Filmmaker Margaret Tait: A Woman's Voice in Context.

by
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Fig. 1: Leggett 1977. Margaret Tait.

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I certify that this work has not been accepted for any degree other than that of Doctor of Philosophy. I declare this work is the result of my own investigations except where identified by references and I have not knowingly plagiarised any other work.

Abstract

My thesis is inspired by the recent restoration of the short films made by the Scottish filmmaker Margaret Tait (1918-1999) between 1951 and 1998. Tait, who was also a doctor and a self-published poet, recognised that film had the potential to reverberate with audiences' imaginations. Her oeuvre includes a range of indigenous voices, field recordings, actuality sequences and modernist film techniques, in films which observe and capture the everyday and the overlooked in her locality. It reflects on the interconnectedness of people and their environment and contributes to the ways in which we understand ourselves in the world.

I engage with prevailing responses to Tait's work, archive research, biographical information and interviews with Tait's colleagues. I also analyse her films within the historically specific contexts of modernity and local short film production of her time to uncover the dialogues that her films formed with the social and cinematic discourses in experimental and standard film culture. I show how Tait can be included among those who have made a significant contribution to the film and cultural discourses of the modernist era.

Petrolle and Wexman suggest that feminist research reveals 'formerly unknown principles at work in the lives and psyches of women' (2005: 5). This has opened new levels of inquiry and analysis to suggest that women filmmakers typically engage with prevailing discourses and creative practices as individuals who articulate perspectives and ideas from differing standpoints. I use feminist and contemporary film theories to examine key aspects of Tait's work within the circumstances of modernism's approach to women. I also draw on theories emerging from Derrida's concept of 'différance' (1997: 60-64) to examine the ways in which Tait used film to negotiate meanings and express her personal perspectives in ways that differed from, but did not discount, other viewpoints and film practices.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my director of studies Dr. Anna Misiak and my co-supervisors Professor John Hall and Dr. D. Ferrett for their expertise and encouragement.

I would also like to thank Felicity Sparrow and Annabel Nicolson for sharing their memories of Margaret Tait with me, and Mike Leggett for his time, conversations and the audio tapes, photographs and copies of his correspondence with Tait, which he sent me in the early stages of this project.

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Introduction: 'The lady who makes films' (Jan Moir 1993)

Margaret Tait (1918-1999) was born in Kirkwall in Orkney, an archipelago to the North of mainland Scotland. She spent much of her life there writing poetry and making over thirty short films in and about her localities on a second-hand, single lens, clockwork Bolex camera using 16mm film. Her films combine local references with experiments in written, aural and visual languages across avant-garde and standard film practices. They include film portraits (figures 2-4), hand-painted animations (figures 5-6) and films themed around nature (figures 4, 8, 11), social issues (figures 9-10) and children (figures 11-12).

Fig. 2: Tait 1952. *A Portrait of Ga.*

Fig. 3: Tait 1964. *Hugh MacDiarmid: A Portrait.*

Fig. 4: Tait 1981. *Land Makar.*

Fig. 5: Tait 1955. *Calypso.*

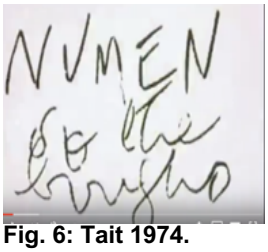

Fig. 6: Tait 1974. *Colour Poems.*

Fig. 7: Tait 1964. *Where I Am Is Here.*

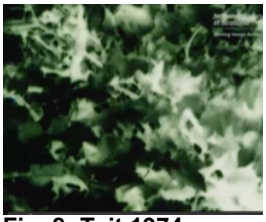

Fig. 8: Tait 1974. *Aerial.*

Fig. 9: Tait 1957. *The Drift Back.*

Fig. 10: Tait 1956. *Rose Street.*

Fig. 11: Tait 1955. *Happy Bees.*

Fig. 12: Tait 1966. *Splashing.*

I first came across Tait's films in 2009 on a DVD titled *Margaret Tait: Selected Films 1952-1976* (LUX 2004) while researching the early documentary film movement which included

the work of Robert Flaherty (1884-1951), Dziga Vertov (1896-1954), Joris Ivens (1898-1989), Humphrey Jennings (1907-1950) and Norman McLaren (1914-1987). I felt Tait's films should be included since they had similar production values and correspondingly observed society's adjustments to modernity. But it seemed to me that where the work of her slightly younger contemporaries followed a single film category's codes and conventions, Tait combined aspects of these genres in ways that opened the short film format to wider possibilities and levels of meaning. She also appeared to relocate the issues that preoccupied her fellow filmmakers into an environment with which she was familiar yet also resonated with the wider world. Her observations of impermanence and the everyday, and her proficiency in the art of filmmaking, indicated someone whose perspectives and film practice were relevant to the socio-cultural history of mid-twentieth century Britain.

In my original research I found ample material on Tait's peers and precursors but little on her. Most came from *Subjects and Sequences: A Margaret Tait Reader* (Todd and Cook 2004) which includes biographical data, photographs, responses to Tait's output and samples of her own words. More information came from obituaries, reviews and academic papers by Mitch Miller (2005) and Sarah Neely (2008a, 2009). These resources variously portray Tait as a remote, talented Scottish filmmaker whose work was admired by small avant-garde groups in Europe and England but overlooked in local film outlets. They also reveal that her resolve to maintain creative control over her work and only co-operate with film boards and committees on her own terms, made it difficult for organisations to place her work within established film taxonomies and categories. I discovered too, that Tait's paperwork and copies of her films were held in archives in Orkney, London, Glasgow, Berlin and California indicating that she had some cultural standing in wider frames. Most remarkably, I learnt that if her partner, writer Alex Pirie (1933-2016) – whom she married in 1968 – had not donated the disintegrating films and notebooks left in her studio after her death to Scottish Screen for restoration (now the National

Library of Scotland Moving Image Archive – MIA),[1] Tait's story and lifetime's work would have been lost forever (McBain and Russell cited in Todd and Cook 2004: 101-109).

These early investigations prompted my interest in women whose work sheds light on ways of thinking and making that are often overlooked by standard outlets. It inspired me to research Tait's intersection with the socio-cultural discourses which she persuasively engaged with in her films, including feminism. This, I discovered, was not only a contributory factor in her marginalisation, but also an underlying component of her work. Accordingly, the term 'woman' in my thesis refers to female filmmakers and artists whose work mindfully connects their subjectivity with the issues of their day.

My Contribution to Knowledge

My thesis is a timely project that contributes to current interest in Margaret Tait. It builds on existing material to uncover Tait's perspectives on modernist culture and society by using film in innovative ways. It is the first sustained feminist evaluation of Tait's short films oeuvre using close and theoretical analysis within historically specific contexts. My thesis also contributes to women's film studies. This involves transforming women's exclusion from film history into inclusion by placing and evaluating their work within wider contexts. For example, in their anthology *Women and Experimental Filmmaking* (2005), Jean Petrolle and Virginia Wright Wexman have assembled a range of individual experimental women filmmakers whose cultural backgrounds inform their practice. In their introduction they acknowledge Tait within this frame:

> The range of ethnicities, aesthetic traditions and socio-political concerns represented by filmmakers like … Margaret Tait, Midi Onodera … Julie Dash attests to the field's expanding richness and inclusiveness. (2005: 10)

Robin Blaetz agrees that women experimental filmmakers should be approached as individuals adding that differing methods of appraisal should be used when evaluating their distinct

[1] Scottish Screen was the national body for film and television in Scotland established in April 1997. It took on the functions of the Scottish Film Council, the Scottish Film Production Fund, Scottish Screen Locations and Scottish Broadcast and Film Training, forming a unitary organisation. They restored Tait's films between 1999-2003. In 2007, the Scottish Screen Archive became part of the collection of the National Library of Scotland and in 2015 was renamed as the Library of Scotland's Moving Image Archive (MIA), [online]. Available at: http://movingimage.nls.uk/biography/10032 [accessed 19 June 2017].

innovation since their films cannot be ‘inserted in a coherent way into any pre-existing history of avant-garde film' (Blaetz 2007: 7).

Central to my study is Sue Wise and Liz Stanley’s premise that research into women’s female-centred work,

> involves ‘seeing reality differently’ (Stanley and Wise, 1979). … And while we see ‘feminism’ as a particular way of seeing reality, we also feel that ‘feminist research can be defined as something more than this. This ‘something more’ is to be found in the nature of the relationship between the researcher and the researched, as well as in the researcher’s own ‘feminist consciousness’ and her experience of being a woman. (1993: 43-44)

From this perspective, I reveal how Tait’s short films unmask the pervasive laws that governed everyday relationships and cultural environments in the twentieth century. I also examine how Tait circumvented the obstacles that thwarted women’s agency in her time, and how her advocacy of the local and the domestic highlights the importance of these factors in the formation of identity.

Additionally, my thesis contributes to research into ‘minor films’. These include avant-garde shorts, newsreels, educational and information films, travelogues, home-movies, amateur film, animations and actualities – aspects of which appear in Tait’s film oeuvre. Tom Gunning identifies the short film as a niche area of film research (cited in Bennett and Frow 2008: 185-206). He suggests that feature-length narrative and documentary films are a ‘default mode’ (cited in Bennett and Frow 2008: 187) of academic film studies and that the methodologies used in this type of research often obscure the knowledge and skill to be found in short films. Whereas research into this lesser-known area of film production often sheds light on marginalised individuals and groups who have made use of the relatively low cost of film equipment for their own purposes and whose work reveals other knowledge. Furthermore, the outcomes are often unconventional and inconclusive (Gunning cited in Bennett and Frow 2008: 190-193, Code 1995: 13-44).

Gunning equates the academic disregard of the short film with the ‘avant-garde practice of upsetting hierarchies of taste’ (cited in Bennett and Frow 2008: 194). Indeed, Tait’s formal innovation and ‘simple, intimate subject matter’ (Curtis 1999: 62) did upset ‘hierarchies of taste’.

She can thus be placed among filmmakers who choose not to conform to the demands of executive producers, galleries or sponsors, but to take risks by exploring film in unconventional ways on their own terms. Some filmmakers in Tait's time used the accessibility and freedom of the short film to test ways of expressing an inner life and of examining the illusion of the stability disseminated by the grand narratives of standard film productions. These are among the ideas Tait was keen to explore, as my thesis reveals.

Tait's Film Practice: An Overview

Orquil Studio in Rendall, Orkney was the final headquarters (1984-1999) of Tait's film company Ancona Films which she set up with Fernando Birri and Peter Hollander in Rome in 1951 while they were film students there. Her friend and fellow filmmaker, Peter Todd, describes a visit to her Orquil studio:

> The amount of work that went into her films could be seen physically at her place of work, as the actress Gerda Stevenson wrote in her tribute: "She drove me one day, in the back of her rattling small van, down a winding Orkney seaside road, to the old kirk, which was her work base, the hub of Ancona Films. … Every inch of the floor was covered in leaning towers of dusty film-reel cans – her life's work." (2005)

Indeed, the film *Orquil Studio* (1999) which Alex Pirie and Alan Watson made after Tait's death, reveals an array of abandoned film cans, trolleys of equipment, cabinets, papers, notebooks, photographs, crowded worktables, projectors, and other equipment. This environment resonates with work and processes waiting to be explored. Lines from Tait's poem, *The Scale of Things,* intimate that her focus on the overlooked and the everyday in her locality in these films is linked to a sense of history and place in ways not generally re-presented on film:

> There's a whole world at the foot of the stone
> If you care to look.
> (*The Hen and the Bees.* 1960 cited in Neely 2012: 85)

Tait's self-conscious probing of her locality connects with the work of her contemporary, Simone Weil (1909-1943)[2] who felt that familiarity with the narratives within which we develop is key to understanding our 'place' in the world:

[2] See Appendix 1: iv for Tait and Pirie's discussion on Simone Weil's concept of 'loving attentiveness'.

> To be rooted is perhaps the most important and least recognized need of the human soul. It is one of the hardest to define. A human being has roots by virtue of his [sic.] real, active and natural participation in the life of a community which preserves in living shape certain treasures of the past and certain expectations for the future. ([1949] 2005: 40)

Tait's work thus foregrounds the expertise required to articulate non-standard concepts and what could be accomplished if film was understood as part of the way we understand ourselves in the scheme of things.

The curators at Scotland's Moving Image Archive (MIA) stated, '[Tait] knew the value of her works and wanted them to be shown as widely as possible. But she seems to have taken few steps to maintain her negatives and prints. "Posterity" was something she gave little thought to' (McBain and Russell cited in Todd and Cook 2004: 101-102).[3] Tait explained:

> I'm not really interested in recording for posterity. That's an incidental, or accidental, value that any of my films might have … not what I'm making them for. I make my films for audiences who are there at the time – for a response at the time. … but more for the sake of reverberation than for the sake of record. (cited in Krikorian 1983b: 6)[4]

McBain and Russell added, 'Alex [Pirie] was not surprised at this. Margaret, he recalled, worked in the present, making films which she regarded as artefacts belonging to the time they were made' (cited in Todd and Cook 2014: 101). This suggests that what was important to Tait were the 'reverberations' that audiences might respond to when and wherever they came across her films – even after her death.

Current audiences were first acquainted with Tait's work at a screening of two of her films in *Tate Britain: A Century of Artists' Films in Britain* (19 May 2003-1 April 2004).[5] In

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[3] In keeping with her contradictory nature and indifference to posterity as a motivation for her work, Tait wrote to Mike Leggett: 'My jocular remark about "my biographer" was a JOKE [sic.], Mike, nothing else' (Letter 01/10/1979. Held at the BAFVSC, London). Also, in response to some photographs Leggett took she wrote: 'The photographs are interesting. Pity I didn't come out so well in the two, which include us both (figures 96-97). I suppose the one of me, which is the best, is one, looking down and not quite profile (figure 14?) (as an addendum she handwrites over the types lettering 'but almost profile' (Letter to Leggett 07/08/1979. Held at the BAFVSC, London) as if to ensure this would be the image Leggett might use.

[4] Tamara Krikorian (1944-2009) was a film and video artist who interviewed Tait for the BBC Arts programmes *The 11th Hour* 1983, 1987. She was a film curator and known for championing experimental films.

[5] *Tate Britain: A Century of Artists Films in Britain* (19 May 2003-1 April 2004) [online]. Available at: https://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-britain/exhibition/century-artists-film-britain/century-artists-film-britain-13-6 [accessed 19 September 2017]. *Portrait of* Ga (1952) and *Hugh MacDiarmid-A Portrait* (1964) were included in the 'Portraits' section in Programme 3.

response to the positive reaction to these films, Peter Todd and Ben Cook (director of LUX) – who were also involved in the restoration of Tait's films – curated and organised the LUX world touring programme of a larger selection of her work.[6] They published a DVD and the *Margaret Tait Reader* (Todd and Cook 2004) by way of an exhibition catalogue to introduce her work to wider audiences. But in his introduction to the *Tait Anniversary Symposium at Tate Modern* (2009),[7] Todd observed that 'things had gone quiet' since the Artists' Films Exhibition and the LUX Touring Programme in 2004. Sarah Neely reflected:

> Ultimately, as Tait's experience proves, this means that avant-garde works that do not engage with identity, or important feminist discourses relating to the domestic or the personal, essentially become invisible. The recent financial investment in Tait's films is clearly a positive step, but because of its archival nature it is difficult to argue persuasively that the interest goes far beyond that of cultural artefact. (2008a: 218)

Also, as Pirie explained, 'these films make demands on people' (cited in Appendix 1: v) adding:

> There are certain films that are just invulnerable because they are there. ... If they were dug up in a hundred years' time, they would be perhaps the truest kind of icons of our time. … They might actually be, in their very kind of this-ness you know, and I don't mean as oddities and I don't mean as museum pieces, but they might actually have something of the living. (cited in Appendix 1: xi)

Thus, if 'cultural artefacts' are understood as objects which when re-discovered reveal insights into the society and people who made them, then Tait's restored films can be approached as a series of interconnected 'objects' waiting for further inquiry.[8] Current literature on Tait, together with feminist interpretations, archival research, the notion of artefacts, avant-garde film practice

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[6] LUX is an international arts agency that supports and promotes artists' moving image practices and the ideas that surround them. It was founded in 2002 as a charity and non-profit limited company. The organisation builds on a long lineage of predecessors comprising The London Film-Makers' Co-operative, London Video Arts and The Lux Centre, which stretch back to the 1960s. Tait's LUX World Tour 2004 included *Three Portrait Sketches* (Tait and Hollander 1951)*, A Portrait of Ga* (1952)*, Hugh MacDiarmid A Portrait* (1964)*, Where I am Is Here* (1964), *Aerial* (1974)*,* and *Colour Poems* (1974). The opening took place in Cecil Sharpe House, Regent's Park, London before touring Britain, Europe and America.

[7] Tate Modern. 2009. 'Margaret Tait – Introduction'. This Special Programme Marks Ten Years Since the Death of Acclaimed Scottish Filmmaker Margaret Tait (1918-1999), [online]. Available at: https://www.tate.org.uk/search?page=1163&f[0]=im_vid_47%3A1876 [accessed 1 March 2018].

[8] Maarit Mäkelä writes: 'As an object made by an artist-researcher, the artefact can also be a method for collecting and preserving information and understanding. However, the artefacts seem unable to pass on their knowledge, which is relevant for the research context. Thus, the crucial task to be carried out is to give a voice to the artefact. This means interpreting the artefact. During the process of interpretation, furthermore, the artefact must be placed into a suitable theoretical context. In this process, the final products (the artefacts) can be seen as revealing their stories, i.e. the knowledge they embody' (2007).

and local film production and the growing interest in Tait, suggest a range of contexts for exploring her work and a frame for my research.

Literature Review

My primary sources include Tait's films (digital copies of most of her films are available online at Luxonline, MIA, social media outlets, including YouTube and Vimeo) and paperwork held at the British Artists' Film and Video Study Collection (BAFVSC), London. This archive also holds Tait's applications for funding and screening opportunities, and transcripts of interviews she gave in preparation for three television programmes the BBC made about her.[9] The amendments in these transcripts, together with Tait's correspondence with friends, film and other organisations, reveal her caution regarding how she and her work were presented in public. They also provide insights into her tenacity, skirmishes with bureaucracy and marketing tactics.

At the start of my research, Mike Leggett[10] sent me some photographs (figures 1,13, 14, 96, 97) and copies of his correspondence with Tait in the 1970s-1980s which are also held at the BAFVSC, and which he has since donated to the Orkney Library and Archive (2019).[11] These provide insights into Tait's character and motivation. The corrections, addendums, jokes and layouts in her hand and type-written letters confirm that letter-writing is an important resource in feminist research because it 'allows women to venture towards … a public world from which they were effectively excluded. It is a transgressive mode … in which boundaries are crossed, erased, negotiated and recreated' (Benhabib 1996: 19). Leggett also sent me a copy of his audio tapes of a conversation between himself, Tait, and Pirie in Bristol (1977) (Transcription Appendix 1). These reveal additional thoughts and contexts for Tait's filmmaking and insights into her relationship with Alex Pirie whose knowledge of culture, film, literature,

[9] Tait was the subject of BBC Scotland's *Spectrum* in 1979 and two other BBC productions, 'Margaret Tait: Filmmaker', April 25th 1983 which contained extracts if her films, and 'Films by Margaret Tait' March 9th 1987 which presented the films screened in full. Both were made for the BBC's *11th Hour* series. See Appendix 4 for Transcripts of BBC *11th Hour* broadcasts.

[10] Mike Leggett (b 1945) is a filmmaker, artist, curator, writer, lecturer, researcher and friend of Margaret Tait. He was one of the original members of the London Filmmakers Co-operative (LFMC) workshops (est.1966) before it merged with London Video Arts to form LUX in 1999. His conversation with Tait and Pirie in 1977 at his home in Bristol, formed the foundations for his 1979 unpublished article 'The Autonomous Filmmaker: Margaret Tait Films and Poems 1951-1976'. (Held at the BAFVSC, London)

[11] The reference codes for this correspondence are D97/2/1; D97/29/6; D97/38/1/4; D97/41/2; D97/41/2/1; D97/41/2/2; D97/41/2/3; D97/41/2/4.

Scotland and philosophy echoed her own. The Q&A session Tait held with students at Goldsmiths (Lewandowska 1986, Transcription Appendix 2) offers further access to Tait's unmediated speaking voice and insights into her ways of thinking. These audio resources, interview transcripts and Tait's correspondence provide the foundations for my quest to recover the voice of a reticent woman filmmaker attempting to be heard in the twentieth century. Interestingly, in these resources, Tait never said what her films were about. She only spoke or wrote about issues and ideas that were proximate to her films, including how they were made. This was noticed by Leggett who said, 'the notes that Margaret had made about *Where I Am Is Here,* I found a little ambiguous in that they didn't actually give a clear way through to what was intended.' This was no surprise to Pirie who knowingly replied, 'Margaret wouldn't say what she thought her films were about' (cited in Appendix 1: xiv). This elusiveness underpins my quest to place Tait's own testimony within the specific socio-cultural contexts of her time and to analyse her films in ways that correspond with her unmediated voice as evident in the primary sources in which her voice can be heard.

My secondary sources include newspaper articles, reviews, obituaries, pamphlets and fliers, also held at the BAFVSC, London which substantiate Tait's participation in several film events. These resources, together with the reviews of her work and testimonies from the people who knew her, suggest that Tait's isolation was partial and that her standing among small groups of critics and practitioners worth exploring.

Subjects and Sequences: A Margaret Tait Reader (Todd and Cook 2004) is a foundational secondary resource. It is the first comprehensive volume dedicated to Tait's films and poetry.[12] Ryan Shand applauds its aim 'to encourage future research into these highly distinctive films' and adds it 'is an important contribution to critical and scholarly debates' (2007a: 108) on Tait. He suggests that 'succinct, informed and clearly argued writing' is also

[12] Tait's self-published poetry comprises *The Grassy Stories: Short Stories from Children* (Edinburgh: M.C. Tait, 1959), *Lane Furniture: A Book of Stories* (Edinburgh: M.C. Tait, 1959), *Origins and Elements* (Edinburgh: M.C. Tait, 1959), *The Hen and the Bees: Legends and Lyrics* (Edinburgh: M.C. Tait, 1960. Cover by Robin Philipson). Poet Ali Smith maintains that Tait's poems have 'scandalously been totally critically ignored. But [she] is now a recognisable Scottish literary voice' (2005).

needed to augment a ‘loose literary style’ (2007: 109) and an ‘ahistorical approach’ (2007: 110) to Tait’s films. Accordingly, I place Tait’s work within the Scottish and British mainstream and avant-garde film cultures of her time. I expand on the section ‘Margaret Tait in Her Own Words’ in the *Tait Reader* (Todd and Cook 2004: 77- 98) by returning, where possible, to the original sources of these extracts as held at the BAFVSC, London. Poet Ali Smith’s essay ‘The Margaret Tait Years’ (cited in Todd and Cook 2004: 7-27) identifies Tait’s asynchronous soundtracks, innovative film strategies, male and female vernacular voices and voice-overs as signs of a signature style, a ‘new film language’ and ‘a new voice’. Smith also recognised that Tait’s work is ‘informed by a profound, commonsensical proto-feminism’ (2012). I explore these ideas at length and suggest that when combined with the autobiographical elements, her filmic innovation and the female-centred perspectives located in her oeuvre, Tait can also be seen in terms of a female ‘auteur’. Finally from this volume, I build on Lucy Reynolds’ ‘Margaret Tait: Marks of Time’ (cited in Todd and Cook 2004: 57-69) which evaluates Tait’s landscapes, portraits and animations in terms of time, modernity and memory.

Mitch Miller (2005) discusses Tait within local frames and points to the inadequacy of standard film classifications when discussing her work. I extend this shortfall by also considering her playfulness with traditional film modes as a means to insert ‘other’ perspectives and fragment the authority which traditional film nomenclatures contain. Miller links Tait with her Scottish contemporaries Enrico Cocozza (1921-1997) and Frank M. Marshall (1896-1979) who also lived and worked locally, and Bill Douglas (1934-1991) who moved to London to develop his career. I discuss the circumstances of these and other marginalised filmmakers, to contextualise Tait’s status in Scotland, and in twentieth century film culture.

Filmmaker Kayla Parker (2014) and poet So Mayer (2014, 2018) have provided personal and theoretical evaluations of Tait’s work as it relates to their own practices and perspectives. My experience as a woman artist likewise informs my evaluations of Tait’s female-centred work which, I suggest, both checks and augments the omnipresent male perspectives that dominated film production in her era.

In her study of classic Hollywood films Laura Mulvey (1975) identified that the 'male gaze' was guided by a (male) director's point-of-view camera and compounded by the onscreen protagonist and the audience, presumed to also be male, and that this perspective was generally accepted as universal. In this situation, she noted, women were the object of the director's 'gaze' and their viewpoints and intelligence were obscured from dominant film production and reception. Various critics and filmmakers later responded to Mulvey's paper to include other subjectivities and perspectives on film reception (Mulvey 1981, Stacey 1987, Hollinger 1998). Their work, directly or indirectly, informs my close readings of Tait's films.

Many commentators refer to Tait's poetry (Curtis 1999, Evans 2004, Smith 2005, 2012, Neely and Riach 2009, Neely 2008a, 2012, 2017, Mayer 2014, 2018). I use fragments of Tait's poems to integrate her voice into my interpretations and analyses of her films. Tait anticipated that her short films would be a prelude to her original intention of writing screenplays and making feature-length productions, but this did not occur until she wrote and directed *Blue Black Permanent* in 1992 (Moir 1993, Grigor 1996, Todd 2004a, Miller 2005, Goode 2005, Romer 2006, Mayer 2014, 2018, 2019 Neely 2008a, 2009, 2012, 2017).[13] My focus however is on Tait's short films which, I argue, became the primary vehicle for expressing her ideas and insights into local life under the conditions of modernity.

My research notably draws on the work of Sarah Neely who has championed Tait by publishing her poetry and upholding her presence in academic frames and scholarly conventions. From her position as a juror on the panel of the annual Margaret Tait Award for Young Scottish filmmakers, launched in 2009 by Glasgow Film Festival, Neely has promoted Tait's legacy as a filmmaker and highlighted her significance in Scotland and beyond.

Neely's scholarship has inspired much interest in and writing on Tait, including my own. I have made use of her publications based on her research in the Tait collection at the Orkney Library and Archive to support my interpretations of Tait's films (Neely 2008a, 2008b, 2009,

[13] Jan Moir suggests that many people focused more on her age and how long it took her to achieve her aim to make a feature length film rather than on the film itself. Tait was particularly displeased with references to her age, 'At 74 ('Don't make a big fuss about my age')' (Moir 1993).

Neely and Riach 2009). Neely's volume, *Between Categories: The Films of Margaret Tait: Portraits, Poetry, Sound and Place* (2017) was published towards the end of my project. It includes an appraisal of Tait's films and their relationship to film and art, literature, Scotland and other frames. As with many academic retrospections, aspects of our research overlap in these fields, and with the anomalies that occur in Tait's contradictory nature. More purposefully, I expand on Neely's evaluation of Tait's work, isolation, marginality and relationship with prevailing film categories and taxonomies. Where Neely places Tait within a spectrum of practitioners, I evaluate the work of those artist, filmmakers, thinkers and critics whose work applies to my appraisal of specific films. I expand on Neely's references to Lauren Rabinovitz (2003, 2006) and Robin Blaetz (2007) with regard to Tait and feminism and add Claire Johnston's 1973 paper on women and counter-cinema together with Second and Third Wave feminism to reveal how Tait re-forms the formal conventions and ideological influences in popular cinema. I also extend Neely's references to Tait's relationship with local film boards and committees by providing short historical accounts of these institutions as contexts for her effective Scottish and personal focus.[14] Neely devotes a chapter to sound in relation to Tait's oeuvre in her 2017 publication, but I intermittently explore sound as it relates to the sound-image connections within specific films.

Where Neely divides Tait's work into *Poems, Stories and Writings* (2012) and her films into *Portraits, Poetry, Sound and Place* (2017), I locate Tait's short films across two key areas of film production – experimental and Scottish film – while also drawing attention to how Tait's films blur these distinctions. These intersections stem from a common knowledge of film and feminism, a shared interest in Tait and a desire to widen discussions of her work within academic, practice-based and theoretical frames.

[14] For a comprehensive overview of the formations of the Films of Scotland committees see 'The First Films of Scotland Committee', [online]. Available at: https://sites.scran.ac.uk/films_of_scotland/History/Chapter02.htm [accessed 12 December 2017]. For further information regarding the film in Scotland in the twentieth century see Colin McArthur (ed.). 1982. 'An Interview with Forsyth Hardy'. In *Scotch Reels: Scotland in Cinema and Television.* BFI Publishing, 73-92.

In the process of gathering primary sources, I found that close examination of the material cited above provided the foundations I needed at this stage of my research on Tait. It also allowed space in my thesis to examine the historic and cultural contexts in which she worked and to include a close and extended analyses of a selection of her films, as this is also key to my project. Any research I undertake which emerges from this study will involve wider resources including those held at the Tait Collection at the Orkney Library and Archive.

Methodology

My selection of films from Tait's oeuvre is indicative of her scope, innovation and personal awareness. This is not to suggest a hierarchy of competence in her work but to show that Tait addressed a range of topics and film strategies over a lifetime of filmmaking. Some of her films appear 'unfinished' or as works in progress while others such as *Palindrome* (1964), *The Big Sheep* (1966), *Aspects of Kirkwall Series* (1977-1981) and *Garden Pieces* (1998) are beyond the scope of my project, but I refer to them as they connect with my lines of thought.

I have chosen a subjective and qualitative methodology which enables interpretative rather than empirical lines of inquiry. Many feminist academics explore qualitative methodologies to develop ways of evaluating female-centred creativity and articulate perspectives that emerge from working as women. For example, Sue Stanley and Liz Wise (1993: 151-178) assert that subjective and qualitative investigative settings enable the female researcher to describe and theoretically support her interpretations through active engagement with the material she examines. This corresponds with Kim England's suggestion that in female-centred research, 'the inter-subjective nature of social life means that the researcher and the people being researched have shared meanings and we should seek methods that develop this advantage' (1994: 243). She also states that subjective feminist research methodologies are important if the links between women, their experiences and perspectives are to be validated in accounts of women's cultural production and critique.

Patti Lather states that a feminist researcher's chosen 'text' and the questions that arise from her selection, can evolve through a process of reflection which is connected to her own life and interests (1988: 569-581). This approach connects with Gunning who suggests that 'minority' films could be understood as 'texts' generated by specific people within historically specific contexts. Addressed this way 'the context becomes part of the [film] text itself' and the 'formal properties … are neither insulated from cultural pressures, nor do they provide an escape from them' (cited in Bennett and Frow 2008: 193).

Accordingly, I approach Tait's films as 'texts' that stem from a particular person, place and time and my methodology has allowed for the findings that proceed from my research to remain open-ended rather than following a hypothesis that objectively precedes it (Hesse-Biber 2012: 28-30). I frame my thesis around questions such as: How do I approach Tait's representations of twentieth century Britain as an important contribution to culture and social discourses? How can I articulate Tait's equivalence with, and difference from her male contemporaries? How and why did the modernist canon impede Tait's attempts to take part in and contribute her voice to the dominant film culture?

Methods and Conceptual Frameworks

Feminism and Feminist Theory

To address these questions I use feminist, film and cultural theories not 'as a fixed and removed body of "truth" which has universal validity [but] as a means of providing paths and footholds' (Rowbotham cited in Stanley and Wise 1993: 71) into Tait's complex and newly restored work. The theories I select contain concepts which allow me to analyse and interpret Tait's films using forms of evaluation unavailable in her time. They also help explain how and why Tait was among women filmmakers whose equivalence as cultural producers was unacknowledged, and how film played a pivotal role in 'naturalising' the relationships between men/women, high/low culture and professional/amateur in the twentieth century. Applied this way, 'theory means something rather different when shown in relation to, and as a construction out of, "substantive work", because to locate it within a context enables us to see how and why it was constructed, not just that it was constructed' (Stanley and Wise 1993: 178).

Filmmakers and theorists engage with feminism in different ways. For some it can be a constructive identity, for others their commitment is less absolute. Generally, particularly from the mid-twentieth century, many feminists believe/d in intrinsic differences between men and women because of their differing experiences of life (Gilligan 1982, Irigaray 1985). Others that masculinity and femininity are socially conditioned qualities that are exchangeable and

performable (de Beauvoir,1957, de Lauretis 1984, Butler 1990, Grosz 1994). Some are uneasy with the relationship between feminism and post-modernism since they believe that women's progress continues to be subsumed by male mastery over post-modern aesthetics and narratives (Owens 1983, Hutcheon 1989, Rivers 2017).

Tait's feminism is indirect in her films but more evident in her poetry (Neely 2012). Her caution against the label 'feminism' is explained by Toril Moi who, when writing about the French feminists explains,

> many French feminists reject labels and names and 'isms' in particular – even 'feminism' and 'sexism' – it is because they see such labelling activity as betraying a phallocentric drive to stabilise, organise and rationalise our conceptual universe. They argue that it is masculine rationality that has always privileged reason, order, unity and lucidity, and that it has done so by and excluding the irrationality, chaos and fragmentation that has come to represent femininity. (1985: 159-160)

However, Petrolle and Wexman argue that the very act of making films is political because it signals a woman's agency and intent:

> In the broadest sense, by the very act of making movies these women have positioned themselves as active agents, whatever political or aesthetic agenda they may represent. As such they command the interest of feminist-minded critics. (2005: 2)

Accordingly, in my thesis, I demonstrate how Tait engages with feminist ideas by acknowledging the subjectivities of those she filmed and transforming 'feminine' qualities such as nurturing and irrationality, once associated with inferiority, into forces for change. She thus contributes to a 'critical perspective on hegemonic constructions of women and nature' (Niamh Moore cited in Gillis 2007: 135). I also establish that Tait's female filmic 'gaze' on the everyday, the overlooked and the local, reveals experiences that were hidden or missing in the socio-cultural organisations and dominant film productions of her era, from her perspective.

In Tait's time, the aim of elite and male-directed film organisations was to select and produce work that maintained the mechanisms of the patriarchy and a gender-specific order:

> Patriarchy does not refer to the static oppressive domination of one sex over another, but to a web of psycho-social relationships which institute a socially significant difference on the axis of sex, which is so deeply located in our very sense of lived, sexual, identity that it appears to us as natural and unalterable. (Pollock 1988: 33)

Griselda Pollock suggests that to adjust this imbalance, feminist researchers should open the symbolic fields of signification and examine women's access to the means of production to reveal why their work was judged against benchmarks that sustain levels of proficiency in favour of men. Close analysis of women's experimental filmmaking shows that, rather than derivative or inferior, their experimentation with dominant forms of signification and technology often stems from a desire to articulate and contribute their differing perspectives on shared realities. As Robin Blaetz explains:

> The immediacy of the process of filming and the ability of film to suggest repetition, lacunae, and varieties of pace were ideal for representing the heightened awareness of daily life spurred by feminism. (2006: 153)

Moreover, a feminist approach enables me to locate Tait within a continuum of women artists and thinkers whose similarly overlooked 'voices' form an alternative genealogy across time and culture through friendship, motherhood, family, nurturing, politics, sexuality, research and creativity. Adrienne Rich called this inter-connection among women a 'lesbian continuum' (1980: 648). For example, while Tait was making films in Scotland, in New York (1979), Judy Chicago displayed her Second Wave art installation, *The Dinner Party* (1974-1979) in which she posthumously invited over 2,000 women from all levels of society and historical periods in the western world to an imaginary dinner party.[15] The equilateral table presented relationships between women as non-hierarchical. One link she identified that connected women was their biological sex which was displayed on bespoke place-settings, highlighting the differences in women's sexuality, identity and achievements. Another was that their accomplishments were negotiated within the patriarchal frames of their eras. To articulate her thoughts on women's attainments, Chicago innovatively re-formed and developed new meanings by experimenting with artists' and artisans' methods and materials – thus also using dominant forms of signification, differently.

[15] See also Caryl Churchill's play *Top Girls* (1982) in which a female manager of an employment agency invites five women from history (Isabella Bird, a Victorian traveller, a 13th century Buddhist nun, a woman from a Bruegel painting, a character from *The Canterbury Tales* and Pope Joan) to a dinner party for an imaginary discussion through their times and experiences.

Third and Fourth Wave, feminists have extended the Second Wave values that underpin Chicago's installation to include women's ethnicity, subjectivity, intersectionality and their involvement with new media and the environment to productive and political advantage.[16] Additionally, by linking with the French feminists' focus from the 1970s, on psychoanalysis and on expanding dominant language-use, feminist practitioners developed diverse ways of thinking/writing/filming to articulate their differing subjectivities and experiences in ways that do not discount established perspectives or practices but engage with and develop them to include their/other experiences. (Marks and de Courtivron 1981). To accomplish this, many drew on post-structuralist notions of différance (Derrida 1997: 60-64), a term which refers to the simultaneous correlation of deferral and difference in meaning in (written) texts. Différance highlights the instability of all texts and probes their claims to 'truth'. It also blurs the boundaries between forms of signification so that these can be re-evaluated to uncover what, or who, is missing from 'core' texts and narratives, while also evaluating 'minor' texts in constructive ways.

Textual Negotiation

Key to my analysis of Tait's short films is Christine Gledhill's paper 'Pleasurable Negotiations' (1988) in which she states, ''negotiation' implies the holding together of opposite sides in an ongoing process of give-and-take' (cited in Thornham 1999: 169). I use this concept to show how in Tait's films, 'meaning is neither imposed, nor passively imbibed, but arises out of a struggle or negotiation between competing frames of reference, motivation and experience' (cited in Thornham 1999: 169). Gledhill also suggests that the 'patriarchal subject is constructed as a unified, consistent but illusory identity' (cited in Thornham 1999: 167) in a society and culture that remains dependent on a central point around which all meaning is organised. This includes the 'male gaze' to which most 'other' films and viewpoints defer. In my thesis I draw on

[16] By the 1990s a new generation of feminists extended the Second Wave's focus on the experiences of upper- and middleclass white women to include global issues, women's ethnicities, sexuality and intersectionality. Third Wave feminists include Gloria Anzaldua, bell hooks, Audre Lorde, Maxine Hong Kingston and Rebecca Walker. From c 2012, Fourth Wave feminism's focus includes the empowerment of women through the internet and social media which has provided the space for greater diversity of women's voices and perspectives.

these ideas to reveal how Tait's Scottish 'female gaze' 'conceive[s] difference without opposition' (Owens cited in Foster 1983: 62), and how film can be used in ways that articulate differing perspectives on shared ideas without cancelling out other viewpoints and practices.

Close Textual and Contextual Analysis

My close analysis of Tait's innovative use of film and modernist film techniques connects her filmic 'voice' with other forms of cultural practice. As Pollock explains:

> Cultural practices were defined as signifying systems, as practices of *representation.* … Representation stresses something re-fashioned. … Representation can also be understood as 'articulating' in a visible or socially palpable form social processes which determine the representation but then are actually affected and altered by the forms, practices and effects of representation. (1988: 6)

As a discursive process, film contains the potential within itself to un/consciously re-form ideas that exist in dominant forms of signification (Kristeva 1980, de Lauretis 1984). In a patriarchal culture, the codes and conventions that sustain hierarchical relationships adapt to withstand challenges to the status quo. Tait's awareness of this is indicated through her refusal to alter her work to suit current trends, film coteries or methods of using film to support dominant viewpoints, but to make films about everyday life in ways that satisfied her exacting standards from her standpoint as a female, Scottish filmmaker.

Feminist Standpoint Theory

Donna Haraway (1988), Dorothy Smith (1989) and Sandra Harding (2004) developed standpoint theory to include women's subjectivity and ethnicity into research on women's creativity. Sociologist Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber explains:

> Feminist standpoint epistemology borrows from the Marxist and Hegelian idea that individuals' daily activities or material and lived experiences structure their understanding of the social world. Karl Marx viewed knowledge as historically constructed and relative because it is based on a given "mode of production." Elites (owners of the "means of production") shape knowledge and ideology to justify social inequality. (2012: 11)

It was the privileged position of 'elite' cultural gatekeepers that enabled the development of meta-narratives that prevented marginalised groups from contributing their knowledge to the

decision-making areas of society and culture. Jean-François Lyotard (1924-1998) noted that the received wisdom in governing discourses was partial, '[t]rue knowledge in this respect is always indirect knowledge; it is composed of reported statements that are incorporated into the metanarratives of a subject that guarantees their legitimacy' (Lyotard 1984: 35). Whereas Tait's focus on local issues can be seen in terms of Lyotard's 'localised narratives' (1984: 61). These develop in geographic and cultural spaces that are often marginal to centrally-based directives, and inclusive of 'other' subjectivities and experiences.

Feminist Auteur Theory

I use the term female auteur to present Tait as the orchestrator of the form and content in her films. This is suggested by her incorporation of autobiographical references, occasional physical appearances and by placing her voice and poetry on her soundtracks. The term 'female auteur' describes women whose films contain recognisable themes and social, cultural, or political insights into culture and society in ways that might differ from their male counterparts (Miller 1986, Mayne 1990, Silverman 1998, Grant 2001, Martin 2003, White 2015). Tait's personal and distinctive ways of making films, articulate her observations of life under the conditions of modernity in Britain in the second half of the twentieth century.

Chapter Overview

In my first chapter, 'Auto/Biography, Location, Vision', I introduce Tait's style of filmmaking and her engagement with the representation of women and children during and after World War II. I link her filmic 'gaze' and 'voice' to the circumstances that influenced her life choices. I refer to Henri Bergson, Virginia Woolf and Jacques Lacan to underpin Tait's thinking and her filming of the everyday at a time of change. I analyse three student films, *One is One* (1951), *Three Portrait Sketches* (1951) and *The Lion, The Griffin and The Kangaroo* (1952), and her home films, *Happy Bees* (1954), *All These New Relations* (1955) *Splashing* (1966), and her film *These Walls* (1974).

In my second chapter, 'The Ambiguity of Film Classifications: Scottish/British Short Film Production', I examine Tait's connections with the Films of Scotland's key production of amateur, information and local interest films. I assess the influence of film entrepreneur John Grierson (1889-1972) who directed government funding towards short films that promoted industry and helped form harmonious relationships and moral support while Britain endured and recovered from World War II. I also examine the concepts 'realism' and 'authenticity' which ideologically underpin sponsored and standard film production. Using Bergson's notion of time and modernity, I show how Tait sustains an interconnection with local Scottish film culture while considering the effects of modernisation on mundane local life. I analyse *A Portrait of Ga* (1952), *Rose Street* (1956), *The Drift Back* (1957), *On the Mountain* (1974) and *Land Makar* (1981).

In my third chapter 'The Ambiguity of Film Classifications: Experimental Film Production' I examine Tait's relationship with the experimental film culture in Britain and America in the 1960s and 1970s. This includes the diary film, lyrical film, film poetry, amateur film and avant-garde and British structural/materialism. I investigate the ways film organisations upheld male filmmakers and critics while women's work was typically excluded from historical accounts and exhibitions at that time. I link Tait with her contemporary filmmakers Marie Menken, Joyce Weiland, Anne Rees-Mogg, Stan Brakhage, Norman McLaren, Len Lye and Jonas Mekas. I

provide close analyses of *The Leaden Echo and the Golden Echo* (1955), *Place of Work* (1976) and *Tailpiece* (1976) and show how these films intersect with prevailing film practices and social issues while remaining true to her identity as Scottish filmmaker. Ali Smith observes that Tait was a 'pioneer. … An original. A maker' (cited in Todd and Cook 2004: 27). Accordingly, I establish 'lone' and 'auteur' as suitable frames to support open-ended paths of inquiry into Tait's independent film practice.

In my fourth and fifth chapters 'The Lonely Furrow Re-examined' and 'The Anxiety of Influence and Intertextuality' I re-view the terms 'isolated', 'overlooked' and 'marginal' to suggest that these terms also describe spaces Tait occupied to escape dominant film production in order to work on her own terms and maintain creative control over her films. I provide a close analysis of *Hugh MacDiarmid: A Portrait* (1964) *Calypso* (1955) and *Colour Poems* (1974) to show how Tait aligned herself and her filmmaking with several acclaimed local 'makers' who also explored vanguard forms and content in their work. I suggest this connectivity moderated her feelings of isolation.

I devote the whole of Chapter Six, '*Where I See From Is Here',* to a close analysis of *Where I Am Is Here* (Tait 1964). I incorporate many of the issues discussed in my thesis in my evaluation of this film and to re-affirm that Tait's 'filmic' voice embodies levels of thinking and political engagement that formed an equivalence with the thinkers of her day. I use Hannah Arendt's *The Human Condition* (1958), to reveal how Tait's perspectives are commensurate with acclaimed perceptions regarding life under the conditions of modernity.[17]

[17] Hannah Arendt (1906-1975) is a German American political theorist and philosopher whose writings are notable for their unorthodox and eclectic style which do not form a coherent or systematic philosophy nor sustain a single argument across a number of works. Rather her oeuvre addresses topics such as thinking, revolution, the nature of freedom and totalitarianism and relationships between political action and the human condition.

Chapter One: Auto/Biography, Location, Vision.

This chapter provides biographical and circumstantial information regarding Tait's education, war experiences and film training in Rome. It establishes Tait as a Scottish woman filmmaker whose interests become evident through her filming of everyday life in her localities, including a focus on women, nature and children.

Fig. 13: Leggett 1977. Margaret Tait.

Fig. 14: Leggett 1977. Margaret Tait.

Those who knew Tait describe her as single-minded yet complex, reticent yet purposeful, shy yet determined. She lived remotely but was well-informed and although keen for her work to be seen, was wary of organised outlets, film coteries and labels. Gerda Stevenson, the actress who plays the protagonist in Tait's feature-length film *Blue Black Permanent* (1992), recalls being invited to Tait's studio:

> As I got to know Margaret, while we worked on *Blue Black Permanent*, I discovered her great warmth, and her many contradictions. She was passionate and cool, mistrusting and giving, explicit in her judgement, yet loved ambiguity. Her humour was wicked – she loathed sentimentality and pretension, both of which abound in the film industry.
> …
> She spoke hardly a word, but generously gifted me with signed copies of her own fascinating books of prose and poetry which she published herself. ... After a few minutes, she ushered me out of the building, discomfited by this invasion, albeit at her own invitation, of her deeply personal space. Yet she was hungry for feedback. (1999)

Experimental filmmaker Ute Aurand (b.1957) remembers a time she and Tait 'watched together her films on a golden framed screen, the size of a small painting, in her living room' (Aurand in Rossin 2013). Annabel Nicolson (b.1946) likewise recalls 'an evening looking at Margaret's films with relations and friends some of whom were in the films. It all felt so natural, the quiet sense of ease. I remember the openness with which Mike Leggett and I were greeted' (cited in Todd 2004a). Nicolson recently reflected:

> I can only say how much I enjoyed her company. She was warm and always interested in my background and very open to talk to. … She did show us her films one evening at home with her relations there too. It was a lovely atmosphere and very fitting for her films which reflected aspects of her life and those around her so naturally. (Private Letter 04/11/2017)

Regarding this inclusiveness, in volume 5 of a 1958 notebook Tait wrote, 'I think that it is a woman's [sic.] capability, the being able to inter-relate the particular and the personal with the whole and with the generalisation that comes out of the whole and the bits' (Held at the Tait Collection, Orkney Library and Archive cited in Neely 2017: 3). The autobiographical and personal resonances in Tait's films confirm her awareness that women's ability to connect the personal to wider issues in their work could modify the received order of things.

The Personal is Political[18]

When writing about Tait's circumstances, Neely cites Bart Moore-Gilbert's remarks on postcolonial feminist bell hooks for whom auto/biographical elements were fundamental to her identity as an African American writer. She then compares her with Tait:

> Although it would be misguided to argue that Tait was adopting such a radical ideological stance, her personal mode of filmmaking challenges professional filmmaking practices, through tendencies to reveal rather than conceal personal contexts. (2009: 312)

[18] The phrase 'the personal is political' was coined as a rallying cry of the Second Wave feminists of the late 1960s and early 1970s. It referred to the consciousness-raising efforts of this generation of radical and other feminist activism and served as a model for creating feminist theories. The origins of its appearance are unclear, so it is not attributed to any one person, but Carol Hanisch's paper 'The Personal is Political' appears in the influential anthology *Notes from the Second Year: Women's Liberation* in 1970, [online]. Available at: https://webhome.cs.uvic.ca/~mserra/AttachedFiles/PersonalPolitical.pdf [accessed 12 March 2017].

