state degenerates, she becomes erratic and dangerous; committing irrational and sadistic acts of violence such as slitting her wrists, pouring acid on his car, kidnapping his daughter, and boiling his daughter’s pet rabbit, until Dan has no other choice than to confess his infidelity and contact the police. Inevitably, Alex is killed by a bullet to the head. This bullet is delivered by Beth, who is represented as the good woman. Her death restores patriarchy and the traditional family unit.

Initially, *Fatal Attraction* delivers an opportunity for female spectators to recognise and align with an active femme fatale, but that moment is over quickly for the film reverts back to comply with the male gaze. This fleeting transition serves as a warning to progressive women. Alex, the mad woman presents progressive women as unhappy with their freedom and independence, an individual in need of patriarchal values, a woman in want of the norms that male ideology places on her. This representation not only dredges up but perpetuates the historical understanding of reason. While men

²⁸ See, Kelly Kretschmar’s thesis ‘Framing Femininity as Insanity: Representations of Mental Illness in Women in Post-Classical Hollywood’ (2007) which argues that films use various generic and stylistic conventions to depict mentally ill women in reaction to social understandings of mental illness.

are rational and well suited for public positions of power, women are hysterical and mad – ill-suited for the same positions in which decisions would need to be made.

The representation of a bad woman is defined by opposing binary distinctions that are, as a result of the patriarchal agenda, now associated with feminine gender identity. Elizabeth Adams argues that ‘since women are usually on the wrong side of binaries and at the bottom of hierarchies, feminists have troubled these structures that often brutalize women’ (2000, p.447). As mentioned earlier, in binaries such as subject/object that the first term (subject) is male and privileged, and the second term (object) is female and disadvantaged. In *Sorties* (1997), Helene Cixous suggests that whenever things are ordered they are set up in opposing pairs, which in turn all relate back to the coupling of man and woman. Cixous argues that our entire culture is based on binary coupling, through which men gain superiority by way of logocentrism²⁹. These binary distinctions are then echoed and preserved through Butler’s theory of performative acts. Cixous’s logocentric theory, alongside its reiteration through Butler’s theory of performative acts, typifies the femme fatale as irrational, emotionally driven, and implies that she enjoys her place in the criminal underworld. The male character is aligned with rationality and reason, demanding authority and typically placed in roles that symbolise these constraints, i.e., police officers, detectives, lawyers.

Moreover, the bad woman is used as a tool through which spectators can explore and take pleasure in watching perverse male fantasies. These fantasies usually take the form of violent attacks against the femme fatale, which are then balanced out by the irrational and detached killings of their male aggressors. These attacks are used to represent her empowerment. Yet is empowerment through irrational psychotic violence an improvement from the contained sexual empowerment of the past?

²⁹ Ferdinand de Saussure (1950) argued that structuralism in literary theory would fail on account of its own foundation. ‘Language constitutes our world; it doesn’t just record it or label it. Meaning is always attributed to the object or idea by the human mind and constructed by and expressed through language: it is not already contained within the thing’ (Barry, 2009, p.42).

Virginie Despentes's *Baise Moi* was initially welcomed by some feminist critics as the pioneer of a new gaze in neo-*noir*. For example, the feminist theorist, Amy Forrest, regarded it as a film that 'conveys a radical, sex-critical, and subversive discourse' (2013). Forrest argues that the confidence of the plot, its irate depiction of female sexual pleasure and gratuitous illicit violence had earned it a status as male gaze subversive, that violence empowers the femme fatale. My examination argues that the film's attempt at subversiveness is not subversive as it feeds into the sadomasochistic tendencies³⁰ behind the male gaze by representing *noir*'s women as sexual objects of perverse phallic fantasies.

Further, the bad woman is seen as monstrous. Many neo-*noir* films provide an absent backstory exploring how the femme fatale came to be the monster we see. This implies that the monstrosity we see represented is similarly that way due to her femininity. While this violent development of power presents a paradox in dominant Hollywood narrative cinema, the outcome sets us further apart by feeding the gender binary divisions that reiterate the development of woman as a monster. These are notions such as the mythology of witches, mermaids, vampires, and Eve, the temptress³¹. Barbara Creed notes in *The Monstrous Feminine* (1993) that depictions of the monstrous feminine are nothing new; indeed, they go as far back as classical mythology and the Bible. Creed explores the notion of woman as witch, highlighting that it was once believed that a woman during her period and often while pregnant was believed to have powers³². This led to them being unable, at times, to even set foot inside a church. Creed argues that women in these states, pregnant or menstruating, were regarded as being untrustworthy as their bodies were too close to nature. Therefore, the woman and her body are

³⁰ Andreea Nica elaborates on and deconstructs the theoretical and philosophical attributes of sadomasochism and explores how the cinematic apparatus is operationalized to create the sadistic femme fatale in 'The Modernized, Empowered Female Figure in Cinematic Features' (2009).

³¹ Jean Higgins' *The Myth of Eve: the temptress* (1976) explores the theological literature of the patristic, medieval and modern periods which show a deep-seated and wide-spread conviction that Eve tempted Adam to commit the first sin. Higgins sometimes go so far as to draw parallels between Eve and the serpent, and even make her the cause responsible for Adam's fall.

³² Barbara Creed's *The Monstrous-Feminine* (1993), specifically, 'Part I: Faces of the Monstrous-Feminine' provides both a definition and foundation for the term 'monstrous-feminine', as well as provide a number of examples, including the witch.

portrayed once again as an everchanging and unstable entity. The woman is equipped with the ability to bring about life or death. This reminds me that they too are just animals who are born and who die once, that they are just links in the chain of life and death. This fearful reminder needs to be abolished, controlled, or punished in order to re-establish patriarchal order and abolish social anxieties. The bad/mysterious/monstrous woman must either return to her patriarchal position or die.

The unwanted woman exemplifies *film noir's* rebellious and for film, pivotal/revolutionary, view of family life, and the patriarchal position women held/hold within society; a portrayal of the dominant vision of a 'natural' woman. She not only belongs within but enjoys her place within the traditional family. She adopts the patriarchal role of mother, carer and nurturer – her patriarchal place in society. Yet her place in *film noir* seems fractured, out of place. According to Sylvia Harvey (1978), instead of being an 'exciting childless whore', the unwanted woman is characterised as being a 'boring, potentially child-bearing, sweetheart' (p.38). The unwanted woman usually offers the male character a chance to achieve redemption or salvation. She almost functions as a hindrance to the femme fatale's evil plot. This good/bad positioning not only informs women of how to behave in order to be seen as a good woman, but further enforces the effect the destructive virgin/whore dichotomy.

Moreover, as Janey Place argues, 'the lack of excitement offered by the [unwanted] woman is so clearly contrasted with the sensual, passionate appeal of the other that the detective's destruction is inevitable' (1978, p.50). In due course, the unwanted woman becomes a symbol of society's prescription for happiness, the obtainment of a traditional family; she is passive, un-sexualised, and not in any way threatening to the male character.

On the rare occasions that the normal world of families, children, homes, and domesticity appears in *film noir* it is either so fragile and ideal that we anxiously anticipate its destruction (*The Big Heat*), or, like the 'good' but boring women who contrast with the exciting, sexy

femme fatales, it is so dull and constricting that it offers no compelling alternative to the dangerous but exciting life on the fringe. (Place, 1978, p.50)

These character archetypes are familiar as not only do they are prevalent in neo-*noir*, but they can be found in abundance across all genres. Films such as *The Devil Wears Prada* (2006) or television shows like *Insatiable* (2018) which are dually written and directed by women, but yet they offer tired tropes about femininity, what it is to be a woman and conforming to beauty standards that all appease the male gaze. The belief that one film created by a female writer or director can intrinsically divest films of this type of representation is as foolish as if one were to think one woman could remove the male gaze from film, but we can challenge these representations and present different performances that alienate such representations. These representations create archetypes that are negative archetypes pertaining to femininity and female gender identity. Neo-*noir*, as explained is exemplary of this. Therefore, there is a need to (re)present and produce a different performance to help femininity move away from these damaging stereotypical representations.

SUBVERTING THE GAZE

John Berger's *Ways of Seeing* (1972) examines how women were portrayed in 15th century painting. Berger argues that women experience feelings of judgment by both others and from themselves, and a constant sense that they are required to look, act, and behave within the constraints of the femininity deemed appropriate by patriarchal society. Deviations from what is expected of women or acting in a way that can be conceived as masculine, can lead to punishment.

Berger's examination paved way for works such as 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema'. In 'Afterthoughts on 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' inspired by *Duel in the Sun* (1946)' (1989), a (re)examination of her 1975 essay, Mulvey argues that contemporary cinema leads spectators to believe

that female characters are empowered yet it is only 'The female spectator's phantasy of masculinisation at cross-purposes with itself, restless in its transvestite clothes' (1989, p.30). Mulvey argues that films where a woman is the central to the plot are 'shown to be unable to achieve a stable sexual identity, torn between the deep blue sea of passive femininity and the devil of regressive masculinity' (p.438). Any attempt to (re)present femininity and the female gender identity within patriarchal society is doomed as it is (re)presented through the masculinisation of the leading female character.

Mulvey's argument about the masculinisation of female characters is apparent in the femme fatales of neo-*noir*. While neo-*noir* defines itself as subversive of the male gaze through its empowerment of the femme fatale, through textual analysis I have identified that this is an empowerment constructed by men through representing femininity and the femme fatale as sadomasochistic, irrationally violent, psychotic and monstrous. This representation is a fetishistic male fantasy. The male character is, however, still aligned with rationality, intelligence and logicity, and the female aligned with irrationality, malicious intent and illogicality. Therefore, how is one to present an active, rational femme fatale if the only way to empower them is then described as merely a masculine representation of the feminine?

The agency that the male gaze employs is achieved through its treatment of anything other as lesser, and its alignment with positive gender binary definitions, for example neo-*noir*'s constant representation of the masculine as the charioteer of justice and the feminine as the violator of justice – that is, as a criminal. I argue that to present an active rational femme fatale and empower femininity in neo-*noir*, we must align the femme fatale with rationality, intelligence and activity. This will allow the presentation of a female agency in neo-*noir* that is not driven by psychotic violence but a sense of justice. Most importantly, a femme fatales agency will be constituted by its presence; that is, a woman writing about women; a woman writing a woman who does not adhere to patriarchal ideals of femininity.

Mulvey argues that ‘In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive female’ (p.438). Therefore, to reiterate, the male gaze centers the heterosexual male as the default subject (the one who looks) and defines women as the objects (the one looked at). In film, the camera acts as the stand in for the subject, the heterosexual male, and the audience is delivered a narrative from that perspective. The spectator sees what the heterosexual male sees. The gap here this thesis aims to explore is whether making a female character active is enough to challenge the male gaze and create a female gaze? Yet, even after making her active it gets tricky when we begin to explore how we can describe or look at a female in film. Film is a purely visual medium and script writing very strict in the amount of description allowed in the action lines (scene description), with an exception for television. The problem became, for me, how do I look at or describe my femme fatales without sexually objectifying them? This places limitations on how much can be explained through the script. For example, in the action lines of the scene at the bar between Annemette and Chump, I cannot write, that she is styled to appease a male gaze to contrast to her predecessors, and that this stylization will be, in the following scenes, dismissed as if it were a costume. I can only describe the action that she is doing: ‘Annemette looks striking: heavy lined green eyes with blown out strawberry blond hair. She sways up to the bar and takes a seat, her black, metallic gown clinging to every curve of her body. She attracts the bartender with a curl of her finger’ (Bitomsky, 2020). Consequently, when the script is read without the understanding that the thesis component of this project delivers, scenes like this can be viewed as conforming to the same representation of women which appeases the male gaze and perpetuates the very thing that I aim to subvert.

BUTLER AND SUBVERTING THE GAZE

Butler’s 1988 essay examines how performative acts constitute gender. Butler argues that gender is not a starting place, but an identity that is constructed through the acts of the body – that gender did not

come first, rather, gender is created via the act of performance.

We are all confined by our gender roles; ‘forced to do gender in polarity because there exists an agency which has constructed the binary gender system as determinate’ (Manley, 2013). Therefore, Butler implies that ‘if gender is not as seamless as it appears’ (Manley, 2013), then there is a space to produce a different performance, a different set of acts. Then, these acts, through repetition, could potentially produce a different female gender identity – a femininity that denies patriarchal influence. Butler writes: ‘In its very character as performative resides the possibility of contesting [their] reified status’ (1988, p.520). As gender identity is constructed through acts, including acts of the body, then there exists a possibility to reform female gender identity by performing a different set of acts that represent femininity. Yet, Butler warns that the possibilities of producing a reimagined female gender identity is ‘constrained by available historical conventions’ (1988, p.521) and that ‘there are strict punishments for contesting the script by performing out of turn or through unwarranted improvisations’ (1988, p.531). Consequently, ‘Society is discouraged from playing in this space by the social expectations and taboos that delimit our assigned gendered space. Any act which deviates from its socially intended gender is subject to punishment’ (Manley, 2013). Therefore, what is asked of us is that we continue to give the expected traditional gendered performance.

This thesis rejects this expectation and aims to create an alternative performance of femininity through neo-*noir*’s femme fatale via exploring them and presenting them as active, rational, and intelligent. On a larger scale, I hope that this thesis will help to (re)invigorate research in and creative works of neo-*noir* that aim to represent femininity in a way that positively informs female gender identity – rather than negative feminine representations that align female gender identity with traits such as passivity, lunacy, and irrationality.

While both Mulvey and Butler both use psychoanalysis to theorise gender, they do so in different ways. Where Mulvey leaves the topic of heterosexuality unexamined, Butler critiques the

patriarchal understandings of heterosexuality. Butler's theory of gender performativity differs from Mulvey's and others from earlier feminist works as it argues that nothing about gender is natural, it is performed, that we live in a heteronormative culture and that this is harmful for those who deviate from the norm. Moreover, Butler argues that we unconsciously perform this phallically constructed gender. She examines how characters consciously or unconsciously perform their roles, whether the text is or is not heteronormative and breaks down the aspects of their lives in which the characters perform. Where Mulvey concerns herself with how men look at women, how women look at themselves and how women look at other women, Butler concerns herself with performance. Butler explores how gender is constructed and performed. She challenges the belief that gender is a natural given category and argues that gender is socially constructed from social and cultural practices. Butler ties her notion of performativity to feminist politics by examining the illusory construction of the 'we' that is continually beseeched in the issues of feminism. The use of 'we' to connect people achieves nothing more than a connection through exclusion. It is a denial of the complex issues of identity politics as 'we' collectively assume that gender identity exists prior to political response.

However, Butler declares that 'there need not be a 'doer behind the deed,' but that the 'doer' is variably constructed in and through the deed' (1990, p.142). Therefore, we are what we do. This leads to the belief that there is no such thing as a self that exists before cultural immersion. This thesis explores whether Butler's theory can be applied to a film script to subvert the usual performance of femininity portrayed by the femme fatale and (re)present a new performance of femininity that challenges the male gaze. Butler's view of performativity views actions, behaviors, and gestures as both the result of an individual's identity as well as a source that contributes to the formation of one's identity which is continuously being redefined through speech acts and symbolic communication. Consequently, this thesis and script explores whether (re)presenting the femme fatale with a different series of acts that contradict the patriarchal representation of femininity is possible within a neo-*noir*

film.

In summary, this chapter has explored the key theories used in this thesis, *film noir*'s representation of women, its phallogentric hegemony and explained its current position in neo-*noir* as (still) male gaze orientated. As neo-*noir* still offers no place for identity with feminine activity it is the ideal genre to examine whether it is possible to subvert the male gaze, to represent an active femme fatale and see whether, if in doing so, we are looking through a female gaze. Kelly Oliver writes in her article 'The male gaze is more relevant, and dangerous, than ever' (2017) that 'In this world all agents and identity are male and all objects to be desired are female' (p. 451). Moreover, *film noir*, once again being such a mainstream genre, has the capacity to reach a much wider audience. A wider audience will mean that more spectators get to identify with and enjoy stories about women via the gaze of an active femme fatale. No longer should women have to be forced to identify or align with a passive object who is merely there for sexual objectification. Nor should they be forced to watch on as the male's objectification is compensated for by their active narrative in the film. This thesis explores new ways to challenge and represent the male influenced femme fatale archetype alongside neo-*noir*'s representation of femininity and the female gender identity. This will create a space in which we can present new performative acts to (re)present femininity, and new ways to go about looking from a female gaze. There is still hope that one day through a collective effort we can create a foundation from which to study and present a female gaze.

Additionally, this chapter investigated how the representation of violent females can be deemed as problematic. When the motive behind the violence is unclear or absent, it insinuates that she is this way due to her gender. The more irrational and psychotic the violence, the more it reinforces the representation of woman as monster. Thus, the unmotivated, sadomasochistic female violence that the femme fatale of neo-*noir* usually presents not only maintains the patriarchal view that women are irrational, hysterical and psychotic, but also satisfies the fantasies of the male gaze. This has informed

my creative process by giving the femme fatales in *The Lonely Drive* backstory, by giving them motive and also, making them accountable for their actions. Even in times where they commit extremely violent acts they do so for pragmatic reasons. For example, the scene between Annemette and Chump in the hotel room. She does not want to kill Chump, but she has to, or he will kill her. I offer more motive for her kill by revealing that Chump had watched and masturbated over Annemette's rape by Ray through an ajar door. But she is not killing him out of revenge or killing just to kill, but to stay alive and achieve her goal. She is killing as a response to, or a need of, the current situation she is in.

In her essay 'Looking at the Past from the Present: Rethinking Feminist Film Theory of the 1970s' (2004), Mulvey argues for a (re)presentation of female gender identity through (re)writing feminine gender identity within film:

The cinema refracted through the new technology not only provides the raw material for re-forging links across the great divide of the eighties but also a metaphor for reflecting on the difficulty of understanding time and history. From this perspective, feminism's alternative histories, its reconfiguring of storytelling and its questioning given patterns of temporality provide an invaluable point of departure (p. 13).

It is necessary take up the tools, to take a pragmatic approach, to locate a point of departure from male gaze orientated mainstream films and begin conceptualisations of active femme fatales to empower women. Classic *film noir* continues to perpetuate the male gaze in its contemporary counterpart, *neo-noir*. Therefore, what better way to subvert this than in a genre that enables its perpetuation? Further, as there still exists a male gaze *neo-noir* as a conceptual approach, how can there not exist a female gaze? The stance of the female gender identity within *film noir* leads to the scales of power being unequal, leads to the male gaze being perpetuated through a female character; a

continuation of representing the femme fatale and, in turn, female gender identity as irrational, sadistic, psychotic and illogical. Film critic, Neha Kale (2015) does not offer an understanding of a female gaze but argues that one needs to be created. She declares that 'golden age of the female gaze' is upon us, that 'something powerful happens when women become their own subjects.' My understanding is that a female gaze will only be possible if we continue to challenge the representation of femininity, continue to inform, and empower female gender identity through the performance of femininity. Eventually, together, we will identify the key elements with which we can define a singular female gaze. This will not be done by creating monstrous women who psychotically kill men out of pleasure. As identified, this power is illusory and offers only a titillation for the heterosexual male spectator. The real power is found in writing the experience of strong women, active and intelligent women, agentive women and aiming to deviate away from sexist representations and the patriarchal performance of femininity. The following chapter explores what the neo-*noir* films selected for analysis were able to achieve in their attempts to subvert the male gaze and look at the efforts made in imagining a female gaze.

CHAPTER TWO

The aim of this chapter is to examine Mulvey's work through a reading of her male gaze theory, alongside the influential works that Mulvey drew from to theorise the male gaze. The findings drawn from this reading will enable an analysis of previous attempts at male gaze subversion in neo-*noir*. More, it will explore the queer gaze in neo-*noir* as the active femme fatales in *The Lonely Drive* are in a same-sex relationship. This analysis is the key to reflecting on how other writers/directors have attempted the subversion of the male gaze and their individual concepts of a female gaze. Moreover, this analysis aims to uncover what the selected films were able to achieve; to look at the efforts made at creating a female gaze, together with how they have negatively affected the creation of such a gaze. This analysis is designed to give an understanding of what has and what has not worked in past attempts and will inform the approach taken in *The Lonely Drive* to (re)present the femme fatale within *film noir*.

FROM CLAIRE JOHNSTON TO LAURA MULVEY

Claire Johnston was one of the first theorists to explore classical cinema's constructs of the ideological image of woman. Johnston's essay 'Women's Cinema as Counter Cinema' (1973) found that the sign 'woman' means nothing in relation to the woman herself, and only carries meaning and significance in relation to man. Her findings brought about an important theoretical shift from analysing cinema as a reflection of reality to viewing cinema as a means through which to construct, define and confine a narrow but extremely influential ideology.

Johnston uses psychoanalysis to understand viewers' fascination with Hollywood cinema, arguing that this fascination is born from our desire to see. That desire is suggested by Freud's concept of scopophilia. Mulvey's application of scopophilia gave rise to the theoretical concept of the male gaze and set forth the institutionalisation of this concept within film theory. Moreover, Mulvey's article

lent weight to Johnston's argument by noting how classical cinema stimulates scopophilia by integrating constructions of narcissism and voyeurism into image and plot. Yet, as film is a visual medium, is it even possible to avoid scopophilia? Is it even possible to have a woman on screen without her being sexually objectified when framed by the camera?

Mulvey argues that there are two categories of pleasurable looking: voyeurism and narcissism. These two categories are defined and enforced by the audience. Mulvey claims that the audience is split between male and female, therefore the categories of looking are split, one afforded to the male and the other to the female. As much as voyeurism involves the pleasure, sexual or non-sexual, derived from watching others as objects and projecting fantasies onto that object, narcissism involves a recognition of oneself in the image of the objectified other being viewed, or an association with them. *Neo-noir* frequently portrays the woman as passive and the male as active. The woman as the object and the male as the voyeur. The male spectators perform the comfortable, in-the-dark role of the voyeur. The darkened theatre provides the illusion of the distance needed for their voyeurism to occur. Therefore, voyeuristically, the female spectator is denied her pleasure and is left to either identify with the passivity of the female image they are observing or assume an active position by aligning themselves with the male voyeur – adopting a male, exclusively heterosexual gaze. This leaves female spectators in a position of unease in their own gender or 'restless in their transvestite clothes' (1989, pg.30).

Mulvey's follow-up piece, 'Afterthoughts' (1989), discusses issues that were overlooked in her 1975 essay, issues relating to the female character and female spectator. Mulvey deems the female spectator resistant to aligning themselves with the female character due to her passivity and sexual objectification or, I suggest, regarding the *femme fatale*, her violent nature. Mulvey then further explores the resistant female spectator through the lens of Freudian theory. Mulvey reiterates that the female spectator's identification is still through a male gaze and that the pleasure found is a regression to the pre-Oedipal active phase of the spectator's development – a stage where femininity had not yet

'imposed its straitjacket of passivity' (Thornham, 1999, p.22). Therefore, Mulvey argues that the female spectator identifies with the female character via an uneasy 'transvestite' fantasy of masculinisation.

Mary Ann Doane argues in 'Film and the Masquerade: Theorising the Female Spectator' (1982) that female spectatorship can be read as a 'masquerade' of femininity. Doane argues that the 'Masquerade ... constitutes an acknowledgment that it is femininity itself which is constructed as mask ... To masquerade is to manufacture a lack in the form of a certain distance between oneself and one's image' (pg. 85). Doane finds difficulty in believing in the possibility of female spectatorship, as 'the history of a cinema ... relies so heavily on voyeurism, fetishism, and identification with an ego ideal conceivable only in masculine terms' (1982, pg.87). Doane argues that the characterization of femininity as closeness or over-identification is a cultural stereotype that closes off other possibilities for identification. Therefore, like Mulvey, Doane contends that the only options for female spectatorship involve adopting masculinity, accepting the masochism of over-identification, losing oneself in the image, or identifying with narcissism by becoming one's own object of desire, becoming one with the fantasized image of masculine desire.

This adoption of, or identification with masculinity leads the female spectator not to not only be confused by her gender, but, I suggest, to reject it, as the roles open to female spectators have traditionally been undesirable. In 1981, therapist Maureen Murdock, author of *The Heroine's Journey* (1990), asked Joseph Campbell, author of *The Hero's Journey* (1989), how he believes the woman's journey relates to the journey of the hero. He responded by saying that women do not need to make a journey:

In the whole mythological tradition woman is there. All she had to do is to realise that she's the place that people are trying to get to. When a woman realises what her wonderful character is, she's not going to get messed up with the notion of being pseudo-male

(Murdock, 1981).

Murdock challenges Campbell's statement, arguing that 'women I know and work with do not want to be there ... they do not want to embody Penelope, waiting patiently, endlessly weaving and unweaving' (1990, p.2). As the heroine's journey is of little significance to the narrative, the female spectator is confused. This leaves her questioning her own femininity, or as Murdock argues, rejecting it because of its traditionally 'passive, manipulative or non-productive' (1990, p.2) definition. Therefore, as Murdock explains, our heroine 'puts on her armour, picks up her sword, chooses her swiftest steed, and goes into battle. She finds her treasure: ... authority. The men smile, shake her hand and welcome her to the club' (1990, p.6).

This shedding of femininity is suggested by one of *The Lonely Drive's* main characters, Annemette, who is at first seen as passive and controlled. She is a sex worker for high-end crime bosses – a tool of pleasure in a world of men. After her split from Laroux, Annemette is left with nothing. With no place to go or no family aside from her disabled father who depends on her, Annemette does what she feels is the only option left to do; to sell her body. This plot is the usual plot offered femme fatales – a woman in need of a strong man's help. Instead, Annemette abandons what is considered a traditional femininity, her passive place, and adopts a sense of traditional masculinity, to break free of her phallic confinement.³³ She does this by taking her future into her own hands. She does not seek out a hard-boiled detective or other male to free her. She learns of a cash deal going down. This deal will provide enough money to get her far away from the criminals she is stealing it from and establish a new life. This places Annemette in an active role. The narrative, right from the start, revolves around her – her experience, her story. In breaking free of her phallic confinement Annemette dismisses her

³³ This notion of 'traditional' or 'hegemonic' masculinity—rational, strong, unfeeling—is theorized by Raewyn Connell in her book *Masculinities* (1995).

passive position. Therefore, theoretically, Annemette shifts from feminine to a masculinisation of the feminine, as there is no link between femininity and an active role. Yet, how is a female character who rejects passivity and adopts a position of activity, seen as being masculinised? As there is no singular female gaze identified and mainstream, the dominant cinema, is still largely written, directed and produced by men female gender identity is still confined to its role as the passive to the active – the male. Therefore, an active femme fatale is really only active as she is empowered by masculinity and aligned with a male gaze.

A femme fatale aligned with activity, rationality and control should not be viewed as an example of masculinisation but as a strong, independent female empowered by her femininity. Such a femme fatale will help begin (re)imagining femininity through gender performance within mainstream film genres that perpetuate the male gaze. *The Lonely Drive* imagines two such roles – active femme fatales equipped with logic and rationale – a neo-*noir* film created via the viewpoint of a woman, explored through female roles, with the female spectator in mind. This (re)presentation of the femme fatale and femininity creates a space for the female spectator to not only view, but to accept, desire and want to take part in the femme fatale's journey.

Mulvey argues for a feminist counter-cinema which will examine, challenge, and transform the form and position of identification offered by mainstream cinema. She suggests that such a cinema will 'free the look of the camera into its materiality in time and space and the look of the audience into dialectics and passionate detachment' (1975, p.448). Mulvey argues that feminist counter cinema would be an avant-garde practice that would destroy the visual pleasures experienced by the spectator and that this destruction would be unproblematic for women, leaving only a small tinge of 'sentimental regret' (1975, p.448). Yet, I argue that while male gaze subversion is necessary to offer an alternative to male, heterosexual viewing and identification within mainstream film, alongside creating films for women about women by women, this subversion cannot be entirely achieved by way of an avant-garde

film. As mentioned earlier, counter cinema does not attract the same mass audience that a mainstream neo-*noir* film would attract. Moreover, the male gaze dominates mainstream cinema. It is in mainstream cinema that we need to focus our attention on subverting the male gaze in and to present different individual conceptualisations of a female gaze for not only female spectators, but female producers, female actors and female characters.

Society still prizes mainstream cinema, whether it be attending an actual cinema or via download through a streaming platform. Many viewers will often opt for mainstream cinema's latest blockbuster, while 'avant-garde films are allocated only a small following' (Mulvey, 1979, p.3). While avant-garde films are more widely received than before and some are now distributed mainstream or made in commercial studios, the majority still only attract a limited following. Many are produced on extremely low budgets with a minimal crew, or, at times, even an individual, and are either self-financed or backed through small grants. Consequently, avant-garde cinema is not as widespread as mainstream cinema. While it does challenge and subvert the male gaze, the question is about its far-reaching impact. To really enable a chance for female gaze identification or to discover the key elements of a singular female gaze we need to continue creating films from a female perspective exploring female experience in mainstream cinema; a cinema that is widely received and within genres that perpetuate patriarchy. Thus, the subversion of the male gaze within neo-*noir* is integral as it is both mainstream and maintains patriarchy. I believe that the only way we can create a space to consider a female gaze lies in the reinvention of the stereotypical female characters in Hollywood, the femme fatale. It is only through reinvention or reimagination of this character that the female spectator will be able to shed her 'transvestite clothes' and feel comfortable aligning herself with the representation of femininity explored on screen.

The understanding that surrounds our knowledge of a spectator's experience is intimately entwined with our understanding and questioning of our ideologically constructed gender identities –

male and female. Mulvey developed male gaze theory as way of understanding those questions left unanswered regarding the power inequality set by our patriarchal way of seeing women, and when women view themselves comparatively to the masculinised woman. Doane (1982) explores the notion of masquerade further to understand woman's relation to the image on the screen. Doane understands the masquerade as a mask of femininity. Like Joan Rivière,³⁴ Doane observes that women who visualise themselves in a male position of authority disguise it by putting on a mask of femininity, which compensates for their masculine positioning. As women are constantly forced to view themselves through a heterosexual male lens, forced to look at themselves not only on a physical level, but a psychological level, they are left with a sense of unease, a powerlessness, left to believe that the male, heterosexual gaze is the only gaze and that they should abide to the social rules and standards it presents. As mentioned, the opening of *The Lonely Drive* challenges the male gaze and offers the femme fatale, Annemette, a moment where her objectification is not the first thing a spectator gets to observe.

ANNEMETTE MARCH (30) sits in a torn armchair in the darkest corner of the room. She wears a tattered black gown and men's black shoes, unlaced. No socks. She clutches a brown duffle bag with snakeskin handles to her lap. Crooked slat blinds throw slivers of moonlight across her blood-splattered face. Dried tears have left her black eyeliner smudged (*The Lonely Drive*, 2020, p.141).

Instead of being an image to be consumed by spectators for visual pleasure, her face is dirtied and hair a mess. She is not a perfect picture. This scene challenges the male gaze by having Annemette not ask her father, a male character, for help, even though she looks desperate for it. She does not

³⁴ Joan Rivière (1883 – 1962) was a British psychoanalyst. She was an early translator of Freud into English alongside an influential writer well known for her account of 'womanliness' as a masquerade.

even mention that she is in trouble, just that she has had a rough day. Moreover, she gives her father money for him to live. She is supporting him. This not only challenges the male gaze by altering the initial viewing of the toe-to-head inspection of the femme fatale and her early representation as picture perfect, but it also alludes to the fact that she is active; it alludes to her strength and represents her as compassionate, merciful, and loving. Further, it sets her up as the heroine of the story; a heroine who has a motive and a backstory.

The sexualisation of the femme fatale and the emphasis on her body, even though not related to the plot or story in any obvious way, encourages the spectating audience to view it as a product, an object of perfection. While the male gaze is invoked within many forms of media, in neo-noir it is identified by the representation of the female as existing only in terms of what they represent to the masculine character. Hence, her existence is unnecessary; she is there merely to be looked upon as the object of beauty or to lead the hero to his demise. Director Oscar Budd Boetticher summarises this view thus:

What counts is what the heroine provokes, or rather what she represents. She is the one, or rather the love or fear she inspires in the hero, or else the concern he feels for her, who makes him act the way he does. In herself the woman has not the slightest importance (Boetticher, cited in Mulvey 1975, p.439).

Boetticher's view is still evident within neo-*noir*. This view can be seen every time the camera puts the spectator in a position which allows them to view shots of a woman's chest, hips, buttocks, hair or mouth; body parts that are regarded as traditionally feminine. Hannah Aspinall argues:

The female body has long been idealised, objectified, and fetishized and this can be seen

particularly in Victorian culture. Social rules and guidelines on how the female body should look, and how it should be dressed, objectified the body and encoded femininity within these rules. This made the representation of the female body a space for expression, oppression, and sexual commodification (2012).

In many films, no female character, including the few given complex back stories and a somewhat active role within the plot, is framed without either a full body or cleavage shot; an exploitation of a female character's 'to-be-looked-at-ness' (Mulvey, 1975, p.439). This objectification of the female body has brought about the breaking down of women on screen to their body parts. These body parts (lips, breast, buttocks, legs) represent the male, heterosexual construction of a woman's desirability and appeal. This indicates that women do not shape their own beauty standards, but rather observe them through a lens that is not their own. This lens, sequentially, influences how women look at each other. This exploitation further instils the notion that the male character is the active and the female as the passive-image; the actor and the acted-upon.

The Lonely Drive turns the camera lens on to a male character, Chump, in a scene where Annemette would be the main focus as she is getting naked. Thus, we get to observe the male gazing at the femme fatale instead. We are watching through Annemette's gaze at Chump who leers at her. The spectator watching Chump instead of Annemette in this kind of scene will create a feeling of disease, and for some disgust, at the way he is objectifying Annemette, the way they, themselves would be leering at Annemette if this were the typical neo-*noir* film. I argue that within this moment the spectating audience is completely disconnected from a male, heterosexual gaze and instead posits a female gaze. We feel Annemette's disgust at watching Chump and get to feel the drive behind her wanting to achieve an out.

She unbuttons the second button.

He wipes perspiration from his bald head with his sleeve. He nods - 'yes'.

ANNEMETTE (CONT'D)

You like to hurt bad girls like me?

He unzips his pants and rubs himself through his white briefs. He nods - 'yes'.

She releases the last button and lets the silky black fabric fall to the floor. Naked - she faces him.

CHUMP

A fucking angel.

Immediately after this Annemette tells Chump to strip; needing more time for Chump to receive the notification that the drop off is complete.

He stands up and reaches for her, eyes fixed on her breasts. She brings him to a halt - a flat palm to his chest.

ANNEMETTE

Not yet.

She circles him, moves to the bed and crawls across it. She primps herself up on the pillows against the bed head and lights a cigarette.

ANNEMETTE

Your turn.

He laughs.

CHUMP

Ok, ok... ya want a show. I do shows.

He awkwardly sways from side-to-side - allowing his pants to fall at their own pace. He pulls at his shoes, pops them off and places them under the chair. He kicks his pants away.

His pocket-phone hits the ground.

He picks it up quickly, flips it open and turns it over. He sighs in relief and places it on the chair.

Again, a scene like this directly aligns the spectating audience with Annemette and lets them

observe what she gets to observe when she is being gazed at as an object, a tool, for sexual pleasure and gratification, a female gaze. The female gaze is not defined and less discussed in contrast to the male gaze, thus it is harder to pinpoint and examine than the male gaze as it is so new. In aim to identify the female gaze in this scene I would define it as exploratory the full gamut of Annemette's life and existence rather than focusing on her being sexy and naked. This scene exposes the voyeuristic intent behind the male gaze as a cinematic device.

Typically, in neo-*noir*, the male is cast as the voyeur and the femme fatale as the object. In turn, the voyeuristic role purposefully and subconsciously primes the audience to display like-minded behaviour. Again, as Mulvey argues, the spectatorship is split two ways: voyeuristically and fetishistically. This occurs as the plot unfolds and spectators, who within everyday society observe each other or are observed, become the observers and most importantly, in the cinema they are unable to be observed. Spectators, in the dark cinema, become the voyeurs of the on-screen characters, creating the perfect environment for either an objective or narcissistic identification.

