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Women are today an increasingly significant force in Australian moving image industries, shaping and reshaping the industry, and its products and artefacts. This introduction sets the scene for the following chapters of *Womenvision* by contextualizing women’s moving image production in Australia in recent times, especially film production.

Since the 1970s, each decade of women’s work in the moving image in Australia can be read as a significant cultural location. The 1970s saw the emergence of feminist culture and a revival of the Australian film industry; the 1980s was known for the consolidation of feminist culture through training and access; and the 1990s saw a more assimilist attitude taking hold.

These emerging cultures continue to feed today into a new millennium, where image-making is more pluralist than ever before, and women are working in all the incarnations of moving image production—not just...
across all genres of film, television, video, and digital formats, but also as computer game designers, multimedia developers and new media artists.

**FILM PRODUCTION: THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT**

From the beginning of film production in Australia, women were present in key roles. Women directed and produced commercial feature (fiction) films throughout the silent and early sound periods in Australia; however, there was a decline in women’s participation after that.

This was due to several factors. One was a decline in the production of Australian films generally (very few Australian feature films were produced from the 1940s through to 1969). Another was the increasing preference by the public for Hollywood productions; this made it difficult for the local industry, which did not regain momentum until the intervention of the Commonwealth Government in the early 1970s. Additionally, the structure of the film industry changed, as more and more films were financed internationally, involving larger financial and production entities, which made it more difficult for women to secure a niche.

The introduction of sound was also problematic for women, since women have historically (particularly before the 1970s) had less access to technology (although the local industry in general wasn’t equipped to compete with the Hollywood talkies). Also, the climate of work for women in traditionally male dominated areas became difficult (the post war backlash was hostile to female employment until the 1960s). An increasingly conservative environment emerged, and increasing industrialisation pushed women into unskilled sectors of the workforce.

One focus of the second wave of feminism was an insistence on rediscovering the women of history. As feminist observers of the Australian industry have noted, much of women’s work had ‘gone unrecorded and unmarked’; so a significant part of the modern feminist project was ‘to recover our history, and write it ourselves’. In the case of Australian film, that meant valorising women like Lottie Lyell and the McDonagh sisters—our ‘founding mothers’. These women and others are discussed in the second chapter of *Womenvision*.

Beginning in the 1970s, Ina Bertrand considers our founding mothers in the light of their importance as role models in shaping women’s career expectations. Bertrand’s chapter considers the inception and the revival of the Australian film industry from the perspective of the impact of the achievements of women within it. She underlines the importance of history to feminist projects, to women’s belief in themselves and in recognizing their place in a larger picture of women’s work.

The 1970s saw numerous groups springing up to lobby for training, access and the status of women in the film industry. The lobby for training was extremely important because, as author Elizabeth Jacka has said: ‘without skills and experience, and schemes like the women’s film units, women remain marginal to the mainstream industry’.
The 1970s and 1980s saw a mushrooming of women’s groups involved in production and exhibition. These groups, devoted principally to the production of short films (in all genres), included The Sydney Women’s Film Group (formed in 1972), The Feminist Film Workers (1970s—980s), The Melbourne Women’s Film Group (established in 1973), Reel Women (1979—1983) and the Women’s Film Unit (1984 in Sydney and 1984/5 in Melbourne).

The Australian Film Commission (AFC) set up the Women’s Film Fund in 1976 (disbanded in 1988–1989) and groups such as Women in Film and Television (WIFT) have operated since the 1980s. In her chapter in Womenvision, Jeni Thornley gives a personal perspective not just of her own work in the 70s and 80s, but of some of these groups. Thornley reflects on more than thirty years of working in film ‘on the margins’: exploring feminism, sexuality, gender and the position of women. From an interior and poetic space, Thornley charts the inner thoughts of her own psyche—a woman film-maker who has been immersed in cinema since the 1940s through to the late 1990s.

From the 1970s it became possible for women to receive training, although this was was no guarantee of success. As reporter, producer and journalist Barbara Alysen observed, ‘having achieved training, it is now important that they enter the mainstream industry because they would be equally “ghettoised” within “women’s cinema”’. Academic Elizabeth Grosz pointed out that the creation of alternatives unrelated to mainstream cinema could have unwanted by-products such as ‘the risk of marginalisation and elitism, alienating potential audience; and more significantly, the risk of leaving the mainstream traditions intact and uncriticised, able to function unchallenged’.

While women made shorts and features in Australia before the 1970s, it was in this era that they began to make their presence strongly felt. The favourable position for women in the Australian industry today is due largely to the combination of a number of factors. These include the revival of the industry in the 1970s, the influence of the women’s movement at that time and the fact that there was not a male dominated industry that had been in place for years. In addition, the reliance of the industry on government funding meant that film production was influenced by the equal opportunity policies of government agencies. Another likely contributor is the comparatively low budget of films (in global terms) resulting in fewer controls imposed by big business structures—unlike those that operated...
elsewhere, for example, in Hollywood.

