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'Killing Romance' by 'Giving Birth to Love': Hélène Cixous, Jane Campion and the Language of *In the Cut* (2003)

Alexia L. Bowler, Swansea University

Abstract:

Jane Campion's work regularly revolves around women's often complex relationship with socio-cultural discourses and their articulation in language whether in familial and institutional structures, or in cultural and creative practice. In this sense, Campion's filmmaking continues a feminist tradition of exploration regarding female subjectivity, identity and desire as it is represented in language (cinematic or otherwise). *In the Cut* (2003), adapted from Susanna's Moore's novel of the same name, again places language and the (dis)articulation of the female voice at its heart: its renewal is positioned within the film as crucial to women's survival. In taking its cue from Hélène Cixous' 'The Laugh of the Medusa' (1976) and later writings such as 'Castration or Decapitation?' (1981) and 'Coming to Writing' (1991), this article frames its discussion of Campion's interrogation of 'Woman's' attempts at the articulation of the self as an exemplar (in both theme and form) of Cixousian strategies. The article will argue that techniques such as a cinematic *écriture féminine*, and the appropriation and adaptation of the language of Hollywood genre film, form part of Campion's feminist inquiry into the discourses and legacies of a phallogocentric patriarchal culture which traditionally delimit Woman as a 'speaking' subject. In this way, *In the Cut* exposes the tensions between what Cixous calls the 'Absolute Woman' of culture (the aphonic hysteric) and attempts towards agency, thus subverting phallogocentric representations of women. In using these strategies Campion's adaptation creates a polyphonic artefact which revises not only Moore's novel but also re-visits (in order to reclaim) female articulation; re-writing phallogocentric claims to agency and subjectivity, imagining women's 'survival' through language. In this sense, then, adaptation itself can be thought of as a feminist act of subversion.

Keywords: *écriture féminine*, aphonia, adaptation, phallogocentric, polyphony, cinema

In the beginning, I desired.
What is it she wants?
To live. Just to live. And to hear myself say the name.
Horrors! Cut out her tongue!
What's wrong with her?
She can't keep herself from flying!
In that case, we have special cages.
(Cixous, 1991: 8)

Much scholarship on Jane Campion's filmmaking and her adaptations regularly discusses her Oscar-winning film *The Piano* (1993) and Henry James's *The Portrait*

of a Lady (1996). In relation to feminist theory, Campion's work has most recently been allied to the ideas of Luce Irigaray and again more usually, although not exclusively, in relation to that earlier, critically acclaimed film (Bolton, 2011; Bainbridge, 2008). However, while performing poorly at the box office (Tincknell, 2013; Verhoeven, 2009) and eliciting mixed critical responses on its release, *In the Cut* (2003) has been called a 'masterpiece' by film critic David Thomson (2012: n. p.) and lately come under more scholarly scrutiny (Bolton, 2011; Fox, 2011; Tincknell, 2013; Cobb, 2010; Cobb, 2014 and Butler, 2015), not least because it makes an important contribution to debates surrounding feminist film in an era which has been theorised as resolutely postfeminist (Gill, 2006; Negra & Tasker, 2007; McRobbie, 2009; Negra, 2009).

This article will develop that discussion by proposing that Campion's film may be usefully aligned with strategies proposed by second-wave feminist theorist Hélène Cixous. When considering Campion's complex engagement with feminism in her films,¹ Cixous's poststructuralist and deconstructionist methods are germane to Campion's own filmic praxis: from *An Angel at My Table* (1980) and *The Piano* (1993), through to *In the Cut* (2003) and *Bright Star* (2009), Campion's cinema primarily explores conflicts between social or cultural discourses and female creative expression, desire and agency. These conflicts are presented primarily as a problem of language as a delimiting tool that precludes female articulation of the self, with which Cixous's work is also concerned. Furthermore, this article argues that Campion's adaptation counters Moore's 1995 novel, which was published as postfeminism emerged out of the backlash against second-wave ideas and competed for cultural space. Finding thematic and conceptual resonance between Campion's film and Cixous's ideas, vis-à-vis the phallogocentric nature of language, the article suggests that the counter-strategies contained in Cixous's seminal essay 'The Laugh of the

Medusa' (1976), as well as 'Castration or Decapitation?' (1981) and 'Coming to Writing' (1991), are paralleled in the film's formal structure and exemplify key appropriative and adaptive strategies that echo concepts found in adaptation theory.

Increasingly understood as less a practice of transposition of 'original' material to the silver screen – an idea which retains hierarchical relationships based on the 'historical anteriority and superiority' of the literary text (Stam, 2004: 4) – this article views adaptation as more of a reimagining, or 'sampling' (Sanders, 2005: 4) of source materials. As both a process and product, the duality/liminality of the term signals it as always existing as what Linda Hutcheon terms as an 'inherently double or multilaminated work [...] with a palimpsestuous nature', in which it is 'haunted at all times by [its] adapted texts' (2006: 6). Indeed, adaptation has been seen variously as 'textual infidelity' by Rachel Carroll (2009: 1), as 'textual echoes' (2005: 4) by Julie Sanders, and in the view of theorists such as Barthes (1977) and Kristeva (1980) the notion of intertextuality is key. In the spirit of Cixous, then, adaptation (as concept, process and product) promotes a multiplicity of potential readings and rewritings whereby new visions can emerge and further exploration can take place. Undeniably, then, adaptation might well be seen as part of feminist praxis itself; one in which *In the Cut* is heavily invested.