The Lonely Drive aims to present an alternative environment. The femme fatales are active, we explore their experience and look through their gaze. Moreover, they do not have to perform masculinity or sexually objectify men in order to be active. The scene above between Annemette and Chump subverts the usual sexual objectification of the female fatale a spectator would expect. When Annemette is stripping bare, we watch Chump sitting in the armchair, in his white underwear and bulging stomach, rub himself over the show she is putting on for him. This scene forces the spectator to view themselves in a way. To view the male gaze in a different way – to watch the male as he watches. This replaces the voyeurism usually experienced through the sexual objectification of the femme fatale that a male gaze in neo-*noir* offers. Annemette does not want to be there; she is uncomfortable and that un-comfortability transitions to the spectator. They feel uncomfortable watching. It is not what they want to see. I intend the spectator to feel repulsed by Chump and his

scopophilia when watching this scene. Instead of having the focus on Annemette, which many spectators would feel comfortable with, we get to watch him. This usual voyeurism served up to the spectators of a neo-*noir* film, is denied. Another example of this is when Annemette is being taken by Ray. We get to see the disgust on her tear-streaked face at the choice she has made and Ray's face – red and strained, gritting his teeth – but we do not get to see Annemette's naked body. We hear Ray's grunting and observe Annemette's silence. It is a scene that creates unease and depicts the horror of Annemette's lifestyle and experiences. Therefore, the environment that *The Lonely Drive* aims to create is one that forces the spectator to see the world through the femme fatales gaze to observe the reality behind the gritty neo-*noir* scenes that are produced to stimulate the heterosexual, male.

THE GAZE IN FILM THEORY

The male gaze in neo-*noir* constructs certain stereotypes of femininity in narratives that promote the belief that the active agency men receive is limited only to them, and that the female is denied human agency. The femme fatale inhabits the narrative only secondarily through the male character's perspective. This thesis argues that we continue to reject the male gaze and persist at conceptualising an individual female gaze in mainstream film genres that perpetuate it. In turn, this rejection and representation of the female characters, or explicitly for this thesis the femme fatale, will aid the construction of a singular female gaze.

In this chapter, Mulvey's male gaze theory and Judith Butler's notion of performative acts will be used to explore/analyse the representation of women within the following neo-*noir* films: *In the Cut* (2003), *Bound* (1996), *Baise-moi* (2000) and *Gone Girl* (2014). The selected films have been chosen firstly as they are neo-*noir* films and secondly because they explore femme fatales that dually subvert and perpetuate the male gaze. Before discussing the selected neo-*noir* films and their efforts at male gaze subversion, a quick explanation is necessary of how some films, across other mainstream genres, have

positively represented women and femininity through a non-binary gaze³⁵. A non-binary gaze is a way of looking that is neither feminine nor masculine, female, or male. Although this non-binary gaze does not subvert the male gaze, it creates a more inclusive approach to viewing in our society, an approach that is inclusive of both the fetishistic gaze³⁶ and the queer gaze³⁷, a step away from stereotypical gender roles, specific sexual orientations, and stereotypical portrayals of ethnicity. Yet there cannot be a non-binary gaze, a gaze that does not objectify gender, ethnicity, or any sexual orientation, as the male gaze is the only gaze institutionalised. Therefore, I believe that a true non-binary gaze cannot exist without first the establishment of a female gaze. How can both be subverted if only one is known?

Jane Campion's *In the Cut* (2003), a tale of an unsatisfied single woman who begins a path of sexual discovery with a serial killer in chase, can be seen as subversive of the male gaze. This is because the plot follows the female character's experiences, both sexual and personal – just as *The Lonely Drive* does. *In the Cut* uses Mulvey's concepts of voyeurism and male pleasure and is represented through the perception or image of a woman. Campion not only explores her female character's sexual pleasure, but presents the male gaze as threatening. The director:

Uses the language of cinema and the machinations of plot to render the film around the

³⁵ Fanny Haga argues in his book *Non-Binary Gaze* (2020) that the non-binary gaze avoids the social construction of gender and ethnicity and offers a new approach to create with a broader representation spectrum.

³⁶ What I refer to as the 'fetishistic gaze' is the use of a female body parts as stimuli to attain sexual gratification or visual pleasure within film. Anneke Smelik writes on fetishism in cinema: 'In the case of fetishism, classical cinema reinstates and displaces the lacking penis in the form of a fetish, that is, a hyper-polished object. Therefore, the fetishistic gaze in cinema perpetuates 'the reification of the female figure' and 'fails to represent 'Woman' outside the phallic norm' (Smelik, 2016, p.353).

³⁷ Tim Wray writes in *The Queer Gaze* (2003): 'Queer codes of looking undermine the certainties of the gaze. Growing up queer there is always a point when we realise ourselves to be different, but this difference must immediately be controlled depending on where we are and who we are with. A tension is set up between the appearance we are obliged to project, and our sense of our own image. Often long before we can accept or understand ourselves to be queer, sexuality is related to an idea that identity is no more than a constructed image. Like surrealism, the queer gaze questions any 'natural' appearance, and the transformability of our identities contests that there can ever be a unified subject who is the spectator of the world' (p.69). For further reading, see essays in Paul Burston and Colin Richardson's *A Queer Romance* (1995) or Jack Halberstam's *In a Queer Time and Place* (2005) who focuses in particular on the 'transgender gaze' via a reading of the film *Boys Don't Cry* (1999).

subjectivity of a woman, to challenge the myth of romantic love and the ‘cult of the female star,’ and to establish a world where the male gaze is presented not as a pleasurable vantage point for the audience but a viewpoint to be feared (Haggstrom, 2011).

Yet, films that seek to explore female sexuality often face unfair censorship via ratings from entities such as the Motion Picture Association of America, due to their depictions of acts such as cunnilingus. The heavy censorship around cunnilingus exposes that female oral genital stimulation is not as readily accepted as male oral genital stimulation – something that is often seen in film. This suggests that cunnilingus, an integral form of female sexual satisfaction, as something that is wrong and should either hidden or unexplored completely. Therefore, female genitalia and its ways of stimulation and satisfaction must remain mysterious and be known as ‘other’ from general sexual experience. Another example is Catherine Breillat’s *Romance* (1999). *Romance* featured raw, non-simulated sex and many films followed suit: *The Brown Bunny* (2003), *9 Songs* (2004), *All About Anna* (2005), and *Shortbus* (2006). This film explores the life of a young woman, Marie, who lives with her boyfriend. He refuses to have sex with her, so she searches for intimacy elsewhere. She transcends traditional sexual limitations in her journey, a journey that proves to be empowering and satisfying. In Australia, the film was initially refused classification, before it was awarded an R18+ on appeal³⁸. The original version was then aired uncut, but only on the cable television network World Movies.³⁹ By elevating their ratings to an R or NC-17 (adults only), this treatment of cunnilingus as extremely ‘graphic’ in comparison to other forms of sex, including fellatio, can be argued to be another form of gender inequality in film. The woman cannot control the outcome of her sexual adventure, the man

³⁸ Richard Phillip writes in his article ‘The Banning and Unbanning in Australia of the new French film *Romance*’ (2000): ‘The Review Board decided to release the film after an appeal by Potential Films, *Romance*’s Australian distributor. Breillat wrote to the OFLC protesting the decision to ban the film declaring: ‘Nudity, love and sex are part of our daily life and if my film is sexually explicit, it has nothing to do with a porn film’.

³⁹ The film classification debate focused on how to preserve and promote freedom of expression, while ‘protecting society from the normalisation of extreme violence and obscenity’ (A.L.C.O.A, 2005).

must take over, and she must be 'had'. This kind of heavy censorship burdens any attempt at (re)presenting feminine desire and pleasure, as such films of that nature are not highly likely to reach a mainstream audience. This instils yet another limitation toward the representation of femininity, a female experience, and a female pleasure and desire. How can we change this to have representations of female pleasure reach mainstream cinema without being restricted by an R18+ classification?

The Lonely Drive features a scene involving Annemette and Laroux in which cunnilingus is performed. This scene seeks to avoid heavy censorship by having the camera being in Annemette's (the receiver of the cunnilingus) point of view. The scene has the camera focus on the lust and desire on Laroux's face as she moves down Annemette's body. Her body will be visible but only as a background blur – the viewing of her body is not important; it is the emotional journey of their lovemaking that this scene explores.

THE MASCULINISATION OF THE FEMALE CHARACTER

In 'Feminist Film Theory' (2016), Smelik argues that 'the account of 'the male gaze' as a structuring logic in Western visual culture became controversial in the early 1980s, as it made no room for the female spectator nor for a female gaze' (p.4). How can there be no room for the female spectator when they make up 60% or more of the viewing audience?

To reiterate, Mulvey's 1975 essay overlooks the position of the female spectator. Her oversight has been heavily criticised, 'the most prevalent objection raised by critics such as Mary Ann Doane (1982) and E. Ann Kaplan (1983) concerned Mulvey's failure to account for the female spectator' (Block, 2008, p.35) and so the question of the female spectator arose. This led Mulvey to write her 1989 essay in which she analyses the structures of female spectatorship with an analysis of King Vidor's *Duel in the Sun* (1946). Mulvey proposes two roles with which the female spectator can identify: passive femininity (the patriarchal position) or a masculine point of view (the male gaze). Mulvey's elaboration

of transsexual identification⁴⁰ and spectatorship alludes to Freud's concept of pre-oedipal and phallic fantasy of omnipotence. Freud argues that for women to procure a 'pure' femininity, their early childhood aspect of an active sexual identification, must be rejected then forgotten. Mulvey uses Freud's concept to suggest that the female spectator enjoys what Mulvey terms her 'transvestite' identification as they signify the missing facet of their childhood's sexual identity, the active sexual identification. Moreover, Mulvey argues that dually, the female spectator and the female character share the same problem: the inability to achieve a stable sexual identity. Neo-*noir* is exemplary of this as it explores that have no set sexuality. They use sex with either a male or female as a tool to manipulate and achieve their desired outcome. In *The Lonely Drive*, both Annemette and Laroux have a stable sexual identity. They are lesbian. This never sways or changes.

Mulvey's argument about the masculinisation of female characters through their inability to achieve a stable sexual identity is apparent within the femme fatales of neo-*noir*. Yet this masculinisation runs counter to some of Freud's insights. In *Femininity* (1964), Freud cautioned against enforcing heterosexuality as men and women are, as Freud believed, psychologically bi-sexual. Freud stated on bisexuality:

It is well known that at all times there have been, as there still are, human beings who can take as their sexual object's persons of either sex without the one trend interfering with the other. We call these people bisexual and accept the fact of their existence without wondering much at it ... But we have come to know that all human beings are bisexual in this sense and their libido is distributed between objects of both sexes, either in a manifest or a latent form (Young-

⁴⁰ Mulvey's theory of the transsexual gaze and Halberstam's theorised transgender gaze in *In a Queer Time and Place* (2006) leaves a divide in these gazes. As the term transsexual alludes to those who are at some point on the path to a surgical-sex-reassignment, Halberstam sought to create a distinction between the gazes as she believed that 'transgender is valued as queer, progressive, political statement while transsexuality becomes the marker of easily assimilated, binary-reinforcing living' (Hornsby, 2016, p. 22).

Bruehl, 2001, p.179)

Freud's argument that a woman develops out of a child of bisexual tendencies postulates that masculinity and femininity are social constructions rather than being naturally endowed. He wrote: 'In conformity with its peculiar nature, psychoanalysis does not try to describe what a woman is ... that would be a task it could scarcely perform ... but sets about enquiring how she comes into being, how a woman develops out of a child with a bisexual disposition' (Freud, 1969, p.42). Therefore, passivity is an actively constructed ideal for achieving femininity rather than being a default state. As a result, both, the female character, and the female spectator's empowerment is now considered a borrowing of masculinity, a revival of a lost bisexual disposition, an active role, now replaced by the passivity that has been aligned with femininity in a patriarchal culture.

Mulvey's aim in 'Afterthoughts' was not 'to debate the rights and wrongs [the] narrative division of labour or to demand positive heroines, but rather to point out that the 'grammar' of the story places the reader, listener or spectator with the hero' (1989, pg.28). This is the gap *The Lonely Drive* aims to fill. In neo-*noir*, the male character is depicted as the hero and the femme fatale as the villain. There is a need now for an active, rational femme fatale that aligns with her archetype yet presents her as a heroine. *The Lonely Drive* steps into this space and conceptualises two active femme fatale characters in the mainstream genre of neo-*noir*. In turn, this conceptualisation can then be maintained or reworked to positively reinform femininity and create an active non-masculinised femme fatale – shifting her to an equal or empowered position.

This thesis aligns with Butler's theory of performativity and argues that gender should be understood as emergent of the experience lived by the individual. Thus, in order to identify a singular female gaze, we need to keep writing about women's individual experiences, their own stories, through their own gaze without her empowerment coming from her masculinisation. How can we do this?

Elinor Ochs (1990) argues that language is precontextualised through the repetition of previously established linguistic routines⁴¹. She explains that holding your body in such a way suggests withdrawal or meekness, avoiding eye contact, deferring to others and having a high pitch in your voice, you are adopting a submissive routine. This submissive routine often evokes an existing societal trope of the submissive woman. Further, after reiteration of this routine, maintaining it within everyday socialisation, film and media, the submissive routine becomes normative. This means that the submissive routine, evoking the societal trope of the submissive woman, through performative reiteration, indexes womanliness. I argue that by challenging the normative submissive routine that evokes femininity, through Butler's notion of performativity, we can begin to rewrite and shift away from this belief to create a new model of femininity. This will, in turn, not only project a new feminine leadership or strength, but also a new form of masculinity that problematises the patriarchal active/passive relationship between male and female. In other words, there is a possibility that performative acts are the key with which we can begin to shift from the patriarchal way in which society deems a person's gender, the performance being to appease social expectation, and begin to populate mainstream film with a true and anti-sexist expression of femininity and female gender identity.

THE QUEER IN NEO-NOIR

The post 1980s femme fatales of neo-*noir* hold a dangerous sexuality that has become increasingly excessive. In such an excess, this dangerous sexuality is ambiguous and indiscriminate in nature. Here I use the term 'queer' as an indeterminate – but most definitely not heterosexual - identity label. This discussion refers to the lesbian, bi or sexually ambiguous female characters in neo-*noir*. In many neo-

⁴¹ See, Elinor Ochs essay 'Indexicality and Socialization' in *Cultural Psychology: Essays on Comparative Human Development* (1990).

noir films, same-sex relations between women are used as a tool to either create a spectacle for the viewer or set up the femme fatale's promiscuous nature. This promiscuity, when aligned with same-sex relations, creates an association between queer coupling and negative themes such as overindulgence, unorthodoxy, and deviance – an unconventionality that will ultimately lead to destruction. These alliances indirectly problematise lesbianism as they feed the dominant patriarchy by re-establishing heterosexual normality as natural and presenting the queer and queer coupling as excessive – a not necessary or needed sexual act.

Butler examines the history of the term 'queer' in her essay 'Critically Queer' (1993). She explores how the term which once meant weird or strange shifted into a derogatory slur, and how academics are now trying to take it back to its original meaning. She is not only concerned about the temporality of the word, but the limits of the term's reversal as language have historically been used to oppress, confine, and define individuals and cultures. The beginning of Butler's essay examines what the social and political implications of the reversal attempt and the potential negative impacts it could have in the future. Butler argues that there will be a constant fight to keep homophobic culture from attempting to 'redeploy, twist, or 'queer' [it] back [into] to a slur' (p.19). This allows agency for the term and over the term, but it also sets the limits for future agency – much like a game of tug of war, it will only make it so far before it is pulled back into its negative use. Butler's tug-of-war concept of the term 'queer' is much like the representation of same sex relations between women featured in neo-*noir* films. While they allow some agency to be given to same-sex desire, they also problematise it further.

Same-sex relations between women in neo-*noir* are almost interwoven into the very fabric of the femme fatale. With this said, it is also wise to acknowledge that rarely does the femme fatale feel fulfilled by this relationship, nor do they find help or any assurance in their holds. Therefore, the

promise of a lasting love, or even a mere romantic relationship, is evidently uncertain. Because of the femme fatale's sexual ambiguity, swaying in her bisexuality to toy with either a man or woman for her own personal gain, neo-*noir* can be seen as a genre that helps problematise same-sex desire by aligning it with themes of physical instability, mental illness and narcissism. This leads the spectator, and in turn mass consciousness, to view same-sex relations as illegitimate - relations that will not last or prevail and are not meant to match or even come close to heterosexual normality.

There is a proliferation of female characters in Western cinema who align with the bisexual femme fatale and her themes of instability, treachery and narcissism. One is *Bound* (1996), which is discussed in depth below. As mentioned, the femme fatale characters who seduce women as well as men, are cast as troubled and insane. Moreover, the women that these femme fatales seduce are also represented as troubled and easily manipulated; perhaps they are also unsure of their own sexuality. These films engage with wider narratives and anxieties about the correlation between bodily actions, desires, and identities. Therefore, the femme fatale's refusal of a conflation of current object choice with sexual orientation provides vital space for heterosexuality to make its stance as the normal and natural sexual occupation. The gap this thesis explores is how does one move away from this negative alignment of queer coupling with instability, mental illness, and narcissism?

The Lonely Drive not only explores two individual femme fatales but explores the relationship between the women. It explores how these women look at themselves and how they look at each other. Their relationship and the authenticity of their feelings, which are explored over many scenes and given a backstory to the present, seeks to quash fears about the potency of female power and present a legitimate representation of same-sex relations in neo-*noir* – which inherently only problematises such relations. It will move away from the typical femme fatale character whose narcissism sees her rejecting conventional relationships and who uses sex as a device to aid her schemes

or benefit her evil plot. Unlike neo-*noir*'s problematic bisexual femme fatale, Laroux and Annemette are lesbians, they know their sexuality, but they do, like the femme fatale, use their sexuality for financial gain. Annemette, stuck in the slimy underworld of crime, sells her body to her boss's high-end clients and Laroux uses her looks to pull off small petty crimes such as the stealing of a wallet at her local club hangout. Their romance is not merely a meeting and then a fling, it is a long-standing relationship, that like so many heterosexual relationships has faltered. Their relationship and the way we get to view it does not offer the spectator the promise of erotic intrigue, nor does it align at any point with the codes and conventions of soft-core pornography as is seen in the films discussed below. When we finally do get to see them coupling, it is an exploration, not a show. Many neo-*noir* films, *Basic Instinct* (1990), *The Last Seduction* (1994), *Wild Things* (1998) and *Showgirls* (1995), leave little to the imagination and titillate their audiences with carnal pleasures that are shot in a soft focus with low lighting to cast shadows over the female body exposing her breasts and buttocks. Consequently, *The Lonely Drive* offers a representation of the femme fatales coupling that denies making a spectacle of them and instead, depicts it sensually, in a natural, raw focus. They are in a hotel room, but the feel is not shady and enveloped in darkness.

Annemette sits up, as if it were all a big mistake, and pulls the bed's sheet around her shoulders.

Laroux sits on the edge of the bed. She shuffles closer to Annemette.

Tears roll down Annemette's face.

Laroux brushes them away.

Annemette does not stop her.

ANNEMETTE

I fucking loved you.

LAROUX

I know.

Annemette lies down.

Laroux lies down behind her.

Annemette reaches back and pulls her in; presses her body onto Laroux's.

Laroux softly runs her fingers over the back of Annemette's arm, down the arch of her hip and across the front of her belly.

Annemette shivers at the touch.

LAROUX

I've always loved you, Anne.

Annemette twists around.

Annemette, eyes open, kisses her gently. She lets her tongue rediscover Laroux's upper lip, taste her mouth. Laroux holds back for a moment, letting her discover, then turns the kiss hungry and heavy.

Laroux sucks on Annemette's lower lip as her hand moves up Annemette's ribs to her breast. She thumbs her nipple, traces over it lightly. It hardens.

Annemette arches her back and moans heavily.

Laroux softly pinches, flicks and rubs Annemette's nipple gently between her index and thumb. She pulls her bra aside and takes it in her mouth.

This scene moves the viewer away from aligning what they are seeing with carnal pleasures, a pleasure that would appease the male gaze. The camera does not focus on Annemette or Laroux; rather, it explores the way they look at each other in their sexual coupling. In one moment, the camera lingers on the grasp Laroux has on Annemette's hip, as Annemette caresses Laroux's lower back. The way Laroux pulls Annemette against her suggests longing and portrays how much she has missed, waited for, and wished to touch her again. Note that I say, 'her love', not 'her lover'. Laroux and Annemette do not want to rush into sex but explore each other again and re-discover their way around each other's bodies. Their relationship and queer coupling shifts away from the carnal spectacle of the lesbian or bisexual that help problematise same-sex desire. It moves away from lesbianism being aligned with a deep narcissism and abjection, a mere confusion of self that will eventually, if the

troubled person is fixed, will return to 'natural' heterosexuality. It explores the idea of (re)aligning same-sex relations with the legitimacy offered its heterosexual other, in a genre that perpetuates the representation of bisexual/lesbian relations as illegitimate.

ADDITIONAL PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS AT SUBVERTING THE MALE GAZE

In this section, I analyse the selected neo-*noir* films in order to see what approaches I can employ to subvert the male gaze in *The Lonely Drive* and what approaches to avoid. Further, this chapter seeks to identify the limitations of both (re)presenting the femme fatale with a female gaze and male gaze subversion in a neo-*noir* setting. As neo-*noir* is a well-defined genre, most recognised by its intelligent, hard-boiled, male character as the active and its villainous, seductive femme fatale as the passive, will it allow the femme fatale to be the diegetic storyteller rather than the object of desire? In back seating the detective will it still be identifiable as a neo-*noir* film, or will it become something other? Most importantly, there is the issue of looking, how can we gaze at women in a manner that is not objectifying? It becomes more problematic when we ask how we can gaze at women of the criminal underworld (in the cinema, this a setting in which most women are used as sexual objects or tools of fetishistic pleasure) or how we can look at women during a sexual act without appeasing the male gaze or objectifying the women?

Baise-moi

Virginie Despentes and Coralie Trinh-thi's film *Baise-moi* (2000) uses provocation as an attempt to subvert the male gaze and offer a female gaze. The film (which is an adaptation of Despentes' 1994 novel of the same name) revolves around the lives of two young femme fatales: Nadine, a sex worker and Manu, a part-time porn actress. They meet on the run from their individually committed murders, and they embark on a road trip full of violence, armed robbery, hateful killings, and sexual events that

end in violent acts or death for the men they encounter. The film ends with Manu's death during a robbery gone wrong, and Nadine's arrest.

Due to the film's non-simulated sex and sadistic violence, its initial PG16 rating (which was secured via support from Breillat) was changed to an X-rating after much campaigning from influential bodies such as the National Front.⁴² This change of rating led many to debate issues surrounding censorship. In turn, these debates created an abundance of critical and academic material exemplary of the extent that female filmmakers will go to shift the representation of women in film. Yet in analysing *Baise-Moi* as subversive, one can argue that Desportes' use of excessive hard-core sex and violence perpetuates negative assumptions about women through its representation of femininity and female violence. Additionally, *Baise-moi's* problematic representation of sadomasochistic violence as being empowering for women could potentially lead others to the same conclusion, further reinforcing the representation of women as monstrous, irrational beings that need to be defeated, punished or controlled. *Baise-Moi* presents two femme fatales that, once again, leave the female spectator uncomfortable and confused by their own gender or rejecting it. Throughout the film, Nadine and Manu do not exhibit any redeeming qualities which position them as anti-heroines. More, even though their friendship at times presents them as human, throughout the rest of the film they are observed as psychotic, cold-hearted, irrational killers. More, their narrative alludes to a nondescript goal, making their story lack any substance.

Film scholar Lisa Downing reads *Baise-moi* as an inversion of Ridley Scott's *Thelma and Louise* (1991). Downing argues in 'French Cinema's New 'Sexual Revolution': Postmodern Porn and Troubled Genre' (2004) that Manu and Nadine's perverted, violent road-trip is semi-resultant of Manu's initial rape. Yet, unlike *Thelma and Louise*, Manu's reaction, specifically in contrast to that of her

⁴² The National Front is a socially conservative, nationalist political party in France. This party concerns itself with include economic protectionism, a zero-tolerance approach to law and order issues, and issues in immigration.

drug-addicted friend, seems to be disproportionate to her rape. Therefore, it is not the rape that propels their road-trip but the chance to go on a violent spree against a society in which they feel marginalized.

Downing writes:

The film establishes the understanding that these women cannot be other than the products and constructions of an environment which imagines them. Nadine and Manu are, effectively, the products of a dystopian imaginary milieu in which sex and violence are inevitably wedded together. They become the stylised products of a misogynist culture, in which they take action, an action appropriate to the nightmare of that culture (2004, p. 257).

While Scott's *Thelma and Louise* arguably can be seen as subversive of the male gaze, the female characters are punished at the film's end, when they drive off a cliff; patriarchy is reinstated, and phallic anxiety is quashed. The film stays cautiously tucked inside the boundaries of Hollywood's representations of femininity; any rejection of the mother role proscribed to women will be met with swift punishment. Therefore, *Thelma and Louise* is arguably a challenge to the male gaze only on the surface level, almost giving women a whiff of an active identity within film before removing it by way of the female characters' deaths. Mulvey argues that any threat to patriarchal domination results in Hollywood attempting to contain the female threat via a method of investigation, a demystification of the female character, or death. Similarly, *Baise-moi* shares in this conventional ending, Manu dies, and Nadine is arrested – punished by law.

As mentioned earlier, most of *Baise-moi*'s violent acts have no narrative justification, and even though they seem to be indiscriminate, the absence of reason behind the female character's violence leads again to the assumption that they are that way due to their gender. Manu and Nadine's irrational, illogical and violent behaviour is explained simply by their femininity, which is aligned with madness

and hysteria. Therefore, the long history of representing woman as deviant, as monster, as bad, is perpetuated once again within film, unchallenged and unchanged.

Moreover, I argue that the perpetuation of this feminine representation, within a female directed film, through two active female characters, strengthens the interconnectedness between the concept of femininity and the societal construction of female madness and hysteria. The only way to move away from and disconnect with the societal construction of female madness and hysteria is to utilise Butler's notion of performativity and challenge this performance to create a new performance for women that can then be perpetuated to guide and reimagine femininity.

Another example of *Baise-moi*'s subversive approach is uncovered when analysing the framing of its male characters as violently gesturing mouths or fists. By representing the male character in this distinct manner (which has been adopted from the rape/revenge genre),⁴³ Desportes seeks to reduce the male characters to empty, grotesque, caricatures, visions of phallic aggression. Most of these phallic caricatures, including the inverted types, are punished via execution by the gun-wielding femme fatales. While Desportes uses these stereotypes as an aggressive representational strategy to subvert the male gaze and empower the female characters with a female gaze, her attempt to elevate female gender representation in film to a position of equality does the reverse. Her attempt strengthens the phallically constructed performance of femininity, further reinforcing the negative gender binary distinctions – that is, rational/irrational, active/passive. As mentioned earlier, women objectifying men has neither the power nor the menace of the male gaze. Thus, we will not create a female gaze, an active female character within a film, by objectifying the male characters. Further, *Baise-Moi* feeds into perverse male fantasies that appease the male gaze. Manu and Nadine are presented as empty, monstrous vessels

⁴³ Rape/revenge films are a subgenre of exploitation film which became particularly popular throughout the 1970s. It is a genre that has attracted much critical attention, particularly from feminist film theorists. For a more in-depth reading see Claire Henry's *Revisionist Rape-revenge: Redefining a Film Genre* (2014) and Alexandra Heller-Nicholas' 'The black hole: Remembering 1980s Australian horror' (2014).

with no motive. They objectification of both femme fatales and the films use of soft-core pornography creates the perfect space for men to observe sadomasochistic desires. Manu and Nadine are not seen as people as the camera fixates on their body parts which satisfies the voyeuristic element of the male, heterosexual gaze.

Nadine and Manu are extreme variations of Carol Clover's theory⁴⁴ of the 'final girl'. This is because they are both representations of femininity and masculinity. The basic premise for Clover's theory is that spectator identification in slasher/horror films is unstable and fluid across gender lines. The final girl abandons her usual position of damsel in distress and adopts an active position in the saving of her own life. She no longer needs a man to save her from whatever monstrosity is in tow. Clover argues that it is not until the final girl's climatic confrontation with her aggressor that a shift occurs. The shift is evidenced by her embodiment of masculinity, her phallic appropriation (her use of a weapon, knife or chainsaw), to defeat her opponent. There is a common understanding that a weapon of protection, such as the knife or chainsaw, within a fight or flight moment, is representative of the phallus. Most weapons are vaguely phallic. Any object longer than it is wide is phallic, as weapons penetrate human flesh. Even guns, as they shoot bullets, like ejaculation and swords are held at crotch height and thrust into their opponent. Author Robert Heinlein writes in *The Number of the Beast* (1980): "This [pistol] is a penis substitute. After all, if I could kill at a range of thirty meters with my penis, I wouldn't need to carry this thing around, now would I?" (p.27). Consequently, the power of the final girl shifts into a masculinisation of her femininity for the active power she possesses is obtained through her use of a phallic object. In her final moment, she reverts to her lost oedipal identification, the active role of her past.

I would argue that taking up a weapon when it is needed, when it is life or death, simply

⁴⁴ The term 'final girl' was coined by Carol Clover in *Men, Women, and Chainsaws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film* (1992). Clover argues that horror/slasher films begin by having the spectators sharing the perspective of the killer, but a shift occurs in identification when the spectators are forced to align with the final girl partway through the film.

represents the final girl's desire to live, in her fight or flight moment, not a masculinisation of her femininity. There are a few moments in *The Lonely Drive* where the femme fatales pick up a weapon in self-defence. If they chose not to use it, they would be choosing death. Therefore, their use of a weapon is necessary for survival. The characters they are pitted against, specifically the ones that die, either have a weapon to kill them instantly or the information needed to have someone else eventually name and kill them. As Freud remarked to one of his students, 'sometimes a pipe is just a pipe' (Freud, 1969, p.57). If survival is linked only to masculine identification, then one is left to believe that death is what women must accept for subverting their socially assigned gender roles. Here is where *Baise-moi*'s psychotic femme fatales are exposed as phallic creations, examples of how female characters can be masculinised. It is not a case of fight or flight for these women. It is not a case of life or death, nor is there any excuse for their behaviour. Naked, they hide behind weapons and kill relentlessly for the purpose of appeasing male viewing pleasure.

Nadine and Manu are constantly filmed partially naked, in either violent acts or dancing around hotel rooms. Nadine has one scene where she poses in a bathroom mirror in her underwear with her new gun. It is a weapon that empowers her. Moreover, the weapon reassures the male spectator that her apparent power is that way due to the phallic object. This representation of power for the female, contained by its limits of cinematic fiction, perpetuates typical heterosexual male fantasies, offering no alternative representation or subversive quality. *Baise-moi* does not threaten the phallic authority perpetuated within film, but rather preserves 'the structure of male competence and sexuality' (Clover, 1993, p.51). Clover argues that the slasher/horror/rape-revenge film, alongside films such as *Thelma and Louise*, merely expose 'a mainspring of popular culture' through their 'brutal simplicity' (1993, pg.116). Thus, these films, through the narrative of the female character, simply offer a vision of women enacting revenge on their patriarchal positioning, together with the 'corporately liable' male. It is in this way that the final girl, alongside the femme fatale in neo-*noir* still occupy a passive position, a

male gaze. *The Lonely Drive* does not offer up a narrative that is fuelled by revenge, but a narrative in which the femme fatale's intelligently and rationally fight for their own liberation from their past and present abuse and aims to enable them to lead a decent life.

Bound

Mulvey's 1975 essay states:

However self-conscious and ironic Hollywood managed to be, it always restricted itself to a formal mise-en-scene reflecting the dominant ideological concept of the cinema. The alternative cinema provides a space for a cinema to be born which is radical in both a political and an aesthetic sense and challenges the basic assumptions of the mainstream film (p.441).

Yet despite the emergence of the space which alternative cinema provides, and developments in technology, Hollywood still dominates. Hollywood's skill in manipulating visual pleasures is unmatched as 'mainstream film coded the erotic into the language of the dominant patriarchal order' (Mulvey, 1975, p.440). Therefore, feminist film analyses moved away from not only analysing visual pleasures and began to analyse the erotic pleasure and the central place of the image of woman. These analyses would set out to fight against mainstream's naive pleasure in watching the narrative fiction film. Only by leaving the past behind, or transcending it, can we 'conceive a new language of desire'. Queer theorist Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990) is useful to discuss here. This book, which has become a key text in queer theory, is based around the argument that the heterosexual/homosexual binary has greater deconstructive potential as a dichotomy than the male/female binary. Sedgwick's contention is that sexual orientation has a 'greater potential for

rearrangement, ambiguity, and representational doubleness' (1990, p.2) is reflected in neo-*noir* films such as the Wachowski siblings' *Bound* (1996). *Bound* suggests that the empowerment of the femme fatale, alongside the subversion of the male gaze, is possible by either depriving men of their dominant authority, making a joke of them or punishing them for their actions. The film focuses on Violet (Jennifer Tilly), who longs to escape her relationship with her Mafioso boyfriend Caesar (Joe Pantoliano). She does this by entering a clandestine affair with ex-con Corky (Gina Gershon). The two women hatch a scheme to steal millions in mafia money from Caesar.

At first, it is difficult to read the sexual politics of *Bound* as anything other than pandering to the male gaze. How much of a difference is there between *Bound* (with its abundance of soft-core scenes between Tilly and Gershon) and other films of the lipstick-lesbian⁴⁵ variety, that have been continually produced to appeal to a heterosexual male audience? The representation of their sexual encounters is relevant to their construction as femme fatales. *Bound* is a genuine benchmark for neo-*noir* exploration of the male gaze theory within cinema as it is subversive in many aspects. A neo-*noir* depicting a lesbian relationship is in fact the reverse—a neo-*noir* that is characterised by a substantive, empowering look at two young women trying to negotiate their love and dismiss male authority in its entirety from their lives. Why?

Throughout the film, the male gaze is continually challenged through the portrayal of the sex between the two women. This sex is not apparently intended to be titillating for a heterosexual male viewer; it is constructed through scenes which explore an emotionally binding attraction between the two female characters. There is an almost fetishizing focus on fingers, not only within the sex scenes between Corky and Violet, but in others. In one scene Corky fixes Violet's drain. The scene involves close-up shots of her hands. They are soft shots, lingering as if connecting to a female audience in the

⁴⁵ A lipstick lesbian is an urban term that defines a lesbian who favours a glamorous, traditionally feminine style.

emotional significance of touch; the hand is soft and supple. These moments challenge the male gaze⁴⁶ as they do not use the femme fatale to provide a pleasurable visual experience for male, heterosexual viewer, but in turn for female and queer viewing pleasure. This challenge was not unintended. The Wachowskis worked with feminist commentator Susie Bright⁴⁷ as a sex consultant and choreographed the sex scenes according to her suggestions. The directors shunned the erotic triggers of heterosexual male-oriented soft-core lesbian and bisexual porn in favour of an emphasis on female pleasure. Violet and Corky seem more determined to please one another than to satisfy an audience with objectifying representations of their lovemaking.

There are also several torture scenes involving the removal or the threat of removal of fingers; Caesar threatens to cut off Corky's and Violet's fingers. This scene could be seen as a homophobic threat yet, analysing it through Mulvey's theory of castration anxiety, one can see it as a belief that power is symbolized, like the final girl's, through the phallic. The fingers are deemed a lesbian's phallus, equal to the penis, therefore the loss of her fingers signals a loss of her phallic empowerment. This naivety is the crack through which the male gaze is observed; that like the weapon a woman wields, the power is found within a phallic image. It is within this moment that the close-up of Corky's supple hand, symbolic of touch, of sensuality, loses its power. No longer are the hands suggestive of feminine softness; they have become a symbol of phallic empowerment.⁴⁸

Bound uses its queer coupling to dismantle sexual binaries. The film further deconstructs sexual binaries via interpretation of feminist and lesbian discourse of sameness by suggesting that women can trust one another because they are alike. But, despite Corky and Violet's gendered sameness, there is still the possibility that Violet is using Corky to free her from her confined life and once she is free,

⁴⁶ Regardless of the filmmakers' intentions, these scenes can still appease a male gaze.

⁴⁷ Susannah 'Susie' Bright (1996) (who is known in the film industry as 'Susie Sexpert') has written extensively about issues surrounding sexual politics and sexuality. See her book *The Best American Erotica* (1996).

⁴⁸ In *Bodies That Matter* (1999), Butler devotes an entire section to the 'lesbian phallus' (p.236).

she will double-cross her. This possibility is apparent and weighs heavily on the narrative. This notion further enforces the equation that women and sex ultimately equal death. Barbara Creed and Katherine Farrimond make similar points. Creed (1993, p.124) claims that by situating female characters in such positions, that a woman's sexual interests are, by nature, unstable and can not to be trusted. Farrimond argues that the femme fatale's bisexuality serves to strengthen her discursive danger. The femme fatale chooses her partner purely on who can give her or will work to get her where or what she wants (2012, p.141).