The dominant image of Australia offered to Australians and the world via mainstream fiction feature films in the 1970s could be described as overwhelmingly male (masculine characters and masculine concerns). As has been well documented, there was a wave of ‘Ocker’ films depicting larrikin characters followed by a wave of conservative and nationalistic period films featuring pioneers and Anzacs and then, films such Mad Max and Crocodile Dundee continued a masculinist approach. However, in the 1980s women film-makers slowly began to make their mark in feature production, following in the path of Gillian Armstrong (My Brilliant Career, Starstruck, Last Days at Chez Nous). While Armstrong was often cited in the 1980s as evidence that women had ‘made it’ in the Australian commercial film industry, very few women were directing features in that decade. Despite this, the importance of Armstrong’s success was that she was a major role model—and other women followed.

**TRAIL BLAZERS:**

**ANTIPODEAN WOMEN FILM-MAKERS AND THEIR INTERNATIONAL RECEPTION**

Australia has reportedly an international reputation for producing exceptional women film-makers—in particular, directors. Andrew Sarris has noted that:

> While women directors in film industries around the world are still seen as anomalous (if mainstream) or marginalised as avant-garde, the Antipodes have been home to an impressive cadre of female film-makers who negotiate and transcend such notions. Before the promising debuts of Ann Turner (Celia) and Jane Campion (Sweetie), Gillian Armstrong blazed a trail with My Brilliant Career.

Armstrong, who has achieved broad international recognition, has herself recalled that she is continually asked why there are ‘so many talented women film-makers coming out of Australia’.

Certainly in international contexts such as the Cannes Film Festival, Australian women have increasingly distinguished themselves in the past two decades: Jane Campion won the Palme d’Or for Best Short Film in 1986 and then later the top prize for her third feature The Piano (1993). Jocelyn Moorhouse’s film Proof (1991) was invited as part of the Official Selection for the Directors Fortnight at Cannes (1991), Shirley Barrett won the Camera d’Or for best debut feature with Love Serenade (1996), Samatha Lang was the only female director in the competition at Cannes with The Well (1997) and Emma-Kate Croghan sold
her film, *Love and Other Catastrophes* (1996), to Mirimax after an impressive showing there.

Journalist Lynden Barber has said that with the exception of France, where several women have emerged in recent times, ‘Australia’s record in nurturing female talent has not been replicated—certainly not in Hollywood’.\(^{19}\) He says that ‘despite a far larger population, the list of women directors in the American film industry—which includes Nora Ephron, Barbra Streisand, [and] Penny Marshall … is not much longer than Australia’s’.\(^{20}\) Barber quotes Hollywood producer Lynda Obst (Contact, 1997 and Sleepless in Seattle, 1993) as saying that ‘you can name on one hand the substantial women directors, and in fact the first women director to create—in my memory—a breakthrough on this issue was Gill Armstrong, who’s Australian’\(^{21}\).

In areas other than directing, women have also made a substantial contribution on the international stage—for example, actors Cate Blanchett and Nicole Kidman, as well as those in other key creative roles emerging in recent times including editor Jill Bilcock, screenwriter Laura Jones and production designer Catherine Martin.

The women who have been successful in the Australian film industry have been particularly lauded and applauded during the 1990s—and beyond. While it is true that many of them have worked principally in the independent sector, they have increasingly taken up opportunities to make films in the mainstream Hollywood system. Such film-makers as Gillian Armstrong, Jane Campion, Nadia Tass, Jocelyn Moorhouse, Ann Turner, Emma Kate Croghan and Samantha Lang have been highly visible. It is also true, however, that their visibility is characterised by comment on their gender; this might give the impression that women have
equal status and representation of women within the industry, when research has shown that across the board, representation has not been equal. In fact there have been many areas which women have found difficult to enter (such as technical areas) and there are other areas that are female ghettos (such as production managing).  

In the field of directing, for example, where women comprise a small percentage of the total, women directors have achieved notable success. For example women have been nominated in eight of the ten years from 1990—2000 in the ‘Best Director’ category of the AFI Awards. 

AUSTRALIAN WOMEN FILM-MAKERS IN THE CONTEMPORARY PERIOD 

The 1990s was a decade of critical and commercial success for Australian films and for women film-makers. In the 1990s Australian film experienced a revival that was fuelled by overseas interest and also by the success at the domestic box office of several Australian films; many of these films, such as Proof (Jocelyn Moorhouse, 1991) and The Piano (Jane Campion, 1993) were produced, directed and/or written by women. 