I maintain that Tait's 'tendencies to reveal' the personal in her films demarcate her difference from the male and often English-centred sponsored short film cultures of her day.

The documentary and information-type films that typified standard film production in Tait's time relied for their stability on the co-dependence between the sign and its referent, synchronised sound-image connections and male voice-overs.[19] These strategies encouraged audiences to think in ways that sustained the status quo, whereas Tait's open-ended, independently produced films relied on asynchronous sounds and images, montage editing and they reflected on prevailing meta-discourses such as modernisation, progress and realism. Also, by incorporating her own voice and poetry on to her soundtracks and occasionally appearing in her films physically, Tait located her presence and perspectives as central and political components of her work. Catherine MacKinnon explains:

> Women's distinctive experience as women occurs within that sphere that has been socially lived as the personal – private emotional, interiorised individuated, intimate – so that what it is to *know the politics* of women's situation is to know women's personal lives.
> …
> Thus, to feminism, the personal is epistemologically the political, and its epistemology is its politics. Feminism on this level is the theory of women's point of view. (1989: 120)

Historically, cultural institutions have often disregarded work that expressed women's points-of-view. Part of the rationale of Second Wave feminist movement, (later extended by the Third and Fourth Wave) was to research, reinstate and re-evaluate women's overlooked work. Regarding film, Lauren Rabinovitz (2006) explains that simply assimilating women's films into existing film history can obscure their differences and the politics which often critically engage with the institutions into which their work is inserted. Griselda Pollock concurs:

> It is not a matter of mere re-inclusion because the manner of the exclusion itself forms a system that must be contested to create other forms of analysis that can remain faithful to the qualities of the artworks that themselves already contest the dominant modes. (cited in de Zegher 2014: 19)

[19] The Second Films of Scotland Committee (1954-1982) (but it did not actively function until 1955), was the main framework for film production in Scotland in Tait's time. Funding for their predominantly educational and information film productions came from industry, tourism, government, and local authorities and this affected the form and content of most sponsored films they produced.

Pollock also recommends that when writing about women artists, feminists avoid traditional art-historical monologues that present artists as misunderstood outsiders making ahistorical works of distinction. When used to evaluate women's work, this same methodology assimilates their differences into dominant systems of signification and masks the often obstructive contexts which have thwarted their achievements (1998:1-24).[20] So, 'unless we talk about women's work in a different way, we will not be able to address this omission' (Martin cited in Levitin et al 2003: 29). Indeed, Neely notes that after years of neglect, 'biographical accounts of Tait's life and working method … may have succeeded in giving Tait a certain degree of exposure, however, they were incapable of addressing the reasons for her oversight in the first place' (2017: 28).

One way to provide accounts of female-centred work in ways that differ from the artist-as-genius-outsider model is 'through paying attention to the specificity and uniqueness of women's lives' (Hesse-Biber 2012**:** 9). This includes the choices individual women make within the historically specific circumstances of their time and place, otherwise,

> it leaves feminist theorists empty-handed when it comes to understanding how individual women give meaning to their lived experiences and how they negotiate the tensions between these experiences and the cultural and institutional discourses in which they are embedded. (Davis 2007: 132-3)

For filmmakers who use unfamiliar or challenging strategies to express their differing viewpoints, experimental film scholar James Peterson suggests that research into their notebooks, letters, diaries, and interviews with their friends and fellow practitioners, can provide a 'way in' to their work:

> The personification of the filmmaker is a basic condition of intelligibility of the poetic strain of the avant-garde. ... Without such an assumption, many elements of these films, and sometimes whole films, would be unintelligible. The general strategy of personifying the filmmaker suggests specific heuristics viewers can use to make sense of the poetic strain of the avant-garde film. The most basic of these is: make sense of the film by relating it to the concerns of the filmmaker. (1994: 34)

[20] In *Hypatia's* issue 'Women and Language', Bauer and Oliver ask 'whether there is a language of experience adequate to women's lives or whether language is encoded by victimage and oppression. What are alternative languages (both visual and verbal) that can deal with the range of women's material existence? '(1992:1). Christopher Canon reveals that in the earliest text known to be written by a woman in English, Julian of Norwich's *Showings* (c 1395) Julian discusses her subjection to the dominant language-use of the Medieval era.

Julia Kristeva cites 'personification' as a valid approach for evaluating avant-garde work by women for which, as her translator John Lechte explains, 'new symbolic means are needed to appropriate this difference' (cited in Fletcher and Benjamin 1990: 32). She also recommends that researchers approach 'art' as a system of practices and processes in which the subjectivity of the artist, audience and researcher play an important role in the production and reception of meanings:

> For Kristeva, as a psychoanalyst, there is no fundamental discontinuity between the production of the work of art and the life of the individual. … this does not mean that a work of art is to be seen simply as a representation of the intention or personality of the artist. … Kristeva views art less as an object, and more as a process, or practice, which 'creates' the subject. In short: art is constitutive of *both* subject and object, and that is why Kristeva emphasises the notion of 'practice' over 'experience' which presupposes an object. (Lechte in Fletcher and Benjamin 1990: 24)

With regard to women, Kristeva expands on Jacques Lacan's belief that there is no pre-discursive reality and that the speaking subject as female is also split between a conscious mind and unconscious information which is stored in her psyche through access to pre- and existing texts and the socio-political-cultural discourses in which she was raised, such as their family and education:

> The theory of meaning now stands at a cross-roads: either it will remain an attempt at formalizing meaning-systems by increasing sophistication of the logico-mathematical tools … or else it will attune itself to the theory of the speaking subject as a divided subject (conscious/unconscious) and go on to attempt to specify the types of operation characteristic of the two sides of this split. (Kristeva cited in Newton 1988: 182)

Feminist literary critic Ruth Robbins summarises Kristeva's approach, 'we must take both the conscious and the unconscious, both the mind and the body, both the cultural and the natural seriously as being absolutely necessary to the process of forming meaning' (2000: 127). Viewed this way, a female artist's body becomes a location for historically specific discourses as well as cognitive and emotional traces which, when closely examined, open new ways of interpreting their work.

Interestingly, Pirie observed, 'I think that whatever film one's talking about, every film that Margaret's made is about Margaret as far as I'm concerned … really, in a sense that the films <u>are</u> [sic.] Margaret for me' (cited in Appendix 1: vii). Tait was also aware that the

intersections between her work and subjectivity provided insights into her creativity and thinking, 'every single moment is based on my own life and all the characters are me. But it is not the story of my life' (Tait cited in Moir 1993: 8). Indeed, an insight into Tait's life reveals un/conscious biographical connections that are woven into her work.

Margaret Tait's Life and Influences

The story of Tait's life began and ended in Orkney.[21] Gerda Stevenson notes:

> At the age of nine, Margaret was sent away to boarding school in Edinburgh. The feeling of isolation and dislocation in being uprooted at such an early age undoubtedly reinforced her intense identification with her native Orkney. (1999)

Peter Todd explains that these early experiences strengthened Tait's affinity with the outsider's position which was integral to her film practice:

> The films can stand for themselves, but the person behind them lived in the real world and had experiences that others have had. She was the child so dismayed by the nature of her boarding school that she worked so as to complete her studies and gain time on Orkney before returning to University to take up medical training. Margaret Tait's films are a record of a certain period, of a family, of Edinburgh and Orkney, each of them a repository of her memories and imaginings of all the phases of her life. (2004a)

After a boarding school education then graduating in medicine from Edinburgh University in 1941, Tait was enlisted as a doctor in the Royal Army Corps and sent to India, Sri Lanka (formerly Ceylon) and Malaya (1943-46). Journalist Jan Moir writes that Tait 'was called up, put on a troop ship to Bombay and found herself in Jhansi, in the baking heat of the Indian plains. They were nowhere near the front and she found herself dealing more with tropical diseases than with wounded soldiers' (1993). Neely (2016) reproduced a collage made by Tait which includes a 1945 train ticket to Jhansi. Also, in a postscript to an unpublished novel, Tait referred to her experiences at the Jhansi station where she had worked with troops returning from the front:

> The Jhansi curtains hang here in the Rose Street Studio now; but they don't give me pain. I seem to have come to rest at last, to accept what it is for me. People describe a

[21] Tait's account of her life can be found in a letter to Mike Leggett 07/08/1979 (Held at the BAFVC, London) in which she clarified and amended his references to her life and achievements in preparation for his unpublished article 'The Autonomous Filmmaker. Margaret Tait: Films and Poems 1951-76' (1979). This is indicative of her desire to have an input in how she and her films were presented in public.

> feeling they have, as if of having lost something. I don't remember ever feeling it to be that. I was seeking, but not for something I had lost. For something that was not there yet. (from the postscript from an unfinished 1959 manuscript. Tait cited in Neely 2016)

Of her experiences in the East Tait said:

> Before I was ever in Italy, I had a couple of years in the East when I was a medical officer in the RAMC, this led to something contemplative, a way of looking at things – which is something to do with the East. (cited in Appendix 4: xlii)

These reflections point to the influence of the War and the East on Tait's psyche and that descriptions of her as reticent and introspective are appropriate. However rather than secluded, her travels in America and Europe, her war work and experiences as a locum in England and Scotland inform her wider world view. Here Tait witnessed recovery, change and disenfranchisement. Reflecting on her work as a doctor Tait said:

> Of course, when I started doing medicine, I thought that medicine would be my life's work, but at a certain point … I think I gradually came over to feeling that it was necessary to do something more than just simply bringing people back to bodily health. (cited in Appendix 4: xlix)

Elsewhere she said, 'I think it's the same impulse that leads to art that leads to, at least something to do with medicine. I think it all comes out of the same thing in oneself ... things are connected' (cited in Wilson 1978a: 14). This statement indicates the importance Tait placed on spiritual as well as physical well-being. In *Orquil Studio* (Pirie and Watson 1999) there is a shot of her medical bag underneath a worktable which captures her inter-connected approach to art and life.

Tait decided to move from medicine to film while learning Italian in Perugia after World War II. She began by writing film scripts including one about St. Francis and planning a film about a place she thought people should know about:

> I saw it as a kind of fictionalised documentary to be done … like a Crown Film Unit … this type of thing so I wrote that down as a script … in ignorance of film-making other than what you pick up watching films … and as a consequence of that I thought I ought to learn more about the technique of film-making … having learnt a little Italian in Perugia and having gone back there with the idea of writing a script while I was there, I heard about the Rome film school I heard about the Rome school … It was sort of semi-accidental. (cited in Wilson 1978: 15-16)

This registers Tait's early awareness of documentary-type filmmaking as a vehicle of expression. So, at thirty-one, she signed up for and self-funded a filmmaking course at the

prestigious Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia in Rome (1950-52) [22] at a time when Italian Neorealism was at its height. Neely writes of the enthusiasm generated at the film school in Rome by students and professionals alike (2009: 304). Adding elsewhere, '[w]hile Tait did not ascribe wholly to the Neorealist approach, Ancona Films adopted similar working methods, making films on a smaller budget, using real locations, and local and untrained actors' (Neely 2017: 17). [23]

The Neorealists' incorporated local people as actors to counter the idealised and fictional representations in prevailing Italian and imported Hollywood feature films (figures 15-17).

Fig. 15: Rossellini 1948. *Germany Year Zero.*

Fig. 16: de Sica 1948. *The Bicycle Thieves.*

Fig. 17: de Sica 1948. *The Bicycle Thieves.*

Close analysis of many of Tait's short films reveal her appropriation of aspects of the Neorealist strategy of location filming among the poor and the everyday in Italy after World War II. Her filming of 'ordinary' people in their localities in post-war Scotland echo the Neorealists' way 'of looking at the world without preconceptions or prejudices' (Fellini cited in MacCann 1966: 379).

[22] The UK's first film school was The London Film School (est. 1956) and National Film and Television School (est. 1971). These, and later many art schools, replaced amateur film clubs, professional connections and the procurement of apprenticeships or support of key players in the industry as conduits for making independent films. Of her course at the Centro Sperimentale Tait said: 'I paid for it out of what was left of my army gratuity, and earnings. I could live quite frugally in Italy, without any hardship. And I coached some pupils in English' (Tait cited in Todd and Cook 1994: 78).

[23] Canonical Neorealist films include *Rome, Open City* (Roberto Rossellini 1945), *Germany Year Zero* (Roberto Rossellini 1948), *La Terra Trema* (Luchino Visconti 1948), *Bicycle Thieves* (Vittorio De Sica 1948). In Tait's obituary in *The Independent*, Murray Grigor wrote: 'It was the height of Italian Neorealist cinema and she could see at first-hand how Rossellini, De Sica and Visconti brought life in grim war-torn Italy to the screen on minimal budgets' (1999). In keeping with the theme of this project, it should be noted that Elvira Notari (1875-1946) was Italy's earliest woman filmmaker making many feature films and documentaries. Her realist approach using non-professional actors and local streets has latterly been linked to the Neorealist movement (Bruno 1992).

Fig. 18: de Sica 1948. *The Bicycle Thieves.*

Fig. 19: Tait 1956. *Rose Street.*

Fig. 20: Rossellini 1945. *Rome Open City.*

Fig. 21: Tait 1964. *Where I Am Is Here.*

Fig. 22: Tait 1964. *Hugh MacDiarmid: A Portrait.*

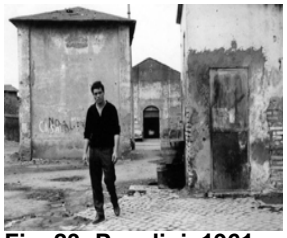

Fig. 23: Pasolini. 1961. *Accattone.*

Fig. 24: Rossellini. 1948. *Germany Year Zero.*

By adopting similar strategies, Tait transported film's potential to make politically charged films that presented lives that were often overlooked or misrepresented in standard Scottish/British film production and American imported films that were screened in cinemas at home. For example, figures 18-19 reveal her un/conscious assimilation of Neorealist images of lone boys, lone men (figures 22-24) and ribbons of school children (figures 20-21) – which is perhaps reminiscent of her boarding school days in Edinburgh. The formal arrangement in these screenshots mirrors the Neorealist use of single figures and local children who similarly become allegories for new beginnings and the forces they must confront as inheritors of decisions made by their elders:

> The essential theme in Neorealist cinema is the conflict between the common, anonymous person and the immense societal forces – war, politics, organised crime, the economy – that are completely external to him or her, yet completely determine this individual's existence. (Cardullo 2015: 11)

While at the Centro, Tait formed an alliance with American Peter Hollander and Argentinian Fernando Birri. All three filmmakers developed their ideas in the low-budget short narrative and documentary-type films they made while students in Rome. In Tait's case, these include *One is One* (1951), *Three Portrait Sketches* (1951) and *The Lion, The Griffin and The Kangaroo* (1951) which, besides its Neorealist references, display influences of Surrealism and the chiaroscuro lighting of German Expressionist films. The allegorical use of shadows, nature,

water, stone, imaginative framing, autonomous children, and an emphasis on 'place' in these films thematically re-appear in Tait's later work. Also, *Three Portrait Sketches* (Tait 1951) establishes the 'film portrait' as a format Tait would develop to present the persona of a person or place.

Fig. 25: Tait 1951. *Three Portrait Sketches.* (Claudia Donzelli)

Fig. 26: Tait 1951. *Three Portrait Sketches.* (Fernando Birri)

Fig. 27: Tait 1951. *Three Portrait Sketches.* (Saulat Rahman)

In *Three Portrait Sketches*, Tait forms a consensus in a trilogy of portraits of a young local girl Claudia Donzelli and two fellow film students, Fernando Birri and Saulat Rahman (figures 25-27). The Rahman section has similarities with *Meshes of the Afternoon* (Deren 1943) through the symbolic use of the flower that Rahman holds, repeated sequences of her descending steps and slowed-down shots of her running through the streets in bright sunshine. As in Deren's film/s, many of Tait's films have the effect of altering 'reality' to include un/conscious thoughts or desires.

One is One (Tait 1951) is a short narrative film about a young couple who become separated on a day visit to Rome. It follows the woman who, after realising she has become separated from her male companion, continues to wander contentedly through the city alone until reuniting with her anxious partner at the end of the film. There are similarities here with Agnes Varda's French New Wave film, *Cleo From 5 to 7* (1962) in which a woman wanders around Paris on her own for two hours waiting for the results of a medical test. She spurns the 'gaze' of male admirers but forms a friendship with a (male) soldier on leave from the Algerian War. Autobiographical elements in this film are noted in Tait's story *The Time I Spent in The Roman Baths* which begins, 'Once I spent three wonderful days seeing Rome, all by myself …' (screen shot from *Orquil Studio* (Pirie and Watson 1999)).

The Lion, The Griffin and The Kangaroo (Tait and Hollander 1951) is a short promotional film commissioned by the university in Rome to attract potential students. It was sponsored by local companies who 'realised that a film has to reflect the point of view of those who are actually making it and that for their own propaganda purposes a film which is a coherent work of art is more useful than a hotchpotch of what everyone thinks ought to be in it' (From 'Independence: Small Budget Production in Rome', Tait cited in Neely 2012: 154). It comprises innovative camera angles and inventively framed shots of local streets and architecture to indicate that the city's history and beauty are as important as the academic side of university life. Hollander's and Tait's voice-overs provide a short history of the town and its extra-curriculum activities. Her use of her own voice, indigenous male and female voices and silence on her soundtracks, were strategies Tait later developed to re-present the diversity she observed in her localities, and to encourage audiences to interact personally with her films as well as absorbing information.

After her training at the Centro, despite encouragement from her contemporaries such as Fernando Birri and filmmaker Lindsay Anderson, Tait decided not to stay in London to make films while working there as a GP. Nor to return to Italy or India, but to return to home, 'I came back to Scotland and began making films in Edinburgh and later in Sutherland and now I'm back in Orkney … but I am mobile. I prefer to make films in Scotland, but I might disappear back to Rome, might go back to India' (Tait cited in Wilson 1978: 30). Earlier in this conversation Tait also conceded that she wanted to make Scotland a central component of her work.

> I definitely feel I want to work in Scotland. I have felt that since about 1954 or 5 anyway. Well, it was partly accidental too … the last time I came back from Rome I was intending to go back, but these premises in Rose Street became available and it just seemed possible to work from there. (cited in Wilson 1978: 18)

Accordingly, Tait re-established Ancona Films Ltd. at 91, Rose Street in Edinburgh which was registered as a film company there from 1954 to 1973. Pirie recalled:

> It was a rented first floor area … … There was a time I think when Margaret slept in her car which was another shooting box, it was not a big car … it wasn't just an ordinary car … it was all fitted out … she would just park her car somewhere and it would be quite safe. … I have no memory of a bedroom in Rose St, nor do I have a memory of a sitting room or a kitchen because this was essentially a workplace. (cited in Appendix 3: xli)

Rose Street was ‘known as a rather tough street’ (Tait 1954) but also a thriving cultural hub whose bars were frequented by key figures in Scottish literary modernism such as Hugh MacDiarmid (1892-1978), Sorley MacLean (1911-1996), Tom Scott (1918-1995) and George Mackay Brown (1921-1996).[24] Neely notes that Tait is regularly cast as a 'diminutive figure among the more dominant characters in the landscape of Orcadian poetry’ (Neely 2012: 5). But even so she absorbed much of the local culture and wider Scottish literary and film influences. The link between written and visual languages in her films was noted as significant by lens-based artists Chris Byrne and Malcolm Dickinson:

> **CB** Her films were grounded in realist documentary but transcended the standard conventions to become much more lyrical, poetic works. Simply made, but with great elegance and flair, focusing on moments, fleeting glimpses, everyday settings. Telling stories through moving images and location sound.
> **MD** Margaret Tait is interesting because she has a creative proximity to a literary tradition. I think the links through literature and philosophy to the visual arts are quite strong and robust. … Writers and artists in moving image have and do work together. (1998: 18)

Tait’s professionalism is evident in her company’s headed notepaper, her van with the Ancona Films’ logo and the signage outside her studio/workshop (figures 28--30). Although mostly run by Tait from Scotland with help from Pirie on occasion, the Ancona business card cites offices in Rome, New York and Edinburgh where each associate (Hollander, Tait and Birri) set up their practices after graduating from the Centro (Winn 2006).

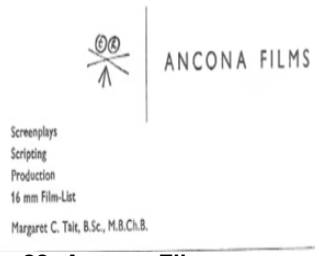

Fig. 28: Ancona Film Headed Notepaper.

Fig. 29: Tait's Company Van with Ancona Logo.

Fig. 30: Tait 1956. Rose Street Studio Entrance.

Leggett explains the significance of the Centro in film and film careers:

[24] The bars in Rose Street have been described as a male enclave, but the intriguing figure of poet Stella Cartwright, a regular presence in these bars, who became known as ‘the muse of Rose Street appears in Tait’s film *Palindrome* (1964). BBC’s Radio 4 aired a 30-minute programme on Cartwright (29/03/2008).

> Many documentaries produced in Italy during the '50s were made by students of the Sperimentale which had been established on the reputation (and occasional presence) of filmmakers involved in the reconstitution of a national film industry and inevitably enjoyed a glamorous reputation. (1979: 1)

Indeed, Tait's fellow students went on to make politically informed films about the disempowered and disenfranchised on their home ground. Birri returned Argentina where he made 'realist' documentary films that portrayed life on the fringes of Argentinian society. The political stance in these films forced him into exile in the 1960s. But he later returned to Latin America to become a respected film theorist and one of the founders of the New Latin American film movement which drew closely on Italian Neorealism. Hollander returned to New York where, from 1958, he worked for the U.N. making documentary films and winning awards in his position as executive producer for many of the most successful films for this organisation [25] (WGBH website). And Saulat Rahman 'went on to make pioneering work in film education in India' (Neely 2017: 55 fn 3).

The admiration her fellow students received for their work on home ground was difficult for Tait to achieve on her return home. Jan Moir describes her struggle to establish a film career in Scotland:

> She had a plan that she would work as a locum doctor for half the year to fund herself, then spend the other half making films. She would drive around the surgeries in little Scottish villages and sleep in the back of her estate car at night to save money. (1993)

Keen to show her work, exchange ideas 'and gauge public response to the work' (Leggett 1979: 4), in 1954 and 1955 Tait organised two small festivals that ran alongside the annual Edinburgh Film Festival. It included three of her own films and one each by Hollander and Birri (figure 31). She wrote: 'My New York partner, Peter Hollander, designed us an excellent poster, I had invitation cards printed, and advertised as well as I could the coming 'Rose Street Festival' (Tait 1954). Tait distributed invitations to local audiences and luminaries such as fellow Scot and film

[25] Examples of their films include *Dimitri Works in Black Wax* (Hollander 1951), *Shapes* (Hollander 1952), *Every Giant Step* (Hollander 1954), *Buenos Dias, Buenos Aires* (Birri 1959), *The Midwife of Kudpeng* (Hollander 1963), *Childs Eye View* (Hollander 1964), *Marastoon: The Place Where One Is Helped* (Hollander 1979). *Flooded Out* (Birri 1962), *Mi Hijo El Che: Un Retrato* de *Familia de Don Ernesto Guevara* (1985), *Century of the Wind* (Birri 1999), *El Fausto Criollo* (Birri 2011).

impresario John Grierson and local poet Edwin Muir (1887-1959) asking them to contribute poetry and critiques (Neely 2012: 19).[26] This may also have been a means Tait devised of placing her voice among those with critical and professional standing, a strategy I explore more fully in Chapters Four and Five of this thesis.

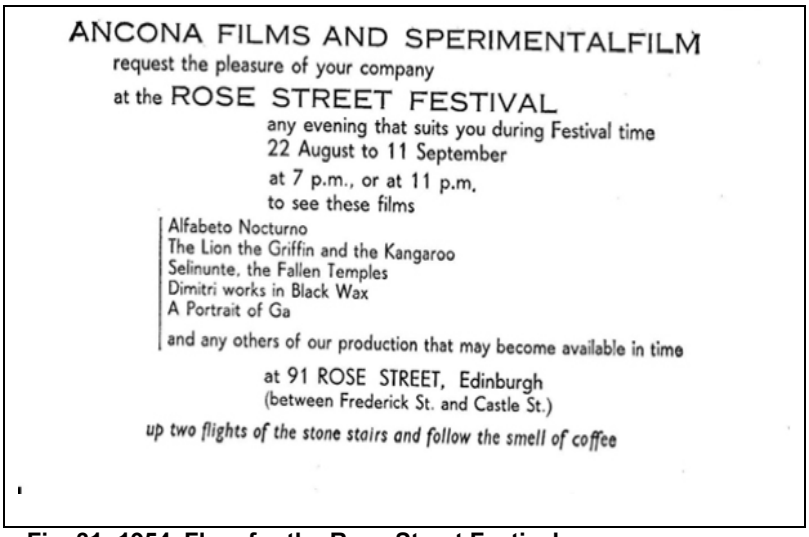
ANCONA FILMS AND SPERIMENTALFILM
request the pleasure of your company
at the ROSE STREET FESTIVAL
any evening that suits you during Festival time
22 August to 11 September
at 7 p.m., or at 11 p.m.
to see these films
Alfabeto Nocturno
The Lion the Griffin and the Kangaroo
Selinunte, the Fallen Temples
Dimitri works in Black Wax
A Portrait of Ga
and any others of our production that may become available in time
at 91 ROSE STREET, Edinburgh
(between Frederick St. and Castle St.)
up two flights of the stone stairs and follow the smell of coffee

Fig. 31: 1954. Flyer for the Rose Street Festival.

Of the reception of these screenings Tait wrote:

> Some of the most appreciative members of our audiences were practising artists in other fields – architects, musicians, a few painters, one poet. It was very encouraging for me 218to get so much appreciation from the very people I would like to like the films, direct people, genuine people, and it was a great joy that most of my visitors were like that. (1954)

However, when discussing her films with Tait and Pirie in 1977, Mike Leggett said that Tait found 'it … difficult … to get the few patrons who did attend to view the work on its own terms. It was seen merely as a local adjunct to the orgy of cultural consumption' (1979: 4). Peter Todd also recalls:

[26] In 'On Throwing a film Festival' (1954) Tait describes the films that were included: 'The programme was as follows. '*ALFABETO NOTTURNO* made by Agostino and Alfonso Sansone, Fernando Birri and Peter Hollander in Sicily in 1952, an account of evening school in the tiny mountain village of Torretta in the heart of Giuliana country. *THE LION THE GRIFFIN AND THE KANGAROO* made by Peter Hollander and Margaret Tait in 1951-52, a film sponsored by the city of Perugia and the Italian University for Foreigners, by U.S.I.S. and the Fulbright Commission, about the mediaeval and once warlike city which now is a meeting place for foreign students. SELINUNTE, THE FALLEN TEMPLES, made by Fernando Birri in 1951, a study of the Greek ruins at Selinunte in southern Sicily. *DIMITRI WORKS IN BLACK WAX* made by Peter Hollander in Rome in 1952, an account of the lost wax method of casting and a study of the sculptor, Dimitri Hadzi. *A PORTRAIT OF GA* a colour portrait of an old lady, made by Margaret Tait in 1952-53 [online]. Available at: https://lux.org.uk/writing/throwing-film-festival [accessed 18 November 2020).

> She had these ideas of short filmmaking, short documentary, films for communities. And I think when she returned to Scotland, she always thought that she would be part of a group of likeminded people, and it never did quite happen. I think that she didn't really fit in with the 'Films of Scotland' and the big documentary tradition. ... She realised that she didn't fit in. (cited in Miller 2005: 7)

At that time in Scotland, film patrons were primarily industry sponsors and the second Films of Scotland Committee (1954-1982) whose limited budgets and fixed itineraries supported films that promoted industry and helped form cohesive interests nationally and locally. Tait explained:

> There was something called the Films of Scotland Committee … about that time, to encourage the use of sponsored films. I really wasn't interested in making promotional films about carpets and tourist attractions, so it was not my cup of tea ... I think that some … of the younger Scottish filmmakers coming on after that did earn their bread and butter and learn the craft of filmmaking through that. A chance for them to go into better things ... [Grierson] had that sort of reputation … of being connected both with documentary and with sponsored film, so … people confused sponsored film with documentaries. (cited in Krikorian 1983b: 2)

Elsewhere she added, 'a sponsor can sponsor any sort of film. It doesn't have to be documentary – it doesn't have to be promotional' (cited in Krikorian 1983d: 7). Tait also explained:

> I was at the [Films of Scotland Committee] meeting of 1956. They explained their constitution … and what they could do and why. … We kept up a connection for a bit, going on parallel lines. John Grierson used to breeze in to 91 Rose Street to see what was happening there; I'd go to their annual shows … I couldn't take the kind of film they wanted seriously; and they maintained that I was being obstinate in going my own way. (cited in Krikorian 1983c: 5)

Indeed, when she approached the Films of Scotland Committee to discuss her films and treatments on shared areas of interest, they were judged as too personal and idiosyncratic for the Committee's more didactic purposes. Tait however recognised that for some filmmakers sponsored filmmaking was a means to an end:

> I think it's very hard for people working in film in Scotland to apply the sort of seriousness to their work because of the things that they're supposed to make to keep themselves in employment. But they're keeping a kind of spark going by … developing their technical abilities, and I'm keeping another spark going by developing my kind of approach to film. (cited in Wilson 1978: 10)

For Tait, this 'spark' involved a more complex approach to filming. She explained that in sponsored films, 'there's no poetry… In poetry something else happens. Hard to say what it is. Presence let's say soul or spirit, an empathy with whatever it is that's dwelt upon, feeling for it to

the point of identification' (cited in Todd & Cook 2004: 10). Leggett confirmed that Tait had hoped to transfer the creative freedom, status and camaraderie she had experienced among filmmakers in Italy to Scotland and to be taken seriously as a professional, independent, local filmmaker:

> Her intention was to earn a living by making films in her own environment like the small Italian companies which produced documentaries chronicling the shift from a largely agricultural economy to a modern industrial one. (1979: 3).

These transformations impacted on Tait's independent work and local film production – albeit in different ways. Where sponsored films presented urban environments as signs of progress and goal-orientated industrialisation, and social relationships as idealised, Tait's open-ended reflective films invited audiences to think about these issues more mindfully.

In the next section I discuss Tait's choice to make film the medium through which to articulate her different perspectives on prevailing socio-cultural discourses.

Tait's Medium of Choice

To become an artist a person must find suitable materials and methods of working which enable them to articulate their vision. These choices are often contingent on what is accessible, affordable, current and allied to a person's principles, aptitude and intuition.

Rose Street (1954), *Happy Bees* (1954), *All These New Relations* (c1955) and *The Drift Back* (1957) were among the last films Tait made to fit with sponsored filmmaking – albeit in more progressive ways. Between 1957-1963 Tait explained, 'I wrote most of the ... poetry in that period … out of translating the Lorcas … from my point of view … those verses lead me to some paintings of the verses, then the painting lead to more films' (cited in Wilson 1978: 17). This marked the beginnings of a deeper engagement with film as the form of expression through which she could articulate her perspectives:

> I had been … writing poetry – studying poetry perhaps more than anything – after I finished *Rose Street* I did attempt to get it taken for cinema or TV, I think I have a letter signed by Lew Grade declining – it doesn't seem possible to sell short films … so that I had, kind of to stop making films of that kind, but in 1963 I started *Where I Am Is Here …* by that time I just felt I wanted to make a film, but there was absolutely no point in making it specifically for a market say, when there wasn't a market, and that the only

> point at all in making a film with your own time, your own equipment … just making one in that way, was to do it on the level of poetry and to be as absolutely serious about making the thing as you possibly could. (cited in Appendix 4 xlvii)

In a 1958 notebook she wrote, 'I wonder if I'll ever write again. And yet, when it's films, I feel I could go on making films for the rest of my life' (cited in Neely 2012: 9). Elsewhere she explained:

> It's not that you're writing it for yourself, or making a film for yourself, I don't see it like that. But you're doing it to your upmost, you know, so that it seemed to me, that film had to be approached at that level, that all the great film makers work on that level. (cited in Wilson 1978: 17)

And in 1959, in an unpublished manuscript:

> There is a kind of poetry which is essentially incomplete. Any attempt to complete and form it to known ends ruins it. It is not slipshod to reverse that incompleteness – that PROMISE. It is the substance of poetry rather than the made thing. … But it's probably a film I'm thinking of, really. (cited in Neely 2016)

Having understood film's potential as a plastic medium, from 1963 experimental and observational filmmaking became the principal method through which Tait was able to make films that articulated her reflections on local life under the conditions of modernity 'on the level of poetry':

> I think the real films [are] still being used as a poet would use a pen or pencil, as a painter paints, as a musician composes. This is the extraordinary thing about film, that you do this with all this paraphernalia around it. (cited in Wilson 1978: 20)

It was the intrinsic qualities in film, technology, sound recordings and the hand-held camera that enabled Tait to 'see' and articulate more clearly the realities she was drawn to:

> I frame it for myself through the viewfinder and see it, you see it differently – especially if you're looking through a lens – it's not just the framing. It's something else you see of looking through the lens – you peer at it more closely, I think, follow it. (Tait cited in Wilson 1978: 22)

David Curtis explains her working method, 'she gathered images with her camera … and she assembled her films with an alertness to each shot's inner rhythms, which she believed would speak directly to the viewer' (1999). Tait explained that she gleaned hidden incidences sounds and occurrences through her method of 'stalking the image' (cited in Appendix 4: xlix). She also explained her selection process as, 'it's these particular stones, it's that stone and that stone

and that stone which is really similar to the way I pick images I suppose. I mean it's that piece of a puddle and surface of water, and so forth' (Tait cited in Appendix 1: iv).

As for the form her films should take, at the start of her film career Tait's familiarity with the short documentary-type films made during and after World War II in Britain was an influential, if not a foundational, format for her oeuvre. Shand observed, 'it is clear that her short films had more in common with the documentary film tradition than she wished to acknowledge' (2007a: 110). Scottish filmmaker and curator Murray Grigor likewise pointed to Tait's alignment with the prevailing documentary movement in Scotland:

> Throughout her life Tait remained defiantly independent and most critical of the sponsored documentary which up until twenty years ago was practically the only way a film could be funded in Scotland. For Tait and her partner, the writer Alex Pirie, the well-crafted short films produced by the Films of Scotland Committee, on which the veteran documentary producer John Grierson sat, were anathema. (1999)

This was because under Grierson's jurisdiction, the Films of Scotland Committees sanctioned and selected films that 'establish[ed] a relatively neutral information flow from state to citizen, educating, informing, instructing the electorate ... about the relationship between the welfare of the citizens and the state's major institutions' (Higson 1995: 182). In conversation with Leggett and Pirie, Tait explained:

> **MT …** Grierson who I suppose, in the first encounter, I saw as being somebody who, at that point, was preparing to associate himself with what was going on in Scotland, to some extent he spoke as if he was going to do a great lot. I showed him some films that were in the making for instance. Hardy[27] came up with him to see *Orquil Burn* – an unfinished *Orquil Burn*. He saw *Rose Street* and thought he would like to use a 5-minute clip out of it for something – a [television] programme that he had which was terribly consistent with 5-minute clips.
> **AP** *A Wonderful World* – or whatever it's called. (cited in Appendix 1: xxiv)

[27] Forsyth Hardy (1910-1994) was an influential figure in Scottish film culture. He was the co-founder of the film magazine *Cinema Quarterly* and the (1932-1935), Edinburgh Film Guild (1929) and the Edinburgh Film Festival (1947) and a founder member of the Scottish Film Council (1934) and the British Film Institute (1933). He wrote books on Scandinavian and Scottish cinema and two volumes on his friend and colleague, John Grierson, *Grierson on Documentary* (1946) and *John Grierson: A Documentary Biography* (1979). Where Grierson was overseer for film in Scotland, Hardy oversaw the production and promotion of over 150 films sponsored by business or public agencies and widely distributed both at home and abroad.

Neely notes that Tait approached Grierson 'to ask if he would include her film portrait of Hugh MacDiarmid in his television series *This Wonderful World* (1957-1966), but she received a response saying that the film was seen to be unsuitable for transmission' (2009: 314). [28]

While in Italy, Tait was attracted to government funded short films that were made on a topic of the filmmaker's choosing, called il cortomettragio. She explained these films 'had a place in Italian cinema at that time. It was a kind of recognised way to get started … something about the short film form appealed to me' (cited in Krikorian 1983c: 3). In Scotland, government and industry sponsors likewise offered generous funding but for more pragmatic documentary-type short films. While not as imaginative as 'il cortomettragio', this enterprise provided opportunities for many aspiring local filmmakers (Blain cited in Dick 1990: 53-70). A BFI survey explains, '[f]or a very long period of time which stretches from well before the war years until the late 1970s, the documentary was almost the only original form of local, non-metropolitan filmmaking on the Celtic fringe' (2009: 36). This report specifically mentions Margaret Tait and Enrico Cocozza as exceptions to this rule since their films deviated from the primary use of the short film in Scotland as 'educational in purpose' (2009: 36). Even so, hoping to make use of Grierson's influence and screen her films through his outlets was an appropriate strategy for Tait because aspects of some of her films intersected with both the form and content of local film production. However, her films challenged the illusion of the stability in standard film production and included ideas about an inner life rather than fully complying with Grierson's directives. Thus, like many artists/filmmakers whose work does not follow current styles, Tait found screening opportunities, financial support and recognition difficult to sustain locally. [29]

[28] See Jo Fox. 2013. 'From Documentary Film to Television Documentaries: John Grierson and This Wonderful World'. *Journal of British Cinema and Television,* 10(3), 498-523.

[29] Tait only received funding for three of her films, *The Drift Back* (1957) produced for £87 and supported by Orkney Education Committee for distribution in their Rural Film Circuit, *Colour Poems* (1974) financed by the Scottish Arts Council's 'filmmaker as artist competition' in 1974 and *Land Makar* (1981) which received funding from The Scottish Arts Council for post-production purposes only.

In relation to this, writing in 1929, Virginia Woolf felt that markers of success as determined by man-made [sic.] benchmarks should not be the prime motivation for women because these depoliticised women's work and assimilated their distinct uses of language(film) into dominant forms of signification, and thus obscured their differing ways of thinking. Woolf called women's non-compliance with standard procedures their 'vows of derision':

> By derision – a bad word, but once again the English language is much in need of new words – is meant that you must refuse all methods of advertising merit, and hold that ridicule, obscurity and censure are preferable, for psychological reasons, to fame and praise. (1993: 205)

Indeed, Tait had decided to withdraw from the more pragmatic mechanisms of local short film production. So, in 1973, when her studio was reclaimed by the council as part of the re-development of Edinburgh, she returned to Orkney and the Highlands to continue making films on her own terms and standards. Pirie suggested that watching Tait's films involved,

> simply being there and watching and waiting and just seeing what happens … how in fact one sees so many different things each time you see the film …
> if people gave themselves to the films, they would get it, nevertheless it is of an order that makes enormous demands on people's thought processes, emotional maturity and sort of spiritual potential. (cited in Appendix 1: vi)

To this end, in the next section I analyse *These Walls* (1974) a film which reflects on the twenty years Tait spent working in her Rose Street studio in Edinburgh prior to her move back to Orkney and the Highlands. It exemplifies her awareness of the film's potential for looking deeper into how we see ourselves in the world as well as documenting our place in it. It also marks Tait's disappointment that collaborating with and contributing to a Scottish film culture on her own terms was an unattainable goal.

Case Study: *These Walls* (Tait 1974)

This 6-minute silent film[30] has no opening credits but the words in the title are repeated at intervals throughout the film forming an internal structure. *AH – THESE WALLS!* appears 30-seconds into the film immediately changing to *AH – THOSE WALLS!* These words are written in

[30] A soundtrack has recently been recovered in the Tait collection at the Tait Collection, Orkney Library and Archive.

Tait's trademark plastic lettering and register links between present and past. *THESE WALLS* are repeated 30-seconds later and *AH – THESE WALLS* re-appears towards the middle of the film. The tangible sense of loss and memories of this studio space is further indicated by the words *BUT THAT WAS LONG AGO* which appear later. Tait closes the film with a shot of the moon in a night sky echoing the scene she opened with giving the film a circular form.

Transience and silence are palpable in panning shots of a patchwork of cards, photos and cuttings on a wall which are intermittently juxtaposed with close-ups of the traces left after their removal. Shots of a chair, an empty table and boxes of equipment waiting to be moved register 'absence' while images of tables and shelves crammed with books and filmmaking paraphernalia acknowledge that time spent developing ideas here will remain as 'presence' even after Tait has left this space. The traces left in her empty studio (figure 32) and glimpses of the outside world through its windows appear at intervals in the film and highlight a sense of solitude and interiority. Through one window (figure 33) Tait films builders, scaffolding and a plaque promoting the sale of 'six luxury flats' which signal the impending changes to a once fertile area via the council's modernisation of the city. This notion of 'progress' poignantly contrasts with the architectural features, rough studio walls and indigenous fixtures and fittings Tait mindfully films inside her studio.

Fig. 32: Tait.1974. *These Walls.*

Fig. 33: Tait. 1974.These *Walls.*

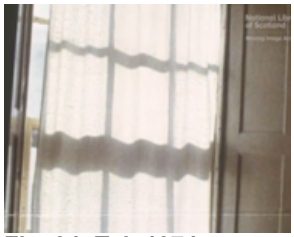

Fig. 34: Tait.1974. *These Walls.*

Fig. 35: Tait.1974. *These Walls.*

A curtained window (figure 34) marks Tait's studio as a private space for introspection and working away from the distractions of the outside world. Another looks out to a blurred space that represents the world Tait would have liked to join had she found commonality and opportunity in Edinburgh (figure 35). Tait films the Council's corporate interjection into her private space without 'preconceptions or prejudices' (Fellini cited in MacCann 1966: 379) in

recognition that transformation is an inevitable part of modernity. The repetition of certain sequences, 'playing' with the words in the film's title, together with her camerawork, montage editing, cuts, pans, and shots that linger for longer than is necessary embody the visual language Tait explores in many of her films.

In *These Walls* Tait also presents her perspectives on time as experiential rather than complicit with the fictional time and suture-editing in popular narrative and standard short films. This suggests that in this film, as in much of her oeuvre, Tait understood time as circular and transitory and that film could convey her perspectives on this. Several writers have identified Tait's deliberation on time and place as central components of her films (Reynolds 2004, Miller 2005, Neely 2017). Indeed, *These Walls* foregrounds the transience and plasticity of time and the significance of place in her filming of the changes imposed on her life by influences beyond her control.

This brings to mind Henri Bergson's (1859-1941) writings on the effect of capitalism, progress and industrialisation on society's experience of time and space. His philosophy influenced many modernist artists who also incorporated experiential time and consciousness in their work, including poet T.S. Eliot, writer Virginia Woolf and painters in the Futurist, Impressionist and Orphists' movements.

In *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness* ([1913] 2012) Bergson explains that changes wrought by modernisation altered people's relationship with time and space, and thus their identity. Increasing mechanisation and the pursuit of abundance impacted on how time and life were experienced. He also suggests that 'modern' time was divided into measurable units (spatial time) via the 24-hour clock and calendars, and experiential time (time durée) which was less conspicuous.

Bergson identified mechanised or clock time as conducive to the rational thinking which existed outside of a person's self-awareness. Under its influence people are easy to regulate and coerce into corporate decisions concerning the greater needs of society, and this helps maintain the status quo in favour of rational principles. This stability is reinforced if people speak

the same language, and indeed watch films which rely on conventional filming techniques and content. The prevalence of mechanical time and uniformly-structured written, visual, and aural texts and language-use made communication and control more effective. But by filming *These Walls* using disjointed sequences, non-static camera work and montage editing, Tait was able to articulate the effect of modernity on her thinking, creativity and internal landscape. And to reflect on the predominance of clock or 'spatial' time on people – and of place, as expendable. As Bergson explains:

> The greater part of the time we live outside ourselves, hardly perceiving anything of ourselves but our own ghost, a colourless shadow which pure duration projects onto a homogenous space. Hence our life unfolds in space rather than time, we live for the external world rather than for ourselves, we speak rather than think, we "are acted" rather than act ourselves. (2012: 231)

Bergson's second model, 'time durée', describes subjective or organic time which permeates Tait's filming of *These Walls*. It occurs when people are absorbed in the 'unmeasured time' which is experienced moment by moment always moving forward such as when children play or artists work. In *Creative Evolution* he wrote,

> to the artist who creates … from the depths of his [sic.] soul, time is no longer an accessory; it is not an interval that may be lengthened or shortened without the content being altered. The duration of his [sic.] work is part and parcel of his [sic.] work. (Bergson [1911] 1983: 341)

Elsewhere he wrote, 'we are free when our acts spring from our whole personality … which one sometimes finds between the artist and his [sic.] work' (2012:172). In *These Walls* Tait suggests that her choices were usurped by the prevailing mechanisms of progress, and that if people had the time and space to work outside the rules of spatial, or clock time, they could cultivate a sense of 'self' unregulated by rational thinking. For Tait, as for Bergson, compliance with many of the conventions of modernity in the public sphere hindered agency, self-knowledge and the potential for people to become autonomous thinking beings. This was particularly difficult for women who had less standing and agency in the material world.

In the next section, I examine how Tait circumvented the barriers that challenged women's equivalence as creative thinkers and practitioners in the public sphere, to become a filmmaker on her own terms within its frames.

Tait's Agency

After leaving her Rose Street studio in Edinburgh, Tait lived in Orkney, Sutherland, West Aith and Firth and had studios in Buttquoy House, Kirkwall and in a converted Victorian church, Orquil Studio in Rendall. Throughout this time she worked intermittently as a locum while painting, writing stories, poems, notebooks, diaries and making films, all of which were perceived as incompatible with prevailing film and literary culture. Poet Rod Mengham is one of many who have expressed disbelief in the lack of recognition of Tait's output, 'Margaret Tait has made little impact on the cultural history of twentieth-century Britain and yet her varied output of films, photographs, poems and stories is both distinguished and compelling' (2007: 39).

In Tait's time, women artists/filmmakers were 'held in such low regard for so long that many of their films have been lost or destroyed' (Foster 1999: xiv) as was the case for Tait. But this did not prevent many from finding ways to sustain their creativity.

In Tait's case, as a well-educated woman of a certain class her success at becoming a doctor and entering this male-dominated profession was an impressive, but feasible achievement. The British Medical Bulletin (cited in Jefferson et al 2015: 5-15) provides a context for this accomplishment:

> Various bars on women studying medicine continued until 1944 when, as a result of sustained public pressure, a government committee decided that public funds would only be made available to those schools that allowed acceptance of a 'reasonable' proportion of women, 'say one fifth'. (Ministry of Health 1944: 99 cited in Elston 1993)

Jefferson adds, '[w]hile this was a positive step in improving women's participation in the public sphere, these recommendations became the basis for quotas that restricted all but the strongest of female candidates from entering medical schools at this time' (2015: 6).

In twentieth-century Britain, women could gain access to the public sphere mainly through roles that were consistent with their perceived propensity for complying with the status quo by working in healthcare, teaching or office work (Rowbotham 1973: 49-61, Spencer 2005: 1-21). Having gained access to the public sphere through their employment positions women had to maintain a form of double-consciousness, as sociologist Bronwyn Davies explains, '[i]n striving to successfully constitute herself within her allocated gender category each woman

takes on the desires made relevant within those contradictory discourses' (cited in Ellis and Flaherty 1992: 55).