The Lonely Drive, much like *Bound*, approaches sex scenes as an exploration of the emotional nature of Annemette and Laroux's attraction toward each other. Their sensual sex scene is not intended to be titillating for a heterosexual male viewer. It explores their desire for one another and focuses more on feeling than seeing. It is in the soft caress of her lower back and over her hip, between her thighs and kisses, hard and soft to her neck. Laroux does not grab at her buttocks, or quickly take her pants off to get something inside of her. Laroux wants to rediscover her body. There is no focus on fingers, but a focus on touch, a slight grip of Annemette's skin to show her longing and rapture at touching her. We look at and explore their bodies not as an object of desire but a person of desire. It is in this discovery we see their connection or re-connection to each other. In contrast to their sex is the sex between Chrystal and Laroux, which is fast, uncaring and unfulfilling. It leaves the spectator with feeling Laroux's emptiness. The sex between Annemette and Ray, even though a fleeting scene, is a scene in which Annemette uses her body to get something she needs, not something she wants.

RAY CASTENELLO'S (35) large hands fix Annemette to a desk. One presses against the back of her neck and the other, wearing a solid gold ring in the shape of an eagle, rests on her upper back. We see his mouth, teeth gritted together hard and perspiration on his top lip. We hear his laboured breathing and heavy grunts.

Tears roll out her large green eyes; one bearing a fresh bruise. A trail of dried blood leads from her nose to her upper lip. She is silent.

The table shudders with each of his thrusts into her. Her gaze is fixed on a spot.

ANNEMETTE POV

Chump watches through the slightly ajar office doors, his shoulders hunched up tight as he jerks himself off.

Annemette needs money to support herself and her father. Ray is a quick way to get that. This scene does not explore Annemette as bisexual, nor does it show her even faking that she is enjoying the coupling. Her silence depicts her disgust, and her tears illustrate her embarrassment. She disconnects from what is happening to her by observing Chump. Thus, we observe Chump masturbating. The male gaze is once again disrupted from being appealed to being observed; the spectators uncomfortably watching the outcome from its perverse fantasies. Therefore, the sex in *The Lonely Drive* seeks to challenge the insinuation that ‘women’s sexual interests are, by nature, ambivalent and not to be trusted ... [that] she chooses her partner based purely on who will get her what she wants, making everyone a potential victim’ (Lindop, 2015, p.48). Further, it seeks to challenge and subvert the presentation of the femme fatale (which in turn subverts patriarchal representations of the female gender identity) as an emotionless other that preys on men and women – a psychotic, hysterical monster that employs no rational thought. Instead, *The Lonely Drive* aims to offer an alternative representation of the femme fatale, one that presents an active, emotional, strong and rational woman, who can act violently and use her body as a tool to survive, without becoming an object.

Gone Girl

David Fincher’s film *Gone Girl* (2014) (which is based on Gillian Flynn’s 2012 novel of the same name) follows the marriage of a psychopath, Amy, and her male counterpart, a misogynist, Nick. Amy and Nick have, what seems, the perfect marriage until the day she goes missing. Quickly the plot unravels, and we find that Amy has set up her cheating husband for her murder. This revenge pits the two

manipulative characters against each other as they vie for sympathy from those close to them in order to survive. As such, *Gone Girl* had many critics arguing against Flynn's representation of the feminine, asserting that it not only strengthens negative characteristics that have been prescribed to the female gender identity, but that it is born out of pure misogynistic intent. One blogger, in reply to critic Robert Palmer's article 'Gone Girl and the Specter of Feminism' (2012), argues that *Gone Girl*'s Amy 'is the crystallisation of a thousand misogynist myths and fears about female behaviour. If we strapped a bunch of men's rights advocates to beds and downloaded their nightmares, I don't think we'd come up with stuff half as ridiculous as this plot'.

I argue that while the film still appears to privilege the male gaze, it has subversive qualities that have been underexplored. While a conniving, manipulative, murderous woman like Amy can be regarded as a negative representation of femininity, Flynn and Fincher have attempted to create a female character more complex and intricate than that usually found within neo-*noir*. Although Amy is a dangerous and manipulative sociopath, who has no hesitation about lying or murdering, she is still smarter and stronger than her male counterpart.

Where the classic femme fatale used her ability to-be-looked-at, her visual appeal, and her visual appeal only, to get what she wanted, Amy uses her intelligence, wit, sexuality, and visual appeal. Unlike the femme fatale in classic noir cinema, Amy does not die and does not return to domesticity to alleviate patriarchal anxiety. Moreover, Flynn analyses and explains Amy's circumstances behind her violent, sociopathic behaviour; this explanation is not offered to the femme fatales in previous neo-*noir* films. For Amy, the suffocating pressure felt by adhering to the social expectations offered her proscribed place within patriarchy or possibly her rejection and hatred of what Flynn terms the 'cool girl' seek to explain her decisions. Amy exposes Flynn's feminist perspective in *Gone Girl* through a scene with a voice-over:

He loved a girl who doesn't exist. A girl I was pretending to be. The Cool Girl. Men always use that as the defining compliment, right? She's a cool girl. Being Cool Girl means I am a hot, brilliant, funny woman who adores football, poker and dirty jokes, who plays videogames and chugs beer loves threesomes and anal sex and jams chilidogs into my mouth like I'm hosting the world's biggest culinary gang-bang-while remaining a size 2, because cool girls are above all hot. Hot and understanding. Cool girls never get angry at their men, they only smile in a chagrined, loving manner. Go ahead! Shit on me, I don't mind, I'm the cool girl. I waited patiently-years-for the pendulum to swing the other way, for men to start reading Jane Austen, organize scrapbook parties and make out with each other while we leer. And then we'd say, yeah, he's a cool guy. Instead, women across the nation colluded in our degradation! Pretty soon every girl was Cool Girl, and if you weren't, then there was something wrong with you. But it's tempting, to be Cool Girl.

In an interview with *The Guardian* (2013),⁴⁹ author Oliver Burkeman asked Flynn to elucidate how *Gone Girl* cannot be regarded misogynistic and how she feels about the accusations of misogyny that it received from some critics. Flynn explained her idea of feminism as 'the ability to have women who are bad characters ... the one thing that really frustrates me is this idea that women are innately good' (2013). Flynn says:

I've grown quite weary of the spunky heroines, brave rape victims, soul-searching fashionistas that stock so many books. I particularly mourn the lack of female villains — good, potent female villains. Not ill-tempered women who scheme about landing good men and better shoes (as if we had nothing more interesting to war over), not chilly WASP

mothers (emotionally distant isn't necessarily evil), not soapy vixens (merely bitchy doesn't qualify either). I'm talking violent, wicked women. Scary women. Don't tell me you don't know some. The point is women have spent so many years girl-powering ourselves — to the point of almost parodic encouragement — we've left no room to acknowledge our dark side. Dark sides are important (2014).⁵⁰

Like Flynn, I too grew tired of encountering these women on screen. I craved a female character that was intelligent, rational, feminine, and villainous in a violent way. I wanted to explore a femme fatale (as to me, is the most intriguing) that is recognised as feminine and not as other, as masculinised or monstrous, and I wanted her to survive at the film's end. I wanted, for once, to be able to really observe the femme fatale, in her neo-*noir* setting and live her experience. What made her the way she was? Why does she do the things she does? I wanted to give her motive, a backstory and allow her the power to overcome the obstacles without a male's help, whether using violence or not, to get herself to where she wanted or needed to be.

Flynn moves on to address accusations of her being an anti-feminist by questioning the very nature of feminism, asking:

Is it really only girl power ... and be the best you can be? For me, it's also the ability to have women who are bad characters ... the one thing that really frustrates me is this idea that women are innately good, innately nurturing. In literature, they can be dismissably bad – trampy, vampy, bitchy types – but there's still a big push back against the idea that women can be just pragmatically evil, bad and selfish ... I don't write psycho bitches. The psycho bitch is just crazy – she has no motive, and so she's a dismissible person because of her

⁵⁰ In her blog 'I Was Not a Nice Little Girl' (2014) Flynn explains her choice of female character for her readers.

psycho-bitchiness (2014).⁵¹

This thesis argues that to judge the portrayal of a violent woman and her actions as misogynistic or constitutive of contempt is problematic. There needs to be a visible line drawn between misogyny and stories about misogyny, and similarly between gendered hatred and merely unpleasant characters. There needs to be a change in the way that unlikeable characters are analysed, a removal of their gendered position as a stand from which to solely judge their actions.

The above film analyses were necessary in exploring previous representations of the femme fatale in neo-*noir* and the tactics they employed to subvert the male gaze. This enabled me to determine which tactics to use or avoid in my own script, and thus support my (re)presentation of neo-*noir*'s femme fatale, subversion of the male gaze and exploration of the possibility of a female gaze. As explained earlier, my thesis is specifically situated within the neo-*noir* genre as its femme fatales are violent, dangerous, beautiful, manipulative, and shocking in their behaviour. They are (as Flynn describes) 'psycho bitches'. They generally have no back story, no reasoning behind their violent acts, and nothing to justify their psychotic behaviour, aside from their gender. *The Lonely Drive* affords the femme fatale a motive behind her behaviour that is not gendered lunacy. This representation depicts her as both rational and capable of reasoning to provide new representations for female gender identification and femininity within neo-*noir*. It will explore the relationship between the women – how they look at each other, how the look itself is non-objectifying but compassionate. It will reject the usual submissive role offered its predecessors whose body language, whether at the start or by a film's end, turns meek, passive – their active stance quashed or subdued by the male hero. It will reject the notion that in times of stress, the female will crumble into a submissive mess and need to be saved by

⁵¹ For further information on the contentious nature of 'positive images of women in film' see Becker et al.'s essay 'Lesbians in Film' (1981).

a man or embrace hysteria and go on a violently irrational killing spree. Punishment will be given to those who deserve it, not by gender. The camera will frame the woman in a way that aligns the spectator with the femme fatale's gaze, a female gaze, and will deny her role its usual ability to be sexually objectified. Once again, gender division is a consequence of the binary system that governs us.

The Lonely Drive disrupts the gender binary system. The woman will not sit back and look pretty, waiting to be ravished or saved or killed or fought over, nor turn into a hysterical murderer as a result of being rejected or hurt. The man will not be the active narrative, the hero, nor the saviour. To undermine constricting social normalities, they need to be challenged. To mount this challenge, we need to explore alternatives for gender representation and expression. These alternatives then need to be viewed on a large scale (why mainstream film is most suitable for this project) for others to analyse, break down and continue to maintain. In turn, challenging the gender binary system and its social expectation and taboo in film creates a space for us to produce new representations of femininity for female gender identification but has the potential to allow us, eventually, to explore the possibility of identifying and defining the key elements to recognise a singular female gaze.

The following chapter directly reflects on what I was able to achieve in subverting the male gaze and (re)presenting the femme fatale within the confines of the neo-*noir* genre. More, what was able to be achieved within the limitations of script writing.

CHAPTER THREE

The aim of this chapter is to explore the ways in which *The Lonely Drive* subverts the male gaze and creates a space in which to consider the possibility of a female gaze within neo-*noir*. Neo-*noir* allows for the portrayal of powerful yet problematic female characters, such as Tramell in *Basic Instinct*. She is active yet presented in a way that presents her as irrational, illogical, psychotic, and narcissistic. Thus, she has no motive for her behaviour, and it is suggested that she behaves this way because of her gender. Yet, as problematic as the femme fatale of neo-*noir* is, their shift in representation from classic to the contemporary suggests that through (re)writing her powerful figure we can begin to identify and define alternative ways of looking other than the oppressive male gaze. This encourages me to believe that via the continual (re)presentation of femininity in mainstream cinema, and through strong female characters such as the femme fatale, we can begin to explore if and how a singular female gaze could be identified.

This chapter also explores the limitations of this research, for beneath the structure of the neo-*noir* genre lie the gender-driven tensions that shape the whole of the genre's history. The active male and the passive female, the symbol and the object, its narrative form and patriarchal historical force, the use of character traits governed by the gender binary to define the characters such as rational/irrational and their stereotypical representations. Then there are the limitations of scriptwriting with its rigid structure and inability to explain what is happening beyond the action of the scene.

GRANTING THE FEMME FATALE, A FEMALE GAZE

In their essay 'The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception' (1944), Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno argue:

Consumers are made to remain what they are: consumers. That is why the culture industry is not the art of the consumer but rather the projection of the will of those in control onto their victims. The automatic self-reproduction of the status quo in its established forms is itself an expression of domination (p.75).

Similarly, as mentioned, *neo-noir* presents its spectators with the same product, a reproduction of the status quo; the male gaze. This perpetuation of the male gaze has led it to become the most predominant way of looking in film. Journalist, Marcy Cooks writes:

The male gaze was first used to describe how the audience for a movie is required to observe from the perspective of a heterosexual male; in almost all movies women exist for men to enjoy, and the message is you too could have this. I say ‘this’ because what the male gaze does is reduce the woman down to an object for the man. It’s since expanded beyond movies to encompass all media, it is in just about everything we watch, read or play. We are told over and over in many different ways that the princess is in another castle. In reality the majority of the audience are not heterosexual males, and the all-pervasive male gaze is as relevant to modern society as the Penny Farthing bicycle. (2015)

It is almost an expectation held by the spectator that they will be aligned with a male perspective, with a male gaze, but even when we exchange this and present an active female, elements of the male gaze are still observed. An example of this is Quentin Tarantino’s femme fatale in *Kill Bill* (2003). Beatrix Kiddo (Uma Thurman) is throughout the whole film identified as ‘The Bride’. She is defined by being married to a man, from her name to the revenge she undertakes. Yes, Beatrix drives the narrative, but she is empty, cold, a relentless killer who is sexually objectified through the way she

is styled. Consequently, how the gender representation is presented in this film through its active femme fatale, confuses the female spectator. On one hand, she is offered a pleasure, enjoying the freedom of her action and control over the diegesis, but on the other hand there is still the possibility that her pleasure in active identification may be broken as she becomes aware that she is still an object of the male gaze. In shots the camera lingers on Beatrix, her breasts, her buttocks, and her long legs in tight spandex outfits. As a result, whilst neo-*noir* films such as *Kill Bill* offer the female spectator an active space to occupy through their masculine tactics (presenting her as active, overtly violent), she is still presented as irrational, psychotic, and hysterical. Moreover, the way the gaze is constructed implies that it is directed for the purpose of generating male, heterosexual viewing pleasure. Thus, the female spectator is confused and torn between her femininity and a masculinised femininity, as it is insinuated that the only active space a femme fatale can occupy is one that is masculinised and/or sexually objectified.

Fatal Attraction's (1987) director, Adrian Lyne, states:

[Women] are sort of pretending or trying to be men, sort of overcompensating for not being men ... One hears feminists talk, and the past twenty years one hears women talk about fucking men rather than being fucked, to be crass about it. It is kind of unattractive, however liberated and emancipated it is. It kind of fights the woman as wife, as child bearer. You might have a career and success, but you are not fulfilled as women (Faludi, 1992, p.149).

Here, Lyne identifies the societal fears and desires found within our unconscious patriarchal structures. Similarly, within neo-*noir*, this representation serves as a warning to women that they will be punished if they stray from their traditional roles – whether this punishment is delivered by death or jail. Then there are the women who are not punished, who get away with the crime, yet they are

presented as evil, monstrous, barren and mentally ill.

It is the representation of the institution of family, which in so many films serve as the mechanism whereby desire is fulfilled, or at least ideological equilibrium established, that in *film noir* serves as a vehicle for the expression of frustration. On the thematic level, one of the defining characteristics of *film noir* is to be found in its treatment of the family and family relations (Harvey, 1978, p.24).

Hence the femme fatale is seen as barren, unfulfilled, and mentally ill due to her inability to adapt to the patriarchal role suggested for women, motherhood. The warnings found within neo-*noir* mainly concern women and the family; that is, the women who transgress the boundaries of traditional family life meet with death, deserve the most extreme punishment, or are presented as not human, but as objects. Generally, the men who fall victim to these women's sexual charms meet a parallel demise. According to Blaser: 'Characters that resist or threaten the traditional family become trapped in the *noir* world, which is abnormal, dark, dangerous, and incompatible with traditional family values' (1994, p.9). The women in neo-*noir* found within the traditional family setting are representational of patriarchy and they perform accordingly the ideals or models of correct behaviour, such as passivity, that perpetuate the heterosexual male gaze.

One of the ways in which *The Lonely Drive* subverts the male gaze is its questioning of the heterosexuality that the male gaze proscribes. Laroux and Annemette are lesbian. The film explores their relationship and in doing so, offers an alternative role for the femme fatale to play. By removing the usually heterosexual/bisexual narrative that a neo-*noir* narrative usually employs, we begin to create a femme fatale that presents a sexuality that is not male gaze-orientated. More, it portrays a queer relationship as stable and unwavering which, as mentioned, is uncommon in neo-*noir*. Annemette and

Laroux are not illusive in what they desire, nor do they use their bodies as tools to get them to their wanted outcome. Spectators will observe their love and desire via their own gaze. The absence of the male gaze is noticed during their scenes of lovemaking or self-exposure as their exposed bodies are alluded to, not revealed to the spectating audience merely to let them see. For example, when Annemette is stripping, she will not be exposed on screen; instead, spectators will watch Chump watching. Thus, the spectator knows what is happening; they are just not exposed to the spectacle of her body.

Moreover, even though Annemette and Laroux are both beautiful women, the film will not linger on their bodies in ways that would appease the male, heterosexual gaze. Most notably, the sex scene that the film builds up to between Annemette and Laroux will not be seen. Instead, spectators will get to see the build-up to it, which focuses on their touch, them forgiving one another, and finally allowing each other to physically feel the other, but the rest is alluded to, rather than offering a scene of soft-core pornography. Through their unwavering love for one another, alongside the challenges they overcome together, which at times are for no other gain than to be there for each other, they are seen as sexually stable. This assigns the femme fatale with a different autonomy; she is no longer a sexual object or unable to establish a stable sexual identity, instead she is empowered by her stability, which is her choice. More, being in control of her desires, her sexual identification, gives her power over the narrative and limits her objectification. Her usual punishment for transgressing her traditional family role is also challenged here as both femme fatales not only survive but achieve what they set out to achieve.

Neo-*noir* follows the same blueprint of rewarding the good women and punishing the bad women that mainstream cinema prescribes. Blaser writes:

The rewards and punishments for women (and men) in *film noir* are especially serious;

characters who willingly play their proper roles tend to survive beyond the end of the film, while characters who resist playing these roles often die violently or, less commonly, go to jail. (1994, p.11).

Irregularly, these films deliver a happy ending where a family or a relationship which was under threat or was torn apart during the course of the film is returned to a state of togetherness (quick example being *Fatal Attraction*, where the femme fatale is killed, and her lover's family returns to normal). *The Lonely Drive*, although it has a subjectively happy ending, shifts away from the classic happy ending of the traditional family being restored – Annemette and Laroux are not a traditional family unit. Toward the script's end we believe that Laroux is dead and Annemette is finally free. But, in the final scene, when Annemette sends her father his monthly amount of cash, we see a polaroid she has sent him. In that snapshot, we see Annemette's and what could only be presumed to be Laroux's feet buried in sand at a beach. They are both free and happy. Even Chrystal, a party girl who is highly promiscuous and continually engages in extramarital relations, is not punished for her actions. Instead, she is offered a choice. She has the briefcase full of drugs, drugs that she could sell for a lot of money, but instead she leaves it in the dust and heads towards home on foot. Her intelligence and rationality prevail. Thus, aligning the performance of femininity with the kind of positive character traits often only offered the male character one way in which *The Lonely Drive* subverts the male gaze. This frees the femme fatale of her usual punishment that would appease the male gaze and posits a new performance of femininity that has the potential to allow female spectators to positively align with the violent women. I aim to create a space in which the female spectator can experience a violent female's narrative in a neo-*noir* setting that by the closing credits still sees them as comfortable within their own skin.

Claire Johnston argues in her essay 'Double Indemnity' (1980) that *film noir* strengthens the male-dominated traditional family by annihilating female characters who threaten the phallically

established order. Johnston argues that *film noir* films like *Double Indemnity* (1944) frequently portray wrongdoings against the traditional family that involve ‘a discontented wife who murders her husband’ (1980, p.100). But rather than casting doubt on the ‘purity’ of the traditional family, these female transgressors exist only to be beaten down, punished and eventually destroyed. This model is reiterated throughout films such as *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (1945), *Out of the Past* (1947), *The Lady from Shanghai* (1948), and *Dead Reckoning* (1947). The plot of these films echoes the same crime; a wife achieves independence through murder yet inevitably dies violently or is punished so severely one would rather die. This conventional plot exposes a film that supports patriarchy and the traditional family. Therefore, classic *film noir* continually provided an affirmation of the patriarchal gender relations and warned people who intended to disturb or oppose it:

Far from opening up social contradictions, the genre as a whole . . . performs a profoundly confirmatory function for the reader, both revealing and simultaneously eliminating the problematic aspects of social reality by the assertion of the unproblematic nature of the Law (Johnston, 1980, p.100).

Place (1978) agrees that through the defamation or destruction of the independent woman, classic *film noir*, creates a moral lesson to the viewing audience, moreover to the male characters who fall under her immoral spell. Place writes: ‘The ideological operation of the myth (the absolute necessity of controlling the strong, sexual woman) is thus achieved by first demonstrating her dangerous power and its frightening results, then destroying it’ (1978, p.45).

Therefore, the perspective of classic *film noir* puts an emphasis on the peril that an independent woman could bring to a man by luring him out of the safety net of his traditional family, even if only temporarily. This emphasis on the peril of the independent woman followed on to define the femme

fatale of neo-noir. Dually, women in classic *film noir* and neo-noir demonstrate their dominance and independence through sexual acts or by using their bodies to achieve their goals; their sexuality a tool to manipulate men. They hold onto this sexuality rather than submitting it to the moral framework of the traditional family and the control of a husband. This is the essence of their threat, jeopardising the family relationships around them by offering a dangerous and unknown alternative to the traditional family. It is through this perception that we start to uncover the message for spectators, that the sexually independent woman will be punished and when she is, patriarchy will be restored. Consequently, it is the femme fatale's lack of family that secures the notion that her gendered position is responsible for her irrationality, violence, and promiscuity, and ultimately it will lead to her demise.

Again, Annemette and Laroux, are both sexually independent women and do not serve to maintain patriarchy or traditional heterosexuality. Their backstory is not absent, nor are their family relations. It is quite the opposite. Annemette and Laroux are fully explored. Their backstory, from Laroux's mother being beaten to death by a man to Annemette's gambling father in a nursing home, missing his deceased wife, is divulged to indicate their motives and behaviour. Yet, Laroux is not portrayed as irrational or excessively violent, even given her horrific backstory. Neither are vengeful women; rather, they are women who seek to escape oppression and, by the end, want nothing more than to stay together. Hence, they are independent, but they are not lacking family. Annemette loves her father and Laroux loved her mother. In turn, this subverts the notion that the femme fatale is violent due to her lack of family or, most importantly, her gender and instead explores their experiences as the reason behind the way they act and who they are.

The establishment of a singular female gaze would, in turn, mean a dismissal or rejection of the male gaze, and therefore, a rejection of patriarchy and the traditional family. This fear is revealed in the neo-noir thriller *Fatal Attraction*, which concludes with the femme fatale, Alex, being killed. Alex begins as a professional success, that success then, at the hands of the male character Nick is turned

in the meaning of her defeat. The film's underlying message to its spectators is that to be unmarried or to not have any children is an ailment from which the woman slowly becomes hysterical, violent, insane, and neurotic. *The Lonely Drive* delivers a different message. As mentioned, the script concludes with Annemette's father receiving a letter with money and a picture of two women's feet in the sand at a sunny beach. This suggests their happiness, their freedom, and their achievement. My script's underlying message to its readers is that happiness is not the same for all. Happiness, for some, will not simply come from choosing the traditional family, and it will not keep them sane. More, that being queer will not make them insane. Yet, being with the person they love, whether male or female, ultimately creates a place of happiness.

Male anxieties are greatly reduced by portraying Alex's lack of family as the film's problem. This kind of sexist assumption is what this thesis and creative component seeks to avoid. By rationalising motivations of female violence, while providing an exploration of the position she is in and her life experiences – family life, class – we can begin to move away from the negative stereotypes of femininity enforced on women by the male gaze. By providing neo-*noir's* femme fatale with substantial background information, a history as to where she has come from, instead of her normal absent family backstory, we can begin to steer the femme fatale away from the view that she is the way she is because of her gender, not her past.

Niels Arden Oplev's film *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* (2009), centres on Elizabeth Salander, a femme fatale who is at first presented as an independent and intelligent woman. However, like Alex in *Fatal Attraction*, Salander is continually punished for her independence and un-feminine behaviour. Salander shifts from her initial empowered position to a position that satisfies the male gaze via Arden depicting male, heterosexual sadomasochistic fantasies. These fantasies associate female independence with danger. This occurs as a result of the repetitive nature of Salander's mental, physical and sexual abuse at the hands of male characters; she is violently mugged, then shortly after she is bound, raped

and beaten. Salander combats these attacks via assimilating with aggression, a trait that is considered male.

Filmmaker Faye Carr-Wilson has argued that ‘in order to have a strong central female character she must assimilate the male traits of her superior male characters; her feminine traits are considered weak and impractical’ (2014). But why should aggression and violence be a point of departure from femininity? How can an act of aggression, an act of revenge, as the result of a heinous violent act, be considered a masculinisation of the female character? Does Salander have to take on her aggressors with a meek manner and let them do with her as they please, even if it means her death, in order to be empowered? Thus, we must continue to challenge the gender binary, as it is no longer relevant and needs to be dismantled. Dolf Zillmann and Rhonda Gibson argue in their essay ‘Evolution of the Horror Genre’ (1996) that female characters who portrayed traditionally feminine traits such as distress, fear and anxiety, are far more favourable than the few who display no signs of distress. In fact, throughout my own research I have received feedback during workshops that suggests my femme fatales need to exhibit more fear, empathy, and distress. Patriarchal thought perceives women as non-violent, non-aggressive, fearful, and empathetic even in situations that could result in death. Genres like neo-*noir* perpetuate this representation and feminise their strong femme fatales by depicting them in psychotic states or in constant distress. Yet, these films actually explore the male fascination with controlling rebellious women, which is ‘considered part of human desire to observe violence and ensure their capability to manage their fear and to control the mayhem’ (Zillmann, 1996, p.30).

The violence performed by *The Lonely Drive*’s femme fatales, while at times severe, is necessary. By necessary violence, I mean, violence that is necessary to avoid death. This is observed when Annemette shoots Walt. She aims to rob him, at gunpoint. While asking him to give her the money, Walt opens his car door to hit her back, but in doing so Annemette loses her footing and falls, causing her to fire a round. This round kills Walt. She stares at Walt, wide-eyed, fearful of what has just

occurred, when the Goon, who was in the car next to Walt, rounds the bonnet to kill her. She snaps out of her daze in time to point her gun at the Goon, she closes her eyes and shoots. This scene portrays Annemette's character in-depth. It shows that she does not want to kill, but she will if forced to. Once again, this presents her character and the violence she performs as rational, not hysterical, or psychotic. Moreover, neither of the femme fatales are in psychotic states, yet we can see that their emotional journey has its usual ups and downs. Their states wavering under the stress of their present condition – which is not female, but human. They are not simply assimilated with aggression and violence to empower them, even though at times they tap into an angered state, they also tap into empathy, sympathy, fear, love, resentment, rage, bitterness, and bravery. Their narrative does not depict the usual femme fatale who is motivated by psychotic revenge or sadistic intent, and conclusively punished or controlled for it, therefore, the male fascination with controlling rebellious women to quash their anxiety of female power is not met.

A quite different representation of female violence is explored in Tarantino's *Kill Bill* as Beatrix Kiddo 'represents defamiliarisation and affirmation through women's entitlement to violence through the visualisation of excessive vengeance' (Minowa, Maclaran, and Stevens, 2014, p.215). Tarantino's epic representation of this entitled female-on-female violence is stylised though 'brutal decapitation, ruthless mutilation of body parts, and spurts of streamlining blood' (2014, p.216). Yuko Minowa, Pauline Maclaran, and Lorna Stevens argue that:

The gender-subversive context of violent vengeance parodies the gender inversion with sprinkles of feminine moments such as female assassins' desire for domesticity and motherhood. An androgynous nouvelle femme (and enfant terrible), the Bride is portrayed having both masculine and feminine qualities, which manifests in her masculine consumption and feminine non-consumption, like *Thelma and Louise* [1991] 'who cross over

the line' (Minowa et al, 2014, p.216).

Therefore, while Tarantino's film questions and undermines the patriarchal institution of gender by presenting strong female characters, it is done by aligning them with ruthless, borderline psychotic, violence. Moreover, Tarantino's femme fatales are accordingly styled to appease the male gaze. The femme fatale's attire is never appropriate in the sense that it is useful to achieve the desired outcome. In most scenes the greatest exposure of its femme fatales or female characters is what is aimed for – a short skirt, high heels, unzipped jackets to expose more breast, skin-tight body suits that hide nothing, alongside excessive make-up. Therefore, Tarantino's glamorised representation of female violence is semi-gender subversive, as it aims to connect femininity with violence and veer away from patriarchy's rigid gender binaries. Yet, the violent performative acts shown by the femme fatale are still male gaze-orientated as her violence is hysterical, psychotic, and excessive in nature. Hence, Tarantino's representation of the femme fatale is male gaze orientated via the erotically stylised bodies of the femme fatales and the excessive, irrational, violence. This representation offers the male audience the chance to, once again, observe two women battle partially naked as ferocious animals.⁵² That, in turn, ensures men's capability to manage and control their fear and mayhem regarding female sexuality and empowerment as it is still coded for their viewing pleasure. Their anxiety is suppressed by the femme fatale's irrationality and sexually objectified body.

Further, the violence exhibited by Beatrix Kiddo is retributive and Minowa argues is 'vindicated for a righteous reason' (2014, p.216). This has led these representations to:

...appeal to women who desire to explosively experience emotional purging and

⁵² Lisa Tickner argues in 'Body Politics' (1998) that men often paint women as animal 'without any interesting complications of the senses' (p.236).

empowerment. The attraction of violent spectacle may result from the viewer's identification with the successful aggressor and a state of euphoria the viewer experiences by observing the sufferings of hateful victims (Minowa, 2014, p.216).

Moreover, this representation of women as violent has led to women embracing the female agency and power that these types of films bring about. Janice Loreck writes 'violent women's subversive power also explains their appearance in some films: thematically and aesthetically ambitious works that challenge established film norms. Violent women provide a means of pushing the boundaries' (2017). Yet, femme fatales only achieve this agency through psychotic, irrational acts of revenge or by having their bodies glamorised, sexualised, and objectified while performing these acts. Therefore, their acts of violence are almost mechanical, aligning the violent woman, once again, with the representation as an emotionless predator, 'desensitized and disinhibited' (Minowa, 2014, p.216). Consequently:

In seeming celebration of female empowerment as aspirational referents, violent women are constructed and circulated to signify a crisis of artificially masculinised, benign female predators and a superficial marker of power transformation in an intricate web of gendered tropes. The violent women in *Kill Bill* are the commodification of men's misogynistic jeer, postfeminist superficiality, postmodern spectacle, and anxieties constructed with artificially empowered women (Minowa, 2014, p.217).

Minowa's idea of artificially empowered women with attire 'evocative of fetish objects and fantasy that stir erotic desire in the male audience' (2014, p.219) perfectly depicts the femme fatales of neo-*noir*. *Film noir*, through its shift from classic to neo-*noir*, has always perpetuated artificially strong femme

fatales to play out male fascination with violent women, whether it be to imagine having sexual relations with a violent woman or to grasp and come to terms with their own eroticised violence or sadomasochism. Whichever of the offered paths of fascination is chosen, the femme fatales of neo-*noir*, equipped with their stylised bodies and psychotic violence, are still stagnant in their objectified positions, offered for male viewing pleasure and observed through a male gaze.

It is necessary to problematize the contemporary femme fatale in order to shift neo-*noir*, into what should have been an automatic move, to incorporate and include feminist politics as other genres have done. Furthermore, it is necessary for us to continue to explore female experience in mainstream film, to develop conceptualisations of a female gaze in order to one day establish elements in which one could identify a singular female gaze. Feminist film scholars initially identified the male gaze as a by-product of patriarchy as they explored the way that male film directors represent, perceive, and look at women. That identification led to its institutionalisation.

Moreover, a genre such as neo-*noir* is deeply invested in its femme fatale's archetypal conventions. Therefore, shifting or changing the archetype, even when using easily identified *film noir* visuals (lighting, close ups, dark shady places, underworlds and dealing with the darker sides of humanity) is problematic. Critics could argue that a film that does so is not a work of neo-*noir*, that the genres title may no longer be appropriate. Therefore, are the elements of a *film noir* setting enough to construct a neo-*noir* film?

A successful neo-*noir* requires a number of elements, including a chorus of vibrant characters, life or death stakes, leaving the viewer on the edge of their seat, and a compelling, well-paced plot. It also needs an evocative setting that can imbue the viewer with a sense of unease. The tone and atmosphere need to be dark, shady, gritty, and raw. Yet, the most important elements of a *noir* are its femme fatale and hard-boiled detective. Both, if not all factors, *The Lonely Drive* delivers. The only factor that *The Lonely Drive* seeks to avoid is the representation of the femme fatale as monstrous,

illogical, and psychotic or to objectify and punish them for male viewing pleasure.

Most of the male characters in *The Lonely Drive* are represented in ways that are unlikeable. They are sleazy, cocky and chauvinistic characters who only care about money or sex. This allows spectators to observe a reverse in gender positioning in neo-noir – a look at the male character in the position that is generally depicted by the femme fatale. This narrative does not explore how or why the men came to be the way they are – leaving their negative traits to be assumed as due to their gender. This is a stark comparison to neo-*noir* films as these films encourage the spectator to identify purely with the male character, to see the world, to see the women, through his eyes. I have chosen to present the male characters this way as a comparison is essential in order to see the position that the criminal, irrational and psychotic femme fatale usually takes. Yet, while there are ‘unlikeable’ male characters, they are contrasted by Grote, the hard-boiled detective looking for Annemette and Laroux. Even though he is rough and aggressive, he is also compassionate and sympathetic when it is rational to be so. As mentioned earlier, a female gaze will not be achieved by taking up the tools that the male gaze has used to objectify women and using them on men. It will be achieved through the (re)writing and (re)presentation of the female character, the female experience, and the performance of femininity. It is hoped that through the (re)writing of female experience and femininity, that we are finally able to identify the key elements that theoretically frame a singular female gaze. I acknowledge that conceptualising even an individual female gaze will be problematic as it is inventing something that does not yet exist. Yet, as feminism recognised, identified, and institutionalised the concept of the male gaze, is it not possible that feminism could identify, facilitate a concept, and establish the key elements of a singular female gaze?

This thesis and creative component aim to be part of that facilitation, to (re)present the femme fatale with a new autonomy, with a femininity that is performed through an exploration of female experience. Moreover, this thesis and creative component aims to challenge the negative gender traits

associated with femininity and represent the femme fatale of neo-*noir*. The creative component, *The Lonely Drive*, will rationalise the motivations behind the femme fatale's violent acts through an exploration of her reality. More, it will avoid the punishment patriarchy proscribes femme fatales who perform 'un-feminine' violent transgressions or sexual deviations. By avoiding this punishment, we can seek to avoid reproducing the fate that any female character who seeks to step into a position of authority or autonomy will meet punishment or death at the hands of her male counterpart.