In the later part of the 1990s, Australian cinema has shifted slightly and cultural nationalism has been described as having dissolved in favour of a new pluralism. While there are still gains to be made, and the progress to date should not be overstated, the input of women film-makers and those from culturally diverse backgrounds has generated national fictions that have finally included, and sometimes privileged women, migrants, indigenous culture and diverse sexualities that had previously been totally marginalised. Most probably, these advances have had something to do with the contemporary postmodern climate that is pluralist in its focus on multiple points of entry, viewing identity as fluid and embracing differences in class, gender, race and sexuality. Numerous contributors to Womenvision have addressed the gaps and silences in Australian cinema—and in so doing, they have also illustrated the role women have played in the shift to a ‘new pluralism’. 

Australian women film-makers have had, and continue to have, an impact on the changing positions of women in society; and, as indicated by the chapters in this book, films by women film-makers either open up space for a diversity of female representation, or consider the lack of diversity that has existed previously. 

Marcia Langton, for example, outlines the special role of women in the history of indigenous production and in Australian cinema history: the narratives, core themes, artistic achievements, the exploration of identity and tradition, and their cultural activism. Langton importantly argues for the work of Aboriginal women to be considered ‘intercultural’ dialogues rather than a ‘racial’ genre. She observes that the insistence of cinema scholars on this ‘racial’ genre has, among other things, led to confusion as to Indigenous women’s place in Australian cinema history; one that overlooks their significant artistic contributions. As Langton rightly notes, the work of these women is highly individualist, and they must be understood as distinct artists in their own right. However, in tracking the trajectory of their
production across various forms and genres, she does find commonalities, such as stories about familial relations based in life histories, and distinctive Aboriginal mythological traditions.

Tracey Moffatt is one ‘highly individualist’ Aboriginal artist whose contribution to the visual arts has been acknowledged internationally. Moffatt has been insistent on disclaiming the Indigenous label, although her ‘Aboriginality, like her feminism is impossible to ignore’. The chapter on short film takes up the problem of labels and their limits. Catherine Summerhayes writes of Moffatt as an artist who performs and describes her place in the world as a contemporary Australian woman artist of Aboriginal and Anglo/Celtic heritage who understands Australia to be a multicultural society. Summerhayes considers Moffatt’s use and subversion of narrative, her aural and visual collage, use of movement and her theatricality. Summerhayes has said that ‘in Bakhtin’s sense of the word, her films possess “polyglossia”, they speak with many voices and describe a society possessing many different voices’.

Other writers in Womenvision have observed the individuality and plurality of vision of contemporary Australian women film-makers. Rai Jones writes about film-maker Clara Law (originally from Hong Kong, but now residing in Australia and making ‘Australian’ films). Jones problematizes the category of Australian cinema, and offers an analysis of Law’s A Floating Life (1995) as diasporic, hybrid and transnational—engaging with spaces outside of the Australian national space. In another chapter, Rose Capp considers the oeuvre of Monica Pellizzari, a film-maker frequently labeled ‘multicultural’. Considering the short and feature films of Pellizzari, Capp details the way her films deal with the specificities of the Italo-Australian migrant experience and wider issues of cultural identity, ethnicity, racism, generational issues, sexuality and feminism. Capp illustrates how Pellizzari’s films have encapsulated many of the central and defining debates of Australian cinema in the 1980s and 1990s.

In their chapter surveying the shifting representations of Greek identity, Freiberg and Damousi demonstrate that ‘Greekness’ in the last thirty years of Australian cinema has been ‘closely aligned with masculinity at the expense of Greek femininity’. As they illustrate,
representations of Greek men and women changed between the 1970s and 1990s; for example, representations of women in the 1970s depicted them as victims who suffered heavily under the oppressive yoke of a cruel and theocentric Greek patriarchy. This shifted in the 1990s as young Greek women became desiring subjects and active heroines who sought sexual satisfaction and resisted the oppressive demands of their caricatured Greek fathers. Women film-makers added to a new pluralism in representations of Greekness as can be seen in the work of film-makers such as Ana Kokkinos in the mid 1990s (e.g Only the Brave, 1994 and Head On, 1997). With a queer twist, her films have served to raise debates about issues of representation (especially in the Greek community).

Sally Hussey’s chapter on Ann Turner’s features examines not just the thematic and narrative concerns of the director, but seeks to situate Turner’s films within a specifically contemporary milieu that intersects with both queer and feminist theoretical concerns. Hussey explores Turner’s use of national mythology—a narrative stalwart in Australian cinema—to question patriarchal values of the national, and the national’s necessary erasure of difference with particular regard to the expression or representation of lesbianism in a national cinema. Hussey illustrates how Australian national cinema seeks to promote heterosexuality and exclude both female worlds and queer representations. In tracing Turner’s films through interviews with the film-maker, Hussey also asks what concerns are facing feminist cinema and film-making in a 1990s post-feminist context.

