
The scripts for nine of the works mentioned above are collected in this volume – Mulvey and Wollen’s six collaborative films, plus *Friendship’s Death, Disgraced Monuments* and *23rd August 2008* – as well as essays by leading writers, which offer new interpretations of each film. The book also presents Wollen’s short story *Friendship’s Death*, the outlines for two unmade collaborative films – *Possible Worlds* (1978) and *Chess Fever* (1984) – and a number of working documents, including diagrams, drawings and early plans for films. This gathering of two filmmakers’ scripts combined with a multi-authored collection of essays on their films places equal emphasis on the writing and interpretation of these works. The new essays in this volume have been written by some of the most critical and engaging writers on different forms of oppositional cinema and art, whose wide-ranging expertise and research illuminates the heterogeneous concerns and strategies in Mulvey and Wollen’s collaborative and independent films. The volume has multiple aims: to make these fascinating scripts and outlines available,
and thereby draw attention to their value as written texts; to encourage further study of Mulvey and Wollen’s contribution to the theory and practice of avant-garde film; and to prompt further reflection on the script as a form within avant-garde film practice.

Section 1 focuses on Mulvey and Wollen’s collaborative films, Section 2 on Wollen’s *Friendship’s Death* and Section 3 on two of Mulvey’s later collaborations. In these sections, the script and essay for each film are presented one after the other. They are arranged chronologically, according to the date each film was completed. Wollen’s short story is also included in Section 2. In Section 4, the two outlines for unmade films are presented. Section 5 presents scans of working documents. In the second Introduction to this book, Laura Mulvey discusses the composition of her and Wollen’s collaborative films and underscores how they were the result of a shared commitment to pursuing a project of feminist counter-cinema through rapidly changing economic and political conditions. In this introductory essay, I aim to give a sense of the documents gathered in this volume and the scriptwriting practices that produced them.

**Scriptwriting**

Peter Wollen’s experiences of scriptwriting were various and reflect the wide range of his engagements with film at different moments in his life. First of all, in the early 1960s, he was commissioned by his cinephile friend Eugene Archer to write a script based on William Faulkner’s novel *The Wild Palms* (1939).² They stayed in a chalet in Switzerland and, while the other guests went skiing, Wollen laboured away on the script. He then co-wrote a number of scripts with his friend Mark Peploe. The first, *The Other Side of the River*, was based on a novella by Heinrich von Kleist, *Michael Kohlhaas* (1810), which they transformed into a Western. Later, after Michelangelo Antonioni had asked Peploe to put in a proposal to Carlo Ponti, the influential film producer, to write and direct a film, Peploe and Wollen collaborated on other projects. The first was based on ‘The Memorandum and Report on Victor de l’Aveyron’ (1806) by the French physician Jean Itard. They began working on this script only to discover that François Truffaut was already shooting a film based on the same text. Following this false start, Peploe developed an original idea, partly informed by his experience as a documentary filmmaker and his dissatisfaction with it, and after some preliminary work he and Wollen went to Spain in early 1970 to develop a script around various locations, particularly in Barcelona. When another of Antonioni’s projects was cancelled a few years later, Ponti suggested that he direct Peploe and Wollen’s script instead. Thus, Antonioni came to direct *The Passenger*, starring Jack Nicholson and Maria Schneider, released in 1975.³
The main focus of this book, however, is Mulvey and Wollen’s collaborative project, beginning in the early 1970s, of writing and directing feminist avant-garde films. By this time they had each made significant contributions as theorists; Mulvey had published important texts such as ‘You Don’t Know What is Happening Do You, Mr Jones?’ (1973), and was working on her manifesto, ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’ (1975), while Wollen had published *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema* (1969/1972) and numerous essays, including ‘Counter Cinema: Vent d’Est’ (1972). According to Mulvey, the extension from theorising film to making films was a logical step. She cites two reasons for this move: first, the women’s movement and the collective conviction that images of women were political and therefore sites of struggle and, second, the growth of radical film in the United Kingdom.

The immediate cinematic influences for Mulvey and Wollen’s early collaborations are numerous and from both avant-garde ‘traditions’ that Wollen outlined in his polemical 1975 essay ‘The Two Avant-Gardes’. Hollis Frampton is probably the most significant influence from the first avant-garde, especially his work *Zorns Lemma* (1970), and Jean-Luc Godard and Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet from the second. In addition to North American and European avant-garde filmmakers, Mulvey and Wollen were also interested in the theory and practice of Third Cinema, a term first formulated by Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino in ‘Towards a Third Cinema: Notes and Experiences for the Development of a Cinema of Liberation in the Third World’ (1969). However, with the growth of women’s liberation in the early 1970s, it was the experimental work of new women directors, including Jackie Raynal, Chantal Akerman and Yvonne Rainer, that was most influential on Mulvey and Wollen’s project of constructing a feminist counter-cinema. If Raynal’s film *Deux Fois* (1969) ‘fell somewhere in between’ the two avant-garde traditions Wollen schematically outlined, Akerman and Rainer showed how they could be combined, producing a third option. More precisely, they showed how critical formal strategies could be combined with narrative and used to address complex issues thrown up by the women’s movement, working on both form and content, signifier and signified. In 1974, Rainer, Akerman and Mulvey and Wollen all released key works (*Film About a Woman Who…, je tu il elle* and *Penthesilea* respectively); Akerman’s *Jeanne Dielman, 23 quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles* and the Berwick Street Collective’s *Nightcleaners* followed the year after. These crucial films make up a body of work that might be understood as a feminist avant-garde.

Mulvey and Wollen’s collaborative films were produced at the intersection of different theoretical discourses – such as psychoanalysis, semiotics and Marxism – and were underpinned by feminist theory and activism. The early 1970s witnessed the publication of many key feminist theoretical interventions, such as Claire Johnston’s
‘Women’s Cinema as Counter-Cinema’ (1973) and Juliet Mitchell’s *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* (1974). Griselda Pollock has suggested that this decade can be understood as an avant-garde moment, that differed from others because it was ‘a specifically feminist avant-garde moment occurring at the singular conjunction, around 1970, of independent cinema and emergent video art practices, conceptual art, feminist engagement with contemporary psychoanalytical theories, and a renewed and politicized theorization of, and activism around, gender and sexuality.’

For Pollock, this conjunction is symbolised by Mary Kelly’s *Post-Partum Document* (1973–1979), Julia Kristeva’s ‘Stabat Mater’ (translated into English in 1977) and Mulvey and Wollen’s *Riddles of the Sphinx* (1977). The feminist artists, theorists, films and artworks mentioned above suggest an intricate web of mutual influence, social connection and shared artistic and political projects.

As conventionally conceived, one of the many major differences between mainstream cinema and avant-garde cinema concerns the status of the script and synchronised sound. According to Scott MacDonald, the North American avant-garde’s rejection of sound, most of all the spoken word and thus scripts, that had been determined at first by underlying economic constraints, mutated by the 1960s into both an ascetic refusal of one of mainstream cinema’s central features and an insistence on the specificity of the medium. This position began to shift. ‘As [16 mm] synch sound equipment became increasingly available to independents in the late sixties and the seventies, new avenues for critique opened up. Filmmakers could now develop screenplays for films that demonstrated the limitations of conventional industry screenplays from positions generically much closer to the problematic industry product than had been possible before. … To choose silence when sound was economically feasible came to seem an implicit maintenance of the status quo, rather than a meaningful critique of it.’ The use of scripts and verbal language in avant-garde films – or in the ‘New Talkies’, as a small group of films came to be known – challenged their use in mainstream cinema and facilitated ideology critique more generally. Mulvey and Wollen’s collaborative filmmaking practice, in which they explored narrative and the relation of different types of writing to film, made an important contribution to these developments. As Wollen made clear in his article ‘The Field of Language in Film’ (1981), their project involved careful articulation, neither a refusal of verbal language, nor an uncritical reproduction of its use in dominant narrative cinema. How might different instances of theoretical writing be extended into film? Could these instances be combined with narrative sections and dialogue, or even incorporated into them? How might experimental or constrained writing disrupt the conventional cinematic experience further? Mulvey and Wollen explored all these possibilities across their work in film.
Documents

In their first three collaborative films, Mulvey and Wollen worked with and across a number of different written documents, each of which might be understood as an individual script, or instance of scripting. As a result, the project of publishing these texts here encountered archival and conceptual problems. Their first film, *Penthesilea*, illustrates the problem most vividly. In a 1974 interview, published in *Screen*, they described how it was written. For the second sequence, a performance-lecture delivered by Wollen to camera, he explained, ‘the text was written and the camera movements were choreographed on paper for the camera man’. Mulvey further explains that the script for the fourth sequence was compiled from letters that the feminist Jessie Ashley had published in the journal *Headquarters* and that the third and fifth were largely a matter of timing. However, she notes that in the final sequence, in which video monitors play back the previous four, a fifth video tape is introduced, adding footage of a ‘carefully scripted’ performance. How, then, could and should the script for this film be reconstructed? There was no single document, the script, to turn to. The document presented in this volume, which has been carefully constructed in collaboration with Mulvey, has therefore been produced from the different texts and working documents referred to above – from the index cards that were written for Wollen’s lecture, the camera movements that were written on a piece of paper for cameraperson Louis Castelli, the edited selection of Jessie Ashley’s letters (on typed pages) and so on. It gathers these instances of scripting and supplements them with others: titles used in the film and brief descriptions at the start of each chapter, which, as with some of their other published scripts, describe how each of the film’s five sequences function. The script for *Penthesilea* is thus a compilation of documents. The advantage of constructing the script in this way is that these material traces, despite their inherent fragility, clarify the precise nature of particular cinematic strategies used in the film, which are otherwise unclear.