Samantha Lindop argues that the femme fatale of neo-*noir* 'functions as a conduit for emergent discourses that serve to undermine the gains of feminism' (2015, p.45). Lindop argues that the deceptive achievements of the neo-*noir*'s femme fatale are dependent on her adoption of 'knowing' what Rosalind Gill (2007) has termed 'subjectification' (p.258); that is, the internalisation of the male gaze. This shift from external to internal is a shift from objectification to self-objectification 'away from an external, male, judging look, to a self-policing narcissistic gaze' (2015, p.46). This idea of an 'internalisation' of the male gaze, Gill argues, is responsible for the establishment of a new disciplinary regime. She argues that women 'are invited to become a particular kind of self', and that they are merely 'endowed with agency on the condition that it is used to construct oneself as a subject closely resembling the heterosexual male fantasy that is found in pornography' (2007, p.258). This is evident in neo-*noir*, an example being the 'money-shot' in *Basic Instinct* where Catherine Tramell exposes her vagina to gain control over a room full of policemen; and in *Baise Moi*, where both femme fatales use their bodies to lure their victims, they then engage in sexual intercourse with them (their bodies on screen, but not faces) and then mercilessly and without reason, kill them. Gill's argument is also evident outside of neo-*noir*. This 'subjectification' or internalisation of the male gaze is seen in Joe Francis's reality television show *Girls Gone Wild* (1999-2009), where young women expose their breasts on live television to receive free items of clothing. Another example Levy uses, which is now heavily integrated into our society is pole-dancing; 'the striptease has transcended from the red-light district [and worked]

its way into mainstream culture' (Lindop, 2015, p.46). The postfeminist idea behind this integration of self-sexualised objectification being that the choice to expose oneself is empowering for women. Lindop argues that '... femme fatales ... knowingly use subjectification as a tool and tactic' and it is this behaviour that enables them to get 'what they want' (2015, p.46). She writes: "This complicates the idea that women are unwitting victims of a discourse that reconfigures misogyny and anti-feminism as empowerment and freedom' (2015, p.46). What Lindop identifies as anti-feminism, this thesis argues is the masculinisation of femininity – that is, women adopting misogynist masculine values to gain a false sense of empowerment.

As mentioned, in the beginning of *The Lonely Drive*, Annemette uses this specific type of self-sexualised objectification explored by Lindop; she uses subjectification as a tactic to get what she wants. She lures Chump to his death with her body, yet there is a difference. The spectators are encouraged to identify with Annemette; thus, they experience her disgust, her fear. Most importantly, though, spectators are encouraged to understand her motive. There is a rationale behind her doing what she does. This is not a convention for femme fatales in neo-*noir*. In this scene, Annemette's motivations are clear. Alongside her present motivations, are past motivations as Chump had not only watched, but also masturbated to her rape. Therefore, it is never unclear to the spectator that her violent acts are not something she enjoys but something she must do to survive. Through exploration of her upbringing and family life, alongside the violent acts she has endured or survived, an understanding of why she is in the position she is in is delivered. The female violence performed in *The Lonely Drive* is personal and it 'occurs outside ethical frameworks or discourses of social or political justice' and both Annemette and Laroux do, at times, enact their roles with 'clinical coldness and ... planning' (Coulthard, 2007, pg.164). Yet, even in their most brutal kills, it will be 'mercy, compassion, and forgiveness that lacks, not rationality' (Coulthard, 2007, pg.164). The violent acts performed are self-explanatory. It is through aligning female violence with rational motivations, exploring their

backgrounds, their family, their present conditions, their experience, their story, that the spectating audience will be able to understand their anger, vengeance, violence, and desires. In turn, this explorative narrative (re)presents the femme fatale of neo-*noir*. *The Lonely Drive*'s femme fatales achieve their goals without irrational, excessive acts of brutal violence. Thus, they challenge the representation of violent women as hysterical, psychotic, and sadomasochistic. This thesis argues that in the 21st Century neo-*noir* needs to adopt a different lens to acknowledge feminist politics and extend its boundaries to encompass femininity and female power.

However, if the female and male characters' gendered performance shifts, will its labelling as a neo-*noir* need to change in order to incorporate feminist politics? As mentioned earlier, this thesis argues that a *film noir* is characterised by its setting as well as its characters. The dark and shady criminal underworld. The dark shadows and low lighting. The violence, smoking gun and cigarettes hanging from lips. The hardboiled detective and the femme fatale. The pace-driven plot and witty, short and sharp dialogue. *The Lonely Drive* has all these elements. Consequently, it creates the necessary mood and provides the key essentials that the genre of neo-*noir* requires.

This thesis argues that by (re)presenting the femme fatale as intelligent, by exploring her experience and subverting her representation as irrational, narcissistic, hysterical, and psychotic, alongside challenging the way the female body is styled and framed for male, heterosexual viewing pleasure, a space is created within which to posit a different way of looking. By aligning the femme fatale with character traits considered masculine – rationality, logic, and activity – and shifting her appearance from overly glamorous to raw and realistic, while still adhering to the shady criminal underworld that neo-*noir* dwells within, the femme fatale has a chance to (re)define the performance of femininity. It opens a space in which to explore and experience a new performance of femininity and in turn, allow an opportunity in which to observe an individual female gaze presented through one of the male gaze's most iconic objects – the femme fatale.

Thus, this chapter has helped me to explore the ways in which I engaged with the subversion of the male gaze in *The Lonely Drive* and the limitations I was challenged by so I could directly reflect on these issues in the following chapter. This chapter has identified through the analysis of films and film theories that the following key elements could present an alternative to, and help writers and directors subvert, the male gaze in neo-*noir*.

Firstly, directors should not invite the spectator to see the naked female body just to see it. If the spectator is afforded the opportunity to gaze at it, make sure there is intention and reason behind it. If she is sharing or using her body as a lure for the male character in the film, it is for this purpose only, not to expose her body to the spectating audience. This reduces her power in self-exposure as she becomes an object on screen, a spectacle and pacifies the male gaze. There is more power in alluding to her self-exposure. This is not to say that men cannot find women attractive, or that women cannot find men attractive, as any mixture of gender and sexuality finding attraction to any other mixture of gender and sexuality is natural, but the objectification needs to stop. Women are much more complex than beautiful body parts. More, directors could represent femininity without deploying the tired trope of the irrational, hysteric and psychotic independent woman or femme fatale who needs a man to save her. If the female character is to be the driver of the narrative give her the character traits that will enable her representation of femininity to be positive, in the very least, make her logical.

Moreover, the femme fatale can be violent, she can be hysteric or manic, she can be psychotic, but she no longer needs to be presented as this way due to her gender. Give her a backstory, a motive, and let her try to save herself from her current situation. Lastly, films can present female sexuality as stable, whether heterosexual, homosexual, or bisexual, through the active relationships that the femme fatale has or acquires. As mentioned, the femme fatales of neo-*noir* are frequently used as tools to view perverse male fantasies and to satisfy a male, heterosexual gaze. Thus, they cannot hold a stable sexual identity. They are presented as being heartless objects that just have sex for self-gain. Aligning the

spectator with the femme fatale allows them to observe her emotions toward the sexual act she is experiencing and to take part in her emotional journey. Anything other is giving the spectator the opportunity of seeing just to see, looking at her as an object rather than a subject and through a male gaze.

Further, I have chosen to define my own individual female as female experience, physical and emotional, and observation of that experience through a female lens. Here, I understand my limitations. My female gaze cannot be universal. As mentioned earlier, this thesis argues that having one person establish a singular female gaze is impossible as when one contends with gender fluidity⁵³ and intersectionality⁵⁴, it is obvious that it cannot be done, but this does not mean that it cannot exist in some form. I believe that eventually, through many conceptualisations of individual female gazes, we will identify the key elements with which to identify a singular female gaze. More, it is not accurate to say that if a female gaze exists it will excuse the male gaze, as the female gaze lacks frequency of use to the male gaze. Jill Soloway argues that for that ‘we would need the next 100 years of almost every single movie to be produced, written and directed by women’ (Topples Productions, 2016). Challenging the male gaze requires films of that nature to have visibility, to have many observe the alternative performance and performative acts of gender presented and such films are yet to move from the avant-garde realm to reach mainstream audiences. The individual female gaze that I present in *The Lonely Drive* is a non-objectifying gaze. It is not a gaze that is rooted in an essentialist notion of identity but as a political act against the male gaze. It aligns with Soloway’s notion of ‘feeling seeing’ which I argue as standing in opposition to the male gaze which ‘sees’. Soloway argues:

⁵³ Gender fluidity is a gender identity that is ever changing or accords to relational or psychological state. Additionally, it incorporates the feeling some have of not having a gender.

⁵⁴ Intersectionality is the interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class, and gender as they apply to an individual or to a group.

I think the Female Gaze is a way of ‘feeling seeing’. It could be thought of as a subjective camera that attempts to get inside the protagonist ... It uses the frame to share and evoke a feeling of being in feeling, rather than seeing – the characters. I take the camera and I say, hey, audience, I am not just showing you this thing, I want you to really feel with me (Topple Productions, 2016).

Like Soloway, my individual female gaze sets in place the notion of feeling not simply seeing. Feeling enables us to get inside the character and really feel their experience and take part in their emotional journey. This is the female gaze in which I aim to present via the femme fatale in *The Lonely Drive* – a gaze that creates a space in which the female spectator has the opportunity to feel a female experience that is empowering without being stripped of that empowerment by the film’s end.

CHAPTER FOUR

This chapter aims to critically reflect on my research and on whether it was possible to (re)present the femme fatale with a female gaze within the confines of the neo-*noir* genre. I consider whether this (re)presentation and conceptualisation was possible in *The Lonely Drive* through the subversion of the male gaze and by challenging the patriarchal gender binary. Moreover, if this subversion is enough to change the definition of neo-*noir* to incorporate feminist politics or whether the genre needs to be completely reimagined to apply a female gaze. The chapter reflects on my research process, what I have learnt, what was achieved and what was not possible to achieve in the context of a patriarchal society.

The chapter will also discuss the limitations and obstacles in my doctoral studies, such as writing female characters from a female perspective while attempting to adhere to neo-*noir* conventions, alongside writing and describing women in a way that can be seen as subverting the male gaze. Also, the chapter asks what further research is necessary?

REFLECTION

This creative research project has taught me just how important it is to have a strong research approach before you begin. The methodologies chosen, CPR and reflective practice, allowed me to thoroughly outline, explore and reflect on and in both the thesis and script. Moreover, I have learnt just how important reflective practice is for growth personally and professionally. Not only is it a means of self-renewal, it is also a method for inner growth. Through reflection, your knowledge grows, and as your knowledge grows you come to see things through multiple perspectives which then inform and renew your individual perspective. As mentioned in the Introduction, Schon's theory of reflective practice as a model for this thesis has enabled me to consider reflection in action, alongside reflecting on these actions in hindsight.

What was learnt and what was achieved?

Neo-*noir* helps to maintain a patriarchal ideology through its legitimisation of certain patriarchal values. This genre creates the illusion that a social truth of gender is depicted on screen, not a representation of the creator's perception. Film, like many forms of creative works, is an element of our wider system of cultural delineation. This delineation creates 'psychological order that results in a distinctive formation of social reality. Social institutions are sustained by these shared beliefs of what the world is and should be' (Snyder, 2001, p.158). Therefore, current western gender performances, which are framed by patriarchy, help to preserve the limitations of femininity, and continue to define what it is to be female in our day-to-day reality. The male gaze in film continues to determine both how the male will act and how the female will act, or in most cases, be acted upon. It confines and constructs gender such that it is easily identifiable with spectators. Suggesting a new approach that challenges this, is troublesome. Thus, as female gaze theory is relatively new and still undefined, conceptualising even an individual female gaze is problematic as it is not only trying to reimagine a representation of the female performance within film, but trying to rewrite female gender identification within a patriarchal society. Yet, I argue that this is still possible.

In working on this thesis, I have learnt that there is still a need to further investigate socio-cultural and political changes, beliefs, and anxieties, as they are manifested in very depraved and immoral characters, such as the femme fatale. Female violence has been a primary research theme within this thesis and exploring its representation within the films analysed has found its function, which has been expressing and characterising gender ideology⁵⁵. I have learnt that neo-*noir*'s representation of female violence, depicted through the femme fatale, reflect negatively on female gender ideology as such representations lead to autonomous femininity being related to psychotic

⁵⁵ The term 'gender ideology' refers to attitudes regarding the appropriate roles, rights and responsibilities of men and women within patriarchal society.

sadism and patriarchal notions of femininity being seen as non-threatening and acceptable. For femininity, there is no in-between stance in the way that there is with masculinity. In masculinity, violent, respectful, and rational actions reside together, and violent outbursts are understood as normal emotional outbursts.⁵⁶ If a male is violent, he can still be understood as intelligent, kind, and lawful. When a woman is violent, she is seen as monstrous, villainous, and unlawful.

Women have fought for equality across many aspects of life, yet their representation and characterisation in neo-*noir*, particularly the femme fatale, is still stuck within patriarchal stereotypes. In fact, the femme fatale *is* a patriarchal stereotype. Such stereotypes still function as a warning to women that if they behave in unfeminine ways, they are monstrous. This, in turn, reinforces patriarchal beliefs about women and men. I have learnt that women need to make a space in cultural production where female violence can be understood as a part of femininity. Genre films tell familiar stories to mass audiences. These spectators are then encouraged to see these performances of gender as reflecting reality. Therefore, the nature of these performances must be challenged. This thesis argues that the femme fatale can have a subjectivity and can have a gaze of her own and can be less of a one-dimensional fantasy figure for an implied male viewer. By presenting a new performance of femininity in neo-*noir* via the femme fatale, the most iconic patriarchal stereotype, this patriarchal stereotype will be challenged, thus, the male gaze will be challenged.

The Lonely Drive explores the type of female character that I would like to identify with while watching a film. From the script's opening, we observe two femme fatales, in a neo-*noir* setting, determined to take on their journey by themselves. They are in no way the lure for the film; although they are attractive, the film revolves around their experience and not their physical appearance. This is

⁵⁶ The American Psychology Association has identified that 'Western culture defines specific characteristics to fit the patriarchal ideal masculine construct. The socialization of masculine ideals starts at a young age and defines ideal masculinity as related to toughness, stoicism, heterosexism, self-sufficient attitudes and lack of emotional sensitivity and of connectedness' (2018). Further, that the 'connection between masculine culture and violence perpetration, in early childhood, violence and aggression are used to express emotions and distress. Over time, aggression in males shifts to asserting power over another, particularly when masculinity is threatened' (2018).

a neo-*noir* that revolves around the femme fatale, it does not simply feature her. Annemette and Laroux are agentive individuals who do not need saving by the male character; they save themselves. They manoeuvre the underworld together to escape their living situations and current circumstances. They rationally plan and execute their plans. The violence they use is instinctive and necessary for them to achieve their escape or to survive their current situation. This is a new representation of the femme fatale in neo-*noir*.

Through my research, I have learnt that if the femme fatale is explored as an agentive individual at the beginning of a film, by its end she still needs to either be saved by the male hero, is sexually objectified through a male gaze, or succumbs to patriarchal conventions. Positive images of women in neo-*noir* who are intelligent, independent, and autonomous, are scarce. Further, they are still unable to be independent and rational while committing violent actions even if they are necessary to their survival in case their femininity is questioned. Therefore, by committing violent acts that are unmotivated, women then become monstrous, an 'other', or a masculinised version of femininity. Here, I am not saying that women have not made advances in challenging and changing the representation of femininity and female gender identity in film; more that, in the genre of neo-*noir*, we have quite a way to go before women are represented in performance with the same rational agency a male character is given. Therefore, my research has uncovered that to challenge the gender stereotyping in neo-*noir* we must continue to create more realistic representations of, and for, women and femininity. This research has led me to uncover that to challenge and change the performance of femininity perpetuated in neo-*noir*, we need to challenge each aspect that makes us recoil when observed. Thus, what approaches were uncovered by this research to challenge the male gaze and help to conceptualise a female gaze?

The male gaze seeks to sexualise the femme fatale, even in dire circumstances, such as abuse, rape, or death. The preservation of this sexualisation needs to be challenged as her flawless appearance leads women to have unrealistic beauty standards and expectations of ourselves. A subversive approach

the *The Lonely Drive* employs is challenging the glamourisation of the femme fatale. As mentioned, there is one scene where Annemette is portrayed in this way: ‘picture perfect’ at the bar waiting for Chump so she can seduce him. However, this scene is used strategically to illustrate and remind the viewer of the appearance the femme fatale usually puts forth. Her perfect appearance, which is styled by a male gaze, then reverts back to her initial appearance after her experience with Chump. We get to see past her glamorous appearance, seeing her as more than a visual pleasure to be consumed, and we get to see why she has chosen to adorn herself this way. This helps to disconnect femininity from the representation of the male-stylised femme fatale and the beauty standards she embodies. She has used her appearance to get where she needs to go, but it is not real nor is it a realistic rendering of her day-to-day appearance.

Throughout the rest of the script, we get to see Annemette in a more relaxed and realistic way. She is styled according to the situation that she is in. She is not styled in a sexualised manner, for example, in an outfit that, in real life, would hinder or prevent her from achieving her goals. For some time, scholars of dress and gender history have explored that dress, like acts of the body, play a critical role in the social construction of identity⁵⁷. Charlotte Nicklas and Annebella Pollen argue in *Dress History Now: Terms, Themes and Tools* (2015) ‘that dress is a fundamental means, indeed sometimes one of the only available ways, by which groups and individuals express and negotiate their identities’ (p.5). The way we dress creates an identity and is a form of symbolic communication. It is used to convey to others information about a person’s class, gender, occupation, morality, and character. Moreover, the way a person chooses to dress can show their resistance toward a certain conformity, ambition, and debate⁵⁸. Annemette and Laroux both fashion themselves fit for comfort, disguise, or the task at hand. For most of the script, they are not fashioned to visually appeal to heterosexual men or appease

⁵⁷ See, Charlotte Nicklas and Annebella Pollen’s ‘Introduction – Dress history now: terms, themes and tools’ (2015).

⁵⁸ See, Diana Crane’s ‘Clothing behaviour as non-verbal resistance: marginal women and alternative dress in the nineteenth century’ (2013).

a heterosexual audience. Instead, they offer a visual appearance that suggests their own identities. They are both styled to suggest that they are uncaring of what others think and are set on achieving the goal at hand. This represents their intelligence and lack of interest in presenting public personas that would be socially acceptable.

As mentioned, in the instance where Annemette is at the bar with Chump, she is styled to appease the male gaze, but this is intentional. This is also an example of where we can see the limitations of script writing when attempting to conceptualise a female gaze. The action lines are limited to the description of the action a character is meant to perform. This then becomes an issue of subjectivity, as one reader may read it as offensive and feeding into the male gaze, while another may reflect on it as how I have intended the scene to be. An answer to this problem may be the writer and director working more closely together or, as I have attempted in my script, to show the female character (Annemette) briefly in the glitz and glamour that would maintain the male gaze, before discarding that appearance, presenting it as a farce and presenting the reality of how she appears in a day-to-day life.

Annemette and Laroux fashion public identities that subvert patriarchal patterns of gender and sexuality usually found in the femme fatales of neo-*noir* films. In one scene, Annemette and Laroux are out at a club celebrating. People are in the background, but they are not in focus. The scene concentrates on the women's experience of each other in that moment. They dance, kiss, and touch each other as if no one is watching – openly displaying affection without a care as to who is watching them. This scene focuses more on feeling their experience than seeing it. Their choice of self-representation portrays self-confidence, agency, logical thinking, and their lack of fear at being judged by others for not conforming to patriarchy's notion of heterosexuality. *The Lonely Drive* seeks to create a new representation of the femme fatale, of femininity; it aims to present a persona that challenges patriarchal authority.

Annemette and Laroux perform their gender in a way that disengages them from individuals who engage themselves in aesthetic care such as maintaining perfect hair, flawless make up and up-to-date fashion standards. They are not victims of the male gaze, of media propaganda or of the beauty industry. Annemette and Laroux are described as being without make-up and they appear as ordinary, at times even unkempt, because they are on the run and short of cash. They are living out of their duffle bags. As some 'feminist work on fashion has largely been critical of fashion as a tool of male domination' (Brennan 2011), Annemette and Laroux deny the usual oversexualised, over glamourised fashioning a femme fatale endures. Instead, they seek to create their own identity and self-fashion themselves in ways that present their own individual personalities as logical, agentive, and rational or help prepare them for the circumstances at hand.

Furthermore, to challenge the performance of femininity perpetuated in neo-*noir*, there is a need to begin understanding and embracing women who commit rational acts of violence or seek to save and protect themselves in a violent manner. Accepting the violent woman has the potential to reconnect femininity with rational violence. Aggression, anger, hurt, and revenge fuelled emotions are not gender determined or orientated.

Annemette and Laroux do act violently in *The Lonely Drive*. They plot criminal acts and commit violent crimes that lead to deaths. The difference between the representation of their violence and that of their psychotic predecessors is that their acts are driven by rationality and necessity. They do not seek just to kill or kill in way that is grotesque. Instead, they find themselves in situations where they either need to kill or be killed. In one scene, Annemette kills Chump. Usually in neo-*noir* the motive behind this kill would be unclear or left a mystery. Here, Annemette's motive for her crime is clear. Chump will seek to kill her. More, Chump will tell his boss, Ray, who will set a gang of people out to find and kill her. Alongside this motive is the motive of revenge. Chump watched on as she was humiliated and raped by Ray. Yet, the motive of revenge is not explored as the main reason.

Annemette's motive here is rational and reasoned.

The scene between Annemette and Chrystal, toward the script's conclusion, provides further evidence that Annemette is neither psychotic nor a hysterical, cold-blooded killer. Chrystal has helped lead Annemette to the dire circumstance in which she finds herself. Annemette, points the gun at Chrystal, but after a moment in thought, lowers it. She, and the spectator, know that Chrystal's death is unnecessary. Moreover, Annemette leaves Chrystal with the drugs, believing that she will sell them to better her own life. This scene creates the same rational representation usually only offered to the male character in neo-*noir* – the capacity for violence coupled with the reasoned ability not to be so. In the end, Chrystal leaves behind the drugs. Even Chrystal, a minor female character in *The Lonely Drive*, is equipped with a rational mind and intelligence. She is scared and by leaving the drugs behind, we see that she is denying her current path which would lead her deeper into the criminal underworld. This thesis argues that by exploring the motive behind a femme fatale's violence, by exploring their backstory and equipping them with rationality, we can represent a performance of femininity that aligns this with the positive character traits usually only offered the male character. This rejects the suggestion that the femme fatale is psychotic, violent, and revenge-fuelled for no other reason than being a female.

Most importantly, the key to rejecting the male gaze and conceptualising an individual female gaze is who controls the narrative within the script. Having the femme fatale in a neo-*noir* film control the narrative, and exhibit both rationality and intelligence, while still being capable of violence, offers us the chance to view the femme fatale in a way that we never have before. *The Lonely Drive* challenges and subverts the male gaze in many ways, but none is as important as giving the femme fatale the chance to share her experience, her feelings and perceptions, her back story, and the reason behind her current situation. This is feeling her character, not merely seeing it. It represents the femme fatale in a new light and denies the spectator the usual viewing pleasure that she would provide through her objectification. We see how the gaze between Annemette and Laroux shifts from the beginning to the

end, how they grow together and as individuals, and how they observe the world around them. We get to watch as their feelings for one another reignite, and their desire develops. In turn, this realistic representation of homosexuality aids to challenge neo-*noirs* perpetuation of presenting queer relations as illegitimate and unstable. I argue that continually conceptualising femme fatales, like Annemette and Laroux, has the potential to help (re)define femininity and the representation of the female gender identity with a power that is not achieved through her objectification or self-exposure, but her logicity and rationale. A strong, independent, and rational representation of femininity that is not punished or presented as monstrous, nor deemed unfeminine or masculinised.

The Lonely Drive denies the femme fatale her usual submissive place. Instead, Annemette and Laroux are the ones who actively drive the narrative. It is their experience, their looking, their living, their present and past, that we get to experience. They are given a backstory to avoid the spectator presuming that they dwell in the shady criminal underworld because they are emotionless, monstrous, female killing machines. Both Annemette and Laroux had rough childhoods. Laroux more so as she was sexually abused by her stepfather and was present when her mother died at the hands of her stepfather. After her stepfather murders her mother, he goes after Laroux. Her stepfather is her first kill. Not a revenge fuelled kill at the sound of her mother dying, but a kill needed to survive. Once again, this represents feminine violence as a type of violence where violence and amiable actions can reside together.

Moreover, Annemette and Laroux's emotional outbursts towards each other are also provided with motive through script's inclusion of their relationship's background. They are not framed in a way that would promote a reconnection between femininity and hysteria. Thus, *The Lonely Drive's* femme fatales are emotional and violent while denying the ability to be argued as an 'other' or a masculinised femme fatale. Moreover, they allow spectators to observe a new representation of the female gender and the performance of femininity.

The Lonely Drive provides a presentation of two femme fatales' experiences that are simultaneously rational and amiable, while being violent. The violence perpetrated by these women is represented in the form of rational reactions to the present situations in which they find themselves. Their motives are drawn from trying to achieve a better position in life. These motives are not gender specific either, they are human, born of a continuous search to be free of the restrictions kept in place by patriarchal society. Annemette is a sex worker by necessity, not by choice. She does what she can to get by, to help her father and to keep a roof over her head. She seeks to be rid of her oppressors and gain freedom. Similarly, Laroux is in a rut, down on life and lost in her miserable existence. Therefore, both femme fatales just want to exist with the same level of freedom that their tormentors have.

Clair Davis, a mob boss in *The Lonely Drive* is another female character that challenges and subverts the male gaze, and I will argue, like Annemette and Laroux, offers a concept of what a female gaze could look like through the alignment of her autonomy, violence, and rationality. Clair is independent, driven, and focused. She is a wife, mother, and a violent criminal. People who cross her are rendered armless corpses. Yet, at the same time, she is a mother who wants to keep her son out of the underworld. She subscribes to gender role stereotypes within the domestic sphere and behind the scenes is a drug lord. Like Laroux and Annemette, her life is not left underexplored as would usually happen with a female character in neo-*noir*. Clair's first scene is set in a kitchen where she is chopping vegetables. She stops chopping when her cheating husband explains he has another late night at work. It is after this scene we learn that Clair is the drug lord from whom Annemette has stolen drugs. Why would the head of a mob keep a cheating husband? Because it is more rational to keep him alive as killing him would be highly problematic. Yet, Clair, a person who with the click of her finger could have him killed, doesn't. The act of revenge would get her nowhere. This helps disconnect the belief that women cannot stop themselves from acting revengefully and that femme fatales lust for revenge.

Clair continues to carry herself with poise throughout the script, even as her world crumbles. In the end, it is the death of her son, who she fought so hard to keep away from the criminal underworld, that crushes her. Yet, any gender, male or female would crumble under such circumstances. Clair is punished in the end for being a drug lord, the difference being, she deserves to be punished. She is not doing it just to better her life; it is her life. She will not stop killing. She is extremely violent yet still differs from the psychotic femme fatale presented in films such as *Baise Moi* and *Basic Instinct*, Clair is rational, intelligent and has a backstory. More, she has not chosen this life; she was born into it. It is her life choices, not her gender that is being punished.

Annemette and Laroux are both extremely violent, yet not irrational in their violence. Their violence is provoked and necessary, and it is brought on by the violent actions of others. Consequently, they are still seen as women. I believe that women will relate to, instead of distancing themselves from their performance and that most could sit comfortably watching a filmed version of this script, not shrinking back into their seats hiding from the gender performance they are watching onscreen. I argue that *The Lonely Drive* provides a relatable experience for spectators as it aligns femininity with rationality and strength, both physical and mental, denies hysteria and punishment, and removes the fear for women, themselves, of being embarrassed or offended by their gender's representation on screen.

My thesis has investigated and explored how the femme fatale is, and has been constructed, the similarities in their construction and performance, their visual imagery and what that visual imagery means. The purpose being to expose the sexist ideologies of women constructed within neo-*noir*, as it is a mainstream genre, in order to have a mass audience experience a different performance of femininity. Moreover, this thesis has argued that presenting women as non-violent or as unyielding mothers, further confines femininity to patriarchy's notion of it and leads to negative judgements of women as monstrous when they step outside of, or do not enjoy their place in, the traditional family. Yet, the line needs to be drawn at irrational, psychotic violence, as shown in *Baise Moi*, which offers no

motive for its female character's acts of violence which is committed with a motive and out of necessity. Here, I am not arguing that women who are psychotic cannot be explored, but that these women should not be defined as psychotic or hysterical purely because of their gender.

In personal reflection, as a woman, I recently became a mother. I was confused and felt lost for quite a while. I was unsure why the first months of my son's life were not the happiest months of my life. I was lost between the woman I was prior to becoming a mother, the selfish urges I felt and the role of the mother that patriarchal society promotes. This confusion further led to places that were quite dark, quite alone. I felt as if I was not a woman, I was the other. I was the monster that you see in the Hollywood films that is now such a huge part of society. It led to a place where I no longer knew or understood who I was. I was lost. This misunderstanding of the emotions that new mothers have is heavily influenced by patriarchal stereotypes. A mother is caring. A mother is selfless. A mother is forever loving and never angry. Yet this is not reality. A new mother initially experiences waves of depression, waves of anger, waves of yearning to be the person they were before giving birth. Unaccepting of your new role. I have learnt through my experience as a new mother that now more than ever it is important to abolish this misconception. A new representation must take its place. Femininity must be explored and represented in a multitude of ways, on a variety of mainstream platforms, including film, to end the limiting concept of woman as just mother, and women who are not mothers, who are independent, or who are violent and monstrous.

What was achieved through this creative research project was the understanding that eliminating the male gaze from film is impossible, but we can challenge it to present alternatives. Moreover, I have learned that in order to recognize and comprehend the patriarchal order in which we are stuck, theorist's use of predecessor's psychoanalytic theories is necessary. It is integral to acknowledge that 'psychoanalytic theory is ... appropriate in demonstrating how the unconscious of patriarchal structure has formed the film narratives and agencies, and how this also becomes a

dominating force in preserving the male gaze' (Mulvey, 1975, p.440).

Initially, I believed that it would be enough to simply sexualise a male character; that this objectification could in turn help establish a female gaze. Upon further research, though, I found that this becomes difficult due to the connotations and codification of the language of the dominant patriarchal order. Also, sexualising the male character to appease a female gaze also assumes that this gaze is heterosexual. Yet, the possibilities of a female gaze are still in reach. Masculinity is often associated with the trait's active, strong, and dominant. Conversely, femininity is often associated with passivity, weakness, submissiveness, and nurturing. Femininity is associated with traits that define and confine females as secondary to males. In *The Lonely Drive*, I have shown that the male character does not have to be the active, and that the female character can be much more than what that patriarchy renders her. *The Lonely Drive* aims to disconnect its femme fatales from the passive characterisation in neo-*noir* narratives and the stereotypes that childless, rational, independent women are sadistic, emotional, and hysterical. Annemette and Laroux are childless, independent, rational, merciful, understanding, loving while being the drivers of the neo-*noir* narrative. They are female, not masculinised, not 'other', they are women who let us experience and feel their tale of bravery and escape.

I argue that this script does not conceptualise a singular female gaze, but it does go some way toward presenting a female gaze. The key to this step forward being that the script is written by a female, it explores female experience and presents femininity in a way that positively reflects female gender identity. Female gaze conceptualisation will not happen by merely subverting the male gaze to objectify men, making women the objectifiers or sticking men in passive roles for women to play out sexual fantasies upon. It will happen through more films that are made from a female perspective, exploring female experience, and aligning femininity with a new performance, free of the stereotypical performance of femininity and the negative gender traits that patriarchy perpetuates.

Obstacles in and Limitations of PhD

In critical reflection of the obstacles found within writing this creative research project, there were many limitations identified. Not only is the research topic highly controversial, but it is also highly subjective. On one hand I wanted to define a female gaze, just as Mulvey had identified a male gaze, but along the travels of doing so I was halted by many roadblocks.

The female gaze is an infant concept and as such, it is hard to define and cannot be done by an individual. I cannot speak for all women and conceptualise a singular female gaze, as one for all is just as problematic as the male gaze. At first, given the understanding of Mulvey's male gaze theory, I thought is as simple as looking at the world through a female's eyes, the parallel assumption being that a female gaze focuses on seeing men, objectifying the male body, and using male characters to merely perpetuate the female characters' roles. However, as discussed earlier, the simple reverse of the male gaze does not reflect the real power dynamic within patriarchal society. Thus, I began to think in terms of an individual female gaze, as the identification of a singular female gaze by an individual is impossible. Here, I realised if a gaze is defined as a way of looking, then how is it not possible for me to conceptualise an individual female gaze? I am a woman, writing a woman's experience from her perspective and then reflecting on the process of the conceptualisation of my female gaze.

Moreover, the femme fatales in *The Lonely Drive* are multifaceted characters. Their bodies are not eroticised for viewing pleasure, as doing so is a conscious gesture to appease the male gaze. Instead, the sex scenes focus on inviting the spectator to feel these women's lust and desire, and the scenes of self-exposure are alluded to. Thus, my question then became can I (re)present the femme fatale? Will neo-*noir* allow for an individual female gaze? Can the gaze be anything other than from a heterosexual male and in subverting the male gaze does the text remain a neo-*noir*?

How women's behaviour within neo-*noir* is portrayed and represented, alongside how their purposes are explored or left un-explored, plays a vital role in defining a film as a *noir*. Grossman writes: 'The representation of women in *noir* and the often-contradictory readings of them in critical and popular discourse ... have much to tell us about the persistence of problematic ways of thinking about gender in society' (2009, p. xxi). Within neo-*noir*, the narrative revolves around the men who are deeply threatened by their own desire toward the autonomous sexuality and power/agency that the femme fatale possesses. This power is not simply found within the femme fatale's beauty, but within the underlying anxiety she creates for men in the way she establishes herself. She leads the man on a path to doom, and she displays qualities that have traditionally been coded as masculine, for example, independence and power. According to Grossman: 'Such a combination [of qualities] ignites cultural anxieties about women and power' (2009, xiv). Yet, as explained, this power is deceptive, being broken, punished, demystified, or killed by the film's conclusion; and the anxiety the spectator feels observing the powerful woman is quashed. Therefore, how does one write a femme fatale who utilises a female gaze? Will it be necessary to branch off *film noir*, as neo-*noir* has done, to create a contemporary *noir* genre that enables female power and autonomy?

Character archetypes play a vital role in identifying the genres that they are performing in; a cowboy in a western, for example, or a suit-wearing assassin in an action film. The femme fatale is a 'highly visible marker' (Farrimond, 2017, p.6) of the *noir* genre as '*noir* and the femme fatale seem inextricably connected' (p. 6). In *The Femme Fatale: Images, Histories* (2012), Helen Hanson and Catherine O'Rawe argue that 'the link between the femme and *noir* can be read in many ways as a tautological one: if film has a femme fatale, it is a *film noir*, and in order to qualify as a *noir*, the femme is indispensable' (p.2).

Hanson and O'Rawe argue that it is crucial for a film to feature a femme fatale for it to qualify as a *noir* film. The evolution of *film noir* would not have been possible without the evolution of the

femme fatale. It is then arguable that some of the films of the 1940s and 1950s should not be regarded as belonging to the *noir* cannon as they employed *noir* aesthetics – lighting, camera work, detective archetypes and dark dingy settings - yet had no femme fatale character.⁵⁹ It may seem impulsive to link the femme fatale so directly to *noir*, or to suggest that a *noir* cannot be so without a femme fatale. Yet, if I was to sit in a dark theatre and watch a film containing *noir* aesthetics, but with no femme fatale in sight, I would not link that film directly within the *noir* genre but within the action or suspense genres. I am not arguing that the use of the femme fatale should be denied its universality, nor that it is unacceptable for other genres to feature the femme fatale. Genre's re-shape and re-mould the femme fatale to fit within the parameters of their genre, using them in specific ways and for specific purposes – to have a female assassin in an action film or a sassy, sexually independent woman in a romance film. I am arguing that for a film to advertise its genre as a work of *noir*, it must abide by *noir*'s conventions, of which the femme fatale is undeniably necessary. Moreover, I am using this argument to situate my film within the genre of neo-*noir*. Not only does *The Lonely Drive* employ two femme fatales who drive the narrative, it uses conventional *noir* aesthetics and conventional *noir* male character archetypes to solidify it within the genre of neo-*noir*.

The femme fatales in my script embody a conceptualisation of a female gaze. The narrative is their own. The audience observes their world and everything in it through their gaze. Therefore, the spectator looks the way the femme fatale is looking, they experience their emotion and perceive as they perceive, as they move through their narrative. *The Lonely Drive* delivers an alternative representation of the femme fatale and her performance, one which challenges and subverts the male gaze and adorns the femme fatale with a female gaze.