To achieve credibility as a filmmaker was even more challenging for women since they additionally had to negotiate socio-cultural frameworks that did not recognise their creativity as significant enough to be included in cultural spheres (Deren 1965: 45-46, Wolff 1990: 67-84, Korsmeyer 2004: 59-83). Griselda Pollock and Rozsika Parker explain that until the late-twentieth century it was commonly accepted that men were 'naturally' predisposed to acquiring higher levels of expertise and more qualified to generate the ideas necessary to maintain a smooth-running society and its standards of proficiency (1981: 1- 49). Consequently, the division of labour was generated by organisations which assumed that women's skills did not reach the same standards as men's. As rarely interrogated signifiers of rational thought and superior action at that time, men had easier access to the skillsets necessary to achieve advantage over establishing meanings and making decisions. Their presence dominated all areas of society and culture, including in the domestic sphere as evident in publications such as *Feeding and Care of Baby* (King 1942) or *The Common-sense Book of Baby and Childcare* (Spock 1957) (Summerfield 1996: 35-52) and in marriage, as documented in *A 1950s Housewife: Marriage and Homemaking in the 1950s* (Hardy 2012).

Thus, in both public and private spheres, women were compelled to 'occupy a different cultural space than that of their male counterparts' (Petrolle and Wexman 2005: 5). 'Different' in this context connotes 'lesser' as Davies explains:

> When I talk about the experience of being 'a woman', I refer to the experience of being assigned to the category female, of being discursively, interactively and structurally positioned as such, and of taking up as one's own those discourses through which one is constituted as female. (cited in Ellis and Flaherty 1992: 54)

The word 'assigned' highlights the arbitrary nature of the gendered attributes allocated to the sexes. It is obvious that so-called 'masculine' qualities of rationality and intellect are evident in women, just as caring and irrationality are qualities observable in men. The difference is, however, that the coercive power of the patriarchy and its underlying binary thinking sustained an ideology which relied on men and women's complicity with their allocated roles in public and

private spheres. Thus, on the surface at least, men and women were ‘seen’ to comply with these hierarchical and structured principles.

Despite these hurdles, some women artists/filmmakers were able to achieve agency through financial autonomy, self-knowledge, access to the skillsets necessary for practising their chosen craft and, as Virginia Woolf advocated, finding ‘a room of one’s own’ ([1929] 1993). Tait eventually gained these requirements by self-funding her training as a filmmaker in Rome and working as a locum until ‘she received a tiny private income in 1960 and could finally finish with medicine altogether’ (Winn 2002 online). She also found studio-spaces (a room of her own) and a supportive partner in Pirie. Thus, as a woman of a certain disposition, ability and tenacity, Tait had/had devised the means to develop her film practice independently.

To demonstrate Tait’s awareness of the ways women were re-presented on film during and after World War II and to establish the foundations for her filmic ‘gaze’, in the next section I show how Tait looked beneath the surface of appearances in dominant film productions to film the everyday occurrences she found there, from her female-centred perspective.

Women, the Documentary Film Short and the Female Gaze

In the early to mid-twentieth century, short documentary films observed the format that ‘what is seen on the cinema screen appears to the spectator to be constructed in much the same way as its referent, the “real world”’ (Kuhn 1993: 131). The relationship between the sign and its referent was ‘naturalised’ in popular films through steady male-point-of-view cameras, male voice-overs, synchronised sound-image connections and cause and effect narratives. In Great Britain in Tait’s time, these techniques underpinned the predominant use of film as a vehicle to entertain and inform audiences in accessible and enjoyable ways, while also providing moral and ethical principles, and a sense of stability.

In the 1930s-1940s, British short-film sponsors such as the General Post Office, Empire Marketing Board, British Gas, Coke Company, Shell Oil, the Crown Film Unit and the BBC’s

Ministry of Information employed women as scriptwriters, co-producers and editors.[31] However, their contributions were often masked and their names excluded in film credits (Low 1985, Fox 2013).[32] Additionally, their responsibilities in the industry largely reiterated the depictions of women in the films they produced, that is as imperceptible and/or supportive (Lay 2002: 39-54).

Ruby Grierson (1904-1940) and Marion Grierson (1907-1998) (sisters of John Grierson), Jill Craigie (1911-1999), Budge Cooper (1913-1983) and Kay Mander (1915-2013) are examples of women who gained a measure of visibility in the national film industry making films mostly about childcare, domesticity, nursing and housing, the very roles that women were perceived as 'naturally' equipped to occupy.[33] But because these filmmakers were employed by subsidised film organisations, they were obliged to use orthodox cinematic conventions for their films in order to pass the sponsors' criteria. These included predominant male voice-overs which gave 'a sense of credibility from qualities such as detachment, neutrality, disinterestedness, or omniscience' (Nichols 2010b: 169). Thus, the form and content of the films women contributed to guided audiences towards the same generic outcomes as their male colleagues. It left scant space for them to include perspectives on domestic issues which they, and many wo/men who watched these films, may have been more conversant with.[34]

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[31] The General Post Office (GPO) film unit ran from 1933-1940 it then became the Crown Film Unit under the control of the Ministry of Information. The Empire Marketing Board (EMB) 1926-1933 was moved to the GPO due to cuts in government funding. It was later reorganised into the Crown Film Unit under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Information.

[32] *Their Finest* (Scherfig 2016), tells the story of a woman scriptwriter working for the Ministry of Information in the 1940s. It demonstrates how this government establishment did not acknowledge the contributions of women working in the film industry at that time. An article on this can be found online. Available at: http://www.moidigital.ac.uk/blog/moi-films-division-and-their-finest/ [accessed 2 June 2017].

[33] Examples of films by women who were also pioneering filmmakers within these frames in terms of interview techniques, interior reflections of their female protagonists and methods of telling women's stories include within the parameters of the dominant ideology are: *London Wakes Up* (Ruby Grierson 1936), *Six Foods for Fitness* (Ruby Grierson 1940), *Beside the Seaside* (Marion Grierson 1935), *Around the Village Green* (Marion Grierson, 1937), *Highland Doctor* (Kay Mander 1943), *Homes for the People* (Kay Mander 1945), *Children of the Ruins* (Jill Craigie1948), *To Be a Woman* (Jill Craigie 1951).

[34] Ruby Grierson (uncredited) was the instigator of ground-breaking interview techniques which encouraged ordinary people to speak of their situations in the iconic film *Housing Problems* (1935). It was her idea to make unscripted interviews which enabled genuine testimony by ordinary women to emerge. She is famously alleged to have said: 'It's your chance to tell the b – – – – – s what it's really like to live in a slum'. However, the conversations in the screenshot appear stilted and formal, perhaps, because of the class difference between filmmaker's received English voice-over and their protagonists. Rather than talking freely about the conditions in which the people they filmed people lived, the film confirms corporate issues regarding slum conditions and the family unit. See also Sarah Neely.

I am not negating the importance of motherhood, nor of information films regarding family-life and social welfare, particularly considering research that reveals the crucial importance of the war and of maternal care in sustaining the population in Scotland (Devine 2006: 523-542) and elsewhere at that difficult time. Neither am I denying that close analysis of the documentary films made by and about women's roles during and after World War II were necessary and/or could reveal alternative readings (Neely 2014b). My argument is that in Tait's time standardised films 'naturalised' the hierarchical division of labour between the sexes. Popular film and the media correspondingly enunciated audiences into ideological and essentialist discourses which linked women to welfare, domesticity and child-care, and men to industry, defending the country and making decisions – despite some blurring of these boundaries in the material world.[35]

Sociologist Penelope Summerfield (1989, 1996) explains that images of selfless mothers and loyal housewives during and after the War played a pivotal role in the recovery of social and economic strength in Britain. Popular media outlets encouraged audiences to conform to gender-specific behaviour to present a cohesive façade to the general population at a difficult time (Harper 1996, 2000, Lant 1991, Frank 1982).[36] Re-presentations which upheld 'women-as-signs' (Cowie 1978) of nurturing and selflessness were the linchpin of the nuclear family,

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2014. 'Sisters of Documentary: The influence of Ruby Grierson and Marion Grierson on Documentary in the 1930s'. *Media Education Journal* (55), 28-31 for an account of Ruby and Marion Grierson.

[35] Linguist Emile Benveniste used the term 'enunciation' when theorising the intersubjective processes of speech (1971). Film theorists such as Christian Metz (1991) and Annette Kuhn (1984) adopted the term to explain the complexity of film spectator relations. They suggest that the film spectator is both the enunciator (subject making sense of the film text) and the enunciated (subject being situated in the film text). In avant-garde, realist and counter-cultural films these two positions are kept separate. Christian Metz (1991) argued that most cinematic modes of address mask this enunciation by implying no explicit addresser or addressee. The dominant strategy in popular narrative films is to suture the audience into the text by not drawing attention to the cinematic apparatus through seamless editing, point of view shots, unchallenging dialogue etc. This leads to the mis-recognition that narrative content seems to unfold 'naturally'. Annette Kuhn explains how this filmic strategy particularly relates to female audiences in women's films (1993: 49-53).

[36] Feature-length films such as *Mrs. Miniver* (Wyler 1942), *Went the Day Well* (Cavalcanti 1942), *Millions Like* Us (Gilliat and Launder 1943), *Mildred Peirce* (Curtiz 1945), *All That Heaven Allows* (Sirk 1955), *Tea and Sympathy* (Minelli 1957), these narratives explore the situations audiences were confronting during and after World War II. These include lone parenting, loss, infidelity, pulling together for the war effort and the inclusion of women in the workplace. See Gledhill (1987) for a comprehensive collection of papers on the links between the representations of women and the films of the 1920s and 1950s in Britain and the USA.

(micro). They also maintained the status quo and stability in society (macro). Furthermore, representations of women's complicity with the division of labour masked the extent of their participation in the war effort. For, as well as mothers and housewives, many single women over twenty-five, and later married women, were employed in skilled and decision-making roles throughout the war years, albeit at much lower rates of pay. This 'reality' was underplayed in information films.[37] Under the emergency circumstances of World War II, many women acquired skillsets, independence, economic awareness, and personal insights which could potentially lead to alternative life-choices and aspirations. But after the War, rather than supplying measures whereby people could sustain newfound skills and resolve their own situations, 'normalised' social structures resumed. Child-care and other facilities that had been provided to assist the war effort were closed and women were encouraged to return to family life, which many found difficult and unfulfilling. Men were also encouraged to return to the workplace and resume familial responsibilities which many found equally difficult and unfulfilling. But without alternative images, or discourses, that could re-present other ways of being (together) or offer alternative possibilities or opportunities, most people had little choice but to identify with their on-screen images and comply with the aspirations and narratives in the information-type shorts as produced by Ministry of Information films for example, and in feature-length films such as *Brief Encounter* (Lean 1945), *Imitation of Life* (Sirk 1959) and *The Children's Hour* (Wyler 1961). All of which contained similar underlying ethics and discourses. This situation continued well into the twentieth century, as Alison Oram explains:

> Although women's traditional sphere of influence, the home, was undermined during the war, the connection between femininity and family life was strengthened as an iconic representation of the future for which the nation was fighting. During the war, social issues typically gendered as feminine, such as evacuation, housing and welfare, were pushed higher up the political agenda, and this fostered much of the reworking of the idea … of a complementary feminine citizenship for women in which they contributed to the wider community through their roles as mother and carers. (cited in Gledhill and Swanson 1996: 55)

[37] A list of films made by the Ministry of Information regarding women's contribution to the war effort and be found, [online]. Available at: https://www.britishpathe.com/workspaces/ajohnen/ww2-women-s-role [accessed 13 June 2017].

Rowbotham (1973: 49-66) reveals that up until the 1970s, the nuclear family remained an ideological ambition and expectation for British citizens. It was also an economic unit which the patriarchy depended on for stability and growth and was thus crucial for the continued maintenance of the status quo at that time.

While not denying the importance of the nuclear family, particularly given the trauma and turmoil after two world wars, nor that motherhood is a central and pleasurable role and identity for many women, it is an option unavailable to all women, either by choice or circumstance. Furthermore, the nuclear family is not always the best or only way to socialise children. Fluid and open-ended ideas such as these permeate Tait's home and other films, which act as points of reflection rather than prescriptive documents.

Interestingly, during and after World War II, amateur home-movies became increasingly popular through affordable film equipment. It enabled some families (and artists see Chapter Three of this thesis) to use film document and screen their own home lives away from the public gaze (Nicholson 1997: 35-44, Citron 1999, Moran 2002). Visual anthropologist Richard Chalfen notes that in many instances, the form and content of most home-movies were un/consciously influenced by the 'transient messages that have been produced through public symbol systems for mass distribution to large, heterogeneous anonymous audiences' (1987: 8) through cinema and television. It was often the case that home and professional filmmakers un/consciously emulated the pre-conceptions and social behaviour absorbed from watching popular films of all types, as just described.

Popular magazines endorsed these perceptions. For example, a 1939 edition of *Women's Home Companion* proposed ideas for structuring home-movies for a competition, suggesting 'such titles as 'A Day in our Home', 'The Sunday Motor Trip' and 'The Saturday Afternoon Picnic'. The writer uncritically assumed that narrative could control, maintain and unify the activities of the home' (Zimmermann 1995a: 66). These projects perpetuated notions of idealised family life from perspectives that were often directed by generic/male gazes.

In *Home Movies and Other Necessary Fictions* (1998), Michelle Citron examines the influence of the dominant 'male gaze' in home-movies. She discovered that it was mostly male family members who had control over who and what should be filmed and thus the/ir 'male gaze' directed what constituted (representations of) private family life:

> Most often it is the father that holds the camera and peers through the lens. … Dad has near total control. … Dad must edit in camera, constantly making choices of what to film. … Technology, as we all know, is historically the province of men. (1998: 11)

Accordingly, 'the image often reproduces the power dynamic existing outside the frame' (1998: 13). Citron's close analysis of her own family's home-movies reveals that these are often more complex than a straightforward documentation of domestic life. Viewing them later in life can sometimes prompt memories that are at odds with the original filming. These include controlling power relations, partiality and behaviour that differed from those presented by, or performed for, the camera.[38]

Amateur film historian Patricia R. Zimmermann observed that as well as recording family life, home-movies and screenings provided potential sites of resistance by offering filmmakers the possibility of representing family life in ways that countered 'the fantasies of nuclear family representations' (1997: 74). A close analysis of the differences between experience (private) and representations in cinemas and the media (public) reveals that Tait's home films echo Zimmermann's observation. It is thus in the gaps between the production and reception of filmed re-presentations of family life that Tait negotiated differing and open-ended reflections regarding (the representation of) women's roles in the private sphere. Her way of filming her own extended family, and children generally, suggests she understood that motherhood and the nuclear family provide/d the nurturing needed to sustain humanity. However, in keeping with her ability to make films which 'conceive difference without opposition' (Owens cited in Foster 1983:

[38] In much of his work, filmmaker Martin Arnold (b 1959) deconstructs classic feature films to empty them of the ideology embedded in these filmed representations of the nuclear family unit and the American dream. By experimenting with film classics and re-appropriating the ethics of this era, Arnold opens the gaps between the film's frames by instantaneously repeating the frames in such a way that the ideology in the film becomes forbidding, and aspects of the family unit that are often repressed are uncovered. For example, *Passage L'acte* (1993) reveals the tension and underlying aggression in the traditional American nuclear family as portrayed in the film classic film drama *To Kill a Mockingbird* (Mulligan 1962).

62), she moots the idea that other forms of family kinship and nurturing children are possible and can/do exist. Her home films can therefore be considered as part of a deconstructive cinema which,

> is always, so to speak, casting a sideways look at dominant cinema. The term "counter cinema'", which is in fact often understood to be synonymous with deconstruction, coveys this sense of conscious opposition very well. (Kuhn 1994: 156)

In her home films (and others which I discuss later in this thesis) Tait thus 'countered' or tested, the idealised 'woman as sign' (Cowie 1978) of the complicity and selflessness that permeated audiences' consciousness via popular film and the media at that time.

In the following section, I provide an evaluation of Tait's home films which demonstrate her reflections on motherhood and nurturing. While on the surface these films appear to comply with the codes and conventions of the film category 'amateur' and 'home' filmmaking, which more readily document family life, other more complex issues can be gleaned through close analysis of her methods of filming.

Case Study: Tait's Home Films and Filming of Children

In *Happy Bees* (1954), *All These New Relations* (c1955) and *Splashing* (1966) Tait engaged with the women-as-signs-of-motherhood that dominated the media in the 1950s-1960s. In them she films regular childhood events such as playing, welcoming new siblings, eating, first days at school (Zimmermann 1995: 112-142) in ways that capture her small relations as autonomous, self-regulating beings largely unframed by the nuclear family triad. By filming them this way Tait considered the biological determinism that underpinned wo/men's primary role as mothers and fathers in mainstream media productions, while simultaneously retaining her awareness of the importance of 'home' in people's lives. She supports this contradiction by filming her young relations as simultaneously independent of, yet close to their families.

In *All These New Relations* Tait used home-movie production aesthetics such as the 'soundtrack' of the technology, no editing, off-balanced framing, flickering surfaces and variable

focus. At the end of the film she scratched ‘Love from Margaret’ into the black leader as if to present a gift to her family from her perspective as a loving aunt and cognizant filmmaker.

At first glance, the film appears like any other so-called amateur home-movie – a collection of erratically-framed black-and-white sequences of endearing young children. But closer examination reveals that Tait countered the ideologies presented in standard documentaries, home-movies and popular narratives regarding the family unit at that time. For example, there is only one shot of a mother nursing a baby and one of a woman knitting, and in the few mother-and-child shots in this film, only parts of the mother appear on screen. Tait’s minimal register of ‘mother-and-child’ in this film affirms the skill of ‘home’ work by women and the importance of mothering, while simultaneously implying that this role does not necessarily (need to) dominate or demarcate the lives of (all) women. She thus implies that motherhood may not lead to fulfilment for all women and that other aspects of their persona may be/are equally important for them and society.

Accordingly, most of the 21-minute film *All These New Relations* comprises a collection of close and medium shots of her small relations engaged in events that typify young lives. Tait draws attention to the curiosity and perverseness in children when left to their own devices. Occasionally, a child might look at the camera as an object of interest rather than something they should pose for, but often the children are unaware of being filmed.

Tait’s reference to the autonomy of children-as-a-group-in-process is implied via shots of unsupervised older siblings entertaining babies, and small groups of toddlers playing, chatting, taking risks and in scenes where small children invent their own rules with toys and everyday paraphernalia, thus signifying, perhaps, the potential in this younger generation for forming new social rubrics. By framing her small relations as autonomous, individuals absorbed in activities devoid of constant visible adult supervision, Tait suggests that maternal bonds, family and home life are important components of, but not the quintessential element in, the process of becoming. She intimates too that wider influences such as other people, extended family

members and the environment in which children develop, also contribute to nurturing and 'forming' them.

In *All These New Relations* – and in her other home films – Tait again evokes notions of Bergson's 'time durée' which provides possibilities beyond conventional mechanical structures including organised play. Although Bergson does not specifically mention children, his observation of artists is analogous with the experience of children who, like artists, are often absorbed in worlds of their own rather than another's making. In her distinctive filming of her young relations, Tait also points to the potential in 'nurtured autonomy' for placing the next generation in good standing for their/the future.

Neely notes that Tait thought children would react more favourably to film experimentation and that an openness to creativity was 'a characteristic of childhood' (2016: 258). Indeed, some of Tait's home films are captured from a child's point of view. This signposts Tait's awareness that home-movies typically 'represent the parent's memories, not the child's' (Berger cited in Citron 1998: 11). This is consistent with John Berger's notion that 'the private photograph … remains surrounded by the means from which it was severed … a memento of a life being lived' (cited in Citron 1998: 21) and thus become totems rather than accounts.

Tait had no children of her own yet her concern for their well-being is maternal and inclusive. [39] This is clear in her filming of her nephews and nieces and Pirie's two children who often visited at weekends and in school holidays:

> I must say that Margaret was wonderful. She took them in and got to know them and was loving with them and the rest of it – at no time did she bring up the question – of whether – it was her or them – I mention[ed] it – but it never came up. … Margaret was engaging with them and learning from them and utilising certain things – a lovely little film called *Splashing*. (Pirie cited in Appendix 3: xlii)

Splashing, is a 4-minute black-and-white home-film of Pirie's children and Tait's nephew playing 'unsupervised' with a tub of water in their garden in the 1960s (figures 36-48).[40] Tait playfully

[39] In an interview for LUX, Sarah Neely said that Lucy Reynolds 'didn't realise that Margaret Tait did not have children. She said she assumed from the films, the relationships she had with children, that she must have had children' (2015).

[40] Tait hoped this film might be financially viable and entered it in a local competition of films made for children on the topic of summer holidays (Neely 2017 104 and 257). Films for and about, children were a popular topic for amateur

reverses a sequence in which the three youngsters run through a garden gate into the landscape and back to the home as if to connote the sheer enjoyment of living in this place/space and as somewhere they might (wish to) return to. It also suggests that childhood experiences endure in our psyches as memories of times and places, and that this perhaps colours our future.

Fig. 36: Tait.1966. *Splashing*.

Fig. 37: Tait 1966. Splashing

Fig. 38: Tait 1966. *Splashing*.

Tait's affinity with children's openness to all that surrounds them is also indicated in *Happy Bees* (figures 39- 44).

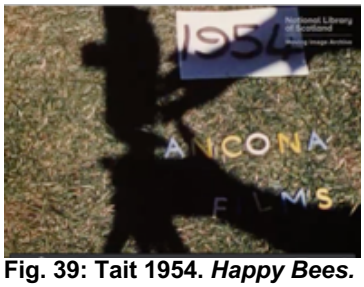

Fig. 39: Tait 1954. *Happy Bees.*

Fig. 40: Tait 1954. *Happy Bees.*

Fig. 41: Tait 1954. *Happy Bees.*

Fig. 42: Tait 1954. *Happy Bees.*

Fig. 43: Tait 1954. *Happy Bees.*

Fig. 44: Tait 1954. *Happy Bees.*

filmmakers. The 'family film' was also a category in film competitions and festivals in Scotland, such as The Glasgow Amateur Film Festival (1934-1980s).

Opening shots of this home film capture her hands starting the camera via her shadow on the grass (figure 39). By including her 'self 'as aunt and filmmaker in the film's frame, Tait is establishing that this film is also about her and that she too once was, perhaps still is, a 'Happy Bee'. But also, that she was involved in the nurturing of the children in her extended family. To support this interpretation, on the soundtrack Tait and a child can be heard engaging in a conversation in dialect and child-talk that only they seem privy to as their hands arrange brightly coloured plastic letters to form the film's title on the grass.

Later in the film, the sound of an upbeat local Scottish reel increase as, the camera moves to the flora and fauna of the Highlands. The dark tones of the bottle green foliage and dark pink and lilac flora are strangely unsettling (figure 41). They refer perhaps to the shadows that hover beneath idealised notions of nature, sunny days and happy memories.

In keeping with her awareness of place and environment as equally important in the formation of subjectivity and identity, Tait dedicates half of *Happy Bees* to filming the children at home and the other half to filming the wider landscape in which they are nurtured. Shots of the sea, sky, rocks, marram grass, heather and wild ponies allegorically link the children with 'natural' environments independent of socio-political restrictions. The perspectives offered in this film provides an opportunity for audiences to consider wider influences on children and the adults they become/became. Tait's soft dialect voice on the soundtrack ends the film, 'the children are not far away, the children live here' may resonate with Tait's childhood experiences in Orkney as somewhere she looked forward to returning after periods away from home. It may also signal, a commercial opportunity since 'the family film' was a popular category in local film competitions and festivals at that time. But more compellingly, it suggests that the energy and memories of time spent in these landscapes will endure even when the children are not physically present.

In *The Poetics of Reverie*, Gaston Bachelard suggests that when recalling childhood memories, what we are seeking is to 'envision a state of being in which our belief in the world is first constituted' (1969: 100). But this memory is not always auspicious or accurate. In *The*

Poetics of Space (1964: 90-104), he uses the term 'nest' to refer to an instinct to construct or imagine shelter, '[i]t takes us back to our childhood or, rather, to a childhood; to the childhoods we should have had. For not many of us have been endowed by life with the full measure of its cosmic implications' (1964: 93).

Tait's distinctive ways of filming children demonstrate her awareness of how the 'cosmic implications' of childhood impact on subjectivity. Her choice to film children largely independent of the family triad in her home films may stem from her boarding school days and prolonged absences from her family. It might also explain the importance of urban and rural landscapes in her films in relation to everyday people when reflecting on their/her place in the world. Somewhere between the mismatch of subjective experience in the material world and the ideological expectations embedded in governing forms of representations is where Tait feels identity and memory lie.

Filming and photographing the connections between children and their environment in ways that consider a child's point of view, is a (maternal) theme that women artists have embrace/d. It again links Tait's film practice with other women's work and ways of thinking. Photographer Jo Spence (1934-1992), for example, captured the self-governing ethos of children in housing estates and playgrounds in London in her project *Adventure Playgrounds: Photographing Housing Communities and Children's Playgrounds* (1973-5). Like Tait, she pointed to the propaganda in films used to promote social housing and perspectives of the 'family' in ways that did not always match the experience of those they filmed. In *Beyond the Family Album* (1979), Spence presents ideas which break the conventions of traditional family photography by drawing attention to the rights of children which are often overlooked by governing edicts, and 'idealised' photographs and films of children, mothers and families in popular outlets.

Tait also dealt with these ideas in *Rose Street* (1956), set in an urban backstreet in Edinburgh where she was living at the time. She films the adults and children in this area as if from their perspectives, capturing their voices and street sounds on the soundtrack to present a

holistic sense of place. Her filming arguably forms a visual dialogue with the representations of poverty, motherhood and childhood in the iconic Ministry of Information films of the 1930s and 1940s. These include *Housing Problems* (Arthur Elton and Edgar Anstey 1935) (figures 45-46) and *Homes for the People* (Kay Mander 1945) (figure 47) .

Fig. 45: Elton & Anstey 1935. *Housing Problems.* (Ruby Grierson uncredited assistant)

Fig. 46: Elton & Anstey 1935. *Housing Problems*. (Ruby Grierson uncredited assistant)

Fig. 47: Mander 1945. *Homes for the People.*

Housing Problems (1935) was made by the Realist Film Unit under John Grierson for the British Commercial Gas Association. Historian Andrew Higson explains that, as a 'sponsored by a commercial gas organisation, it becomes a film celebrating the role of British gas companies in aiding slum clearances and the construction of new housing equipped with modern gas appliances' (1997: 199-200).

Homes for the People filmed ten years later was commissioned by Mander's husband's new production company, *Basic Films,* for the 1945 Labour Party election campaign. It was sponsored by the leftist newspaper the *Daily Herald* to present the government's reconstruction policies 'from a woman's perspective'. But Mander's 'female gaze' reinstates the signs-of-motherhood and welfare-dependency that generally appear in promotional films of this type. Moreover, as a sponsored film, her methods comply with the codes and conventions of standard information films and their staged scenarios. Her imagery is taken from families on composite housing estates across London. This is not to dismiss the importance of commercial films of this type and the messages they contain, but they do not present the diversity of individual families and communities within the specific circumstances of a time and place.

Arguably, this is a gap Tait's 'actuality' filming of *Rose Street* fills, even though twenty years later.

In keeping with her ability to conceive difference without opposition, Tait extends the discourses in the earlier sponsored films by observing and filming local children actively playing, cycling and running errands in a community, and place, which is not London-centric.

Fig. 48: Tait 1956. *Rose Street.*

Fig. 49: Tait 1956. *Rose Street.*

Fig. 50: Tait 1956. *Rose Street.*

Fig. 51: Tait 1956. *Rose Street.*

Fig. 52: Tait 1956. *Rose Street.*

Fig. 53: Tait 1956. *Rose Street.*

Her choice to film the scant supervision and autonomy of the local children she observed near her studio is consistent with her filming of her small relations, albeit in very different circumstances (figures 48-53). But it does reiterate the idea that childhood is contingent on the circumstances of communities, families and individuals who raise children in specific locations, times and ways. Against a background of inner-city neglect, *Rose Street* presents a place in which children played an active part in their community, formed alliances and, like their adult relations, adapted to circumstances over which they had little control. They are thus filmed as part of the fabric of the environment in which they are nurtured and as connected to each other, their community and their families.

Additionally, Tait's actuality filming of Rose Street also reveals that despite campaigns to fund and improve housing conditions, as advocated in the earlier sponsored films, upgraded

living environments had yet to reach parts of 1950s Scotland. Historian Thomas Devine (2006: 527-542) notes:

> Until the Second World War and beyond, most Scottish families were reared in very cramped space. … By 1951 there had been some improvement, but still a little less than a third of all Scottish dwellings had no more than two rooms. As late as 1951, 43 % of all Scottish households did not have access to a fixed bath. ... A third of Scottish households shared a WC in 1951. (2006: 530)[41]

When set against specific historical contexts, demographic documentation and the staging of children and families within the party-political guise of propaganda films, Tait's differing observations of cite-specific communities point to the fact that such circumstances endure, by making their ways of being visible. Where 1930s-1940s state-funded films present mothers-and-children as symbiotic and linked to welfarism and dependency on government subsistence, in *Rose Street* Tait combines the film aesthetics of home and information films with the political connotations of Italian Neorealism to film local children as spirited and vulnerable beings adapting to circumstances within specific historical contexts. As Peter Todd notes:

> One of the things I find very interesting about her work is that she has filmed these things quite to deal with times and changes, but they are not sentimental, and they are open to a more meditative way of viewing, which I think people can bring their own interpretation to. (cited in Miller 2005)

Tait's films are also contingent on her awareness of the subjectivity of the people she filmed and arguably her use of film technology counters, or forms dialogues with the ideological form and content of sponsored film production.

In the next section I highlight Tait's negotiations with symbolic or dominant forms of signification. I also show how women's access to language and film in Tait's time impacted on the form and content of their work. This informs the issues I discuss in subsequent chapters

[41] A local group called the Dawn Cine Group (est. 1954) also made films that drew attention to the living conditions of people in Glasgow. *Let Glasgow Flourish* (1956), for example, is a 12-minute dramatised propaganda film focusing on housing conditions in the Merrylee housing scheme.

Tait's Feminist Vision and Relationship to Language

The symbolic throughout my thesis refers to dominant forms of signification which overlook or supress aspects of the feminine. This typically includes nurture, nature, poetry, the natural elements and the illogical.

It is interesting to note that in *All These New Relations* there is only one shot of an adult male, in *Happy Bees* there is a single medium shot of Tait's father fishing from a small boat and in *Splashing* there are no adults at all.[42] Thus, Tait's home films and films about children are predominantly set outside the symbolic law of logic and reason which permeate dominant film productions and the media. By providing scant evidence of adult males and selecting a distinct way of framing images of nurturing mothers in her home films, Tait draws attention to socialisation – particularly of women.

Following Freud's studies of sexuality in the early twentieth-century, Lacan argued that the acquisition of logo-and phallocentric language-use sustains the symbolic order and is fundamental to the effective running of society. On entering the symbolic order, children must navigate their place in society by taking up the gendered subject positions that provide them with a sense of stability and identity. This process involves loosening contact with the mother and the domestic sphere and moving towards the rational language-use and thinking (of the father) which predominate in the public sphere. Here children recognise that the male figure connotes status and kudos and that, as a signifier of law and common-sense order, he metaphorically represents the organising principle from the masculine perspectives which sustain the status quo (Lacan 2007: 575-585). By saying 'I am a boy' or 'I am a girl', children become speaking 'subjects' in the process of taking up a position as male or female in language, culture and society, as sanctioned by Freud, and later Lacan:

> Indeed, what Freud's discovery brings us back to is the enormity of the order into which we have entered into which we are, as it were, born a second time, in leaving behind the state, which is rightly known as the infants' state, for it is without speech – namely, the symbolic order constituted by language, and the moment of the concrete universal

[42] Neely suggests that Tait regretted not making a film portrait of her father but, in a way she had, 'It's all there, really in the one shot in *Happy Bees*' (Tait in a notebook recently added to the Tait Collection, Orkney Library and Archive, cited in Neely 2017: 90).

> discourse and of all the furrows opened by it at this time, in which we had to find lodging. (Lacan 2007: 371)

As they move towards adulthood, children's choices are governed by the binary ways of thinking which organise their life, and both (all) sexes become un/consciously aware of the repercussions of this. Toril Moi explains this premise from Lacan's perspective:

> When the child learns to say, 'I am' … this is equivalent to admitting that it has taken up its allotted place in the Symbolic Order and given up the claim to imaginary identity with all other positions. The speaking subject that says, 'I am' is in fact saying 'I am he (she) who has lost something' – and the loss suffered is the loss of the imaginary identity with the mother and with the world. (1985: 99)

Lacan also argued, 'woman does not exist' (Lacan 1975: 7) and 'there is no such thing as woman' (Lacan 1975: 72) except as 'other' to the Law of the Father. Ben Tyrer explains that Lacan does not mean this literally, rather he is suggesting, 'there is no generalised category or signifier within the symbolic order capable of defining the set of woman' (cited in Henderson 2012: 133). In response to Lacan's view that 'woman' is excluded from the symbolic as an entity and is not perceived as a speaking subject, Irigaray, a one-time student of Lacan, writes:

> Woman does not exist'? In the eyes of discursivity. … Whence that entity that has been struck dumb, but that is eloquent in its silence: the *real*. And yet that woman – thing speaks. But not 'like', not 'the *same'* not 'identical with itself' not to any x etc. Not a 'subject' unless transformed by phallocratism. It speaks 'fluid', even in the paralytic underside of that economy. (1985b: 111) [43]

Within this frame Tait's 'home films' can be seen to relate to, or anticipate, aspects of the Second and Third Wave feminist resistance to the view, maintained by Lacan in the 1970s, that women's access to symbolic language-use is different in ways that are not equivalent to men's. Lacan's view that, '[w]oman begins to function in the sexual relationship only as mother' (1975: 35) was taken up in the academic world of the French feminists (c 1970s-1980s) (Marks and de Courtivron 1981) and in the artworld by artists such as Mary Kelly (b. 1941). In her art-installation *Post-Partum Document* (1973-1977), for example, using established forms of

[43] Irigaray studied under Lacan at the Ecole Freudienne de Paris and was expelled from her teaching positions after the publication of her second PhD thesis *Speculum of the Other Woman* in 1974 [1985b]. Here she presents a collection of essays which critique the exclusion of women from Western philosophy and psychoanalytic theory and problematises the subject/object, man/woman relationships to consider the existence of two co-existing subjects.

signification differently, Kelly explored Lacan's belief in the supremacy of the metaphoric phallus as the prime signifier in socio-culture by cataloguing her son's entry into the language of the symbolic order from birth to nursery school. She recorded her child's transitions through the pre-symbolic language of lullabies, baby talk and nursery rhymes towards the rational language-acquisition of the symbolic that full-time education represents. Kelly wrote down the sounds and words as her son acquired them alongside other childhood observations and paraphernalia and recorded her own reactions to this process. Over the course of these events she became aware that her role as 'mother' became increasingly diminished.

For her artwork/installations, she formally arranged the material she had gathered in sequences of frames comprising mixed media images and written texts and placed them in galleries. In her review of Kelly's installation, *Post-Partum Document,* Laura Mulvey wrote of the experiences in this socialising process as, 'loss … as the child takes his first steps to social independence. The completeness of the two is broken as the father as authority and the nursery school introduce the child to another world of "law and culture"' (1976: 2).

In this situation, female children must 'choose' whether to maintain their identification with the mother and forgo the possibilities the father represents through his more respected place in the symbolic order. In this process the mother is perceived as less effective and on the margins of rational logocentric (and phallocentric) speech and language-use. As female autonomy and independence were difficult to negotiate in the twentieth century, many girls on becoming women gained access to superior male standing primarily by 'choosing' to become wives, mothers and assistants. They were thus perceived as 'naturally' inclined towards occupying these positions in the public sphere.

There is a sequence in *All These New Relations* (1955) in which Tait seems aware of this dilemma for girls. Most children in this film are small but in one sequence, Tait films her niece aged about eleven in plaits and school uniform, playing with flowers and on a swing in her back garden prior to entering the symbolic order that school signifies. As the girl leaves her swing to go to school she looks back at Tait/the camera before climbing up several large steps

towards the latched door that leads from the garden (domestic sphere) into the street (public sphere). This sequence is filmed from a low angled medium shot making the steps seem difficult for the girl to navigate. The satchel on her back and the awkwardness of opening the door amplify the idea that entry to this world is a hike or a struggle. On reaching the boundary between the domestic and public spheres that the garden door represents, she looks back to her aunt and waves goodbye. Then, as Tait moves to a close-up, she repeats the shots of the girl climbing the steps to the back door and after a final wave goodbye, she closes it. The repetition of the sequence of climbing the steps, is reminiscent of Maya Deren's filming in *Meshes of the Afternoon* (1943) which has the effect of altering 'reality' to include un/conscious thoughts. It is also the only time an off-centre close-up is used in this home film. It perhaps signals Tait's un/conscious awareness of the choices her niece must make as she negotiates her place in language, school and later when 'choosing' what she is to become or how she is to 'be' in society.[44]

This sequence resonates with autobiographical aspects of Tait's experiences in an all-female educational institution as a child, then as an adult when she challenged society's expectations of women by becoming autonomous and independent as a doctor and a filmmaker despite the symbolic order's constraints on women at that time. Tait's nonconformist approach to filmmaking and her focus on details such as 'home' and 'locality', arguably thwarted her entry into Scottish film culture and its symbolic authority on her own terms.

Like many women/feminists Tait was not dismissive of men, only the institutions which obligated a 'masculine' bias that overlooked the abilities of women (and other social groups). Her films thus link with feminist artists who responded to Lacan's treatise that, from his perspective, women's access to language was from a position of disadvantage:

[44] French philosopher Louis Althusser (1918-1990) writes of the ideologies that are embedded in socio-cultural practices and organisations in capitalist economies. In *On the Reproduction of Capitalism* (1968), Althusser identifies Ideological State Apparatus (2014: 232-272) as an invisible set of practices through which people are interpellated into certain behaviour and values. They internalise these ways of being through the dominant ideologies that are disseminated through the family, church, political systems and cultural pursuits such as the arts and literature. It is so effective that people believe the ideas are their own. He says of this 'concert' of ideological apparatus: 'one … certainly has the dominant role, although hardly anyone lends an ear to its music: it is silent! This is school' (2014: 251).

> There is only woman as excluded by the nature of things which is the nature of words, and it is necessary to say that if there is something which they themselves complain at the moment it's very much that – simply they don't know what they say, that is all the difference between them and me. (Lacan 1998: 68)

In the 1970s, French feminists appropriated Derrida's term 'différance' (1997: 60-64) to address this perception of women and to negotiate differing ways of using the symbolic's language to articulate their differing perspectives, imaginations and knowledge. The concept of 'différance' rejects the binary relations that are/were the foundation of society/language/film. It also suggests that texts, once thought of as fixed, do not necessarily convey meaning in ways the author intended, and that 'others' can and do interpret and experience the syntax in all texts, differently:

> Thus one could reconsider all of the pairs of opposites on which philosophy is constructed and on which our discourse lives, not in order to see opposition erase itself but to see what indicates that each of the terms must appear as the *différance* of the other, as the other different and deferred in the economy of the same (the intelligent as differing – deferring the sensible, as the sensible different and deferred; the concept as different and deferred, differing – deferring intuition; culture as nature different and deferred, differing – deferring. (Derrida cited in Bass 1984: 17)

Thus, from this perspective, rather than exclusively connected to presence and stability, language/film can be seen to contain traces of absence and mutability. This suggests that what, or who, is missing in a 'text' is as important as what, or who is present, and that absence and presence exist in all 'texts' and is part of the process of interpretation.

Third Wave feminists used this insight to expand or deconstruct phallogocentric (male-centred logical) language/film by experimenting with the syntax and conventions in all forms of signification to include their viewpoints and ways of seeing. They did/do so by working innovatively with the contradictions that occur in dominant signifying practices and inserting other/s perspectives using language and film in different ways – as did Tait from the 1950s.

In the next chapter I show how by using modernist film 'language' innovatively, Tait engaged with the ideology in the Films of Scotland Committee's film productions, and its reliance on film categorisation, while simultaneously articulating her differing perspectives on shared local concerns, using the short film as a vehicle.

Chapter Two: The Ambiguity of Film Classifications: Scottish/British Short Film Production

In *Gyn/Ecology* (1978), feminist philosopher Mary Daly excavated the etymological roots of words to find out how language had become a force of women's exclusion. She discovered that many of their ideas were hidden beneath dominant language-use and that to recover them the journeyer (researcher),

> must not only know the works of the Masters; she must go much further … Spin[s] around, past, and through the established fields, opening the coffers/coffins in which "knowledge" has been stored … seeking out the threads of connectedness within artificially separated/segmented reality. (1978: 128)

Arguably, 'separated/segmented reality' echoes the categories and nomenclatures that organised films typically committed to 'the works of the Masters' and predominantly male points-of-view. In Tait's time, categorisation provided coherence and stability and was often used to provide benchmarks by film bodies to select films by raising the status of some categories and genres and denigrating others to the lower ranks of film production. As Christine Gledhill observes:

> In seeking to define genres as exclusive categories, the identity of which rested in specific fixed features, established the first boundary skirmishes as to whether specific films fell into a specific genre and whether deviant films were valid variations or decadent corruptions. (2000: 223)

Thus, films that were perceived as 'deviant', fell in-between or across boundaries, or formed 'threads of connectedness' among categories or wider audiences were often rejected, ignored or misplaced. Neely notes that archives have similar difficulties organising films that presented differing levels of proficiency or addressed subjects that could not be accommodated in standard frames.[45] She said, filmmakers like Tait,

> often risk being overlooked because of difficulties in identifying their work within existing genres or filmmaking practices, and their often-attendant designation as "substandard" with reference to aesthetic as well as technical measures.
> …

[45] See Ryan Shand. 2007b. *Amateur Cinema: History, Theory and Genre (1930-80*). PhD Thesis, pp 34-36 for the methods used by Scottish Screen Archives for selecting, indexing and grading amateur film, Glasgow University, [online]. Available at: http://theses.gla.ac.uk/4923/1/2007shandphd.pdf [accessed 22 February 2017].

> Tait's work has often been described as "amateur" in the most negative sense of the word. When Tait sent her work to BBC Scotland in the 1960s for example, the response was that the "filming and editing were technically inadequate" and that it was "difficult to find a theme of interest. (2009: 302)

However, the examination of dominant systems of film production and organisation, and a close look at work that does not comply with their strictures can reveal different insights. Looked at this way, Tait's method of crisscrossing the film categories and conventions of her day can be understood in terms of Third Wave feminist filmmaker Trinh T. Minh-ha (b. 1952) who said:

> Most of the time, the film world divides films into categories – fiction, documentary, experimental – and I made my films precisely because I don't want to fit into any of these categories. So, a film is first and foremost a film, and in the 1990s, a number of women theorists as well as a number of women filmmakers really focused on the fact … [that] the film itself can deal with the ideological aspect of filmmaking. (Minh-ha 2016)

But Tait was working at a time when films which presented differing viewpoints, blurred boundaries or breached established levels of competence were often judged as 'non-professional' or 'amateur' by those with authority to do so. Regarding Tait's oeuvre, Neely explains:

> The range of classifications given for Tait's films, from amateur (*Orquil Burn*), to fiction and avant-garde experimental (*Happy Bees*), and genre/sponsored (*The Drift Back*) is testament to the slipperiness of taxonomies, particularly when considering the work of an innovative artist, working across a variety of disciplines as a non-professional. (2009: 314 fn 43)

I begin my research into the 'threads of connectedness' that Tait formed within standard and local film production in Scotland/Britain from the 1950s, by examining the key taxonomies 'amateur' and 'professional' and their place in film practices, classifications and ideology in Tait's time.

Amateur and Non-professional Film

The online Oxford Dictionary describes an amateur as 'a person who engages in a pursuit, especially a sport, on an unpaid basis. … A person who is contemptibly inept at a particular activity' (n.d.). Within film circles, the term 'amateur' was used to describe work thought by film authorities to be unworthy of critical attention. Zimmermann argues that to label

a film ‘amateur’ based on its formal or aesthetic qualities was ‘to banish it to the territory of the inconsequential and meaningless’ (cited in Kapstein 1997: 75) that is, to the lower echelons of film production.[46] Hogenkamp and Lauwers however suggest, ‘it would be dangerous for historians to fall into the trap of equating “amateur” with “substandard” because substandard refers to film gauge, not professionalism’ (1997: 109). Also ‘amateur’ has never been conclusively established as a fixed film classification:

> Remarkably, some of the basic terminology that forms the backbone of this discussion has never been defined clearly. Words and phrases like substandard film, family film, home-movie, hobby film, private film … are assigned a meaning, but more often than not they are used interchangeably. The resulting confusion has specific negative consequences for the study of amateur film and, by extension, for the usefulness of amateur film as a historical source. (1997: 107)

When asked where she thought her films might fit, given the available outlets of her day, Tait replied, ‘the only other thing around in Scotland at the time of anybody say working, would be in an amateur sense with a sort of amateur outlet in mind, and I wasn’t interested in that’ (cited in Appendix 1: xix). Currently, filmmakers/artists such as Tacita Dean (2006, 2011) and Mark Jenkin (2019) mindfully explore the ‘amateur’ qualities of 16mm film to great acclaim. But in Tait’s time, reflective and imaginative uses of analogue film and technology were not part of filmmaking discourse. It was the received connotations of the term ‘amateur’ rather than amateur filmmaking as a practice that led Tait to reject it as a suitable classification for her work. Pirie explained, ‘these terms amateur and professional are awkward ones to use … whereas in essence you [Tait] were, or you are, absolutely professional in terms of your intentions and your resources’ (cited in Appendix 1: xix). Indeed, as a trained filmmaker, Tait exacted the highest possible standards with the resources she could access yet her work was largely overlooked in conventional circles:

> When Tait sent her films to the Scottish Film Council in the mid 1950s, the work was assessed in terms of its instrumental value and fared badly. In general, her films were described as “too bitty”, “too long”, “too repetitive”, “lack[ing] in unity” and generally too difficult to use for school room purposes. ([SFC 1956] cited in Neely 2009: 309)

[46] See also Fred Camper. 1986. ‘Some Notes on the Home-movie’. *Journal of Film and Video*, 38(3-4), 9-14.

Blaetz explains that such judgements were common responses to women's achievements with filmmaking in the twentieth century:

> One of the greatest misconceptions about this experimentation is that it's often startling and vexing variations from the linear and orderly norm signify incompetence. On the contrary, the technique that signifies amateurism and disorder is quite intentional and often formally complex; the loosely shot footage is invariably heavily edited. (2007: 12-13)

The seeming 'disorder' or unconventional formalism in women's work can be linked to their often limited access to the means of production and a desire to develop '[n]ew symbolic means' (Lechte cited in Fletcher and Benjamin 1990: 32) to articulate their differing perspectives. But this was regularly overlooked in appraisals of their work. Andrew Lambirth's (1999) review of some of Tait's films presents an example of this:

> Since most of these films … are experimental, and therefore unfunded, production values are sacrificed; the highly respected filmmaker Margaret Tait has made "Hugh MacDiarmid: A Portrait", with no budget, and it shows. The visual effect she strives for is an equivalent of lyricism; poor production compromises this. You can applaud the attempts, but not necessarily the result. (cited in Pirie 2000: 5)

Lambirth's references to Tait's film as 'no budget' or 'poor production' reverses his description in the same passage of her as a 'highly respected filmmaker' of 'experimental' work. In Tait's time, many un-funded filmmakers found the expense of higher gauge film prohibitive. This, and the uneven access to processing, editing facilities and technology impacted on their work. Arguably, Lambirth's review implies that films made on 16mm film would be considered more favourably if made by those with higher technical skills. Some filmmakers ironed out the flaws in analogue film as a sign of their competence and control over the materiality of analogue film.[47] Also, in work by filmmakers of Tait's standing, all forms of signification indicate style and intent. Tait was thus one of many socially aware filmmakers who recognised that the flaws, particularly in cheaper film stock, were vehicles for less commanding people to speak from differing standpoints and express viewpoints that were uncommon in dominant film production (Craven

[47] A materialist approach is one that draws attention to the material or physical properties of film and the unique qualities intrinsic to film stock and equipment. This includes evidence of the filmmaker's involvement with the process of filmmaking, such as scratches on the film's surface, the sound of the projector, flicker effects, use of film leader and sprockets.

2009a: 1-33). Reversal film (transparencies), fast film (recorded at high speed and slowed down later) and in-camera editing for example are among shortcuts Tait and other filmmakers on limited budgets used to circumvent the cost of film production, and this impacted on the forms their films took.