The film tells the story of Frannie Avery (Meg Ryan), a teacher who collects words in preparation for a book on slang, which is a pursuit more personally related to a private obsession with language. When a young woman is murdered and her severed head deposited in Frannie's garden, Frannie gets caught up in the investigation and begins a sexual relationship with the investigating officer, Detective Malloy (Mark Ruffalo). The beheading is referred to by Malloy as 'disarticulation', meaning the separation of

two bones at the joint and that the victim's vocal chords have been slit. While denoting a physical violation, the term also signifies a symbolic stifling of the female voice (linguistic agency). Frannie and Malloy's relationship becomes strained when Frannie's sister is murdered and circumstances point to Malloy as the possible perpetrator. Eventually, beginning to doubt whether Malloy's involvement in the case is limited to that of investigator, Frannie turns to his partner, Detective Rodriguez (Nick Damici), only to find that he is in fact the killer. However, while in Moore's novel Frannie dies Campion's heroine lives, killing Rodriguez.

Moore's novel itself was 'formulated as a gendered response to genre', after considering whether a female author could write 'rough and dirty' fiction in what she felt was seen as a 'male' genre (McHugh, 2009: 143-144). However, while Campion loved the book, she found Moore's 'savage ending...unfilmable' (Campion, cited by McHugh, 2009: 143-144). She stated:

I think hers [Moore's] is a fine piece of nihilism [...] and it really is a story of female self-sacrifice which should be told and is scary and interesting. However, I am not into self-sacrifice, I'm a survivor type and [...] I needed my girls to survive. With Susanna's blessing we found [...] another way through.
(Campion, *The Charlie Rose Show*, 2003)

Read through the lens of Cixous, Campion's revision challenges Moore's novel, which privileges the status-quo of phallogocentric discourses. Instead, Campion encourages a poststructuralist deconstruction and hybridisation aligned with more recent theories of adaptation in order to explode and re-write culture's myths.

Language and Genre: "Blowing up the Law" with Hélène Cixous

An opposition to phallogocentrism and the hegemonic ideals contained in patriarchal culture unite theorist and filmmaker in their challenge to such discourses and Campion's film attempts to shatter what Cixous calls 'the framework of institutions' by 'blowing up the law' (1976: 888) through her focus on language as a central trope and her appropriation and adaptation of, or challenge to, genre (as language). Cixous's anarchic strategy to explode the regulating forces of hegemonic and phallogocentric culture is one that suggests cultural discourses, encoded in language and hierarchical oppositions or distinctions between 'Man' and 'Woman', lie at the heart of such structures. In 'Castration or Decapitation?' (1981) we find Cixous's contention that everything 'turns on the Word: everything is the Word and only the Word' because we are 'born into language and language speaks (to) us [and] dictates its law' (Cixous, 1981: 44). This is problematic for women who, in traditional psychoanalysis, according to the 'Law of the Father', remain outside the Symbolic and submerged within patriarchal hegemonic discourse. As a result, women lack a significant relationship with the cultural order and are excluded from language. Critiquing Lacan, who suggests 'Woman' cannot speak of her pleasure, Cixous states:

[A] woman *cannot*, is unable, hasn't the power. Not to mention "speaking": it's exactly this that she's forever deprived of. Unable to speak of pleasure = no pleasure, no desire: power, desire, speaking, pleasure, none of these is for woman'.
(1981: 45, original emphasis)

Campion's film, likewise, underlines its concern with women's access to language, literally and figuratively through Frannie. Pathologically obsessed with words, Frannie has 'located her passions into language' (Ryan, *The Charlie Rose Show*, 2003), an idea replicated in the mise-en-scène of the film. The camera reveals Frannie's body framed by language: from shots of Frannie against a blackboard showing the title of Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* (1927), to the graffiti surrounding her in

conversation with detectives Malloy and Rodriguez. Similarly, Frannie's physical world and intellectual life is literally subject to (or constrained within) language. Her flat reveals a claustrophobic cover of post-it notes and magnets containing extracts of poems, phrases, or choice words which obscure every surface — including mirrors, walls, and even the front door. While Lucy Bolton notes that for Frannie 'the language of sex is demystified and intriguing at an intellectual, academic level', arguing that she shows a 'linguistic mastery of brutalized sex' (2011: 63), Frannie is nevertheless alienated in this respect as the subject of (or subject to) sexual slang. Although she ably illustrates various phrases related to men's naming of female genitalia, it is arguable that Frannie is 'master' inasmuch as initially she is more witness and archivist of language than participant.

In the Cut suggests that language, cultural discourses, and the articulation of heterosexual desire privileges a phallogocentric position. Focusing particularly on the language of heterosexual romance, the film explores those discourses provided by mainstream Hollywood genre by blending elements of the romance with the thriller. Campion's casting of Meg Ryan, an actress synonymous with Hollywood romantic comedy, enhances Campion's version of the thriller genre as "a container for a meditation on the romantic myth in western society" (Campion, cited by Fuller, 2003: n. p.) through Ryan as a primary signifying presence. Campion's interrogation of the genre's legacy, which presents 'pleasures [that] generally depend on a woman's vulnerability and death' (McHugh, 2009: 144), synchronously counters this patriarchal and phallogocentric privilege by articulating in her adaptation 'a woman's point of view, her imagination, and her desire' (McHugh, 2009: 144) and disrupting culturally inflected discourses.

Campion harnesses the tensions between thriller and romance in a fashion that recalls Cixous's 'The Laugh of the Medusa' (1976) in which Cixous postulates that 'Woman' has always 'functioned 'within' discourse of man' as an object locked in a negative signifying loop. According to Cixous, this loop 'annihilates its ['Woman's'] specific energy and diminishes or stifles its very different sounds' (1976: 887). To counter this, Cixous calls for the dismantling of these reciprocal signifiers in order to 'dislocate this 'within' to explode it, turn it around, and seize it; to make it hers [and] invent for herself a language to get inside of' (1976: 887). Particularly useful is Cixous's exploitation of the duality inherent in the French term 'voler', which she explains means both 'to fly' and 'to steal'. The term's pluralism, here, creates a linguistic breach whereby women can innovate and explore the possibility of self-articulation. Cixous's strategy is an appropriative and adaptive one as she sequesters and reworks the term, making it her own. Consequently, women's 'theft' co-exists with the idea of 'flying', implying latent mastery of language and pleasure in linguistic play that signals the potential for boundary crossing and subversion. Indeed, this Cixous-like practice echoes second-wave writer Adrienne Rich's exhortation to women:

[I]f the imagination is to transcend and transform experience it has to question, challenge, to conceive of alternatives...You have to be free to *play* around with the notion that day might be night, love might be hate; nothing can be too sacred for the imagination to turn into its opposite or to call *experimentally* by another name. For *writing is re-naming*.
(1972: 23, my emphasis)

The seriousness of this experimental re-naming lies in the film's foregrounding of language as *the* subject under discussion. In its subversion of genre conventions, Campion's film becomes an equally liminal and polyphonic artefact: from the film's

title,² its status as an adaptation, as a Hollywood product by an independent, feminist auteur, to its mixing of genres, the film confounds the traditional gaze and challenges cultural discourse. This is something recognised by Tincknell who discerns the 'presence of multiple "voices", each layered upon or in conversation with each other' (2013: 35). It is a polyphony that creates new channels and possibilities of communication.

In fusing two seemingly disparate genres – romance is traditionally seen to be exclusively concerned with narratives of love and unity, while the thriller takes violence and trauma as its principle subjects – Campion's hybridisation creates an oppositional exchange between the phallogocentric cultural discourses contained within each and 'unthinks the unifying, regulating history that homogenizes and channels forces, herding contradictions into a single battlefield' (Cixous, 1976: 882). *In the Cut* dissolves the boundaries between the two, suggesting a more natural convergence. The film's mise-en-abîme structure exhibits these principles, framing Frannie's story and punctuating the film with sepia-toned fragments (dream sequences) that relay Frannie's courtship fantasies alongside more erotic reveries. Campion artfully connects these through using *Pink Martini's* reworked off-key version of 'Que Sera Sera (What Ever Will Be Will Be)' (Levinson and Evans, 1956), made famous by Doris Day, during the film's opening. This use serves to transport the viewer back to a pre-second-wave feminist milieu with all this signifies. However, in Frannie's dream sequences, the camera foregrounds a young man's leather-gloved and clenched fist. In this way, the camerawork suggests not the promise of romantic rescue but the assassin of the noir/thriller about to commit a violent crime, with the music providing an unsettling commentary.

Campion continues to play with genre. In many twenty-first century romantic films, New York is represented using well-lit aerial shots, showcasing shiny skyscrapers and the gleaming places of moneyed, aspirational America, or the green spaces of Central Park. However, *In the Cut*'s opening shots are blurred, darkly-lit, revealing the seedy milieu of back alleys, rubbish strewn roads and graffiti. The opening is accompanied not by an uplifting pop track but the sound of police sirens in the background. Rather than chic urban accommodation, Frannie and Pauline live in rundown neighbourhoods or above strip clubs. In this world, women fellate strangers in clubs, topless dancers gyrate around poles for money, and women are mugged or even 'disarticulated'. In what could be considered the film's set piece, Frannie and Malloy go on what is a clumsily arranged first date. It is here that Campion sets up conflict between the two genres and attacks the conventions allied with western cultural discourses on romance seen so often in genre film; the 'high priestess' of romantic comedy 'battles' with the brooding detective of the thriller. The location of Frannie and Malloy's date is a neon-lit, cavernous and cheap-looking bar and stands in direct contrast to our expectations for romantic encounters common in Hollywood cinema. Indeed, Campion's aesthetic clearly pays homage to cinematic influences of 1970s thrillers that depict women's sexual experiences outside typical hegemonic cultural values through the location of the lovers' first rendezvous.³ Genre devices such as the 'first date' and the 'meet-cute' are presented only to be summarily undermined and disrupted in a 'guerrilla-style' unmasking of the romantic sign as a tawdry simulation, emptied of meaning.

Continuing the genre dissonance, the couple's conversation vacillates between sexual flirtation and enquiry about the murder. However, their exchange ends with a reminder

of the object most associated with the thriller and the detective — the gun. Frannie asks why Rodriguez's firearm has been replaced by a water pistol. As the ultimate masculine emblem and synecdoche for phallic power and violence inherent in masculine discourse, its absence in romantic cinema is clearly a temporary dissimulation of phallogentric western cultural narratives. With the arrival of Malloy's partner, the threat of violence returns as Rodriguez comments on the 'hundreds of faggots outside' who want to 'suck his dick'. Frannie's interjection: 'Are all cops homophobic?' earns her the response: 'What are you? One of them feminists?' Frannie's attempt to challenge the hyper-masculine language of violence and exclusion definitively marks her out as 'Other' and the pejorative attribution of Frannie as a feminist (read 'Woman') immediately disqualifies and delimits her as a speaking subject.

Indeed, the return of the men's hyper-masculine banter (particularly Rodriguez's violent proclamations about sex) reveals a phallogentric misogyny usually hidden in cinematic romance, Rodriguez jokes: 'All you need is two tits, a hole and a heartbeat' to which Malloy returns: 'You don't even need the tits' and Rodriguez reveals: 'You don't even need the heartbeat, pal'. As Tincknell observes, Malloy and Rodriguez's partnership depicts a 'symptom of a deeper corruption within male bonds' (2013: 47) only temporarily disrupted by Frannie. As she leaves the men, Campion foregrounds a shot of a teddy bear on its side and Diana Krall informs us that 'the dream has ended, for true love died.' Associated as it is with the kitsch of contemporary romance, the soft toy inhabits the place of previous icons of love (such as the rose) and takes the full force of Campion's hit. Campion's genre hybridisation destabilises the traditionally gendered language of the romance and the thriller, exploding and re-writing

hegemonic discourses concerned with the articulation of romance, love, desire and subjectivity.