The conceptualisation of a female gaze in *The Lonely Drive* is necessary to provide a foundation

⁵⁹ A few of the *film noirs* made in the 1940s to 1950's, while having female characters, do not feature a femme fatale. Examples of this are: *Kiss of Death* (1947), *The Naked City* (1948), *Raw Deal* (1948), *They Live By Night* (1949), *The Third Man* (1949) and *D.O.A.* (1950).

on which other films can build. There is a 'need to illustrate the contexts that inform women's experience' rather than merely 'promoting images of women that emphasise their spirit and unknowable power [or] ... promoting images of women that rely on their bodies' (Grossman, 2009, p.5). It is time for feminist film criticism to move away from demystifying the male gaze's mystified woman and focus more strongly on defining how to empower her as her influential narrative can help reinform femininity on a large scale.

This thesis has helped me to conclude that while Mulvey's male gaze theory has played a key role in identifying the objectification of women within film, it has also led to the overemphasising of 'women as objects and has mystified their role as social agents' (Grossman, 2009, p.3). This has led to a misreading of the femme fatale in film as empowered due to her sexual promiscuity and hysterical violence. This has fuelled western society's obsession with the dangerously sexy, woman. In turn, this obsession has led certain films generating excessively deadly femme fatales, who display irrational, psychotic, and hysterical tendencies. This femme fatale acts in violent ways to appease her own violent nature which 'inevitably [becomes] prescriptive and influences cultural discourse about female agency in counterproductive ways' (Grossman, 2009, p.5). Therefore, the crazier a beautiful woman is, the closer she is to autonomy. Thus, the empowered femme fatale is a male-designed representation of female figure, and this figure is helping to shape our society's idea of the power a woman can wield.

The femme fatale is still a symbol of fear and anxiety regarding autonomous female power and does not offer a representation of a multifaceted female experience. This multifaceted experience is what should be delivered and examined in neo-*noir* as it has both the power to challenge the male gaze and the possibility to present a female gaze. We must continue to examine the contexts that inform the femme fatale in neo-*noir*. We must examine her experience, examine the settings of her experience 'social, psychological, political, physical and geographical' (Grossman, 2009, p.5), the contexts that define her existence and experience in that existence rather than what she means in relation to the

man. *The Lonely Drive* offers this type of experience, an insight into the femme fatale. Annemette and Laroux exist to let us experience their existence. The spectator gets to observe and, in turn, understand why it is they do what they do, how they rationalise their violent acts and why it is they decide to embark on their dark road to seek a better existence. Therefore, Annemette and Laroux may not identify as feminists or have a feminist agenda, but their narrative certainly does.

Moreover, the way Annemette and Laroux look at each other also seeks to further empower femininity and women. Annemette and Laroux do not compete with one another, nor do they fight for power or dominance. Instead, we see them work together and build each other up. We watch them repair each other of the damage that they have experienced individually and together. There is respect in the way they look at each other. This respect is not present when looking from a male gaze. The male gaze is obsessed with looking at the female body and the objectification of it – her lips, chest, legs and buttocks always available for male-viewing pleasure. In contrast, Annemette and Laroux focus on each other's faces, observing each other's expressions and when engaging each other sexually the spectator gets to see the deep want and need in their grip which allows them to feel their desire.

It is important to understand that due to film academics' fixation on the femme fatale within neo-*noir*, feminist and non-feminist criticism has 'neglect[ed] a full examination of the gender politics and social psychology that undergird these films' (Grossman, 2009 p.6). Furthermore:

Film viewers and film critics and scholars make judgements about the appropriateness of representations based on role modelling and already established images of women that are canonised. We look for the ameliorative models of feminist representation. If the characters done optimistically role model for viewers, the representation fails as a feminist narrative (Grossman, 2009, p.7).

Therefore, another obstacle identified was how does one make a film that will not be regarded as anti-feminist? I argue that as *The Lonely Drive* delivers a narrative that examines the femme fatale's existence and experience, and while in that existence we get to use her gaze and actions to define her, rather than her image; it tries to resist being read as anti-feminist. The script rejects the usual pleasures a spectator consumes when watching the femme fatale through a male gaze and instead delivers a femme fatale empowered by a femininity that denies the negative character traits associated with women and femininity – hysteria, irrationality, and passivity. It is this way that we can begin to rewrite femininity for the better and provide one perspective on what a female gaze could look like. It is no longer logical that there is no female gaze theoretical framework which can be used to analyse films as the male gaze theory is institutionalised. What is stopping this from happening?

Conceptualising a female gaze in a neo-noir script.

The male gaze in film determines both how the male will act and how the female will act, it confines and constructs gender to be easily identifiable and aligned with. Therefore, conceptualising a female gaze not only involves reimagining a representation of performance within film but trying to rescript gender identities for everyday gender performance and identification. We must move away from using our predecessor's psychoanalytic theories of analysis of the image of woman and begin to examine her experience. In examining her experience, we can begin to understand the motives behind her actions. Once we understand her motives, we can begin to peel off the layers of the violent, sexual woman to help us understand what makes her do the things she does until her actions are rationalised. Once understood, we can begin to respect her position, the spectators will sympathise with her plight and more easily align themselves with the femme fatale instead of deeming her monstrous.

Moreover, by aligning the femme fatale with intelligence and rationality, traits that are considered 'masculine' and are usually only offered to male characters, we can challenge and subvert

the male gaze and represent that femme fatale as a powerful icon for femininity. This allows for the possibility that through Butler's notion of repetitive performative acts, the positive character traits considered 'masculine' will also be considered as 'feminine'. To eventually identify the key elements of a female gaze, we must begin to conceptualise the female gaze further through more in-depth analyses and new representations of female experience within film. A female gaze cannot simply be defined by one person; rather, this identification and definition must involve a multitude of conceptualisations that show similarities that work together to inform us of exactly how the female gaze can be defined.

Therefore, *The Lonely Drive* endeavours to be the springboard with which others can begin to further develop their own conceptualisations of a female gaze. The aim here being that eventually a singular female gaze is institutionalised in theory, just as the male gaze is institutionalised in theory. Mulvey's male gaze theory is a concept feminist and feminist film critics took it upon themselves to use Mulvey's concept to analyse many films. Thus, the male gaze theory was institutionalised. My aim for this thesis is that others who take it upon themselves to read this work and use my individual conceptualisation of a female gaze to begin analyses of present and past works in order for us to identify and define a female gaze theory.

CONCLUSION

In many contemporary neo-*noir* films, the illusory power that the femme fatale exhibits is suggested through her aggressive nature, her promiscuity, and her willingness to expose her own body for viewing pleasure. Yet, still, at some point, she will be outsmarted, sexually objectified, or punished for her transgressions. Therefore, although a neo-*noir* may conjure up a picture of what a strong femme fatale and a female gaze could look like, they do not explore her experience, her motives, nor look through her gaze and, like in classic *film noir*, her visual power is eventually dismantled. Consequently, the opening empowerment a female spectator experiences in viewing the femme fatale's strong representation of femininity fades as the femme fatale is demystified. All agency is removed from the femme fatale and the female spectator not only feels powerless, but fearful of the power that the femme fatale exhibited.

I argue that by keeping the initial power and offering more of the active pleasure that female spectators derive from the femme fatale, through exploring her experience, her motives, and presenting her as rational during her seductive or violent actions, a (re)presentation of the femme fatale was possible. I believe that a deeper exploration into her experience allows for a rational and logical representation of her character. Thus, *The Lonely Drive* (re)presents both its femme fatales as active and with agency. They are violent but there is motive and rationale behind their actions. They seek to be free of their phallic confinement and want to avoid death at the hands of their oppressors. By the end of the script, Annemette is free from both her oppressors and no longer has to prostitute herself to survive financially and Laroux is by her side. Moreover, while their gaze can not qualify as defining of what a singular female gaze is, they certainly offer a conceptualisation of an individual female gaze – a way of looking that differs to that of any other femme fatale in neo-*noir*. This looking is not fuelled by sadism, nor is it fetishistic, but remains gender neutral and focuses more on the femme fatale's feeling the persons character and reacting to the situation, more so than the seeing of that character.

Writer, Alice O'Keefe writes in 'The film industry has utterly failed women' that she is tired of films dominated by male characters and perspectives, 'I could probably count on my hands the number of films I've seen that explore women's experiences ... whereas I couldn't begin to count the films in which women are overlooked, stereotyped, or treated as little more than eye candy' (2020). I feel the same irritation as O'Keefe. Thus, this research began because of my desire to see a female on screen that I could identify with from beginning to end, and the significance of this research is based on this same want. We live in a society where gender is performed and informed by acts predetermined by men. In respect to film, there have been massive shifts to accommodate women, yet the most major shift, one that has the potential to bring equality within film theory and film itself, is the identification of a female gaze. I am tired of observing narratives through eyes that are unlike my own. I want to observe something different, something that is relatable. Currently, it not possible to remove patriarchy, although it is constantly being challenged, and through challenging it, it is possible to create within it a different representation of femininity other than that which has been scripted for and by women. It is time now for the female spectator to enjoy an active, rational, logical, strong femme fatale on screen who is not punished, demystified, or silenced. It is necessary to make a change to the performance of femininity in neo-*noir* to incorporate positive and powerful character traits that help to (re)inform female gender identity and the performance of femininity. This will enable us to develop a female gaze that gives women an active, rational agency for future film narratives.

Butler argues that gender is a performative accomplishment. As mentioned earlier, by performative she means that an act is an act by the very fact of it happening, that gender is not the starting place it is constituted through the mundane acts of the body – the everyday acts that are performed and reiterated though time. Thus, performance is informed by what is what is already historically constituted and performed by individuals as gender. Acknowledging and using this space that Butler's theory has created allows us to understand that (re)writing and (re)presenting the

performance of femininity as active, intelligent, and rationally violent will eventually influence and (re)script the gender performative acts that patriarchy has designed as female, to performative acts that women have designed for themselves. By (re)presenting these gender performative acts created by women to the mass audiences in which mainstream films attract, they have the long-term potential to overthrow what has been already historically constituted as female and feminine. This will create an empowerment of not only the representation of women in film but has the potential to remove passivity from, and posit a greater autonomy to, the female gender identity. The continuation of active female performances and the exploration of female narratives will enable the key elements of a female gaze to be identified and defined. It is not an easy fix but battling against the system is what feminist politics are all about.

Psychoanalytic theories will always be relevant when understanding the status quo of the patriarchal order in which we all live. Mulvey's psychoanalytic theory has been widely used to demonstrate the unconscious nature of our patriarchal structure within film narratives and agencies and how the patriarchal structure we live in continually seeks to preserve the male gaze. Even when a female gaze is defined, its definition will be questioned as a result of the connotations and codification of the language of our dominant western social order.

Yet, even if it will be questioned, a female gaze is still important to conceptualise. Conceptualising this gaze is important as it will help to represent the female gender identity with active character traits and deny the patriarchal performance of femininity that posits the female gender identity as the passive gender. A female gaze will not be achieved through the sexual objectification of men. It will be achieved through the making of conscious choices when writing and reading our femme fatales as active characters and exploring their worlds more thoroughly, seeking the answers as to why these women are the way they are. It will be through finding the rationale within their narratives and experiences, even when these narratives and experiences are violent. This has the potential to enable

the femme fatale and femininity to act violently, just as men can, in an understandable and, at times, respectable way. The masculine does not always have to be seen or used as the active driving force, or as the hero, and in opposition to the hero, the woman does not always have to be presented as in need of saving and if not in need of saving, as a psychotic mess. The male gaze can not be entirely removed from society, but it can be challenged, it can be subverted and in time, it can be made redundant.

This thesis has identified that the ideas formed by Mulvey's male gaze theory are still relevant to a reading of neo-*noir*. Neo-*noir* films, such as *Fatal Attraction*, initially put forward a strong, active femme fatale, yet, as explained, this representation is short lived. For as the femme fatale's narrative continues her powerful representation shifts to a place of passivity, or she is punished, which appeases the male gaze and quashes phallic anxieties. *The Lonely Drive* offers an alternative to this punishment and presents Annemette and Laroux as being active, rational, independent, powerful, and strong-willed women. They remain represented this way until the script ends. More, their empowerment is not achieved through presenting them as psychotic, hysterical, neurotic, monstrous creatures. In doing so, *The Lonely Drive* challenges the femme fatale's, more femininity's, association with hysteria, irrationality, and psychotic behaviour. It delivers a feminist message through the use of gaze and narration – that a female gaze is possible. That we must let loose the power of the female gaze and continue to define it in the hopes that one day it will be accepted as a theory. The present gender ideology is always changing and over many years we have shifted to offer a more equal stance for the representation of masculine and feminine narratives, but now we must radically shift our patriarchal perspective to bring equality to gender performance and representation. We must create femme fatales in film that not only actively drive the narrative but have purpose and self-drive to lead them in the pursuit of a better, a happier life without having to rely on the male character to get it.

Conclusively, the femme fatale, on screen and in theory, is (if not always, then at least in part) predicated on memory of what she once was. There is no enjoyment to be had by a woman watching

another woman on screen be stripped of all her power to once again become a passive object. As Farrimond argues: 'In many ways the contemporary femme fatale embodies just the anxieties about femininity, power and sexuality that earlier feminist film criticism has observed of classic *noir*' (2017, p.163). As this thesis argues, we need to turn toward the experience of the femme fatale, in order to create an active femme fatale equipped with a female gaze. Moreover, we need to create this representation of femininity in mainstream film to reach and inform a wider audience. By not only taking on the *film noir* genre but setting *The Lonely Drive* within the most nostalgic period of neo-*noir*, *film noir*'s 1980 revival as neo-*noir*, this creative research project has shown that it is not necessary for neo-*noir* to continue perpetuating the male gaze for a work to be included in the genre.

Although I have challenged the representation of the femme fatale, and (re)presented her within neo-*noir* setting, there are a number of avenues left unexplored. As the femme fatale is not limited to the genre of *film noir*, I suggest that future studies could begin to explore and analyse the femme fatale in other genres. How does the femme fatale exist within the space of a romantic film? How does she exist outside of narrative cinema? Do the femme fatales seen on the covers of magazines⁶⁰ with their violent angry stances reveal a further reduction of her into another meaningless object? There are many areas, some briefly mentioned throughout the thesis, that deserve further investigation. One of these areas, being that both Annemette and Laroux of *The Lonely Drive* are white, is the issue of race. Therefore, I suggest that future research is needed and necessary to investigate how the femme fatale is represented by different cultures and shaped by cultural narratives about race and what her way of looking, looks like.

The femme fatale will always be a vital figure when analysing gender representation within contemporary feminism and film studies. Farrimond argues: 'The femme fatale, with her contradictory

⁶⁰ The magazine *Femme Fatale* was founded by Frederick S. Clarke in 1992. *Femme Fatale* is an American men's magazine focusing on film and television actresses. This magazine contains covers featuring beautiful, half naked women in suggestive, angry poses.

meanings, embodies some of the most highly debated issues in feminist discourses and representation' (2017, p.169). Not only is the figure of the femme fatale useful for understanding the limits and potential of female gender representation; she also raises questions about whether women will ever be represented in the cinema as powerful icons who possess agency and a gaze of their own:

The femme fatale in contemporary cinema is an important figure for film studies more generally, most notably because such figures demonstrate the ways in which the weight of cinematic history can bear down on archetypal characters, crystallising them and allowing them to be re-viewed through new perspectives (Farrimond, 2017, p.169).

This thesis does as Farrimond suggests, that is, it examines the femme fatale's illusory power, reimagines a new performance of autonomous femininity and explores this performance and narrative to offer a new perspective – a conceptualisation of an individual female gaze. Theoretically, much more is needed to identify the possibility and the key elements of a singular female gaze. This thesis has enabled me to (re)present female gender performance through the femme fatale in a way that both grants her agency and hold it until the scripts end. It has allowed me to create a script that does not focus on the female form but on the life that comes with it. The hope born out of this research is that that both filmmakers and film scholars others perpetuate this representation within their work. That there is more of an importance put on telling female stories in mainstream genres, allowing mass audiences to explore female experiences and align with female perspectives. This will help to redefine femininity and distance women away from the femininity that patriarchy has invented. Thus, it is necessary and essential to continue conceptualisations of the female gaze to eventually establish, the key elements of a singular female gaze. A female gaze will create a space where gender equality within film and film theory is possible. So where do we go from here?

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THE LONELY DRIVE

by

Jade Bitomsky

DECEMBER 2020

© Jade Bitomsky, December 2020

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NOTE TO MY EXAMINERS

I would like to inform you before you begin reading that I am aware that the script is lengthy and at times heavy in description. I believe, after reading many *film noir* scripts, that the description is necessary to give it that genuine feel and set the scene for you. Additionally, a shooting script is very bland and will not create a picture in the reader's mind. Here I am both director and writer in an attempt to help you to see what I see.

1. INT. RETIREMENT HOME - WEST LA. NIGHT.

ALBERT (65), bald, sleeps on a hospital-like single bed. Bukowski's novel *Women* rests on his chest. A shabby blanket covers him. A wheelchair is parked beside his bed.

ANNEMETTE MARCH (30) sits in a torn armchair in the darkest corner of the room. She wears a tattered black metallic gown and black men's shoes, unlaced. No socks. She clutches a brown duffel bag with snakeskin handles to her lap.

Crooked slat blinds throw slivers of moonlight across her blood-splattered face. Dried tears have left her black eyeliner smudged.

She watches Albert sleep before she clears her throat.

He blinks awake.

ALBERT

Ette?

ANNEMETTE

Hey.

He sits up slowly.

ALBERT

What time is it?

ANNEMETTE

It's late.

ALBERT

I... I must've dozed off.

He fumbles for the glasses at his bedside, puts them on and squints at her.

ALBERT (CONT'D)

Geez... you look rough.

(beat)

What's happened?

She forces a smile.

ANNEMETTE

A rough day happened.

BEGIN FLASHBACK:

MONTAGE: QUICK FLASHES

Thick wads of cash thrown on MULTIPLE sets of stylish bedside tables by male hands.

BACK TO SCENE

He smiles softly, scoots back and leans up against the bedhead.

ALBERT

Too many messages and not enough paper?

ANNEMETTE

Not enough coffee and too many calls.

ALBERT chuckles.

ALBERT

Seriously, you want to talk about it?

ANNEMETTE

Not at all.

He smiles.

She pulls herself into an upright position, takes an envelope out of her jacket pocket and tosses it to him.

He catches it and peeks inside at a thick stack of cash. He holds the envelope out to her.

ALBERT (CONT'D)

Spend it on yourself. Get a nice outfit for work. Your mother bought something new every month. She'd model them for me. Looked like a real business woman, she did. Just beautiful.

He looks away - lost in thought. Annemette smiles. Her eyes soften.

ANNEMETTE

I don't need it. The Boss bumped me up a few bucks.

BEGIN FLASHBACK:

Annemette is bent over an office table, her skirt hitched around her waist.

A MAN buckles his pants behind her. He wears a solid gold ring in the shape of an eagle.

He reaches into his pocket and throws a wad of cash next to her face.

She flinches as it hits the desk.

END FLASHBACK.

ALBERT

It doesn't feel right.

ANNEMETTE

Look, at the end of the month, if you don't need it, give it back me.

ALBERT

Ok, ok. I'll keep it. But you'll get every cent of it back.

ANNEMETTE

I'm sure.

He tucks the envelope under his pillow.

She starts to nibble on the tip of her thumb.

ALBERT

Did you girls have a scrap?

ANNEMETTE

No scrap.

ALBERT

Why the big duffle bag, then?

They sit in awkward silence for a moment.

ANNEMETTE

We split.

ALBERT

Oh, you never told me.

ANNEMETTE
It's been a year.

ALBERT
Why didn't you say anything?

ANNEMETTE
I didn't want to, and I don't
want to now.

ALBERT
It's a shame. I liked her.
Seemed like a smart girl.

ANNEMETTE
She was...
(beat)
Is.
(beat)
I have to go.

She stands up and steps into the dim light.

ALBERT
Jesus Ette... what the hell's
happened?

She pulls her strawberry-blond hair into a ponytail and
piles it on top of her head.

ALBERT (CONT'D)
Has someone hurt you? Should I
call the police?

ANNEMETTE
No... Just relax.

He notices the unlaced men's shoes.

ALBERT (CONT'D)
Whose shoes?

She kisses his bald patch.

ALBERT
Wait. Can you sit down for
five minutes?

She stops at the door and turns back.

ANNEMETTE

Good luck with the poker.

She exits the room - duffle bag in hand.

ALBERT (O.S.)

Ette!

(beat)

Come back!

2. INT. THE CASTENELLO HOTEL - CARD ROOM. NIGHT.

EARLIER THAT NIGHT.

GOWNS and SUITS sit at card tables in pockets of light. A JAZZ BAND plays underneath the sound of lost chips.

Annemette looks striking: heavily lined green eyes with blown-out strawberry blond hair. She sways up to the bar and takes a seat, her black, metallic gown clinging to every curve of her body.

She clicks open a small clutch, pulls out a cigarette flute, inserts a slender smoke and lights up.

She attracts the BARTENDER with a curl of her finger.

ANNEMETTE

Tia Maria on Ice

(beat)

Make that a double.

She swivels her stool to face the room, crosses her legs high and leans back onto the bar. She parts her gown to reveal her legs - thigh to strappy silver heel.

The Bartender puts her drink down behind her. She grabs it without moving her gaze from-

CHUMP (45) glares at the hand he's been dealt - his face florid, a loser's face.

She inspects his crocodile skin shoes, his cheap brown suit, tan turtleneck and the scraggly brown hairs, glued by sweat to his balding head.

He flings his cards at the dealer and stands up.

She takes a heavy drag and lets the smoke curl out her red lips - her gaze set.

He catches her stare, looks around, then back at her. He thumbs his chest and mouths 'me'.

She nods.

He smiles and proceeds in her direction.

At the bar, he rests a hand on the back of her chair and leans in.

CHUMP

You're the reason they call
this place the City of Angels.

(beat)

Does he know ya here?

ANNEMETTE

Does it matter?

CHUMP

I don't want to get-

She silences him with a firm finger.

ANNEMETTE

Do you know why, in France,
one may blow smoke into
someone's face...?

She takes a drag and releases a steady stream of smoke into his face.

He closes his eyes and inhales it with pleasure.

CHUMP

I'll get my things.

CUT TO:

3. INT. THE CASTENELLO HOTEL - HALLWAY. NIGHT.

The hotel's fluorescent red sign lights the hall through a wall of window. Plush black carpet lines the floor and the walls look dipped in gold. The sound of the buzzing city below is barely heard.

At the end of the hall, an elevator chimes open. Annemette steps out room key in hand.

She leads and we watch Chump follows - sweaty and flustered.

Subtle sexual moans escape from occupied rooms as they pass.

She arrives at the room, slips the key into the lock and

opens the door.

Chump pushes in past her dropping his helmet, jacket and keys.

She gives the hall a once-over, then closes the door behind them.

4. INT. THE CASTENELLO HOTEL - ROOM. NIGHT.

Moonlight filters through venetians. A queen-size bed, draped with white silk sheets, dominates the room, a leather armchair at its side. At the foot of the bed is a short table topped with chocolates, roses, a set of glasses, a bottle of liqueur and a notepad with a silver pen.

CHUMP

I must be moving up quicker than I thought.

ANNEMETTE

You are.

CHUMP

He told all us boys to never touch ya.

ANNEMETTE

I know.

She smiles and presses herself against him.

He grabs her by the shoulders and pushes her out in front of him.

CHUMP

Wait. Frankie hasn't had ya yet... has he?

Annemette gently shrugs him off, pulls a smoke from her purse and lights it.

ANNEMETTE

Does it matter?

She takes a long drag, exhales, then flicks her cigarette at him. It hits him in the chest.

He jumps back and brushes the cinders off.

ANNEMETTE (CONT'D)

You better start paying
attention Chump as I'll be the
thought you jerk off to for
the rest of your life.

He rubs at the tiny black spots on his tan skivvy. His
eyes harden as he steps toward her.

CHUMP

Ya crazy cunt. I don't care
who's pussy ya are-

She grabs his balls, tight.

ANNEMETTE

The pussy is mine.

She extinguishes what's left of her cigarette with her
foot. His black look melts into a tacky grin.

CHUMP

I see why he keeps ya around -
kind of ballsy, aren't ya.

She leads him into the armchair beside the bed, shoves
him on it, takes a few steps back, turns and looks over
her shoulder at him.

Chump stares on, his face in disbelief.

ANNEMETTE

You like to watch, don't you,
Chump?

She runs her hands over her hips and up her back. She
unclasps the first button.

His smile widens - exposing rotten yellow teeth.

He nods - 'yes'.

ANNEMETTE (CONT'D)

You like it rough?

She unbuttons the second button.

He wipes perspiration from his bald head with his sleeve.
He nods - 'yes'.

ANNEMETTE (CONT'D)

You like to hurt bad girls
like me?

He unzips his pants and rubs himself through his white briefs. He nods - 'yes'.

She releases the last button and lets the silky black fabric fall to the floor. Naked - she faces him.

CHUMP

A fucking angel.

He stands up and reaches for her, eyes fixed on her breasts. She brings him to a halt - a flat palm to his chest.

ANNEMETTE

Not yet.

She circles him, moves to the bed and crawls across it. She primps herself up on the pillows against the bed head and lights a cigarette.

ANNEMETTE (CONT'D)

Your turn.

He laughs.

CHUMP

Ok, ok... ya want a show. I do
shows.

He awkwardly sways from side-to-side - allowing his pants to fall at their own pace. He pulls at his shoes, pops them off and places them under the chair. He kicks his pants away.

His pocket-phone hits the ground.

He picks it up quickly, flips it open and turns it over. He sighs in relief and places it on the chair.

Annemette slips her hand under the pillow she leans on, then returns it to her lap.

A heavy tug and Chump is out of his tan skivvy. She stubs her cigarette on the bedside table.

Undressed, Chump looks like a prune in tightie-whites.

His beer belly jiggles as he dances over to the bed. He takes down his whites and slithers toward her.

CHUMP (CONT'D)
I've had dreams about you.
Dirty ones.

He lurches into her neck and licks at her skin with his stumpy tongue.

She closes her eyes tight. Her lip quivers.

His hands move roughly over her chest and down her abdomen. His pocket-phone rings.

CHUMP (CONT'D)
Ahhh... for fuck's sake.

Chump slumps on top of her. Relief softens her twisted face. He slides off her and answers it.

CHUMP (CONT'D)
Chump.
(beat)
How long have I got?

He turns back and winks at Annemette.

She forces a smile.

He leers and moves over to the window - his back to Annemette.

CHUMP (CONT'D)
Okay, okay... tell him I'll be
there, tell him I got this.
It's going to be fine.
(beat)
Can ya pick me up on the way,
it's cold out?

Annemette rolls her eyes, reaches under the pillow behind her and pulls out her revolver.

She grabs the notepad and its silver pen from the end of the bed and scribbles on a page - back and front.

She walks over to him, presses the revolver's barrel against his temple and holds the note in front of his face.

INSERT - NOTE: 'NO LIFT'.

He looks confused. She presses the barrel in firmly. His eyes narrow.

CHUMP (CONT'D)

Frank...

Fraaan

k.

(beat)

Look, ahhhh, I'll...I'll take
the bike.

She flips the note over.

INSERT - NOTE: 'ADDRESS?'

She shoves some paper and a pen at him - encourages him
with the tip of her revolver.

CHUMP (CONT'D)

I need the address.

He takes the paper and pen from her and jots down the
address.

CHUMP (CONT'D)

I'll collect it and call ya
after.

She takes his pocket-phone, flips it closed and looks
over the location jotted on the notepad.

ANNEMETTE

Good choice.

(beat)

Now Chump, I need you to
listen for a moment.

CHUMP

No ya need to listen. If I
die, they'll come for ya. And
a whore, especially Ray's own,
(laughs) won't be hard to
find. And when they do, what
he does... we both know that
won't end pretty.

She shrugs.

ANNEMETTE

I'm doing the world a favour...
like a fucking superhero.

CHUMP

So, ya going to kill me? Huh, superhero? Then what?

(laughs)

... put a cape on and head over to the drop? In that?

He looks her up and down. She stands tall.

ANNEMETTE

Dead men don't need clothes.

He takes a step forward and confidently reaches out his hand.

CHUMP

We both know ya ain't going to kill me. Give me the gun. We can sort this out.

ANNEMETTE

Take another step and it'll be your last.

Perspiration is now visible across her forehead.

CHUMP

Someone's going to hear the shot.

ANNEMETTE

No-one pays attention to the sounds up here. That's what he built this floor for. For men like you to do anything you want.

She cocks the hammer.

He throws his hands sky high.

CHUMP (CONT'D)

Woah! C'mon Angel...

(beat)

I know ya ain't a killer. You're a whore. A great whore.

(beat)

Now ya have a nice place. He takes care of ya. Ya really want to throw that all away?

Her finger trembles on the trigger. She steadies the tremble with her other hand.

ANNEMETTE

You watched.

He looks puzzled.

CHUMP

Huh?

ANNEMETTE

That night. You watched.

He takes a step back.

CHUMP

I don't know what ya talking about.

ANNEMETTE

My first time.

BEGIN FLASHBACK:

INT. CASTENELLO HOME. RAY'S OFFICE. NIGHT.

RAY CASTENELLO'S (35) large hands fix Annemette to a desk. One presses against the back of her neck and the other, wearing a solid gold ring in the shape of an eagle, rests on her upper back. We see his mouth, teeth gritted together hard and perspiration on his top lip. We hear his laboured breathing and heavy grunts.

Tears roll out her large green eyes; one bearing a fresh bruise. A trail of dried blood leads from her nose to her upper lip. She is silent.

The table shudders with each of his thrusts into her. Her gaze is fixed on a spot.

ANNEMETTE POV

Chump watches through the slightly ajar office doors, his shoulders hunched up tight as he jerks himself off.

END FLASHBACK.

5. INT. THE CASTENELLO HOTEL - ROOM. NIGHT.

CHUMP (CONT'D)

Let's just forget this.

ANNEMETTE

I can't forget.

She closes her eyes and lets loose her first shot. It catches him in the guts. Her second hits him mid-chest on his way down.

Tears of anger roll down her flushed face as she opens her eyes.

He splutters blood.

She wipes away her tears and turns.

ANNEMETTE (V.O.)

They say your first kill is the hardest... that the gun grows lighter in your hand after every shot. That some bullets become a pit of regret, some, little tumours under the skin and some a bad smell in the breeze. Chump was a bad smell. A stench no-one would miss.

(beat)

Tonight's drop - his in - is my out. This job could've landed Chump in the big league, alongside Frank. Yet neither of them factored me in. The invisible whore. The nobody who wants to be a somebody. The pussy who wants to be a person.

(beat)

This money is my out.

She grabs her dress from the floor, slides it on and buttons it up.

She pulls a sheet off the bed and covers his body. He sucks in sips of air - like water up a straw.

She waits for the blood spotted sheet to still.

ANNEMETTE (V.O.)

Chump was Frank's Peanut...
Frank the guy who collects the
Peanuts... What do they have
in common?
They're Ray's and anyone in
Ray's nut sack deserves to be
underground.

His body stills.

The room falls silent.

She tugs his jacket on, grabs his keys and helmet, hangs
the 'Do Not Disturb Sign' and shuts the door behind her.

CUT TO:

6. EXT. THE CASTENELLO. NIGHT.

A dirty, wet alleyway off Sunset Blvd. Trash bags are
stacked high against walls. The sound of traffic rumbles
and a light rain spatters the ground.

Annemette exits the Castenello via a rear door - a red
fluorescent 'No Entry' sign above.

She powers down the exit stairs. At the bottom, she
glances anxiously left and right.

Chump's bike leans next to the stairs.

She puts on his helmet and looks down at her shoes.

ANNEMETTE

Fuck.

She hitches up her dress, mounts the bike and heads to
the drop off in heels.

7. INT. WHISKEY A GO. NIGHT.

Punk teens mosh, front of stage, as Mötley Crüe rock out
their classic 'Girls, Girls, Girls'.

The music fades as we move away from the stage and
through a CROWD of smooth artist types, cigarettes
between smug lips on serious faces. The women, a mix of
big hair with loud metallic prints or rompers. The MEN, a
mix of fresh punk rockers and double-breasted power
dressers. All converse as if the subject spoken of
carries importance.

SUPERIMPOSE: 1989.

LAROUX (30), a jet-black haired, blue-eyed woman, sits slouched in a chair. She stands out in ripped waist-high jeans and cropped blue sweater that reads 'Jumper'.

LAROUX (V.O.)

I sit here every Friday,
tucked amongst the machines -
the mouths that spit noise,
the bodies that scream labels.
Taking in the show, like a
documentary on primal
humanity. Men wanting a fuck,
women wanting a fuck but
hiding it and me... well,
without her, I'm no different.

She watches a YOUNG GIRL (20), glad-wrapped in a tight red mini, seek a sap for her next drink.

Laroux downs the last of her drink.

She stands up and makes her way to the bar.

Just short of the bar, a tall SONNY CROCKETT LOOKALIKE (30), wraps an arm around her waist. He pulls her in. His suggestive leer ruins his handsome face.

MAN

Need a drink?

She keeps his gaze with her smile, pats his jacket down.

LAROUX

A drink. Yeah, I want a drink.
But letting you buy me that
drink would mean I want to
drink it with you-

He grins - thinking he's in.

She pickpockets his wallet with ease.

LAROUX (CONT'D)

...and I don't want to drink
it with you.

He looks addled.

She broadly grins - sarcastic sympathy - places her hand on his right shoulder and continues on to the bar.

He hides a bruised ego and mouths a 'fuck off'.

She leans up against the bar and takes the notes out of the wallet.

LAROUX (V.O.)
Another dick-wielding-maniac
who thinks if he pumps enough
liquid kindness into you, sex
will fall out.

She drops the emptied wallet on the floor.

CHRYSTAL (18) dressed in tight leather pants and a ripped crop shirt, nods at Laroux to order. Her Bettie Page fringe unable to hide her boredom.

LAROUX
The usual.

CHRYSTAL
I don't know your usual.

LAROUX
Isn't it usual to ask what I
drink?

CHRYSTAL
... what do you drink?

LAROUX
Tia Maria, short glass, on
ice.

Laroux holds her hand out.

LAROUX
I'm Laroux.

Chrystal takes it, a quick shake, like a mouse nibbling at the cheese on a mousetrap.

CHRYSTAL
So, you're the Tia Maria.
(beat)
Unusual to have it on its own.

LAROUX
The ice keeps it company.

Chrystal smiles and turns to grab the Tia Maria bottle

from the shelf.

LAROUX

Here.

Laroux points to a bottle tucked under the bar bench.

Embarrassed, Chrystal turns back, grabs a glass, pours and slides it across to Laroux.

A Tia Maria, long glass, no ice. Laroux laughs.

CHRYSTAL

Is that it?

LAROUX

How old are you?

CHRYSTAL

Young enough. You?

LAROUX

Old enough.

Chrystal smiles and holds up five fingers.

CHRYSTAL

That's a clean fiver.

Laroux puts the stolen wad of cash on the bar.

LAROUX

You wear it well.

CHRYSTAL

What?

LAROUX

Youth.

CHRYSTAL

(giggles)

Huh?

LAROUX

Nothing.

Laroux gives up, sips her drink and turns away. Chrystal picks up the money, confused.

CHRYSTAL

Wait... want your change?

Laroux turns and smiles.

LAROUX

When you finish you should buy
me a drink?

CUT TO:

8. INT. LAROUX' APARTMENT - INGLEWOOD. NIGHT.

Chrystal presses her face hard into a pillow.

Her moans escalate with the smooth pace of Laroux's arm.
Uncontrolled, grunt-like, she orgasms.

Laroux rolls away from her, lights a smoke and watches it
rise to the ceiling.

LAROUX

You have a boyfriend?

She takes a heavy drag. Chrystal, half asleep, replies.

CHRYSTAL

Yes. I've never done this
without him. It's different,
dirty... it doesn't feel as
sexy if he's not watching.

(beat)

You? A girlfriend?

LAROUX

You wouldn't be here.

Chrystal kisses Laroux awkwardly on the cheek and turns
over.

Laroux continues to watch the smoke curl.

LAROUX (V.O.)

Fun isn't how I'd describe it.
She could've been a pillow.
She let me move her around
like a chess piece. Moaned too
loud - got off on being used.
Another girl just used to be
ploughed.

Laroux finishes her smoke and butts it in the ashtray on

her bedside table.

She touches Chrystal gently on the shoulder.

LAROUX

I need to get some sleep...
you mind leaving?

She gently rolls her over. Chrystal, out cold, sucks in phlegmy gasps of air.

She examines her face.

Chrystal's eyes shudder and open. She smiles, a tranquil smile, a smile of complete comfort.

Laroux's eyes tear up.