*Riddles* and *AMY!* were also written across different working documents. Regardless of how these scripts were produced for previous publication (whether they were transcribed from film or reconstructed from working documents), they too combine different instances of scripting. In this volume, the script for *Riddles* is largely identical to its original publication in *Screen* (1977), except that some of the titles have been made consistent with the film and the names of various participants (in the film and credits) have been added. With *AMY!*, items omitted from the previous publication (small sections of voice-over, conversation in interview and song lyrics) in *Framework* (1980) have been reinserted here and some descriptions of camera movement have been amended. The script of *Frida Kahlo & Tina Modotti* has been constructed from an outline and typewritten pages of text. Meanwhile, Mulvey and
Wollen’s fourth film, *Crystal Gazing*, required a slightly more conventional script. Nevertheless, the filmmaking process left openings for improvisation and experimentation, which were crucial for the film’s overarching attempt to cross over with other independent cultural forms. The script that is in this volume includes these improvisational gaps, amends a few deviations from Mulvey and Wollen’s written script, and adds references for some of the quotations. The script for Wollen’s solo feature *Friendship’s Death* was published in a book called *Close Encounters: Film, Feminism, and Science Fiction* (1991) and it is presented here largely unedited; however, a few key phrases, which were omitted, have been inserted.

The script that Mulvey and Wollen wrote for *The Bad Sister* was very different to their previous scripts — it was a much more unified, technical document. This was largely due to the different material conditions of the film’s production. *Penthesilea* was a small-scale and self-funded project, outside industry constraints and without the requirements of funding bodies, using equipment and support made available by the university environment where it was made. These conditions allowed for the film to be written and produced in the informal way described above. Despite the fact that *Riddles, AMY!* and *Frida Kahlo & Tina Modotti* all received state funding (from the British Film Institute Production Board, Southern Arts and the Arts Council respectively), they were each written in a similarly informal way. *Crystal Gazing* received approximately £70,000 in funding from the BFI Production Board in association with Channel 4, and required a slightly more conventional script — though, as we have seen, an element of improvisation was maintained. *The Bad Sister*, however, was largely funded by Channel 4. Working in television involved a much bigger budget and required ‘a more professionalized, less casual, way of working’ that had an impact on all aspects of the film’s production. The script included in this volume has been derived from Mulvey and Wollen’s original shooting script, which, in terms of mise-en-scène, costume and dialogue, is remarkably similar to the final film.

The text for Mulvey’s first collaboration with Lewis, *Disgraced Monuments*, could not have been generated in the same way as the other films described above as this political documentary had no script, understood in either a conventional or an expanded sense. The document previously published in the journal *PIX* (1997) — which included the transcription of arranged interviews, the details of voice-over, titles, captions, commentary and music, together with a few visual descriptions — could therefore only have been produced from the documentary itself. That text has been slightly edited for this volume, so that the different examples of visual text (titles and captions) are clearly specified for the reader, and some spelling and transliteration have been amended. The text for Mulvey’s collaboration with Lewis and Abdullah, 23rd *August 2008*, presented here for the first time, is similar in status. It consists of Abdullah’s twenty-one-minute
monologue, details of the brief opening shot and titles. The texts for both *Disgraced Monuments* and *23rd August 2008* are therefore transcripts of the films. They provide an entirely retrospective view of the films to which they correspond and include, or constitute, written traces of the audio testimonies within them.

The scripts gathered in this volume have different relations to their corresponding films, and the interest to be found in these texts shifts from one moment to the next. At times, they illuminate the films. For example, they clarify various aspects, such as the specific details for camera movement and camera position, and help unpack dense and layered sequences for the reader. They also allow for compositional rules – such as the symmetry and patterned arrangements of sections, which are often features of Mulvey and Wollen’s collaborative films – to be easily discerned and verified. At other times, these texts can be read as creative and critical texts in their own right.

In a discussion event, Griselda Pollock proposed to Mulvey that the ‘script [Mulvey and Wollen] wrote for the *Riddles of the Sphinx* … makes *Riddles of the Sphinx* not just a cinematic text but a major piece of feminist poetry. It is a conjunction of feminist poetics and feminist philosophy’. The availability of *Riddles* as a script – that is, as printed text, independent of images and sounds – allows for this poetic aspect of the work to emerge more clearly, and for the diverse modes of writing therein to be appreciated independently. To this end, in the remainder of this essay I would like to draw attention to some of the strategies employed by Mulvey and Wollen in writing their independent and collaborative films, and examine certain textual approaches that can be seen to cut across them.

### Starting Points and Strategies

Mulvey and Wollen often began writing their collaborative films with a critical encounter with a particular story or set of artworks. The first three films all include feminist investigations of the way various stories have been previously narrated. Here, certain figures – the Amazon, the Sphinx and the heroine – function as emblems for reflections on patriarchal culture. The starting point for their first film, for example, was Kleist’s 1808 play *Penthesilea*. In an interview, Mulvey commented on the interconnected reasons for her and Wollen’s interest in this play, namely: Mulvey’s work on male fantasies of women; the question of whether the Amazon myth was politically useful for the women’s movement; and the transformation of the myth itself over time through its retellings in art and literature. These concerns are explored in various ways across the film, including a performance-lecture delivered by Wollen. The text he reads is maze-like, palimpsestic and contains a number of layered stories and digressions within it. This interest in myth was carried over into *Riddles*. In the
second section of that film, Mulvey introduces a feminist perspective on the Oedipus myth, and in particular the forgotten figure of the Sphinx, direct to camera. Here, she describes the Sphinx as the film’s ‘imaginary narrator’, and suggests that it is a suppressed figure, associated with motherhood and resistance to patriarchy. Hence the investigation of myth in Riddles is metaphorically tied to another story, which, in the film’s central section, is told through a series of thirteen 360-degree pans and concerns a mother, Louise (Dinah Stabb), and her daughter, Anna (Rhiannon Tise).  

(See Mulvey’s Introduction for an account of the story’s composition.) In order to investigate the figure of the heroine, AMY? takes Amy Johnson’s 1930 solo flight from Croydon to Darwin as its starting point. The film, which includes theoretical texts read by both Mulvey and Wollen on the soundtrack, reflects on how Johnson’s flight was rewritten into the form of legend.

The feature-length films that follow have a different relation to their source texts. Here the writing process is more akin to critical reworking or adaptation. Crystal Gazing is set in London during the early 1980s, but bases its four characters and aspects of its plot on Erich Kästner’s 1931 novel Fabian: The Story of a Moralist. The novel’s depiction of mass unemployment and businesses going bankrupt no doubt resonated with the gloomy historical present of the film’s writing and production: the Thatcher recession of the early 1980s, cuts to the arts and, as a newspaper headline incorporated into the film signals, ‘three million jobless’. The central section of Crystal Gazing revolves around the radical interpretation of another story, Charles Perrault’s ‘Puss in Boots’, which is the subject of the PhD thesis of one of the central characters. While the earlier three films all include a theoretical discussion of certain stories and their transformation over time, this film and some of the other feature-length films that would follow incorporate elements of theoretical discourse within the dialogues of the stories themselves.

Mulvey and Wollen’s final collaborative film, The Bad Sister, is an adaptation of Emma Tennant’s 1978 novel of the same name, itself a reworking of James Hogg’s Gothic tale The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner (1824). Significantly, Tennant switched the genders of Hogg’s protagonists. Mulvey and Wollen were interested in this gesture, just as they had been in Kleist’s decision to make Penthesilea kill Achilles, rather than the reverse as in the original Greek myth. Here, Mulvey and Wollen’s consistent interest in multi-layered or palimpsestic texts is apparent. However, as Mulvey explained in an interview, they were also drawn to Tennant’s novel because it is full of ‘invisible transitions between different worlds, and different kinds of consciousness’. Furthermore, The Bad Sister ‘is a story of a double, in which it’s never quite clear whether there is an actual “doppelgänger” or double or whether the central character, is in a sense, splitting herself into two. There
are a number of unresolved questions of dualism, dualities, fusions, hybridities’. These fantastic aspects of the novel also lent themselves to the new production context of Channel 4, suggesting a way that Mulvey and Wollen’s feminist engagement with concepts from psychoanalysis could be carried over into television and taken in new directions via experimentation with special effects.