However, it is in this spirit of experimental re-writing and revision that, away from Rodriguez, Campion allows Malloy to proposition Frannie. He states:

Hey listen. I can be whatever you want me to be. You want me to romance you, take you to a classy restaurant, no problem. You want me to be your best friend and fuck you, treat you good, lick your pussy – no problem. Ain't much I haven't done. The only thing I won't do is beat you up.

Malloy's rather blunt offering is put into relief later on as we listen to the post-coital detective sensitively relate his positive teenage experiences with an older woman with whom he experienced the pleasures of learning about female desire. While certainly incongruous with traditional expectations of a first date, Malloy's claim implies an ability to redefine himself according to Frannie's needs and offers Frannie a sexual freedom and honest intimacy that dispenses with hyperrealised romantic ritual. It is a statement that recognises Frannie's potential choice in directing her desires, and encourages fearlessness. However, fettered by traditional discourses of romance, it is a freedom Frannie does not recognise and cannot yet claim, seen by her redirection of their conversation. Highlighted here is a conflict of genre and the viewer's sense of 'appropriate' language as Campion problematizes culturally absorbed discourses of courtship which dangerously conflate sex, desire and love.

This problem of interpretation and genre is highlighted in Tincknell (2013). Reading Campion's film as a remediation of the Radcliffian gothic, she argues: 'to what extent Campion's film presents a commentary on rather than a simple remediation of such [gothic] tropes is, however, debateable' (2013: 51) and suggests the film re-sexualises

the woman's body, as well as negatively reaffirming Frannie's position as a Radcliffian gothic victim, or Hitchcockian blonde (2013: 15). In terms of Campion's male figures, Tincknell similarly remains unconvinced. Following Joanna Russ (1995) and her assessment of the modern gothic, Tincknell designates Malloy and Rodriguez as 'relatively interchangeable' (2013: 48), two sides of the same coin (the Super-Male versus the Shadow-Male). Malloy's empathy with women is, in Tincknell's estimation, 'too sexualised to be wholly reliable' and Rodriguez's 'cheery misogyny may mask a more sympathetic private self' (2013: 48). However, Tincknell's framework tends towards an oversimplification of the characters of Malloy and Rodriguez to fit its paradigm, overlooking the nuances of interpretation of the motivations that revolve around Campion's portrayal of sexual desire and fear of rejection. Campion never allows Rodriguez the kindness of suave gentlemanly behaviour that is part of the Shadow Male persona identified by Russ — described as 'ostensibly more sympathetic, more gentlemanly and more accommodating' (Tincknell, citing Russ, 2013: 49). Furthermore, Tincknell omits one of the caveats to Russ's description of the Super Male, which suggests that 'even when the Super-Male is not a physical danger, *sexuality itself* provides enough threat (or that and the possibility of being disliked or harshly judged)' (Russ, 1995: 108, my emphasis). Perhaps more importantly, Tincknell suggests Frannie's investigation is one which revolves around the murders (2013: 50), rather than what I would argue is an interrogation of language and her own subjectivity.

While Tincknell maintains Frannie is drawn to Malloy's 'phallic power', his allure is one arguably allied to Cixous's vision of an alternative to the phallogentric libidinal economy. In 'Decapitation or Castration?' (1981) Cixous dares the woman to 'speak her piece about giving, the possibility of a giving that doesn't take away, but *gives*' (1981: 51, original emphasis). She demands the woman speaks of her pleasure so

that:

[S]he gets to unblock a sexuality that's just as much feminine as masculine, "de-phallocalize" the body, relieve man of his phallus, return him to an erogenous field and a libido that isn't stupidly organized round that monument, but appears shifting, diffused, taking on all the others of oneself. (Cixous, 1981: 51)

Cixous thus suggests that while male sexuality is predicated on loss, or its avoidance of loss (the castration complex), 'Woman's' is not. The possibility of realigning and shifting the libidinal economy from 'taking' to 'giving' is demonstrated through Malloy's sexual education via the 'chicken lady'. His sexual power (an eagerness to share, and to give) is a result of a woman daring to speak her pleasure. As such, the sex scenes between Malloy and Frannie provide an example of Cixous's call for woman to articulate her desire, which in turn promotes a more nuanced heterosexuality on screen.

With his frank sexual desire, and his ability to listen to Frannie, Malloy returns an authenticity of desire without cruelty. It is a space which includes Frannie, as Campion deconstructs 'the couple as terrain, as [a] space of cultural struggle...insisting on, a complete transformation in the relation of one to the other' (Cixous, 1981: 44). In this way, Campion's hybridised text 'steals' the language of both the thriller and the romance genres and practises Cixous's art of 'jumbling the order of space, throwing off the agents of sense [by] changing around the furniture' (Cixous, 1976: 887). That is, in the thriller women are traditionally investigated as enigmatic but treacherous entities and in the romance women's desires are often only nominally explored. In both cases, however, the figure of the woman is ultimately censored, neutralised, or contained — usually through punishment such as death in the former, or heterosexual

monogamy and/or implied eventual marriage in the latter. *In the Cut's* hybridised text offers neither. Cixous's theory is echoed in Campion's filmmaking practice:

[Jane was] like an atomic bomb going off in my life and also in my creative life. She just completely rearranged my molecules and my whole idea of what to expect from the filmmaking experience. (Ryan, *In the Cut: Behind the Scenes*, 2003)

Campion's preference for a speculative and meditative approach links her filmmaking to Cixous's idea of the linguistic breach as a space in which the limiting legacy of past discourses (of language, and of genre) can be challenged.