Many of the chapters in Womenvision explore representations of particular ‘types’ in Australian cinema. Terrie Waddell’s chapter explores the ‘scrubber’, a dominantly Australian fusion of the battler-trollop-mole-slut-bogan-rough-as-guts, oversexed, wild type of women
seen in films such as Fran (Glenda Hambly, 1985), Sweetie (Jane Campion, 1989), Praise (John Curran, 1998) and Radiance (Rachel Perkins, 1997). Waddell traces a line out of the past, offering the ‘scrubber’ as a character who has come down to us from our convict past where ‘our founding mothers were regarded as no better than whores’. Waddell’s chapter enables readers to understand the vulnerability, rage and sorrow such characters reveal in a culture insulated by sexism.

Several chapters in Womenvision focus on genre, such as the road movie or comedy. Catherine Simpson subverts the common perception of cars and the road as an undisputed male terrain. She notes that a lot has been written concerning the connections between the road movie, the car and masculinity—albeit often a kind of crisis associated with this masculinity. However, what is of particular interest to Simpson is the importance of cars and those small, seemingly inconsequential domestic journeys between home and somewhere else which depict interaction between the driver, passenger(s) and the car, (both aesthetically and symbolically), in films which wouldn’t even loosely be considered road movies. Her discussion centres specifically around women’s interaction with these machines and the use of the car as an agent for exploring the dynamics of family relationships within vehicular/autospatial contexts—when women take the wheel and explore other cultured and gendered geographies.

Felicity Collins examines the centrality of comedy to Australian cinema in the 1990s and the reworking of it by female directors in ‘Brazen brides, grotesque daughters, treacherous mothers …’ Collins outlines the original contribution Australian women film-makers
have made to this genre. Among her observations of a range of films, Collins contemplates how they refuse to secure characters for traditional female roles (such as Love Serenade, Shirley Barrett, 1996); decentre heterosexuality (Love and Other Catastrophes, Emma Kate Croghan, 1996); or test the way heroines are educated to accept a happy ending based on inequality (Dating the Enemy, Megan Simpson-Huberman, 1996).

TELEVISION

Individuals in the contemporary industry don’t necessarily work in film or television but often work in both. Numerous women are working across film and television. Kate Woods, for example, who directed the award winning Looking For Alibrandi (1999) came from a successful career in television with directing credits such as the series Wildside (1997), the mini-series Simone de Beauvoir’s Babies (1996) and telemovies such as The Feds (1995). A number of other film-makers have worked or do work in television; for example, Shirley Barrett, Nadia Tass and Rachel Perkins—just to name a few.

Julie James Bailey has noted in her research that:

[W]orking full-time in a television station is a very different experience from working freelance on a film crew. Television stations have an organisational culture that was set up in the 1950s and 1960s when a woman’s place was regarded as being in the home, and there are some men in senior positions who have difficulty thinking otherwise. There is still a very male culture and there are very few women in senior management positions or on the boards of the stations or networks. ... Because film is a freelance industry, with high turn over of jobs, women have had more employment opportunities.

The most recent research on television in Australia has shown that it is less accepting than the film sector and a more difficult area for women to gain access. This is particularly true in upper level management and technical areas. Just as the independent sector of film production is more accessible and accepting than other sections of the industry, there are areas of television where women have made in-roads, but these are generally in the non-commercial networks: the ABC, SBS, Imparja Television in Alice Springs and Melbourne Community Television, for example. There are always exceptions, such as Sue Masters Executive Producer TV Drama at Channel 10, but it should be noted that she had a previous string of successes at the ABC.
In the commercial sector it is still difficult for women, but as Julie James Bailey has observed, changes have been occurring due to an awareness of discrimination (and legislative regulations to maintain it) and affirmative action, as well as a growth in the industry caused by the advent of pay television. Despite this, Bailey concludes that the picture is not rosy in television; we ‘have had nearly half a century of television and the very few women in technical and senior management positions has to be an indictment of everyone involved in the industry’.34

In her chapter in Womenvision, Bailey explores the issues of representation, affirmative action and the masculine culture (and control) prevalent in television. While it is an easier industry for women than it once was, and women are making great gains, it is still male dominated and difficult. Film-maker Solrun Hoaas has expressed the mixed feelings about affirmative action held by women in the industry generally when she said that it sets up ‘this fiction that across the board, women are getting a better deal’ and ‘it’s automatically assumed that any woman who does anything or gets anything in the industry has had her hand held by the Government’.35 As in the past, many women are ambivalent about affirmative action. When at the AFC Hilary Glow explained that ‘it seems that many men believe that their female colleagues are being rewarded beyond their merit. As a result, they may come to view Affirmative Action legislation as ‘unfair’ when it is absolutely necessary to redress the balance’.36

Expressing a slightly different view, many successful women in the Australian industry categorically deny that there were any special privileges for women, and have never sought nor received any funding designed just for women. They have functioned within the same framework as men in the industry and competed on their own merits. Film-maker Pat Lovell has said that ‘[w]e just had to keep proving that we were highly responsible and highly creative people’.37 Writer-director Jackie McKimmie has said that she never received funding from the AFC’s Women’s Film Fund ‘because you never felt you were handicapped as a woman just going through the normal streams at the AFC’.38