Wollen’s solo feature film *Friendship’s Death* also involved the transformation of a pre-existing text: his own short story, which was first published in *Bananas*, the literary magazine that Tennant edited, in 1976. Wollen wrote about an experience he had had in Amman, Jordan, during the early days of September 1970, transforming it into a science fiction story set in the recent past. In this text, an unnamed reporter narrates his memories of meeting an extraterrestrial called Friendship during the events leading to Black September. In rewriting the short story for the screen, various aspects changed: Friendship is now a woman (Tilda Swinton) and the extraterrestrial’s gift for the reporter, now named Sullivan (Bill Paterson), is different. In the story it is a ‘translation’ of Stéphane Mallarmé’s *L’Après-midi d’un faune*, but in the film it takes the form of a brightly coloured object, which Friendship refers to as an ‘image unit’, a ‘kind of sketch-pad with a language facility’, containing a collage of moving images. In the film, as Kodwo Eshun has recently observed, the journalist and the extraterrestrial have a ‘dialogue, this duet, this dance of ideas … they are both personifications of Wollen’s thinking, of Wollen’s theoretical thought and of Wollen’s fictional thought.’ Eshun argues that science fiction suited Wollen because it is a ‘cinema of ideas’ and that the figure of the robot allowed him ‘to enact, and to dramatise and to perform ideas that he held for many years’.

In Mulvey and Wollen’s collaborative films, the project of working critically with narrative is often accompanied by instances of poetic, speculative and constrained writing. In *Riddles*, for example, the voice-off moves through different modes of speech. In the first three sections of ‘Louise’s story’, the central section of the film, it speaks in small sentences, and reads a poetic text that relates to domestic space and the experience of motherhood. In the ninth section, it enumerates a number of questions that open on to one another. Beginning with strategic questions about working conditions for mothers and the efficacy and focus of campaigns, it leads to a consideration of domestic labour, which, in turn, opens to broader questions about the politics of the unconscious: ‘Does the oppression of women work on the unconscious as well as on the conscious? What would the politics of the unconscious be like?’ In this passage, the voice-off moves from the concrete to the highly theoretical and back again, raising a number of feminist questions related to the oppression of women, which, according to Mulvey, were just beginning to be formulated by the women’s movement. Then, in the final section of ‘Louise’s story’, the voice-off employs the
third-person female pronoun, ‘she’, and associates it with various memories. While in the ninth section the use of this ‘shifter’ appears to refer to Louise, the recollections described in the final pan seem to belong to her daughter, Anna. Paradoxically, however, the voice-off describes Anna’s act of remembering from a later moment in her life. Here, unlike in previous sections, it is as if the voice-off is referring back to events in the diegesis from an undetermined point in the future, offering a complex account of the formation of her subjectivity.

While the poetic texts in the first three pans of *Riddles* were collaboratively worked on, Mulvey often credits Wollen with writing other sections alone. For example, in the twelfth pan of *Riddles*, Louise reads a transcript of a dream to another character, her friend, possible lover and, in Catherine Grant’s words, ‘guide to finding a more feminist life’, Maxine (Merdelle Jordine). Here, Wollen used a writing method adapted from the French writer Raymond Roussel, a precursor of Surrealism and Oulipo. ‘I took words from a French dictionary, according to an arbitrary system I had devised,’ Wollen explained, ‘and then incorporated them in sequence into a narrative… I also used some words from H.D.’ Mulvey noted that ‘it was not so much that Peter intended to emulate dream language or the language of the unconscious, but rather to generate words, and images from words, that foregrounded a linguistic materiality in the same sense that avant-garde film had always foregrounded the materiality of its medium’. In some autobiographical notes, Wollen states that ‘Roussel pervades *Crystal Gazing* too’. As working documents presented in this book show, Wollen generated lists of words that began and ended with the same letter, some of which were incorporated into the film. These quasi-palindromic words, scattered through the dialogue and passages of voice-over, mirror on a small scale the shape of the entire film, setting up a formal device that is almost imperceptible to the cinema viewer but undoubtedly generative for the writer.

As in much of the avant-garde art and literature that interested Mulvey and Wollen, as well as in many of their cinematic precursors and fellow travellers, the writing of Mulvey and Wollen’s films utilised quotation as one of their central strategies. That this is the case should come as no surprise, for Wollen discusses Jean-Luc Godard’s radical use of quotation in his 1972 essay on counter-cinema. There, he contrasts the closure of classic Hollywood films with the open-endedness and intertextuality of Godard’s counter-cinema, arguing that a film that utilises such strategies ‘can only be understood as an arena, a meeting place where different discourses encounter each other and struggle for supremacy’. Mulvey and Wollen often deploy direct quotations from theoretical or literary sources. Each of the five sequences in *Penthesilea* contains an epigraph, while *Riddles* begins with a quote from Gertrude Stein. This use of quotation underscores the sense in which these films were not designed as self-sufficient works, but were structured in relation to other writers and discourses.
In many of their films, artworks, movies and ‘found footage’ are included on the image track and whole passages of text, including letters and poetry, are read aloud, either by characters in the films or voice-over on the soundtrack. For example, in Crystal Gazing, a character reads a passage from Antonin Artaud; Friendship’s Death includes a recitation of Samih al-Qasim’s poem ‘Travel Tickets’; and Mary Kelly reads from the diaries she compiled for Post-Partum Document, introducing the idea of ‘weaning from the dyad’ and entry into ‘the Oedipal triad’, in Riddles.

Mulvey and Wollen also used quotation in a more radical way. This is most apparent in AMY?, which Wollen described as a ‘collage portrait’. In this film, alongside titles, performed tableaux and shots of particular locations related to Johnson’s life, different media and textual sources are used to evoke the historical figure of Amy Johnson, her flight from London to Australia, and its entanglement with the political realities of the 1930s. In section seven of the film, titles alert the viewer to the financial backer of Johnson’s endeavor, Lord Wakefield, and his nefarious oil interests which, as Esther Leslie has noted, ‘do not easily give up their underpinning, their enmeshment in colonial oppression, capitalist business practices and military adventures’. This critical register is extended in the following section, in which Johnson’s journey is tracked across a map and accompanied by a voice over that reads news headlines from The Times, May 1930. Here, Johnson’s flight becomes part of a news cycle that makes reference to the rise of fascism, colonial subjugation, and racist atrocities, thereby presenting both the reportage of Imperial violence, and the casual violence of Imperial reportage.

In sections fourteen and fifteen of the film, Yvonne Rainer reads a text on the soundtrack that is composed of undifferentiated and unidentified snippets of quotation which, according to the film’s credits, are taken from Bryher, Amelia Earhart, Lola Montez, Gertrude Stein and others. Here quotation functions for Mulvey and Wollen as a method for writing a text, but one that is very different to the writing techniques employed in Riddles or Crystal Gazing. In other sections, two songs by Poly Styrene and X-Ray Spex are used on the soundtrack to directly comment on issues of celebrity and identity raised by the film. The inclusion of lyrics in the script (as opposed to a simple notation of the song name) marks the sense in which Mulvey and Wollen deployed them as text within the writing of their film. This also emphasises the sense in which this film itself is very much a textual and musical collage, one that interweaves many different types of writing and media which, as the quote from Wollen about Godard suggested, comment on, counteract and critique one another.

Mulvey and Wollen’s filmmaking project also involved paying attention to the way words appear on the image track, in the form of epigraphs, superimpositions, titles and intertitles. Just as dialogue and voice-over provided codes and signifying practices to be explored and intervened with during the writing process, so too did
intertitles and visual text. For example, in the performance-lecture that Wollen delivers in the second sequence of *Penthesilea*, the camera discovers a set of index cards written in felt-tip. These, in a sense, add another layer of meaning to the section; at times they reinforce what is being said, and at others – the instances where the text is different to that which is read – they undermine it. The viewer is thus presented with a series of problems to negotiate and questions to think through regarding the significance of the mismatch between what is being said and what is written on the cards, and, to make matters more complex, whether to read the cue cards presented on the image track or listen to the speaker on the soundtrack.

The exploration of the way that word becomes image continues in later films. In the central section of *Riddles*, Mulvey and Wollen also use an intertitle before each of the thirteen tableaux in ‘Louise’s story’. As the film unfolds, it becomes clear that the majority of these fragmentary texts present aspects of the story and the psychoanalytic and political issues with which it is concerned. The text in each intertitle is in a blue font and framed by a blue square, contrasting their visuality and their supportive, narrative function. Aside from the first and last intertitle, they all start and end in the middle of the sentence. This presentation of text on the image track suggests that these intertitles are – like the depiction of motherhood in the scenes in ‘Louise’s story’ – sections of a larger whole. Furthermore, this sense of incompleteness relates to ongoing and repetitive acts of domestic labour.