Aphonia, Hysteria and the "Absolute Woman"

Language and the (dis)articulation of the female voice is emphasised throughout Campion's film and its renewal is positioned within the film as crucial to women's survival. Like Dante's journeyman, who 'wander[s] off from the straight path' (2003: 67), and having 'blow[n] up the law' as Cixous suggests, Frannie's successful journey towards articulation and mastery of language is only one of several possibilities Campion's film relates. For Angela Sands and Pauline, the journey ends with death: the ultimate state of aphonia. Nevertheless, Frannie's own flight to linguistic freedom is not easy. It seems silence or speech equally offers unique dangers. Indeed, Cixous offers an alarming picture of the effect of attempts to speak (equated with the notion of 'living'), contending that for a woman to desire autonomy as a speaking subject, in command of language and able to 'name' the world around her, is to embark on a dangerous enterprise. In an imagined conversation from her essay 'Coming to Writing' (1991, cited in the epigraph to this article), Cixous suggests that such an endeavour engenders a counter desire: to subdue and silence woman. Punishment of the delinquent female, through violence (cutting out her tongue) and incarceration in

'special cages' (1991: 8), it seems, is the corollary of breaching the existent phallogocentric parameters.

The film's treatment of the language of desire and female (dis)articulation is also an issue that arose in the media coverage and wider discourses surrounding the film itself. On its release, Campion's film and lead actress were both vilified,⁴ with the now infamous interview with Meg Ryan on *Parkinson* in the United Kingdom (BBC 1, 2003) a case in point, particularly when juxtaposed with her interview on *The Charlie Rose Show* in the United States (PBS, 2003). While the latter engages the film's cast and director in a nuanced discussion, *Parkinson* maintains a combative stance. Contrary to the post-interview popular vilification of Ryan's appearance on his show, Michael Parkinson attacks Ryan based on his arguably limited view of the film's representation of culturally disempowering myths available to women. Indeed, the interviewer trivialises *In the Cut* as 'a search for cynicism and disenchantment', suggesting that romance has 'inspired great movies, great poetry [and] great music' while 'great sex never did' (Parkinson, *Parkinson*, 2003). The veteran host conflates romance, desire and love but more crucially misconstrues Ryan's responses. While recuperative criticism since has seen a volte-face in critical appraisals of the film, Ryan bore the brunt of the initial outrage for some time: the effrontery arguably stems from Ryan's turning her girl next door's simulated orgasm in *When Harry Met Sally* (Rob Reiner, 1989) into a reality. Ryan's escape from the cage arguably provoked an ire disproportionate to that targeted at Campion or, indeed, the film itself. Behind that indignation lies the reality that the phallogocentric culture has fashioned 'Woman' in western culture to the point that she is unrecognisable:

[Her] flesh [has] been superhistoricized,
museumized, reorganized [and] overworked...

‘[W]oman’ projected by the Law, wounded by the same strokes of the censor that tailor an imaginary cut from a pattern – more or less skintight, clinging, incarcerating – for every woman.
(Cixous, 1991: 56)

This construction of women is also one of exclusion from hierarchical structures of power, borne out in *Campion’s* film. Frannie’s linguistic investigation of sexual slang used by men reveals women’s absorption and construction in dominant discourses which she explains to her sister Pauline (Jennifer Jason Leigh) is in a way that is ‘either sexual or violent’. It is an exclusionary, hostile language that *Campion’s* film suggests needs decoding and rewriting. Comprehension is eagerly provided by student Cornelius and, to some extent, Malloy. However, in terms of women’s usage and access, it seems language is not so easily mastered. The ability to use, claim and recognise oneself in (sexual) language is what is at stake for Frannie (and the female spectator). Pauline, frustrated at her lack of power to steer a relationship, states: ‘I can remember every guy I ever fucked by how *he* liked to do it not how I wanted to do it’, asking whether there are any women able to say ‘suck my dick, pinch my nipples, bend over the sofa’. Frannie responds: ‘Probably not suck my dick’. Their humorous discussion belies the seriousness of debates surrounding the construction of male and female power through language and consequent cultural discourse. Usually constructed in terms of bodily lack and limited (or no) access to the Phallus, with regard to power over and power in language, women are rendered invisible or are, as Cixous terms it, made ‘culture-sized’ (Cixous, 1991: 56). In *Campion’s* film, women are brutally ‘disarticulated.’ Indeed, Frannie is herself adept at performing acts of dissimulation and disarticulation, highlighted by Cornelius who accuses her of never really ‘talking’. He maintains that Frannie’s conversation is ‘always just jive’, to which she defensively responds: ‘Well, I like to be ironic’. Like the murdered girls, she is

symbolically 'disarticulated'. She can neither speak in her own voice, nor voice her own desires.

However, Campion's film implies that silence ultimately runs the same risk as daring to speak, realised through the murders of Pauline and Angela Sands. Both women succumb to culturally prescribed roles for women and femininity, resembling what Cixous conceptualises as the 'Absolute Woman' of culture (1981: 47); that is, the hysteric. For Cixous, the hysteric 'represents femininity most effectively' because it is 'is closest to femininity as *prey* to masculinity' (1981: 47, original emphasis). Both women are clearly submerged by feminine identities which mark them out as prey. Furthermore, according to Cixous, the mark of hysteria is silence: having lost speech, the hysteric is 'aphonic' (1981: 49). In Cixous's theory, hysterics are already 'decapitated, their tongues are cut off' (1981: 49). Thus, while the condition of aphonia stands in direct contrast to Campion's polyphonic text as a whole, Pauline and Angela Sands arguably signify and assume the role of Cixous's 'Absolute Woman'. Pauline's cultural pathology burdens her with a sense of guilt with respect to her failure to find love, to get married ('just once for [her] mother') and to have a baby. Angela is similarly trapped within hegemonic romantic discourses as the 'promiscuous woman'. Both are emblems of extreme femininity as offered by a phallogocentric economy. Similarly, Frannie's initial silence (in the film's romanticised dream sequences, for example) corresponds to this cultural pathology and is symbolic of her inability to articulate her own desires through the phallogocentric language she investigates. It is, after all, a system in which she is object rather than speaking subject.