Pirie felt that Tait's limited access to 35mm disadvantaged her position with local film organisations since this more expensive film gauge connoted professionalism, commercial potential, cinematic distribution and higher range productions (cited in Appendix 1: xxv-xxvi). Leggett explained:

> In Britain … there was no support or backing for film proposals without reassured financial returns. As 35mm production entailed substantial capital investment, the filmmaker or organisation seeking some kind of autonomy inevitably resorted to 16mm, which remained barely respectable and poorly serviced for some time to come. (1979: 3)

Tait used 35mm film in *Rose Street* (1956) and in her short animations *Calypso* (1955), *Painted Eightsome* (1970), *John MacFadyen* (1970) and *Numen of the Boughs* (1974) but most of her films were made on 16mm film for reasons cited above. [48] Her training at the prestigious film school in Rome suggests that Tait's use of lower gauge film stock was also predicated on her desire to make films that differed from dominant styles and perspectives. Pollock explained that typically, in this context,

> difference has been used as a crude weapon of exclusion, impoverishing our knowledge of the modern world through the institutional selection of the work of white, Euro-American men as the representative voices of modern culture. (cited in de Zegher 2014: 14)

But the 'difference' in Tait's films can more productively be assessed within the context of Derrida's concept of 'différance' which simultaneously merges difference and deferral of meaning in a (written) text offering fluid approaches to what is being connoted and received. (Derrida 1997: 60-64). From this perspective, Tait's uses of 16mm film, time, space and

[48] Examples of 35mm short films at this time include *Granton Trawler* (John Grierson 1934. 35mm), *They Made the Land* (Mary Field 1938. 35mm), *The Heart of Scotland.* (Laurence Henson 1962. 35mm), *The Rugged Island: A Shetland Lyric*. (Jenny Brown1939. 35mm). Examples of 16mm film include *Berlin: Symphony of a Metropolis* (Ruttman 1927. 16mm), *The Blood of a Poet* (Cocteau 1930. 16mm). *Man of Aran* (Flaherty 1934) and *Moana* 1929) *A Colour Box* (Lye 1935.16mm), *Upstream: A Story of the Scottish Salmon Fisheries* (Elton 1932. 16mm) made for the Empire Marketing Board and *Chick's Day* (Cocozza 1950. 16mm) an independent film from Tait's contemporary which won first prize at an amateur film festival with this film.

distinctive editing techniques can be seen as part of her desire to destabilise the content in categories that organised film production and reception along specific lines and offer spaces in her films for other ideas and open-ended audience engagement. This is evident in an interview Tait gave to Tamara Krikorian for the BBC's *11th Hour* arts programme regarding her observational-type filming of her locality:

> **TK** …in recording those places it seems to me it is not propaganda; you're leaving a space for the viewer to make up their own mind.
> **MT** …Yes, I like that, leave a space, I like something open – open to interpretation you could say open-ended. In fact, Orcadians like myself are always being accused of leaving doors and houses wide open, not wide open, but doors open that should be closed. No, it's not propaganda it's more a matter of sheer wonder and astonishment at how much can be seen in any place you choose … (cited in Appendix 4: xlv).

Elsewhere she said, 'my films are sketches for films rather than films themselves' (Tait 'Personae' (1959), an unpublished manuscript cited in Neely 2012: 17). Her film-language focuses on the gaps or spaces that occur in dissonant sound/image connections, stop-motion, splices, cuts and shots that are sometimes unsteady or held for longer than is usual. These 'sketch-like' techniques offered audiences ways of looking at film, and life, in ways they may not have considered before. But Tait had difficulty getting her work screened via local public outlets.

As previously discussed, when Tait began making films in Scotland from the 1950s, she anticipated screening her films through John Grierson, a major figure in local film culture at that time. However, Neely notes, 'in her notebook Tait wrote that Grierson said she would not survive as a filmmaker unless she conformed to his methods' (2012: 8). Elsewhere Neely writes, 'correspondence between Grierson and Tait reveals Tait's pragmatic intention to seek assistance with financing and distribution, not to confirm her artistic practices' (2008a: 217). Tait's films reached beyond entertainment, information and education and this discrepancy prevented her from screening her films to local audiences through Grierson's platform.

A short background to the 'institutional consolidation by the state' (Butt 2000) of film production and the systems that sustained its output at that time in Scotland provides a context for these circumstances.

A Brief History of the Films of Scotland Committees

Historian Richard Butt writes of early Scottish film culture:

> Up until 1938 … Scottish film production is almost exclusively non-fictional, specialising in promotional or educational documentaries, it is supported by a strong network of film societies, festivals and libraries, and it is becoming increasingly centralised in its organisation, a centralisation partly engineered by the state. (2000)

Many private and local film clubs and societies in Scotland in the early twentieth century were overseen by the Scottish Film Council (SFC) (est. Glasgow 1934-1997) which was annexed to, funded and administered by the British Film Institute (BFI) (est. London 1935). Historian Ian Goode notes:

> It is against this background of institutions and individuals such as John Grierson seeking to instrumentally direct the use of film towards non-commercial and educational ends that the British Film Institute and its Branch in Scotland, the Scottish Film Council, emerged. The four-panel structure of the SFC consisted of Education, Entertainment, Amateur and Social Service. (Goode 2011: 18)

Each of these four categories had its own committee which administered, selected and sustained its area of film throughout Scotland. At the inaugural meeting of the SFC and the BFI in 1934, it was agreed that '[t]he Scottish Film Council would be "an integral part of the British Film Institute but with a status superior to that of the provincial branches in England"' (Griffiths 2012: 227). This was in recognition of Scotland's historic interest in, and contribution to film. The minutes from these meetings disclose:

> At the start of the 1940s, the opinion was being voiced by, among others, the Scottish Film Council, that "In Scotland far more than in England the film now plays an ever increasing and useful part in the life of the community" … in areas still innocent of the kind of mass, commercialised recreational culture exemplified by the picture palace, film acquired an even broader significance, as one of the key building blocks in the construction of a viable society. (Griffiths 2012: 219)

The minutes do not state what a 'viable society' might look like, but they do establish that the Scottish Film Council had the final say when it came to regulating film in Scotland:

> If at any time it became impracticable to continue the production and circulation of Scottish films of national interest, the funds and the films held by the Committee should be at the disposal of the Secretary of State. (Thomas Johnston cited in Butt 2000)

In 1938, the SFC set up the first Films of Scotland Committee (1938-1939) to discuss and select films to be screened at the International Empire Exhibition to be held in Glasgow that year. They

appointed John Grierson as their advisor and authorised him to mastermind the project. This prestigious event not only placed Scotland on the global stage, it also protected its film industry and established the short film as the most popular and lucrative form of film production there. Nowlan and Finch observed that '[h]osting the 1938 Exhibition provided a welcome opportunity to celebrate Glasgow's and Scotland's contributions to industry, commerce, social and economic development, culture and the arts' (2015: 238) in ways that could counter previous representations of Scotland, including Kailyard and Tartanry stereotypes.[49] This iconography stemmed from American and English feature-length films and literature that presented the Scots as either noble Highlanders or local provincials living in rural idylls among tartan, bagpipes, weaving and heather. Scottish film impresario Forsyth Hardy felt that in his view, the films chosen by the Exhibition board 'present[ed] a very complete picture of Scotland that was utterly different from anything that had appeared before' (cited in McArthur 1982: 75).[50] But Nolan and Finch argue that the style of these films was corporate, entertaining, educative, and reinforced the cinematic strategies audiences were familiar with such as uplifting music, synchronised sound-image connections, male voice-overs and a propagandist tone. They also observe:

> The series depicts Scotland as a single united nation sharing a common national character and committed towards a common national purpose. … The Scotland these films depict evinces little to no evidence of social division or conflict, or of competing interest and need. (Nolan and Finch 2015: 329-330)

Thus, only educational or instructive films that corresponded with the Committee's vision, remits and formats were selected for screening at the 1938 Empire Exhibition.

Interestingly, prior to this Exhibition, Grierson was asked to oversee and commission films in the British government's film units such as the GPO (1933-1940) and EMB (1926-1933)

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[49] These stereotypes began with feature-length films such as *Rob Roy* (Vivian 1911) and continued in *Bonnie Prince Charlie* (Kimmins and Korda 1948), *Whiskey Galore* (Mackendrick 1949), *Braveheart* (Gibson 1995). See also Hardy (1990), Higson (1997), Anderson (2006) for the formation of stereotyping and nationalism as disseminated through film and other mediated imagery. Also, 'Scotland and Cinema: The Iniquity of the Fathers'. In Colin McArthur. (ed.) 1982. *Scotch Reels: Scotland in Film and Television.* London: BFI Publishing, 40-69.

[50] The seven films that were selected and screened for the Exhibition were *Face of Scotland* (Basil Wright 1938) *Wealth of a Nation*, (Donald Alexander 1938), *Scotland for Fitness* (Brian Salt 1938), *They Made the Land* (Mary Field 1938), *Sea Food,* and *The Children's Story* (Alexander Shaw 1938), *Sport in Scotland*. (Stanley L. Russell 1938). Available on the National Library of Scotland Moving Image Archive.

that would modernise Britain's image and unite the country at a very difficult time (Aitken 1992: 90-149). To achieve this, he recruited pioneering filmmakers and cinéastes including Alberto Cavalcanti (1897-1982), Humphrey Jennings (1907-1950), Basil Wright (1907-1987) and Norman McLaren (1914-1987) who 'borrowed' or assimilated aspects of the 'new symbolic means' developed by the vanguard Soviet and European filmmakers of the 1920s into their sponsored short films. These earlier filmmakers, such as Dziga Vertov (1896-1954) and Oskar Fischinger (1900-1967), experimented with asynchronous juxtapositions, creative camera work and montaged imagery to express personal visions in ways that countered the bourgeois and authoritarian governments of their era (Grimshaw 2001: 57-70). Their pioneering experimentation with lower-gauge film and technology was executed in 'amateur' and 'experimental' ways prior to this aesthetic being adapted by 'professional' or commercial outlets.

Documentary film historian Bill Nichols explains, 'the explosive power of avant-garde practice subverts and shatters the coherence, stability and naturalness of the dominant world of realist representation' (2001: 592). But, under the directives of the British government and industry sponsors, 'by 1930-1932 a documentary film movement existed but with its the radical potential harnessed by figures like Grierson to the specific needs of the nation-state' (Nichols 2001: 602). In the films he oversaw, Grierson assimilated the poetic and formal experimentation of the original amateur avant-garde to suit the objectives of his employers, but as Blain observes regarding Scottish film production:

> There is a danger that the poetry can actually replace the life which it started to depict. This very self-conscious poeticism, which was to persist as a characteristic of a significant element of the Films of Scotland output in a fashion which rapidly became anachronistic … and is discernible thirty or forty years on in some of the later films. (cited in Dick 1990: 59)

From the 1930s, under Grierson's jurisdiction, government-sponsored film units presented a toned-down version of the 'disruptive' elements of realist and vanguard filmmaking and transformed it into a 'disabling poeticism and lyricism' (Blain cited in Dick 1990: 59) in films that were designed to promote industry and present Great Britain to the world in a modern way:

> Grierson's commitment to government and corporate sponsorship, the only viable means of institutional support required an act of separation from the more radical

> potentialities of the modernist avant-garde and the particular example of the Soviet cinema. Grierson championed long and hard for a documentary film practice that persuaded more than it informed, guided more than observed. (Nichols 2001: 600)

The films Grierson selected and commissioned for the first Films of Scotland Committee (1938) were directed towards educating and promoting Scotland in a corporate and conservative manner rather than through the more imaginative, modern methods used in the government and industry-sponsored film units he oversaw at the GPO and EMB, for example.

As various organisations recognised the influence of film in national life, a Second Films of Scotland Committee (1954-1982) was set up under Grierson's continuing jurisdiction, to accelerate the production of short documentary and information-type films and chart the changing face of Britain in films that were predominantly educational and moralistic (Butt 2000). After the Empire Exhibition, the short film and style of filmmaking established here were seen as a particularly efficient way of disseminating information, promoting industry, tourism, commerce, national interests and ethical thinking to large audiences. It thus acted as a catalyst for short documentary filmmaking both at home and abroad and confirmed Grierson's influence in local and inter/national film production (Nowlan and Finch 2015).

As a key member of the second Films of Scotland Committee Grierson had overall control over film production and as first director Forsyth Hardy 'had responsibility for the entire film output of all the government departments in Scotland' (cited in McArthur 1982: 85). Hardy said, 'Grierson stood behind us all in Scotland as a kind of conscience (cited in McArthur 1982: 78). Amazingly, he also explained that despite moving to Canada in 1939 to form the National Film Board of Canada, Grierson still managed to sustain an influence over British short filmmaking:

> Although working outside Scotland, Grierson was sufficiently often here for us never to forget about him. During the whole of the thirties he was coming to and talking regularly to the film societies, in Glasgow, in Stirling, in Aberdeen and Edinburgh. We were conscious that he, although outside Scotland, had never forgotten his country and was looking for every kind of opportunity to make films here. (Hardy cited in McArthur 1982: 78)

Indeed, Grierson's Calvinist background, social conscience and advocacy of cinema as a means of mass education and tool for democracy held considerable sway over national

consciousness. As did fellow Scot John Reith (1889-1971) whose remits for the BBC (est.1922) similarly educated audiences along particular and ethical lines. Both men had the authority to guide the media in Britain in specific directions and thus represented the gateposts through which Tait and other progressive filmmakers in Scotland would typically need to pass for funding and support for their films. The Narval report for the BFI provides a context for Grierson's influence:

> The legacy of Scotland's adherence to Grierson's principles was mixed. On the one hand, the stern anti-entertainment ethos held back Scotland's ambitions for a diverse, devolved cinema capable of reflecting Scottish culture back to local audiences and the rest of the UK. By discouraging the emergence of other, non-factual genres, it paradoxically reinforced the hold of Hollywood and English popular entertainment films over the Scottish popular imagination. (BFI 2009: 36)

Consequently, '[a]lmost all post-war documentary films intended for the cinema, were made for the second Films of Scotland Committee set up in 1954' (Blain cited in Dick 1990: 55) which commissioned films that followed guidelines established by the 1938 Committee. In her work from the 1950s, rather than observing the remits set by these Committees, Tait can be seen to draw on the pioneering strategies and the political connotations of earlier European avant-garde, Neorealist filmmakers and the formal innovation in films made for the British GPO and EMB film units. By assimilating some of these earlier and more experimental aspects of filmmaking into her work, Tait was able to express differing perspectives on common interests in ways that broadened local short-film production's emphasis on education and information.

Furthermore, in films such as *The Drift Back, Land Makar, Aspects of Kirkwall, Hugh MacDiarmid: A Portrait* and *Ga*, Tait emphasised Scotland's 'voice' on screen and drew attention to the intrinsic Britishness of Grierson and Hardy's legacy. For despite the number of films they oversaw concerning Scottish issues, a Scottish 'voice' was subdued:

> While Scotland was rarely explicitly the subject of films produced either by the Empire Marketing Board or the GPO Film Units … if such films ensured Scotland a place in the cinematic representation of Britain, they also worked to still her own screen voice. (Griffiths 2012: 297-298)

As a self-determined, independent artist/filmmaker attempting to establish a more progressive and inclusive practice in Scotland, Tait may have felt she had to extend dominant short-film

production by contributing films about post-war change and experience in a diverse Scottish society, from her perspective. She achieved this, in part, by filming small and overlooked local details. Miller suggests that against a background of 'big landscapes that excited political and social engagement and educated the masses drove this small northern adjunct of the British Film Industry. Tait's examination of the minute and domestic, had it been noticed at all, would have seemed indulgent in such a setting' (2005: 7). Interestingly, however, Adrienne Scullion states, 'where Grierson's documentaries pushed the notion of film-as-public-service, as educator and film-as-weapon, elsewhere other groups were equally examining film-as-art' (cited in Dick 1990: 49). Tait was emotionally, if not physically aligned with these 'artistic' groups, as I examine in detail in Chapter Four of this thesis. She explained her views on standard short filmmaking:

> I don't mind watching documentaries… I don't feel particularly concerned in making documentaries about things … I don't see that you can do very much with it. It's not art, is it? (cited in Wilson 1979: 6)

Tait had anticipated that by contributing to local documentary film production in 'artistic' ways she might widen the possibilities of film as also an expressive and progressive medium, but she found that people,

> weren't very interested in film as a serious thing to be working at, you know, in seeing them, but … there's also the thing you see that my intentions at that time were really directed towards films which would be shown in the cinema and to a general public – this was what I was aiming at. (Tait cited in Appendix 1: xix)

From the 1950s-1970s there was scant support for innovative filmmaking in Scotland. To be commercially viable, gain funding or contribute to film culture at that time, filmmakers had to either move to cultural hubs in Britain and elsewhere or be willing to participate in the constitutional politics and principles of local film sponsors. This involved making ideologically robust short films that observed the type of 'authenticity' and 'realism' that underpinned local film production and accepted by audiences as factually re-presenting 'reality'. Since most standardised films of this type were filmed from the 'male gaze' of filmmakers who did not inhabit or experience the 'reality' they presented, the viewpoints in their films were partial. By contrast, from her local, female standpoint, Tait tested the partiality and 'truth' of these dominant

viewpoints by pointing her camera at aspects of life she felt were missing or mis-represented in prevailing government-led and sponsored short-films, from her perspective.

In the next section, I reveal that by filming overlooked lives and occurrences in her locality, Tait moderated the 'reality' and ideology in standard short films, which relied for their stability on two key concepts, 'authenticity' and 'realism'.

Realism, Authenticity and Early Documentary Films

In his use of cinema, Grierson was committed to registering the social lives of everyday people in film narratives that audiences could believably engage with. He famously referred to documentary filmmaking as 'the creative treatment of reality' (1932: 8) thereby establishing 'creativity' as central to film's capacity for making 'realistic' or 'authentic' re-presentations.[51] He coined the phrase after seeing Robert Flaherty's docu-fiction feature-length film *Moana* (1926 16mm) which sought to capture a Polynesian way of life Flaherty felt was endangered by the modern world. The cinematic elements Grierson admired in this film were Flaherty's location filming, use of technology and the narrative structure which brought the Polynesian's everyday circumstances to life.[52] Bill Nichols noted:

> When John Grierson praised *Moana* for its "documentary value" (but not its documentary form) he acknowledged its value as a document of Pacific island culture despite its fictional pretext of a coming-of-age-story. The qualities of the document lurked amidst the fabrication of the fiction. (2001: 587)

Films that integrated documentary with narrative were popular and commercially viable in Tait's time. Audiences enjoyed seeing 'other' cultures in ways that contravened the boundary between the viewer and the viewed whilst upholding the link between representation and reality

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[51] See also Laura Marcus. 2009. '"The Creative Treatment of Reality": John Grierson, Documentary Cinema and "Fact" in the 1930s'. In Kristin Bluemel (ed.) *Inter Modernism: Literary Culture in Mid-twentieth Century Britain*. Edinburgh University Press, 189-207. Forsyth Hardy (ed.) 1966. 'Battle for Authenticity'. In *Grierson On Documentary.* University of California Press, 215-217.

[52] For Grierson's own discussion on Flaherty, realism, authenticity and film sponsorship in the post-war years see John Grierson. 'Post-war Patterns'. In Julian Stallabrass. (ed.) [1946] 2013. *Documents of Contemporary Art.* London: Whitechapel Gallery and Cambridge: MIT Press, 30-35.

(sign and referent). As Tait observed, ‘there is an exotic interest in seeing things on film from some other parts of the world’ (cited in Krikorian 1983b: 7). However, many scenes in *Moana* were staged to comply with a romantic ideal of Polynesian life Flaherty’s wished to present. He chose not to film the Western presence that was altering Samoa’s indigenous culture but to preserve a preconceived idea of life before these impositions (likewise in *Nanook of the North* (Flaherty 1922)).

In keeping with his interest in the everyday lives of ‘ordinary’ people, in his own innovative 40-minute silent documentary *Drifters* (1929 35mm) Grierson filmed North Sea herring fishing and the tensions between tradition and modernity. By combining location sequences, studio constructions and modernist filming techniques, he skilfully enhanced the dramatic effect of the fishermen’s ‘reality’ from his perspective. But, as with Flaherty’s docu-narrative films, Grierson did not include the material conditions in which the fishermen worked. Rather, he followed lines of reasoning based on a conventional ‘male gaze’ to construct a specific aesthetic and perspective on communities and experiences outside of his expertise. In 1942 Grierson said, ‘the penalty of realism is that it’s about reality, and has to bother forever, not about being beautiful but being right’ (cited in Dick 1990: 59). By contrast, Tait filmed places and people she knew and filmed occurrences as they unfolded in front of her camera rather than staging her subjects’ lives and filming them in exotic ways. She said, ‘I used the actuality around me as I always do use available actuality' (cited in Appendix 4: xlvii), adding elsewhere, ‘in my use of the language of film … I like to have them [my observations] accurate (cited in Krikorian 1983b: 6).

An example of Tait’s ‘accuracy’ in her filming of ‘reality’ in circumstances with which she was familiar can be seen in a short information film she was commissioned to make for the Rural Cinema Scheme (RCS) about local population erosion and re-patriation. These were major concerns in Scotland at that time. The film is called *The Drift Back* (1957) and, like Flaherty’s *Moana* and Grierson’s *Drifters,* it incorporates the tensions between tradition and modernity in a ‘locally’ observed life. But in *The Drift Back*, Tait filmed the ‘reality’ of a local

family returning to farm on the Orkney island of Wyre as the events occurred rather than staging them.

The RCS was an organisation that transported cinematic experiences to less accessible areas of Scotland via mobile cinema units (Butt 2000, Goode 2011). It co-ordinated screenings of popular feature-length films alongside short films on topics of interest to small communities around the Highlands and Islands.[53] As Griffiths explained, '[t]he educative potential of film, long recognised, was pursued through projects designed to integrate the moving picture into the everyday curriculum' (2012: 218). Interestingly, film was so popular in Orkney that it 'organise[d] its own rural cinema scheme semi-independently of the Film Guild in 1946' (Goode 2011: 19). Furthermore, the Orkney branch of the RCS (1946-1967) was 'supplemented by the formation of the Kirkwall 16mm Film Society in 1953' (Goode 2011: 26). Tait's enthusiasm for this local interest in film is recorded in the Moving Image Archive which states, 'Dr. Margaret Tait offered her services free to the Rural Cinema Scheme' (2107d). (Arguably, the popularity of film locally and nationally was contributory factor in her decision to use film as her principal vehicle of expression.)

The Drift Back, was the first film made for a project initiated by the *Orkney Film Magazine* to produce and fund five further films a year at a cost of £1500 (Neely 2009: 306). It was a rare opportunity for Tait and the only film she made that was fully funded and in which she observed, to some extent, sponsored film production methods.[54] The *Orkney Magazine* gave her a measure of freedom to interpret their brief, but as a commissioned film Tait was expected to comply with the conventions required by her sponsor. In April 1957, the local newspaper *The Scotsman* wrote:

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[53] Ian Goode states: 'A typical programme for the Rural Cinema Scheme would comprise a Pathé newsreel, followed by a cartoon or a travel film, a preview of coming attractions and finally the main feature … The composition of the programme addressed a family audience with popular Hollywood genre feature films such as westerns, war films (particularly those involving naval conflicts and musicals) – as well as British/Scottish films. (2011: 25).

[54] The film's 'premiere was held on the island of Wyre. As well as screenings at Rural Cinema Scheme venues, *The Drift Back* was screened as part of the normal programme at the Phoenix Cinema in Kirkwall and was included in a programme of Orkney films shown by Dr. Tait at the Aberdeen branch of the Caithness, Orkney and Shetland Association on 23rd October 1964' (The National Library of Scotland Moving Image Archive 2017b).

> The first experimental film magazine sponsored by the Orkney Education Committee has just completed its round of the Orkney rural cinema circuit. The circuit has 27 locations on the mainland and South and Isles of Orkney. The Orkney Education Committee has not yet revealed whether to continue sponsoring a local magazine regularly. (Held at the BAFVSC, London)

The Drift Back cost £87 to make and was the most ambitious of the films produced for the RCS. Its form is in keeping with local interest or information films, but its content and filming are more challenging, as my close analysis reveals. Arguably, parallels can be drawn between Tait's observation of this close-knit community's resilience and her own experience of returning to Scotland and working, largely unsubsidised, as a self-determined filmmaker.

Case Study: *The Drift Back* (Tait 1957)

The Drift Back is an 11-minute grainy black-and-white 16mm film about the return of farmer Neil Flaws' and his family to Wyre after working away for some time. The film has a narrative structure, synchronised sounds and images, and a voice-over by Harald Leslie, a local judge from Glasgow (Moving Image Archive 2017b). The opening scenes introduce local farmer George Tait who had also recently 'drifted back' to Wyre but was now established here.

Fig. 54: Tait 1957. *The Drift Back*

Fig. 55: Tait 1957. *The Drift Back*

Fig. 56: Tait 1957. *The Drift Back.*

Fig. 57: Tait 1957. *The Drift Back.*

Fig. 58: Tait 1957. *The Drift Back*

On the soundtrack, a jaunty Scottish reel by local musicians implies that a similar experience awaits the Flaws family. Tait films the low-key equipment and conditions that made farming on

Wyre feasible. Then as the camera cuts to their new home, the upbeat sounds change to a Highland lament signalling to the audience that they are witnessing the 'reality' of the Flaws' return / 'drift back'. Leslie's voice-over says, 'the farm of Harbrech in Wyre has been standing empty for over a year, but Neil Flaws is coming to farm it'. A wide shot captures the Flaws' farm in conditions that are muddy and lacking facilities (figures 54, 55), while on the soundtrack Neil Flaws explains his plan for the farm. Figures 56-57 show the local community loading the Flaws' possessions onto a small boat moored at the harbour in Kirkwall before unloading them onto a tractor and cart and transporting them to their farm in Wyre. An accomplishment that must have taken several stages to complete.

Harald Leslie continues, 'the Flaws family have arrived in Wyre … and Neil with the furniture direct from Kirkwall in Mr. Nicholson's boat'. Close and medium shots track the difficulties the Flaws' move entails.

Fig. 59: Tait 1957. *The Drift Back*.

Fig. 60: Tait 1957. *The Drift Back.*

The children (figure 59), as ever in Tait's films, signal generational continuity so their voices and perspectives are included on the soundtrack. At one point, their mother Alice (figure 60), who signals a key female presence, struggles across the rocks towards the small local boat which will take her to Wyre. Her Irish voice states, 'there is a vast difference in travelling here than in England because we had the bus service to the door', a veiled reference perhaps to the uneven financial investment in the infrastructures of Great Britain. The Flaws' voices are embodied in their experiences, and each of their names and those of the eight farms on the island are mentioned on the soundtrack. This inclusive strategy personalises the film in terms of a place, gender and identity. At one point Tait's camera pans the landscape to where, 'the only two boys

of school age on the island' explore the land and the ancient ruins where Norse communities once lived (figure 61). Harald Leslie's commentary also includes information about a nearby farm where local poet Edwin Muir (1887-1959) grew up as a boy. Thus Tait's references to Wyre's heritage and ways of life indicate that cycles of returning, leaving or moving to the Island/s were part of the area's narratives, skills and history. This is supported by Tait's filming of the stone structures which mark the landscape as traces of earlier diasporas.

Fig. 61: Tait 1957. *The Drift Back.*

Tait anticipated that local audiences would respond to her 'actuality' filming of the issues her films consider as part of their cinematic experience. She said, 'I would hope, anyway, that there's more to it than just, 'Oh look! That's such-and-such a place or here, isn't that Mr. So-and-So in that shot, even though I do like bringing those things in' (cited in Todd and Cook 2004: 92).

However, despite her expressed interest in local film production and offering her expertise free of charge, after *The Drift Back* was made the RCS cancelled the project due to budget cuts and the advent of television which became a more popular conduit for disseminating information around Highland communities.[55] Tait explained:

> The Orkney Education Committee … used to run the rural cinema showing films around the isles, and Mr Dorgan [sic.] had the idea … to have a regular news magazine, so we made one as a pilot, but the Education Committee didn't decide to carry on with it. … They thought it too expensive. (cited in Wilson 1978: 17)

This retracted opportunity must have been beyond disappointing for Tait especially as the director of the RCS, Alex Doloughan, continued to support other local 16mm 'amateur' filmmakers in this and similar projects (Neely 2009: 306-7, 2017: 225-230).[56] Moreover, the

[55] Examples of these television programmes include *Nation on Film* (BBC), *Scotland on Film* (BBC) and *The Way It Was* (Grampian). Earlier cinema programs that aimed at increasing the production of amateur films included *Cine Club* (BBC, 1950-51), *Cine Holiday* (Associated-Rediffusion, ITV, 1956), *Personal Cinema* (BBC, 1960), *Take a Cine Camera* (ATV Network, ITV, 1972) and *Happy Days* (ITV, 1983).

[56] 'Doloughan formerly a schoolteacher on Fair Isle, occupied the roles of County Youth Organiser, Assistant Director of Education and director of Further Education. He later acted as the election agent for the Liberal Member of

proposed additional five films would have provided Tait with financial stability for a while and a niche place in local filmmaking.

To shed light on other reasons why her contract with *The Orkney Film Magazine* may not have been renewed despite conforming somewhat to the brief, I examine the 'threads of connectedness' (Daly 1978: 128) that Tait formed with standard local interest and information films, and rural cinema. These intersections highlight her differing approach to the 'reality' she observed using the short film as a vehicle for her 'actuality' filming of life on Wyre. I present these ideas in my analysis of *The Drift Back* (1957).

Precursors to *The Drift Back* (Tait 1957)

The two standard films I have selected to contextualise *The Drift Back* are *Crofters* (Keene 1944 35mm) whose associate producer Edgar Anstey was a member of the EMB, and *Life in the Orkneys* (Harper 1957 35mm) which was sponsored by the Films of Scotland Committee. These films can be classified as tourist, information or local interest short films that were produced under Grierson's authority. They use Kailyard and Tartanry iconography which, as instant short-cuts, obscure the skills and tenacity that sustain Highland cultures. They also fix Scotland's identity in a romantic, mythical past and provide scant evidence of a productive self-directed future. Additionally, they establish the Highlands on the periphery of Great Britain/England to both local and global audiences (McArthur 1982: 40-69, Craig cited in McArthur 1982: 7-15, Blain cited in Dick 1990: 53-70).

Parliament for Orkney, Jo Grimond. The proposition that Orkney should have a Rural Cinema Service was concurrent with the beginning of the Highlands and Islands Film Guild. Doloughan attended the conference that agreed the establishment of the Guild and subsequently indicated to the council 'that a more satisfactory and more economical service could be provided in Orkney on an independent footing' (CO5/1/16)' (cited In Goode 2011: 21).

Fig. 62: 1944 Keene. *Crofters*.

Fig. 63: 1944 Keene. *Crofters*.

Crofters, filmed thirteen years before *The Drift Back,* examines everyday life in a crofting community in Achriesgill, Sutherland, during World War II (figures 62-63). It is an unchallenging film that glosses over what elsewhere could be interpreted as rural poverty, as noted in *The Drift Back.* It promotes the improvements of this part of Britain and its agricultural infrastructure of sheep farming and crofting. Longshots present the scenery as a backdrop to the events that are filmed rather than as a landscape with which people are closely linked. Tait explained, 'I'm more interested in filming the landscape, even if it's a minute landscape, than in shooting scenery' (cited in Wilson 1979: 5). In this instance, 'scenery' refers to the surface of appearance, while landscape evokes a strong sense of place and locality. The Anglicised male voice-over drives the narrative while generic Scottish voices which speak about everyday issues are interspersed among standard pipe and harp music. The voice-over confirms central government's investment in the Highlands as part of its improvement of Britain's outer reaches supplying electricity, plumbing, two-storey housing (figure 64) transport and modern forms of communication. These are cordially set alongside indigenous industries such as fishing, sheep rearing and farming (figure 65).

Fig. 64: 1944 Keene. *Crofters*.

Fig. 65: 1944 Keene. *Crofters*.

Synchronised sounds and images and suture-editing depict, or construct, idyllic sun-filled scenes, local industry, children walking to school through country lanes and people going about their business in scenarios reminiscent of popular dramas:[57]

> **Anglicised male voice** Everybody knows John Angus Morrison who drives the mail car. And everybody knows the Posty.
> **Highland male voice** Yes indeed, we all know Jimmy. He's carried our news good and bad for 30 years now. He always likes to see us crowding round when the car comes in. It saves him a power of walking. … Then there's Mrs Mackay up at the shop where the women buy their stores.
> **Highland female voice** Och, Yes. We all know Judy Mackay, Robbie married her when he was away in Canada working on the railroad. Vancouver, I think it is she comes from. Och, but she's quite one of us now.

This scripted dialogue emphasises a community spirit and local employment prospects in an environment which welcomes new and returning families – ideas that connect with local concerns regarding population erosion and re-patriation:

> **Highland female voice** But there's not half the number of children here that there were when we were at school. That's because so many of our folks have left the crofts and gone away to the towns or over the seas … to find a living. Aye it's sad to see them go but ye canna' blame them for it.
> **…**
> **Anglicised male voice** Yes. There's room for more children and more people in the Islands.

The upbeat tone of the film establishes that progress and modernisation in the Highlands go hand-in-hand with tradition and are facilitated by the British government. The voice-over's informational stance explains 'the Scottish Department of Agriculture has done a lot to help the crofters raise the standard of their livestock' which is indicative of an idea that local people have also contributed to decisions regarding their future. A similar comment on Crofters' Rights alludes to local politics and Highland history but reads more as an illustration of a past way of life now being modernised, rather than a past whose repercussions are still felt:

> **Anglicised male voice** The Crofter's Act was passed in 1886. This gave the crofters a fair rent and … now none can be turned off his land at the whim of a grasping landlord … with the help of state grants the crofters began to build themselves new homes. Solid two-storey houses … improvement of roads and drainage.

[57] See for example *Edge of the World* (Powell 1937), *I Know Where I'm Going* (1945 Powell and Pressberger).

In contrast to the (necessary) optimism in these types of sponsored films that offer audiences a sense of hope for the future, the 'reality' in Tait's *The Drift Back* presents a specific place in Orkney where such improvements and prospects were yet to be realised.

The second film, *Life in the Orkneys* (1957), made in the same year as *The Drift Back,* promotes idealised accounts of local life and island accessibility. A BBC-type English male voice-over and stirring generic music synchronise with images of people ferried between the Orkney Islands and the mainland in state-of-the-art vessels with uniformed pilots (figures 67, 68), a contrast to the borrowed boat, cart and tractor that the Flaws' used in *The Drift Back*. In *Life in the Orkneys*, the passengers are described as 'the frequent exile returning from abroad to revisit old scenes and friends'. Whereas in *The Drift Back*, Tait observed the difficult accessibility and harsher material conditions of a specific family returning to a specific place in Orkney. The film similarly connects tradition with modernisation and accessibility (figure 66).

Fig. 66: 1957 Harper. *Life in the Orkneys.*

Fig. 67: 1957 Harper. *Life in the Orkneys.*

Fig. 68: 1957 Harper. *Life in the Orkneys.*

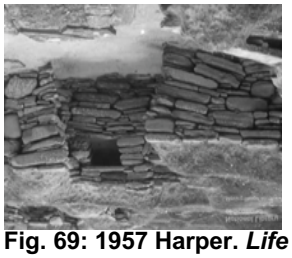

Fig. 69: 1957 Harper. *Life in the Orkneys.*

As the boat passes ancient ruins in *Life in the Orkneys*, the voice-over describes 'primitive stone furnishings' and asks, 'was it here that the Orcadians of long ago … perhaps offered up human sacrifice?' – indicative of the type of information being circulated to audiences in such films (figure 69). It contrasts with Tait's respectful references to Orkney's history and its stone ruins as a rich and continuing heritage. Moreover, the commentary and title of Harper's film refers to this area of Scotland as 'the Orkneys', something an Orcadian would never do.[58] It also presents Orkney as a homogenous and accessible 'outreach' area of Britain transformed by British/English modernisation into an attractive and improved place to live in and visit. Conversely, Tait's local female-centred gaze seeks and films a specific experience and the

[58] In the 1986 Q&A session in Goldsmith's College a student asked, do you live on the Orkneys? To which Tait replied, 'I live in Orkney' (Appendix 2: xxxiv).

material conditions in a part of Orkney as yet overlooked in government schemes. Her films thus provide evidence of the micro experience of local life which augments the macro perspective of dominant film production.

Both *Crofters* and *Life in the Orkneys* are filmed from ethnographic gazes which form subject-to-object relationships between filmmaker-and-filmed and provide re-presentations of communities who often live outside the cultural framework of the filmmaker (Russell 1999: 120 – 125). As sponsored films they offer generalised accounts of their topics and use familiar film strategies and rousing music to form a pleasing narrative set in fair conditions. In *The Drift Back* however, Tait's straight to camera medium shots and close-ups, film conditions that are less gracious, and her soundtrack comprises local everyday voices including a voice-over of a known Glaswegian character and music performed by a local band. Her use of local sounds, voices and her filming of extant material conditions highlight the specificity of a particular place and indicate her awareness of the dominant use of film which more usually films or documents local lives. Additionally, Tait's proximity to her subject/s suggests an empathy with local circumstances in a subject-to-subject relationship between filmmaker and filmed. For example, aspects of *The Drift Back* connect with the concerns of local community leaders. Neil Blain quotes the 1944 Educational Film Bulletin in which T. A. Blake noted:

> [there is] a need for films which "give a true picture of Scotland" [and which]" portray the spirit, culture and enterprise of a people the world knows as "Scottish". And he knows what he doesn't want: 'the bonnie banks of Loch Lomon' in a tartan border is not Scotland.'' (cited in Blain 1990: 57)

The Drift Back, like *Portrait of Ga*, *Land Makar, Rose Street, Aspects of Kirkwall* and *On the Mountain* provide grassroot perspectives, local voices and 'actuality' filming to give a 'true picture' of Scotland and the 'enterprise' of Scottish people that Blake wished to be included in local film production. *The Drift Back* also addresses the 1947 pamphlet 'Youth's Opportunity' which points to the Ministry of Education's concerns regarding indigenous language-use, particularly in 'those areas where "language had degenerated into a worthless jumble of slipshod ungrammatical and vulgar tones, still further debased by the less desirable Americanisms of Hollywood"' (Jones cited in Goode 2011: 20). Additionally, the English or

Anglicised voice-overs which typically dominate sponsored films, mask the diversity, heritage and culture of Scottish communities and their histories. By including local dialects, music and poetry, Tait highlights the links between locality, language-use and identity. She weaves her own educated, strong local accent in many of her films among the indigenous voices of those she films to 'authentically' present the diversity that underpins her re-presentations of Scotland. This is a quality that James Wilson draws attention to:

> **JW** It seems to me that this is a central concern of yours. The genuine thing doesn't always win by a long chalk. There's something in people that prefers falseness. That's from another of the poems.[59]
> **MT** Yes … I think people quite often do prefer something a bit false. (1978: 14)

Tait's insights and innovation support her vision of film as an expressive medium which has the capacity to invite discussions on a shared world in constructive and inclusive ways.

Regarding false consciousness in films that ideologically sustain specific perspectives and thus the status quo, Walter Benjamin (1892-1940) argued that artforms have always been able to replicate 'reality'. In 'The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility' ([1936] 2008) he wrote that the aura of 'High Art' stemmed from its status as an original one-off form, 'it's unique existence in a particular place. … The here and now of the original underlies the concept of its authenticity' (2008: 21). He explains:

> The painter maintains in his work a natural distance from reality, whereas the cinematographer penetrates deeply into its tissue. … The painter's is a total image whereas that of the cinematographer is piecemeal, its manifold parts being assembled according to a new law. (2008: 35)

As a 'new medium' Benjamin felt that film could 'bring out aspects of the original that are accessible only to the lens … [using] enlargement or slow motion, to record images which escape natural optics altogether' (2008: 21). He recognised that images captured on camera have a different relationship to the truth of a situation than other artforms do. Also, that the plasticity and immediacy of film (and photography) had the potential to challenge the type of 'realism' sustained by 'expert' practioners of this, and other arts/crafts. He anticipated that as reproductive technology became affordable more people would acquire cameras and

[59] From Margaret Tait. 1958. *Remains That Have Been Tampered With* (cited in Neely 2012: 90).

experiment with film's ability to capture reality using close-ups, repetition and slow or fast motion. Also, by pointing their cameras at their own lives in so-called 'amateur' or non-expert ways, Benjamin anticipated that 'reality' would be re-presented more comprehensibly and that the outcomes of such filming could be exhibited alongside 'expert' images in galleries, museums and less exclusive places. Indeed, when possible, Tait screened her short films in a range of venues from her front room and village halls to international events and galleries. She 'was … savvy at distributing her films in guerrilla fashion, succeeding in doing so in diverse ways' (Nowlan and Finch 2015: 87).

While Benjamin felt that 'the expropriation of film capital is an urgent demand for the proletariat' (2008: 34) he also warned that dominant groups w/could take control of the potential in reproducible image-making to direct film production and reception along standardised and partial lines to large audiences. As an influential form of communication, those who gained control over film could develop a hegemonic 'gaze' that masked the material conditions and diversity of 'actual' lives and thus present a 'false consciousness' of 'reality' to audiences: [60]

> In Western Europe today, the capitalist exploitation of film obstructs the human being's legitimate claim to being reproduced. The claim is also obstructed, incidentally, by unemployment which excludes large masses from production – the process in which their primary entitlement to be reproduced would lie. Under these circumstances, the film industry has an overriding interest in stimulating the involvement of the masses through illusionary displays and ambiguous speculations. To this end it has set in motion an immense publicity machine. (Benjamin 2008: 34)

As audiences became conversant with standardised filmmaking and corporate production methods, and absorbed in its meta-narratives, Benjamin felt it unlikely they would engage with films that challenged the ideological content in immersive and popular films, or those that were seemingly made in less 'professional' ways.

Indeed, Blain argued that government-financed films 'demonstrate only a superficial concern with the realities of industry or take a romantic approach to Scottish history' (1990: 56)

[60] A materialist conception of reality was a concept devised by Karl Marx (1818-1883) as a means of understanding human engagement with the natural and social worlds in a specific place and time as part of his critique of capitalism and his materialist conception of history. In Eric Fromm. [1961] 2004. *Marx Concept of Man.* London. New York: Continuum publishing, 1-18.

in keeping with their sponsor's remits. By contrast, the 'realism' in Tait's films has been identified by critics as an 'authentic imprint' (Curtis 1999: 63) or 'the aura of authenticity accompanying the everyday' (Neely 2008a: 220). This echoes Robin Blaetz' observation that some women filmmakers 'look in the least promising places and often locate through cinema, not truth, but something that rings true' (2007: 16). Pirie explained this in relation to Tait's films:

> The central fact of the humanity in Margaret's films – nothing to do with sentimentality, nothing to do with your average 'grab' of people's feelings, but with a sort of authentic human statement about being alive and being present in the world. Because I think one can move from the microcosm of looking at a stone through the concept of presence being a stone, right the way through to one's sense of being present in some – whatever we like to call it you know – the sense of being present in a time span. (cited in Appendix 1: vii)

To discuss the quality of 'being present' in films that 'authentically' 'ring true' to local or informed audiences, I return to *Rose Street,* previously discussed in relation to Tait's filming of children. This film can be categorised as a film essay, a documentary, a local interest film or a city film.

Case Study: *Rose Street* (Tait 1956)

When Tait invited Grierson to her 1955 Film Festival, his response to his viewing of *Rose Street* was recorded in an Edinburgh newspaper, 'Fantastic, I haven't seen anything so beautiful for a long time' (Neely 2009: 314) but he did not include it in his platforms. Miller notes that this film captures the 'actuality' of urban life also that:

> This innocuous backstreet could be any street in the Western world, the "shock" of the film stems from the recognition of what is common to all. Quite apart from the 'local colour', it conjures the nature of a street recognisable – and reverberant with – anyone. (2005: 1)

The 'actuality' filming in *Rose Street* and its 'authenticity' as a film text are contingent on the qualities inherent in the film technology and film processing available to Tait at the time. The soundtrack is recorded separately via 'wild' recordings on a single magnetic track then connected with the images in imaginative and asynchronous ways. Tait sometimes planned her ideas on paper prior to filming so as not to waste film, and she used a 'first see, catch with a camera; see again what comes through the camera and then re-arrange' (Tait cited in Krikorian 1983d: 9):

> The actual camera I use is a light-weight clockwork driven Bolex … the wind up, of course, only runs a certain length, and the roll is only a certain length … I have a hundred feet to work with before I have to change the film and … eighteen feet or something like that in any wind so that yes it does eventually influence the way that I compose the film, even on paper before I start. ... I know that I'm going to have to work in short takes before I ever start. (cited in Wilson 1978: 26)

Her in-camera editing and post-production were executed as directly as possible to her requirements. She also worked with a conversant trust in chance:

> I have to prepare my tracks and everything in such a way that they can be mixed at the other end of the post, the mail. … You have to exercise your imagination a bit more strongly when you're doing separate tracks. You have to be absolutely sure of each thing and not trust to just a general mush carrying it over … I like the editing part of it. When I've sent the film away, I can't wait to see it … you find things in the process of editing that you didn't quite know were there, and you also have to ditch things that you thought would be there and aren't. (Tait cited in Wilson 1978: 22)
> …
> there are things that rather surprise you when you get the film back … and you find that you can do something that you hadn't quite thought you could … that is just part of the creative process of making a film. It's inherent [sic.] in it. (Tait cited in Wilson 1978: 23)

Another contributory factor to the 'authenticity' in Tait's films is her practice of 'stalking the image' (Tait cited in Appendix 4: xlix). This forms parallels with Agnes Varda's notion of gleaning for strange and forgotten objects and practices as noted in her feature-length documentary *The Gleaners and I* (2000).[61] In this film, Varda travels across France re-searching for the gleaner's art of scavenging to show how this way of being has been adapted by marginalised groups and individuals to a modern mechanised world. It also refers to filmmakers who create films from the images and 'actual' material they glean (stalk) and collect.

[61] Agnes Varda's documentary film *The Gleaners and I* (2000) is filmed on a hand-held camera and explores a hidden side of French life as lived by the poor, the prudent – and herself as filmmaker. The word 'gleaners' refers to a forgotten group of mainly female agricultural workers who flourished in feudal France picking up what remained in the fields after harvesting. In the Bible's book of Ruth, gleaning refers to the act of collecting leftover crops from farmers' fields after they have been commercially harvested or where crops are not economically profitable to harvest. It became a legally enforced entitlement of the poor in a number of Christian kingdoms. Varda is also known for her focus on women, traditional crafts and aspects of daily life not included in mainstream film, and for her contributions to French New Wave cinema.

Fig. 70: Tait 1956. *Rose Street.*

Fig. 71: Tait 1956. *Rose Street.*

Fig. 72: Tait 1956. *Rose Street.*

Rose Street opens with a child singing 'on the mountain stands a lady' as the camera pans from the outlying rural landscape into Edinburgh's urban traffic. Sounds such as children shouting, Highland pipes and a male street singer singing about wanting somebody to love in the old music hall style on the soundtrack combine with 'actuality' sequences of bustling city life. Indigenous sounds and provisionally captured images uncover transient moments as people go about their daily business. Figure 71 shows two small girls negotiating their spoils and figure 72 a fleeting glimpse from a side street of women chatting and pushing prams. A shot of a woman walking along a busy street is framed in ways that suggest this man-made [sic.] urban environment restricts people's choices (figure 70). Elsewhere Tait points to 'paths of desire' (Norman 2011: 110-141) or routes of least resistance formed by people among demarcations devised by urban planners. Paths of desire (desire lines) are unregulated trails that defy corporate planning and are carved into rural and urban landscapes by people (and animals) who may not know each other but who co-operate in forming alliances by breaching or observing civic directives. Their presence manifests in *Rose Street* via shots of children playing tag in the streets, drawing on pavements, randomly riding bicycles, playing football in alleys, taking short cuts and lorries too wide for the streets spilling on to pavements. By filming Rose Street this way, Tait captures the resistance and compliance of a community imprinting their presence via their gestures, actions and footprints in an environment which is evolving in time.