The scripts gathered in this volume offer an opportunity to consider Mulvey and Wollen’s collaborative and independent writing for film. These texts function as representations of the films in their absence, and as creative and critical texts in their own right. In the former sense, they provide a notation of the majority of verbal speech in their films, as well as details regarding how cinematography and structure were conceived and designed. In the latter sense, they are sites where different modes of writing are folded into one another in singular and novel ways. As such, in addition to facilitating the study of these films, these texts represent an important aspect of Mulvey and Wollen’s broader practices. By comparison to the writing of theory, writing for film – whether collaborative or separate – allowed them to do three significant things: first, to proceed in an even more speculative and experimental manner; second, to engage with many of the textual conventions of cinema, to subvert them in the writing process and to open them up to new possibilities; finally, to juxtapose different sources and modes of writing, and in so doing approach the political subjects with which they were concerned from multiple standpoints. The meaning of each text is not one that is given but, like the documents themselves, has to be constructed. Thus the pleasure to be found in these texts may lie less in following an argument or story through to conclusion than in deciphering how these different instances and modes of writing merge and collide.
Notes

1. Wollen also wrote the outlines and treatments for many other projects that, often due to institutional limitations, did not reach production. After his collaborations with Mulvey, he co-wrote with film theorist Anne Friedberg the treatment for a film called *Extravagance* (1984). Around three years later, he co-wrote a proposal for a film on the Scratch Orchestra (c. 1987) with writer and later editor of the film publication *PIX* Ilona Halberstadt. Other unmade solo projects include *Dream Thief* (1984), *Eisenstein in Mexico* (c. 1985), *Expedition to the North Pole* (1985), *Grottoes* (1986) and *The de Man/Heidegger Affair* (1987). Wollen also wrote the treatment for a film called *Necessary Love*. The latter was written for Bandung Productions and published by *New Left Review* in 2006. See: Peter Wollen, ‘Necessary Love’, *New Left Review* 38 (May/April, 2006), 95–112.


3. The script for *The Passenger* was published by Grove Press. See: Michelangelo Antonioni, Mark Peploe and Peter Wollen, *The Passenger* (New York: Grove Press, 1976). Wollen also contributed to other scripts. For example, the screenplay for the film *Melancholia* (1989) is credited to both its director, Andi Engel, a film distributor and critic, and Lewis Rodia, a pseudonym Wollen employed when working on it. However, this was not a collaboration in the same sense as Wollen's other co-authored works. In this case, he was hired as a script doctor to work on the screenplay.


5. This essay was first published under the title ‘Counter Cinema: Vent d’Est’ in *Afterimage* 4 (Autumn 1972), 6–16; it was republished as ‘Godard and Counter Cinema: Vent d’Est’, in *Readings and Writings: Semiotic Counter-Strategies* (London: Verso, 1982), 79–91.

6. In addition to writing theoretical essays and making films, Mulvey and Wollen were also involved in many other aspects of experimental film culture; they took part in key debates, served on editorial boards, including *Screen* (Wollen) and *Framework*.
(both), organised international events as part of the Edinburgh Film Festival and held important roles at various institutions. Wollen worked for the BFI Education Department and Mulvey was on the board of management for the Other Cinema and a member of the Arts Council Artists’ Film Sub-Committee. Mulvey and Wollen both had roles in the Independent Film-Makers’ Association (IFA). Many of their institutional and editorial roles are outlined at: www.luxonline.org.uk/artists/laura_mulvey_and_peter_wollen/bibliography.html (accessed 26 July 2020).


10. As Mulvey describes in her Introduction to this book, she was part of the History Group, a feminist reading group, in the early 1970s. The self-directed study undertaken by the group informed many of the essays she wrote during the decade and, by extension, her filmic collaborations with Wollen. Mulvey has also previously explained that the Women’s Liberation Movement’s demonstration against the Miss World Competition in November 1970 was her ‘initiation to the politics of woman as spectacle’. See: Laura Mulvey, ‘Introduction to the Second Edition’, in *Visual and Other Pleasures* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), xv.


12. Griselda Pollock, ‘Moments and Temporalities of the Avant-Garde “in, of, and from the feminine”’, *New Literary History* 41:4 (Autumn, 2010), 801. Nicolas Helm-Grovas and I discuss this in our essay ‘Art at the Frontier of Film Theory’. Pollock’s concept of
a ‘feminist avant-garde moment’ is of crucial importance to us, and has informed many of the decisions we have made in relation to a series of exhibitions we have organised about Mulvey and Wollen’s work. See: Oliver Fuke and Nicolas Helm-Grovas, ‘Art at the Frontier of Film Theory’, catalogue essay in Art at the Frontier of Film Theory: Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen ex. cat. (London: Peltz Gallery/Birkbeck Institute for the Moving Image, 2019).


15. See: Peter Wollen, ‘The Field of Language in Film’, October 17 (Summer 1981), 53–60.

16. In a 1976 interview, Yvonne Rainer describes the writing process for her early films in similar terms. She says: ‘I … accumulate stuff, from newspapers, my own writing, paragraphs, sentences, scraps of paper, photos, stills from previous films. Ultimately, the process of sorting it all out forces me to organize it and make the parts cohere in some fashion. Sometimes a given text suggests a visual treatment and I dispense with the text. There is always the question of to what extent I want to duplicate content in text and image.’ See: Yvonne Rainer, ‘Interview by the Camera Obscura Collective’, in A Woman Who…: Essays, Interviews, Scripts (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 156.


18. Ibid., 126.


23. The thirteen tableaux tell this story schematically and, according to Mulvey, are designed ‘to bring out a series of problems, which are problems for feminist politics’. These problems operate on two levels: both the concrete – everyday practical problems, such as the realities of childcare and gendered labour issues – and the psychoanalytic. Here, the carefully planned camera movement operates independently of the story told but also reinforces the circular nature of the political problems with which the film is concerned. See: Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen, ‘Riddles of the Avant-Garde’, interview by Don Ranvaud, *Framework* 9 (Winter 1978), 31.

24. Mulvey and Wollen significantly altered many aspects of Kästner’s novel.


28. In his emphatic review of *Friendship’s Death*, Edward W. Said described Friendship’s ‘translation’ as ‘a virtuoso misreading’ that features various ‘ingenious renderings’. According to the narrator in the short story, Friendship’s approach to translation ‘combined literalness with a set of systematic procedures for deforming ordinary uses of language’. Here Wollen’s interest in experimental literature, use of quotation (the ‘translation’ is a text within a text) and experiments with ‘counter-language’ are clearly evidenced, as they are in the majority of the scripts presented in this volume. See: Edward W. Said, ‘Review of *Wedding in Galilee* and *Friendship’s Death*’, in *The Politics of Dispossession: The Struggle for Palestinian Self-Determination 1969–1994* (New York: Vintage, 1995), 135; and ‘*Friendship’s Death* (Fiction)’, Chapter 13 in this volume, 223.

29. However, as the script for this film makes clear, in ‘12. Sullivan’s Hotel Room’, Friendship’s voice can be heard reading some of this ‘translation’ of Mallarmé against a background of electronic sound, which gradually fades away.


31. See the script for *Riddles of the Sphinx*, reproduced in this book.


34. Oulipo is a group of writers exploring formal constraints in literary composition in postwar France, the best known of whom are probably Raymond Queneau and Georges Perec.


40. This text might be contrasted with the narration in Frida Kahlo & Tina Modotti, which is more didactic. Mulvey has explained how this text was partially extracted from a previous instance of critical writing (the catalogue essay Mulvey and Wollen collaboratively wrote for an exhibition they curated of the two artists’ work). However, at one point in the development of the work, Mulvey and Wollen had planned to write a more experimental text for the soundtrack, utilising quotations from different authors, such as Octavio Paz. For more information about the exhibition, see Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen, ‘Frida Kahlo and Tina Modotti’, in Frida Kahlo and Tina Modotti (London: Whitechapel Art Gallery, 1982), 7–27. Mulvey and Wollen worked on this exhibition together with Mark Francis. After its opening at the Whitechapel Gallery, it travelled to Germany and Sweden, before going on to the Grey Art Gallery in New York and, finally, to the Museo Nacional de Arte, Mexico City. Wollen and Francis also organised a number of other exhibitions together, including: Komar & Melamid: History Painting (The Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh; Museum of Modern Art, Oxford, both 1985) and On the Passage of a Few People Through a Rather Brief Moment in Time: The Situationist International (Musée National d’Art Moderne, Centre Pompidou, Paris; Institute of Contemporary Arts, London, both 1989; Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, 1990). Wollen curated other travelling exhibitions, such as Posada, Messenger of Mortality (1989), Addressing the Century: 100 Years of Art and Fashion (1999) and the North American section of Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin, 1950s–1980s (1999).
This Introduction is designed to be read alongside Oliver Fuke’s first Introduction. Two questions run through it: what circumstances brought these quite unusual films into existence? And then: what were the working methods that made the Mulvey/Wollen collaboration possible? Given that this is a book of scripts, I have, by and large, concentrated on the early stages of our projects’ development, on ideas and working methods that precede the actual process of production itself, the filming and its aftermath. I have also tried to stay close to those moments in time and avoid comments informed by hindsight, although some retrospection cannot but creep in. Needless to say, writing this Introduction has been difficult in Peter Wollen’s absence and I have constantly felt a frustrated impulse to confer with and consult him. And his memories and perspectives would, of course, have differed from mine. I am sure that Peter would have taken great pleasure in this book and would have been as impressed as I am by the meticulous work that Oliver has invested in its production. All the scripts, and some very much more than others, have needed careful and patient reconstruction, often from scattered fragments, and in every case Oliver has demonstrated an exemplary fidelity to reproducing a valid and reliable text.