OTHER AREAS OF THE MOVING IMAGE

In terms of form, women in Australia have contributed to every incarnation of moving image production. In the documentary area, female producers seem to have made their mark particularly strongly in the past decade, winning six out of 10 AFI Awards for ‘Best Documentary’ between 1990 and 2000.39 Present, but less strongly have been women documentary directors. In Womenvision, Meredith Seaman considers the unique contribution of three women directors to the documentary form via aspects of their personal histories (Corrine Cantrill, Merilee Bennett and Anna Kannava). Seaman considers how they have self-consciously performed and constructed identities through an exploration of the physical evidence of their lives through film footage and photographs. These films are powerful examples of women seeking to author their own on-screen visions of ‘self’. The film-makers represent themselves physically on screen in their dual role as film-maker and filmic subject. Seaman observes that this ‘dual role’ enables a unique process of self-analysis as well as the possibility of constructing a unified self, however temporary or fictive this ‘unified self’ may
be. Seaman observes that while the films outwardly remind the spectator of the fluid and alienated nature of self, on a deeper level they celebrate the therapeutic aspects of constructing coherent identity, through filmic processes and autobiographical narrative.

Womenvision acknowledges the diversity of ‘film forms’ across which women have worked. Dianne Reid tracks a path between dance and the dance film from her personal experience as a contemporary dance artist. Reid’s analysis illustrates some of the issues arising from the shift from choreographer to film-maker; and details the dance film form. My own chapter on the short film describes the prolific and diverse output of women working in this mode as well as the special characteristics of the form itself. Animator Ann Shenfield looks closely at the animation genre in terms of the specific contribution women have made to all manifestations of the form—from techniques to aspects of style and approach (often, for example, displaying emotional content and analysis of the ‘self’). Shenfield also considers issues for animators—such as animating as a career path for women.

Fiona Kerr gives her own experiences as a computer game designer, examining her own role creating the ‘cyberbabe’, a busty, ‘high kicking, monster crunching female’, a woman ‘without tears, without kids, [and] without bonds’. Kerr is aware of her own complicity in developing sexualized cybernetic entities for the male gamer and also, she considers the styles of computer game that women do engage with and the relationship of women to the form (one widely perceived as ‘not for women’).

While this book does not focus on the contribution of women outside of production areas, it should be noted that women in Australia work across a range of administrative/bureaucratic, curatorial, exhibition, marketing and distribution sectors.

NEW MEDIA

Is it a brave new world or just a version of the real one?

Brisbane’s Digitarts (quoted above), who aim to support emerging women artists within the new media sphere, ask an important and interesting question and in so doing, reveal how gender themes have currency—even in cyberspace. As digital media artist Jen Seevinck has pointed out: ‘[d]igital technologies are not neutral but subjective tools created by humanity. They exhibit the same biases as their authors and potentially influence daily communication in the same way as language …’

The very existence of groups formed specifically for women to work in new media and create digital media art indicates an awareness that, despite the contemporary disenchantment with feminism, feminist activism is still required. Themes around gender are still among those that interest contemporary women; women who have had the benefits of access, training, computer literacy and advances directly attributable to the feminist movement. It should be stated however that gender issues are among many, and creative women obviously explore an eclectic and diverse range of issues, themes and aesthetic approaches and
make work in a range of contexts. As with other moving image production in the current climate, in general, women’s practice in digital media art is well integrated within the main-stream, rather than being separate from it.

However, some women working in new media are exploring feminist themes. Among them are contemporary Australian cyberfeminists VNS Matrix, a group well known internationally. They have been interested in questions of power in cyberspace and the potential of it for social impact. The impetus of the group has been to ‘investigate and decipher the narratives of domination and control which surround high technological culture, and explore the construction of social space, identity and sexuality in cyberspace’. Jen Seevinck describes this group as having been at the ‘forefront in articulating new relationships between women and technology’.

With reference to the group’s web site, she explains:

Haraway’s catchcry “I would rather be a cyborg than a goddess” is echoed in the 1991 VNS Matrix Bitch Mutant Manifesto which uses explicit corporeal language bordering on the pornographic to locate the (female) body within digital technology. Their work utilizes specific narratives and metaphors to investigate relationships between women and technology and address the potential alienation of women from digital technology.