LAROUX (V.O.) (CONT'D)

Fuck.

She throws on a t-shirt and pads to her lounge room.

It's bare, aside from a couch equipped with a blanket and pillows, a loaded washing basket and a coffee table with two glasses, a cut up lemon, short-handled knife and a half empty bottle of gin.

A lonely Polaroid of Laroux and Annemette clings to a barren wall.

She grabs the Polaroid, takes a seat on the couch, pulls the blanket across her legs and pours herself a gin.

She knocks it back and looks over the Polaroid.

She pours another shot and raises it to the Polaroid.

LAROUX

Wherever you are.

She slugs the shot.

She plumps the pillows, lies back into the couch, closes her eyes and passes out.

The Polaroid falls to the floor.

CUT TO:

9. INT. HANK'S BAR. NIGHT.

A shabby bar dotted with a few lonely DRINKERS and some MEN playing pool.

One of the lonely drinkers is FRANK (42). A bulky man in a tight, sleek black suit. He looks like a hundred dollar note in a bar of fives.

He sips a glass of whiskey. An unlit cigarette hangs from his mouth.

The BARTENDER (45) attempts to light his cigarette but Frank waves him away. He is trying to quit.

His pocket-phone rings. He picks it up.

FRANK

Frank.

He pulls the smoke from his lips and stubs it in the bar nuts.

FRANK (CONT'D)

Yes, Mr. Castenello.

He shifts the phone slightly - his eye twitches as the caller raises his voice.

FRANK (CONT'D)

I'll leave now.

He stands up, finishes his drink, pulls out a smoke and rests it between his lips.

He throws a tip on the counter and makes his way to the exit.

People shy away from him.

10. EXT. LA BREA AVE. NIGHT.

An abandoned industrial district in Crenshaw. Dilapidated buildings, mesh fences and 'Keep Out' signs. A light rain has left the ground wet. The street is silent, dead.

Nearby, a PUSH CART LADY collects rubbish.

Annemette, soaked, parks her bike around the bend from La Brea Ave.

She removes her revolver from her pocket, slips the jacket off and hangs it over the bike. She leaves her helmet on but pushes the visor open.

She takes a step and notices the clatter of her heels on the pavement. She slips them off and sits them below the bike.

Looking around, she makes her way to the street corner, staying close to the shabby brick wall.

A metallic blue Camaro waits in the middle of the street. Smoke billows out the driver's window. Muffled voices can be heard.

She checks the rounds left in her gun - four.

11. INT. WALT'S CAMARO - LA BREA AVE. NIGHT.

WALT (45) a stocky man with a long beard and cropped brown hair waits with a thin, weasely-looking GOON #1.

Walt's smoke pours out the window and Goon#1 flips through a copy of *Playboy*.

GOON #1

I wish they'd show their legs
spread. Tits are overrated.
You can see them anywhere.

He looks at Walt. Walt takes a drag. His silence reveals his interest in the subject.

Goon#1 puts down his magazine.

GOON #1 (CONT'D)

C'mon, you don't like pussy?

Walt turns to Goon#1.

WALT

The fact you still call it
that shows you know shit about
it.

(beat)

Stick your head back in there
and shut the fuck up.

CUT TO:

12. EXT. LA BREA AVE. NIGHT.

Annemette, crouching low, leaps the last distance. Her helmet taps the Camaro's bumper - a soft tap. She freezes.

The car door opens, and Goon#1 gets out.

She swings her revolver toward the passenger side. A sweat droplet rolls between her eyes - panic sets in.

Goon #1 starts to take a leak.

GOON #1

You feel dirty even pissing on
these streets, you know, who
knows what you'll catch.

Walt replies, uninterested, with a snort. Goon#1 zips up
and gets back into the car.

Annemette sneaks up the driver's side and hides below the
door frame. She closes her helmet's visor.

Walt, still smoking, flips through the *Playboy*.

GOON #1 (CONT'D)

What do you think? Legs need
to be wide open, show those
flowers?

He passes the magazine back.

She takes a deep breath and stands up.

ANNEMETTE

Give me the money.

Walt raises his hands a little and Goon #1 drops his
magazine.

WALT

(laughs)

You serious, Little Girl?

Goon #1 reaches for his gun. Annemette notices.

ANNEMETTE

Touch the fucking roof.

Goon#1 complies.

Walt's hand jerks the inside handle. He smashes the door
open.

The door hits Annemette, shoving her back, causing her to
lose her footing and fire a round.

Her back hits the asphalt. She watches her revolver skid
a few feet away from her - then sits up.

Goon#1 looks wide-eyed at Walt - splashes of blood across
his face.

He shakes Walt for a moment, then watches as his body
tumbles out the door - a bullet in his forehead.

GOON #1
She'll have your fucking arms
for this.

He gets out of the car.

Annemette scrambles over to her revolver.

He rounds the hood of the car and reaches into his jacket.

She grabs her revolver, swings round, shuts her eyes and triggers the remaining three rounds.

He drops to his knees. Blood spills from his neck.

She shakily stands up and walks over to the car. On the dash she finds a handgun. She pulls the door open, leans in and grabs it.

Goon #1 splutters behind her.

She walks back over and lifts the handgun to his head.

ANNEMETTE
I'm sure you did something bad
to someone, somewhere along
the way.

She pulls the trigger.

ANNEMETTE (V.O.)
I guess it does get easier.

She grabs a brown duffle bag with snakeskin handles from the driver's side back seat.

As she shuts the door, she notices how small Walt's feet are. She looks down at her bare feet. Same size. She takes his shoes, tugs them on and laces them tight.

She slams the door shut and rests the brown duffle bag on the road, wiping sweat from her brow and letting out a long breath.

She unzips the bag. Her face drops.

No cash.

Plastic wrapped bags of white powder line its inside.

She kicks the bag.

ANNEMETTE
Fuck... Fuuuuuuck...

She tucks her revolver inside the duffle bag. The rumble of an engine fades in.

She spots headlights in the distance, grabs the duffle bag and breaks into a run.

She hurls herself round the street corner, throws the duffle bag on her back and swings a leg over the bike.

She turns the engine over. It roars to life.

She throttles out - running over the heels she's left behind.

CUT TO:

13. EXT. LA BREA AVE. NIGHT.

A black Mercedes pulls in and parks behind Walt's Camaro. Frank gets out.

He unholsters his pistol and slowly makes his way to Walt's car.

It's silent. Nothing moves.

Frank re-holsters his pistol, takes a pair of hospital gloves from his coat and slips them on.

He lifts Walt back into the driver's seat, pats him down, takes his pocket-phone and slips it into his jacket. He checks the back seat and lastly the boot.

No bag.

He slams the lid shut and Donkey Kong punches the boot lid. He pulls out his phone and makes a call. The line picks up.

FRANK

It's Walt. He's, ahh, dead.

(beat)

I'll find Chump, Sir. He won't be far.

(beat)

The bag's gone.

14. INT. CLAIR'S HOME (BEL AIR) - KITCHEN. NIGHT.

CLAIR DAVIS (42) chops vegetables on a marble benchtop. The kitchen is lit up like a hospital, with every cooking-gadget in place.

Her navy suit fits her tiny figure. Her platinum blond hair is piled tight atop her head, exposing large pearl earrings.

Her husband, STEPHEN DAVIS (47), walks in, opens the fridge and grabs a piece of fruit. He's a tall, lanky man with greying brown hair, dressed in a finely tailored suit.

STEPHEN

No dinner for me. A deal went sour at the office. I need to head in and sort it all out.

She stops chopping, and calmly bins the vegetables.

Stephen leans against the bench top and throws his hands up defensively.

STEPHEN (CONT'D)

C'mon, Clair! It's work.

She tosses the chopping board into the sink, turns the water on and scrubs it down.

She turns the water off, removes her apron, folds it and lays it on the bench neatly.

CLAIR

I know exactly what you do at work.

He laughs - insinuating that she is acting irrational.

STEPHEN

You know what your Father told you.

CLAIR

And he told me everything.

STEPHEN

Well, I don't see you getting lonely any time soon. He made sure of that.

CLAIR

My Father knew I needed a real man around the house.

STEPHEN

I don't have time for your
shit tonight.

CLAIR

I'd love to see you talk to me
like that in front of him.

STEPHEN

Bit hard when he's dead.

She slaps him hard across the face, walks to the kitchen
door and turns back.

CLAIR

You're lucky he's dead.
Otherwise, you'd be.

(beat)

Oh, and don't hurry back. Take
your time with her.

15. INT. CLAIR'S HOME - OFFICE. NIGHT.

A minimalist office. A solid marble desk sits in front of
large bay windows. On the desk is a drink tray with fine
crystal glasses and a bottle of whiskey.

Clair sits in a high-backed chair behind the desk and
turns it to look out the window. Outside a sprawling
garden is lit by hundreds of lights.

She waits and listens for the front door to close. GOON
#2 knocks and enters.

GOON #2

Do you want me to follow Mr.
Davis?

She waves him in.

CLAIR

No... I need to make a call.

He moves over to the desk, picks up the phone.

CLAIR

Walt.

He dials a number and hands the receiver to Clair. She
wipes the phone down and puts it to her ear.

CUT TO:

16. INT. FRANK'S MERCEDES. NIGHT.

Frank pulls up outside The Castenello Hotel. On the passenger seat Walt's pocket phone rings.

The green digits on the strip screen read 'Clair'.

Frank exits the car, slips the ringing phone down a street drain and heads inside.

CUT TO:

17. INT. CLAIR'S HOME - OFFICE. NIGHT.

Clair turns and slaps down the phone.

CLAIR

Get me Tom - let him know it's soured.

Goon #2 exits.

Clair's Daughter, LILLY (9) - the spitting image of Clair - enters. She hands her a pencil-drawing.

LILLY

I drew this for you.

She looks it over.

CLAIR

It's wonderful darling. You really are a little genius!

The drawing is of six figures - a man in a business suit, a woman in a skirt suit, a little girl and a man in a dark suit holding a fringed brown haired girl's hand.

Lilly points them out one by one.

LILLY

That's Daddy next to you.
Uncle Walt is next to me,
that's me, and there's Lester
and his new Girlfriend.

Clair's smile becomes forced. She taps a finger on the female figure next to Lester.

CLAIR

Oh Lil. She isn't family. I want you to draw family.

LILLY
Lester said I should. Do you
want me to draw another
picture Mummy?

CLAIR
Yes, darling, and then we can
put it up wherever you like.

Lilly takes the picture and walks out of the office.
Clair gets up and shuts the door.

She opens her desk drawer, lifts out a compartment, pulls
out a smoke, lights it and drags heavily, waving the
smoke away with her hand.

CUT TO:

**18. EXT. EAST LA - STREET. LATE AFTERNOON. (DREAM
SEQUENCE)**

1969.

A crumbling neighbourhood in East L.A.

Ratty houses adorned with leaning drunks, young men
crowding street corners, scantily clad women in doorways,
overgrown front yards decorated with paint stripped cars
and rotten fences.

LAROUX (V.O.)
'I love you'. Those three
words have always fucked me
over.

A shabby weatherboard house. Duct-taped newspaper lines
the windows.

There is a large crack in a windowpane.

**19. INT. EAST LA - SHABBY WEATHERBOARD HOUSE.
LATE AFTERNOON. DREAM SEQUENCE.**

1969.

Dust lines every surface. Rubbish collects in corners.
Down the rotting hallway is a kitchen.

Mould is visible through the wallpaper. Syringes are
scattered on the bench tops.

Through a connecting door and down a set of stairs to the
basement. It's empty, dusty.

There is a large red stain on the cement floor at the bottom of the basement stairs.

FADE IN (O.S.)

loud BANGING - heavy KNOCKING on a wooden door.

SMASH CUT TO:

20. INT. LAROUX APARTMENT - INGLEWOOD. NIGHT.

Laroux sits up quickly.

Another HEAVY KNOCK sounds.

In a daze, Laroux looks toward the front door. Another KNOCK.

She stumbles over to it in her t-shirt, swings it open and leans out, ready to hurl abuse.

She pauses, then pulls back.

MONTAGE: QUICK FLASHES

- A female hand runs through strawberry-blond hair.
- A female hand lightly caresses a brow.
- Fingertips move from the brow to the lips.
- Fingers make their way from the earlobe, down the neck to trace a bare clavicle.

BACK TO SCENE.

LAROUX
Annemette?

Laroux pulls at the hem of her t-shirt and smooths out her messy black hair.

ANNEMETTE
Are you alone?

Laroux takes her in.

Annemette steps forward. Annemette's running make up, the blood spots on her skin, the scrunched-up dress, the scratches, the brown duffel bag in her hand and her stolen shoes - Walt's shoes.

ANNEMETTE
Are. You. Alone?

Laroux steps back.

LAROUX

Anne... I didn't think you
were-

Annemette's eyes harden.

ANNEMETTE

Coming back?

Annemette pushes past Laroux and flicks the lounge room
light on. A dull white light wraps its way around the
room.

She sits the duffle bag on the coffee table. Her hand
stays on the handle as she takes a seat.

LAROUX

Yeah.

ANNEMETTE

I'm not.

In the light Laroux notices the blood on Annemette's
face. The spots trail, like a dot-to-dot, up her neck and
speckle her cheek.

Annemette grabs the gin bottle and helps herself to a
large swig.

She puts it down hard on the table. Laroux flinches at
the sound.

LAROUX

Jesus, Anne. You stomp in-

ANNEMETTE

If I walked into your bedroom,
would it be empty?

Laroux looks at the ground.

Annemette laughs, then wipes her mouth with her sleeve.

LAROUX

It's been a year, Anne.

ANNEMETTE

What I should've forgiven you
by now, right?

Laroux looks to her bedroom.

LAROUX

Is there somewhere we can go?

ANNEMETTE

You want me to go?

LAROUX

I didn't say that.

Annemette picks up the gin.

ANNEMETTE

Trust me-

(she sips at the gin)

If there was anywhere else,
I'd be there. Instead, I'm
here.

Laroux takes the bottle from Annemette's shaky hand and places it on the table.

LAROUX

The blood, Anne. Where's it
from?

Annemette looks at the blood spots on her skin. Her eyes begin to well. She rubs at them hard and stands up.

ANNEMETTE

Not me.

She stumbles over to the washing basket, pulls item by item out, sniffs them and tosses them aside.

LAROUX

Whose blood is it then?

ANNEMETTE

You need to fucking pack...
put something on. It's cold.

LAROUX

Pack? Why the fuck am I-

CHRYSTAL (O.S.)

I didn't think you had a
girlfriend.

Chrystal is awake. She stands in the doorway wearing nothing but a dressing gown.

Annemette freezes as if the youth has a sniper rifle on her.

Heat flushes her cheeks. She looks at Laroux and snickers.

LAROUX

I don't.

ANNEMETTE

Wow, they seem to be getting younger.

CHRYSTAL

You're the ex, then?

(at Laroux)

I figured you were hooked on someone.

Laroux slumps onto the couch, grabs the gin and downs some.

Chrystal walks over and holds her hand out to Annemette.

CHRYSTAL

I'm Chrystal. I work at the-

ANNEMETTE

Whiskey a Go Go?

Annemette snorts, turns back and continues going through the washing.

ANNEMETTE (CONT'D)

You're one of many, kid.

Chrystal shifts awkwardly and looks to Laroux for answers. Laroux downs more gin.

LAROUX

Please put your clothes on and go.

CHRYSTAL

Can you call me a cab?

LAROUX

I don't have a phone.

Chrystal takes a seat in the armchair across from Laroux and lights a smoke.

CHRYSTAL

It'll take me hours to find a
cab around here.

Annemette glares at Laroux.

ANNEMETTE

Does she mean anything to you?

CHRYSTAL

We just-

ANNEMETTE

Does she?

LAROUX

No, Anne. No one has.

Chrystal butts out her smoke.

CHRYSTAL

We just met. A one-time thing.

She leans back in her chair and checks her fingernails.

LAROUX

Fuck kid. You NEED to go.

CHRYSTAL

Where have you been?

Chrystal's finger air traces the blood spots on
Annemette. Annemette pauses.

Laroux pauses, watches Annemette. Chrystal giggles.

CHRYSTAL

Why are you both so-?

Annemette swings round, her revolver in hand.

Laroux lurches off the couch and knocks the gun from her.

Chrystal tries to scramble out of the armchair but
Annemette is on her before she can get to her feet.

Annemette catches a clump of her hair and pulls her down
to the ground. She pins her to the floor and wraps her
hands around her neck.

Annemette turns to Laroux. Laroux looks on in shock.

ANNEMETTE

The gun! Get the fucking gun!

Laroux looks at the gun.

ANNEMETTE (CONT'D)

You don't have to touch it...
just kick it over!

Chrystal struggles.

Annemette turns back to face Chrystal.

Chrystal frees an arm and squares Annemette in the face.
She flips her.

Chrystal starts to strangle Annemette. Laroux grabs the
gin bottle.

Annemette smiles as her face reddens. Chrystal eases her
grip in confusion.

The gin bottle connects with Chrystal's head. She tumbles
to the ground, unconscious.

Annemette sucks in air like a vacuum. She looks up at
Laroux.

ANNEMETTE

The fucking gun, Laroux. I
wanted the gun.

She flips over and gets to her feet.

LAROUX

You could've killed her.

ANNEMETTE

That'd be hard with no
bullets.

LAROUX

Where are the bullets?

ANNEMETTE

In someone else.

LAROUX

Who the fuck is someone else,
Anne?!

ANNEMETTE

Someone else.

Laroux puts the gin bottle down and takes a breath.

LAROUX

Anne... you need to start
telling me something.

ANNEMETTE

I will... but right now I need
you to get dressed. Don't
bother packing, there's
nothing in this shit hole
worth keeping. If he knows
what's happened... He knows
about you. I told him. This is
the first place they'll look.

(beat)

I need to get changed.

Annemette rummages through the washing basket.

LAROUX

Wait. Who the fuck is he... who
the fuck are *they*?

ANNEMETTE

We DON'T have time.

LAROUX

Make time!

(beat)

How does he or fucking they
know about me, Anne?

ANNEMETTE

They just know.

LAROUX

What? What do they fucking
know?

ANNEMETTE

That we were together, when we
were together.

LAROUX

Why? What the fuck are you
into Anne? What the fuck is
going on?

ANNEMETTE

I'll tell you what's going on,
you OWE me.

Laroux's anger diminishes, her inquisitive stance cut
short.

LAROUX

I know. I just-
(beat)
These people. Are they
killers?

ANNEMETTE

Yes.

Laroux slides a smoke out and lights it.

LAROUX

The someone else you shot, are
they dead?

ANNEMETTE

Yes.

Laroux nods in shock. She sucks on her cigarette and
exhales slow.

ANNEMETTE

We need to go, Laroux.

LAROUX

Can I at least know where
we're going?

ANNEMETTE

We need a cab.

LAROUX

I don't have a phone.

ANNEMETTE

There's a pay phone down the
street.

Annemette grabs a pair of leather pants and a top and turns to Laroux.

ANNEMETTE (CONT'D)

Are these your clothes?

Annemette picks up her gun and heads for the bathroom. Laroux looks at Chrystal.

LAROUX

What are we meant to do with her?

ANNEMETTE

I don't fucking know. Fix her?

LAROUX

How do I fix her?

Annemette stops in the bathroom doorway. She flicks the light on and turns back.

LAROUX

Anne... I can't do that. You know I can't do that.

Laroux takes a long drag.

ANNEMETTE

Do what you want. They'll fucking kill her anyway. They'll find her and they'll kill her. Then they'll kill us, and nothing will change, nothing ever fucking changes. They'll keep doing what they do and us - well, we'll just be dead.

LAROUX

I just can't Anne.

ANNEMETTE

Well walk away then. You're great at that. See how far you make it.

Annemette slams the bathroom door.

CUT TO:

21. INT. BATHROOM. NIGHT.

Annemette turns the shower on.

She throws her clothes and the revolver in the basin and stares closely at herself in the mirror.

She looks at the bloodspots - traces between them softly with a fingertip.

Tears well in her eyes.

She turns away, leans against the wall and slides down it.

CUT TO:

22. INT. LAROUX APARTMENT - INGLEWOOD. NIGHT.

Laroux gazes at Chrystal's limp body, which is half-covered by the dressing gown.

She picks up the short-handled knife from the coffee table and kneels down beside her.

She holds it above Chrystal's chest. Her hands shake. Her breath is short. She lowers it until the tip meets Chrystal's skin. Laroux increases the pressure until a droplet of blood wells.

She closes her eyes.

BEGIN FLASHBACK:

- a black screen
- a burst of light in the shape of a door.
- gunshots - BANG, BANG, BANG

END FLASHBACK.

She opens her eyes.

She wipes at the blood, as if trying to wipe Chrystal's chest clean.

The shower cuts off.

Laroux looks to the bathroom, then back at Chrystal.

She picks up the short-handle knife again and makes small cuts on Chrystal's chest. She smears the blood over her face and neck.

She wipes her hands clean, throws on the same jeans she

was in earlier, and a jacket.

Annemette exits the bathroom in Laroux's navy jumper and leather pants. Her hair is wet.

ANNEMETTE

Look, I'm sorry. We will put her-

Laroux slides the bloodied short-handled knife. It stops at Annemette's feet.

LAROUX

It's done.

CUT TO:

23. INT. ITALIAN RESTAURANT - WEST LA. NIGHT.

GOON#2 walks into an empty room.

In the centre of the room, at a well-lit table, sits clean cut TOM (45). His beard is trimmed, his suit perfect. He slurps spaghetti through sauce stained lips, spattering the table.

A well-dressed MAN (35) sits across from him shaking with nerves - his face a bloody mess. A glass of whiskey sits in front of him.

A sawn-off shot-gun rests in the middle of the table. The Man's eyes dart between Tom and the gun.

Goon#2, arrives at the table, leans in and whispers in Tom's ear.

He nods, finishes his mouthful, wipes the side of his mouth with a napkin and signals to the man to drink his drink.

The Man cautiously picks up his glass and takes a sip.

Tom stands up, pulls out a wad of cash and throws money on the table. He pulls on his jacket and looks at the Man.

The glass shakes in the Man's hand as he takes another sip. Tom waits.

The Man takes his last sip.

TOM

The way a man drinks shows a lot about his person.

The Man puts his glass down and raises his hands to his chest - as if praying.

MAN

Please... just ask Mrs.
Davis... everything will be
cool.

Tom's eye twitches at the mention of her name.

TOM

Sipping a drink shows that
you're unsure of your ability
to handle the drink.

(beat)

I don't sip.

Tom picks up the shotgun and blows a hole in the Man's chest.

He looks to Goon#2.

TOM

Does she want his arms?

CUT TO:

24. INT. TAXI - SANTA MONICA BLVD. NIGHT.

Laroux watches Annemette through the reflection in her window.

Annemette's hand moves to her face and performs a brush away motion. She is silent - her gaze fixed out the window.

Laroux inches her hand toward her.

A fingertip makes contact with Annemette's leg.

MONTAGE:

Laroux watches Annemette sleep. Her eyes shudder and open. She smiles, a tranquil smile, a smile of complete comfort. She laughs, turns away and turns back to kiss Laroux.

ANNEMETTE

(whispers)

I love you.

Annemette throws the covers off, stands up and disappears into sunlight.

BACK TO SCENE.

Annemette, without looking, pushes her hand away. She looks to the driver, her eyes red with tears.

ANNEMETTE

It's just up here... on the left.

CUT TO:

25. INT. LITTLE INN. NIGHT.

Annemette clutches the duffle bag as they enter. A long corridor leads to the check in. Laroux follows.

A red-haired woman, IVY (20), leans against the wall. She winks and smiles at Laroux.

Laroux, distracted, runs into Annemette.

Annemette looks over her shoulder - a cold look - and spots Ivy.

She smiles.

ANNEMETTE

Unless you're giving away freebies, she can't help you.

Ivy returns the smile and flips Annemette the bird.

At the reception desk, Laroux waits as Annemette books a room from an OLD LADY (72), then follows Annemette to the room.

Annemette unlocks the door and turns. She looks at Laroux quizzically.

ANNEMETTE (CONT'D)

Don't you need a room?

She enters and shuts the door in Laroux's face. Laroux kicks the bottom of the door.

LAROUX

We need to talk!

ANNEMETTE (O.S.)

We will.

LAROUX

When Anne?

ANNEMETTE (O.S.)

Later.

Laroux, irritated, shakes her head, turns and heads back down the hall.

CUT TO:

26. INT. LAROUX'S APARTMENT - INGLEWOOD. NIGHT.

Chrystal wakes up. She puts her hands on her chest. She winces. Her eyes widen as she runs shaky fingers gently across the small cuts in her skin. She stills her breathing enough to hear the silence.

Fear plays in her eyes as they whip around the room. It's dark.

She spots a letter opener. She crawls to it, picks it up and holds it - ready to attack.

Her gaze catches the Polaroid of Laroux and Annemette. She grabs it.

With one last look around, Chrystal stands and runs for the door. She throws it open and escapes into the night; naked except for the dressing-gown flapping in the breeze.

CUT TO:

27. INT. CLAIR'S HOME - FAMILY ROOM. NIGHT.

CLAIR, LESTER (25), Clair's son, a clean-cut youth with blue eyes and blonde hair and LILLY sit around a long glass table eating dinner. The tension between Clair and Lester is thick. Symphonic music plays from a record player at the back of the room.

Lester looks over Lilly's painting. He looks at Clair, then Lilly.

LESTER

I thought she was going to be
in the picture?

Lilly looks to her mother, then back to Lester.

CLAIR

She painted family.

LILLY

Is she coming tonight?

LESTER
She said she woul-

CLAIR
(smiling at Lester)
She won't be coming here
Honey.

Lester returns her smile and wipes his mouth with a napkin.

LESTER
Excuse me Lilly.

He takes his plate and walks it over to Goon#2 standing at the entryway.

Goon#2 looks to Clair, as if for permission to take it.

LESTER
Take it.

Goon#2 looks to Clair again.

Lester drops the plate at his feet. Clair stands up.

LESTER
Better check if she'll let you
clean that up.

Clair watches Lester walks out.

Lilly silently tucks into her dinner.

CLAIR
Don't worry. He loves your
picture. He is just not
hungry. Keep eating. I'll be
back.

Clair follows Lester.

CLAIR (CONT'D)
(to
Goon #2)
Clean it up.

28. INT. CLAIR'S HOME - OFFICE. NIGHT.

LESTER enters and pours a drink. As CLAIR enters, Lester begins.

LESTER
I love her.

She laughs at him.

CLAIR
You love a bar girl?... Your
father will be proud.

He sneers.

LESTER
Which father?

She moves to slap him, but he catches her hand.

CUT TO:

**29. INT. PASADENA POLICE DEPARTMENT. CUBICLE.
NIGHT.**

In the cubicle sits ALLAN GROTE (40), a stern-faced, brick-built African American man. He pulls the last drag from his cigarette then stubs it out on the side of his coffee cup. Red cinders fall to his feet.

He stares at a large pin board on his wall.

Photos of dead bodies, women, children, men, families, surround large pictures of seven faces. One is Ray Castenello's, under him, Chump's and Frank's. The other is Clair, and below her are Walt and Tom.

He takes a sip of his coffee and spits it back in his cup. It's cold.

He heads to the lunchroom, coffee cup in hand.

In the hall, two officers avoid eye-contact when passing.

CUT TO:

**30. INT. PASADENA POLICE DEPARTMENT. LUNCHROOM.
NIGHT.**

Three MEN sit round a table, eating sandwiches. Grote pours a percolated coffee.

JACK (55) visibly churns the sandwich he's stuffing into his mouth.

JACK
How's the big case Grote?

His colleagues grunt - a pack of hyenas.

Grote pauses for a moment, smiles and shakes his head, then continues making his coffee. He throws some sugar in his cup and stirs it in. He taps the spoon on the side of the cup then tosses it in the sink. He turns to face Jack and leans up against the bench.

GROTE

You know Jack, obesity is a condition. Now, obesity ain't the same as being overweight, nah, overweight people just look a little plump. But Jack, morbid obesity, well that occurs when there is so much fat that it becomes a danger to your overall health... So, you should stop worrying about me and start worrying that, that sandwich might be the last thing you eat.

The Men laugh.

Jack - red in the face - drops his sandwich. Grote takes a sip of his coffee.

OFFICER #1 walks in. Silent, and look at her.

OFFICER #1

Sorry Grote. We have a girl in. Picked up running naked. Eli's out so I sat her at your cube.

He nods, acknowledging her.

JACK

I'm not sure he's the man for the job, Honey. He deals in photographs, not people.

Officer#1 looks at Jack with disgust. Grote smiles and raises his coffee cup.

GROTE

Good day, fellas. Always a pleasure.

CUT TO:

**31. INT. PASADENA POLICE DEPARTMENT. CUBICLE.
NIGHT.**

Chrystal sits on a plastic chair beside Grote's desk. A blanket covers her.

Grote enters, takes a seat and offers her his coffee. She declines.

He leans back and sips it.

CHRYSTAL

How long am I gonna be here
for?

GROTE

Until we are assured you
aren't a harm to yourself or
to others.

Chrystal snorts.

CHRYSTAL

A girl running around naked is
considered a harm?

GROTE

A girl who attacks an officer
when he tries to help her is.

(beat)

Your long list of priors
doesn't help either.

CHRYSTAL

Yeah well, I changed. Got a
job, cleaned up.

GROTE

Are you on something now, Miss
Welsh?

CHRYSTAL

I just told you, I'm clean.

GROTE

Why were you running around
naked then?

Chrystal shrugs.

CHRYSTAL
I needed the exercise.

GROTE
You don't own a sweat suit?

CHRYSTAL
I like it breezy.

GROTE (CONT'D)
Look, if you're in trouble, we
can help.

CHRYSTAL
Cops don't help. They take
blowjobs in back alleys and
eat donuts.

Grote sniggers and shakes his head in disbelief. He notices something curled up in her hand.

GROTE (CONT'D)
What's in your fist?

Chrystal rolls her eyes and hands him the curled-up Polaroid of Laroux and Annemette.

He looks it over then back at her. He points to her neck.

GROTE
Is that your blood or theirs?

CHRYSTAL
Mine.

He flips the Polaroid over. An address is scribbled on the back.

GROTE
Are you planning to return the
favour?

CHRYSTAL
I wasn't.

GROTE
Who was?

Chrystal falls silent.

GROTE (CONT'D)

You can tell me, or I can find
out myself.

ELI (25), Grote's partner, enters and sits at a desk opposite. He looks sharp, stylish - a pretty-boy cop. He looks at Chrystal.

ELI

Bit cold out for no clothes,
Miss...

She glares at him. He laughs, throws his hand up in surrender, then leans into his chair.

GROTE

Eli, this is Miss Welsh.
(beat)
Find anything?

ELI

Nah, it's quiet out.

GROTE

(eyeing a stack of papers)
Well, those papers ain't going
to fill themselves in. They've
got to be filed today.

Eli's pocket-phone rings. He reaches inside his jacket, looks at it, flips it open and shuts it.

GROTE (CONT'D)

Daddy checking if your new toy
works?

He takes a file from the stack and begins to fill it in.

ELI

Jealousy doesn't suit you.

Grote stares at him for a moment, shakes his head, then looks back to Chrystal.

GROTE

As you can see, we got a bit to get through. So, let's do each other a favour. You tell me what went on and I'll get Eli here to drive you home.

Chrystal leans into Grote.

CHRYSTAL

After I say, I'm free to go?

GROTE

As a bird.

CHRYSTAL

Fine... You got a smoke?

GROTE

Sure.

Grote taps one out. Chrystal takes it. Her hand shakes.

Grote goes to light her smoke, but she takes it off him and lights it herself.

Chrystal takes a heavy drag and exhales. She leans back in her seat.

CHRYSTAL

I slept with one of them... met her at the bar. She was nice. We fooled around. I fell asleep and when I woke up, I heard voices. I got up and this crazy lady covered in blood was tripping out. At first, I thought that the one I fooled around with must've had a girlfriend or something and she was mad. But... she had this brown duffle bag; she had a gun.

Eli looks up from his paperwork. His interest piqued.

CHRYSTAL (CONT'D)
She pulled it on me, and we
wrestled. The one I slept with
hit me with something. Then I
woke up like this.

Chrystal opens the blanket to show Grote the cuts. She
takes another drag and butts the smoke.

CHRYSTAL (CONT'D)
I don't know which one cut me
up. I just know the crazy
one'd done something...
someone out there isn't too
well because of her.

Grote's desk phone rings.

GROTE.
Grote.
(beat)
Where?

Grote puts the phone down and scribbles on a notepad.

CHRYSTAL
Can I go now?

GROTE
We can't hold you and you
don't want a check over.

He stands up, pulls on his jacket. Chrystal stands up.
Eli stands up and pulls on his jacket.

GROTE (CONT'D)
Where are you going?

ELI
I'm taking Miss Welsh home.

GROTE
No argument?

Eli shrugs.

ELI
I'll need the photo. I'll
check it out on the way back.

GROTE
Make a copy.
(beat)
I'll meet you there.

Grote rips the scribbled note free and shoves it in his pocket.

He hands Eli the Polaroid.

ELI
Will do... I'm sure they're
both long gone by now.

GROTE
Maybe, maybe
not. (to
Chrystal)
Miss Welsh, you're free to go.
Eli can take you down the hall
first if you want to clean up
a bit.

CHRYSTAL
I just want to go home.

GROTE
Sure, sure... oh, Miss Welsh,
if you don't want them to
finish the job - I'd advise
you stay there.

CUT TO:

**32. INT. LAROUX'S APARTMENT - THE LOUNGE ROOM. DAY
(FLASHBACK SCENE)**

There is a HIGH FREQUENCY SOUND - a light ringing.

The lounge-room is clean. Bright. Decorated. Homely.

Annemette is shouting angry words in silence. Tears run,
well and drip over her lips.

Annemette stands by the front door - one hand clinging to
the doorknob. The other shakes a pair of lacy underwear
at-

Laroux sits, silent, still. Her gaze is fixed -
unblinking - on Annemette. Her eyes are full. Her face is
pale.

The lacy underwear hit her in the face.

The HIGH FREQUENCY SOUND intensifies - sounding like the ringing after a bomb.

Annemette's hand turns the doorknob. Opens the door. Annemette, who is now surrounded by sunshine, turns.

Laroux's face is drenched in sunshine. She blinks. A single tear escapes.

The light on Laroux's face fades as Annemette closes the door behind her.

BLACK SCREEN

The door slams.

CUT TO:

**33. INT. LITTLE INN - LAROUX'S ROOM. NIGHT. LAROUX
C.U**

Laroux lifts her head from between her hands.

Leant up against the foot of the bed, she stares at the wall.

She stretches out and pulls a smoke from the pocket of her jeans.

She lights it and drags heavily.

She ashes on the floor then crawls to the head of the bed. She presses her ear against the wall, then lightly knocks. She waits.

34. INT. LITTLE INN - ANNEMETTE'S ROOM. NIGHT.

Annemette listens to the knock. She lifts her hand up to knock back but stops.

She rolls over, pulls a pillow in and closes her eyes. Laroux knocks again.

LAROUX (O.S.)

The least you can do is tell
me what is going on.

Annemette's eyes open. She sits up and faces the wall.

ANNEMETTE

Like you told me?

LAROUX (O.S)

About what?

ANNEMETTE

About her.

LAROUX (O.S)

... this is different.

ANNEMETTE

It's not nice being in the dark about something, is it? Not knowing.

LAROUX (O.S)

You've proven your point, Anne.

ANNEMETTE

I'd have to drag you through mud and back again for a whole year to prove my point, Laroux.

LAROUX (O.S)

I get that I'm the last person you'd want to need but I can't fucking do much if I don't know what the fuck I'm helping you with right?

She rolls off her bed, grabs her boots and begins to lace-up.

CUT TO:

35. INT. LITTLE INN - LAROUX'S ROOM. NIGHT.

LAROUX

Right??

Silence answers her.

She gives in, butts her smoke on the side table and rolls over. She tucks the blanket between her legs.

LAROUX

I wonder if Pho City still has that Vietnamese soup you like. Remember?

The door swings open.

Footsteps make their way inside.

Laroux slides off the bed and rolls under it.

LAROUX P.O.V

A pair of women's boots come into view.

ANNEMETTE

Get dressed. You made me
hungry.

LAROUX

That was the plan.

She leans against the door-frame - facing outward while
Laroux pulls on pants and a shirt.

ANNEMETTE

And you're right. You need to
know, and I need help. I don't
want it, I need it.