To my mind, and these three points are in juxtaposition with those in the first Introduction, there is a triple rationale for the publication of the film scripts brought together in this book. In the first instance, most of the films come from the mid-period of the ‘long 1970s’, and, as documents of the British independent film movement’s most experimental phase, will contribute to the recent revival of interest in that period and its cultural production. The term ‘long 1970s’ is usually used to evoke the political period bracketed, at one end, by the revolutionary fervour of 1968 and, at the other, by the defeat of the miners’ strike and the triumph of Thatcherism in 1984. But the term also evokes the arc traced by the UK experimental film movement itself, bracketed symbolically, at one end, by the founding of the London Film-Makers’ Co-operative
in 1968 and, at the other, by the arrival on air of Channel 4 in 1982. These ‘brackets’ had a determining impact on Peter’s and my collaboration between 1974 and 1983.

Second, the book’s critical strand, the essays accompanying each script, has made an invaluable contribution to the publication. As the essays are about the actual films themselves, they bring the dimension of the screen and the image to the words on the page. The collection benefits particularly from the ‘essayistic’ qualities of the writing, that is, from the personal perspectives, interests and imaginative engagements these writers have brought to the Mulvey/Wollen films. Furthermore, all the contributors to the collection are engaged with critical and theoretical questions surrounding the politics of experimental film now. While they bring a thorough understanding of the films’ various historical moments (from 1974 to 1992), the essays also give them a new significance in the present and, I hope, a new lease of life.

Third, working on the scripts for publication, focusing primarily and unusually on the words as such, has reminded me of the importance of language in Peter’s and my films. Our shared commitment to a feminist politics of language runs through the first three, *Penthesilea: Queen of the Amazons* (1974), *Riddles of the Sphinx* (1977) and *AMY*? (1980). In all these films, the question of language includes its absences and women’s silences. But Peter also wrote specific passages that both foreground the materiality of language and implicitly reflect Julia Kristeva’s concept of the pre-Oedipal ‘chora’, finding a narrow edge between words as image and as conveyor of meaning. In this quotation, he very clearly sums up these relations between theory, politics and language:

> Language is the component of film which both threatens to regulate the spectator, assigned a place within the symbolic order, and also offers the hope of liberation from the closed world of identification and the lure of the image. Language, therefore, is both a friend and a foe, against which we must be on our guard, whose help we need but whose claims we must combat. Hence the fractured and dislodged body of language in our films. …It is important to stress that the sphinx represents an alternative form of language – she is not outside language as she is outside the city of Thebes, the realm of patriarchy, but is able to offer a different discourse, potentially the nucleus of a nonpatriarchal symbolic, based on a different Oedipal structure – or perhaps it would be better to say, a different mode of entry into language, kinship, and history.²

The points that Peter raises here crystallise the conjuncture between the various radicalisms that interested us: avant-garde aesthetics, feminist politics and psychoanalytic theory, for all of which semantic structures, words, their comprehensibility or difficulty,
were of central significance. To sum up: the importance of language for our cinematic project meant that it was unavoidably theoretical and also essentially impure; the films moved away from linguistic transparency to the stutter, the hieroglyph and the riddle. Folded within these theoretical questions about language is the crucial contribution Peter’s own writing made to the films. The key passages that I have in mind from the first three films are: Peter’s monologue in *Penthesilea*, some of the ‘Sphinx’ voice-off in *Riddles of the Sphinx*, and the Yvonne Rainer voice-off in *AMY*! Although we discussed their significance and their rationale as part of our collaborative process, it was Peter who actually penned them, materializing the ideas into words in a way that gives them a formal, ‘literary’ quality, in addition to their psychoanalytic and political relevance to the films more generally. On the screen, these highly experimental and original compositions slip inexorably away, absorbed into the movement of the film; but once published, once they appear on the page, the writing can get the more prolonged attention it deserves. In the Preface to *Readings and Writings: Semiotic Counter-Strategies* (1982), Peter specifically describes his intention to overcome the division of labour between theory and practice and points out that his essays and fictions ‘present different aspects of work from a common aesthetic position.’ He also explains that our collaborative films ‘form part of the same heterogeneous corpus.’ I would suggest that his experimental writing for the films and his experimental writing, over the same period of time, for *Bananas* are two sides of a coin. Now the publication of the scripts allows this aspect of Peter’s writing to be read alongside his fictions.

The other scripts differ from the first three and from each other. The voice-over for *Frida Kahlo & Tina Modotti* (1983) is primarily drawn from the catalogue essay of the 1982 exhibition, which we wrote together. Of all our six films, the script for *Crystal Gazing* (1982) is the most complex. For the first time in our collaboration, Peter wrote some intricate passages of dialogue, in which he used the voice of a character to return to the politics of language and semiotics, now with irony and a certain dimension of self-satire. The dialogue intertwines with an elaborate voice-over commentary, at times poetic and at times novelistic, mixed with casual observation of the immediate and the everyday.

The Mulvey/Wollen Collaboration: How it Began, Continued and How it Ended

Beginnings: Peter’s and my shared love of Hollywood films had, from the earliest days of our relationship, been an integral part of our daily and our social lives. But in the early 1970s our attitudes and commitment to the cinema changed. The Hollywood studio system was, by then, a thing of the past and we began to discover new
avant-garde and feminist experimental films: cinema as critique, film as a radical aesthetic for a radical politics. However, our actual move into filmmaking, the beginning of the Mulvey/Wollen collaboration, was more or less a product of circumstance or, even perhaps, chance. In 1972, Peter was invited to work in the Department of Radio, Film and Television at Northwestern University by Paddy Whannel (who had given Peter his first proper job at the British Film Institute Education Department in the mid-1960s). Peter and Paddy’s relationship, professional and personal, had been founded on a mutual love of Hollywood cinema and I, although professionally marginal, had always been included in this cinephilic bonding. But with the changing times Peter’s interests and writing shifted towards counter-cinema, publishing his essay ‘Counter Cinema: Vent d’Est’ in 1972, and I began to write ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’.4 At some point in 1973, Peter asked Paddy if he could teach an MA seminar on avant-garde film. Of course, Paddy agreed. But soon after, he said: ‘If you and Laura are so keen on the avant-garde now days, make a film yourselves. We have a whole cupboard of equipment here, not used in the vacation. See what you can do!’ Penthesilea: Queen of the Amazons was made in response to this challenge.

Furthermore, living in Evanston, Peter and I were both cut off from our political roots in London. I had belonged to the History Group, a Women’s Liberation reading group, and helped out with the administration of the London Women’s Liberation Workshop.5 Peter was still on the Editorial Boards of Screen and New Left Review, but at a distance. 7 Days, in which he had been closely involved in the early 70s, had failed to survive. I sometimes think that, in that comparative political isolation (our son Chad, aged three, was, of course, with us), we turned to each other as though to found a minimal collective, a small filmmaking and study group, as it were. Our first film emerged gradually. It was rooted in our recent polemical writing, inspired by the new horizons of possibility offered by films of ideas and revolved around issues, thrown up by feminism, that directly challenged the cinema, its imagery and its modes of story-telling. The actual process began with research: reading and discussion around, for instance, Amazons in ancient Greek culture and beyond, the psychoanalytic implications of the Amazon figure and Kleist’s rewriting of the Penthesilea legend, an interweaving of myth and the historical realities of women in struggle… all producing endless notes, charts and conversations. The process of producing Penthesilea did not involve writing a script as such (see the first Introduction on the relation of documents to production) but, in keeping with Peter’s and my tendency to think through diagrams and patterns, the words grew out of the film’s evolution, through its various planning stages.

When we moved back to London, in late 1974, we found a new flourishing film cultural environment. Although the independent film movement had definitely been
in the process of taking off when we left, it had gathered momentum. Having made *Penthesilea*, we not only arrived back home as filmmakers but also found a film culture that recognised the rationale for this work of feminist counter-cinema. It was this movement and this moment that gave a further impetus to Peter’s and my collaboration. I sometimes think that in other circumstances *Penthesilea* might have been a one-off oddity; but it became, in fact, a crucial stepping stone both for our further film production and for the further development of our ideas.