Frannie's alignment with the aphonic hysteric shifts during the scene in which Malloy bathes Frannie after the trauma of discovering her sister's corpse. Key are Frannie's attempts to articulate her desire in response to Malloy's question about what she wants from him. Frannie's admission is that she knows she wants 'a lot'. Her initial silence (paralleled by the film's numerous silent scenes, as well as the dream-sequences) stems simultaneously from a growing desire but an inability to articulate it (or fear of its articulation) via inaccessible phallogocentric language. The juxtaposition of their discussion with Pauline's murder may seem odd at such a juncture. However, Campion's careful structuring connects the (often symbolic) violence and dissimulatory practices of romance and its cultural legacy to the failure of heterosexual love – Malloy and Frannie's messy, raw but truthful discussion stands in contradistinction to notions of 'romance' so heavily valorised and treated as a synonym for love. In this sense, then, Campion's appropriation, adaptation, and subversion of the language of genre "kills romance" in order to "give birth to love" (Campion, cited by Fox, 2011: 179).

Écriture Feminine: Challenging Phallogocentric Legacies

Campion's film challenges our literary and cinematic cultural legacy. Canonical discourses saturate Campion's film, creating a dense textual map of love and romance within western contemporary culture that is primarily articulated via the male voice, with women represented through the male gaze. Cited texts range from Keats's imperiled knight and seductive 'pale-faced beauty' of 'La Belle Dame Sans Merci' (1819) to lyrics from popular songs, including the faithless female lover of 'I Just Can't Let you Say Goodbye' (Willie Nelson, 1968). In aligning Frannie's psychological and emotional voyage with an exploration of language, and in the context of these celebrated cultural articulations, Campion's film questions language and those cultural

discourses as suitable vehicles for woman's expression of the self, desire and subjectivity. It is a position reminiscent of Cixous's view that, in the construction of the feminine, woman is 'othered', denied agency in self-representation and is 'unable to recognise herself in the images the other may or may not give her' (Cixous, 1981: 47). These, Cixous argues often don't 'belong to her' but are ones which she has forced herself to resemble (Cixous, 1981: 47).

The director's commentary explicitly reveals the connection between historical cultural texts and the legacy of heterosexual discourses on love and romance. Producer Laurie Parker explains that Robert Browning's poem 'Porphyria's Lover' (1842), informed Campion's interpretation of the myth of romance and finds its modern exemplar in Rodriguez's rendition of 'I Just Can't Let you Say Goodbye'. In Browning's dramatic monologue and Nelson's country ballad, both narrators are pathologically in love with women they fear will leave them. In their psychosis, they countenance murder to keep hold of their lovers. Relevant to Campion's film is Rodriguez's similar desire to make the women he seduces remain wordlessly bound to him, which ultimately emerges as violence against women. Woman is not the speaking subject but the 'disarticulated' object, and the legacy of phallogocentric literary representations of romance arguably ensnares those unable to take control of such discourses. Indeed, Frannie refers to Pauline at one point as a 'poet of love', signaling an intimate relationship between the language of love and cultural myth-making, but the phraseology also hints at Pauline as a 'victim of love', presaging her murder.

However, Campion acknowledges the conventions of the legacies within (or against) which she is working and dislocates them through her commitment to the process of

adaptation and polyphonic practice. As Tincknell has suggested, Campion's work more generally embodies a 'reflexive approach to the adaptive process' (2013: 5) in that she is 'creative with and disrespectful of conventional literary values and canonical traditions' (2013: 5) while still utilising their framework. Both Cixous and Campion are equally (to use Tincknell's term) 'disrespectful' of convention and tradition while aware of those they seek to disrupt — deliberately employing them as part of their respective projects' strategies. Like Cixous, Campion's appropriation and adaptive strategies signal her alignment with a plurality of signification and the potential for new meanings to be created in the spaces and margins. Cixous's *écriture féminine* is a particularly useful notion here, in that it recognises that language is a non-neutral medium but nevertheless fundamental to the way in which we understand ourselves and construct social identities. Stemming from psychoanalytic ideas, *écriture féminine* privileges non-linear writing in which a transgressive, rule-transcending praxis subverts the imposition of a traditional and regulatory ritual of linearity. It offers escape from the burden of patriarchal tradition and a phallogocentric mode of expression in which the woman has been 'othered'. Problematic in some senses, derived as it is from an arguably essentialist position, Cixous's call for the woman to write herself — to encode herself and her experiences in her own language — is nevertheless useful if seen as an anarchic bid or stratagem by which we can renegotiate boundaries and escape. It is in using these strategies, Campion's film suggests, that we can re-emerge as fully speaking subjects.

Campion arguably performs a cinematic *écriture féminine* from the very beginning: the visual representation of language on the post-it notes and magnets in Frannie's flat, only containing snippets rather than full sentences, is one such example. Fragmented

and non-linear, full of textual citation, Campion's technique breaks the linearity of phallogocentrism as Frannie attempts to reorganise and restructure language for herself. Campion's adaptation, and appropriation of other works, creates a densely textual and textured film, confirming its Barthesian nature as 'a plural stereophony of echoes, citations and references' (Barthes, cited by Hutcheon, 2006: 6). Just as Cixous's examination of the linguistic breach yields potential for re-thinking and re-writing, Campion too creates a fresh work and necessary intervention into the margins through which we can contemplate the reality of our (romantic and sexual) cultural heritage. Similarly, the film's copious textual citations create a paradoxical tug-of-war between language's limitless potential and limiting nature. In this way Campion's dense textuality and polyphonic citations become a synecdoche for women's struggle for the mastery of language, and the articulation of selfhood and subjectivity.