In 'The Work of Art', Benjamin notes that film is made up of a series of single frames, each of which can be frozen and scrutinised on its own as well as part of the chronological movement, 'where the way each single image is understood seems prescribed by the sequence of all the preceding images' (2008: 27). These sequential images form equivalence with

Eisenstein's theory of intellectual montage editing (Bordwell 2005: 111-138) in which, he explains, each film frame has its own internal tensions as well as being part of a timed sequence of interconnected and provisionally captured images. As film advances, each frame collides and co-operates with its adjacent images. It is in the editorial splices, montage editing and the tensions in and between film frames that Tait confirms that 'the here and now' – which Benjamin said was evident in one-off paintings – is also present in film. Tait explains her perspectives on film's ability to penetrate the 'deep tissue' of 'reality' which Benjamin thought was particularly effective when film is used experimentally:

> In a way, it's what all film is about – why is that there, just now? Or, rather, no 'why' in it, but it is, there it is, look! And when you find what absolutely is in the frame, then when that's screened it affects you in the same way as Wells Cathedral or a standing stone. To my mind that "is" includes movement and the exact nature of the movement is just as important as choice of placing, colour etc. of who and what is in the frame. Then the element of 'performance' in this movement is another thing again, can take it all into another sphere. (Tait's emphases) (Tait cited in Letter to Leggett 05/06/1976: 3. Held at the BAFVSC, London)

In 1974 Tait filmed Rose Street again in *On The Mountain*. Into this later film she inserted the whole of *Rose Street* thereby forming a dialogue between the two time frames and two films, and highlighting the links between the past, present and future. She specifically left the black leader on *Rose Street* visible, 'to make the point that the whole film was inserted, not just excerpts' (Tait cited in Wilson 1978: 11).

On the surface, *On The Mountain* appears as a short documentary of a street in Edinburgh in the 1970s, but further analysis reveals that it also reflects on tradition, progress, transformation and modernisation in a form of 'realism' not shown in sponsored films.

Case Study: *On the Mountain* (1974)

On the Mountain could be categorised as a documentary, local interest or city film. It incorporates Tait's thematic interest in time, transience and change which is registered via young and old local voices singing the same songs and rhymes across both films and time frames. Tait explains:

> In the old days, children played peever on the pavement and 'chainy tig' in the back lane, and sang skipping songs: nowadays, shoppers can amble along in the middle of the street. The smoke has gone, but the (seemingly) same rubbish cart collects the refuse, and the same window cleaner is washing the very same window as sixteen years before, although the shop has a different name. (cited in Luxonline 2013)

While there is little evidence of local children playing or adults interacting in ways they had when the streets were narrow*,* the presence and folklore of the earlier time do reverberate in *On the Mountain* via Tait's inclusion of the sounds and images of the earlier *Rose Street*. By integrating local voices, field recordings, skipping rhymes, songs, whistling, traffic, children playing and street calls alongside her 'actuality' filming this area of Edinburgh, past and present, Tait transports the sounds and activities from *Rose Street* into *On the Mountain* and seemingly back again as if to suggest that history is simultaneously circular, linear, transient and mutable.

Tait also addresses Scottish concerns regarding the effect that post-war modernisation had on local communities as stated in the Ministry of Education pamphlet 'Youth's Opportunity' (1947):

> The rapid industrialisation of the previous century had delivered many benefits, but this had come with consequences for the town and city life enjoyed by youngsters. These included a loss of community, reduced proximity to nature and increased complexity of social relationships. (Jones cited in Goode 2011: 20)

In *On the Mountain* Tait suggests that these concerns endure. By filming a specific place in two time periods in a single film, she reveals ways in which people formed social relations and interacted with urban development, modernisation and architecture over time. She films the community's responses to changes in their environment via a montage of sounds and images in a form of signification Kristeva calls the 'semiotic chora' (cited in Moi 1991: 89-131).

The 'chora' is an element in language/film repressed by the symbolic's authoritative and common-sense logic. It manifests in local speech, sounds and gestures and is connected to biological drives, emotions and rhythms – rather than the rational and organised underpinning of standard documentary films. The 'chora' exists in relation to dominant film/language-use but can disrupt its logic through art, poetry, sounds and music. Although it cannot be identified as a separate entity, aspects of the 'chora' become increasingly repressed as society becomes reliant on logic, notions of progress and dominant forms of signification.

The ‘chora’ in many of Tait’s films manifests via the voices of people whose access and proficiency with dominant forms of signification is marginal or beyond their reach. In *On The Mountain,* the chora emerges via Tait’s poetic sound-image connections and creative editing which suggest that although the local community may have had little or no say in the changes that altered their ways of being. Their ‘voices’ and experiences are discernible in their songs, folklore and movements. Similarly, their unrest and compliance are visible in the reclaimed shops, graffiti, demolished tenements, corporate business ventures, open precincts, buskers, scaffolding and luxury housing developments. By filming this way, Tait draws attention to the ways people have adjusted to change in Rose Street and formed differing social relationships over a period of time among a continuum of narratives, memories and experiences, as well as changing architecture, history and culture.

By creating a dialogue between the older black-and-white and the newer colour film (a strategy I discuss later in this chapter in my analysis of *Land Makar*) Tait acknowledges that while modernisation is an inescapable part of life, its impact on social relationships and the landscape is sensed by local characters. At a public screening of *On the Mountain* Tait explained:

> It struck me that the difference really between the black and white part of the film and the later colour part is that the people in the b/w were mostly people that I knew, and these are like miniature portraits of most of them. In fact, in looking at it you can probably tell the difference between people who are just passers-by and those who belong to that part of the street. … ‘scar face’ [indecipherable] (figure 73) swept that bit of the street and he lived there too actually … Frances Rosy dancing to his music (figure 74). I think she was about three at that time. … the drivers of vehicles coming along expected there would be some children around – they never got run over anyway (figure 75). … in 1973 … the whole of Rose Street … had largely changed its character … that section had become a pedestrian precinct. The people who lived there had been housed somewhere else. The little grocer shops and things had been changed into boutiques selling jeans and pop records and so forth. So, there are not so many portraits in what was filmed in 1973. Perhaps none at all. (Tait cited in Appendix 1: xxxiv)

Indeed, *On the Mountain* has less character portraits than *Rose Street,* which is a perhaps a comment on the speed at which modernity was evolving.

Fig. 73: Tait 1956. *Rose Street.*

Fig. 74: Tait 1956. *Rose Street.*

Fig. 75: Tait 1956. *Rose Street.*

Tait's subjective 'stalking' for images and sounds that represent social and environmental changes connects with Benjamin's modernist notion of the 'flaneur', a concept he borrowed from the French poet Charles Baudelaire (1821-1867). The 'flaneur' personifies the city street wanderer (male) who observed the effects of modernity and the changes made to urban landscapes (1999). [62] Or perhaps Tait pre-empts the post-modern female flaneuse (Wolff 1990, Elkin 2016) who similarly wanders through urban landscapes observing the changes wrought by industrial upheaval. But where the male flaneur observed the city from a detached position, the post-modern flaneuse is emotionally bound up in the environment she navigates. By directing her point-of-view camera in a similar way, Tait invites audiences to explore the changes in Rose Street through its sounds, people, landmarks and fashions. Furthermore, by repeating the title song 'On the Mountain' as sung by old and young voices across both films, she forms a genealogy among locals past and present. The child singing the words 'all fade away' on the soundtrack exemplifies the fragility and uncertainty of these transformations.

In the next section I consider Tait's re-presentations of gender which, as well as class, is part of her commitment to 'authentic' or 'realist' re-presentations of everyday local people. It provides insights into her subjects' ways of being rather than recording their lives in ways that reiterate the dominant perspectives of that time.

[62] Walter Benjamin, after the poet Charles Baudelaire (1821-1867), wrote of the flaneur in his *Arcades Project* (1927-1940). Graeme Gilloch explained: 'For Benjamin, the ultimate hero of modernity is the figure who seeks to give voice to its paradoxes and illusions, who participates in, while yet still retaining the capacity to give form to, the fragmented, fleeting experiences of the modern. This individual is the poet' (1996: 134). Janet Wolff later redressed the assumption that the flaneur was primarily a male figure with a privileged viewpoint by discussing the female counterpart to this (Wolff 1990: 34-50).

Representations of Gender and Place

By the 1960s, many politically conscious groups in Britain were 'concerned with demystifying representations to make people aware that texts are producers of ideology and that we live in a world of constructions rather than solid essences' (Kaplan 2013: 138). Regarding the ideological underpinning in films sanctioned under Grierson's authority, documentarian Nick Fraser wrote:

> [Grierson's] school shied away from overt class-war propaganda. But it also perpetuated a woozy propagandist worldview in which poor people were patronised, somewhat in the style of contemporary "one world" social commentary, with its obsessional focus on the "flatness" of the world at the expense of human differences. (2012: 25)

Film scholar Peter Hutchings also observed that early documentary films may ostensibly have been about 'ordinary people' but from the 1960s audiences had become immune to middle-class images of the working-class since they were filmed from the same middleclass male viewpoint as those who commissioned them:

> In the documentaries produced by John Grierson during the 1930s the middleclass perspective has become so obvious over the years that they have lost their power to win us over to their viewpoint and their power and main interest is now either historical or – in the case of the more 'poetic' or visually arresting film aesthetic. (cited in Murphy 2009: 304)

Other 'realist' representations of class appeared in the 1950s Free Cinema movement which overlapped with Tait's early film practice. It was an influence on British New Wave (1959-1969), prior to the New Scottish Cinema from the 1970s (Petrie 2000, Hutchings 2009, Murray 2015). Like Tait's work, the films produced here were outside standard film production systems and involved observational and location filming of working British subjects on black-and-white 16mm film stock, but unlike Tait's, they were underpinned with grants from the BFI.

While working as a locum in London in the 1950s Tait met Lindsay Anderson, a leading figure in Free Cinema, 'to discuss some of her film scripts which, because of their focus on the events of WW II, were being met with a lack of enthusiasm due to a surplus of material on the subject' (Neely 2017: 14). Yet Tait's 'realist' observations of post-war transformation in her Scottish localities can be considered as part of the film culture that addressed modernity in

Britain. Anderson is known for claiming 'Humphrey Jennings is the only real poet that British cinema has produced' (1954: 181).[63] However, Tait's films redress many issues that earlier documentary films omitted including those by Jennings' and Free Cinema, arguably in equally innovative ways. Her inclusive filming of local life, culture, environments and women indicates aspects of 'modern' life that were largely missing in the 'new cinema' frames. But, despite this setback, Tait continued to observe, 'stalk the image' and film everyday people and environments in her Scottish locality in her self-determined way.

Nevertheless, as an educated person who had 'sprung from a long line of seafaring merchants' (Grigor 1999: 6), Tait could also be accused of 'patronising' her less well-off subjects in the ways Hutchings (2009) and Fraser (2012) suggest. But Jan Moir defends Tait's stance by pointing to the humble conditions in which she lived and worked:

> How has she supported herself all these years? "Dribs and drabs from the films," Tait says, crisply. "I've never been a spendthrift. I've always managed to live cheaply." Somewhere along the line she married writer Alex Pirie and the couple, who have no children, live in splendid isolation – with no phone – on the outer reaches of the Orkney mainland. (1993)

There are two ways of approaching this. One is that middle-class left-thinking artists in the early to mid-twentieth century formed an alliance with the 'masses' against the bourgeoisie, albeit from an intellectual activist perspective. The other is that living frugally on the margins of a Scottish culture which did not recognise her worth, in a community that had its own patriarchal infrastructure and was marginal to London-centred thinking, informed Tait's empathy with the overlooked and excluded. She was mindful that her subject position was constructed by the same oppressive ideology as those among whom she lived. Consequently, her standpoint perspectives enabled her to blur the more usual barriers between filmmaker and filmed, and to look beneath the surface of the 'realities' presented in standard film categories to the small

[63] In a eulogy to the filmmaker Humphrey Jennings (1907-1950), whose work drew attention to everyday heroism in the 1930s and 1940s, filmmaker Lindsey Anderson wrote: Jennings' style 'bore the closest possible relationship to his theme […] that is to say a poetic style. In fact, it might reasonably be contended that Humphrey Jennings is the only real poet the British cinema has yet produced' (1954:181). It is for this reason, perhaps, that Anderson perceived Tait's work as a repeating something that had already been accomplished and surpassed by British New Wave such as Tony Richardson, Karel Reisz, Jack Clayton and John Schlesinger. Tait mentions Jennings and Free Cinema in conversation with Tamara Krikorian (1983b: 4).

details and overlooked subjectivities which she felt were missing from standard and new cinema representations in/of Britain.

Pirie described Tait's egalitarian approach to filmmaking as a form of 'loving attentiveness' contingent on 'a particular kind of detachment' (cited in Appendix 1: iv) that related to her training as a doctor. He felt Tait's lack of squeamishness enabled her to give equal form to things others might not 'see' or wish to confront. She agreed:

> Yes, I think some of this must come out in spite of me, because people sometimes make this remark. … yes, that's what I like, everything treated equally – the woman standing there, and the leaf and the wall, and it's all got equal significance. … But … it must be inherent in me that I treat the other things in the frame as being just as important. (cited Wilson 1978: 24)

Tait also admitted that she 'borrowed' this approach from Lorca's evaluation of Don Luis de Gongora's poetry, '[f]or Gongora an apple is no less intense than the sea, a bee no less astonishing than a forest. He treats all materials at the same scale and the poet must know this' (cited in Appendix 4: xiv). This democratic approach to all elements in her films connects to her female-centred and inclusive perspective.

Indeed, by the 1970s, under the influence of feminism and other groups committed to socio-cultural reform, the film categories and nomenclatures which once sustained traditional representations as stable were beginning to be 'redefined, eroded, defended and redrawn' (Gledhill 2000: 222). Even so, writing in 1973, feminist film critic Claire Johnston doubted that women filmmakers could bypass the ideology embedded in the current film conventions and technology they were compelled to use to challenge it:

> It is idealist mystification to believe that 'truth' can be captured by the camera or that the conditions of a film's production (e.g. a film made collectively by women) can of itself reflect the conditions of its production. This is mere utopianism: new meaning has to be manufactured within the text of the film.
> …
> What the camera in fact grasps is the 'natural' world of the dominant ideology. Women's cinema cannot afford such idealism … New meanings have to be created by disrupting the fabric of the male bourgeois cinema within the text of the film. (cited in Thornham 1999: 36)

Johnston suggested that to circumvent the 'naturalisation' of hierarchies in standardised films, women sh/could expose the ideology in cinematic apparatus by manipulating film technology

and drawing attention to the constructed nature of dominant film production. This would reveal that films are re-presentations of reality and not 'reality' itself, and that the agents of standard film productions were aligned to the same group that sponsored and organised films.

Arguably, in many of her films, Tait employed similar deconstructive cinematic strategies to ensure that her audiences were watching a 'film of a reality' rather than 'reality' itself and that women were part of this 'reality'. I present these ideas in my analysis of *Land Makar* (1981).

Case Study: *Land Makar* (Tait 1981)

Land Makar can be classified as a documentary, a local interest film, a film portrait or an avant-garde short.[64] Filmed over three-years, it represents a farming 'year' in crofter Mary Sinclair's life in West Aith, at a time when elsewhere modernity intersected with postmodernity. In a flier to promote this film Tait wrote:

> A landscape study of an Orkney croft, with the figure of the crofter, Mary Graham Sinclair, very much in the picture, and enriched throughout by her vivid comments. Filmed over several seasons between 1977 and 1980, it takes in many of the human activities which alter the look of the land.
>
> The croft is on the edge of a small loch where swans and other birds nest in the grass. It is worked in the old style, and, although mechanised aids are brought into use when appropriate, much is done by one woman's labour.
>
> The crops are hay, turnips, potatoes, kale and oats; the croft also fattens a few cattle and feeds a little flock of hens and a few ducks. (cited in Moving Image Archive 2017a)

The opening sequence introduces the treeless landscape of West Aith where Tait was living at the time. On the soundtrack, in a conversation rather than an interview, Tait and Sinclair discuss in Gaelic dialect their differing understanding of the word 'beauty'. Tait explains that she is making a film to be called *Land Makar*:[65]

> **Sinclair** Land Makar?
> **Tait** That means poet of the land.

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[64] Neely writes that The British Council and Arts Council, which organised *The Elusive Sign: 10 Years of British Avant-garde Film and Video (1987)* Exhibition at the Tate Gallery in London bought a copy of *Land Makar* as part of the exhibition (Neely 2017: 29 fn 30).

[65] In a recorded introduction to her portrait films, Tait said 'In William Dunbar's poem *Lament for the Makars* which you'll find in the *Oxford Book of English Verse …* there are the names of any number of poets, of Makars, of poets, of those days ... and some of them well-known names still, but others whose 'making' has disappeared without trace' (Appendix 1:xxxi).

Sinclair Poet of the land?
Tait I feel it's creating a beauty of West Aith
Sinclair Some beauty!
Tait Well, it's a beautiful place.

This dialogue establishes that both women share a landscape, a language, differing approaches to 'beauty' and an identity as Makars (one of the land, the other of film). Also, that they are of a similar age, have 'lone' relationships with their work and have chosen hard-won lifestyles which are overlooked by the wider world. In an interview with Tamara Krikorian Tait discussed the limited funds that she and Sinclair both managed:

> Do you remember at the end where she's talking about her hens and saying that they don't really pay, that the cost of feeding is so high and that if they live then you get a dinner out of each of them then it's worthwhile. But if something happens to them and they die, then they die in debt? (Tait cited in Appendix 4: xlvii)

The working 'year' in *Land Makar* 'starts in autumn, goes through to winter, then comes back to another winter and possibly the first winter you see happened after the second winter' (Tait cited in Krikorian 1983d: 6). This protracted approach to time presents Sinclair's working year as cyclical, changeable and cumulative, offering levels of thinking and symbolism not discernible in standard 'documentary' films of this type. In terms of categories Tait explains:

> It wasn't intended as a portrait so much as a landscape. But as a … landscape made by somebody working upon it, and inevitably the maker of this landscape came very prominently into the film, and I think that a lot of people do see the film as a portrait of Mary Graham Sinclair. Mary Graham as she's known by her friends. So, you could see it as a kind of accidental portrait. … I couldn't help portraying Mary Graham as I stumped about her land while she ploughed. (cited in Appendix 1: xxxiii)

Their conversation cordially considers how time and life rely on the animals, harvest and cycles of nature.[66] Tait sheds light on the inclusive subject-to-subject relationship she forms between herself and those she films (filmmaker-and-filmed) in much of her work:

[66] In the first section of their conversation, Sinclair and Tait discuss their optimism for a good crop which has deflected worries about it surviving the wind and rain. They talk of the balance of growing traditional crops of corn, oats and barley and shifting towards animal consumption. Corn is the most flexible and widely used grain, and cattle are fed on a mixture of turnips, straw, hay and grain. There is talk of the birds that have started nest building and laying eggs despite the weather and of a couple of swans that have made a nest by the lake. They mention the corncrakes, which are often heard but rarely seen as they spend much of their time in the long grass. They also speak about local traditions such as midsummer's night, an annual ritual, which had just recently passed and of a walking tour of local haunts. They discuss a neighbouring croft that has fallen into disrepair, roofs that have fallen through and walls that are crumbling. Mary remembers walking and cycling on the challenging route to school in her final year, and the joy of finding road workers and the chance of a blether.

> Yes, I think I've always felt this is that I like to introduce the atmosphere of somebody being behind the camera as well as people being there in front on the camera. And maybe you always feel this in a film anyway, but maybe it's a bit naïve to think that you have to deliberately bring it in. … You start off with the textbook notion that the person mustn't look at the camera, that this spoils the look of the thing, or destroys the illusion- that there's nobody there – it's not a screen. But sometimes one wants to destroy the illusion and recognise that there's a camera there and these people ... they're kindly doing this for you and recognise the fact that, not only does the camera know they're there, they know the camera's there too. (Tait cited in Wilson 1978: 26)

In *Land Makar* Tait presents the difficulties of sustaining a livelihood in West Aith as work that requires commitment and fortitude. Telephones, modern transport, mechanisation and consumer products were either too expensive, unavailable or incompatible with the island's infrastructure therefore their community had little contact with, or in some cases desire for the excesses of late capitalism, which acted as a catalyst to socio-economic and industrial change elsewhere in Britain at that time. Considering this, Sinclair's presence is compelling as she goes about her business driving tractors, tending her land and animals, climbing up haystacks, overseeing small details such as a nest of swans with the same level of attention she gives to harvesting and ploughing (figures 76-79).

Fig. 76: Tait 1981. *Land Makar.*

Fig. 77: Tait 1981. *Land Makar.*

Fig. 78: Tait 1981. *Land Makar.*

Fig. 79: Tait 1981. *Land Makar.*

Tait's 'creative treatment' of the 'reality' of Sinclair's egalitarian care of every aspect of her croft echoes her own approach to filmmaking:

In the next section there is talk of hay baling during July and August and of an agricultural 'show'. The storms in September that flattened the haystacks which have to be rebuilt and stooped against the rain that lasted for days to the point of flooding. Mary refers to grocery shopping and the exchange of her eggs for her stores. The swan and her family get another mention as one of the eggs didn't make it. The last section is about how the introduction of electric light has improved egg production in the early winter and there is some speculation about the birds' sense of a longer day. Mary says, even though its nicer to have an egg than not, there is little profit to be made from the hens.

The penultimate scene in late autumn sees the cutting of the peat – the ironic taking from the land to burn in their homes – a form of taking from the land in order to keep warm and sustain them.

> Well, I got her to go along there because I particularly liked the way that she seems to encourage the wild birds and even the wildflowers and things on her land and doesn't just cultivate the whole thing and drain it to extinction. This is part of what she is. Part of what the landscape is so that it is a kind of portrait I suppose.
> …
> I used her voice for the sake of the sound of her voice. I think you'll probably won't necessarily follow everything that she's saying, although you'll pick up some of it. But if your ear was tuned to the Orkney accent of course you would hear everything. When I showed it in Orkney the audience is in stitches because some of the things she says are very funny. (Tait cited in Appendix 1: xxxiv)

Tait did not provide English subtitles to translate the Gaelic even though this might have been financially beneficial as she was also keen to earn a living from her films. By refuting subtitles she upheld her commitment to using Scottish voices and dialects and to counter films that 'worked to still Scotland's own screen voice' (Griffiths 2012: 297-298). Tait knew that the resonances in local language-use would be lost if translated into English because different languages, like different films, conceptualise 'realities', differently. She also aware that as a visual language film does not necessarily need words, 'I don't think you actually need to know what's being said all the time to follow this film' (cited in Krikorian 1983d: 7). This suggests that other ways of receiving information through film are possible, from her perspective.

Tait's use of indigenous dialects made audiences aware that they were entering a different world. Standard documentary shorts used English BBC-type or Anglicised male voice-overs to typically presented a corporate 'expert' commentary by someone (often English) assumed to be conversant with the events screened, but in *Land Makar* Tait directs audiences by using Scottish dialects and fe/male voices. Occasionally a shot is held for longer than usual, editing and jump cuts are sharp, and the sounds of soundtrack of tractors, ducks, birds, wind and muffled local voices are increased on the soundtrack. These cinematic devices draw attention to the constructed nature of the film and a 'reality' which it re-presents. But with no clear rationale or familiar film strategies to fall back on, audiences may have found her films difficult to watch. Pirie observed*:*

> Most people live out their lives incapable of sinking back into those things or to recognising those things which are in us all, you know I mean they are in us all, and yet most people seem, on the face of it, they go through life nipped in, held back, not open to experience, not open to the experience of themselves. (cited in Appendix 1: xviii)

As with *The Drift Back,* rather than providing idealised views of Highland life, in *Land Makar* Tait films the few resources and lack of modern amenities in this crofting community while elsewhere in 1980s Britain people were absorbed in mechanisation, monetarism and late capitalism. References to the inconsistency in government support across Britain can again be gleaned in this film. Duncan Petrie explains that under Prime Minister Thatcher's Conservative government (1979-1990), Westminster's commitment to increasing the UK's economic autonomy through de-regulation and a free market economy impacted unfairly on the Celtic fringes which were on the margins of centralised distribution of wealth and resources (2004: 1-5). Journalist Peter Riddle, writing on this period of British history concurs, 'the Conservative leader stood for all the values of the English suburban and provincial middle-class and aspiring skilled working-class [which was] very much an English phenomenon that failed to be replicated in either Scotland or Wales' (cited in Petrie 2004: 3).[67] Thus *Land Makar* acknowledges lifestyles in Britain that people were committed to, either by choice or adherence to a heritage they identified with. Additionally, it is filmed in ways that are neither nostalgic nor an escape from post/modern pressures. Rather, Tait's modernist filming techniques point to the contemporaneity of her film treatment on a traditional subject and make audiences aware that they are watching a filmed re-presentation of an extant reality.

Tait's references to time also resonate in this film. As discussed in Chapter One of this thesis, in *Time and Free Will,* Bergson divided time into 'time durée' which he describes as time we experience moment by moment (temporal) and mechanised time (spatial) which is measured by clocks and calendars. 'Temporal' time is un/consciously experienced as a single continuous process that runs parallel with, but is often obscured by, the 'spatial' time that regulates daily life and the smooth running of society:

> We set our states of consciousness side by side in such a way as to perceive them simultaneously, no longer in one another but alongside one another; in a word we

[67] See Jonathon Murray. 2015. *The New Scottish Cinema*. London: I.B. Tauris and Co. 21-47 for information regarding the increased funding in Scottish cinema and television since the 1980s. The investment in film training and funding short film projects during this time was intended to create a homegrown film industry and raise the profile of Scottish cinema. See also, Duncan Petrie. 2000. *Screening Scotland*. BFI, for an account of the Scottish cinema since the 1970s.

> project time into space, we express duration in terms of extensity, and succession thus takes the form of a continuous line or chain, the parts of which touch without penetrating each other. (Bergson [1913] 2012: 101)

Gillies explains that for Bergson, it is the ability to integrate temporal and spatial time that leads to balance and self-knowledge, for when we turn the gaze inward, either alone or as a community, 'we intuitively enter into an understanding with our self and then employ our intelligence to explain what intuition has revealed' (Gillies 1996: 20). Living exclusively in spatial time prevents personal growth by preventing the self-knowledge implicit in experiential time (durée) or pushing it into the unconscious. But living permanently in temporal time is equally impractical since it makes functioning in the material world difficult. The trick is to be open to Bergson's concept of 'intuition' and to fluctuate in-between both 'times'.

Bergson explains 'intuition' as moments of recognition of experiences that occur in time durée and triggered by events in mechanised/spatial time. These moments happen suddenly and wordlessly. They lie beyond analysis and cannot be explained with language, but if acknowledged and acted upon they provide opportunities for people to recall experiences and reflect on ideas suppressed by the rational thinking that sustains post/modernity.

A moment of 'intuition' appears in *Land Makar* and if recognised as such, can be interpreted as Tait's way of re-minding local audiences of a shared heritage. For example, the opening 10-second colour sequence establishes the treeless landscape of West Aith and Sinclair's croft in 'spatial' or clock time. This is followed by a 50-second black-and-white sequence (figure 76) indicative of 'temporal' time (durée) in which Sinclair and her fellow crofters hand-harvest hay in the traditional manner against loud mechanised discordant sounds of a timeworn tractor and muffled local voices. Then, after more opening titles hand-written in chalk on slate, for the rest of the 30-minutes the film returns to colour and thus spatial time while continuing to film the crofters' daily routines using the same traditional methods (figures 77-79).

Like moments of intuition, the 50-second black-and-white time durée sequence makes no difference to a surface reading of the film. It may not even be noticed by audiences as it is spliced among images of Sinclair and her neighbours continuing to scythe, dig and stack hay in

time-honoured ways. But from another perspective, the black-and-white interjection echoes the fleeting moments of intuition that Bergson noted that were difficult to register under the conditions of modernity – including watching ideologically sound conventional films. It suggests that Tait un/consciously anticipated that the short black-and-white sequence might 'trigger' memories in her audiences of a time in their history or experience which had been pushed aside by the coercive logic of late capitalism and popular film reception. Tait may also be un/consciously inviting audiences to reflect on the investment in modern facilities in predominantly urban areas. For although modernisation provided work and wealth for the nation at that time, the streamlining of regional aid had yet to reach some parts of Great Britain and therefore the changes generated by post/modernity impacted on rural and 'outreach' communities in less favourable ways (Petrie 2004: 1-16, Devine 2006: 588-589).

Sinclair's low-key existence in *Land Makar* points to a community that worked in unison (with their children at times as in films of this type) in ways that contrasted with the prevailing world of individualism, competition, gender politics and profit margins. Tait's film provides insights into the experience and tenacity of people whose bond with the land stemmed from a sustained sense of 'place' and a connection with its history and culture in ways that are different, rather than lesser, than life elsewhere in Britain.

Other signifiers of this community's lack of commercial consumption include shots inside Sinclair's modest cottage and a mobile shop in a converted van (on which her mother's family/local name Isbister Bros. is written) which serves as a place of exchange that provides basic supplies and bartering, and a meeting point for the community. This aspect of Highland life features in many local or rural interest films. Tait's filming of the crofters' subsistence and egalitarian relationship with their environment is referred to in an interview with Krikorian:

> **TK** In your latest film, I think you imply, from the title *Land Makar,* that the changes in that landscape are brought about by the activities of the crofter, Mary Graham Sinclair
> **MT** Hmm**.** Some variations are simply seasonal, and come from above, so to speak. Mary Graham lends a hand, and transforms, but doesn't over transform the land that she farms. (1983b: 5)

Rather than sentimental or exploitative, Tait films her neighbours' way of life as difficult and reciprocal as noted in the hard-won 'beauty' Tait and Sinclair discuss in the film's introduction. Tait also films West Aith as a place where life is indicative of a communal 'self'' knowledge. She also invites questions regarding progress as a universal aim or an achievable goal for some people in parts of late twentieth century Britain, in contrast with the abundance of 1980s late capitalism elsewhere.

Land Makar is one of many of Tait's films that form 'threads of connectedness' (Daly 1978: 128) with sponsored films that promote government subsidies and local information. In the next section I explore these links by placing *Land Maker* within the context of earlier films of this type – as previously executed in my analysis of *The Drift Back*.

Precursors to *Land Makar* (Tait 1981)

Land Makar, like *The Drift Back,* reveals Tait's dialectic engagement with earlier and local film production. Tait once said that while standard documentary films had value, from her perspective:

> Recording for its own sake is an educative, or journalistic use of film (worthy enough in its way) that has the same relation to the kind of filmmaking that I care about as textbooks or newspapers have to literature. (cited in Krikorian 1983b: 7)

To demonstrate this discrepancy, I have selected three standard black and white short films about crofting in Scotland from the 1930s and 1940s. There are several ways in which these films intersect with *Land Makar,* even though it was filmed forty to fifty years later.

These films are, a local interest film *A Crofter's Life in Shetland* (Gilbertson 1931 16mm) (figure 80), an amateur film *Eriskay: A Poem of Remote Lives* (Dr. Kissling 1935 35mm) (figure 81), a Ministry of Information film *Crofters* (Ralph Keene 1944 35mm) (figure 82). All three films sustain subject-to-object relations between filmed and filmmaker, as previously discussed, and rely on 'tourist' or 'ethnographic' gazes which typically re-present filmed documentations of Highland communities.

Fig. 80: Gilbertson 1931. *A Crofter's Life in Shetland.*

Fig. 81: Dr. Kissling. 1935. *Eriskay: A Poem of Remote Lives.*

Fig. 82: Keene 1944. *Crofters*.

Jenny Gilbertson's *A Crofters: Life in Shetland* (1931) is a silent film which follows traditional crofting over a conventional (spatial) year – in contrast to Tait's experiential year in *Land Makar*. This skilful film offers historical interest and insight into life in Shetland in the 1930s. Using English intertitles and captions, Gilbertson offers a filmed documentation of life on Shetland in enjoyable and informative ways. She regularly holidayed in the Scottish islands and later moved to Shetland to film life there as she observed it, and to marry a local crofter (Brownrigg 2016: 67-68). Like her mentor, John Grierson, Gilbertson wanted her films to educate and inform audiences, in this case, about working lives in Shetland.[68] Her filming style relies on an ethnographic gaze which Catherine Russell explains records subjects and events as if they belonged to a cultural framework that is either lost, or outside the filmmaker's, and audiences' experience, in a form of aesthetic realism (1999: 120 –125).

Eriskay: A Poem of Remote Lives (1935) is another skilfully filmed record of a way of life on the Outer Hebridean island of Eriskay. Kissling's 'amateur' film presents this community, its Gaelic dialect and local trades in informative and harmonious ways. Jenny Brownrigg observes that this film presents 'a romantic view of the islanders for … audiences. … it's as if the crofters

[68] In comparison with Grierson's response to Tait's films, the BFI's online archive records his more positive reaction to Jenny Brown-Gilbertson's film *Crofters*: 'Once completed, Brown arranged a screening in London and somewhat audaciously invited John Grierson to attend. Grierson came, saw, and was impressed: "Miss Jenny Brown has made a picture of the Shetlands. It is her first picture, and she has made it very daringly by herself without any professional assistance whatsoever. For a solo effort it is an extraordinary job of work. It not only gives you very beautiful pictures of Shetland, but it gets down to the life of the crofters and fishermen and brings the naturalness of it. Miss Brown has already broken through the curse of artificiality and is on the way to becoming a real filmmaker, a real illuminator of life and movement"'. A creative relationship ensued between the two, culminating in the production the following year of a further five short films for Grierson and later *The Rugged Island: A Shetland Lyric* (1933). This film was screened in British cinemas for several years, but Gilbertson received no money.

of Eriskay are trapped in time and mist, “little has changed in this corner of Gaeldom”’ (2016: 72 (quote from the narrator in the film)). Kissling’s is the earliest film known to use Gaelic dialogue and like Tait, he included local voices, songs, field sounds and the names of Eriskay’s residents, on captions added in post-production in a London studio. The film has an Anglicised male commentary, a narrative structure and standard credits and intertitles which inform audiences of features in the film. The funds collected at its London premiere were given to the people of Eriskay who used it to build roads on their island (Screenonline n.d.).

Like Gilbertson, Kissling holidayed in the Highlands and this may account for the ‘tourist gaze’ with which it is filmed. John Urry (1996) explains the ‘tourist gaze’ as one that films local people as if they belong to a culture the filmmaker has no first-hand knowledge of, such as when holidaymakers look for ‘authentic’ experiences of an ‘other’s’ culture. This ‘gaze’ is learnt from watching popular films about indigenous cultures. Indeed, Kissling’s film was inspired by Robert Flaherty's *Man of Aran* (1934), and Gilbertson’s by the film productions overseen by her mentor John Grierson.

In *Crofters* (1944), Keene filmed working life in Achriesgill, Sutherland, including crofting, farming, fishing and cutting peat from an ethnographic gaze. As discussed previously, this is a skilled sponsored information film which has an Anglicised male voice-over and emotive music. Like Gilbertson’s and Kissling’s films, *Crofters* has a narrative which evokes an ‘exotic interest’ in an/other’s environment. All three films present an idealistic form of ‘realism’ which observes the form and content of standard local interest films rather than challenging it.

With regard to re-presenting women, Kissling films the women of Eriskay as co-operative members of their community. He includes their names and occupations as part of his documentation of island life in which everyone helps each other no matter what their age or gender. In Keene’s sponsored film, the male voice-over explains women in relation to the community as, ‘if any of the crofters are away or if it’s a woman, the others get together and clip their sheep for them … there’s always plenty for them to do in the house and around the croft. … A good wife and sturdy bairns are the best help a man can have.’ Generic re-presentations of

women in local film production contrast with the Tait's filming of Mary Graham Sinclair whose autonomous presence, perspectives and voice are central to *Land Makar*.

These three earlier films thus rely on, construct and restore received ideas about Highland life in popular film shorts of this type. Often, locals familiar with being filmed by visitors, defer to the expectations of the 'tourist gaze' and pose or dress up for the occasion and/or financial remuneration. Their performances question such films' claims to 'authenticity' and suggest notions of constructed ideals or nostalgia on the part of the filmmaker (Urry 1996: 115-33), which was something Tait redressed in films such as *Rose Street, The Drift Back* and *Land Makar*.

As straightforward documentary/information films that observe the educational stance of standard short-filmmaking, they rely on the same conventions advocated by the Films of Scotland Committees. They are enjoyable and well-made films, but the filmmakers do not interact with their subjects or address the material issues facing the Highlands or consider their protagonists' relationships with their means of production. Locals often appear posed and the indexical links between images, sounds and referents are ideological and stable.

In *Land Makar*, Tait arguably 'deconstructs' standard iconography and methods used in earlier films of this type and explores modern filmmaking strategies to film a traditional way of life which is ongoing in some parts of Britain. She also probes the idealism sponsored films typically promoted. Her films thus reach beyond skilful documentation to form dialectical relationships with popular film formats, a difference which she says echoes the 'relationship that textbooks … have to literature'. Regarding the labelling her films, when asked if her film *Portrait of Ga* (1952) was a form of documentation Tait replied, 'that could be any film surely' (cited in Krikorian 1983: 3), thereby making the point that all films 'document' to some extent, but in her films, this outcome is incidental.

I conclude this chapter with an analysis of *A Portrait of Ga* which can be viewed as a local interest film or film portrait of Tait's mother whose tenacity and knowledge, like Mary Sinclair's, is connected to the landscape in which she lives. She is also the focus of this film.

Case Study: *Portrait of Ga* (Tait 1952)

A Portrait of Ga could be classified as local information documentary film, a film portrait an amateur film, an avant-garde reflection, or a blurring of several categories. It invites levels of interpretation beyond film classification and documentation while also re-forming sponsored films of this type.

In *Ga*, as in *Land Makar, On the Mountain, Rose Street* and *The Drift Back,* Tait combines time, place, landscape, language, dialect, progress and local culture. She films her mother as part of a continuum of people who share a love of a 'common land', its practices, songs, stories and ways of life which are in danger of being set adrift by changes wrought by modernity. The Orkney landscape is presented as a physical and temporal panorama reaching back to pre-Norse times. Traces of the existence of other communities across time mark the landscape and enrich this area.

Fig. 83: Tait 1952. *A Portrait of Ga.*

Fig. 84: Tait 1952. *A Portrait of Ga.*

Fig. 85: Tait 1952. *A Portrait of Ga.*

Tait's voice on the soundtrack tells of her mother's life and family traditions that extend back to Ga's grandmother and forward to her grandchildren – and beyond. At one point Ga looks straight at the camera acknowledging her daughter with a knowing smile in a subject-to-subject relationship (figure 85). This highlights the matriarchal link between mother and daughter stretching back through their family to long forgotten voices, languages and customs that confirms their connections with the land and each other. On the soundtrack Tait says:

> It's her grandchildren who Ga and, I suppose, I call her Ga, but I only dimly remember my grandmother, my mother's mother … maybe the Viking ancestors the Isbisters and the Spencers [her family's surnames] used to make up burns and riddles in Old Norse.

The folklore of family life is also part of this continuum. Tait's reference to her family's play on words 'why did the pan drop? You don't know? I butter nut tell you' presents a playfulness with language at a micro level. It also signals her reflections on prominent language-use in her later films, at a macro level.

Like Mary Sinclair, Ga's connections with the land are informed by memory, knowledge, stories and experience. The colours in her clothes match the earthly tones of the Orkney landscape (figure 84). She is filmed as if at one with the cycles of time and nature and accepting of beginnings and endings as part of life, which is particularly evident in rural landscapes. In one scene Ga runs along an open track towards an empty horizon with a faint grey rainbow in a dark sky (figure 83). This, and occasional shots of shadows cast by Ga, evoke the inevitability of time passing and the transience of life. Indexical signs of age, white hair and weathered hands are countered by pro-active images of Ga running, gardening, smoking and reading. Ga thus defies the stereotypes of beauty and old age, and the confines of the film's frame by moving her hand to a non-diegetic highland jig. Re-presentations of age and women like Ga and Mary Sinclair, were/are rare in popular film productions.

With an eye to earning an income from her film, as noted previously regarding *Happy Bees and Land Makar,* Tait ends her film with a nod in the direction of local interest film productions as overseen by the Films of Scotland Committees, 'My mother lives in the windy Orkney islands. It's certainly a wonderful place to be brought up'.[69]

In keeping with Petrolle and Wexman's inclusion of Tait in their anthology of women filmmakers who have integrated their cultural backgrounds into their practice (2005), aspects of *Ga* also resonate with Alice Walker's *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens* (1983), a collection of 'womanist' prose whose themes echo those in Tait's films. Walker writes, 'in search of my mother's garden I found my own' (1983: 243) referring to aspects of her mother's Afro-American

[69] In 'Margaret Tait: Film Maker' (Krikorian 1983), Tait movingly said of this film: 'whatever audience I made it for the first audience it got was back in Rome where I showed it to an invited audience … it was very good to get their reaction to it, and as it happened my parents were there on a visit so my mother saw it there for the first time' (Transcript 5: 4. Held at the BAFVSC, London).

ancestry, history and life. Walker uses the term ‘womanist’ to refer to ways of thinking that connect women from all backgrounds with those who are searching for paths toward self-possession. Her prose contributes to Third/Fourth Wave feminism’s emphasis on the importance of the environment and the subjectivities and ethnicities of groups, and individuals, whose identities are contingent on sustaining a sense of place and history. This involves accepting change and transience while simultaneously searching for spaces where overlooked communities, set adrift from their origins, can contribute to decisions about their own lives and neighbourhoods in changing circumstances. The diversity, experience and knowledge that Walker and Tait inscribe into their work, exist outside the scope of classifications and genres and in between the demarcations that separate them.

In the following chapter, I analyse Tait’s films within the contexts of the 1970s experimental film culture in Britain where Tait’s innovation with film was more acknowledged. Within this frame, she continued to safeguard her ways of filming and focus on local issues while keeping informed of current film discourses and practices in this field.

Chapter Three: The Ambiguity of Film Classifications: Experimental Film Production

In her 1971 article, 'Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?' (1989: 145-178), Linda Nochlin explained ironically, '[t]here are no great women artists because women are incapable of greatness' (1989: 145). She linked such (mis)judgements with institutional obstacles that rendered women and their work invisible in the history of Western art:

> It is precisely the insistence upon a modest, proficient, self-demeaning level of amateurism as a "suitable accomplishment" for the well brought up young woman, who naturally would want to direct her major attention to the welfare of others … militates against any real accomplishment on the part of women. (Nochlin 1989: 164)

Avant-garde cinema, experimental film and video intersected with high art to express the personal, political or radical viewpoints of artists/filmmakers through their exploration of time, space, colour, materiality and formalism on film:

> Experimental film, experimental cinema or avant-garde cinema is a mode of filmmaking that rigorously re-evaluates cinematic conventions and explores non-narrative forms and alternatives to traditional narratives or methods of working. (Pramaggiore and Wallis 2005: 247)

Robin Blaetz explains that women have engaged with film in this way since its inception:

> Experimental cinema has always been an art form in which women have excelled. As far back as 1942, when Maya Deren made the ground-breaking *Meshes of the Afternoon* with two people and a 16mm camera, countless women working in small scale film and video have been creating a deep and wide-ranging body of film. (2007:1)

By the 1960s and 1970s, the Second Wave feminist movement, together with low film production costs and affordable equipment, acted as catalysts to women's innovative experimentation with film. The short film in particular gave women the freedom to explore their subjectivities and articulate personal perspectives without having to follow male-oriented ways of thinking or making (Hollinger 2012: 6-9). Across America and Europe women participated in vanguard film practices and negotiated ways of contributing to film culture, but neither they nor their work achieved equivalence or recognition in the public sphere.

American art critic Clement Greenberg (1909-1994) was influential in discussions regarding classifications and hierarchy in avant-garde art and Modernism in America and Europe at that time, and this had an effect on British experimental film culture. He approached the history of the visual arts in the twentieth century as a set of representational problems and set the agenda for Abstraction and Minimalism as the quintessential forms of the modernist art aesthetic. His ahistorical trajectory through art history gave primacy to male artists who explored abstraction and formalism within a painting's frame. Many 'abstract' filmmakers from the 1960's and 1970s contributed to the philosophy and aesthetics of non-representative, minimalist and conceptual art, while others were committed to a subjective and figurative approach in their experimentation with film and formalism.

Greenberg's influence on British Abstract Film

By the 1930s, popular and applied arts such as printing, film and advertising blurred the boundaries that once established the hierarchies in cultural production. Greenberg felt that the rise in mass culture posed a threat to high art's independence and intellectual content. His essay 'Avant-garde and Kitsch' (1939) was key to upholding a divide between high and low art:

> There has always been on one side the minority of the powerful – and therefore the cultivated – and on the other the great mass of the exploited and poor – and therefore the ignorant. Formal culture has always belonged to the first, while the last have had to content themselves with folk or rudimentary culture, or kitsch. (Greenberg cited in Frascina 2000: 55)

By categorising popular arts, factory-made goods, commercial and amateur productions 'kitsch' and separating them from high art, Greenberg was able to sustain an argument regarding a classed supremacy over the avant-garde as a high art aesthetic and resist what he felt was a dumbing down of culture. He reasoned that where representative and imitative image-making was less advanced, abstract and non-figurative art demanded levels of appreciation that were difficult for the general public to achieve. This perspective also enabled abstraction as a high art form to foreground its own material conditions, an idea which Greenberg later reinforced in 'Modernist Painting' (1961). Here he noted that the pictorial space in paintings in the modern

age had become increasingly flat and veered towards more formal compositions and self-referential forms. Starting with Édouard Manet (1883-1863), he identified an underlying logic in painting in which each movement appeared to resolve the formal problems of its predecessors – culminating in the 1960s and 1970s with the work of the Abstract Expressionists and Minimalists. From Greenberg's perspective, abstraction as a pure art form exemplified art's contribution to Modernism. By severing abstraction from figurative and narrative painting and advocating an a-political approach to art/painting, he demonstrated that progressive modern artists eliminated all non-essential elements from their medium in search of 'purity' and autonomy, and that this typified modernist avant-garde art.

Following Linda Nochlin, Andreas Huyssen (b. 1942) noted that despite their contributions to modern/ist art women were excluded from Greenberg's configurations. In 'Mass Culture as Woman: Modernism's Other' Huyssen noted that, like popular culture, women posed a threat to a classed and masculinised modernist project so that work that contested a male self-authentication of Modernism was marginalised (1986: 44-64). Consequently Modernism, like its successor Post-modernism, upheld its status in public spheres as a master discourse and sustained its command, in part, through the marginalisation of women's perspectives in avant-garde art productions.

The following section provides a short background of experimental film in Britain from the 1960s and considers Tait's inter-connections with this area film production.

British Avant-garde Film in the 1960s and 1970s

Discourses on key modernist practices influenced British film and video most notably at the London Filmmakers' Co-operative (LFMC est. 1966). Their workshops provided facilities and support for artist/filmmakers outside of commercial filmmaking and traditionally funded organisations.[70] The LFMC attracted people from a range of visual arts backgrounds interested

[70] The London Film Co-op (1966-1999) was founded by Stephen Dwoskin and Bob Cobbing inspired by the Filmmaker's Co-op founded by Jonas Mekas in New York, 1962. Mike Leggett was a founder of the LFMC workshops (1968/9). This group of experimental filmmakers provided a base for procuring exhibition spaces and funding opportunities for experimental work. In 1999, the LFMC merged with London Video Arts to form LUX. Filmmakers

in synthesising all forms of moving imagery and experimenting with the material qualities of film, video and reproductive technology (Payne 2015: 1-29). Tait had much in common with the personal and expressive forms of filmmaking at the LFMC. She occasionally screened her films through them and maintained relationships with some of its members. This enabled her to keep informed of current film discourses while continuing to make films that were relevant to current practices – on her own terms – while also remaining connected to her Scottish roots.