Seevinck has observed that ‘new media practice has tended to shift emphasis away from the singular product towards process, experience, the generation of multiple solutions and patterns’. She offers artists such as VNS Matrix and Linda Dement, ‘spatially subversive naviga-
tional and interactive structures to subvert predominant goal-driven interactive structures by metaphor’. I have alluded to Lucy Lippard’s arguments in my chapter on short film production in this book, where she suggests that ‘women’s art making can be distinguished from men’s because of qualities found more often in the work of women than that of men: ‘central focus (often ‘empty’, often circular or oval), parabolic bag-like forms, obsessive line and detail, veiled strata, tactile or sensuous surfaces and forms, associative fragmentation, autobiographical emphasis’. If the work of women more often has these characteristics, then it would follow that the ‘non-linear structures’ that ‘distinguish digital hypermedia’ are likely to suit women new media artists making installations, internet pieces and digital hypermedia. Seevinck explains that:

A hypermedia work gives audiences the opportunity to diverge along different routes, moving sideways or backwards as well as forwards. Images, texts, movies, sounds or information are to varying degrees and through means from directing attention to clicking a button, prioritized by the spectator. The audience forms chains of association and to some extent constructs meanings: a qualitatively different experience to that of reading a book or watching a film from start to finish.

A number of digital artists have been interested to explore the female body. Linda Dement’s ‘Cyberflesh Girlmonster’, which like VNS Matrix, addresses the perceived schism between the body and technology, addresses the female body as a common site for improvement. Seevinck says of them that utilizing ‘scanned images of body parts from contributing women … [the] images are combined into highly evocative and disturbing animations or other graphic elements. The composition and the accompanying text all serve to convey a rich corporeal environment of taboo body spaces: the ‘Cyberflesh Girlmonster’. The user wanders through a ‘body space’—a labyrinth of sounds, animations, videos, images and words—to construct an almost physical understanding of a highly personal, internal, virtual place’. Other Australian digital artists working in a similar vein are Gillian Morrison, Moira Corby and Emma Myers who made a work titled ‘GOGZI Girls Own Girls’. It is an interactive cultural anatomy of the female body which invites women who interact with it to build their ideal female self—but they do this while exploring the way history, mythology and media have structured the representation of women.

While this book is unable to comprehensively cover the contribution of the many women working in digital screen arts in Australia, Janet Merewether traces the link from early innovations and low budget forms (such as Super 8) to interactive media and the internet. She briefly outlines a number of artists making an impact on the contemporary scene, and observes the strong pressure away from traditional and towards digital forms (caused by funding agendas being pro ‘new’ digital media rather than interested in experimental film and video). Merewether notes many of the thematic concerns of practitioners, such as the computer/human interface (including relationships between computers, the body and gender), artificial intelligence, fusions with popular culture, creation of virtual worlds and sensory experiences, explorations of identity and also, the convergence of art, science and technology.
**GENDER**

Writer Leslie Felperin has said that being a woman in the film industry today could be seen as a kind of power rather than a handicap, explaining it this way: ‘only women could have got away with making a film as explicit as Romance, as mocking of male and female vanity as Holy Smoke or even, with Ramsay’s Ratcatcher, as defiant of film-school rules of conduct’. As I have argued elsewhere, this is an emancipating reflection on the importance of gender, sexual politics and feminism, which picks up on the question (one which has been unpopular) of whether women can in fact make a contribution that is informed by their gender. Felperin’s point is an important one, that women might be able to ‘get away’ with something that male film-makers can’t; that they both might want to, and be able to explore content that would not otherwise get an airing. As already stated, the impact of gender on art production has not been at the forefront but from my own perspective this is still an intensely interesting question; I don’t believe the fear of essentialism should block such a question, given that it can be reflected upon in a plural sense.

Contemporary positions have refocused since the 1970s and 1980s when, as Felperin says, the difference between male and female artists was hotly contested; as was the politics of gender in regard to whether it was empowering or essentialist to argue that women might have different strategies, or visions to men. Labels are always rejected by those who find themselves wearing them: ‘woman director’, ‘Australian woman director’, ‘Australian, Aboriginal, woman director’ etcetera all find a place in the descriptions given to women working in the Australian industry. Those who find themselves having these labels understandably want to shake them. The current climate finds women film-makers want to be seen as creative people rather than a particular type of creative woman. The diversity of women’s work can be seen in last section of Womenvision, where there is a focus on selected contemporary Australian women film-makers (Monica Pellizzari, Clara Law, Tracey Moffatt, Jane Campion, Ann Turner, Jeni Thornley and the Gecko team: Sue Brooks, Sue Maslin and Alison Tilson). The diversity of work is the more common focus in contemporary times and it is true that in many quarters, there is a general distancing from gender. Many women film-makers have wanted to be seen as ‘film-makers first and women film-makers second or not at all’. Gillian Armstrong has said ‘we will never achieve true equality until people drop the label “woman” before “director”’.53

**FEMINISM IN A POST-FEMINIST ERA**

Feminism has been seen as passé in some quarters, as if the need for activism has passed. Some, including myself, perceive this view with alarm. Patricia Mellencamp, for example, states she does not agree with quiescence and she refuses to accept the boredom that has come from repeating the same weary thoughts.