Campion's aesthetic demonstrates an affinity to literary modernism concerned as it was with attempts to forge new methods for the articulation of selfhood and subjectivity and can be allied to an *écriture féminine*. In placing excerpts of poetry in the subway, characterised as a 'Poetry in Transit' programme, Campion signals the liminal but mobile space inhabited by language, adding literal movement to the more nuanced idea of language (and indeed identity) as always already in flux, or as a slippery entity that is always in the process of being undone and remade.⁵ This movement and liminality is mirrored by Frannie herself. More often found wandering the streets than in the classroom, Frannie, like the *flâneur* of modernist novels such as James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) and Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* (1925), is an observer of all of humanity's interactions and the life of the city. Campion's film also has affinities with a cinematic modernist aesthetic which attempts to find new modes of expression – the

mix of poetic realism and cinema vérité contributes to the film's sense of fragmentation, its looseness of plot and non-linearity. The heavily stylised dream sequences, the silence punctuating the film, its roaming camera style, as well as the intense multi-layering of genre motifs and its intertextuality, provide a surplus of signifiers which cut through the narrative, breaking apart the linearity of Hollywood cinematic and phallogocentric discourses. Indeed, modernism's famed interiority and stream-of-consciousness narrative techniques and modernist film's often-dreamlike atmosphere are echoed in Campion's film through what Bolton (2011), following Merleau-Ponty and Deleuze, describes as a haptic visuality, a technique she finds to be common in the films of Jane Campion, Lynne Ramsey and Sofia Coppola. Haptic visuality, according to Bolton, cultivates the engagement of all the senses (also referred to as film's 'synesthesia' by Laura Marks), and includes colour, sound, music, and the importance of silence as much as dialogue (Bolton, 2011: 41-42). Haptic cinema provides a densely textured and 'tactile' filmic encounter, taking account of the embodied experience. Indeed, the presence of silence throughout much of *In the Cut* lends it a sense of interiority, providing a space in which to contemplate the overwhelming nature of language and the discourses that are not Frannie's own, as well as the noises of a (sexually) violent and defamiliarising city which attempt her 'disarticulation'. I would argue that Campion's haptic approach indeed moves us away from the male gaze of traditional Hollywood cinema and locates the viewer as part of Frannie's sensory world as we accompany her in her flâneurie and experience a series of almost inexpressible moments, sensations and emotions throughout the film.

Through this commitment to the adaptive process and a cinematic écriture feminine, Campion rewrites Frannie's journey and investigation as one seeking access to a

language through which to write her own narrative and re-write the 'canon' so-to-speak, rather than embrace and adopt phallogocentric templates of desire. In this way, Campion's adaptation is reminiscent of Cixous's call for the woman to commit to this mode of writing:

By writing herself, woman will return to the body which has been more than confiscated from her, which has been turned into the uncanny stranger on display – the ailing or dead figure, which so often turns out to be the nasty companion, the cause and location of inhibitions. Censor the body and you censor breath and speech at the same time. (1976: 880).

Campion returns the 'confiscated' body of the woman by tempering the Freudian masochism and nihilism of Moore's text, deconstructing and reassembling it as a survival narrative. Moore's prominent inclusion of male authors, male protagonists and their violent encounters, is replaced with Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* as the text-body being taught by Frannie (see Thornham, 2007) and the phallogocentric literary legacy is overwritten by Campion's polyphonic practice. Frannie's survival means her potential return to discourse as a speaking self (a gift also provided to Ryan, by Campion's film, in light of Ryan's body as cinematic text). Thus Moore's story is reframed to focus on women's experiences of life, language, the articulation of desire, and new cultural legacy.

Adaptation and Appropriation as "Acts of Survival"

Campion's film returns to and rewrites popular Hollywood genres whose discourses disarticulate and disembody women. The link to Cixous is clear but her adaptive practice is also reminiscent of Adrienne Rich's suggestion that 're-vision' and 'the act of looking back' (1972: 18) allows us to critique, challenge (and perhaps transform) our cultural heritage. Rich argues that the canon of male-dominated literature has

submerged women's creative practice beneath the 'specter...of Male judgment', of 'authorised' language, and a homogenizing 'universal' poetry (1972: 20-24). Within this phallogocentric legacy women have been 'tokenised' and 'romanticized as special' (1972: 20-21) in the male libidinal economy and rendered superfluous to the intellectual world of men. This situation, Rich argues, is in 'direct conflict' with the 'subversive function of the imagination' (1972: 23) and has brutal implications for female agency in creative and everyday life.

Traceable threads of Rich's thinking can be found in Campion's work from *Sweetie* (1989) to *Top of the Lake* (BBC 2, 2013-). Heterosexual relationships feature strongly in her films, which have a clear focus on the problem of language, whether that is in the articulation of voice, identity and desire, or conflict with institutional discourses. For example, Campion's film explicitly positions Frannie's investigation of sexual slang and literary models of women as an interrogation of what Rich might call a male cultural tradition of domination through language and representation. A case in point is Rodriguez's idealisation but violation of his female victims using the discourse of romance. Similarly, Frannie and Pauline are haunted by romantic cultural legacies which have had debilitating effects on their respective mothers: the archetypal authority figure of their father and tales of his courtship romance are idealised despite his absence and abandonment. In her longing for marriage and a baby, Pauline particularly falls foul of traditional heteropatriarchal and phallogocentric discourses: through her lover's rejection, through the legal case against her, and in her murder, Pauline is trapped by a system of patriarchal judgment. In contrast, Frannie embodies this conflict of tradition/legacy versus the subversive imagination which results in the exploration of what Rich calls a 'new psychic geography' (1972: 19) in which the

submerged dreams, desires and voice of women and the female artist re-emerge. Through the use of dream-imagery, the hybridisation of genre's discourses and Frannie's investigation of language, Campion maps the painful process and emergence of a personal subjecthood. By doing so, she challenges the damaging masochistic legacy of guilt, or what Rich recognises was falsely diagnosed as 'a failure of love [in herself]' (1972: 24), but which can be more accurately characterized as lost contact with that self and its reemergence.