By the mid-1970s, there was a dynamic context not only for filmmaking but also for critical writing on radical film, historical research into the avant-garde, programming the new national and international cinema through screenings and festivals etc. The Independent Film-Makers’ Association (IFA) had been founded in 1974 and I was part of the original organising group; Peter was a key figure in the IFA’s campaign to ensure the presence of independent film on the newly envisaged fourth television channel. The sense of a movement, of belonging and of shared agendas for radical cinema, brought very different kinds of independent film into dialogue and co-operation, from the artist filmmakers of the Co-op, to left documentary and agit-film collectives. Before leaving for the US, both Peter and I had been involved with different projects at the Edinburgh Film Festival (EFF); its director, Lynda Myles, managed to programme retrospectives of the Hollywood directors who had been so precious to the cinephiles of the 1960s, with systematic programming of avant-garde and experimental films. After our return, the EFF continued to be an annual source of cinematic excitement: screenings, symposia, personal encounters, new friendships…

Questions about the representation of women, and what a feminist cinema should be like, were important issues under discussion at the time. As Peter and I decided to apply to the British Film Institute Production Board to fund another film, our commitment to a *theoretical* feminist counter-cinema became a conscious project. The independent film movement was fortunate that Peter Sainsbury (founding co-editor of *Afterimage*) at the BFI and David Curtis (founding member of the London Film-Makers’ Co-operative) at the Arts Council, both long supporters of these new cinemas, were in a position to give it financial backing. We received £20,000 from the BFI for the project that became *Riddles of the Sphinx*. Southern Arts backed *AMY!*, the Arts Council funded *Frida Kahlo & Tina Modotti* and the BFI in association with Channel 4 funded *Crystal Gazing*.

Endings: it is, of course, well known that the early 1980s was a transitional period for independent film. The 1979 election not only coincided with funding changes at the British Film Institute Production Board but also brought an end to the (doubtless over-utopian) optimism that had characterised the cultural left of the 1970s. On the other hand, Channel 4 came on air in 1982 offering new hope, funding possibilities
and exhibition slots. There is a certain inverse symmetry between the beginning and ending of Peter’s and my collaboration. Both took place at the start of a new era for independent film; *Penthesilea* could definitely be described as a theoretical film within a *cinema povera*, while *The Bad Sister* (1983) offered an opportunity to translate our ideas into a different kind of film world, as it were, a ‘new mainstream’, a film/television hybrid. The leap beyond *Crystal Gazing* was striking. With a budget of £418,000 and a full-sized crew, *The Bad Sister* was produced for the Film on Four slot through the Moving Picture Company, known for its accomplished special effects and commercials.

The new context demanded different working methods – some we could adapt to, some we found difficult. In the first instance, Film on Four produced art films, which, quite unlike our previous theoretical films, needed a conventional, fully elaborated script not only for raising funds but as the essential blueprint for the production, its costing, its casting, its locations and so on. Peter had written film scripts of this kind during the 1960s, particularly in collaboration with Mark Peploe (see Oliver Fuke’s Introduction) and, with my full agreement, he wrote *The Bad Sister* script accordingly. While the written strand of our films had, previously, always emerged out of a process of collaborative research, discussion and development, here the two were necessarily separated. We still worked closely together on the adaptation of the book, its ideas and its visual potential, but the script was less organically and collaboratively integrated than for our previous films.

At the heart of our collaborative commitment to making *The Bad Sister* lay two key aesthetic ambitions. First of all, to re-work the concept of medium specificity, which had been so important to those of us who had worked with 16mm film, into the televisual through electronic special effects. Second, we wanted to explore the key themes in Emma Tennant’s novel, which resonated with the feminist-orientated use of psychoanalytic theory and various motifs in our previous films, in this very different production context. For instance, the wild women bear some relation to the Amazons of *Penthesilea*; Jane’s self-transformation into a kind of androgyny in preparation for her dream travels had been prefigured in *AMY*; and the anti-Oedipal nature of Jane’s relation to her mother and father dramatizes theoretical issues raised in *Riddles of the Sphinx*. But the theme in *The Bad Sister* of sibling rivalry, of the double and the uncanny, took us into a psychoanalytically different, if still Freudian, terrain. These confusions of identity and fusions between dream and reality lay at the heart of both novel and film, and seemed particularly appropriate for the visual experiments we were envisaging.

There were, however, certain problems with the finished film, partly due to incidental circumstances, partly to miscalculation on our part. There was a mismatch, for instance, between our hope for a visualisation of the fantastic and the actualities of
special effects available to us in post-production. In terms of our shooting strategy, we were still thinking cinematically rather than televisually; we used actual locations, extended shots and a mobile camera, which sometimes pushed the one-inch video past its technological capacity. And the circumstances of directing were very different in the production of *The Bad Sister*. On our previous films, Peter and I had always worked everything out before filming and we were unprepared for the on-the-spot/on-the-set decision making demanded by such a large production, a different kind of relation with actors and some of the technological problems involved in using video on location.

After *The Bad Sister*, I came quite easily to the conclusion that my approach to cinema, and my way of thinking and imagining cinematically, was unsuited to this kind of filmmaking. There was no way back to the 1970s and, I felt, the dialogue between radical aesthetics and radical politics that had enabled Peter’s and my collaboration no longer had either practical viability or relevance in the very different political and economic conditions of the 1980s. At the same time, new alternative, energetic cultural movements were taking off in film and in experimental video and television. Furthermore, by the mid-1980s, Peter’s and my relationship was also changing. When we decided, at least for the time being, to live separately but still in the same house, Peter moved into the basement of 207 Ladbroke Grove.

While I backed away from further filmmaking, Peter proved with *Friendship’s Death* that he could work extremely successfully and, indeed, politically with the art film form, although he himself nuanced that categorisation, highlighting the film’s studio production and its tight schedule. As he told Simon Field in an interview after completing the film, ‘It clearly isn’t a Hollywood film or even an art film … I knew Sam Fuller made films in two weeks. This is a “B” movie, it’s a BFI “B” movie. I was thinking about Val Lewton at RKO’. At the same time, as the film revolves around journalism and the figure of the journalist, he saw *Friendship’s Death* as ‘a sequel to *The Passenger*’. Although he went on to make interesting documentaries with the Rear Window slot on Channel 4, it seems sad that he never again found an opportunity to use his talent for a kind of cinema that had its roots in his pre-avant-garde, scriptwriting days of the 1960s.

The Mulvey/Wollen Collaboration: Themes and Structures

The first step in the composition of all our films (until *The Bad Sister*, that is) was to arrange the thematic material we had collected together into a structure, which was ultimately organised into a series of parts or sequences. In a sense, this represents an aesthetic of layering or ‘piling up’ of ideas and images; our ‘counter-cinema’ commit-
ment to challenging the transparency and the horizontal flow of both language and cinema is extended to structure. Rather than ‘narrative or cinematic incident’ leading seamlessly from one to another, the structure accumulates and also makes visible its fissures and gaps.

In Penthesilea, the sequences are visually and thematically cumulative. The first, a simple registration of Kleist’s version of the story in mime, is complicated in the second. Here the camera’s autonomous movement, its ‘take’ on the space and the performance, is additional to Peter’s commentary on Kleist and the Amazon legend, already as he put it ‘a palimpsest and a maze’. In the third sequence, images of Amazons are layered across history and mythology. In the fourth, the layering takes the form of cinematic superimposition; the suffragette film What 80 Million Women Want (1913) is switched alternately from foreground to background with an actor who reads from articles written by the contemporary socialist feminist Jessie Ashley. In the final part, the previous four are played on stacked video monitors, filmed by a video camera that picks out and zooms in on each one until they are gradually displaced by an added ending.

Pattern became a key organising strategy for our films. For both of us, symmetry had an aesthetic, modernist attraction. From the perspective of ‘counter-cinema’, it could also give the linearity of film a non-linear shape, overriding the drive towards an ending, in keeping with the principle of narrative aperture as opposed to closure. In Riddles of the Sphinx, the structure has the shape of a palindrome, symmetrically extended either side of the turning point, the roundabout sequence, of ‘Louise’s story’. In Crystal Gazing the opening and closing images rhyme with each other and the structure is also symmetrical. As Peter describes it: ‘It’s a triptych. The beginning, then the central section that revolves around “Puss in Boots” and Julian’s character, and then the third section picks up elements from the first. There’s an underlying narrative structure that’s formally blocked out. Although I don’t think the “blocking out” is foregrounded in the extreme way that it might have been.’ In Frida Kahlo & Tina Modotti, the strict symmetry is enhanced by a looping mechanism that takes each image section back to its point of departure and it too has a rhyming beginning and ending.