*I want to ascertain where we’ve been, what has changed, and what needs to be done …* The twenty-five year rediscoveries of the women’s movement in the twentieth century (i.e., 1915, 1940,
I 1965, 1990) make one thing clear: women cannot afford to rest on their laurels (which are significant). 54

As outlined in the preface, this book takes its name from a feminist event in 1973, and is as committed to feminisms as its namesake. One of the driving agendas of Womenvision can be summed up by this quote from Lynn Fieldman Miller:

*I do not know if the evidence supports the existence of women’s imagery of a particular female iconography or a specifically female approach to film-making that is not accessible to men … The one thing I do know is that there is such a thing in this culture as a women’s life as it is lived in a woman’s body even though not all women have the same experiences in their lives or in their bodies … there is a women’s culture … women film-makers and video producers do have identifiable methods, approaches and visions.* 55

Within Womenvision, writers have illustrated that the need for feminist activism has indeed not passed. For example, cinematographer Jane Castle is able to make a link from the present to the past by utilising the experiences of her mother, Lilias Fraser, a pioneer writer, director and editor of documentaries since the 1950s. Castle offers both a narrative of how women experience a ‘shoot’ and a personal account of what it ‘feels’ like behind the lens of the camera. As a cinematographer, Castle asks what it means when the eye of the camera is located in the body of a woman. She also asks how the cinematographer reconciles her contribution to the gendering of filmic reality with the resulting oppressions that her input helps to create.

Castle uses narrative stories and reflective analysis based on her experience as a cinematographer working at the top end of the Australian and US film industries. Castle sets out in this piece to explore core issues for women in her field; such as how women negotiate a space for themselves, both economically and ethically, within a system that persists in telling, almost exclusively, men’s stories. She reflects on whether it is possible for women technicians to contribute in a positive way from within this system and also asks why, despite decades of positive discrimination in the technical areas of the film industry, have so few women cinematographers have ‘made it’ into the mainstream.

In the 1992 AFC survey, women nominated three reasons almost equally when asked what barriers they saw to their progress: conditions in the industry, lack of opportunities in the company or work area, and sexism. These responses suggest that it is not primarily social and family responsibilities which inhibit women’s progress in the industry. It should be noted, however, that the nature of work in the industry presents difficulties in combining paid work and family responsibilities. When she was a television presenter, Mary Delahunty (now in the Victorian government) said that she was perceived by other staff at The 7.30 Report as being ‘aloof’ but she explains that ‘the men go to lunch; we race out to get the groceries and ring the nannie’. 56 Childcare is an issue for the industry generally (given that a significant section of it is made up of freelance workers) but most prominently it affects women in their careers. Among many other issues, Virginia Murray takes up the issue of
childcare in her chapter, ‘When Worlds Collide: Working Mothers in the Post-production Industry’. She asks what the key effects are of having children. Using case studies of real picture editors (who’ve elected to give pseudonyms), Murray outlines key issues for the contemporary period, issues that have been there throughout the industry’s history—balancing work and life.

Feminism has evolved into postfeminism, and while this does not mean that feminist projects are over or redundant, it does mean that there are new ways of thinking about identity, gender roles and representation. Felicity Collins, for example, considers postfeminist plots in comedy, and I consider examples of postfeminism as found in contemporary short films. As I have argued in my chapter on short films, the evolution of feminism into postfeminism is a natural evolution process of a movement that has always engaged in self-criticism and change—and in this way, it remains continually relevant.

CONCLUSION

The pages that follow are a testament to the fact that women’s moving image production in Australia has spanned the whole spectrum. Women’s output has been richly diverse and constantly evolving. Moreover, there is no homogeneity in the way women film-makers (or other moving image producers) have operated; they have been working in a wide variety of ways and styles, with a wide array of intentions. As Hannie Rayson has observed, ‘women don’t exist as a single distinctive group but are subject to individual problems due to other factors such as class, race, ethnic origin, access to employment etc’. 57

Womenvision seeks to rejoice in the diversity and plurality of women moving image producers and also, in the pages that follow, to celebrate not just this individual output, but the commonalities, the shared elements that might be found in the work of women—such as an interest in stories about women, power relations in society, families, and multicultural perspectives or ‘other’ voices and visions. Importantly, the success of women in Australian moving image industries is attributable to hard work and talent; they have done it on their own merits—which are considerable.

Endnotes

1 Women were, however, making work in this period. During 2000, The Melbourne Cinémathèque, AFI National Cinémathèque and ScreenSound Australia screened a season of films called ‘Work Never Done—Australian Woman filmworkers between the 1930s and the 70s.’ Included in the program was a tribute to the life and work of Joan Long: producer, screenwriter, director, researcher and activist for the right of Australian women film workers to participate creatively in their own industry. Also presented were the neglected and rarely seen films of Rhonda Small, Lilias Fraser, Jennie Boddington, Elsa Chauvel and others—all made in the decades between the McDonagh’s The Cheaters and Gillian Armstrong’s My Brilliant Career. (Between 1930 when Paulette McDonagh made Two Minutes Silence and 1979 when Gillian Armstrong made My Brilliant Career, there weren’t any feature films directed by women—in a 49 year period.)