LAROUX

I know. I got it.

ANNEMETTE

Good.

(beat)

No soup. We'll go to Luc's Inn
or something. Pho City'll be
too much.

Laroux pulls on her jacket.

LAROUX

Too much what?

ANNEMETTE

Nostalgia.

She laughs as she slips on moccasins.

ANNEMETTE (CONT'D)

What's funny?

LAROUX

Nostalgia.

ANNEMETTE

I don't dwell in the
past.
Laroux walks out the door.

LAROUX

I do.

She closes it.

CUT TO:

**36. INT. ELI'S '89 PLYMOUTH. SOUTH LA CIENEGA BLVD.
NIGHT.**

Eli is silent.

Chrystal rides passenger. She watches him.

CHRYSTAL

Sorry, Eli is it?

He ignores her.

CHRYSTAL

You need to take this exit.

His pocket-phone rings. He answers.

ELI

I'm on my way.

Fear sets in as they drive past the turnoff.

CHRYSTAL

Excuse me-

ELI

(on phone)

... not far.

He flips the phone closed and tucks it in his pocket.

CHRYSTAL

If you have somewhere you need
to be, I... I can just walk
from here.

He pulls over, switches off the car and turns to her.

CHRYSTAL (CONT'D)

Thank you for the lift.

He smiles at her.

She forces a smile then pulls the door handle. It's
locked.

CHRYSTAL P.O.V

Her hand trembles as she pulls at the pop-up lock - over and over. It doesn't budge.

She looks at Eli.

CHRYSTAL (CONT'D) (O.S.)
You need to let me out.

His smile widens.

CHRYSTAL P.O.V

She hits the window with clenched fists. The punches, fast at first, slow - as if giving in. She looks at him.

CHRYSTAL (CONT'D) (O.S.)
(sobbing)
Please... let
me out.

CHRYSTAL P.O.V

He shakes his head, slides a hand down the side of the car seat and pulls out a club lock. He lifts it up and brings it down.

CUT TO:

37. INT. THE CASTENELLO HOTEL. NIGHT.

Frank opens the door - a black briefcase in hand.

Chump's body lies on the floor covered by a bloody sheet. He pulls back the sheet.

FRANK
About time.

He pulls his phone out, dials, and puts it to his ear.

FRANK
Sir, I have the cash. He never
collected it from the foyer.
(beat)
Someone made sure he never
made it there.
(beat)
Sure.

CUT TO:

38. EXT. PHO CITY. NIGHT.

Laroux and Annemette are seated in a corner booth.

The restaurant is low lit. A few scattered wooden chairs and a huge jade dragon sculpture.

Annemette's hand twitches as she lights a cigarette.

LAROUX

I'm sorry, I thought it would be open. We'll eat and go.

Annemette shrugs.

A small Asian WAITRESS (40) walks over.

WAITRESS

We are clean. There's no smoking in here, it ruins the food. Not like those other dirty diners.

Annemette stubs her smoke in an empty sauce dish and smirks at the waitress.

The Waitress narrows her eyes.

WAITRESS

Oooo... is there going to be trouble?

LAROUX

No. No trouble. She's cold. It's a windy night out.

(beat)

Can we get two glasses of tea and a bowl of soup.

WAITRESS

Yes, yes, ok. As long as there's no trouble?

LAROUX

No trouble.

ANNEMETTE

I don't want tea. I'll have sake. A bottle.

(beat)

at)

She's paying.

The Waitress takes the order and walks off.

Laroux leans in.

LAROUX
What was that?

ANNEMETTE
People are all the same. Light
a smoke and you're a criminal.

LAROUX
You are a criminal.

The Waitress interrupts. She plonks the sake and a bowl
of soup in front of Annemette, and places a tea in front
of Laroux.

Annemette snickers, picks a pair of chopsticks from the
bundle and tucks in.

Laroux cradles her tea, watching Annemette.

ANNEMETTE
It was a drop. I took it.

LAROUX
What kind of drop?

She takes a long drag.

ANNEMETTE
A cash drop... well, it was
meant to be.

LAROUX
Whose drop?

Annemette pours herself another shot.

LAROUX (CONT'D)
Whose fucking drop?

ANNEMETTE
Ray's.

She knocks it back.

Laroux leans in, over the table.

LAROUX
Ray? As in Castenello, Ray?
Mr. Fucking Castenello?

Annemette nods.

LAROUX (CONT'D)

How the fuck do you know Ray,
Anne? How the fuck were you
planning to get away? He
fucking runs L.A.

Annemette continues to eat.

LAROUX

Answer me.

Annemette takes a long slurp of noodle and pushes the
bowl aside.

ANNEMETTE

You want to know. Ok. I didn't
fucking plan on a bag of white
powder. It was meant to be
Franklins. Franklins I could
use to get out, go somewhere
miles away from L.A, from Ray,
from you. It was meant to be..

Annemette's eyes well with tears.

ANNEMETTE (CONT'D)

Ray took me in. I stay in his
apartment, I eat, I fuck, I
sleep, and I collect the cash
in the morning. He takes most
of it, the rest covers Dad.

LAROUX

Jesus Anne... how the fuck?
You could've-

ANNEMETTE

Could've what? Gone and got
myself a decent job. Not a lot
of places keen on hiring ex-
strippers. You must know that.

LAROUX

You should've come to me.

Annemette laughs and aggressively wipes an escaped tear.

ANNEMETTE

As in, for help?

(beat)

Look. This is... I mean, you could've chosen not to fuck that girl, right? But you did. Now here WE are.

ANNEMETTE

Stop blaming what you never had, your parents... that night. They're your choices.

LAROUX

That night changed me.

Annemette extinguishes another smoke in the sauce dish and downs the rest of the small bottle of sake.

ANNEMETTE

Stop... it doesn't matter anymore. They said this shit is worth two mill. We can sell it and spilt the cash.

(beat)

You still know the people? People outside of Ray? Old friends?

(beat)

So, if you want in... shut your mouth about all the old 'us' shit and accept what is, or leave. Go back to cherry picking on Friday nights and I'll do it all myself. Either way, you need to find another sucker to listen to your sob story. I charge more than some fucking noodles and you can pay like everyone else.

Annemette stands up and grabs the duffel bag.

LAROUX

Wait, just fucking wait.

Laroux grabs Annemette's wrist. Annemette is still for a moment.

LAROUX (CONT'D)

There are so many things...
things you don't need to know
but I want you to. Please?

ANNEMETTE

There is nothing I need to
know.

She yanks out of Laroux's grip.

ANNEMETTE (CONT'D)

People who care want to know
things.

Annemette turns and weaves through a few tables, heading
for the exit.

Laroux stands up.

LAROUX

I'm in.

Annemette stops. She turns back.

CUT TO:

39. EXT. LA BREA AVE. NIGHT.

Police have barricaded both ends. Paramedics bag Goon#1.

Grote leans in to take a closer look at Walt's wounds.

OFFICER #2

Walter Kitchinkov. He worked
for the late Robert Davis and
it seems his daughter, Clair
Davis, picked up right where
he left off.

GROTE

Davis had no sons. She was his
heir. He moulded her for it.

OFFICER #2

Kitchinkov is her right hand.

GROTE

So, what's he doing here?

OFFICER #2

Not sure... apart from a few unregistered pistols these guys are carrying nothing. A midnight drop gone bad?

(beat)

Either way, won't take the Queen of Arms long to retaliate.

GROTE

She has... we just don't know about it yet. She's sharp, real sharp. But a deal all the way out here? It'd have to be a start-up-deal. The first drop in a new relationship - one outside of Mexico. Clair's spreading her wings to L.A. Getting greedy. Has to be someone heavy.

OFFICER #2

Castenello?

GROTE

Yeah, Ray fits, but he doesn't make sense... he's known to make reckless moves but he ain't crazy enough to fuck with Clair.

Grote notices Walt's shoes are missing.

GROTE (CONT'D)

Where are his shoes?

OFFICER #2

Gone, Sir. We found a pair up the block from here. Ladies, Sir.

Officer#2 grabs the bagged shoes from the items behind the car.

OFFICER #2 (CONT'D)

Walt was a small man.

Grote looks over the bag with Annemette's stilettos inside.

OFFICER #2 (CONT'D)
Maybe some pushcart needed a new pair and Walt's were up for offer?

GROTE
Maybe... or maybe our perp has nice taste.

He passes the shoes back and pulls a smoke from his pocket. A piece of paper tumbles out.

He picks it up and re-reads the scribbled writing - Laroux's address.

CUT TO:

40. EXT. CASTENELLO HOME. BEVERLY HILLS. NIGHT.

Eli's '89 Plymouth is buzzed in though a tall wrought iron gate. SECURITY#1 and SECURITY#2 wave him through - big dogs on thick collars at their sides.

Eli drives up the winding driveway to a Spanish looking red-sand mansion. The place is lit up, with protection comparable with Fort Knox.

He parks, pulls Chrystal from the car and throws her slumped figure over his shoulder.

41. INT. CASTENELLO HOME. RAY'S OFFICE. NIGHT.

A large office with a timber mezzanine. Mirrors spot the walls alongside a few scattered paintings of naked women.

There is a large gold eagle ring on RAY's hand. He sits behind a flat-line desk and looks over his face in a small hand-held mirror. He lifts his eyebrows and traces the wrinkles on his forehead.

There's a knock.

He slicks his eyebrows with his fingers, puts away the mirror and positions himself strongly.

RAY
Come in.

GOON#3 enters with a big black garbage bag in hand.

GOON #3

Sir-

Eli enters and pushes past Goon#3 with Chrystal slung over his shoulder.

Ray stands up.

RAY

Eli. Welcome, welcome. I see you have bought me a surprise. Put her down right there.

He points to the chair opposite him.

RAY (CONT'D)

No wait, put her on the floor. The chairs are velvet.

Goon#3 clears his throat.

GOON #3

Ahh, excuse me, Sir?

Eli drops her on the floor. Ray stands over her.

RAY

(to Goon#3)

Shhhh...

(beat)

Take a moment to look over this pretty little thing. A real-life sleeping beauty.

Chrystal shifts slightly.

RAY (CONT'D)

I like to wake sleeping beauties with a surprise.

Ray flat foots Chrystal in the stomach.

RAY

Surprise!

Chrystal curls into a fetal position and sucks air.

RAY

Excuse me for a moment, Miss-

He looks to Eli and cups his ear.

ELI
Miss Welsh.

RAY
Miss Welsh! Can you excuse us
as we have a little chat?
(to Eli)
So why is she here? Does she
have my drugs? Did she find my
drugs? Or does she know where
the fuck my drugs are?

ELI
No.

RAY
Can you please explain why she
is here then?

Eli passes him a B&W copy of the Polaroid of Annemette
and Laroux.

ELI
She was attacked earlier
tonight. She said the one on
the left had a duffle bag,
seemed scared, like she was
going to get caught for
something bad.
(beat)
Know either of them?

Ray looks over the Polaroid.

He giggles as he taps a finger on Annemette's face.

RAY
Ahhh... my beautiful
Annemette.

His smile quickly turns into a forced grin.

RAY
... sneaky CUNT.

ELI
There's a body somewhere too.
The girl said she had blood on
her.

RAY
It wouldn't surprise me...

His upper lip twitches.

RAY (CONT'D)
Seeing she FUCKING KILLED A
MAN!

Eli takes a step back.

ELI
Who?

RAY
Chump.

ELI
Walt's Chump? ... Clair's Walt?

RAY
Yes, fucking Walt's Chump,
Clair's Walt... I thought you
were a fucking cop?

ELI
Have you organised a sit down?
She's going to retaliate.

RAY
Yeah, yeah, I know. I'll
handle my shit; you just get a
grip on your own. Otherwise,
what the fuck am I paying you
for?

Ray unscrews a shovel-pendant that hangs around his neck,
taps some cocaine onto the spade head and snorts it up.

Goon#3 steps forward.

GOON #3
Ahh... Sir... about Clair?

Ray snorts another shovel, wipes his nose and looks to
Goon#3.

RAY
Yes... What the fuck is it?

Goon#3 walks over to Ray and opens the garbage bag.

GOON #3
She already has.

Ray peers inside then steps back quickly. He swallows hard.

RAY
I see... who has she taken them off then?

GOON #3
Tiny's brother, Sir.

Eli peers into the bag.

ELI
The Queen of Arms.

RAY
Poor Tiny... whoever the fuck he was...

GOON #3
He works the yard here, sir.

RAY
That wasn't a fucking question.

Ray rolls Chrystal over with his foot. Her dressing gown opens to one side.

RAY (CONT'D)
Someone has good taste.

He crouches down and squeezes her exposed breast. He traces his fingers down her abdomen, puts his hand between her legs and pushes his fingers inside her.

She shudders and begins to cry, now fully awake, eyes wide with fear.

RAY (CONT'D)
You're going to tell me the truth, aren't you?

She nods 'yes'.

RAY (CONT'D)

You know where these girls are at right now? I'll make them disappear and then you can go home. Be all warm and cosy.

CHRYSTAL

I just... just went home with her from the bar. They attacked me... they were, they were gone when I escaped.

He inserts his fingers again.

RAY

You sure about that, Miss Welsh? I'd hate to have to ruin the pretty little flower you have down here.

CHRYSTAL

(sobbing)

I don't know... I don't know!

RAY

Well... OK.

He helps her up.

RAY (CONT'D)

I believe you.

She barely gets to her feet before Ray kicks her from behind. She lands on the edge of his desk.

Eli is still fixed to the same position; sweat wells on his brow.

Ray walks over to a mirror, fixes his eyebrows and slicks his hair back.

He walks past Chrystal, without a glance her way and sits back down.

RAY (CONT'D)

I need you to find those girls... and the kid... well, do what we do with people who don't know anything.

Chrystal panics.

CHRYSTAL

Wait, just wait. Please...

Tears stream down her face.

The phone chirps. Ray pushes the button.

RECEPTIONIST (O.S.)

It's Frank.

Ray picks up.

RAY

I know you collected it Frank...
you think it leaves
unauthorised?

(beat)

Yeah, well, the world won't
miss him.

(beat)

Listen, Clair is playing match
the arms already. I need you
to find Annemette. Her and her
little girlfriend did me over.
Eli got us an address. 10
Hampton Street, Inglewood.

He hangs up, looks at Eli and Goon#3.

RAY (CONT'D)

Well, what the fuck do I pay
you people for? Get those
fucking arms out of my house
and kill the kid.

CHRYSTAL

No. Wait. Please. I know
people... Pleaseeee...

Eli grabs Chrystal off the desk and follows Goon#3 out.

RAY

Everybody knows people
Sweetheart.

Ray picks up the phone.

RAY (CONT'D)

Set a meeting with Clair.

42. INT. THE WHITE RHINO. NIGHT.

The lighting is poor but warm. Art drips from walls lined with black velvet. Pearls hang from the ceiling and connect to a crystal chandelier.

Little booths separate the PATRONS.

We follow BABY (22), dressed as an infant, who carries a plate with an octopus squirming on it.

In the distance, a PHONE RINGS.

Baby places the plate on the table of a booth and stands back.

Four MEN (40s) sit around the table. They select knives and take a turn each to stab it. They relish in its erratic squirming.

The octopus stops squirming.

Baby leans in and hacks it up with a cleaver.

The Men select forks and shovel it into their mouths.

Baby bows out from their company and makes her way back to the bar to answer the still-ringing phone.

CUT TO:

43. EXT. PHO CITY. NIGHT.

Laroux stands at a pay phone just outside the restaurant. She watches Annemette through its street-side window. She wipes the cold sweat formed on her upper lip and pulls her jacket collar up around her neck.

Inside, Annemette sips her tea and looks to the payphone.

BABY (O.S.)
Baby at the White Rhino.

Laroux turns and leans into the payphone.

LAROUX
Hey Baby. It's Laroux...

BABY (O.S.)
Long time.

LAROUX
I know. Is she in?

BABY (O.S.)
She's in.

LAROUX
Tell her to give me 60
seconds... it's worth it.

BABY (O.S.)
Are you coming back?

LAROUX
No.

BABY (O.S.)
Then I'm not sure she'll be
interested.

LAROUX
She likes money. Big money.

The line goes silent.

BABY
She does.
(beat)
Hold.

44. INT. WHITE RHINO. KOREATOWN. NIGHT.

Baby presses a button and puts the phone down.

She walks through a black double-door, into a red-lit hallway. The hallway is lined with doors.

As she makes her way down the hall, WE HEAR sounds from inside the rooms. A MAN MOANS. A WHIP CRACKS. A WOMAN SINGS A LULLABY. A MAN SOBBING. A WOMAN HUSHING.

Baby stops at another set of large double doors. She knocks loudly and enters.

Inside, two BUSINESSMEN sit opposite JENNA (40)- wild black hair, dressed in a long black shirt buttoned neck tight and red tie. She heads the table.

The room is all dark oak and warm light.

Baby walks round and whispers in her ear. Jenna excuses herself with a bow.

They exit.

Jenna picks up her phone and presses the red blinking light.

JENNA
I'll give you 40.

She looks to her watch and listens. We watch the time tick over.

JENNA
Stop... Same old Laroux.
Double dealing to make a dime.
(beat)
I'm interested enough to give
you five minutes. Tomorrow.
10am.

She hangs up.

45. INT. PHO CITY. NIGHT.

Laroux hangs up the phone. She walks inside and slides into the booth smiling.

Annemette sips her tea.

ANNEMETTE
I'm guessing from the smile
your lover was entertained?

Laroux loses the smile. Annemette lights a smoke.

The Waitress, cleaning the table behind them, 'tuts' and rolls her eyes.

LAROUX
The Ex is interested.

ANNEMETTE
Of course, she is. It's money.
How much did you offer?

LAROUX
Half.

ANNEMETTE
Half?

LAROUX
She wouldn't take any less,
Anne.

ANNEMETTE
Did you offer less?

LAROUX

I know her. Anything under a million she wouldn't blink at. She's doing us a favour.

ANNEMETTE

Nothing is a favour with people like that.

(beat)

She'll want you back.

Annemette finishes her tea and throws the cigarette butt in it.

LAROUX

She's the only option we have.

46. INT. ELI'S '89 PLYMOUTH. S LA CIENEGA BLVD. NIGHT.

Eli turns the radio on. The Coaster's 'Down in Mexico' pours out. He checks Chrystal in his rear view.

The single lane stretch of road is empty. Quiet. Dead. Open fields to each side.

In the back seat, Chrystal sits sobbing. She pulls the sides of her gown together tight.

He smiles at her in the mirror and starts to sing along.

ELI

Well, the first time that I saw him. He was sittin' on a piano stool. I said "a-tell me dad, when does the fun begin?" He just winked his eye and said "man, be cool..."

A beam of blinding white light flashes on behind Eli's car. It slams into him.

Eli loses control, veers off the road and rolls. The Plymouth comes to a stop on its roof.

47. EXT. ELI'S '89 PLYMOUTH. S LA CIENEGA BLVD. NIGHT.

A black Fleetwood Cadillac rolls up and comes to a stop; its headlights aimed at Eli's Plymouth.

Eli is hanging from the roof by his seatbelt. Blood pours

out from a crack in his skull. He moves ever so slightly.

Tom exits his Cadillac, leans back in and grabs his sawn-off shotgun.

He slowly makes his way over to Eli. Eli starts to mumble in fear.

ELI
I'm an officer...

Tom bends down and shoves the gun in Eli's face.

TOM
Shhh...

Tom moves the gun to Eli's mouth.

Tears stream down Eli's face. He squeezes his eyes shut.

TOM (CONT'D)
You cops are all the same. You
throw your job around like
you're someone important...
you don't realise that one day
you'll run into someone like
me... someone who, well, just
doesn't give a shit.

Tom cocks back the hammer.

ELI
(mumbling)
Wait... please wait.
(beat)
I can find the drugs... Ray,
Ray will pay you your money.

Tom moves the gun from Eli's face, enough so he can speak clearly.

TOM
How will you do that?

ELI
The bitch in the back... she,
she knows the girls. The ones
who hitched the bag. Two, two
girls. I have a, a picture,
their picture... it's in my
pocket.

TOM

I see, but the thing is, I despise cops like you. Killing a cop like you is justice. I'm helping the law... saving people.

(beat)

Besides that 'Bitch' in the back... well if she knows, what do I need you for?

Eli cries, spluttering spit everywhere. Tom shoots him in the face.

He searches Eli and pulls the B&W photocopy of the Polaroid from his pocket. He tucks it inside his jacket.

He moves to the back seat and leans in over Chrystal. He pushes her fringe aside with the tip of his gun.

She stirs and opens her eyes.

CHRYSTAL

Tom?

CUT TO:

48. EXT. LAROUX APARTMENT - INGLEWOOD. NIGHT.

Grote sits in his car under a streetlight. He gets on his two-way- radio.

GROTE

Base. This is Senior Sergeant Grote. Please send Sergeant Watts down to my location.

INTERCOM VOICE

Sorry Sir. Sergeant Watts isn't back yet.

GROTE

Thanks.

Grote hangs the receiver, exits the car and crosses the street.

He spots Chump's bike, parked on the lawn out front. He looks over it.

GROTE
Still keepin' a low profile, I
see.

Grote unholsters his gun and makes his way across the lawn. He stops at the front door. It's opened a crack.

CUT TO:

49. INT. LAROUX APARTMENT - INGLEWOOD. NIGHT.

Grote steps inside. It's empty. Dark. Silent. He holsters his gun and closes the door behind him.

He takes out a small flashlight and looks around the room. He spots smeared blood leading to the short-handled knife.

He walks over to the glass table, pulls a napkin from his pocket and picks up the gin bottle, observes the blood on it, then puts it down.

He notices two packets of matches - one from The White Rhino and the other from the Whiskey A Go Go. He pockets them and heads for the bedroom.

Inside the bedroom, Grote starts to rifle through drawers. Outside heavy footsteps sound.

Grote freezes. Listens.

The heavy footsteps head for the front door.

Grote listens to the door handle turn - it squeaks as someone enters.

Heavy footsteps enter the lounge room.

Grote removes his gun from its holster and shuffles closer to the doorframe. He peers out.

Frank stands in the middle of the room.

Confused, Grote leans out to get a better look. The door frame creaks.

Frank rips out his gun and lets loose a shot in Grote's direction. Grote ducks back inside the door. He pops out and fires two rounds.

They miss Frank as he exits, returning free fire on Grote.

Grote hides from the shots, then runs for the door, only to see Frank's black Mercedes screech away.

It's then he notices the black shoes tucked inside the doorway.

Walt's shoes.

CUT TO:

50. INT. LITTLE INN. SPLIT-ROOM VIEW. NIGHT.

Annemette and Laroux lay on their beds.

ANNEMETTE
You still awake?

LAROUX
Sort of... you can't sleep?

Annemette pauses and sits up. She leans against the bedhead.

ANNEMETTE
(slight slur)
Too much sake.
(beat)
I want to ask you something
that I'm not sure if I want to
know the answer to.

LAROUX
Ask me and I'll answer with
that in mind.

ANNEMETTE
Did you love her?

Laroux turns to face the wall - scoots closer to it, then rests against it.

LAROUX
No... I felt like I could
never love anyone. I used her.
She was my out. I couldn't
leave you, but if you saw me
with her... I knew you would
leave.

ANNEMETTE
Why did you want me to leave?

LAROUX

I didn't think I could do it
again, not like you wanted.

ANNEMETTE

She was twenty years ago.

LAROUX

And for twenty years I've
wished that I would've opened
my eyes. I held it like she
said... I waited like she
said...

(beat)

The shrinks said I'd be okay.
I waited for that 'okay' day.
I tried. I looked at people,
but I didn't see them.

(beat)

Then first time I saw, I saw
you. You were bright. In
focus. Real.

(beat)

After a while, you felt like
home.

Tears stream down Annemette's face. She doesn't bother to
wipe them away. Wide eyed, she lets them silently roll.

LAROUX (CONT'D)

That scared me.

(beat)

I had nothing, Anne. Day after
day, you were happy, but I had
nothing. I was hoarding a gem.
I started telling myself you
would leave and that if you
left it would crush me... so I
left.

Annemette lies down again and pulls the blanket up over
her. She closes her eyes.

LAROUX (CONT'D)

I crushed myself.

(beat)

Are you still awake?

Silence answers her.

Laroux leans back on her pillows and closes her eyes.

CUT TO:

**51. INT. PASADENA POLICE DEPARTMENT. CUBICLE. DAY.
(DAY TWO)**

Grote, slumped over his desk, wakes up.

He moves slowly, stands up and stretches, before he pulls out a smoke and shoves it between his teeth.

He stands in front of his corkboard full of pictures and scribbled writing. He has connected a red line between Ray and Davis and stuck the Polaroid of Annemette and Laroux between the two gangs, circled in red.

He rubs his brow, then reaches into his pocket, as if looking for a lighter. He pulls out the match boxes.

OFFICER#3 passes by. Grote stops him.

GROTE

Hey... you seen Eli?

OFFICER #3

Nope.

Grote nods - a dismissal.

He uses a match to light his smoke. He looks at the box, turns it over. They're from The White Rhino.

He stands up, pockets the matchbox and grabs his jacket.

CUT TO:

52. EXT. CLAIR'S HOME. MORNING.

We follow Tom outside to Clair's pool. A pair of BLACK ROTTWEILERS stand guard at the bi-fold doors. They watch Tom as he walks past.

Clair sits. She watches Lilly swim. Tom stops just behind her.

CLAIR

Never stand where I can't see
you.

Tom moves into her view.

TOM
It's done.

CLAIR
Did you package them and send
them on their way?

TOM
I was interrupted. There was
an unknown car.

CLAIR
Did it see you?

TOM
No.

CLAIR
Good. Next time work faster.

Clair stands up and starts to walk inside. She stops and
looks over her shoulder at Tom.

Tom follows her into-

CUT TO:

53. INT. CLAIR'S KITCHEN. MORNING.

A MAID (20) chops vegetables.

Clair dismisses her with a wave, picks up the knife and
continues chopping.

CLAIR
Shame you didn't finish the
job. But as my Father used to
say, a man for a man is still
a good deal.

TOM
Walt was a good man.

CLAIR
He was.
(beat)
Now then, where are my drugs?

TOM
There's a lead. Two girls.

Tom pulls Eli's B&W copy of the Polaroid out and holds it out to her. She looks at it, then at him.

CLAIR

Well?

TOM

Yes, Mrs. Davis.

Tom walks out of the kitchen and down the hall into-

CUT TO:

54. INT. CLAIR'S HOME - FAMILY ROOM. DAY.

A room full of dangerous-looking suits are sitting at the dining table eating with Lester.

Tom approaches Lester, leans in and whispers in his ear.

Lester nods and slips a piece of paper into Tom's shirt pocket.

CUT TO:

55. INT. BASEMENT. EAST LA. FLASHBACK - DAY. 1969.

LITTLE GIRL (10) CU

blue eyes; PANICKED, TEARY, RED. They close. Water runs down her pale cheeks and catches in strands of jet-black hair.

FADE IN (O.S.)

A heated ARGUMENT between a submissive WOMAN (32) and an abusive MAN (45), close but muffled.

The Little Girl sits on a mangled steel bed frame - the mattress torn in places; its stuffing exposed. Her arms are wrapped tight around her legs. She clasps her hands together. Her right thumb rubs circles on the palm of the opposite hand. She rocks back and forth, her wide eyes fixed on something in front of her.

LITTLE GIRL POV

a set of old wooden stairs lead up to the basement door. A silhouette of light outlines it. The light shades on and off as figures pass by behind it.

MAN

Have ya even cooked? I mean...
ya been here all day, haven't
ya?

Cause ya weren't there.

WOMAN

Laroux needed picking up, said
she wasn't feeling...

MAN

I set it all up just to watch
your lazy ass knock it down.
All ya had to do was get those
pretty cheeks down there.

WOMAN

The school called.

MAN

The school... always the
fucking school... she won't
have a fuckin' school if ya
don't start making coin.

WOMAN

I'm sorry. Next time...

MAN

Next time?

(he laughs)

Who said anything about a next
time?

There is a loud CRACK - a body drops to the floor.

DRAGGING and SCRAPING sounds begin - a lifeless body
being moved around.

The Little Girl watches the basement door shudder - as if
something is pressed against it.

Pants UNZIP and HEAVY BREATHING commences.

LITTLE GIRL CU

blue eyes - FEAR, PANIC, ANGER - a caged animal.

Her thumb's ceaseless rotation has lifted away a layer of
skin. Tiny blood spots now visible beneath the surface.

The HEAVY BREATHING quickens - excitement. The door
rattles shakes on its hinges.

The Little Girl takes a deep breath, holds it and
squeezes her eyes shut.

LITTLE GIRL POV - BACK OF EYELIDS

WOMAN (V.O.)

Hide it. Keep it close.

(beat)

One day... please believe me.

One day... things will be
different for you.

LITTLE GIRL POV - OPENS HER EYES

a small pistol rests between her thighs. Her little fingers wrap around the steel grip. She slides it out, cups it in her hands, sets both index fingers on the trigger and cocks the hammer with her thumbs.

There's a loud MOAN of relief, then a single gunshot ring out. A body drops to the floor.

Silence. LITTLE GIRL C.U.

tears well and drop steadily. Her body convulses with fear. Her grip tightens around the pistol. She does not blink.

Her HEART begins to PUMP hard and fast.

Two feet shape the light peeping underneath the basement door.

The basement door handle turns. The Little Girl aims the pistol.

The BEATING OF HER HEART abruptly stops. An explosion of light bursts in.

She closes her big blue eyes.

Three consecutive GUNSHOTS follow - BANG BANG BANG.

SMASH CUT TO:

56. INT. DINER. KOREATOWN. MORNING.

A typical American diner across from The White Rhino. Annemette and Laroux sit in a street-window booth.

Black bags line Laroux's big blue eyes.

ANNEMETTE

Still having them then?

Annemette smokes, and Laroux gaze doesn't move from her coffee.

ANNEMETTE

Laroux?

Laroux looks up - pulled from her thoughts.

LAROUX

Huh?

ANNEMETTE

The nightmares.

Laroux looks out the window. She observes The White Rhino. She watches SECURITY GUARD#1 and SECURITY GUARD#2 chatting, leant up against the bar's front doors.

ANNEMETTE

What happens if you don't come back out?

LAROUX

You don't go in.

ANNEMETTE

I just leave you in there?

LAROUX

Yes.

ANNEMETTE

What if I can't?

LAROUX

You can.

A WAITRESS delivers their breakfast.

LAROUX

(to waitress)

Thank you.

Annemette takes a sip of her coffee.

Laroux notices the duffle bag under Annemette's chair. She tucks it out of sight with her foot.

Annemette pushes it back.

ANNEMETTE

I need to keep an eye on it.

LAROUX

Someone could recognize the bag.

ANNEMETTE

We can deal with a someone.

Annemette taps her jacket pocket.

LAROUX

Stop acting like a killer Anne.

ANNEMETTE

I've killed.

LAROUX

Killing because you have to isn't the same as killing because you want to.

ANNEMETTE

I wanted to pull the trigger.

LAROUX

And you had to.

ANNEMETTE

Everything is a choice.

LAROUX

Then chose to live. This could kill us, Anne. These people... they don't mess around.

She puts her fork down and looks up.

ANNEMETTE

It's worth it.

Annemette flips out a smoke and pulls out a lighter. She attempts to light another smoke, but her hand shakes the flame out.

Laroux reaches out, steadies her hand for a moment and ignites her lighter.

Annemette leans in and lights her smoke.

She inhales deeply, caresses her brow and exhales slowly.

ANNEMETTE

I'm tired of existing... I don't fit in. I try but I don't. I'm different and there's no place for different... different is only good to fuck, to own or to hurt.

She breaks their gaze.

Laroux reaches over to touch Annemette's hand. She pulls away.

ANNEMETTE

I don't need your sympathy.

Annemette butts her cigarette in an ashtray and takes a sip of her coffee.

Laroux checks the clock on the diner wall. It ticks ten. She watches SECURITY GUARD 3 and SECURITY GUARD 4 open The White Rhino's doors.

Laroux stands up.

The diner's DOORBELL rings as Laroux exits.

Annemette shakily lights another cigarette and watches Laroux head across the street toward The White Rhino.

CUT TO:

57. INT. THE WHITE RHINO. DAY.

The place is dead. A few men in tight shirts and metallic short shorts are hovering over tables: cloths in hand.

A booth of power-dressed WOMEN are eating hand-crafted sushi off a young naked MALE.

Baby is at the bar. She waves Laroux over.

BABY

Myyy... how clean you look!

Baby leans right in. Peering at Laroux's pupils.

BABY

How long?

LAROUX

Long.

BABY
Good, that's good.
(beat)
Don't mind me. It's standard.

Baby pats Laroux down.

BABY (CONT'D)
I assume you don't need me to
show you where Jenna is?

LAROUX
Right, as usual.

BABY
Off you go then. On your way.

Baby nods toward a double black door behind the bar.

LAROUX
Thanks, Baby.

BABY
Don't thank me yet.

Laroux heads through the door and makes her way down a long hall. The walls, ceiling and polished concrete floors are painted black. The hall is lined with red doors either side. On each door is a name. She stops at one of them and looks at it for a moment. Her name is on it.

She continues to the end of the hall and knocks on another set of black double doors.

The door opens.

Jenna, all wild black hair, a high-collared white shirt and red bell bottoms, leans up against the doorframe.

JENNA
Long time.

She stands aside to let Laroux through.

JENNA
Sit.

LAROUX
I'll stand.

Jenna pulls out a chair.

JENNA
No. You'll sit.

Laroux sits.

Jenna sits on top of her.

JENNA (CONT'D)
I still like to play before
business.

She pushes Laroux's hair aside and licks her earlobe.

Laroux stiffens.

Jenna pulls back.

JENNA (CONT'D)
You're still with her?

LAROUX
You could say that.

JENNA
Never stopped you before.

LAROUX
Before was different.

Jenna stands up, walks around the desk and sits down.

JENNA
So, what is it? This deal?
Your golden opportunity?

LAROUX
I need a buyer.

JENNA
What kind?

LAROUX
The cocaine kind.

JENNA
Who's dust?

LAROUX
5 keys. It'll be a fifty-fifty
split. A mil each.

Jenna leans over the desk.

JENNA
Who's dust?

LAROUX
A find - I don't know. The
sale needs a nobody buyer.

Jenna laughs, butts her smoke and stands up.

JENNA
New Boss, new rules. No
outside drugs in house. So,
I'll shop it 'round. See what
street rat pops up.
(beat)
It won't take long. I'll have
an offer by tonight.

Laroux stands up. Pushes her chair in.

JENNA
I've kept your room.

LAROUX
I saw.

JENNA
Do you want to know why?

LAROUX
I can assume.

JENNA
She looks like you but isn't
you. We needed someone. An
attempt to keep your clients.

LAROUX
I'm glad it all worked out for
you.

JENNA
It didn't. She doesn't dance
like you.

LAROUX
In a daze of heroin?

JENNA
We don't do that anymore.

LAROUX
Good to hear.

JENNA
We've changed.

LAROUX
Same... but for the better.

Jenna grabs a pen and paper out.

JENNA
Shame.
(beat)
So, where are you staying?

LAROUX
I'll call you.

Jenna smiles.

JENNA (CONT'D)
Still a smart girl.
(beat)
Give me until 5am.

CUT TO:

58. INT. THE WHITE RHINO. DAY.

Grote enters. Security Guards#3 and #4 follow. He blinks, his eyes adjusting to the darkness.

He notices the sushi-eating Power-Dressers in the booth. He watches as one of the women lifts the man-platter's flaccid penis with her chopsticks. A woman seated next to her laughs.

Laroux walks by as he watches. She notices Grote for an instant, a passing glance, then exits.

Baby spots Grote.

Security Guard#3 nods at Baby.

Baby grabs a napkin off the bar, scribbles on it and pours a shot.

Grote takes a stool at the bar. Baby lays out the shot on the napkin. The scribble reads 'No Cops'.

He throws back the shot, slides the glass to Baby, pulls out his badge - a thing of pride - and covers the writing on the napkin with it.

GROTE

Thanks for the shot but play time's over. I need some answers. If you're honest I won't have to go bother your Boss.

BABY

Bother my Boss and I won't have to worry about your questions.

GROTE

A big threat for a girl dressed in a baby outfit.

BABY

People are fooled by appearances.

Grote reaches into his jacket pocket, pulls out and holds up the Polaroid of Laroux and Annemette.

GROTE

Know these two?

Baby doesn't even look at it. She refills his shot glass.

BABY

Nope.

Grote smiles and downs the shot.