Although Peter thought diagrammatically, clearly enjoying the arrangement of ideas into pattern (as seen in his note books on display in the exhibition Art at the Frontier of Film Theory and in Section 5 of this book, ‘Working Documents’), he also felt that symmetry could become formulaic. The otherwise symmetrical structure in AMY! is disrupted by the ‘flying sequence’ with Yvonne Rainer’s voice-over (section fourteen, ‘Over a jungle’, and fifteen, ‘Bird in flight’). For Peter, the voice-over sequence gave the film an essential twist, a baroque distortion of an otherwise over-classical order. But even thrown out of kilter, the pattern itself would still be
visible, organised around the before and after of Amy’s journey across the map that forms the central section of the film.

While symmetry, and other kinds of pattern, imposed an overall shape on the early films, the separate sections were themselves made up of contrasting, hybrid and heterogeneous materials. The films made extensive use of quotation and citation, which worked against the coherence of an authorial voice (see the first Introduction). We also included other kinds of art, media and found footage, producing an incohesive or hybrid aesthetic, as well as different kinds of performance: direct address (both Peter and me) and some ‘guest appearances’ (Mary Kelly, Yvonne Rainer and Keith Allen, for instance). Most particularly, our films were committed to including a storyline and character. While narrative itself is intrinsically hybrid, for us the cinema’s specificity and its fascination came from an ability to move, seamlessly, between the real and the fantastic, between everyday life and a dream world. We chose stories that would confuse a classical idea of narrative through, in the case of myth, a layered journey through history, or by folding multiple stories, or just anecdotes, into the main one. I think the narrative elements in our films tended to revolve more around situation than progression, which again, I think, contributes to their overall sense of irresolution. Gestures against narrative closure, intransitivity and identification were, of course, in keeping with Peter’s principles of counter-cinema but the way the very different stories we used either rejected endings or ended with a symbolic blockage varied from film to film.

Situations

In constructing the central section of *Riddles of the Sphinx*, ‘Louise’s story’, we worked quite literally with a series of five situations, spread across thirteen tableaux, that led, in some sense inexorably, from one to another, tracing various psychoanalytic and political issues around motherhood. The initial situation (the first two pans plus a third transitional one) quite simply imagines a mother whose love for her two-year-old daughter resists the logical steps of the Oedipal trajectory. The final situation (the last two pans preceded by a transitional one) would return to the Oedipal trajectory, not through an individual mother, but by imagining a stop on the Oedipal threshold, a pause, in which the maternal would not be relegated to an outside of culture but could dream of a non-patriarchal symbolic. The figure of Louise moves through three other situations in between. In the second, the mother and child are separated (the nursery and the switchboard) not Oedipally but through the intervention of social life and necessity. The third situation raises and touches on questions at stake in a campaign for workplace nurseries and the possibility of union involvement (the can-
teen and the discussion in the van). The film moves from interior spaces into exteriors of women’s everyday lives: the Arndale Shopping Centre and the playground that, in turn, leads into a fourth situation, around a kind of pause in a world of women, through Louise and Maxine’s relationship and the grandmother’s care of her daughter’s daughter (the walled garden, the editing room), prefiguring the more poetic moment of pause in the fifth and final situation. Here again the question of pattern comes into play. While the opening and closing scenes are symmetrical, a doubled reflection on motherhood and the place of the maternal in the Freudian and Lacanian Oedipal drama, the central and pivotal section (represented by the discussion in the van at the roundabout) is political and rooted in the everyday. A final point: the film is taken from its fourth to its final section by Mary Kelly as she reads from *Post-Partum Document* (1973–1979), a work that, among other things, combines the mother’s diary, an account of her relation with her two-year-old child taken from daily life, with psychoanalytic theory. Kelly reads the section ‘Weaning from the Dyad’, the dilemma around which ‘Louise’s story’ revolves. But while *Post-Partum Document* follows the Oedipus Complex through to the end, *Riddles of the Sphinx* hovers on the threshold without a certain conclusion.

To sum up: we decided not to complete ‘Louise’s story’ with any kind of narrative closure, neither with a more acceptable version of a traditional Oedipal trajectory nor with a not-yet-properly-theorised or -envisaged feminist alternative. A ‘pause’ ending (although we were criticised for it at the time) would be in keeping with both avant-gardist and political principle. As mother and daughter walk into the Egyptian mummy room in the British Museum hand in hand, the gesture rhymes with but transforms their first appearance, when Louise unnecessarily carries her two-year-old daughter on her hip. There is a sense of liberation but not of closure. Furthermore, the last chapter of *Riddles of the Sphinx*, a short, self-sufficient but abstract ‘story’, comments on the question of endings. Rhyming with the ‘Opening pages’, images of monstrous women in various films, is ‘A riddle ending’. A small toy, depicting a maze, challenges the player (me) to get mercury into its centre. Each bit of mercury seems to embark on a journey as it struggles through the maze, contending, like a character in a story, with success or failure until the two bits fuse into one at ‘the end’. At that point, I shake them apart, instinctively resisting an image of unity and centrality that could evoke ‘closure’. There was also a Brechtian dimension to this commitment to an open ending. That is, a desire to leave with a question to be taken up by whoever might be interested, whenever, in its implications. Incidentally, I remember that back in our Hollywood movie-going days in the mid-1960s we were struck by the ending of Sam Fuller’s film *The Run of the Arrow* (1957); a title comes on the screen saying ‘The end of this story will be written by you.’

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In *Crystal Gazing*, the question of narrative situation revolves around the four characters we took from Erich Kästner’s *Fabian* and reinvented for our script. The atmosphere of disillusion and disorientation that has overwhelmed the book’s intellectual, bohemian protagonists in Berlin in 1930 seemed relevant to the onset of Thatcherism. But through images of the future and the idea of crystal gazing, we added another dimension. Real or fantastic, these ‘intimations’ reach towards an indistinct temporality in which ‘now’, ‘then’ and ‘to come’ are entangled. For instance, during the magic act in the fifth scene, the protagonist is described in the voice-over as ‘looking through a childhood window onto a landscape where the present succumbed to the future’. And later: ‘They had damaged the map to dreamland and there was no way home for the blindfolded’. The four characters loosely represent different and contrasting aspects to this sense of time, varying between ruined traces of a lost utopianism to the technological advances of speculative capitalism.

Peter and I had begun, in the late 1970s, to collect newspaper articles about contemporary capitalism, gradually focusing our interest on the economics of future markets, which became the topic of the unmade project *Possible Worlds* (1978). The latter not only prefigures the multiple-narrative and character structure of *Crystal Gazing* but also revolves around ideas of the future, combining (through three emblematic characters) computer technology, market speculation on ‘futures’ and a utopian community. We salvaged something of this in *Crystal Gazing*; Vermilion works as a reader of satellite maps forecasting weather and crop trends. As the voice-over suggests, ‘This insight into the future, bought at such a great price, would benefit only a few… through the paradoxes of the commodity market, the prediction of failure could bring good fortune and money in the bank.’ (On the other hand, we lifted Vermilion’s very ‘modern’ marriage contract directly from the Berlin/Weimar atmosphere of Kästner’s novel.) In both the novel and our film, the central character is a dreamer, who drifts aimlessly and is sacked from his job early on in the story.

Neil, in *Crystal Gazing*, illustrates comic books and has invented a science fiction world of the future: ‘The Cities of Alpha’. In the novel and the film, his best friend is finishing a PhD but in *Crystal Gazing* Julian’s semiotic and psychoanalytic reading of Charles Perrault’s fairy tale, ‘Puss in Boots’, revolves around the way that Puss’s speech acts and actions can alter his master’s future life. For Julian, ‘Puss in Boots’ was ‘the founding text of modernism, the secular celebration of language as desire and language as power ... its transformation of lies into truth, fiction into fact and desire into fulfilment’. Throughout the central section of the film, Peter’s writing is once again of particular importance, both in its own right and also as a reworking of his longstanding interest in the relation between word, sign and meaning. The fourth character in *Fabian* is a rising movie star who sells out to a corrupt film indus-
try; in *Crystal Gazing*, Kim is a rising pop star. Lora Logic’s music, her saxophone and most particularly her voice light up the film, bringing the culture of punk that Peter and I had wanted, but also an unexpectedly lyrical and melancholy resonance that enhances the story and its atmosphere. The gender politics of *Crystal Gazing* reflect the changing economic atmosphere of the 1980s as a male-centred labour force began to succumb to unemployment and casualisation while women’s marginal work remained, by and large, the same.