Like Rich and Cixous, Campion engages with the phallogocentric culture which haunts women's creativity and stifles subjectivity. In a similar fashion to Rich's slowly awakening 'sleepwalkers' (1972: 18), the viewer is guided through the cinematic maze by Campion, revisiting past narratives and encouraging us to 'know it differently' (1972: 18) in an effort to break the cycle. For Rich and Cixous language has trapped us but used strategically and subversively it may well be our liberation. Both Cixous and Rich suggest alternatives for women to the Medusan gorgon of classical legend — reinforced and reduplicated down the centuries as either dangerous femme-fatales or romantic pale-faced beauties that enthrall their male suitors. Campion's film similarly commits itself to the idea of imaginative play and linguistic strategising through adaptation and appropriation, allowing us to see anew and 'live afresh' (Rich, 1972: 18). The consequence of this re-emergence of woman's consciousness and voice as cognisant with new forms and approaches to creativity, including writing and indeed filmic practice, is arguably one embodied in Campion's project and Campion's filmic praxis is invaluable in this respect.

In the Cut illustrates that the critical work of adaptation and appropriation is essential to Woman's survival. Campion's palimpsestuous adaptation is an act of looking back and re-entering old ground in several ways, not least at the narrative level itself. In a striking reversal of Frannie's fate in Moore's novel, Campion's Frannie resists the language and mythology of romance — a visual cue comes as we note Frannie leaves behind the recurring image of the bride on the subway platform, who in a later shot we notice has a broken arm. The 'writing-in' and the return of the 'body of the woman' to the woman occurs as Frannie 'seiz[es] the occasion to *speak*' (Cixous, 1976: 880, original emphasis). In recognising the violent phallogocentric codes of the genre she is in, Frannie rescues herself by appropriating its language (the gun) and kills Rodriguez. This act is underscored by Frannie's re-entry into a defamiliarised space: Manhattan at ground zero. Like a new Eve, Frannie returns to her garden, in which the Medusan head of Angela Sands was dumped at the film's beginning, and re-enters her apartment.

This is not to say adaption and appropriation provide answers. Campion's film does not provide closure. Instead, Campion commits herself to openness, exchange, and transformation. She does this by leaving the viewer outside the door to Frannie's apartment, denying our gaze. As the couple lie down side-by-side we note that this is in direct contrast to the highly sexualised tableau of the dead figure of Rodriguez, lying on top of Frannie at the lighthouse. In this way, Campion's open-endedness adopts Cixous's *écriture féminine*, which is:

[A]lways endless, without ending: there's no closure, it doesn't stop [...] [A]t a certain moment the volume comes to an end but the writing continues and for the reader this means being thrust into the void. These are texts that work on the beginning but not on the origin.

(1981: 53)

We do not know the future for Frannie and Malloy, Campion's film leaves us at the 'beginning' of a new relationship. As such, Rich and Cixous's expectations of access to and power over language are manifested in Campion's film. In the 'drive to self-knowledge' and in 'understanding the assumptions in which we are drenched' (Rich, 1972: 18) women will finally be able to begin to undertake the work of articulation. In this process (of coming to writing), Cixous suggests we will 'find ourselves in writing like fish in the water, like meanings in our tongues, and transformation in our unconscious lives' (1991: 58). Thus the register of the final scene in Campion's adaptation is not one of romantic triumph and immediate coupling but of exhaustion and the beginning of a grieving process which precedes renewal.

Conclusion

Campion's works, including recent crime drama *Top of the Lake* in which the female protagonist has finally *become* the detective, explore a variety of genres, figures and time periods. What links them is an overarching concern with women's voices and agency, be it through discourses surrounding romance, marriage, religion, family, or creative endeavour. *In the Cut* embodies Cixous's theoretical experimentation in its staging of Frannie's escape from those 'special cages' of conventionalized discourse promulgated by inherited myths. In appropriating and interweaving the iconography, mise-en-scène, tropes and character types of two seemingly disparate genres, Campion enacts Cixous's strategies and channels the spirit of Rich and returns us to second-wave feminist politics and theory. Campion's investment in the transformative power of the linguistic breach – in her use of adaptation, intertextuality, allusion and juxtaposition in which 'signifiers are made to "fly" in new contexts' (Makaryk on Cixous,

1993: 275) – allows her to reclaim a space in which women can investigate and articulate their own subjectivity, and makes the connection between Cixous’s ideas and Campion’s transformative filmic practice clear. Like these second-wave writers and theorists, Campion’s adaptive and appropriative method, in which nothing is ‘too sacred for the imagination’ (Rich, 1972: 23), is more than rebellion: it is an ‘act of survival’ (Rich, 1972: 18).

¹ Campion has said in the past: ‘I no longer know what this [feminism, in the context of her filmmaking] means or expresses...I am interested in life as a whole. Even if my representation of female characters has a feminist structure, this is nevertheless only one aspect of my approach’ (Campion, cited in Wright-Wrexham, 1999: 4). However, Campion is also vocal about women’s lives and the under-representation of females in the film industry, concluding that, as “women are going to tell different stories – there would be many more stories in the world if women were making more films” (Pulver, 2014: n. p.).

² The phrase ‘in the cut’ has multiple meanings and is used by various groups, including hip hop music and drug culture. Its various meanings include usage in popular slang when referring to the vagina, or as a safe place to hide, or somewhere that is hard to find in a neighbourhood.

³ Cinematic influences mentioned by Campion are 1970s thrillers such as *Klute* (1971), *Chinatown* (1974), *Taxi Driver* (1976) and *Looking for Mr Goodbar* (1977) (see McHugh, 2009: 144).

⁴ For an indication of the film’s controversial and mixed reception in the press see Anthony (2003); see Brookes (2003) for a response to Ryan’s against-type casting and the film’s pornographic element; see Potter (2003) for her accusation that feminist filmmakers (Campion, Denis, Breillart and Despentès) mistakenly equate desire, danger and violence with equality; see Queenan (2003) and Burr (2003) for a rejection of *In the Cut* on the basis of Campion’s perceived rejection of genre conventions; for a discussion of the erotic and ‘pornographic’ content in the film, see Williams (2005 and 2008).

⁵ See Maya (2013) on Campion’s film and movement.

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