Tait's relationship with the London film Co-op effectively began at 'The First Festival of British Independent Cinema' in Bristol (1975) where she screened *The Big* Sheep and *Colour Poems*, and at the Arts Council's 'Filmmakers on Tour of the Southwest' (1977).[71] Chance played a part in her participation in this tour. In a letter to Mike Leggett, Tait wrote, '[s]till nothing definite from the Arts council. SAC are … having an argument with ACGB about who if any should be responsible for travel expenses for a film maker on tour [sic.] if starting from Scotland'. The discussions between the arts councils in London and Scotland shows her struggle to get funding until the very last minute:

> If they say NO ye cannae go, then, it would be a matter of sending the films. … if I got the films to them for the 30th and asked Deke Dusinberre to put them on the train to Exeter the following day, would you … carry them to Penzance on the 8th, Dartington on the 7th … (Tait cited in Letter to Leggett 27/10/1977. Held at the BAFVSC, London)[72]

Tait also came across LFMC members at the Edinburgh International Film Festivals including filmmaker Felicity Sparrow who encouraged Tait to place her films with them:

> it was me who got/persuaded her to put her films into the LFMC. I was distribution organiser there from 1976 to 1980. I first came across her work in approx. 1977 when I was attending the Edinburgh Film Festival on behalf of LFMC. … I think I first met her the following year and again in 1979 when she came to London to show her films at a

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who benefitted from the facilities in this co-operative include Sally Potter, Derek Jarman and Lis Rhodes (Payne 2015: 8-9).

[71] LFMC member Mike Leggett organised the Independent Filmmakers Tour of the South West, funded by the Arts Council of Great Britain (ACGB), the British Film Institute (BFI) and South West Arts (SWA). Throughout 'October-December 1977. The exhibition toured Bristol, Exeter, Plymouth, Falmouth, St Ives, Penzance, Dartington and Exmouth. The show included Laura Mulvey, Lis Rhodes, William Raban, Humphrey Trevelyan (Berwick Street Collective), Peter Gidal, Steve Farrar, Tony Sinden, Roger Wilson and James Scott. (Berwick St Collective) and Margaret Tait', [online]. Available at: http://fv-distribution-database.ac.uk/findev.html?_search=Search [accessed 15 October 2016]. See Appendix 7 for Leggett's introduction to the films Tait screened here.

[72] Appendix 6 shows a letter 06/10/1977 held at the BAFVSC, London in which Tait discusses with Leggett films to be included in a LFMC show which she hopes to co-ordinate with SAC funding. She also mentions other outlets in which she was screening her films and her active engagement in looking for spaces to show her work.

> festival event at the BFI to accompany the Arts Council's Film as Film exhibition at Hayward Gallery. That was when she agreed to become a Distribution Member of LFMC. (Sparrow Private e-mail 2018)

Through these connections, Tait was aware of the range of practices that were developing in short film and video production at that time such as optical printing, multiple screens, loop printing, re-photography and cross-disciplinary approaches. Some artist/filmmakers, like Tait, preferred a single screen and a single-lens film camera that could be taken anywhere. Others were interested in film an expanded field, and in American structural filmmaking of the 1950s-1960s as established by, among others, Hollis Frampton (1936-1934), Paul Sharits (1943-1993) and Stan Brakhage (1933-2003) who variously linked their formal experimentations with film and technology with the emotional spontaneity of Abstract Expressionist painting.[73]

To differentiate their work from American structural film, several LFMC members formed the influential British structural/materialist film movement which developed into a major discourse at that time. Founder member and exponent of British structural cinema, Peter Gidal, explained, 'structural/materialist film attempts to be non-illusionist. The process of the film's making deals with devices that result in the demystification or attempted demystification of the film process' (1976:1). This involved removing all external influences when creating a moving image in order to explore the inherent qualities in film itself – such as movement, duration, light, grain, flatness, repetition, projection and technology. A key aim of the structural/materialists was to create pure, self-referential, non-narrative moving images that represented no 'thing'. They underpinned this conceptual approach to film/filmmaking with theories of perception and phenomenology, particularly as these related to the abstract surfaces of non-illusionist films. Their ideas were explored in an edited collection of essays and screen-led film theories by practitioners and critics involved in these aspects of filmmaking, *Structural Film Anthology* (Gidal I976).

[73] Stan Brakhage debated the differences between American structural film and the lack of personal expression in structural/materialist with Le Grice. A transcription of this debate can be found in Malcolm Le Grice,. 2001. 'Stan Brakhage and Malcolm Le Grice Debate (1978)' *Experimental Cinema in the Digital Age.* London: British Film Institute, 85-128.

In *Abstract Film and Beyond* (1977), fellow exponent of structural/materialist film Malcolm Le Grice traced a theoretical and ahistorical account of non-representational moving images that established connections between abstraction in film and their counterparts in art history in ways that echoed Greenberg's 'Modern Painting' (1961). Beginning with the flat abstracted surfaces and narrow pictorial space of Paul Cezanne and Cubist painting at the turn of the twentieth century, Le Grice linked this formal experimentation with aspects of early Soviet films by, for example, Dziga Vertov (1896-1954) and Futurist cinema and European filmmakers such as Man Ray (1890-1976) and Oskar Fischinger (1900-1967). He continued this trajectory through to aspects of the American structuralists c1950s ending with British structural/materialism from the late 1960s in films such as *Clouds* (Gidal 1969), *Berlin Horse* (Le Grice 1970), *Frames* (Nicolson 1972), *Light Reading* (Rhodes 1978). Like Greenberg, Le Grice felt that abstract filmmaking in the modern era went through a form of purification via a focus on film's material properties and narrow pictorial spaces while paying particular attention to the film's surface. Also, that British structural/materialism represented the moment these concerns were fully realised (Rees 1999).

Le Grice's pathway provided the curatorial format for the influential exhibition *Film as Film: Formal Experimentation in Film 1910-1975* at the Hayward Gallery, London (1979). The work selected for this influential event drew attention to male filmmakers whose work foregrounded formalism and abstraction rather than realism, naturalism and figurative representation. It was supported by a catalogue (Dusinberre and Rees 1979) which comprised a series of articles, theories and critiques that endorsed conceptually-informed abstract film as a complex and innovative modernist art form and demonstrated film's equivalence with the informed and intellectual thinking in fine art discourses.[74]

[74] Phillip Drummond wrote in the *Film as Film* catalogue: 'Le Grice's polemic history, *Abstract Film and Beyond,* ensured a key position for the category of structural/materialist film in British culture in the second half of the 1970s' (cited in Dusinberre and Rees 1979: 14), [online]. Available at: https://monoskop.org/images/3/36/Film_as_Film_Formal_Experiment_in_Film_1910-1975.pdf. [accessed 6 June 2018]

Tait, alongside several members of the LFMC, also took part in a more eclectic exhibition of experimental film and video held in London at the same time, *Film London: The Third International Avant-garde Festival* (1979).[75] In the accompanying booklet, Le Grice wrote of Tait's contribution, '[f]rom the work seen, she must be considered as the only genuine independent, experimental mind to precede the current movement which began here about 1966' (Programme Notes for *The Third International Avant-garde Festival* 1979, held at the BAFVSC, London).

Patti Gaal-Holmes includes Tait among British filmmakers who were less committed to structural/materialist approaches and developed other aspects of experimental filmmaking, attracting different audiences:

> While filmmakers such as Ian Breakwell, Jeff Keen, Derek Jarman, David Larcher, Anne Rees-Mogg, Margaret Tait and Peter Whitehead have received some recognition in 1970s histories, their collectively extensive (image-rich and representational) body of work has been overshadowed by film experimentation with structure and material film experimentation taking place predominantly at the London Filmmakers Co-operative. (2015: 1)

Artist/filmmakers such as these, experimented with the inherent qualities of analogue film and video and its propensity to being over/under exposed, manipulated in-camera and in post-production across a range of themes and styles. They typically focused on the materiality of film, video and cinematic apparatus as a means of articulating their subjective encounters with technology, the environment, life and politics – using figurative and abstracted imagery.[76] David Curtis explained:

> It was her [Tait's] transparent technique that struck a chord with the English "materialists"; she revealed rather than concealed the means of production; she worked like them, at an artisanal level. (1999: 63)

[75] Tait screened *Aerial, Colour Poems, Place of Work, Tailpiece, Portrait of Hugh MacDiarmid, Land Makar and Where I Am Is Here* at Film London: Third Avant-garde Film Festival at the NFT (9th-17th June 1979) The exhibition was screened across London at the National Film Theatre (NFT), The Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA) and LFMC premises in London. (Booklet of the programme held at the BAFVSC, London)

[76] Joy L. Payne 2015. *Reel Rebels: The London Co-operative 1966 to 1996.* Authorhouse. UK. gives an account of the range of film and video productions, technology and methods of screening at this time related to, for example, expanded cinema, multiple screens, performances and installations.

Tait's materialist approach to image-making was linked to her understanding of film as a conduit for articulating relationships with the material world from personal perspectives. In a letter to Leggett regarding some connections in their work Tait wrote:

> I think it is that we both start from a use of photography. Some knowledge or understanding of photography as such informs the images. This is by no means the case with all of the current avant-garde. There might be little ability to 'catch' the image in the first place, just by means of the basic tools of photography, light, lens and emulsion, to put it at its most basic. … I think that even more can be done by using photography as the starting point, because then one's 'found material' is the whole outside world. (Letter to Leggett 05/01/1978: 4. Held at the BAFVSC, London)

Tait felt that an objective focus on the surface of film, as advocated by structural/materialism, was contrary to the intuitive and perceptive filmmaking she was interested in. She also felt that the flat and haptic surface of film was the start of an encounter between filmmaker and viewer:

> In fact, I'm not terribly interested in the "surface of the film" as such, and I don't even see that as being the material one is working with. Surface of the film is just one of the tools in filmmaking, it's not the material. I think the importance, even predominance, given to "surface of the film" in much art college type filmmaking is spurious. Tools of the trade are fascinating too, and I could SEE a sculptor for instance, wanting to exhibit an arrangement of chisels, hammers and so forth alongside a lump of unworked marble; even then, the arrangement would be the work of art, if it was a work of art. And it's only what any of them DO with the surface of the film, not the fact that it IS surface [sic.] of the film, that produces any FILMS, really. … And at the moment it's as if they're so excited about what can be done with FILM … that they're stuck in a kind of adulation of the surface of the film and what beautiful work can be done by manipulation of that. Beautiful work CAN be done, undoubtedly, just using the surface of the film as a starting point. (Letter to Leggett 05/01/1978: 4-5. Held at the BAFVSC, London)

Tait was also cautious of conceptual ideas that promoted film as an autonomous object and of films that were based on objectively captured images or random found footage:

> Some of these English people at the moment they get right down to doing it all themselves, I think, or they try to … actually taking a piece of found film and working around with that and having their own printing machine and it is entirely what they can do with a bit of stock and their own hands. (Tait cited in Wilson 1978: 21)

Pirie clarified Tait's caginess regarding the theories that supported this approach to filmmaking:

> In a sense, over the years you've never presumed to consider making statements or try to work out the principles or some kind of film theory or you know what it is you've discovered – you work in a sense in an intuitive way just to enjoy the moment … humanly inviting people to look at things … and one should look at things as a human being –that's it, you know, a human thing of looking and trust and waiting. (Pirie cited in Appendix 1: v)

Tait's view that rather than preventing the viewer from engaging with film the surface was a starting point for an experience with film, concurred with critic Constance Penley who in her psychoanalytic reading of British structural/materialism argued, 'no matter how obscure, devoid of content or formally self–referential a film is, the spectator un/consciously makes sense of what is presented to them on the screen' (1989: 11-12).[77] Penley explains further,

> there is no way of controlling the interactions of the film with the process of memory and fantasy (always fictional) of the perceiving subject. … Instead we are asked by the films and the viewing situation to *investigate* [sic.]*,* and we are even promised the sanction of science. As valuable as these strategies might be on one level, they also tend to suppress a knowledge of the imaginary of the image by asserting the objectivity of those images and the rationality of our relation to them. (1989: 14-15)

The 'imaginary' is a psychoanalytical term crucial to self-identification in psychic development. Lacan equated the imaginary with the 'mirror' or pre-Oedipal stage of childhood which occurs when an infant feels symbiotically connected to its mother:

> The jubilant assumption of his [sic.] specular image by the kind of being still trapped in his … nursling dependence – the little man [sic.] is at the *infans* stage, still sunk in his motor incapacity and nursling dependency thus seems to me to manifest in an exemplary situation the symbolic matrix in which the *I* is precipitated in a primordial form, prior to being objectified in the dialectic of identification with the other, and before language restores to it, in the universal, its function as subject. (2007: 76)

The 'imaginary' was one of a triptych of psychoanalytical terms Lacan used alongside the 'symbolic' and the 'real' which located subjectivity within a system of perception and interchange with the external world (Barnard 2002: 171-186, Lacan 2007: 237-268). From this perspective, the 'imaginary' refers to a space where 'there is no difference and no absence, only identity and presence' (Moi 1985: 99). Whereas the 'symbolic' is marked by laws that structure classify and organise meanings in culture and society through what Lacan calls the Law of the Father:

> This law, then, reveals itself clearly enough as identical to a language order. For without names for kinship relations, no power can institute the order of preferences and taboos that knot and braid the thread of lineage through the generations. And it is the confusion

[77] Constance Penley's 'The Avant-garde and Its Imaginary' first appeared as a paper presented during the avant-garde event at the Edinburgh Film Festival in August 1970 where Richard Demarco had organised a retrospective of Tait's films. An extended version of the article was published in 1977 in *Camera Obscura* (2), 3-33, a film magazine of which she was a founder member. Penley presented further papers that engaged with women's relationship to the avant-garde, including at the International Forum on Avant-garde Film at the Edinburgh Film Festival (1976). This event was accompanied by a catalogue – *Edinburgh '76*, whose articles focused on psychoanalysis and cinema and avant-garde cinema. The introduction to this catalogue can be found in Margaret Dickinson (ed.) 1999. *Rogue Reels: Oppositional Film in Britain 1945-1990.* BFI Publications, 138-140.

> of generations which, in the Bible as in all traditional laws, is cursed as being the abomination of the Word and the desolation of the sinner. … It is in the name of the father that we must recognize the basis of the symbolic function which, since the dawn of historical time, has identified his [sic.] person with the figure of the law. (Lacan 2007: 229-230)

In Chapter Two of this thesis, I discussed the partiality in the selection processes and criteria used by film authorities and archivists to classify films. This method can be linked to the symbolic order's systems of organisation which maintain benchmarks that exclude some work from appearing in public socio-cultural spaces. To productively function in the symbolic realm, some elements of the imaginary which cannot be expressed within symbolic systems of organisation are repressed and effectively silenced. It is often at the level of the imaginary that the 'feminine' is located and this underpins many films by women, but not exclusively.

Penley felt that the elevation of cinematic apparatus in structural/materialist experimental filmmaking in Britain in the 1960s and 1970s indicated a form of fetishisation or 'castration anxiety' that signalled male apprehension that their authority over naming, forming and selecting was in danger of being overruled (1989: 3-28).[78] She likened the focus on technology and cinematic apparatus to a 'bachelor-machine [which] is typically a closed, self-sufficient system' (1989: 57). [79] This suggests that the (symbolic) authority of key male figures would be usurped if films that did not conform to the premise of an film/art exhibition or anthology they oversaw were included. By discounting and excluding films by women that related to the imaginary or explored

[78] Julia Kristeva's conception of fetishism is relevant here since she argues that language (including film as a signifying practice) is used at times to cover the lack that often arises when confronting what she calls the chora-(some) women's differences or different use of language (and to describe their sexuality/subjectivity). She writes: 'It is perhaps unavoidable that, when a subject confronts the factitiousness of object relation, when he stands at the place of the want that founds it, the fetish becomes a life preserver, temporary and slippery, but nonetheless indispensable. But is not exactly language our ultimate and inseparable fetish?' (1982: 37).

[79] Penley refers to the term 'Bachelor Machine' as used by the Dada Artist Marcel Duchamp c 1913 to describe the realm of the 'bachelors' who were placed in the section below the 'brides' in his sculpture *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors Even (The Large Glass)* (1915-1923). The groups in both sections, although desiring each other, had no prospect of mutual comprehension. Penley discusses this theory through the writings of Jean-Louis Baudry and Christian Metz to suggest that bachelor machines circumvent questions about sexual difference and presume such mechanisms belong culturally and essentially to a masculine rather than feminine choice.

abstraction on film in differing ways and contexts, the 1979 *Film as Film* exhibition eclipsed their work from that influential platform.[80]

Many women LFMC members including Lis Rhodes (b. 1942), Annabel Nicholson (b. 1946) and Felicity Sparrow (b. 1950) were uneasy about the scant female representation in the *Film as Film* exhibition and selection committee (only Rhodes was on the board at that time). They questioned the attention given to abstract structural/materialist films at the expense of those that incorporated formal experimentation with narrative, interiority and subjectivity. They also questioned the lack of engagement with feminist principles at an institutional level. Many felt that the differing circumstances under which women filmmakers worked was part of experimental film history and therefore important to a critical assessment of the role of formalism in experimental film culture. Furthermore they 'felt themselves to be continually undermined by the lack of understanding and respect for their research by the Arts Council and committee members, and that their 'perspectives were tolerated rather than considered seriously' (Nicolson et al cited in Dusinberre and Rees 1979: 118).

In response to Le Grice's article 'The History We Need' in the *Film as Film* catalogue (cited in Dusinberre and Rees 1979: 113-117) Rhodes wrote 'Whose History?' (cited in Dusinberre and Rees 1979: 119-120) in which she queried who and what constitutes as significant in film and how language can, and had, become a force of exclusion.

The process of selecting and organising films for exhibition reveals the hierarchies and marginalisation that can form when dominant parties, guided by the symbolic's Law of the Father, take hold of the language of film, film critique and classification, as discussed previously with regard to the Scottish Film Council and Films of Scotland Committees.

Like Tait and local film production, the women at the LFMC had expected to work alongside their male colleagues and contribute equitably to experimental film culture and production. But their misgivings about the direction that the *Film as Film* exhibition was taking

[80] See Appendix 8 for the text written on the scroll in Carolee Schneemann performance piece *Interior Scroll* (1975). This text also contributes to the argument against the Structuralist focus on experimental film at this time which excluded women's work and work that incorporated the Imaginary.

experimental film led some to form a breakaway collective called *Circles* (later *Cine Nova*) – the first women-only artists' film and video co-operative which collected, exhibited and curated women's work (1979-1992).[81] Arguably, the women's withdrawal from the *Film as Film* platform echoed Tait's re-move to the Highlands, albeit in different circumstances. But like Tait, their detachment from dominant approaches to filmmaking enabled them to explore wider possibilities in their film experimentations, on their own terms.

Reflecting on the differences and misunderstandings that arose via the *Film as Film* exhibition, in a recent interview with Katy Deepwell, Felicity Sparrow said:

> The problem was that the whole history of the women's involvement in film was not going to be represented well in this exhibition, in spite of our research into early women filmmakers. Through this prism of the received avant-garde, it was seen as 'difficult'. Or to put it another way, they were trying to fit us into a very male reading of film history. (cited in Deepwell 2014: 88)

Sparrow also spoke of Tait's place in British film regarding *Circles*:

> I asked her if she'd like to co-distribute her work with *Circles* and LFMC (as many women did back then). … She declined but immediately wished me every success with *Circles*. She most definitely was a feminist! I think what she meant was that she'd done her own distribution, fairly successfully, over a number of years and LFMC plus *Circles* was a step too far too fast. Now, I think that in terms of her legacy she made the right decision to stick with LFMC/LUX as I don't think the latter-day Circles/Cine Nova would have done nearly as much to promote her work or get her the recognition she now has. (Sparrow Private e-mail 2018)

Although wary of labels and coteries including feminism, Tait's experience corresponded with the feminist principles that informed the work of the women at the LFMC. Annabel Nicolson explained that when she met Tait in the 1970s she did not immediately connect her with the underlying feminist politics in the work of the younger women at the LFMC. Indeed, such references were veiled in Tait's films, but her poem *Bushels* (1960) is one among many poems which reveal her thoughts on women's socio-cultural position:

> ***Bushels***
> Women under bushels,
> Extinguished lights,

[81] *Circles* (full title *Circles: Women's Work in Distribution*), was collective that supported, collected, reclassified and distributed women-only films and accumulated a body of research into, and the rehabilitation of, pioneering women filmmakers. Their inclusive organisational strategies, like those at the LFMC, acted as a catalyst in the development of independent feminist film practice and a prototype for women only film festivals and screening opportunities. Their differing ways of distributing and discussing women's filmmaking are still used today by theorists, curators and practitioners to disband hierarchical organisation in the arts (Knight and Thomas 2011: 139-184).

Women poets
– Poetesses –
You never had a chance, had you?

They either dressed you in blue stockings
Or put you in the kitchen
You could be gracious
Or gossipy
Or good cooks,
'Motherly,'
Or, if not that, then 'manly', they insisted,
Never strong, feminine, yourselves,
Not that, never that,
Never women poetesses,
Beings and doers in your own right.
(from *Subjects and Sequences* (1960) cited in Neely 2012: 80)

As new acquaintances, Nicolson's discussion with Tait focused on experimenting with film, working in isolation and Nicolson's background in the N.W. Scottish Highlands:

> Although I went to stay with Margaret in 1975 (with Mike [Leggett]) and met her a few times at the Film Co-op and festivals I didn't have in depth conversations about the areas you are thinking of.
> …
> This is surprising as I certainly talked to my contemporaries about ideas arising from new feminist awareness. I wouldn't have been able to articulate such thoughts in 1975 although I would two or three years later. ... Isn't it interesting who one chooses to talk to about things. I think if I had seen more of her a few years later, our conversations might have gone in different directions.
> …
> She was warm and always interested in my background and very open to talk to. I think it must have been quite special for her to have support from younger artists who were keen to show her work and include her in the developing context for experimental film. (Private Letter 04/11/2018)

Commonalities among these women included circumventing the dominant 'male gaze' and for some, working in the margins on their own terms. Although Tait was familiar with this strategy, she was hesitant about the organisation of film, even within the LFMC and *Circles* groups, because a connection with these coteries would still guide her films along specific channels and influence how they were screened and contextualised. This is noted in an interview with Tamara Krikorian:

> **TK** Would you describe your work as avant-garde?
> **MT** I was asked to exhibit at *Film London*. But I never describe my work as avant-garde. I don't see that it's a term one can use of oneself anyway. Besides that, there's something too limiting about the idea of the avant-garde – as if at all costs you must be making innovations.
> **TK** But, do you mind being called avant-garde by others?

> **MT** Oh, well, no! How could I mind that? It's not the only thing they've been labelled though. (1983b: 3)

Tait was also cautious of the London-centric focus in experimental filmmaking at that time:

> I feel there's some confusion of categories at the moment. … The 'Scottish independents' are not remotely related to any kind of 'avant-garde' movement, whether the predominant British one of 'structuralism' etc. or any other. But neither are they quite 'mainstream cinema '. I think there's a lot of very good talent around, and a lot of, say, willingness, considerable sense of purpose about work or working, less sense of <u>the</u> work, what the work IS. [sic.] (Letter to Leggett 05/01/1978: 2. Held at the BAFVSC, London)

Tait's reference to what else the work 'IS' not only problematised the processes involved in film classification, it also drew attention to the diverse and distinct ways artists used film for particular and personal intentions. Filmmaker Vanda Carter (b 1958), who worked in the distribution office at the LFMC, notes that this aspect of filmmaking is often overlooked when evaluating an artist's work:

> The reasons why people adopt particular filmmaking techniques are often overlooked in critical appraisal of work. The relationship between filmmaker and equipment, and with film itself, is one of the foundations on which individual style is developed. (2003: 168)

This concurs with the women at *Circles* who felt that, historically, women artists' differing access to the means of production and their inventiveness with film and technology across a range of themes and styles should have been included in the history of formal experimentation with film in the *Film as Film* exhibition. The inclusion of women's distinctive uses of film and technology could have facilitated a democratic destabilisation of the means of production and supplied different cinematographic experiences for audiences.

Most women used film to articulate the feminist principle that the personal is political which ran through their experimentations with film at that time. Anne Rees-Mogg (1924-1984), chair of the LFMC (1981-1984) spoke for many when she said that she 'wanted to do something quite different. I was trying not to be within the conventions of an English avant-garde' (cited in Payne 2015: 133). In *Light Reading* (1978), Lis Rhodes linked a woman's voice with a montaged lexicon of Letraset letters, rulers, scissors thus articulating inner landscapes in an abstract narrative aesthetic, but still not being 'heard'. Annabel Nicolson sometimes used film in

live performances and installations. In *Reel Time* (1973), for example, she stitched a celluloid filmstrip on a sewing machine while a looped filmstrip hung from the ceiling and through one projector while another cast her shadow on a wall. In *Shadow of a Journey* (1976) Tina Keane used a soundtrack of Gaelic songs and traditional tales including a woman telling of the plight of Scottish Crofters while filming her shadow on the sea's undulating surface on a ferry from the Isle of Skye to Harris. The use of shadows, locality and female and indigenous voices are also key features in Tait's practice.

Women's personal and abstract experimentation with the inherent qualities and possibilities in film, technology and reception often confounded the selection processes in most film organisations. Arguably too, women's female-centred 'gazes' and differing filmic 'voices' had a destabilising effect on the symbolic function in dominant areas of experimental film production.

It was for reasons such as this that Karen Hollinger observed, '[t]he work of women experimentalists has often been undervalued and ignored because it challenges not only mainstream filmmaking styles but also avant-garde traditions' (2012: 69). This intersects with the experience of the women at *Circles* and Penley's observation that '[i]t is not the modernist pressure toward finding the most 'advanced' solution to formal problems that motivates progressive marginalised filmmakers like Chantal Akerman, Marguerite Duras, Yvonne Rainer, Babette Mangolte and Jackie Raynal and others' (1989: 28).[82] This status can be extended to include earlier filmmakers such as Alice Guy (1873-1968), Lois Weber (1879-1939), Germaine Dulac[83] (1882-1942) and Maya Deren (1917-1961) who were researched for the first time by the

[82] Marguerite Duras (1914-1996), Yvonne Rainer (b. 1934), Jackie Raynal (b.1940), Babette Mangolte (b. 1941) and Chantal Akerman (1950-2015) are filmmakers who have explored conventional cinematic signs, narrative structures and a range of film strategies to articulate other ways of using film, to make known their differing experiences and ways of seeing, and of experiencing film.

[83] Germaine Dulac's *The Seashell and the Clergyman* (1928) was overshadowed by Luis Bunuel's *Un Chien Andalou* (1929) which, although filmed later, was claimed as the first Surrealist film and which still sustains its canonical status as such. However, it is now acknowledged that many of the techniques and ideas in Bunuel's film stem from Dulac's. *The Seashell.* This film was ridiculed when it was first screened in front of her peers. The British Board of film censors banned it because they thought that it was 'so cryptic as to be almost meaningless. If there is a meaning, it is doubtless objectionable'. Dulac's French expressionist film *The Smiling Madame Beudet* (1923) is cited as the first feminist film.

women at the LFMC. An account of these then little-known filmmakers was included in the *Film as Film* Exhibition catalogue (Nicolson et al cited in Dusinberre and Rees 1979: 118-129). These diverse pioneering women historically and individually explored ways of presenting female subjectivity, abstraction and narrative by experimenting with film's artifice, technology and formalism across a range of film classifications. Regarding this Penley suggested:

> The strategies of these feminist filmmakers point to a manner of reworking subjectivity within an analysis of social/sexual relations that avoids the kinds of transgressions of the symbolic paternal function that risk ending in an identification with patriarchy. (1989: 28)

Their point-of-view cameras and innovative film experimentations both countered and formed dialogues with the dominant 'male gaze' of standard and experimental film practice whilst also forming 'threads of connectedness' (Daly 1978: 128) among themselves, which at that time was not fully appraised.

Interestingly, digital filmmaker Lev Manovich (b. 1960) noted that the British structural/materialism movement coincided with the socio-cultural revolutions prompted by feminists who, at that time, were working towards equal opportunity, diversity and inclusiveness:

> After the events of 1968 it became clear that structuralist approach inadvertently supported the status quo, the Law, the System. Because structuralism wanted to describe everything as a closed system and because it treated every individual cultural text as an instance of a more general "deep structure," structuralism turned out to be on the side of the norm rather than the exception, the majority rather than minority, the society, as it existed rather than as it could have been. (2005: 12)

Manovich observed that women's focus on finding new forms of experimentation to articulate their subjectivity and individual perspectives in the 1960s and 1970s, heralded post-modern notions of hybridity, pluralism and deconstruction. His insights echo Huyssen's (1986) earlier observation that women were excluded from key modernist discourses regarding their perceived association with mass culture and kitsch which was used to elevate high art forms. Both critics noted that the partiality in the selection, organisation and exhibition of experimental film prevented women and other minority groups from contributing to film and other cultural practices at that time. Their marginalisation was partly contingent on the difficulty in gaining and sustaining their agency within modernist film culture, as I explore with regard to women in the following section.

Women's Agency in British and American Experimental Film

In Tait's time, women's lack of visibility in accounts of experimental and avant-garde filmmaking in public spheres was largely predicated on men's easier access to the corridors of influence. In the twentieth century, it was mostly male filmmakers and critics who directed the selection, organisation, classification, exhibition, reception and evaluation of experimental work.[84]

In America, from the 1960s, Jonas Mekas (1922-2019) was instrumental in forming initiatives that distributed and published articles on experimental film in magazines via N.A.C.G. (New American Cinema Group) and the Filmmakers' Co-op (est. 1962). This non-profit organisation became the centre of the New York Underground and acted as a prototype for the London Filmmakers Co-op (Rees 1999: 62-72). In 1970s New York, Mekas established the Anthology of Film Archives and formed a selection committee including Peter Kubelka (b. 1934), Adam P. Sitney (b. 1944) and Stan Brakhage (1933-2003). They created a canon of experimental films that were catalogued in *The Visual Film Anthology* (Sitney 1974) and *The Essential Cinema: Essays on the Films in the Collection of Anthology Film Archives* (Sitney 1975).[85] Lauren Rabinovitz explains the effect of this:

> Now within a united circle of political allies, the choices made by Mekas and others were inscribed in Anthology Film exhibitions, catalogues, and auxiliary publications that included two books as *the* New York avant-garde cinema. (2003: 140-141)

These publications, together with the aforementioned British *Structural Film Anthology* (Gidal 1976) and *Abstract Film and Beyond* (Le Grice 1977) indicate the institutionalised exclusion of women and minority groups at a pivotal point in documenting experimental film and video in

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[84] The complexity of women as artists, curators and museum directors from the 1940s reveals that the distinctions and power relations between men and women in the arts fluctuates. This is explored in Cornelia Butler and Alexandra Schwartz (eds.) 2010. *Modern Women: Women Artists at the Museum of Modern Art.* New York. MOMA and Mary Gabriel. 2019. *Ninth Street Women: Lee Krasner, Elaine de Kooning, Grace Hartigan, Joan Mitchell, and Helen Frankenthaler: Five Painters and the Movement That Changed Modern Art.* Back Bay Books.

[85] The partiality of Sitney's anthology was criticised by film critics Andrew Sarris (1970), Constance Penley, Janet Bergstrom (1978), Patricia Mellencamp (1990) and Robin Blaetz (2007). Subsequent publications of Sitney's *Visionary Film* (1999, 2004) have added more women and constructive evaluations of their work. Blaetz notes that in the second edition Maya Deren and Marie Menken were included, and the third edition included Yvonne Rainer, Su Friedrich, Marjorie Keller and Abigail Child (2007: 18 fn 5).

America, Britain and elsewhere. Robin Blaetz confirms that, 'certain male experimental filmmakers have received a narrow but steady stream of attention … firmly establishing a small group of artists in the history of the medium' (2007: 2).

Although women were not included as 'key' vanguard filmmakers in public outlets at that time, in private they were respected as important contributors to underground film cultures. As with the LFMC in London, in New York, '[a]nyone bringing a copy of a film was admitted free of charge' (Ruoff 1991: 24-25) to meetings and screenings where ideas were cross-fertilised among the sexes. Yet few works by women were cited in the formalised accounts of these gatherings nor given equivalence in key exhibitions, festivals and anthologies. Mellencamp observed, 'the historical avant-garde was fascinated with "woman" as muse, the U.S. avant-garde with "women's lib" as sexual liberation, and postmodernism with feminism … [but] it is not able to locate many examples or quote any feminist writing' (1990: 22). She continues, 'while Mekas speaks of and praises women artists, they are on the periphery, although not cordoned off or qualified' (1990: 188) to voice opinions or contribute to experimental film culture as co-producers of films and makers of meaning in the public sphere.[86] Consequently, women's presence and their contributions to experimental film culture at that time were, if not lost, often found in the footnotes of experimental and art history and in resources such as the letters and biographies of (male) artists.[87]

It is useful to note that in America in the 1950s, Maya Deren, whom Brakhage famously described as 'the mother of us all', supported and promoted experimental filmmakers in the Creative Film Foundation (CFF) (1954). Where *Circles* was a woman-only Co-operative*,* Deren formed and ran CFF as 'a one-woman operation' and an inclusive foundation over which she

[86] Patricia Mellencamp adds that male filmmakers in America and Britain promoted their films at universities in the 1960s and 1970s discursively disseminating their films by hand-delivering them to universities and creating stories so that the 'avant-garde developed a history of heroic, mythical accounts, spiced with personal remembrance and gossip' (1990: 9) in ways which were not available to women. She also writes: 'from the late 1960s and 1970s paradoxes of "sexual liberation" including being a sexual partner for the nomadic artist - permanently as wife, great mother, business manager, and general caretaker' (1990: xi). Then from the 1980s, discussions regarding female subjectivity and a woman as 'a speaking subject, artist, or writer' (1990: xi) was pivotal to the feminist project.

[87] For research into the footnotes of anthologies and historical accounts of women in early cinema as a methodology, see Radha Vastal. 2009. 'Re-evaluating Footnotes: Women Directors in the Silent Era.' In Jennifer M. Bean and Diane Negra. (eds.) *A Feminist Reader in Early Cinema*. Durham: Duke University Press Books, 119-139.

had ‘complete administrative control’ (Rabinovitz 2003: 82). Deren anticipated creating ‘an elaborate system that would define and support the artist' (Rabinovitz 2003: 81). Her Foundation filled the gaps left by the more influential male-orientated (symbolic) Independent Filmmakers Association Inc. while simultaneously using their (male) status to legitimize independent films and set up connections with wider fine art forums and artists. Deren welcomed all filmmakers, but in keeping with the demise of many smaller organisations working to form a cohesive community that opposed the dominant culture, her impact on mainstream strategies was transitory and disadvantaged primarily due to lack of funding.

Thus, up until the 1970s, an evolving experimental film canon in Britain and America (and elsewhere) deferred to the perceived superiority of men. As signifiers of an assumed propensity for ‘genius’, men sustained a close affiliation with the symbolic and were able to establish, categorise and organise experimental film according to their judgements (Rabinovitz 2003: 82-85). Women’s scant appearance on the committees that activated these processes meant that their voices and contributions to the language used to critique and discuss experimental or any forms of film, were excluded in the public sphere at that time. It was also often the case that, for some women, their responsibilities in the private sphere as wives and mothers limited the amount of time they could dedicate to making coherent or substantial bodies of work or focus on a distinguishing style or category of film – always supposing that was their desire (see Chapter One of this thesis).

With regard to Tait, Pirie felt she ‘was too well informed about developments in film practice over the decades but understood the need of others to accept the comfort of such designations’ (cited in Winn 2002: 14). In the next section I show that despite maintaining her distance from ‘such designations’, some of Tait’s films connected with the poetic, lyrical and diary films which comprise key experimental classifications at that time, while continuing to film everyday life and experiment with the imaginary aspects of film language.

Il Cortomettragio and Poetic Films

Krikorian proposed il cortomettragio, or the short Italian documentario as a suitable framework for Tait's work because these films typically lasted for 10-20 minutes on a topic and style of the filmmaker's choosing. As noted previously, Tait was familiar with il cortomettragio from her time in Italy and particularly admired the autonomy, government funding and audiences guaranteed to the filmmakers:

> There was another kind of filmmaking going on in Italy at the same time you see, subsidised short films which [were] also shown in the cinemas along with the feature and this gave a sort of freedom to people too. These were very free films I would say because some … were quite imaginative really and I think we were all a bit influenced by them, by the idea that you could make a film like that. (cited in Appendix 2: xxxviii)

Elsewhere Tait said:

> The short 'documentario' that was always, then, programmed with the feature, might be more of an essay, or a poetic evocation of something. (Not always, but sometimes.) The editing could be on a different principle, less to do with following action, & more to do with creating a continuity … in some of these shorts the whole film consisted of this sort of shot to shot continuity based on pictorial composition, or from detail to detail, rather than what is 'happening' in the sense of a plot, or argument. Maybe, at a later date, the so-called "Free Cinema" … picked up something of this style. (cited in Krikorian 1983b: 4)

Tait's editing techniques, pictorial composition and fluid signifiers indicate a 'poetic' approach to film. Since the 'poetic' is a means of expressing thoughts and imprinting the psyche into a text/film, it is easy to see why 'poetic', 'lyric' and 'il cortomettragio' were understood as appropriate frames for locating and discussing her oeuvre. However, placing a coded film vocabulary such as Tait's into a single film classification, even one as wide-ranging as 'poetic' or 'il cortomettragio', still obscures the politics and other nuances that are woven into her work. Pirie and Tait drew attention to this conundrum and wondered about the ability of nomenclatures such as 'lyrical' or 'poetic' to explicate Tait's films:

> **MT** I think lyric can be quite severe really ([indecipherable] spoken under Pirie)
> **AP** I mean they're not statements that can be drawn out of them and then turned into words, but I mean I would say that in a general sense Margaret's … poems are – statement's not the right word – I think that they're more speaking
> **MT** No, I don't see them in terms of statements, but I use statements
> **AP** I think you speak in your poetry. I mean I think what you do is speak to people, I don't think –
> **MT** Hmm!

> **AP** I mean to try and get the thing right I mean, I withdraw the word statement because it suggests maybe something too definite and assertive. But I think that if it's possible in the sense that if we talk in this generalised way, I mean about a corpus that either I think that your poems *involve* [indecipherable] *your speaking voice*
> …
> **AP** I wish I could get hold of a word, which is not just speaking and not just statement. But I think actually she was … there's more, it seems to me, there's much more, there's strange paradoxes here in your poetry just as there is much more dramatically and extremely in your films. (cited in Appendix 1: vi)

This conversation highlights the difficulty Pirie found in finding words to talk about Tait's work since her films and poetry blur established boundaries and are linked to the same (maternal) source. As Miller observed:

> The poetic impulse, at its most basic, is about forging links and finding a resonance within that link. It is a quest, or to be more exact, a question. Tait's films are a collection of questions she asked of her surroundings through her camera lens. As with all simple questions, the answers run deep. (2005: 5)

Tait said, 'the kind of cinema I care about is at a level of poetry in fact it has been in a way my life's work making film poems' (cited in Appendix 4 xlv). 'Poetic' in this instance, refers to formulating ideas that 'run deep', and the skill required to combine moving images and sounds in ways that parallel the layering of meaning, metonym and metaphor often found in poetry. She said:

> **MT** the compulsion to make films is strong … and I just decided … one had to approach the filmmaking with the same intensity as poetry. … It wasn't that I meant it should be shaped in the way that one might shape one's words … the approach is like poetry in the sense of poetry using words. … I was using that as a sort of level at which one did that
> **…**
> **AP** [the] level of application if you like, a seriousness – a sense that, well what was the point of aiming at less than the highest expressions of what people are capable of. (cited in Appendix 1: iii)

Pirie added that classifications such as 'poetic' or 'lyrical' imply a romanticism that is not in keeping with Tait's 'realist' approach:

> **AP** I do think that 'romantic' and 'lyric' are very much what they're not. … it's certainly my strong feeling that there's a different kind of gravitas really in the films which to my sensibility really precludes the lyrical. There may be an incidental lyricism, but … what I see is something more essential, or real. we never talk about it ... although I see I'm meant to … [Laughter] (cited Appendix 1: i)

And later:

> **AP** The intellectual rigour, the spiritual content of the films and the emotional sensibility in the films are in the films. And they are well-clear of what I think of as lyrical productions. It's not to diminish lyrical productions – I just do not see this. I mean it's a different order of intensity – a different kind of weight and it seems to me. (cited in Appendix 1: vi)

Tait also pointed to the limitations in the word 'lyrical':

> **MT** If you think of lyric, lyric form, but then when you make it into the adjective lyrical, I think that's a word that's been debased rather – I mean I don't think lyrical just works as an adjective from lyric really – I think lyric can be quite severe. (cited in Appendix 1: v)

Tait and Pirie's discussion regarding the inability of film classifications to frame her oeuvre is in keeping with Gledhill's observation that, 'work belonging to a category such as tragedy, poetry, epic or lyric could claim the identity of 'art' separate from forms of daily social usage and low culture' (2000: 222). Generic film classifications are often detached from personal experiences, particularly those of women whose work was/is often informed by their allocation to caring roles in society, and the mutability of their subjectivities and aspirations for film. Blaetz (like Penley) notes that fixed organising principles contributed to women's exclusion from (symbolic) film anthologies and canons. She adds that if and/or when women's work was discussed, at that time, it was often in relation their male colleagues or if consigned to categories such as 'poetic' or 'lyrical', essentialist implications were often in place:[88]

> There is evidently something that seems appropriate about a woman making a poetic film ... yet the broad stroke with which the adjective lyrical is applied to women's film becomes symptomatic of either a refusal to examine the work or discomfort with the films themselves. … To a large extent, women filmmakers in general are most often discussed when their films can be seen as lyrical meditations vaguely in the tradition of Jonas Mekas or Stan Brakhage but less constructed. (Blaetz 2007: 7-8)

Blaetz cites Mekas and Brakhage largely because these filmmakers are acknowledged as exemplary (canonical) practitioners in lyrical, poetic and diarised work (Sitney 1974, Ruoff 2003, Fox 2004). The prominence given to male filmmakers in these areas of experimental filmmaking at that time, obscure/d women's equivalence even though they developed comparable practices and innovative thinking. To clarify this, in the next section I examine Tait's connections with

[88] Lambirth's evaluation of *High MacDiarmid: A Portrait* echoes this understanding of 'lyrical': 'The visual effect she [Tait] strives for is an equivalent of lyricism; poor production compromises this' (cited in Pirie 2000: 5).

each of the key experimental film classifications ‘lyrical’, ‘poetic’ and ‘diary’ in ways that confirm her difference from, and connections with, innovative filmmaking in the twentieth century.

Lyrical Films

Film historian P. Adams Sitney defined the ‘lyrical film’ as one in which the filmmaker (male) is understood as seeing more deeply than others:

> The lyrical film postulates the filmmaker behind the camera as the first-person protagonist of the film. The images of the film are what he [sic.] sees, filmed in such a way that we never forget his [sic.] presence and know how he [sic.] is reacting to his vision. In the lyrical form there is no longer a hero [sic.]; instead, the screen is filled with movement [that] reverberates with the idea of a person looking. As viewers we see this mediator’s intense experience of seeing. ([1974] 2002: 160)

This suggests that the ‘person looking’ through a male point-of-view camera presents experiences and ways of seeing the world that universally represent all perspectives. Sitney cites Brakhage as a consummate ‘lyrical’ filmmaker of work that expressed his anxieties about domesticity, life, love and mortality, and selected *Anticipation of the Night* (1958) and *Dog Star Man* (1961-1964) as prototypical examples of the ‘lyrical’ film. In them, Brakhage, as first-person protagonist, filmed his cosmic expeditions into self-discovery on a hand-held camera using 16mm film (Sitney 2002: 189-203).

Dog Star Man, is an epic Odyssean journey comprising five short films in which a man (Brakhage) and his dog forge through undergrowth and mountains, drawing on myths and memory seeking new ways of seeing the world and of understanding himself as a man, filmmaker and father. This remarkable film captures the cycles of nature, a single day and glimpses of Brakhage’s body as evidence of his status as first-person protagonist in his search for ‘meaning’. It relies on internal rhythms, striking use of colour, montaged images and abstract and scratched surfaces to form an expressive and poetic exploration of visual perception through what he called an ‘untutored eye’ (Brakhage 1963: 56-78). Dan Clark cites *Dog Star Man* as,

> Brakhage’s most beautiful film. A masterpiece. [sic.] Perhaps it is too much a masterpiece for me. It is too great. The mountain of meaning contained by the film gets in the way of simply ‘looking’ at beautiful things happening. However, it is undeniably

> one of the most important films ever made and is technically brilliant beyond description. (cited in LUX n.d.)

Where Sitney described the lyrical film as one in which the male filmmaker sees more deeply than others, Blaetz identified women's films of a similar type as, 'a desire to look beneath the surface layering of images and sound to reveal the emotion underneath' (2007: 15). She described the responses of LFMC associate Carolee Schneemann (1939-2019) and Marjorie Keller (1950-1994) head of the American Filmmakers' Co-operative in the 1980s, to Brakhage's work:

> Schneemann and Keller made films in reaction to Brakhage's films about sex and birth. They worked in different ways to get beneath the beautiful and striking surfaces, for which Brakhage was known, to reveal the sense of relentless becoming and overwhelming intensity that more closely approximate for women the experience of the physicality of love and family life. (Blaetz 2007: 15)

Despite also exploring their experiences and responses to life through first-person-protagonist perspectives, nature and visual perception on 16mm film using hand-held cameras in domestic and 'natural' settings, women's films and ways of seeing did not receive equivalent critical attention at that time.[89]

David Curtis suggests that aspects of Tait's films share similarities with the recently recovered 'lyrical' films of Marie Menken (1909-1970) whose work Brakhage admired:

> In many ways she [Tait] was Britain's Marie Menken (though the two lives could not have been more different). Her 30-plus films share with Menken's a clarity of vision and a simplicity – almost naiveté of technique: shots held too long, hand-held camera not always perfectly still or level; frequent and abrupt in-camera edits, and a fondness for simple intimate subject matter. (Curtis 1999: 62)

Blaetz states that Menken's work 'is playfully irreverent and abject and does not fit the prevailing model of her as a lyrical film poet and keen observer of everyday life' (2007: 27-28). She points to the difficulty of defining Menken as a 'lyrical' filmmaker per se and describes her films as 'quick sketches' (2007: 25), a term Tait also used in 1959 regarding her films (cited in Neely

[89] Some feminists took issue with the ways Brakhage filmed his wife Jane Wodening (née Brakhage), mother of five of his children. Blaetz quotes Carolee Schneemann as being upset that Brakhage's wife Jane was never acknowledged in the credits of Brakhage's work. She said, Jane 'was the muse and he [Stan] had always wanted the visionary, structural authority over the work' (Schneemann cited in Blaetz 2007: 109). The couple divorced in 1987. Wodening is now a writer and artist in her own right.

2012: 17). Like Tait, Menken blurred the boundaries between the film categories lyrical, film journal, poetic and diary, using animation, collage and montage in her first-person observations of her environment as evident in, for example, *Glimpse of the Garden* (1957), *Go Go Go* (1964) and *Lights* (1966).

In *Glimpse of the Garden*, Menken as first-person-protagonist and 'lyrical' or 'poetic' filmmaker, filmed a friend's formal garden through a powerful magnifying glass as if to emphasise that when closely observed, nature is something to be in awe of and/or that its wonder is hidden beneath an organised garden. This 5-minute film, like Brakhage's lyrical films, tests perception and the limits of film itself. It consists of jump cuts and in-camera editing echoing the glimpses of an eye taking in a landscape, rather than just 'seeing' it. Menken's saturated colours disorientate the spectator's vision requiring them to draw on other forms of sensory perception to 'look' beneath the surface appearance of this garden while the heightened shrill of chirping birds on the soundtrack also makes 'sight', or simply watching this film, difficult. [90] Through her challenging sound/image experimentations, wandering camera, haptic surfaces and creative editing, Menken invites audiences to consider ideas such as 'mastery' and 'façade' when making sense of this film. It may be that she was also taking issue with the formality, control over nature and the maintenance this formal garden required.[91] Her dissonant sounds and saturated colours 'connect' with Brakhage's often silent work and Tait's innovative use of sound/image when filming her locality and nature. Furthermore, the themes, aesthetics and innovation in Menken, Brakhage and Tait's films are informed by their differing subjectivities, perceptions and content, which all intersect within the classifications 'lyrical' or

[90] When *Glimpse of the Garden* was shown at the Cinemathèque Française in 1963, Jonas Mekas reported that the French audience laughed at it, embarrassed by the film's benign simplicity. Yet in 1958, *Glimpse of the Garden* won an award at the Exposition Universelle et Internationale in Brussels and it was later selected for the National Film registry by the Library of Congress in 2007. Feminist research has re-evaluated Menken's work and revealed her influence on many male filmmakers in the 1950s, including Stan Brakhage, Norman McLaren and Andy Warhol. Her contribution to film culture is now acknowledged (Blaetz 2007: 25-27).