GROTE

Great hospitality.

(beat)

You sure you don't want another look before I go ask Jenna?

BABY

Sorry, we have a two-shot policy for cops.

Baby puts her fingers to her lips and whistles.

Security Guard#3 and Security Guard#4 appear on either side of Grote. They grab an arm each and lift him off his chair.

CUT TO:

59. EXT. THE WHITE RHINO. DAY.

Grote dusts gutter off himself as the Security Guards#3 and #4 head back inside The White Rhino.

A VOICE on his two-way car radio fades in.

RADIOWOMAN

Senior Sergeant Grote, come in... Senior Sergeant Grote, can you hear me?

Grote throws open his car door and grabs the receiver.

GROTE

Yeah, I'm here.

RADIOWOMAN

Its Eli, sir... we found him.

His face turns grim.

GROTE

Found him?

CUT TO:

60. EXT. S LA CIENEGA BLVD. DAY.

A few cruisers surround Eli's '89 Plymouth.

Grote looks in on a mutilated Eli - he is missing half his face and one arm.

OFFICER #4 (O.S)

Shotgun round. Messy work. They took an arm, too.

(beat)

We found blood in the back seat. They'll run it soon. We assume its Chrystal Welsh's, the girl Eli was meant to take home... she never made it.

Grote's stare hasn't left the body. He pulls out a smoke from his jacket pocket. He attempts to light it but the zippo only sparks - out of fuel.

He kicks the sand, winds up and pitches it.

He steadies himself, fixes his shirt and looks at the FEMALE OFFICER#4.

GROTE

Go on...

She looks at her feet - silent.

Grote taps his pockets down and pulls out a pack of matches.

GROTE (CONT'D)

Well?

He lights his smoke.

OFFICER #4

We found Eli's pocket phone...
they've already traced the
last numbers dialled.

(beat)

His last call was to one of
Ray Castenello's properties in
Beverly Hills.

Grote looks up at her confused - a firm stare on his rough mug.

GROTE

Castenello?

She awkwardly places a hand on his shoulder. Grote watches her hand.

She steps back.

OFFICER #4

Yeah.

OFFICER#4 C.U

She squints.

OFFICER #4 (CONT'D)

I guess there are those who
play a part and those who live
it. Eli was a player.

(beat)

Those closest, can't see.

She turns to walk off.

GROTE
Nothing on the girl?

OFFICER #4
Chrystal? No. We know she
worked at that Whiskey place
on Sunset Blvd.

CUT TO:

61. EXT. WHISKEY A GO GO. DAY.

Grote's Dodge Diplomat bumps up the curb and handbrakes out front.

SECURITY GUARD#5 and SECURITY GUARD#6 - walnuts in suits - stand on either side of the entrance. They look at each other.

Security Guard#5 walks toward Grote's car, smiling.

Grote gets out of his car. He doesn't bother to close the door.

Security Guard#5 places a hand on Grote's chest.

GUARD
Not today, Grote.

Grote breaks his nose with one punch.

Security Guard#5 stands in shock for a moment then lurches at Grote. He shoves Grote to the ground.

Security Guard#6 watches on. He finds the show amusing, he laughs as if he knows Grote will be put in place.

Grote manages to flip Security Guard#5 and knocks him out cold.

Security Guard#6 stops laughing.

Grote stands up and heads toward the entrance. Security Guard#6 reaches into his jacket for his gun.

Grote steals his pistol and shoots him in the foot with it. He falls to the ground in agony.

Grote enters the club.

CUT TO:

62. INT. WHISKEY A GO GO. DAY.

The place is empty aside from a few scattered WORKERS. The place looks as if it's seen a heavy night. Bottles rest under tables, smashed glass litters the floor, and a few broken stools are stacked to the right of the entrance.

(O.S.)

A jukebox plays Carly Simon's 'You're So Vain'. Grote makes his way to the bar.

The BARMAN (25) - a mess of hair, a bowtie and an open shirt - cleans wine glasses. He watches Grote approach - a flushed red face, a trickle of sweat snakes down his forehead.

The Barman raises his hands above his head.

Grote grabs his bowtie. It rips off. He tosses it behind him. He grabs a handful of Barman's chest hair and shoves the Polaroid of Laroux and Annemette in his face.

GROTE

Know them?

He whimpers and points at Laroux.

BARMAN

She, she is a regular... likes girls, always taking them home. Another one of ours last night. A newish girl... C..C..Chrystal... that's all I know.

The Barman shakes. His chest is excessively red from Grote's tight grip.

Grote eases his grip and let's go. He shakes the hair off his hand.

A red-haired GIRL walks behind the bar - BACK to the CAMERA.

BARMAN (CONT'D)

Is, is Chrystal ok?

Grote ignores the Barman. He watches the girl pour herself a drink.

GROTE

Hey...

She turns. It's Ivy from the entrance of the Little Inn.
He holds up the Polaroid.

GROTE (CONT'D)

Have you seen these two girls?

Ivy walks over, leans in close to the Polaroid, leans back and takes a sip.

She swallows.

IVY

Nope.

She attempts to take another sip, but Grote grabs her hand.

She smirks at him.

IVY (CONT'D)

I like it rough.

He takes the glass out of her hand and replaces it with the Polaroid.

Ivy laughs.

IVY (CONT'D)

Ok Mr. Tough Guy... Come to think of it... I seen 'em.

(beat)

How much you payin'?

GROTE

I'm giving out free rides to the station.

She shrugs his threat off.

IVY

I like rides.

GROTE

You won't like this one.

IVY

Info on two girls like that... I'd say a hundred.

GROTE
How about 100 hours in lock
up?

IVY
You ain't got a reason to lock
me up cop. I'm just here,
workin' away.

GROTE
I don't need a reason. Could
just be me making a false
arrest. I'll write you an
apology letter before you
leave.

IVY
I just got this job. I can't
be-

GROTE
Then cut the shit.

IVY
Ok, ok, calm it down big guy.
(beat)
I wanted the dark haired one
for a quick piece. She didn't
take. Her partner's a real
bitch, snooty, rollin' her
eyes and shit.
(beat)

They're stayin' down at the
Little Inn on Santa Monica
Boulevard...
It's one of those places -
you're either workin' or
hidin' there and they ain't
workin'.

Grote takes a note out of his wallet and slaps it on the
bar.

CUT TO:

63. INT. BAR. SANTA MONICA BLVD. AFTERNOON.

The bar is empty. Rockabilly music plays from a radio
behind the bar.

Annemette picks up two glasses of Tia Maria on ice, throws down a fifty and walks over to where Laroux sits. She takes a seat and slides a glass over to her. She lifts her glass.

ANNEMETTE

Cheers to finding a buyer.

Laroux clinks her glass against Annemette's unenthusiastically, then takes a sip.

Annemette downs her drink.

ANNEMETTE (CONT'D)

Let's dance.

She grabs Laroux's hand and pulls her to her feet. Annemette sways slow to the music.

Laroux grabs her hand and they swing dance a little.

Laroux pulls her in close. Annemette presses up against her. They sway in the heavy rockabilly beat - completely off beat from the music.

Laroux leans in. Annemette steps back.

LAROUX

I thought...

CUT TO:

64. EXT. LITTLE INN. LATE AFTERNOON.

Grote pulls into the car park and gets comfortable.

He retrieves a half-eaten burger from his centre console, scoffs it down and tucks the wrapper away.

He lights a smoke and exhales, slumping further into the driver's seat.

ANNEMETTE (O.S.)

Stop following me.

Annemette stumbles through the car park towards Grote's car, Laroux in tow.

Grote leans into his seat and watches.

They pass him. At the Little Inn's entrance Laroux grabs Annemette's arm. She pulls away and heads inside. Laroux follows.

Grote exits his car.

CUT TO:

65. INT. LITTLE INN - ANNEMETTE'S ROOM. LATE AFTERNOON.

Laroux follows Annemette through the door.

LAROUX
Stop acting, Anne. I can see through it.

Annemette laughs.

ANNEMETTE
You think I still love you.

LAROUX
I know you do.

ANNEMETTE
You're very wrong.

LAROUX
Kiss me then.

ANNEMETTE
This is not a fairy-tale,
Laroux.

Laroux grabs Annemette and kisses her.

Annemette pulls back and slaps her.

They watch each other for a moment, out of breath.

Laroux moves in slowly, grabs Annemette's red face and kisses her gently.

Annemette returns the kiss hungrily. They begin pulling, unbuttoning, undressing each other.

They fumble over to the edge of the bed. Laroux pushes Annemette down. She shuffles back on the bed, her pants unbuttoned, and chest covered by a bra.

Laroux pauses, her look a mixture of disbelief and happiness.

Annemette bites her lip. Her smile fades.

Laroux begins to pull down Annemette's leather pants. Annemette grabs Laroux's hand.

Annemette sits up, as if it was all a big mistake, and pulls the bed's sheet around her shoulders.

Laroux sits on the edge of the bed. She shuffles closer to Annemette.

Tears roll down Annemette's face.

Laroux brushes them away.

Annemette doesn't stop her.

ANNEMETTE

I fucking loved you.

LAROUX

I know.

Annemette lies down.

Laroux lies down behind her.

Annemette reaches back and pulls her in; presses her body onto Laroux's.

Laroux softly runs her fingers over the back of Annemette's arm, down the arch of her hip and across the front of her belly.

Annemette shivers at the touch.

LAROUX

I've always loved you, Anne.

Annemette twists around.

Annemette, eyes open, kisses her gently. She lets her tongue rediscover Laroux's upper lip, taste her mouth. Laroux holds back for a moment, letting her discover, then turns the kiss hungry and heavy.

Laroux sucks on Annemette's lower lip as her hand moves up Annemette's ribs to her breast. She thumbs her nipple, traces over it lightly. It hardens.

Annemette arches her back and moans heavily.

Laroux softly pinches, flicks and rubs Annemette's nipple gently between her index and thumb. She pulls her bra aside and takes it in her mouth.

CUT TO:

66. INT. THE LITTLE INN. HALLWAY. LATE AFTERNOON.

Grote slips a room key in his pocket and makes his way down the hall.

He unholsters his gun.

He presses his ear up against each of the doors - listening for Annemette's or Laroux's voice.

He stops out front Annemette's room. There is a female heavily MOANING.

He tries the door handle. It's unlocked.

He opens the door. The MOANING grows louder. He feather-foots it into the room.

The MOANS get louder with each step he takes.

He pauses - spotting their feet twisted together at the end of the bed.

He wipes his forehead, looks to the front door, then turns back.

He composes himself and walks into the room, his badge in hand.

We see the outline of Laroux's head moving between Annemette's legs. Annemette spots Grote. She sits up fast.

LAROUX
(from under the sheet)
What's wrong?

ANNEMETTE
We have a visitor.

Laroux stills then scrambles out of the blanket, careful not to expose Annemette.

GROTE C.U

sweat speckles his forehead.

GROTE
I'm a Senior Sergeant at the
Pasadena Police Department.
The name's Grote.
(beat)
I need you both to get
dressed.

Laroux sits up, pulls the sheet close and faces Grote.

Annemette throws the sheet off, swings her legs over the bed, pulls on her underwear and swaggers over to Grote.

ANNEMETTE

Must be serious if we have a senior sergeant's attention.

GROTE

I'll explain at the station.

LAROUX

You haven't arrested us, which means you have nothing. Why would we go with you?

GROTE

I haven't arrested you because you're naked.

ANNEMETTE

Strange. Most cops would.

GROTE

I'm not most cops.

ANNEMETTE

In that case, are you going to watch us dress? Or can we have some privacy?

Annemette walks over to where her clothes are strung over a chair.

Grote looks at the floor.

Annemette pulls on her shirt but doesn't button it. She shuffles into her leather pants then slumps into the chair and lights a cigarette.

ANNEMETTE

Are you a pervert, Grote?

Grote looks at Annemette. She suggestively parts the sides of her shirt, enough to expose the middle of her chest to her navel. She caresses it suggestively with her fingertips.

GROTE

Not that kind.

His gaze follows Annemette's finger. He swallows hard.
Laroux reaches for Annemette's revolver.

ANNEMETTE
We could work something out if
you are.

Grote notices Laroux shift and points his gun her way.

GROTE
I'm not.

Laroux recoils.

ANNEMETTE
Wait... look...

Annemette lets go of her shirt and approaches Grote. She pushes the barrel of his gun down an inch and looks him in the eye.

ANNEMETTE
We have something that might
interest you. It's a risk to
offer it but I like our
chances... the way I see it,
you can take us in on whatever
little charges you can prove
and stay a nobody cop or you
make the bust of a lifetime.

GROTE
What are you talking about?

ANNEMETTE
We have the hook you need to
catch a big shark.

Grote's eyes harden.

He lifts his gun, re-aligning Laroux with its barrel. She lifts her hands in surrender. He puts out his free hand.

GROTE
Give me the pistol and I'll
listen.

Annemette walks over to the bed, grabs her revolver and offers it to him.

He puts out an open hand.

Annemette holds it up over his hand and drops it.

Grote watches as it bounces off his hand and hits the floor.

Annemette steals his gun, points it at him, then picks up and tosses her revolver to Laroux.

ANNEMETTE

Sit down and you'll listen.

She ushers Grote, with the tip of his gun, into a chair.

ANNEMETTE (CONT'D)

Let us explain how you are about to win the cop lottery.

Annemette sits on the edge of the bed, facing Grote, and rests his gun in her lap.

GROTE

I'm going to need a drink.

CUT TO:

67. EXT. CLAIR'S HOME. BACKYARD. NIGHT.

The sun retreats throwing a slight red into the night sky.

Clair rests on a daybed in a shirt and pants, reading a recipe book.

Ray, escorted by GOON#2, is stopped by Tom at the bay-door entrance to the patio. Tom pats him down. He's clean.

Tom nods - a permission granted nod - and steps aside. Ray exits onto the patio.

Clair doesn't look up from her book as Ray approaches with Tom a few steps behind.

Ray waits, shifting from foot to foot, for Clair to put down her book.

She folds an edge and places the book in her lap. She looks at Tom first.

CLAIR

Let the big girls have a private chat.

Tom walks away and waits by the patio door. Clair smiles at Ray.

CLAIR
Please sit.

Ray looks around. There are no other chairs.

RAY
Where?

CLAIR
You need me to direct you as
to where you should sit?

He returns her smile and lowers himself to the ground - his face a shade of red. He crosses his legs and grins up at her.

CLAIR
Good. Now that we are both
comfortable... did you like my
gift?

RAY
I can't say that I did.

CLAIR
It was the least I could do.
There was another pair on the
way, the cop type, but my man
was interrupted, and I don't
package singles.

Ray's eyes widen in anger.

RAY
You didn't have to do that.

CLAIR
Oh, but it was my pleasure.
(beat)

Now enough about gifts and on to business. While I am aware of your position, Mr. Castenello, understand it even, the problem is that I am not in that position. My position, although still unfavourable, is VERY different. You see, I am missing two million dollars' worth of powder and I am of the understanding that the buyer, that's you Mr. Castenello, has either taken it for himself, which would be rather silly.. OR.. he is not capable enough to control those who are underneath him and they now have my powder.

Clair takes a big breath and leans back.

CLAIR (CONT'D)

So, which is it Mr. Castenello.

Ray runs his fingers through his hair, slicking it back, and fixes his jacket.

RAY

There are two girls - one I know. We can get it-

CLAIR

You know, I never did like the name The Queen of Arms, but it grew on me. Hell, these days it kind of suits.

(beat)

Now, if you don't want your arms to end up in a bag Mr. Castenello, then I need either my dust or the money. I leave the ball in your court. Keep in mind, you have one chance.

(beat)

Tom will call you with the details of where my money should be delivered. If you don't show, well...

She waves Tom back. He stands over Ray - a sign that the meeting has concluded.

Clair opens her recipe book and unfolds the edge, a dismissal.

Ray stands up and brushes himself down. He looks at Clair.

RAY
An absolute pleasure as usual.
Such hospitality.

Clair ignores him and flips a page. Ray leads himself out. Tom follows.

CUT TO:

68. EXT. CLAIR'S HOME. BEL AIR. NIGHT.

Tom opens the door on Ray's '68 Corvette. Ray gets in and shuts his door.

Tom taps on his window. Ray lets his window down.

TOM
Tonight.

He slips him the piece of paper Lester gave him.

CUT TO:

69. INT. CLAIR'S HOME. OFFICE. NIGHT.

Clair watches Tom and Ray from the window.

She takes a heavy drag of her cigarette and releases it slowly.

GOON#2 knocks and enters.

GOON #2
A lady is here. Says she has info on the lost load.

Clair moves away from the window, sits behind her desk and butts her smoke. She stashes the ashtray and pours herself a drink.

CLAIR
Send her in.

Jenna, from The White Rhino, enters.

CUT TO:

70. EXT. DENNYS - COMPTON. NIGHT.

Frank rests against his black Mercedes. Through the street window he watches Ray take a booth inside.

Tom's Cadillac pulls in behind Frank's Mercedes. Tom gets out of the car and opens the back door.

Lester steps out, fixes his suit and enters the diner.

Tom leans against his Cadillac and nods at Frank. Frank returns the greeting with a nod.

Simultaneously, Tom and Frank light cigarettes, and then return to watching their bosses through the window.

Observed through the diner's window, a waitress offers Ray a coffee. He dismisses her with a wave.

Lester makes his way to the booth and sits down across from Ray.

CUT TO:

71. INT. DENNYS - COMPTON. NIGHT.

Ray stands and shakes Lester's hand.

RAY
You look just like your
grandfather.

LESTER
People do say.

RAY
People are right.

Lester waves the waitress over. She heads his way.

LESTER
I don't have much time. She
has eyes everywhere. So here
is the short...

The waitress arrives at the table. Lester keeps his eyes on Ray.

LESTER (CONT'D)
Short and black.

He waves her off. She rolls her eyes and leaves.

LESTER (CONT'D)
My mother is on her way out
and I will be taking her
place. Her business will be my
business. Now you're in a
pickle.

RAY
Not a pickle but...

LESTER
It's a pickle.
(beat)
I'm willing to let this pickle
go if it works to my
advantage.

RAY
Ok, ok, so how do I shift the
tide?

LESTER
You'd need to kill her.

CUT TO:

**72. INT. LITTLE INN - ANNEMETTE'S ROOM. EARLY
MORNING (5AM).**

Grote, Laroux and Annemette sit in an awkward triangle,
silent but alert.

Laroux looks at the clock. It ticks onto five. Laroux
picks up the phone and dials out.

The line picks up.

Laroux listens for a moment.

LAROUX
We can be there in twenty.

She hangs up the phone and looks at Annemette.

LAROUX (CONT'D)
She found a buyer.

ANNEMETTE

Who?

LAROUX

A buyer Anne.

Laroux looks at Grote.

LAROUX (CONT'D)

Ready?

Grote nods.

Laroux hands Grote his gun back.

ANNEMETTE

We'll keep this one.

Annemette grabs her jacket.

LAROUX

You really think that's a good
idea?

Grote and Annemette stop what they are doing and look at
Laroux.

LAROUX (CONT'D)

Good idea... got it.

Annemette slips her revolver into her oversized jacket
and pulls on some romper boots.

CUT TO:

**73. INT. CASTENELLO HOME. RAY'S OFFICE. EARLY
MORNING.**

Frank enters.

FRANK

The drop is set Mr.
Castenello.

Ray sheepishly snorts cocaine off his shovel head and
walks over to the mirror. He slicks back his hair and
checks his teeth.

He grabs his jacket off a chair and puts it on. He picks
up his gun and tucks it into his pants, covering it with
his jacket.

He grabs the same black briefcase from earlier and turns

to Frank.

RAY
You trust them?

FRANK
Is there another option?

Frank nods and follows Ray out.

CUT TO:

74. EXT. CASTENELLO HOME. BEVERLY HILLS. EARLY MORNING.

Frank opens the rear door of his Mercedes.

Ray slips in.

CUT TO:

75. EXT. LITTLE INN. EARLY MORNING.

Grote watches from his Dodge as Laroux and Annemette hail a taxi on Santa Monica Blvd.

A taxi pulls up.

Laroux gets into the front seat.

Annemette opens the back door, throws Grote one last look and gets in.

Grote turns over his engine. It rumbles to life.

He tails the taxi.

CUT TO:

76. INT. DESERTED AIR STRIP. SURFRIDGE. EARLY MORNING.

The taxi pulls up just outside the airstrip. Laroux pays the driver and gets out.

Annemette gets out, a little shaky.

She feels her jacket pocket for her revolver. It's there.

Goon#2 waits on the strip, standing tall in front of a black Cadillac.

LAROUX

Everything and anything that happens from now... it was worth it for me.

ANNEMETTE

Don't get all sappy. We'll be in and out. Then it'll all be over.

Laroux looks at the ground, then to Annemette.

LAROUX

What if I don't want it to end?

She smiles.

ANNEMETTE

Everything ends, Laroux.

LAROUX

Even us?

Annemette kisses her cheek.

ANNEMETTE

Grab the bag.

Laroux grabs the duffle bag.

They make their way over.

CUT TO:

77. EXT. DESERTED AIR STRIP. SURFRIDGE. EARLY MORNING.

Grote parks his Dodge just outside the strip.

He gets out, crosses the street and sneaks along the wire fence.

He ducks behind a worn-out movie poster - *Love and Death* - and observes Annemette and Laroux make their way onto the airstrip toward the Cadillac.

CUT TO:

78. INT. DESERTED AIR STRIP. SURFRIDGE. EARLY MORNING.

Laroux and Annemette approach the Cadillac.

Tom gets out. He walks around the car and opens the rear door.

Clair steps out. She straightens her skirt and jacket. They all meet in a stand-off position.

Clair clicks her fingers at Goon#2.

CLAIR
Get the bag.

Laroux steps forward.

LAROUX
Wait. We want to see the cash.

Clair laughs.

CLAIR
My, My. A girl with guts.
(beat)
You'll see the cash but first
we need to check what you have
is worth it.

ANNEMETTE
(to Laroux)
It's ok.

Annemette hands Goon#2 the bag.

ANNEMETTE (CONT'D)
It's all there.

Goon#2 walks the bag back over to the Cadillac. Clair motions for Tom to check the bag.

Happy with its contents, he walks the bag over to Clair, puts it down and nods.

She looks inside.

CLAIR
Seems it is.

Annemette shivers at a gust of wind. Her hand trembles - restless in her pocket.

ANNEMETTE
Your turn.

CLAIR

Jenna tells me the drugs are
stolen. Do you know who from?

She awaits a reply, then titters at their silence.

CLAIR (CONT'D)

Obviously not.

Annemette shifts from foot to foot. Her hand turns in her
pocket.

Laroux looks toward the road where Grote is parked. As
she turns back, Annemette pulls out her revolver and aims
it at Clair.

ANNEMETTE

We don't... we found them...
and now here they are. If you
want them, you need to give us
our money.

CLAIR

Your money? ... Oh, you sweet
little girl. You should never
offend someone playing in the
big girl pool.

Clair approaches her calmly - without fear and stands in
front of the gun.

CLAIR (CONT'D)

I own the big girl pool.

She puts a hand in the air and clicks loudly.

CLAIR (CONT'D)

Lester.

The rear door of Tom's Cadillac opens. Lester steps out -
gun drawn and pointed at Annemette.

CLAIR (CONT'D)

This must be your first deal.
This was meant to be my Son's
first deal, but I found out,
he too, was not ready to
handle it. But... he will have
another turn.

(beat)

See, I am feeling very
forgiving today. I gave Lester
an option, now

CLAIR (CONT'D)
I will give you both an
option... Die and possibly
take me down in the process or
wait and see what else could
come of this meet and greet.

Tom points his gun at Laroux.

CLAIR (CONT'D)

On the count of 10 he will shoot.

Clair smiles, her stare fixed on Annemette. She begins to
count down from 10.

CUT TO:

**79. EXT. DESERTED AIR STRIP. SURFRIDGE. EARLY
MORNING.**

Grote watches as Frank's Mercedes turns into the street.

CUT TO:

**80. INT. DESERTED AIR STRIP. SURFRIDGE. EARLY
MORNING.**

Annemette's gaze leaps from the bag to Laroux.

CLAIR
Five... Four...

Annemette looks at Laroux. She lowers her gun.

CUT TO:

**81. EXT. DESERTED AIR STRIP. SURFRIDGE. EARLY
MORNING.**

It's no longer dark enough for Grote to hide.

The Mercedes approaches.

With nowhere else to go, Grote draws his gun and slips
through a slit in the wire fence.

A gunshot rings out.

CUT TO:

82. INT. DESERTED AIR STRIP. SURFRIDGE. EARLY MORNING.

Annemette lies face down. She's still. Aside from her strawberry blonde hair blowing in the breeze, nothing moves.

Tears of shock flood down Laroux's face. Without a sound, she crawls over to Annemette.

Tom hands Clair Annemette's revolver, then stands over Laroux - his pistol pointed at the back of her head.

Laroux slides her hand up Annemette's back. She pushes gently, as if to wake her.

LAROUX
(whispers)
Anne?

LAROUX CU

blue eyes; PANICKED, TEARY, RED.

SMASH CUT TO:

83. INT. BASEMENT. EAST LA. FLASHBACK - DAY. BLACK SCREEN

There is the heavy breathing of a child. Panicked. Frenzied.

PAN OUT

From Laroux (10) CU

blue eyes; PANICKED, TEARY, RED.

She rocks back and forth - her gaze fixed.

She cradles her knees to her chest. A pistol rests beside her.

She reaches a trembling hand out and gently touches the Woman's twisted body at the bottom of the basement stairs.

She pulls her hand away and stares at the blood on her fingers.

SMASH CUT TO:

84. INT. DESERTED AIR STRIP. SURFRIDGE. EARLY MORNING.

Clair watches the black Mercedes pull in.

CLAIR

Why is it that men are never
on time?

The Mercedes parks and Frank exits. He opens the rear door. Ray steps out with the black suitcase. He sets it down next to him.

CLAIR (CONT'D)

Good to see that you came Mr.
Castenello. One less job for
Tom to do.

Clair motions to Goon#2 to put the duffle bag of cocaine into Tom's Cadillac. He obeys.

She turns to Tom.

CLAIR (CONT'D)

Check them.

Tom checks Ray. Then Frank.

TOM

They're clean.

CLAIR

Well then, Mr. Castenello,
give me my money and we may
yet have a solid business
relationship.

Ray cockily shakes his head. He chuckles.

RAY

A business transaction never
consists of one party getting
nothing.

CLAIR

It upsets me that you think
you deserve anything.

Clair raises Annemette's revolver. Ray throws his hands up in the air.

RAY

Now hold on, Sugar... no need
for things to get any messier
than they are.

He grins.

Clair stares down the barrel at him.

CLAIR

Messy... See the problem with
most women in this business is
they're scared to get messy.

She flicks the revolver left and shoots Tom in the chest.
Tom hits the ground. His gun with him - unnoticed.

Clair positions herself over Tom.

CLAIR (CONT'D)

... see, if being a woman is
to lack the ferocity to kill,
even under the threat of
death...

She unloads two rounds into Tom's face.

CLAIR (CONT'D)

Then I am one of a kind.

She aims at Ray again and waves Goon#2 over.

CLAIR (CONT'D)

Re-check him.

Goon#2 heads over to Ray.

Flustered, Frank draws, shoots Goon#2. He moves to shoot
Lester, but before his aim is set, Lester shoots Frank.

Frank eats dirt.

Ray pulls out the gun tucked in the back of his pants. He
points it directly at Lester's head.

RAY

Why'd you do that?

Lester looks on at him - betrayed.

LESTER

I thought we had a deal.

RAY

Oh, Son, we did, but both of
you dead is just better for
business.

(beat)

Put it down, Clair.

Clair drops her gun.

Laroux, a mess of tears over Annemette's body, spots
Tom's gun.

RAY

(to Clair)

On your knees like a good
girl.

(beat)

And you, Son... go get that
bag out of Mommy's car.

Clair lowers to her knees - her eyes fixed to Ray's.

Lester heads over to the Cadillac and leans in to get the
duffle bag.

Laroux, unnoticed, picks up Tom's gun. She stands up
shakily behind Ray.

Clair watches her.

She aims it at the back of Ray's head. She cocks the
hammer.

Hearing the click, Ray raises his hands again.

Lester leaves the duffle bag and hides behind the
Cadillac.

Laroux shuts her eyes - tears fall.

SMASH CUT TO:

85. INT. BASEMENT. EAST LA. FLASHBACK - DAY.

The basement door swings open.

A figure stands in the door frame.

BLACK SCREEN BANG, BANG, BANG.

SMASH CUT TO:

**86. INT. DESERTED AIR STRIP. SURFRIDGE. EARLY
MORNING.**

Laroux's eyes twitch open.

CLAIR

Do it!

Laroux lowers the pistol and drops to her knees. Ray turns to face Laroux.

RAY

Poor thing. Killing isn't for everyone.

He raises his gun.

Laroux, heaving with tears, unable to catch her breath, raises the gun in a pathetic attempt to try again.

Ray touches the barrel of his gun to her forehead.

RAY (CONT'D)

A bad girl with a conscience.
No wonder Anne liked you.
You're soft.

Grote swoops in from behind the Mercedes - two bullets take out Ray.

Ray gets off one shot before he eats dirt.

Laroux hits the ground.

Grote cuffs Clair and turns Laroux over. She is still.

GROTE

(mutters)

Fuck.

Annemette moans - starting to come to.

Grote leaves Laroux and moves over to Annemette. He rests his gun next to her head and kneels beside her. He spots her shoulder wound, pulls his jacket off and presses it against her wound.

Lester, sweating profusely, crouches behind Tom's Cadillac. He watches as Grote doctors Annemette's wound. He takes it as an opportune moment and leaps out.

At the SOUND of Lester's movement, Grote's hand blindly fumbles for his gun. It's not in its holster.

Lester's shoots blindly, each shot missing Grote, until he is clicking over empty rounds.

Two gunshots ring out.

Grote covers his ears - the ringing painful.

Blood seeps through the Lester's shirt in two places.
Clair screams as Lester's body meets the ground.

Grote turns back to Annemette.

She's sitting up, composed - Grote's gun in hand.

ANNEMETTE

He was going to kill you.

She slowly gets to her feet, holding her shoulder.

She motions for Grote to move by waving his gun towards
Clair.

Clair wails, an emotional mess.

ANNEMETTE (CONT'D)

Sit over there and stay still.

Grote moves to sit next to Clair. He flops down and
crosses his legs.

Annemette stumbles over to Laroux.

GROTE

She won't make it.

Annemette drops to her side and brushes the hair from her
face. She cries silently and kisses her gently.

Grote reaches inside his jacket.

Without looking, Annemette releases a bullet in Grote's
direction.

Grote falls back. An unlit cigarette rolls from his hand.
Annemette stands up, walks over and looks down on him.

He moans, a shot to the right-side of his chest.

ANNEMETTE

I told you to stay still.

Annemette looks at Clair.

CLAIR

You fucking...

Annemette stops Clair's accusation with a kick to the
guts.

CLAIR (CONT'D)
(splutters)
... you fucking killed him.

ANNEMETTE
He would've ended up that way.
You can't live the life you
live and not expect him to
die... We didn't want your
drugs. We wanted his cash.
(beat)
You killed him.

Annemette jams the gun against her head and cocks back
the hammer.

ANNEMETTE (CONT'D)
You can join him if you want?

Sirens SOUND in the distance.

CLAIR
No ... please ...

ANNEMETTE
I didn't take you for a
beggar.

CLAIR
Please don't kill me...

ANNEMETTE
That'd be a cold-blooded
kill...

Annemette pushes the hammer back into position.

ANNEMETTE (CONT'D)
...and I'm not a killer.

She picks up Ray's black suitcase and clips it open. It's
full of cash.

Annemette heads over to Tom's Cadillac and throws in the
suitcase.

She grabs Laroux's feet and drags her over to the
Cadillac.

The SIRENS grow closer.

Annemette lifts Laroux into the back seat and shuts the

door.

Clair holds out her cuffed hands.

CLAIR
Please?

Annemette looks back at Clair's sobbing face, then gets into the Cadillac.

CUT TO:

87. INT. TOM'S CADILLAC. EARLY MORNING.

Annemette turns the car over. It roars to life.

She sits Ray's black suitcase on the passenger seat next to the brown duffle bag.

She shuts the door.

CUT TO:

88. INT. DESERTED AIR STRIP. SURFRIDGE. EARLY MORNING.

Clair watches as Annemette drives off in the Cadillac.

She stumbles over to Grote's body and searches him frantically for a key.

POLICE cars fill the airstrip. Officers pile out of their cars. OFFICER#5 pulls out a megaphone.

OFFICER #5
Put your hands where we can
see them Mam! Now! Put them up
or we will open fire!

Clair reaches for the sky.

Her handcuffs glisten sharply in the first rays of the morning sun.

OFFICER #5
Gun!

All Officers open fire.

Clair, now resembling Swiss cheese, falls to the ground.

The Officers swarm in.

OFFICER#5 hovers over Grote. He uses his shoulder radio to call for a medic.

OFFICER#5

Officer down. Officer down.

Grote's eyes open. He attempts to sit up, but Officer#5 gently holds him down.

Grote swats him away and sits up. He spots his unlit cigarette, grabs it and lights it.

OFFICER#5

Sir?... Sir?

Grote looks at him.

GROTE

What?

OFFICER #5

Are you the only survivor?

Grote looks around.

OFFICER #5 (CONT'D)

Sir, I need to know if there is there anyone else??

Grote grins to himself.

GROTE

No. Just me.

CUT TO:

89. INT. TOM'S CADILLAC - MOVING. EARLY MORNING.

Annemette drives. Her gaze locked to the road.

She ruffles her hands through the cash, opens the glove compartment and pulls out some sunglasses.

She puts them on.

FADE IN

a pounding noise coming from the boot. Annemette eases off the gas and pulls over.

She grabs her revolver and exits the car.

CUT TO:

90. EXT. TOM'S CADILLAC. EARLY MORNING.

Annemette rounds the back of the Cadillac.

She pops the lid and steps back. It springs open. She poises her revolver at the boot.

ANNEMETTE

Get out.

A bloody hand grips the boot's lip.

Annemette takes a step back.

Chrystal pulls herself up into a sitting position. Her red robe is ripped and black, her mouth swollen and her left eye bruised.

Shocked, Annemette cocks back the hammer - a gut reaction. Her shock turns to confusion.

Chrystal, wide-eyed, climbs out and drops to the asphalt. Cold and scared, she shakes. She gets to her knees and raises her hands in prayer - one eye open enough to look at Annemette pleadingly.

CHRYSTAL

Please... I didn't know...

Tears flow down her bloodied cheeks.

CHRYSTAL (CONT'D)

Is he dead?

ANNEMETTE

Who?

CHRYSTAL

Lester...?

Annemette's face softens.

ANNEMETTE

The kid?

Chrystal nods.

Annemette lowers her gun.

ANNEMETTE (CONT'D)

I'm sorry.

Chrystal crumples over in emotional agony.

Annemette walks over to the Cadillac and pulls the brown duffle bag out.

She returns and throws it at Chrystal's feet.

ANNEMETTE

Time to make your own way.

Annemette gets back in the Cadillac.

She winds the window down and turns the radio on. Nina Simone's *Feeling Good* pours out.

CUE MUSIC

'Birds flyin' high, you know
how I feel. Sun in the sky,
you know how I feel. Breeze
driftin' on by, you know how I
feel. It's a new dawn, it's a
new day, it's a new life for
me. Yeah, it's a new dawn,
it's a new day, it's a new
life for me, ooooooooh... And
I'm feelin' good.'

She leaves Chrystal and the drugs in the dust.

CUT TO:

91. EXT. LOOKOUT. LOS ANGELES HILLS. EARLY MORNING.

The sun sets.

Through the clearing dust we see Chrystal stumbling toward the edge of the road, brown duffle bag in hand.

At the edge of the road, she drops the bag beside her and takes in the magnificent view of Los Angeles.

Without a word, she leaves the duffle bag at the side of the road and begins her long walk home.

CUT TO:

92. INT. RETIREMENT HOME - WEST LA. DAY.

ALBERT opens a manila A4 envelope. It's stuffed with cash.

He laughs to himself and tips the money out. A handwritten note and a photograph spill out with it.

He opens the note and reads it. He smiles. Tears well in his eyes.

He looks at the photo.

INSERT:

Photo of two women's feet in the sand at the beach.
He laughs to himself.

ALBERT
Ditto, Sweetheart. Ditto.

FADE OUT

THE END