2 Some of the material here has been taken from my research: Do Contemporary Australian Women Film-makers share a feminist perspective in their
4 Elizabeth Jacka quoted in Annette Blonski, Deb Verhoeven & Sophie Cunningham, ‘Funds, funds, funds. - The phasing out of the Women’s Film Fund and repercussions for women in the film industry’, Cinema Papers, no. 67, Jan 1988, p.31.
5 Barbara Aylsen, ‘Australian Women In Film’, An Australian Film Reader, 1985, p. 309.
7 For a brief overview of production in the 1960s and 1970s, see Jocelyn Robson & Beverley Zalcock, op. cit. pp.30-39.
8 Such as The Adventures of Barry McKenzie (Bruce Beresford, 1972).
9 Such as Breaker Morant (Bruce Beresford, 1980).
10 George Miller, 1979.
11 Peter Faiman, 1986.
14 See for example Julie James Bailey, Reel Women: Working in Film and Television, AFTRS, Sydney, 1999, p.199. Bailey offers that ‘Australia leads the world in the number and quality of its women film directors’, but although she notes this as significant progress, she also noted that only 17% of features between 1990-1997 were directed by women.
16 Gillian Armstrong quoted in Lynden Barber, ibid.
17 Campion is from New Zealand but is claimed as Australian given she trained, lives and has made the majority of her films in Australia.
18 Palme d’Or, Best Feature, 1993.
19 Lynden Barber, op.cit. p. 5.
20 ibid.
21 ibid.
23 The 2001 Encore Directorate (Reed Business, Sydney, 2001, pp. I I58-1206) lists film production since 1970 and lists only two of eleven as directed by women in 2000 and only five of thirty-seven directed by women in 1999 (acknowledging that there were films made that do not appear in these lists, it does illustrate the significantly lower number of women than men directing features).
25 In 1992 it was noted by Gil Appleton that the industry is characterized by an overall lack of diversity in background and languages spoken, and in the representation of minority groups such as people with disabilities, among its workers’. (See Gil Appleton, Women in Australian Film, Video, Radio & Television Industries Survey Summary, Australian Film Commission, 1992, p.1). In 1992 the percentage of film-makers in the industry with non-anglo backgrounds was 13 per cent (below the level in the general community) and although the 1992 AFC survey didn’t reveal how many of the 13 per cent were women, it is likely to be lower than half given the under-representation of women in the industry generally. Thus in 1992 Australian films didn’t reflect Australia’s multi-cultural society and in particular, were not offering the voices and experiences of ethnic women.
28 In 2000, it won five AFI Awards: ‘Best Film’, ‘Best Actress’ in Leading & Supporting Roles (Pia Miranda and Greta Scacchi), ‘Best Adapted Screenplay’ (Melina Marchetta) and ‘Best Achievement in Editing’ (Martin Connor).
29 She directed the feature Love Serenade (1996) and numerous series' such as Heartbreak High (1994), Police Rescue (1994) and A Country Practice (1992/93).
30 Tass directed the mini-series Stark (1992) between her features Pure Luck (1990) and Mr Reliable (1996).
31 Perkins directed the television series Songlines (1997) and several documentaries for television.
32 Julie James Bailey (1999), op. cit. p.239.
34 Final sentence of Bailey’s chapter in Womenvision.
37 Pat Lovell quoted in Lynden Barber, op.cit. p. 6.
38 Jackie McKimmie quoted in ibid.
39 In 1990 Handmaids And Battleaxes from Producer/Director—Rosalind Gillespie; Black Harvest (Robin Anderson with Bob Connolly-winners in 1991as well as in 2001 for Facing the Music); 50 Years Of Silence (Carol Ruff with Ned Lander winners in 1994); The Good Looker— Claire Jager (winner in1995); Not Fourteen Again, Gillian Armstrong
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(winner in 1996): The Dragons Of Galapagos, Elizabeth Parer-Cook (with David Parer, winners in 1998); The Diplomat (Sally Browning with Wilson da Silva, winners in 2000).

And other notable producers featuring in the nominations included Shirley Barrett (nominated for Chainsaw in 1991) and Pat Fiske (nomination: For All The World To See in 1993).

Digitarts web site: http://digitarts.va.com.au [accessed 30/10/01].

Unpublished notes written and supplied by Jen Seevinck to Lisa French 13/3/01. All quotes attributed to her come from this source.

Josephine Starrs, Francesca Di Rimini, Julianne Pierce and Virginia Barratt (until 1996 when she left the group).


Seevinck op.cit.


Terry Barrett, Criticizing Art: Understanding the Contemporary, Mayfield, Mountain View, California, 2000, p. 49.

Seevinck op. cit.

ibid.

Leslie Felperin, 'Chick Flicks' (Editorial), Sight and Sound, vol. 9, issue 10, October 1999, p. 3.


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