[91] Caroline Guo (2012) writes: 'That is not to say that Menken is being critical of this structuring; on the contrary, she acknowledges that such construction can certainly be beautiful. But its maintenance is hardly natural. Simultaneously, through the speed, close-focus of her camera and added soundtrack of chirping birds, she is in the midst of reorganizing the space with her own hand, bringing forth the notion that work thus invites more work.'

'poetic'. From this perspective, these filmmakers' ways of articulating their experiences and concerns can be seen to overlap, without forming – or having to form – a hierarchy of competence. Their collusion extends to tracking shots from a moving vehicle as noted in *The Wonder Ring* (Brakhage 1955) and *Go Go Go* (Menken 1962) and Tait's *The Leaden Echo and the Golden Echo,* existential and abstract explorations using film, and making home, friends and family films from local standpoints.

The Leaden Echo and the Golden Echo (1955), *Orquil Burn* (1955), *Aerial* (1974) and *Garden Pieces* (1998) are examples of Tait's films that can be classified as 'lyrical' according to Sitney's criteria of 'seeing more deeply than others', and Blaetz' observation that women's lyrical films signal 'a desire to look beneath the surface layering of images and sound to reveal the emotion underneath' (2007: 15). As with Menken's *Glimpse of the Garden* and Brakhage's *Dog Star Man* and *Anticipation of the Night,* Tait used nature as the subject of her vision in the films cited above, through a process of 'looking' attentively (stalking) for the nurturing and natural forces that connect all living things while paying close attention to personal reflection, time, place, colour, light and surface texture.

The Leaden Echo and the Golden Echo (Tait 1955) was filmed at the same time as *Glimpse of the Garden* (Menken 1957) and *Anticipation of the Night* (Brakhage 1958). It takes the form of a dialogue between Tait and a nineteenth century lyrical and mystic poet Gerard Manley Hopkins' (1844-1889) unfinished poem of the same name, written c 1879. Tait's first-person protagonist camerawork articulates similar existential themes to Hopkins regarding nature, life, God and mortality. Her film forms a dialogue with the poet's words and reflections in a conversational format across time (an approach she uses in *Colour Poems, Land Makar,* and *On the Mountain*).

Interestingly, Tait's contemporary, local poet George Mackay Brown wrote of Hopkins in *The Orcadian* (1989), 'I feel his life and writing was seeking for the sources of things, from which new life springs perpetually to renew the earth that is forever being soiled and filthied by industrialism and the wounds that men inflict on the environment' (cited in Riach 2016). Riach

also wrote that Brown and Tait wrote in praise of each other's work, so this local interest in Hopkins may be why Tait un/consciously selected this poet as a focus for her film, 'I have at times been imbued with the idea of making a film to illustrate … an existing poem, a known poem and an early effort of mine was to set to pictures Hopkins' *The Leaden Eco and the Golden Echo*' (1997: 4). Nevertheless, my close analysis reveals overlaps and negotiations which suggest that Tait's film is more than just an illustration of Hopkins' poem, it is also a posthumous discussion, through time, within the shared frames of lyricism and existentialism.

Case Study: *The Leaden Echo and The Golden Echo* (Tait 1955)

Tait filmed *The Leaden Echo and The Golden Echo* in Orkney, Scotland and England which presents a roaming sense of rootedness. It is a 6-minute 'lyrical' film which engages with the themes in Hopkins' two-part 'lyrical' poem of the same name (c 1882) regarding earthly and spiritual beauty. This manifests via the decay of beauty in young maidens and the realisation that a higher less perishable 'beauty' can be found in nature and 'God'.

On the soundtrack, Tait's vernacular voice directs the film by reading Hopkins' complete poem for the duration of the film. She starts on the soundtrack reading 'The Leaden Echo and the Golden Echo: Maidens' Song from St Winifred's Well' over a close-up of young man drinking from a makeshift tap in the middle of an isolated field, followed by shots of a young girl's 'golden' hair – thus linking 'water', nature and 'maiden' as key signifiers. Then as she continues reading the *Leaden* section of Hopkins' poem, on the screen another suited young man and an older woman in a wrap-around apron join him. The woman takes charge of securing the field's gate, then all three walk away leaving the tap dripping and unattended in the field. A close-up of the locked gate lasts for several seconds as if (allegorically) highlighting that the field and the tap are difficult to access – and that this is significant in some way. Repeated shots of the dripping tap later in the film suggest that this resource is continuous, ignored and wasted – and that even when unobserved – water, or a nourishment of some kind, continues to support life. While Tait's imagery associates youth and nature with nourishment, on the soundtrack the

words of Hopkins' poem point to his apprehension that the beauty and fecundity in young maidens will fade,

> How to keep – is there any, any, is there none such, nowhere known some, bow or brooch or braid or brace, lace, latch or catch or key to keep
> Back beauty, keep it, beauty, beauty, beauty, … from vanishing away?

An interpretation of this as a 'feminine' text contingent on a 'female gaze' is suggested near the start of the film where Tait, as lyrical filmmaker (who sees more deeply than others/beneath the surface of appearance) is filmed sitting at a dressing table mirror parodying the application of make-up and looking for signs of ageing – something Hopkins is anxious about in young maidens. On the soundtrack Tait reads,

> Oh is there no frowning of these wrinkles, ranked wrinkles deep,
> Down? no waving off of these mournful messengers, still messengers, sad and stealing messengers of grey?
> No there's none, there's none, O no there's none,
> Nor can you long be, what you now are, called fair,
> Do what you may do, what, do what you may,
> And wisdom is early to despair:
> …

As Hopkins' *Leaden Echo* section continues in this manner, on the screen panning shots of suburban houses filmed as if from a moving vehicle intersect with a montage of images of mundane life including gravestones, a woman teacher at her desk, worms and a young boy balancing along a pavement edge (a motif she uses in *Hugh MacDiarmid: A Film Portrait*), ending with a short sequence of the isolated tap dripping in the wind.

References to women's age, gender and socialisation have previously been identified in *Three Portrait Sketches* (1951), *All These New Relations (*1955), *Ga* (1955) and *Land Makar* (1981). In *The Leaden Echo and The Golden Echo* Tait again negotiates women's non-compliance with social mores in ways that problematise objectified images of female attractiveness, age and fertility in the media (male gaze). For example, by filming herself looking in a mirror for signs of aging and thus using a motif that is often used in film as a symbol of a search for a deeper 'self', Tait highlights the notion that for some women the pursuit of idealised beauty is an unachievable and/or undesirable goal. She also suggests that the knowledge and wisdom that accompany a self-aware evolving female body rather than one clinging to youth

and/or a perceived notion of ‘beauty’, has limited outlets for discussion or expression in the arts/media. Older women in Tait’s films connote a knowledge or wisdom that is linked to inclusiveness, interconnection, nurturing and nature, as noted previously in *Ga* and *Land Makar*. In these films, Tait’s ‘female gaze’ counters the often voyeuristic ‘male gaze’ on idealised female forms as the focus of female re-presentation in popular films. In *The Leaden Echo and the Golden Echo,* it is an older woman who organises the locking of the gate, who is the teacher in the classroom and the maker of the film and the young girl (maidens) appear as part of this continuum. Tait thus connects women of all ages with the natural cycles of life rather than, and as well as the loss of physical beauty, which Hopkins wished could be halted in young maidens,

> … no nothing can be done
> To keep at bay
> Age and age’s evils, hoar hair
> Ruck and wrinkle, drooping, dying, death's worst, winding sheets, tombs and worms and tumbling to decay;

In his *Golden Echo* section Hopkins turns to God for answers to the laments established in the *Leaden Echo* section, whereas Tait’s references to ‘God’ manifest as a form of female energy embedded in nature and its cycles. Hopkins suddenly finds the answer to his unease that nothing can be done:

> Spare!
> There is one, yes I have one (Hush there!);
> Only not within the seeing sun,

This realisation suggests an understanding that self-knowledge or ‘wisdom’ also emerges after deliberation in the shadows rather than in the sun/light. Tait agrees. Her response suggests that it may also be discovered/discussed by looking at life and ‘young maidens’ ‘differently’. As she reads Hopkins’ answer to his dilemma on the soundtrack, in the film she repeats the sequence of the locked gate and the man drinking from the tap and then fills the screen with a montage of angled shots of a forest, panning upwards towards an awning of leaves as if in a cathedral of nature,

> Not with the singeing of the strong sun,
> Tall sun’s tingeing, or treacherous the tainting of the earth’s air,
> Somewhere else there is (ah well where!) one,

One. Yes I can tell such a key, I do know such a place,

Tait thus suggests that the 'place' they both seek occurs beneath the surface of appearance and that ‘mystery’ and ‘beauty’ can also be found in the mundane and the everyday. She intimates this via a set of images including a stained-glass church window and a man carelessly sowing seeds either side of a grassy track in an overgrown field, a seemingly pointless or wasteful thing to do. She films him again, this time hand-scything a grass verge so that seeds are blown randomly connoting ideas of waste, or the creation of other forms of growth, then cuts to a young ‘maiden’ leaning against a haystack as if in a homage to Demeter the goddess of grain, fecundity and harvest. This is followed by a fast-moving montage of stained glass, choirboys, dandelions, fauna, harvested seeds blown by the wind. Over these images Tait reads Hopkins’,

> beauty-in-the-ghost, deliver it, early now, long before death
> Give beauty back, beauty, beauty, beauty, back to God, beauty’s self and beauty’s giver.

Both filmmaker and poet concur in ways that differ but conjoin, that beauty and prolificacy are deeper than surface appearance and resonate from transient beings who are intrinsically linked to the universe and its cycles. Tait extends this recognition of ‘resurfacing’ and ‘renewing’ in a sequence in the film in which a man re-builds a rustic structure from ruins – a scene which also appears in *Three Portrait Sketches* (1951), while on the soundtrack she reads,

> O why are we so haggard at the
> heart, so care-coiled, care-killed, so fagged, so fashed, so cogged, so cumbered,

The film then cuts to (mother) nature via a series of montage-edited ‘actuality’ sequences of nature, bird’s eggs, babies, lambs, flowers, corn and other signs of fertility and new beginnings as something that should be cherished. Tait reads,

> When the thing we freely forfeit is kept with fonder care
> Fonder a care kept than we could have kept it, kept …

In the final sequences, Tait returns to the opening shot of the locked gate and then points her camera upward to the sky as she reads Hopkins’ lines,

> A care kept. – Where kept? Do tell us where kept, where. –
> Yonder. – What high as that! We follow, now we follow. – Yonder, yes yonder, yonder, Yonder.

The repetition of the word 'yonder' coincides with a shot of a bird in the sky closely followed by a crane shot of the two young men first seen at the tap, running across a field and thus the surface of the film/screen.

A feminine interpretation of this 'lyrical' or 'poetic' film is endorsed by the subtitle to Hopkins' poem 'Maiden's Song from St. Winifred's (Winefriede) Well'. This holy well (tap) is a pilgrimage site Hopkins visited when studying at a Seminary in north Wales.[92] The myths surrounding Holy Wells link to pagan and early Christian female saints and ancient folklore involving the healing powers of women, nature and the elements. These wells are often in inaccessible places near the more discernible churches and chapels in Celtic landscapes (Cotterell 2000). The knowledge that emanates from them can be traced back, as Daly suggested, to archetypal female energies and their differing ways of knowing that are often buried, forgotten or dismissed by the patriarchal thinking that permeated the Church's teachings, which Hopkins was aware of. A similar underlying elemental or a spiritual presence recurs in many of Tait's films to counter the symbolic and logical thinking in standard film production, and to expand notions of what constitutes as knowledge.

In *The Leaden Echo and The Golden Echo*, Tait is perhaps alluding to the idea that mutual understanding is possible within frames of difference, and among shared perspectives, creativity and knowledge. Also, that nature and the 'everyday' are to be treasured as these also hold many of the answers to the disquiet both poet and filmmakers' experience and posthumously discuss, in differing ways.

Similar themes appear in *Orquil Burn* (1955), filmed the same year as *The Leaden Echo and The Golden Echo.* This film can similarly be classified as a poetic, lyrical and/or a local

[92] St Winifred was born in Holywell, Wales around 600 AD. Her story states that she was an intellectual person seeking Divine Love and a consecrated life. But a neighbouring prince (Caradoc) sought her hand in marriage having heard of her beauty and talents, but he severed her head when she refused his attentions. Her head rolled along the ground and where it stopped, a well formed. She was miraculously restored to life with only a scar on her neck.

interest film. It consists of Tait 'stalking the image' as she follows a stream she has known since childhood to its origins, while on the soundtrack her voice recounts discoveries and anecdotes interspersed with loud and repetitive pipe music from the Orkney Reel & Strathspey Band and field recordings. Sounds and images are equally significant in this film and form dialectical rather than harmonious connections. Neely notes:

> When Grierson suggested *Orquil Burn* (1955), a film that takes the meandering path of a burn in her native Orkney as the basis for its structure, could be reworked into a 'brief abstract film of burn patterns', Tait remained committed to her initial ideas for the material, writing that Grierson's suggestion 'might be very pretty, but it would not be my view of *Orquil Burn*, and I think it will be more satisfying in the end to retain the form I intended for it. (Tait letter to John Grierson 1956 cited in Neely 2008a: 217)

This might refer to the 'disabling poeticism and lyricism' that Blain identified in Grierson's assimilation of avant-garde film techniques in Government and industry sponsored films (cited in Dick 1990: 59). Tait directs the narrative via her commentary as she follows the burn in a linear trajectory in the manner of such films, while also inviting interpretations which do not rely on symbolic frames of reference or organising principles. As Tait explained, 'I had expected to find "a source" but it turned out that it's sources were many, the origins widespread; and there was no particular point at which I could say "this is the source of Orquil Burn"' (cited in Todd and Cook 2004: 159). She discovered that on its journey the 'burn' changed direction and form, sustained farms and people, shaped the landscape, nurtured imaginations, propagated flora and fauna, facilitated pre-mechanised industry, and provided sustenance and mutability before reaching the sea in a continuous cycle of regeneration. This 'lyrical' 'local interest' film reverberates with Luce Irigaray's thoughts on the relationship between the symbolic and the imaginary, nature and nurture, as reciprocal rather than hierarchical. She wrote, that when interpreting women's writing/filming/texts,

> *one must know how to listen otherwise than in good form(s) to hear what it says.* That it is continuous, compressible, dilatable, vicious, conductible, diffusible, . . . That it is unending, potent and impotent owing to its resistance to the countable; … that it changes – in volume and in force, for example – according to the degree of heat that it is in physical reality… (1985b: 111)

Irigaray suggests that women's differing styles of seeing/thinking/writing/filming fragment the logic of rational thought which is typically focused on a single 'source' of authority and often

interpreted through sight alone (male gaze). Indeed, in *Orquil Burn*, Tait's discordant image/sound connections (degree/s of heat), like Irigaray's notion of a 'female text', reveal that the burn is active and multi-sourced, cyclical, autonomous and flows unevenly through a range of contexts. The assumption that the stream was linear, or that Tait's approach to filming it should be singularly 'lyrical' in the ways suggested by Grierson, echoes the unquestioned monolithic approaches to knowledge and film production as circulated by the symbolic, and which Lacan explains via the singular and metaphoric phallus. This he identifies as the 'master' 'signifier' (prime signifier) of desire in language. Lacan uses its steadfast stability to allude to or mask the impossible attainment of mastery over nature, culture, society and meaning (Lacan 2007: 575-585). By privileging the phallus as the single organising principle that governs and classifies all forms of representation and ways of thinking, Lacan assigns the responsibility of keeping order and control to the masculine element in language-use via this symbol. The laws of the symbolic which the male figure symbolises, on the surface at least, sustain an ongoing mastery over nature (film and language) by containing the unpredictable qualities predicated on the 'feminine', which arguably Tait foregrounds in this, and many of her films. Typically, the suppression of the 'feminine' in language/film curtails 'other' forms of filming, organising and writing in and about society and culture. *Orquil Burn* embodies the idea that, like many aspects of nature and 'facts' which are left unquestioned, the burn has many sources, is open to change and contains knowledge to be uncovered (excavated) rather than definitively identified.

Irigaray uses the word 'mimicry' to parody mainstream approaches and prerogatives sustained by logocentric and phallocentric thinking. From this perspective, *Orquil Burn* can be interpreted as 'mimicking' the format of local interest or information films, as can *Ga, Land Makar, Rose Street* and *The Drift Back* as previously discussed.

Irigaray recognises mimicry as a negotiating strategy some feminists use to engage with representations that sustain (their) oppression. In this sense, '[t]o play with mimesis is thus for a woman, to try to recover the place of her exploitation by discourse, without allowing herself to be simply reduced to it' (Irigaray 1985b: 76). She suggests for example, that women mimic

assumptions regarding their illogicality or their 'biologically determined' affinity with nature and nurturing in order to reclaim the inferior connotations allocated to these 'female' qualities (Irigaray 1985b: 23-33). To mimic, is therefore is to de-construct dominant classifications, suppositions and practices and to fragment the ideology they sustain.

Irigaray feels that male 'mastery' via the phallus as the prime signifier can also be 'mimicked'. Following (mimicking) Lacan's logic and metaphoric reference to the 'phallus' as the organising principle of the symbolic to which everything defers, Irigaray invites women to correspondingly and 'metaphorically', use their biological sex to inform their own writing/filming styles and organising principles by also incorporating the imaginary. Women's sex, like their assumed illogicality and nurturing skills – comprises more fluid elements which resonate with their mutability and differing uses of language/film (cf Judy Chicago's *The Dinner Party.* 1979). When approached from this perspective, women's writing/filming, form/content has the potential to disrupt fixed genres, classifications and boundary formations and present differing but equivalent forms of knowledge. Additionally, if, as artists/writers/thinkers, women use signifying practices in ways that embody their talents, intuitions and knowledge, they could reassign their essentialist and allocated roles and gender-specific qualities into positive articulations of their experiences. This includes their constructive relationship with nature and nurturing and so-called irrational and idiosyncratic ways of thinking/writing/filming (Irigaray 1985b: 205-218). From this perspective women can confirm how they contribute/have contributed their voices and experiences to culture in equivalent ways.

Some feminists argue that 'mimicry' and 'deconstruction' (rather than autonomy and construction) affirms the status of women as derivative and that a focus on women's connections with nature and nurturing deflects from their relationship to culture (Fuss 1989, Stone 2004). Others, like Tait, work to get beyond the binary logic intrinsic in categorised ways of thinking to contribute other ways of writing/filming which Irigaray suggests, by virtue of its plurality and female-centred standpoints, is interrogational and productive. Thus, rather than

constructing alternative and singular ways of writing about their differences, some women's relationships with dominant film modes become dialectical.

From this perspective, it is no surprise that Tait un/consciously chose the burn as a subject for a film and discovered that its sources were multiple, nor that her filming is tentative, inquisitorial, interpretive and open-ended rather than compliant with single film classifications and a style of filmmaking that would appear to 'suit' her subject/s.

Aerial (1974) is a later example of a lyrical, local interest film by Tait. It is a 4-minute audio/visual study of nature, '[t]here's a general theme of the four elements, earth, air, fire and water and in a different order, air, water, earth, fire and then air again with other elements intermingled' (Tait cited in Krikorian 1983d: 18). When asked where the ideas for this film came from Tait replied,

> earth, air, fire and water … and the elements from which film is made. Image…duration…construction … structure, musical structure, poetry etc. Editing, relationships … recombination, … presence … place … order … duration and the actual image itself as retrieved through the camera, movement in the frame and from frame to frame. (cited in Krikorian 1983c: 1)

This fragmented collection of words echoes Tait's description of time previously discussed in *Land Makar*, 'the working year starts in autumn, goes through to winter, then comes back to another winter and possibly the first winter you see happened after the second winter' (Tait cited in Krikorian 1983d: 6). Tait's protracted approach to time and language in these descriptions, echo the illogic and fluidity Irigaray suggests informs female writing/filming as simultaneously intermittent, tactile and equivocal. *Aerial* comprises a montage of aural and visual allusions express ideas about nature that cannot be conveyed through logical connections. The soundtrack includes field sounds, wind chimes, harp music, whistling, piano notes, bird song and dogs barking which interconnect with images of wind, rain, land, snow, clouds, water, air, the moon and fire. It is an eloquent film in which the (phallocentric) symbolic has little, or no place.

Aspects of the imaginary including nature and the natural elements feature in many of Tait's films. She sometimes spliced images and sounds of the natural world into sequences of

industrial landscapes or as bridging shots and cutaways in order to fragment the predominance of a rational focus on modernisation and industrial development, and to insert 'other' ways of thinking. Tait spoke of her affinity with the elements and the weather:

> I like different kinds of weather. In fact, I sometimes feel I haven't nearly enough of different kinds of weather …just to make a film of weather … my favourite television programme is the weather forecast – not just to know what the weather's going to be but … I like this thing of being able to see depressions moving in from the Atlantic, or not moving in. (cited in Wilson 1978: 24)

The qualities in Tait's films, as discussed in this section, blur the boundaries between lyrical, poetic, local interest and information films. Similar approaches are evident in the Diary Film/Film Diary films, a film category which portray artists/filmmakers' experiences in their daily lives, and in times of change.

Diary Films – Film Diaries

Krikorian suggests that some of Tait's films are 'diaristic' since they document the people and places she was familiar with. When discussing *Land Makar* (1981) for example, she noted, 'the pace of production is set by Tait's need to work her camera, or rather celluloid, as a diary' (cited in Maziere 2002: 103). Yet in conversation with Krikorian Tait explained that she found the word 'diary' problematic:

> **TK** Do you use your camera the way other people use their diaries?
> **MT** No not in the least really – I've never thought of it like that at all.
> **TK** But in the way you gather material over a long period.
> **MT** Well I set out to gather specific material – I know what I'm looking for, but it isn't necessarily over a long period, it's just sometimes gathered over quite a short period. You use the word 'gathered' – no, I don't see it as a diary at all. (1983d: 2)

Elsewhere Krikorian explained:

> [Tait] denies that she has affinities with film diarists like Jonas Mekas or Ian Breakwell but that her work is entirely personal and even idiosyncratic and her method of recording the minutiae of places and objects around her reveals an intimate approach to documentation very much related to keeping a diary. (cited in Maziere 2002: 103)

Often, what can be interpreted as 'diary' elements in Tait's films occur through her response to events in her life and regularly 'stalking the image' with her camera. But rather than a catalogue of her life (spatial time), the plasticity of experiential time (la durée) manifests in the way Tait

might repeat a sequence in a single film or across several films or alter the order in which she captured images. Thus, her work more typically forms a palimpsest of experiences, memories, sounds, images and 'actuality' filming as her life evolves. Tait was aware of the diary film/film diary through her connections with the LFMC:[93]

> Some filmmakers have a sort of diary approach, but that is not what I am intending, even if it seems like that, because of my daily excursions to collect material, over a period. (When I've got the material I need, I stop.) (It's not random really; it's not just anything that happens, that's what happened to me today.) No! When I have got the material I need, I stop. The photographs, then – all 24 of them in every second – and the recorded sounds – are the equivalent of notes, or words, (or letters might be nearer it) or blobs of paint, and it's a matter of composing them so that the effect is in a sense musical – or poetic, if that's a better word for it. (cited in Krikorian 1983b: 6)

Blaetz points to the essentialist connotations when linking 'film diaries' with women, '[t]he tendency to categorise and dismiss women's filmmaking as simple diary, particularly in its early years, has had the unfortunate consequence of rendering the pervasive irony and humour of this work invisible' (2007: 8). She said that Marie Menken used the term 'diary' in relation to film before it was established as a film category, 'Menken's invention of the film diary is valued as something unique because it strongly influenced Mekas and Brakhage' (Blaetz 2007: 25). Also that Menken was 'one of the first to use the film journal as a forum' (Blaetz 2007: 24).

The 'diary films' of key male artist/filmmakers such as Stan Brakhage, Jonas Mekas and Ian Breakwell for example were selected as representative of this film classification but similar films by women were not perceived and thus included as equivalent. To illustrate the gender discrepancies in the 'diary' as a film category, Blaetz draws on David James' distinction between 'film diaries' as those made by women, and 'diary films' as those made by men:

> Whereas the film diary is the unsophisticated record of the filmmaker's world, the diary film mediates the raw, unplanned material shot in daily life with editing, other kinds of material, and sound. (cited in Blaetz 2007: 8)

[93] As evidence of this as a popular film style, an exhibition called 'Diary Films at the Co-op' was screened at the LFMC on 16th, 17th, 23rd March 1977. Also, *Jonas Mekas*, '*Diaries*, *Notes* and *Sketches*' programme *for 'A* Season of Diary Films*:* Hill*,* Mekas*,* Breakwell*,* McBride*',* was screened at the ICA*,* March- April 1977. (Papers held at the BAFVSC, London)

This description upholds the assumption that women's 'film diaries' are a 'visual record of a network of social relations' (Erens cited in Ruoff 1991: 15) and of little interest to audiences more accustomed to the critically acclaimed cosmopolitan perspectives in male 'diary films' (as with 'lyrical' films). Sitney established Mekas' work in the 'diary' category of filmmaking as exemplary:

> The three categories, diaries, notes, and sketches share a negative relation to lapidary, fully constructed and finished achievements; they are *quotidian lyrics,* spontaneous, perhaps tentative, records of a sensibility in the midst of, or fresh from, experience. (2002: 424)

Mekas' films comprise a collection of fragments and sequences which he refers to as notes and sketches, as do Menken and Tait. They capture times in his life chronologically in innovative, open-ended, disjointed, in-camera edited film montages. They also include his signature hand-written and typed intertitles and soundtracks comprising music, white noise and a range of aural commentaries and diegetic sounds.

Lost Lost Lost (1976) is an experimental feature-length visual 'diary film' Mekas made of his family adjusting to New York (1949-1963) after arriving as political exiles from Lithuania. Using home and amateur film aesthetics Mekas filmed their adjustment to their new environment and his personal struggle to build a life among the underground and immigrant communities and cosmopolitan artists of New York.

Walden: Diaries, Notes and Sketches (1965-1969+) comprises an eclectic collection of home movies, outtakes and unfinished works which serve to diarise Mekas' life among street protesters, artists, filmmakers, activists, families and friends such as Marie Menken, Harry Smith, Stan Brakhage, Hollis Frampton, Yoko Ono, Andy Warhol, Alan Ginsberg, Annette Michelson, John F. Kennedy and P. Adams Sitney, who are all key players in the American avant-garde and counter-cultural community in the 1960s-1970s and thus of (exotic) interest to audiences.

Across her oeuvre, Tait also filmed her locality, family, friends and neighbours adjusting to change in post-war Orkney, the Highlands and Edinburgh in films such as *Where I Am Is Here* (1964), *Aspects of Kirkwall* (1974-1981), *On the Mountain* (1974), *Place of Work* (1976)

and *Tailpiece* (1976) from perspectives that were reflective, non-sequential and intimate. Mekas, developed the 'diary film' as the mainstay of his oeuvre, but Tait, like many women filmmakers at that time, used the 'diary' format as an aspect of their work. Their films similarly intersect with modernity, domesticity and subjectivity and use 16 mm film, 'amateur' aesthetics, creative editing and modernist film techniques. But where critical acclaim confirmed Mekas', and Breakwell and Brakhage's, status as significant 'diary' filmmakers, comparable work by women was perceived as too personal and idiosyncratic to be of interest to wider audiences. Zimmermann explains these distinctions within the key frames 'amateur' and 'professional', as discussed in Chapter Two of this thesis:

> Feminist scholars have argued how the private sphere of family, home and sexuality, reproduction, child-rearing, celebration and mourning has been the site of enormous social contention and change on the micro-political level. In many ways, there is a gendered division of labour in film: professional film is identified within the masculine while amateur film is identified within the feminine. (cited in Kapstein 1997: 74)

Blaetz observed that women's focus on the domestic, the everyday and the local from their perspective, 'provides exemplary material with which to create a political film' (2007: 11) because their diary films provide insights into domestic life and their roles in society. For example, Anne Rees-Mogg's (UK 1924-1984) *Real Time* (1971-74) (also shown at *The First Festival of British Independent Cinema* in Bristol, 1975 alongside Tait), *Sentimental Journey* (1977) and *Living Memory* (1980), like Tait's 'diary' films, reflect on aspects of her life in ways that 'are the equivalent of notes, or words … or blobs of paint … composing them so that the effect is in a sense musical – or poetic (Tait cited in Krikorian 1983b: 6). Also, like Tait, Rees-Mogg regularly filmed her family, home and her locality and explored time in film as duration and distance. Or Joyce Wieland (USA 1930-1998) whose studies of domestic, urban and rural spaces echo some of Tait's themes in films such as *Water Sark* (1964-65), an autobiographical film about a domesticity, and *Sailboat* (1967), in which a boat slowly moves across the horizon and thus the film's surface, to a loud and dissonant soundtrack, reminiscent of Tait's thematic use of sailboats, ponds, water and streams. Although not a 'diary' of events per se, these films point to the idea that women used the portability of film and video as part of their process of

thinking about events in their lives, but not necessarily sequentially nor as a specific record of occurrences. What emerges through close analyses of their 'diary' films is their diversity and insights into what occurs below the surface of daily life in ways that are arguably more reflective and transitory, or at least less certain than their male counterparts.

I explore this aspect of Tait's practice by analysing two separate but connected films *Place of Work* and *Tailpiece* which Tait made during her move from Buttquoy House in 1976. Jo Comino observed that *Place of Work* 'is a diary film that logs shifts in time and space so that they seem almost imperceptible. … Both pieces have some connection with a particularly British genre of experimental filmmaking' (1983: 285).

Case Study: *Place of Work* (Tait 1976) and *Tailpiece* (Tait 1976)

These two films 'diarise' Tait's move from her family home/studio at Buttquoy House, Kirkwall after the council reclaimed it for development. They echo her move from her Rose Street studio two years earlier for similar reasons which she reflected on in *These Walls* (1974) (see Chapter One of this thesis).

Tait explained, '*Place of Work'* was made in Kirkwall and made in the house that was the family home. Seeing it, I suppose, it seems that I'm making a film about something that's mine and that I know very well' (cited in Wilson 1978: 20). Rather than documenting this event in spatial time, Tait 'diarised' the experience in ways that suggest the reverberations of this move will endure. In conversation with Tait, Pirie noted:

> **AP** I think in *Place of Work* there is not a physical sense of time passing, it's just a particular and overwhelming sense of time but not something which is passing or flowing … there's no notion of linearity of clock time or even season time, though in a sense of course the film is constructed.
> **MT** … not quite the seasons although in a sense [indecipherable] it wasn't going directly through the seasons – you went back and followed them up again. (cited in Appendix 1: xxxii)

The slower pace of *Place of Work* is evocative of her life in Buttquoy house over a period of time. Tait moves around her home/studio with her 'wandering camera', observing, 'stalking the image' and reflecting on the significance her home and garden held for her. Panning shots of

her studio at the start of the film suggest this as perhaps the most unsettling aspect of the upheaval. Throughout the film she blurs the boundaries between home, studio, garden and the wider Kirkwall environment. From the house, Tait and her first-person camera move seamlessly out into a self-seeding, disorganised but nurtured garden similar to the one in *Garden Pieces* (1998) which she made to meditate in and think. She said of the Buttquoy garden, 'in the seven years up to the film I had been working in it quite a lot, mostly by myself' (cited in Todd and Cook 2004: 85) indicating that nurturing does not always mean control or order in the manner of a manicured garden, as noted by Menken in *Glimpse of the Garden*. Her camera slowly pans the garden observing the plants and flowers, and a cat in long grass calmly watching a bird with no intention of chasing it. Back in the house, she films herself washing mismatched crockery at a sink while on the soundtrack the weather forecast and 'pop music supposed to be being played by the painters working on the windows' (Tait cited in Todd and Cook 2004: 86) is heard. Upstairs, Tait's camera looks through a window to the neighbouring estate where unsupervised children play on the street as she might once have done, then across the rooftops to St. Magnus' church, the sea and beyond. This sequence is accompanied by the harsh sounds of the council's workmen laying pipes outside her window in anticipation of the inevitable changes that are to come. Contrapuntal sounds and images locate Tait's work and domestic life within the rhythms of a place and time in ways that suggest that this beloved space will remain in her memory long after she has left. Also, that the resonances generated here by her family will continue to reverberate in this place too.

To confirm her role as lyrical first-person protagonist in this poetic diary film/film diary, Tait marks her presence in mirrors, or her via her voice talking on the telephone or to the postman. She also captures her shadow on outside walls and the lawn filming herself as part of the fabric of this cherished place. Close-ups of old wallpaper, paintwork and plaster become traces of a presence that will withstand even when covered by new surfaces, reminiscent of her filming in *These Walls* (1974). Back in the garden she pays homage to the craftsmanship in the

stone walls and other architectural features soon to be overlaid by modern construction materials and methods.

In the second film, *Tailpiece* (1976), Tait films the emptying of the house in ways that present time as more immediate. This shorter film has an experimental soundtrack indicating the disturbance of the move itself. Early shots scan the garden and the walls of the building through to the kitchen, the soundtrack plays the soulful whistling of *Whispering Grass*, a trumpet playing *There's No Place Like Home,* children talking and reciting rhymes and Tait reading from her own translation of Lorca's *A Poet in New York* (1929-30). The words 'Love, Love, Love' are heard as the camera moves across a copy of this book on Tait's kitchen table. This blurring of intellect/domesticity and popular/high culture transcends the hierarchical relationships being established elsewhere in modernity. Tait's stoicism in the face of expulsion from this felicitous place contrasts with Scott Joplin's upbeat ragtime music on the soundtrack which morphs into family conversations, 'my brother is heard teaching his grandchildren a Glasgow counting out rhyme which my mother had taught us when we were young' (Tait cited in Todd and Cook 2004: 86). Haunting sounds of children singing (used in *Rose Street* for similar reasons) accompany Tait's panning shots of emptied corners of a house once full of objects, stories and life. She occasionally captured glimpses of her 'self' in this place in mirrors and shadows:

> That's why you probably get a feeling of 'presence' in that film – my presence there with the camera – perhaps the sense of other people who had been there before, and even your own presence in the picture, as you look at it. (Tait cited in Todd and Cook 2004: 85)

Place of Work and *Tailpiece* 'diarise' an event in Tait's life while simultaneously considering concepts such as impermanence, place, memory, belonging, history and genealogy in a film in which the symbolic again has limited currency. Had it adhered to the spatial time of the symbolic, these nuances would have been indiscernible. It is into the gaps between edits and the metonymic resonances of objects and sounds that Tait inserts personal insights and knowledge. Although these two films are sequential, Tait's way of filming them implies that they are not necessarily experienced or viewed as such, since many aspects overlap and circulate across both films.

As discussed previously, locating Tait within established film classifications is not only difficult, it obscures the political allusions and the levels of interpretation her films invite. When locating women's films into film culture, Ruby Rich noted:

> The situation for women working in filmmaking and film criticism today is precarious. While our work is no longer invisible, and not yet unspeakable, it still gets dangerously unnamed. There is even uncertainty over what name might characterise that intersection of cinema and the woman's movement but limited to the two unsatisfactory choices of "feminist film" or "films by women". (1978: 9)

Tait was one of many women artists who did not want to be located within overtly feminist or female settings, or any form of categorisation, as this would exclude other issues they might want to address. But in order to discuss their work, Petrolle and Wexman suggest that since women 'can be approached as social conduits with privileged access to oppositional discourses invisible to the mainstream' (2005: 2), 'experimental filmmaking' could be considered as a framework for the films they have selected for their anthology,

> constructing experimental films by women as a category … heightens the visibility of women's contributions to traditions of formal innovation and explores how formal innovation enables women to enlarge discourses about women's subjectivity. (2005: 2-3)

These critics highlight the difficulty of evaluating women's work outside of standard film terminologies but recognise that if their work is to be relevant and contribute to culture, standard frames of reference must be acknowledged. They also note that to replace one set of classifications with another is equally as problematic because, as Daly observed, '[t]he temptation/trap of mere labelling stops us [women] from spinning' (1978: ii).

Tait's description of her practice as 'lonesomes working' [sic.] (Letter to Malcolm Nixon 1956 cited in Neely 2009: 316) enables her to 'spin' across film categories and nomenclatures while also engaging dialectically with these frames on her own terms. For this reason, I have selected 'lone' as an appropriate 'classification' for discussing Tait's film practice. It places her among filmmakers whose work does not comply with conventional forms of organisation and allows her less visible work to remain relevant to film culture, as Griselda Pollock explains:

> The intellectual enterprise, which is also aesthetic-political, is to change the terms of our encounter with art by drawing out from works, made illegible in hegemonic art historical terms, the very principles through which they can speak to – often dissenting against

> that hegemonic culture of domination and thus help generate change and transformation that serves to radically pluralise our self-understanding. (cited in de Zegher 2014: 19)

To consider Tait's negotiation of differing ways of filmmaking in a 'hegemonic culture of domination' I also link her lone status with the 'female auteur'. Not in the sense of the 'artist-genius as outsider' (Battersby 1989: 156) but as a frame to discuss the innovative film languages women have developed on their own terms and often from marginal standpoints. It also underpins my approach to Tait's work in the chapters that follow.

Tait as a Lone Female Auteur

'Lone filmmaker' is a lesser-used film category which describes self-sufficient filmmakers who worked with 16mm film, in solitude or small groups and used family, friends, localities in their home productions. Some 'lone' filmmakers participated in the 'discursive colonisation' (Zimmermann cited in Horak 1995: 142) of film as circulated in magazines such as *Home-movies and Home Talkies* (1932-1940), *Amateur Cine World* (1934-1967) and *Amateur Movie Maker* (1957-1964). These periodicals directed readers towards reproducing 'professional' or 'commercial' film strategies and provided 'professional' benchmarks for 'amateur' filmmakers to gauge their accomplishments. Some lone filmmakers 'experiment and distinguish cinema as an art, salvaging it from the commercialism of the talkie and the Hollywood movie studio' (Zimmermann 1995a: 66). Others made short films as precursors for larger projects as did Tait who said that her 'short films were done, keeping the concept of big-film making in mind' (Neely 2009: 317), which she finally achieved in *Blue Black Permanent* (1992).

There was also a 'small coterie of political and socially aware avant-garde filmmakers [who] viewed this simple and inexpensive technology as an accessible way to produce personally meaningful images' (Zimmermann cited in Horak 1995b: 139). What linked 'lone' filmmakers as an approximate group was their commitment to a personal body of work, a belief in their vision, and a reliance on self-funding and family and friends as protagonists and assistants. They also shared a commitment to the self-motivation needed to organise their own

screenings and marketing while sustaining contact with prevailing film/social discourses. Most of these attributes fittingly describe Tait's position.

Additionally, Tait's insistence on creative control can be seen within the concept of the 'female auteur', a nomenclature allocated to women directors who have jurisdiction over their vision, integrate autobiographical elements into their work and whose themes and film-style differ from men's, in the opinion of feminist critics (Mayne 1990; Gaines and Renov 1999, Ramanathan 2006, Veronne 2012). Tait's film oeuvre, as I have discussed so far, suggests an equivalence with this description.

The term 'auteur' was originally applied to the films of directors such as Alfred Hitchcock, John Ford, François Truffaut, Frederico Fellini and Jean-Luc Godard in the 1950s and 1960s. Their selection for auteur status was contingent on their control over collaborative productions and an identifiable imprint including critical perspectives of their directorial role (Bazin 1957, Sarris 1962, Kael 1963). Since the 1980s, 'female auteur' has been connected to women feature film directors such as Dorothy Arzner (1987-1979), Agnes Varda (1928-2019), Chantal Akerman (1950-2015) and Jane Campion (b 1954). However, Rabinovitz notes that Kaja Silverman (1988) was one of the first film critics to recognise the relevance of film auteur-ship when evaluating the work of experimental women filmmakers:

> The author often emerges within the context of discussions [on women's experimental cinema] as a largely untheorised category, placed definitively "outside" the text, and assumed to be the punctual source of its sounds and images. … There is no sense in which the feminist author, like her phallic counterpart, might be constructed in and through discourse – that she might be inseparable from the desire that circulates within her texts, investing itself not only in their formal articulation, but in recurring diegetic elements. (Silverman cited in Rabinovitz 2003: 22)

Hollinger agrees, '[t]he issue of authorship is central to the feminist avant-garde in terms not only of the filmmaker's attempts to inscribe her presence into the film, but also to establish herself as its author or, as film scholarship would have it, its auteur' (2012: 70) Tait correspondingly said:

> I sometimes am physically in the film myself – you'll see my shadow appears holding the camera – somewhere there's a mirror image of me – I do sometimes appear in it. Not just in the Hitchcockian fashion of having a signature in every film, though there is a bit of that too – everybody copies that nowadays. (cited in Wilson 1978: 26)

Pirie also refers to this:

> There's another little paradox that you never see Margaret apart from the statuary, the obligatory mirror shots which you know are just a wee fun trick as far as you're concerned, nevertheless there's a paradox that those films are absolutely Margaret, every film there is, but you never see her. (cited in Appendix 1: vii)

Considering Hollinger's and Silverman's statements, Tait's placement of her 'self' in her films via gesture, home-made intertitles, scratching the film's surface, her shadow, reflection, voice and poetry, connote her presence as the unobtrusive orchestrator of ideas and maker of meanings (figures 86-89). From this standpoint, Tait can also be seen to alter the ways the symbolic is traditionally organised in order to indicate that hers is a different filmic 'voice'.

Fig. 86: Tait 1951.*Three Portrait Sketches.*

Fig. 87: Tait 1954. *Happy Bees.*

Fig. 88: Tait 1964. *Where I Am Is Here.*

Fig. 89: Tait 1976.*Tail Piece.*

To explain such strategies as a feature of women's experimental filmmaking, Alison Butler draws on Hamid Naficy's concept of 'accented' filmmaking. Naficy, a scholar of Iranian and Middle Eastern cinema, coined this phrase as an alternative to Third Cinema, a film category which suggests a grading of cinemas. 'Accented cinema' marks a non-hierarchical separation from mainstream ways of filming and thinking and that so-called First and Second Cinemas are neither neutral nor value-free regarding 'realism' and 'ideology'. The term 'accented' also includes filmmakers whose position is 'presumed to be more prone to the tensions of marginality and difference' (Naficy 2001: 11) in relation to 'the dominant cinema produced by the society's reigning mode of production' (Naficy 2001: 23). Naficy cites Trinh T. Minh Ha, Chantal Akerman and Jonas Mekas as examples of 'accented' filmmakers whose self-reflexivity, autobiographical elements and references to home and place in their films mark their difference from mainstream film practices and presumptions.

Alison Butler suggests that Naficy's concept of 'accented' cinema forms a parallel with women whose work similarly addresses displacement, marginalisation, exile or post-colonialism and who include themselves in their films for comparable reasons:

> The purpose of self-inscription is not the construction of a coherent Subject position for the author, but the construction of a viable speaking position which, nonetheless, mirrors and enacts the author's experience and embodiment as multiple and fragmented. (Butler 2002: 61)

A central feature of self-inscription in 'accented' cinema is 'performative' filmmaking. This is achieved by a director/filmmaker incorporating personal and cultural references into his/her films' diegesis and recognised by local or cognizant audiences as significant. This includes original languages, indigenous dialects in a bi- or multi-lingual manner and cultural-specific signifiers such as music, poetry, folklore, crafts and 'place' – something which, as I have shown in my thesis, thematically occurs in many of Tait's films. Naficy explains:

> In accented cinema the author is in the text in multiple ways traversing the spectrum of authorship theories. … We may discover certain consistencies from which we can construct an authorial presence within the films.
> …
> It is thus that authors become discursive figures … who inhabit and are constructed not only through history but by their own filmic texts. In these films' filmmakers are engaged in the performance of the self. … how they are "personified" varies. (2001: 35)

These strategies also evoke the 'double-consciousness' (Naficy 2001: 22) that is required by those who have to negotiate differing cultures, languages and experiences in their everyday lives in terms of gender and culture. Sentient audiences recognise that the individual and collective identity encoded in 'accented' cinematic strategies refer to specific and shared experiences, and that these films invite differing levels of audience reception:

> Performative filmmakers are not concerned with the control of meaning in their films but to use film to speak from viable, fluid positions, including multilingual narratives which indigenous and empathetic audiences would recognise as shared or overlooked experiences. It is thus a form of 'authoring' agency. (Naficy 2001: 4)

Naficy's term 'authoring agency' fittingly describes Tait's awareness that, as a Scottish woman filmmaker on the margins of a patriarchal society and English culture, her role as filmmaker 'is not solely one of parentage but also of performance' (Naficy 2001: 4). This manifests via her

hand-crafted titles, mindful 'stalking the image', her inclusion of national and local references and inserting her own voice among other indigenous voices on some of her soundtracks. These strategies combine to articulate multi-levelled perspectives on the changes taking place under the conditions of modernity in her Scottish localities – from her perspective.

In the final section of this chapter, I examine Tait's self-inclusion in her films physically and via her 'voice' on her soundtracks and consider her authorial presence as a key component of her experimental short films.

Tait's Voice

In *La Jeune Née* (1986), Helene Cixous suggests that women's work is linked to the 'mother' as the source of 'female' texts in which 'writing and voice … are woven together' (cited in Moi 1985: 114). Cixous feels that speaking and speech are privileged forms of communication for women because the sounds, experiences and ideas that appear in their texts often reveal that they are wholly present in their writing/filming. From this perspective, female-centred 'texts' are an extension of women's speaking voices. Cixous believes that the connection between the voice, body and text is more important than that between signifier and signified. She calls this type of writing/filmmaking 'l'écriture féminine' after Derrida's notion of 'différance' (1997: 60-64). It destabilises the binary oppositions and phallocentric logic that underpinned mainstream texts by creating open-ended works in which meanings are indirect rather than assured.[94] It also fittingly describes Tait's self-inclusion as a strategy through which she 'physically materialise[s] what she is thinking; she signifies it with her body' (cited in Moi 1985: 114).

[94] Agnes Varda adapted the term to cinécriture to describe her own work in film, not to replicate Cixous: 'l'écriture féminine' but to suggest crafting films via rhythms in editing and filming, is similar to the ways a weaver or seamstress might. 'A well-written film is also well filmed, the actors are well chosen, and so are the locations. The cutting, the movement, the points of view, the rhythm of filming and editing have been felt and considered in the way a writer chooses the depth and meaning of sentences, the type of words, numbers of adverbs, paragraphs, asides, chapters which advance the story or break its flow, etc. In writing it's called style. In the cinema style is cinécriture' (Varda cited in Levitin 2003: 35).

Cixous' interest in generating ways of writing, seeing and thinking which embody 'feminine' principles is evident in textual strategies such as gaps, fragmentation, illogic, silences, punning, playfulness with words and discordant sound-image connections, as also noted in many of Tait's films. Cixous maintains that what is significant about such texts is a) that the 'feminine' in the text is recognised as a form of subjectivity, b) that a female-authored text is not subjugated and c) that the terms 'women' or 'feminine', as signifiers of female subjectivity, are not subsumed by essentialist associations where gender-specific qualities are allocated to biological sex.

Tait said that she wanted her films to evoke 'a response at the time' (cited in Krikorian 1983b: 6) which suggests a desire for interpretive connections between herself, her films and audiences. This is also advocated by Irigaray who, like Naficy and Cixous, argues that in order to hear the resonances in films/texts audiences must 'know how to listen' (1985b: 111) for voices speaking differently from crafted texts/films in which the embodied voice of 'other' is recognisable.

Britta Sjogren's (2006) study of the female voice-off in 1940s melodramas provides a way of understanding Tait's anticipated connection with audiences through her embodied and 'authorial' presence both inside outside her films' diegesis.