Woven into these temporal twists are the points where ‘necessity and contingency collide’, the blockages that thwart Neil’s progress: from wrong turnings, to the unexpected husband, to the crossed telephone line, to his accidental death. To enhance this sense of a narrative at standstill, we also inserted into *Crystal Gazing* quite arbitrary scenes, episodes and images. Some of the locations taken from our Ladbroke Grove neighbourhood have no significance for the story: the Portobello fish-and-chip shop, the Golborne Road Chinese take away, Elgin Books, Rough Trade, the restaurant Monsieur Thompson, the mural by Ladbroke Grove Underground Station. There were also quotations and images, such as the crystal ball, the Rings of Saturn and the Joseph Cornell box. All these turnings, references, stories within stories and interruptions created a continuum with the principles of ‘counter-cinema’: narrative intransitivity, multiple diegeses, apertures formed by citation. The story of the rationale for Neil’s projected trip to Mexico was drawn from an experience of Peter’s when he was researching our *Frida Kahlo and Tina Modotti* exhibition. In Mexico City, he visited Dolores Olmedo, the powerful patron of Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo and an important collector of their work, to solicit her support and the loan of Kahlo paintings. To Peter’s horror, she explained that in order to buy ‘an expensive Diego Rivera’ at Sotheby’s, she had pawned two Kahlos at the Central Pawn Shop in Mexico City. The ticket was held by Sotheby’s, New York. Eventually the situation resolved itself, and just in time for the exhibition, but the incident had made a strong impression on us.

In some notes for *Crystal Gazing*, Peter wrote: ‘London. Midwinter. 1982. Unemployment hangs like a noose round the neck of the city. Shattered dreams. Redundancy figures. … This is a story set in the Thatcher recession. But it begins far far away. … In the Cities of Alpha.’ These notes reminded me of the way that a film about the Thatcher-designed economic crisis is punctuated by dream-like images and themes. Here *Crystal Gazing* has some kind of overlap with *Riddles of the Sphinx*, continuing and exaggerating the earlier film’s fusion of abstract spaces and actual locations. Ultimately this combination of the fantastic, in a range of different forms, with the starkness of everyday reality is characteristic of both films and comes close to capturing something of what Peter and I loved about cinema.
From Script to Screen

AMY! and Frida Kahlo & Tina Modotti, our two short films, were based on the real lives and achievements of extraordinary women. Although Frida Kahlo & Tina Modotti originated as a film record of the exhibition Peter and I curated in 1982 at the Whitechapel Gallery, it evolved into a much more complex, and cinematically considered, project. Obviously, the exhibition had consisted of Kahlo’s paintings and Modotti’s photographs on the gallery walls; the accompanying catalogue essay reflected our interest in the two women’s lives and their politics, their attitudes to the female body and the significant, but very different, questions they raise about women’s art and aesthetics. On the screen, the images, stories and ideas could come together, fusing into a series of visual juxtapositions. Although I would say that our previous films had all been constructed around systems of montage (primarily due to the place of pattern and tableaux in their structure), juxtaposition, in both form and content, was crucial for Frida Kahlo & Tina Modotti. The film’s shape and argument had a rigorous binary structure, that became dialectical through montage. The Kahlo paintings and Modotti photographs were grouped thematically into three chapters; the first contrasted Kahlo’s persistent return to painting herself with Modotti’s engagement with public spaces, the second contrasted Kahlo’s roots in her house and in Mexican culture with Modotti’s internationalism and the third contrasted their personal, different, relation to the female body and its effect on their art. The combining of ideas, the use of montage, that is, was intended to generate a wider conceptual framework, a reflection on how very varied experiences could still inform a feminist political consciousness. Julian Rothenstein designed an initial ‘starting point’ for each chapter in which ‘Frida Kahlo’ and ‘Tina Modotti’ are juxtaposed in word and image. The montage opens up a space for a ‘third meaning’, a resonant evocation, through Kahlo and Modotti individually, of women’s lives, their struggles and the particularity of their art more generally. Given that the documentary was intended for educational screenings, we ultimately added a voice-over text, taken from the exhibition catalogue, to make the implications of the montage clearer.

We first came across Amy Johnson in 1980, when the fiftieth anniversary of her flight to Australia in 1930 was the occasion for newspaper stories and celebrations of her life. Her story raised the question, difficult for feminism, of a woman’s attempt to move into a male role and the associated, but intractable, concept of the ‘heroine’. From an Amy Johnson biography we discovered that our original theme of a woman’s heroism was complicated by her celebrity. While the public gaze and patriarchal recuperation surrounding her return interested us psychoanalytically, her flight also attracted a certain imperial triumphalism as it was interpolated and ‘transcribed’, as Peter put it, ‘into the language of the Empire in legend.’ Coincidentally, the date
further drew us to the Amy story; we had already been thinking about the political significance of the year 1930, the onset of the Great Depression, for 1980 in the immediate aftermath of the 1979 election.

From the wider events of Amy Johnson’s life, we extracted two pivot points to dramatize the significance of gender and the public gaze for her story. The first: her transition from ‘ordinary girl’ to aspiring aviatrix; the second: from triumphant heroine to abject celebrity. The first transition takes place through the *mise-en-scène*. Amy as ‘ordinary girl’ is evoked through soft lighting, colour and the kind of objects she has close to her as she moves together with the camera from her dressing table to the fireplace. As ‘aspiring aviatrix’ she is shot in day light, wearing trousers, and her dressing table has become a desk where she studies engineering and, accordingly, in her reverse movement from the fireplace, the collection of objects has also changed.

There is a very reduced, but still pertinent, homage to Hollywood melodrama’s use of *mise-en-scène*, lighting, colour, objects and camera movement in this scene. The second transition is staged through the apparatus. As ‘triumphant heroine’, Amy is filmed with an extremely long lens. At first, she retreats from the camera’s pursuing and phallic gaze but then turns to face the lens with a complicit, feminine passivity. In the fourth scene, she is filmed, in close-up, through a two-way mirror; she puts on layers of make-up, excessively and ironically, and then draws her image onto the mirror as though onto the camera’s lens. There is a sense of flatness as though the active presence of the camera had morphed into the passivity of the screen. My theoretical interest in the Hollywood melodrama and my critique of woman as spectacle in ‘Visual Pleasure’ both inform, if only residually, the representation of Amy.

We had originally planned to make our Amy Johnson film as a feature but failed to get the requisite BFI funding. We immediately reconfigured the project, paring the story down to essentials and entwining the performed tableaux with certain still-extant sites that Amy had, as it were, inhabited in her lifetime: the department store Peter Jones, Croydon Airport, the *Daily Mail* building and her little Tiger Moth hanging in the Science Museum. For Peter and me, these were indexical traces of a once-upon-a-time reality, a tribute to both the complexity of time and the cinema’s complex recording of it. The Poly Styrene and X-Ray Spex songs further complicate temporality; evocative of punk from the late 1970s, they would in time acquire a historical patina not unlike that of ‘Amy, Wonderful Amy’. In the case of the map, certain places have acquired emblematic and tragic significance due to wars that have spread across the intervening decades: for instance, Banja Luka (Bosnia), Fallujah (Iraq) and Raqqa (Syria).

Throughout this Introduction, I have occasionally cited Peter’s essay on ‘Counter Cinema’ as a point of theoretical reference for us, particularly in relation to our experi-
ments with narrative, character and story-telling. In fact, the actual experience of translating theory into practice was always unpredictable and principles were always subject to reinvention and reconfiguration. To my mind, the films we produced over our ten-year collaboration are strikingly different from each other and bear witness to Peter’s and my commitment to pursuing a project of feminist counter-cinema through changing circumstances. In our films, the question of pleasure, which is raised in both Peter’s ‘Counter Cinema’ and my ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’, is reconfigured. I would like to think that the ideas and images that you might find in these scripts evoke something, as Peter would put it, ‘at a knight’s move’ away from visual pleasure as such. You might notice the appeal to a curious spectator and to the human mind’s pleasure in form and structure … away from linguistic transparency to the stutter, the hieroglyph and the riddle.
Notes

2. Peter Wollen, ‘The Field of Language in Film’, October 17 (Summer 1981), 54–56.
7. Ibid., 325.
8. For detailed descriptions of these sequences, see the script published in this volume.
10. At this point, I stopped writing to check Lee Russell’s 1964 essay on Fuller in New Left Review. I had forgotten that Peter had already spelt out the connection between Brecht and Fuller: ‘…it seems to me that Fuller is the film director whose methodology closest approaches Brecht’s theatre. Compare, for instance, his use of characters both as actors in a drama and spokesmen of their consciousness of the drama… at the end of Run of the Arrow a rubric flashes on to the screen, “The end of this story will be written by you”’. Lee Russell, ‘Samuel Fuller’, in Peter Wollen, Signs and Meaning in the Cinema, fifth edition (London: BFI/Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 151–156.
11. For further information about these scenes, see the script published in this volume.
12. The journalist on the crossed line is John Howe, an old friend of Peter’s from Oxford days, later co-occupants of a flat in Westbourne Terrace. John and my sister, Rosamund, married and we shared the 207 Ladbroke Grove house. At the time of Crystal Gazing, John was contributing a column, which he wrote in French, for the newspaper Le Matin. He used his ‘Laker’ copy in the film.
13. The idea for the exhibition itself had come from a holiday in Mexico with Jon Halliday and Francine Winham (Christmas 1978 to New Year 1979), when we first encountered, and were deeply impressed by, the art of the Mexican Revolution and the history of that period.