Once disparagingly known as 'women's weepies'[95] the melodrama or 'woman's film', which was only allocated the 'status' of a film sub-genre in the 1970s, was immensely popular with female audiences in the 1940s and 1950s – much to the surprise of its male directors and the film industry (Doane 1987). Through her research, Sjogren found that female audiences recognised that a woman leading the narrative was subversive because such an active female-centred presence was a rare occurrence in popular generic films, and this destabilised standard film conventions (2006: 50- 52). Audiences were also aware that a female protagonist re-

[95] Feature length post-war melodramas were known as 'weepies' because, as Mary Ann Doane explains, female audiences emotionally connected with the women presented on screen. They could not differentiate themselves from their cinematic sign because they *were* the sign. There was no easy way of distancing themselves from this/their image unless through masquerade and mimicry (Irigaray 1977: 68-85). These strategies could reveal the fabricated nature of gendered expectations and gender as a performance. See Mary Ann Doane. 1982. 'Film and the Masquerade: Theorising the Female Spectator', *Screen*, 23, (3-4).

presented a ‘female subject who speaks (and listens) from within Patriarchy’ (Sjogren 2006: 4) and this echoed their own subject positions.

In melodramas, a female presence emanates from inside the films’ diegesis via the protagonist’s body, and outside it via her voice on the soundtrack. To register the female ‘speaking’ voice as an important signifier of an active female presence outside the frame, Sjogren makes clear the difference between the voice-*over* and the voice-*off*.

As previously discussed, the male voice and voice-over are standard cinematic devices that lead the narrative and register *the* perspective in popular film productions. In mainstream documentaries it unifies the male-speaker-as-expert with the imagery being screened. Both types of film encourage standard interpretations and leave few hooks for audiences to negotiate their own readings or to read against the grain of the ideology they contain. Furthermore, the male voice-over promotes stability and adherence to the status quo. By contrast, the female voice-off, as Sjogren identifies in melodramas, ‘register[s] an independent space which evokes the tension of a dialect to the image’ (Sjogren 2006: 4). A female presence is ‘heard’ via the protagonist reading her letters or diaries (women’s thoughts) and ‘seen’ on-screen by a woman leading the narrative via her story (women’s experience). Sentient female audiences (but not exclusively) recognised the female voice outside the film’s frame emanates from an embodied female intelligence who is ‘speaking’ authoritatively about her/their experience or knowledge. Thus, rather than a ‘disembodied voice freed from the claustral confinement within the female body’ (Silverman 1988: 186), or the female voice as a critique of the dominant voice-of-God model, or one that can be reclaimed by a patriarchal fantasy of women-as-object, the female voice-off points to an inclusivity among wo/men. Indeed, female audiences in the 1940s and 1950s recognised the melodrama as a vehicle for ‘hearing’ experiences and knowledge that were absent from dominant film production.

This notion of ‘absence’ provides a way of understanding Tait’s occasional placement of her ‘voice’ and her ‘self’ both inside and outside her films’ frames as ‘presence’ since this strategically registers voices and observations which she felt were missing form standard film

production. Films made by women who are wholly present in their work through self-inscription, performance and/or innovative formal strategies, indicate an authorial presence which gives 'voice' to perspectives that are her own and part of a collective experience. As Cixous suggests, '[t]he voice in each woman is not only her own, but springs from the deepest layers of her psyche; her own speech becomes the echo of the primeval song she once heard' (cited in Moi 1985: 114). Because of their place in culture and society, female audiences (again not exclusively) more readily identify with films that do not rely on phallocentric or logocentric strategies. Irigaray also notes that to hear the resonances in these films/texts:

> One would have to listen with another ear, as if hearing an "other meaning" which is constantly in the process of weaving itself, at the same time ceaselessly embracing words, but also getting rid or words in order not to become fixed, congealed in them. For if she says something, it is not, it is already no longer identical with anything moreover; rather, it is contiguous. (1985b: 29)

Openness to new ideas is particularly heightened in experimental films since these steer audiences away from films produced for entertainment, information or those that have overt ideological content.

Although Tait's texts are female-centred, this does not discount sentient audiences of all sexes from recognising her vocalisation of differing aspects of life under the conditions of modernity. This is evident in the number of men who have responded to Tait's work and gone to great lengths to restore and promote it. In artistic circles, 'feminine' and/or female-centred texts are accepted by audiences who more willingly form links between the symbolic and the imaginary in unconventional ways. A person of any sex can create 'feminine' texts as noted in melodramas which were predominantly directed by men. But, within the context of a 'text' as a fluid conduit between maker and audience, the female '[v]oice-off allows (narratologically) for the introduction of heterogeneous and seemingly incompatible perspectives or points of view in a film – perspectives that, moreover, do not necessarily cancel each other out in their contradictoriness' (Sjogren 2006: 15).

Sjogren explains this in relation to the psychical development of a child and its relationship to language (see Chapter One of this thesis) which can also be equated with

hearing a voice speaking differently as adults within an economy not based on the symbolic functions in dominant language-use:

> In as much as the voice speaks of the traverse of a limit that is not yet based on the symbolics of the visible … or the unconscious and consciousness. It may be construed as evocative of difference that is not "sexually" or gender determined. (That is, difference here is not attached to an appreciation of the physical characteristics that distinguish humans). … Rather, this seems to be a peculiarly mutable difference, one that allows for the simultaneous consciousness of self and other in a way that does not yet imply dissolution for the Subject. (2006: 63-64)

Cixous similarly argues:

> Great care must be taken in working on feminine writing not to get trapped by names: to be signed with a woman's name does not necessarily make a piece of writing feminine.
> …
> To be signed off with a woman's name doesn't necessarily make a piece of writing feminine. It could quite well be masculine writing. … It's rare, but you can sometimes find femininity in writings signed by men, it does happen. (1981: 52)

Tait's articulation of the 'feminine' in her films relies to some extent on her stance as a lone filmmaker and her refusal to alter her work to organisations who more typically favoured films that deferred to the symbolic. Tait knew that the resonances and meanings in her films would disappear if they were altered to suit any organised remits, as would her 'voice'. It was her awareness of this that contributed to her feelings of isolation as an independent filmmaker in Scotland.

In the next chapter, I examine ways Tait un/consciously offset her feelings of isolation by (pro-actively) by aligning herself with prevailing film practices and practitioners whose work she admired or whose vision matched her own. I examine Tait's veiled connections with artists/filmmakers – albeit from a marginal standpoint.

Chapter Four: The Lonely Furrow Re-examined

Tait was one of several enterprising Scottish women filmmakers of her generation whose achievements were invisible to all but a few. Most, like Tait, were independent, self-trained, self-funded, one-woman operatives who attempted with various levels of success, to submit work to agencies or magazines (McBain and Russell 2004: 102, Ewan 2006, Neely 2014a, 2014b, Nolan and Finch 2015, Brownrigg 2016).[96] They include Isobel Wylie Hutchison (1889-1982) an explorer, filmmaker, writer and artist. Jenny Gilbertson (née Brown, 1902-1990) a documentary filmmaker championed by Grierson and her friend and fellow filmmaker, author and painter, Elizabeth Balneaves (1911-2006). Also, Helen Biggar (1905-1953) who was a set designer, filmmaker and co-producer of the iconic documentary *Hell Unltd* (1936) (which I will discuss in more detail later), Mary Field (1896-1968, Evelyn Spice-Cherry (1904-1980) who collaborated on films for government agencies, and Agnes Violet Neish (née Anderson c 1912-2005) who also made films while pursuing other interests. But it was Tait's innovative observations of everyday local life under the conditions of modernity, and her vanguard filming techniques that attracted interest from small groups and individuals who were inspired to promote and restore her films.[97]

Tait knew that her work was transient, 'I sometimes feel about my films that, if they're seen or not then responded to then they live, but if they're not much seen and just quietly disintegrate into their chemical constituents then they'll die …' (cited in Appendix 4: xlviii).

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[96] *Cataloguing of the Institute of Amateur Cinematographers Women Filmmakers' Films* is a 2015 research project that re-evaluated 142 'amateur' women filmmakers in the East Anglian film archives. This demonstrates a range of filmmaking and motivation among women filmmakers on the margins of culture and labelled 'amateur' elsewhere in the country, [online]. Available at: http://www.academia.edu/16865555/Researchers_Guide_Cataloguing_of_the_Institute_of_Amateur_Cinematographers_Women_Film-Makers_Films_ [accessed 22 February 2017].

[97] Archivist Janet McBain reveals that 'It took almost three years [to restore Tait 's films] and cost about £60,000 … Scottish Screen Archives found £20,000 from its budget. Another £20,000 came from the Arts Council of England and £20,000 from The Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, a charity that specialises in artistic projects. That £60,000 was probably more money than Tait made from her films in her whole life' (cited in George 2004: 2).

Elsewhere she said, 'I think my films appeal to people through dreams – the connections in them are felt connections rather than logical connections' (cited in Appendix 4: xlv). But even so, as Rod Stoneman noted, to be recognised as significant, an artist's work must connect with the society and cultural discourses of their time:

> The critical context involves a series of discourses, which serve to interpret, mediate and locate the film. They offer the terms in which the text can be read. A work of art like any other cultural and social discourse has no meaning outside of its context and a number of complex and reciprocal determinations operate at the point of production. (1979: 47)

Tait's assimilation of twentieth-century socio-cultural discourses and modernist film techniques indicate that her films were more than personal or vanity projects. The BAFVSC in London is among archives that hold evidence of acclaimed venues where Tait's films were screened (see Appendix 12 for example). She could thus be located among artist/filmmakers who are wholly present in their work and who strive to articulate connections between self and expression. As Fred Orton and Griselda Pollock explain, 'inner experience only enters consciousness when it finds a language. … If it is not to be passed over in silence, experience must be translated' (1996: 301). Tait did translate her perceptions and filmic voice into a film language that was recognised by audiences in her time, as previously noted via British avant-garde coteries, and currently in events such as *Rhythm and Poetry: The Films of Margaret Tait* at the BFI (2018) curated by Peter Todd, LUX's travelling programme, *Where I Am is Here: Margaret Tait at 100* (2019) and *Go Go Go: Women in Experimental Animation* (Bristol, 2019).[98] This indicates that her work was and is not passed over in silence, particularly among small creative circles and sentient or artistically-minded audiences.

Limited contact, intermittent exhibitions, rejected applications, isolation and solitariness are par for the course for artist/filmmakers particularly those whose work is unconventional. Regarding marginal standpoints, David E. James explains:

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[98] *Rhythm and Poetry: The Films of Margaret Tait.* November 5-30th 2018, [online]. Available at: https://lux.org.uk/event/rhythm-and-poetry [accessed 23 October 2018]. *Where I Am Is Here*: Margaret Tait at *100.* A touring programme produced by LUX with films selected by Sarah Neely and Matt Lloyd (2019), [online]. Available at: https://lux.org.uk/work/where-i-am-is-here-margaret-tait-at-100 [accessed 23 October 2018]. *Go Go Go: Women in Experimental Animation* (Bristol, 2019) [online]. Available at: http://www.beefbristol.org/go-go-go-women-in-experimental-animation-an-essay-by-vicky-smith/ [accessed 23 February 2020]

> Some experimental filmmakers have attempted to isolate themselves, or had isolation forced on them. But however hermetic such individual artisans have been, almost always avant-garde films emerge from social movements, from identity groups, subcultures and the like, who find the medium valuable in their own self-promotion and self-articulation. Their films similarly entail social references and have a social function, however disguised or attenuated it may be. (2005:15)

In his review of the 1975 *First Festival of Independent British Cinema*, Malcolm Le Grice wrote that Tait's 'work is sophisticated … she is no primitive … and … deserves a full critical review' (1975: 225). Pirie agreed,

> you're not primitive. I mean you're a highly sophisticated and highly intellectual, highly ordered filmmaker, but all these things of intellect, of philosophy, of statement, of aesthetic, you know, are in the films. (cited Appendix 1: vi)

The links between Tait, solitude, isolation, marginalisation and transience can thus be considered within other contexts.

Trinh T. Minh-ha, for example, has described the margins as boundary-free places, 'right at the limits of several categories and approaches [which] means that one is neither entirely inside nor outside' culture (1992: 218). Art curator Catherine de Zegher also explained that in these unofficial spaces,

> women artists … appear to recognise that working within and not outside patriarchal discourse with what is on hand – a kind of bricolage – erodes established meanings and naturalised differences and destabilises fixed gender and racial categories. Their need to deconstruct existing representational codes is a search for beginnings. (1996: 23)

Many women throughout history, whether through relegation or intent, have recognised that the margins offer the time and space to develop new textual forms away from the male gaze, as noted previously in Chapter Three regarding *Circles*. Sandy Flitterman-Lewis writes:

> Possibilities for opposition can be conceived in terms of the type of subject constructed by a particular … cinema and by the alternative enunciative positions it suggests. It is this reformulation of national cinema and of art cinema along theoretical lines that connects both of them to the project of a feminist counter-cinema, for all three work at the margins of mainstream commercial production in an effort not only to subvert and undermine the structures of dominance, but also, and perhaps more importantly, to generate new textual forms. (1996: 24)

From this perspective, Tait's studios can be re-viewed as generative spaces from which she developed new textual forms as a lone / 'female auteur' while simultaneously sustaining connections with current film production and cultural discourse.

Several Scottish filmmakers of Tait's generation moved to central hubs such as London or Hollywood to achieve their ambitions in film (Moffat and Riach 2014, Nowlan and Finch 2015). However, Tait was not interested in creating 'Oscar winners or festival fodder, but to make a serious film that means something in Scotland' (Tait letter to Murray Grigor 1967 cited in Neely 2017: 22). Mike Leggett wrote, 'Margaret talked about how she felt a kind of responsibility to the Orkneys [sic.] to be not only their documenter of changes but also their poet'. He added, 'she was part of the pre-war political movement amongst Scottish university students to "move back" into the Highlands' (Private email). Interestingly, Tait's return to Edinburgh correlated with the Scottish Literary Renaissance – a version of Scottish Modernism:

> One of the major concerns of the contemporary literary debate was around the distinctiveness of Scottish (distinctive that is to British Culture) … re-examining the clichés of the traditional depictions of Scotland's cultural and social life with a crucially contemporary spirit. (Scullion 1990: 46)

Aligning with Scottish Modernism may not have been not Tait's primary objective, but her locally-based work and references to Scotland's heritage, culture and people are central to her film oeuvre and thus in keeping with this perspective:

> I felt that ultimately everything had to come from Scotland, that the films I would want to be involved in would be ones coming up out of Scotland, that would be something to do with the place really … not just Orkney. (Tait cited in Wilson 1978: 19)

An example of this intent can be found in 1960 when she invited Scotland's eminent Scottish Nationalist poet and key figure in the Scottish Renaissance, Hugh MacDiarmid (1892-1978) (real name Christopher Murray Grieve*)* to her Rose Street studio to view a selection of her films.[99] He praised her work and wondered why education authorities did not take up films like *The Drift Back* anticipating that Scottish institutions would welcome filmmakers like Tait to circulate their ideas to the public:

> One of Dr. Tait's … films, *The Drift Back,* was commissioned by Orkney Education Committee and shown in circuits in community Halls. … It is surprising that education authorities on the mainland are not taking up this idea to a greater extent. …

[99] See Oscar Marzarolli's 1972 film *Hugh MacDiarmid: No Fellow Travellers,* which was made to celebrate MacDiarmid's 80th birthday and sponsored by the Films of Scotland and the Scottish Arts Council [online]. Available at: https://movingimage.nls.uk/film/2688 [accessed 3 November 2019]

> Such developments in Scotland are alas, far behind those achieved in other countries. Studios like Dr. Tait's work closely with Government and scientific organisations. ... So they will yet in Scotland too. Dr. Tait is ploughing a lonely furrow but has set a process in motion, which is bound to develop. ([1960] cited in Calder et. al.1998: 416-417)

So Mayer thought MacDiarmid may have misread Tait's intentions since his 'desire to re-appropriate Tait's work for Scottish nationalism locates her as a public servant rather than an artist, a stenographer of local life' (2014:18). Tait did want to work with public services and a national film culture, but on her own terms. But her 'realist', poetic and politically nuanced films were perceived as incompatible with local film boards' institutional remits and limited budgets. Her noncompliance with their obligations and standards of proficiency signalled wider ambitions for her films.

In 1964, she approached MacDiarmid again, this time to make a film portrait of him. She explained her affinity with the poet in an interview with Tamara Krikorian:

> **TK** So you used the structure of MacDiarmid's own poem [*You Know Not Who I Am*] to pace the film
> **MT** That's right.
> **TK** How did you meet MacDiarmid?
> **MT** Well literally how I met him I drove down to his house Brownsbank and knocked on his door, but how this came about – I had been reading a lot of MacDiarmid in those years – I think I had read it before, and it was a great revelation to me really – his own work and other things I had read through having in a sense discovered MacDiarmid for myself at this time
> …
> I and my friends at this time had been so utterly involved in MacDiarmid's writing, and that he should think … that people he didn't know weren't reading it, struck me as not right, so I just wanted to go down and say 'hello' to him and say … how much it meant to me – and of course I met Christopher and Valda. And just the very human warm situation, and a very nice welcome. That's how I actually met him. (cited in Krikorian 1983d: 12-13)

Without a platform of her own, Tait's decision to invite MacDiarmid to her studio and later to make a film portrait of him can be interpreted as Tait placing her voice alongside MacDiarmid's professional standing, politics, poetry, voice, and aligning with his marginal status in British/English Modernism. It also perhaps deferred her feelings isolation, as I discuss in the next section.

Case Study: *Hugh MacDiarmid: A Portrait* (Tait 1964)

Hugh MacDiarmid: A Portrait was made shortly after Tait's decision to make films at the level of poetry. She tried to gain funding for *Hugh MacDiarmid* based on its local and cultural interest in this Scottish poet:

> Yes, I even printed a leaflet which I sent round to various universities in this country and the USA to try and do it on a subscription basis in the way that books sometimes used to be published … with subscribers putting in some money to the thing beforehand … I thought perhaps a film could be done like that … in relation to the non-response from the universities, they did buy-some universities did buy prints of the film after it was made. (cited in Wilson 1979: 6-7)

As there were no buyers originally, Tait made the film on a tight budget and later refused requests from those who wanted to use parts of the film for its rare footage of local streets and bars (Neely 2017: 74-75). Despite having a few poems published by MacDiarmid (Neely 2017: 12) and inviting him to her studio to view her films, Tait did not presume to 'know' the poet, 'I was only trying to show one or two aspects of him – my view of him. I didn't know him that well, to make a penetrating portrait of the man, and I was approaching it from the point of view of what I had read of his, really' (cited in Todd and Cook 2004: 80). She confirmed this in a Q&A session at Goldsmiths (Lewandowska 1986):

> it's not exactly meant to be a documentary about him, but it isn't you see … he rather preferred [indecipherable] which … were more documentary and had him explaining his political views and so on, I didn't want that. I just wanted to make a film portrait. You just get a view at the time, your own personal – in a way it's the picture that's there rather than anything you might [indecipherable] ... take away something of the person too. (cited in Appendix 2: xxxvii)

Tait's filming of *Hugh MacDiarmid: A Portrait* involves her practice of allowing ideas to develop from an open storyboard, a list or set of notes rather than directing towards a specific conclusion. Opening close-up shots of MacDiarmid's face, and avant-garde music on the soundtrack, are followed by panning shots of bookshelves and modernist artworks which can be interpreted as signifiers of his intellect and contemporaneity. Later, he is heard reading a vernacular rendition of a poem by German poet Stefan George (1868-1933), *You Know Not Who I Am*:

> Ye kenna wha I am-but this is fac'

I ha'ena yet by ony word or ac'
Made mysel' human … an' sune I maun
Tak'
Anither guise to ony I've yet ta'cn.
I'll cheenge: an' yet my ain true sel'
I'll hain
(MacDiarmid 1993: 22)

Tait translated this poem for the students at Goldsmiths as, 'I'll change into something that you don't know as me, everything you know will disappear and there'll be something else altogether. That in a sense, that is the theme …' (cited in Appendix 2: xxxvi).

MacDiarmid is known for his use of 'Lallans', a combination of vernacular, archaic Scots and English, aspects of which can be traced back to Robert Burns (1759-1796) and Robert Louis Stevenson (1850-1894). His fusion of Scottish, English and Gaelic dialects counters the predominance of English in British Modernism and points to the diversity of language-use and cultural identity in Britain. By asking MacDiarmid to read his own poetry in her film, Tait suggests a shared understanding that regional voices and forgotten languages could re-awaken knowledge obscured by the hegemonic use of English in Scottish life and culture, and the importance of local language-use and indigenous voices to Scottish identity. This is noted in a scene in which a BBC male English voice is heard reading the news and weather reports on a wireless next to where MacDiarmid is writing (figures 90- 91).

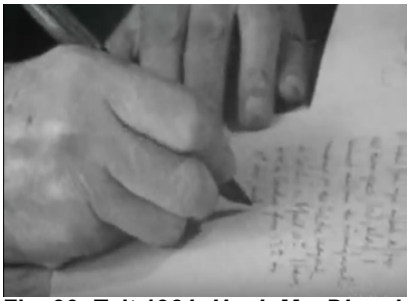

Fig. 90: Tait 1964. *Hugh MacDiarmid: A Portrait.*

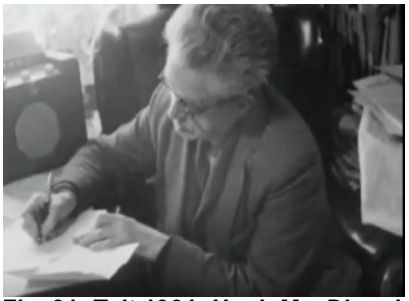

Fig. 91: Tait 1964. *Hugh MacDiarmid: A Portrait.*

This juxtaposition points to the predominance of English language and policies in Scottish life that MacDiarmid was, in part, writing to diffuse. The wireless also signals Lord Reith's influence through a single channel of communication which encouraged specific national responses. By paying close attention to local language-use in their work, MacDiarmid and Tait linked local

audiences, makers and Makars through a shared knowledge and interest in their place, culture and history. Tait's filming of MacDiarmid writing also suggests her affinity with the poet's 'intellectual inquiry, national disposition and formal experimentation' (Neely and Riach 2009: 4).

Tait once said her aim was to structure her films 'as seriously as if they were major productions or works of poetry' (cited in Neely 2017: 27). Perhaps in ways that parallel the layering of thoughts as described by MacDiarmid reading from his poem *The Kind of Poetry I Want* (1961) on the soundtrack,

> I dream of poems like the breadknife
> Which cuts three slices at once …

MacDiarmid, in turn, referred to the creative potential of film in an article he wrote for *Cinema Quarterly* (1932-1935), a magazine which promoted reviews of mostly European cinéastes, films and filmmakers. In it, he explained that for him poetry was more than 'mere verse' and should be 'defined as the art of maximum statement in a minimum space' (1934: 146) and that similar imaginative approaches could be used in film:

> The characteristic of all great poetry is an economy in presenting experience which keeps us wondering that so much can be said in so few words … and the desirability, even the need, of associating this quality with the cinema by every possible means needs no stressing … the future of cinema depends on its power to use the imagination. (1934: 146)

There is also evidence of MacDiarmid's compliance with Tait's 'creative treatment of reality' and a shared understanding of local culture, place, imagination and childhood in representation/s in a scene in which Tait films the 'lion of Scottish poetry' (Smith cited in Todd and Cook 2004: 17) walking along a low brick wall and pavement curb (figure 92). (This echoes a sequence in which a small boy does the same in *The Leaden Echo and the Golden Echo* (1955)). Tait explained:

> I asked Christopher if he thought he could walk along as if he was balancing the earth, making the earth turn round with his own foot, and he thought he could do that, and so this is what he's doing; and he walks east, throws his notebook into the wastepaper basket and that's what I used that poem for, with his permission. (cited in Krikorian 1983d: 12)

Tait shed more light on this scene and her sense of him:

> **MT** … but when you say 'patriarchy' did you say you thought MacDiarmid was a patriarchal figure?
> **TK** Well I saw him as a patriarchal figure certainly.

MT Well, I can't say I see him as a patriarch.
TK Well, he does fit into that sort of tradition of … great Scottish figures in a sense of, sort of patriarchs, sort of leading particular cultural areas
MT Yes, you say that the Scottish Society is patriarchal – I don't think Scotsmen – I think Scotts [sic.] men are more inclined to see themselves as wee boys than as patriarchs you know. (cited in Krikorian 1983d: 15)

Fig. 92: Tait 1964. *Hugh MacDiarmid: A Portrait*.

She again presents MacDiarmid as an atypical signifier of patriarchal and cultural 'mastery' by filming him washing dishes – as she does of herself in *Place of Work* (1976) – as if to suggest that they both blur the boundaries between home/work and public/private spaces.

Gaston Bachelard refers to 'home' as a 'felicitous' (1964: xxxi) space, cherished 'corners of the world' (1964: 40) and/or places of renewal where 'there is ground for taking the house as a tool for analysis of the human soul" (1964: xxxiii). MacDiarmid's reference to home in *Lo! A Child is Born* echoes this:

I thought of a house where the stones seemed suddenly changed
And become instinct with hope, hope as solid as themselves,
And the atmosphere warm with that lovely heat,
The warmth of tenderness and longing souls, the smiling anxiety
That rules a home where a child is about to be born. ([1935] 2006:168)

All subjects experience or seek the comfort of a home or similar space/place in the private sphere, yet domesticity in its many guises was rarely portrayed or discussed in public spheres at that time. It was thought to be inconsequential in cultural and decision-making areas in mid-twentieth century discourses. Nevertheless, Tait films MacDiarmid from the outside of his home looking in as if to present this cosy haven as a productive place of security and creativity away from outside pressures (figure 93). Inside the cottage she films MacDiarmid's wife Valda

and their books, artworks and memorabilia including a photograph of his mother, against a soundtrack of avant-garde music.

Fig. 93: Tait 1964. *Hugh MacDiarmid: A Portrait.*

Fig. 94: Tait 1964. *Hugh MacDiarmid: A Portrait.*

Fig. 95: Tait 1964. *Hugh MacDiarmid: A Portrait.*

Tait later films the poet socialising in a local bar – another 'felicitous' space (figures 94-95). Using close and medium shots she draws attention to the people among whom the poet lives and for whom/with whom he/she/they speak. MacDiarmid is thus re-presented as part of the fabric of a Scottish community in ways that acknowledge that 'culture is not only a body of intellectual and imaginative work; it is also essentially a whole way of life' (Williams 1968: 132), and that social and cultural 'difference' can and does coexist in some parts of Britain.

In *Hugh MacDiarmid: A Portrait,* Tait can again be seen to refer back to sponsored films on the 1930s such as *Coal Face* (Cavalcanti 1935 35mm) and *Night Mail* (Wright and Watt 1936 35mm narrated in part by Grierson) made for the GPO under Grierson's jurisdiction. Both films are cited as ground-breaking for their time (Nichols 2001).

The cause and effect narrative in *Night Mail* follows an overnight mail train between London and Scotland and *Coal Face* films workers in a Yorkshire mining community. These pioneering information films heroize working men and the voice-overs signify the type of middleclass Englishness and patriotic undertones prevalent in prevailing films of this type and is compounded by the incorporation of avant-garde music by Benjamin Britten and poetry written (and read in *Coal Face)* by W.H. Auden – two icons of English modernism. The juxtaposition of middleclass voices against British working industries establishes a patriotic and gender-specific social order from an English, male, and classed viewpoint. Tait echoes (mimics) the content and modernist tone of these iconic films by incorporating signs of Scottish modernism in her film

portrait of MacDiarmid. She asked MacDiarmid to (similarly) read his own poetry and used local composer, Francis George Scott's avant-garde setting of *MacDiarmid's* poem *The Eemis Stane* performed by local musicians Duncan Robertson (piano) and Olive Ogston (singer). Creative sound-image associations such as these link MacDiarmid, local musicians, everyday people, and herself as collaborators within the film's frame. Tait films MacDiarmid among his fellow artists and countrymen/women in ways that are difficult to imagine for the makers of *Coal Face* and *Night Mail.* In doing so, she blurred the more usual boundaries that separated high/low cultures, men/women, centre/periphery elsewhere in modernism. In her film portrait of MacDiarmid Tait revealed a small and believable corner of Scottish life that she felt was missing from the output of organisations such as The Films of Scotland and British Film Units.

So Mayer observes that the language used to discuss Tait sustains her marginal status, 'Margaret Tait is (portrayed) as forgotten – lost – invisible' (2014: 19). Indeed, these descriptions mask Tait's operational stance in modernist film culture and an awareness that her isolation was relative rather than complete.

Tait's Isolation as Relative

Malcolm Le Grice originally conferred the term 'relative isolation' on Tait in his review of the landmark *First Festival of Independent British Cinema,* Bristol, 1975:

> The main surprise and came through seeing the work of Margaret Tait for the first time…working in a direction which received no echo of support in the films of her generation, she has developed her ideas in relative isolation … she must be considered as the only genuinely independent experimental mind in film to precede the current movement. (1975: 225)

Evidence that Tait accepted 'relative isolation' as a description of her situation appears in a letter she wrote to Leggett when he was working on an article about her (1979):

> Began to be seen outside Scotland? What about Moscow 1957, Brussels 1959 (the Exp Fest) followed by a showing on Belgian TV of 'Rose Street', 'Rose Street' in Malmo and Karlstad filmoteks in Sweden, 'MacDiarmid' also, showings on WGBH TV, USA, of 'Calypso' 'The Drift Back', 'Rose Street', one or two early films held in the Govt. of India's education department, prints of 'MacDiarmid' in USA, Canada, Sweden? Begun to be seen in <u>England</u>, you could say.

> And the bit about 'working in isolation' isn't quite true either. I accepted (accept) Malcolm Le Grice's 'relative isolation' in the context of his mention in 'Studio International', but I'm not really isolated and haven't been isolated. I think it gives a wrong impression of isolation. (Letter to Leggett 07/08/1979. Held at the BAFVSC, London)

As discussed in Chapter Three of this thesis, Tait 'was an active part of these tight but influential circles and far from isolated, was well known on these tight circuits' (Todd cited in Miller 2005:1). Elsewhere, Neely notes, 'apart from screenings organised by Tait herself, her work was rarely shown in Scotland' (2016: 23).[100] Ryan Shand concurred saying that despite her marketing tactics Tait was 'not so much forgotten as never discovered by Scottish critics' (2007a: 107-108). Tait occasionally screened her films in local venues including Edinburgh's International Film Festivals 1970, 1976, 1977 where her friend Murray Grigor, who organised the 1970 retrospective at EIFF, said that this 'came as a revelation to most British critics' (1999).[101] Richard Demarco invited Tait to screen her films and read her poetry at his Edinburgh Gallery (1971, 1973, 1977) and she was the subject of three BBC television arts programmes, one in Scotland and two in England.[102] Importantly too, the support of her partner Alex Pirie must have cushioned her feelings of isolation and been pivotal to a reticent filmmaker attempting to contribute to a film culture, which did not yet recognise her worth (figures 96 and 97). Although Pirie denied having an influence on Tait's work, he understood her processes and shared her affinity with Scottish culture. He also assisted in *Rose Street* and *On the Mountain*,

[100] See Appendix 5 for letter from Tait to David Curtis to whom she sent the flier for a typical screening of her films in Kirkwall as an example of her marketing tactics.

[101] *Place of Work* and *Tailpiece* were shown at 'Film House' at the 1977 EIFF (Tait letter to Leggett 06/10/1977. Held at the BAFVSC, London). *Colour Poems* was screened at the International Avant-garde Forum at EIFF (1976). It included a programme on Avant-garde film that was attended by influential filmmakers and writers including Laura Mulvey and Constance Penley.

[102] 'Poet with a Camera', *Spectrum*, BBC Scotland Arts Series (1979), 'Margaret Tait; Film Maker', a documentary for Channel 4 (1983) and an Interview with Margaret Tait with Tamara Krikorian for *The Eleventh Hour*, Channel 4 (1987) (Transcripts held at the BAFVSC, London) This series of television arts programmes was launched in 1982 to replace regional funding bodies for films and low budget documentary films and this encouraged a range of independent filmmakers and groups to comply with broadcasting objectives. The Independent Filmmakers Association formed an alliance with the Association of Cinematograph and Television Technicians provided a frame for arts programmes such as *The Eleventh Hour*, and thus a tight window of opportunity for low budget filmmakers and critical voices from other minority areas within society and culture on television. See Rod Stoneman, 1992. 'Sins of Commission', *Screen* 33(2) in Margaret Dickinson (ed.) (1999) *Rogue Reels: Oppositional Film in Britain 1945-1990.* BFI, 174-187.

produced *The Big Sheep* and *Where I Am Is Here* and wrote the script for *A Pleasant Place* (1966).

Fig. 96: Leggett 1977. Tait and Pirie in Leggett's kitchen in Devon.

Fig. 97: Leggett 1977. Tait and Pirie in Leggett's kitchen in Devon.

Pirie described his role at best as a 'sneak preview audience' while Tait described Pirie as her 'co-procreator, colleague, partner' and 'touchstone' (cited Appendix 1: xxii). He was keen to clarify that their relationship was insignificant where discussions of her work were concerned, 'that's nothing to do with it … it's not a piece of information nor does it lead to other bits of information that are relevant … what you've got are films and a filmmaker' (cited in Appendix 1: xxii).

Regarding her 'relative isolation', in the late 1970's when reflecting on the twenty years in her Rose Street studio (1954-1973) Tait said, 'I don't want to get bogged down to the extent to which I was isolated, but I was working on my own. I didn't have anybody else working in film to talk about it to directly' (cited in Appendix 1: xix). She noted that working with editors, sound engineers and printers forestalled complete isolation, 'at the very least there are the labs involved, there's somebody else doing the sound mixing. Even if you're working alone, you've got to take the organisation into account no matter how solitary a worker you are' (cited in Wilson 1978: 20-21). Tait also mentioned several neighbouring filmmakers who made tourist and information films for the Films of Scotland Committees and whose equipment she sometimes used:

> I don't think I ever was then talking about a specific project of mine or bringing them in to what I was doing at a particular time really. It was more that they were talking about their own frustrations of working on camera [apparatus] and what they were going to do next.

> You know, what little there was to do – I mean we would do something together if there was the financial possibility. ... There was the least hope of getting anything done really. (cited in Appendix 1: xxiii)

Occasionally John Grierson, Peter Hollander and other friends visited and gave feedback and Forsyth Hardy had once 'talked of raising £350 towards the completion of a hand-painted film, but nothing materialised' (Leggett 1979: 4). The lack of opportunities resulting from these contacts, together with scant support for local independent filmmakers at that time, underlined Tait's feeling that her sense of relative isolation was linked to the idea that no-one in Scotland was making films in ways she envisaged:

> Working close to a particular place is an extension of the coming into your own country. I say coming into it in that I maybe started making films in another country – in Italy – but the sort of film that arises out of your own country … then reverberates back to the people who see it … who belong to that place too. … This was something that was happening in Italy … in the early fifties. They suddenly found that they were really making films which sort of surged up out of the place, out of themselves and how they felt about things, and that this then in turn affected the people which then affected the films again. I mean, a true art of the country. Now … this does seem to be lacking in Scotland. (Tait cited in Wilson 1978: 3)

In conversation with Leggett (1977) Pirie agreed, 'I mean who else in Scotland over the last twenty-odd years has made films that are at all approximate to yours in content or theme or formal development. Who? Is there anybody you could name? Is there any group of people you could name?' (cited in Appendix 1: xxiv). Elsewhere he said, 'there was no audience, no peers, you were not necessarily sharing or discussing your emergent ideas or intuitions or discoveries that were coming from your actual process of working' (cited in Appendix 1: xxvii).

In terms of a wider film culture, Tait's 'interests in the moving image range from progressive filmmakers such as Yasujiro Ozu and Ingmar Bergman, to the comedies of Jerry Lewis and the popular American television series Ally McBeal' (Neely 2017: 1). Pirie sheds light on their enthusiasm for film:

> The great, awful, commercial narrative film informed our being and consumed us and yet liberated us or liberated our imagination or encouraged us to dream, you know, and went through the whole gamut of human feeling. I like human feeling. (cited in Appendix 1: xi)

Regarding local film productions, Tait admitted in interviews and her correspondence that her relationship with Scottish and other film companies was uneasy, but she did not explain how her

films registered a difference from or connection with these organisations or the types of film they sanctioned. She also never said what her films were about as this might have been mis-read or connected her and her films within fixed frames and contexts she did not want for her work.

At the start of her career, Tait had anticipated forming connections with the Edinburgh International Film Festival (est. 1947) which was on her doorstep while she lived in Rose Street (1954-1973). As the oldest continually running film festival in Europe, the EIFF was an important landmark in Edinburgh's cultural calendar, particularly among local and independent filmmakers. It attracted critically aware filmmakers from across Europe, America and Australia and international audiences interested in cutting-edge film. On her return from Italy in the 1950s Tait wrote of her interest in Scottish film and the EIFF:

> I was particularly pleased by the response of Edinburgh people. I found a very keen positive interest in films and enthusiasm for the idea of more films being produced in Scotland, especially by Scottish independents. Of course, there must always have been a positive feeling for film in Edinburgh for the Film Guild to have been formed in the first place and to have grown into the Edinburgh Film Festival. This latter has become very much of a 'festival proper'. (Tait 1954)

But by the 1970s Tait only briefly mentions the EIFF despite having screened her films there and attended the festival on many occasions. Pirie explained:

> **AP** Over the years I suppose I would say that just in the Edinburgh Festival as well, one has seen a great range of things that at that time you know were regarded as, or stated to be, whatever the terms were, you know, experimental or avant-garde
> …
> which were the two terms that were broadly used … so there's that kind of background. Now if you ask me what films I've seen that since apparently something happened … we'll say a major shift within Britain, or a kind of flowering of a genre or a series of redefinitions of a genre, I honestly couldn't name them.
> **MT** …we saw some of them … (cited in Appendix 1: viii)

Tait's decision to remain on the margins of standard or international film coteries, particularly from the mid-1960s, can be interpreted as a concern to maintain her distinct filmic voice and identity as an independent filmmaker of work that manifestly stemmed from Scotland. She noted, 'there was no other filmmaking … that was at that time going on other than this sponsored type of thing that for some reason or other they called 'documentary' … well generally speaking instructional films' (cited in Appendix 1: xxiv). But Scullion explained that while 'Grierson's documentaries pushed the notion of film-as-public-service, as educator and

film-as-weapon, elsewhere other groups were equally examining film-as-art' (cited in Dick 1990: 49).

In the next section I provide a brief account of Scotland's early film culture as a context, and perhaps influence, for Tait's work in this area of local filmmaking.

Early Scottish Film Culture

Moving pictures were first shown in Scotland on 13th April 1896 in the Empire Palace Theatre, Edinburgh and developed into a popular, lucrative and flourishing film industry. Film permeated all areas of Scottish life via entertainment, education, the Church, amateur film and films for children (Butt, 2000). Indeed, Scullion states that for the first two-thirds of the twentieth century, 'the cinema habit affected almost all of Scotland' (cited in Dick 1990: 42) adding:

> Scotland was at the forefront of this remarkably popular movement. 1925 saw the founding of the London Film Society. On 22nd November 1929 the Glasgow Film Society was founded with an initial membership of 80 (but rising to over 400 by 1932-1933). In the following year, the Edinburgh Film Guild was formed. (cited in Dick 1990: 49)

Trevor Griffiths suggests that 'film in Scotland must be judged a central part of early twentieth century Scottish society in more ways than one' (2012: 247). He explained that from the 1930's-1950s,

> cinema's mass appeal reached new heights, an alternative approach to film and its place in society enjoyed growing influence. Here, film's worth was measured, not in terms of box office returns, but with regard to the wider political and cultural significance of both its subject matter and the techniques deployed to convey it. (2012: 218)

Interestingly, in terms of Tait's work, 'it is perhaps in the non-commercial application of film that a distinctive Scottish experience appears more pronounced' (Griffiths 2012: 220).

Scotland's familiarity with and enthusiasm for a wide range of films in the early twentieth century is evident in the films screened at the Glasgow Film Society (est. 1929) and the Edinburgh Film Guild (est. 1930) followed by 'other film societies in Aberdeen, Dundee, Inverness and eventually by a hundred or so societies in Scotland here' (Hardy cited in McArthur 1982: 81). Additionally, the Highlands and Islands Film Guild and Rural Cinema schemes were popular elsewhere in Scotland. To overcome the difficulty of acquiring a range of

films for enthusiastic Scottish audiences, 'assistance was sought from the only comparable body to pre-date the Glasgow Society, the Film Society in London. Active since 1925, the latter was the earliest organised manifestation of a growing propensity to see film as an artistic medium' (Griffiths 2012: 220). When the London Film Society disbanded in 1939, it was the Edinburgh Film Guild that became central in maintaining film production across Britain through film societies and national film events:

> In Edinburgh, the ambitions of the local society, the Film Guild went further as it began the period by promoting the publication of one of the first periodicals outside London to adopt a critical approach to evaluation of the moving image, *Cinema Quarterly,* and ended it by overseeing the development of an annual Festival of Documentary Film, a remit reflecting an aesthetic preference for actuality footage and the importance of such productions to Scotland's film culture generally. (Griffiths 2012: 218)

Griffiths' research into the minutes of Scottish Film Council Committee meetings 1939-44 further reveals:

> Such was the acceptance of film's central place in post-war culture that … what became the First International Festival of Documentary Films fell to the Edinburgh Film Guild, which offered daily screenings at its newly acquired theatre in Hill Street, … the programme of seventy films in 1947 growing to over 150 within two years. At the same time, its remit was widened to encompass 'Realist, Documentary, and Experimental' films … testimony to the breadth of Scotland's engagement with moving pictures beyond the world of mainstream cinema. (2012: 242)

The emphasis placed here on 'documentary', 'realism' and 'experimental' echoes the substance of Tait's independent films. Early in her career Tait wrote that there was a 'positive interest in … films being produced in Scotland, especially by Scottish independents' (Tait 1954). She anticipated that this interest in film would lead to productive and creative opportunities for Scottish filmmakers.

The Archives at Stirling University confirm the documentary and realist focus of this inaugural Edinburgh Film event opened by Grierson in 1947:

> The First International Film Festival to be held in Britain will be devoted entirely to Documentary. This is no accident; for not only does Britain lead the world in documentary production, but the documentary approach – an innate feeling for reality – is now the distinguishing characteristic of British feature films. (Forsyth Hardy cited in University of Stirling Archives 2014)

This festival featured European films including those by Neorealist director Rossellini, who gave seminars at the film school in Rome while Tait studied there and this film movement, as previously discussed, was an influence on her work. Film historian Colin McArthur notes that the accompanying booklet for the First Documentary Film Festival *(Documenta 47*) 'included substantial essays and even more wide-ranging reports on the documentary scene throughout the world' (cited in Dick 1990: 92-3). From the 1960s, 'even in the process of decline' (McArthur cited in Dick 1990: 93) as other types of film took precedence over the original documentary focus and the festival changed its name to the Edinburgh International Film Festival, (EIFF) it remained a prestigious annual event. It continues to attract critical debates about realism, contemporary, art-house, avant-garde and independent cinema to this day. The change in emphasis in the 1960s however, with its international focus and themed events, recanted the opportunities Tait had anticipated would be apportioned for Scottish film and Scottish independents in the earlier days of its formation.

Elsewhere in Scotland, Janet McBain's survey of the Scottish Amateur Film Festivals (1933-1986) interestingly reveals that an assortment of amateur and experimental films were screened in many non-commercial and independently funded film festivals and venues across Scotland's main towns (1977: 97-105).[103] Early Russian and European politically-minded avant-garde films, whose innovative formalism was influential in Grierson's film productions in units such as the GPO, were also screened in many independent film venues, freelance clubs, festivals and societies across the main cities in Scotland in the 1920s-1940s (Allen 1982, Scullion 1990, Griffiths 2012). Arguably, these liberal environments might have acted as a catalyst for an emergent alternative filmmaking in Scotland if the war, conscription and local redevelopment had not triggered a set of events that thwarted its progression. Higher entry fees, mounting rents and increased censorship of imported 'arthouse' films also led to the

[103] See Jim Hickey. 1982. 'Scottish Film Culture: A Chronicle'. In Colin McArthur *Scotch Reels: Scotland in Cinema and Television*. BFI Publishing, 70-72 for a list of Scottish film clubs, societies and Guilds (1929-1982).

closure of most privately hired venues, clubs and societies (Allen in McArthur 1982: 93-99). Thus, the spaces that had once sustained an alternative film culture in Scotland were curtailed:

> The outbreak of World War II brought organised radical filmmaking in the United Kingdom to a virtual stop as most on the left subordinated campaigning politics to support the war effort. … A core of activists mainly in London continued to document social causes but … beyond the sponsored documentary, Scottish filmmaking from the late 1950s to the mid-1970s remained largely the preserve of three groups: enthusiastic amateurs; a tiny clutch of artists using film as their primary medium; and a few determined professionals endeavouring, through occasional self-financed short film … to escape the bounds of sponsorship and graduate to the feature film. (Nowlan and Finch 2015: 35-36)

McArthur also pointed to the continuing influence that the second Films of Scotland Committee had on local film production and distribution:

> For two decades after its formation in 1955 [it became] the almost exclusive channel through which indigenous Scottish film production flowed and the determining structure on the practice on the practice of several generations of Scottish filmmakers. (1982: 57)

Thus, when Tait returned to Edinburgh in the 1950s, the main outlets for filmmakers in Scotland were the EIFF, the Edinburgh Film Guild, the Second Films of Scotland Committee, the Scottish Arts Council and Amateur Film Festivals. These organisations variously funded and co-ordinated film production in Scotland in ways that did not suit Tait's vision for film.

Against this background, Tait's lack of acknowledgement of the influences in her work, including an earlier Scottish film culture, can be interpreted as part of her desire to sustain a 'pioneering' (Tait from a promotional clipping cited in Neely 2017: 22) stance as an independent Scottish woman filmmaker of a different type of work. For example, when discussing *Hugh MacDiarmid*: *A Portrait*, she said, 'I was only trying to show one or two aspects of him – my view of him. I didn't know him that well, to make a penetrating portrait of the man' (cited in Todd and Cook 2004: 80). She similarly distanced herself from Gerrard Manley Hopkins saying, 'perhaps the very first film I ever made was an illustration of Hopkins' *The Leaden Echo the Golden Echo* … this is the picture I've chosen to march to the lines of the poem, irrespective of him' (cited in Appendix 2: xxxvii). Yet my analyses of these two films reveal much deeper levels of engagement with these poets' work and thinking.

Tait's seeming resolve to sustain her distance from existing films and filmmakers was contingent to some extent on her awareness of what she was 'independent' from. She once ironically said, 'independent from what?' (cited in Neely 2017: 22). In 1954 she wrote, 'I found … enthusiasm for the idea of more films being produced in Scotland, especially by Scottish independents' (Tait 1954), yet by 1975 she reflected, '[f]ar from a quorum. I don't know <u>any</u> [sic.] other filmmakers in the north of Scotland-in south Scotland, yes and there may be some in the north, but I do not know them' (Letter to Leggett 04/04/1975. Held at the BAFVSC, London). She also acknowledged her un/conscious awareness of other films and filmmakers:

> There's always been people making films on their own I think, 16 or more than 16 and even if you don't see them somehow or other you hear about them. Just exactly where I have, I couldn't exactly tell you I suppose, I mean somehow, we knew. Some people mentioning them, that sort of thing. I've seen a few, as I said last night at the Edinburgh Festival, some that I saw in Rome ... (cited in Appendix 1: xviii)

Local independent filmmakers Tait might have mentioned include Norman McLaren who moved to Canada with Grierson in 1941 to work for the National Film Board there, and Bill Douglas who moved to London to train and work. His film trilogy about his Edinburgh childhood (*My Childhood* (1972), *My Ain Folk* (1973), *My Way Home* (1978)) is celebrated as a significant achievement. Also, Enrico Cocozza who, like Tait, trained at the Sperimentale in Rome and returned to Glasgow to also self-fund his life-long film practice. His fictional/documentary film *Chick's Day* (1950) won Amateur Cine World film of the year and at the Scottish Amateur Film Festival (1951). Frank M. Marshall was another local 'amateur' filmmaker who made over seventy-seven films including information films about training women during the war and was known for establishing the 'family film' as a film category. But Tait makes no mention of these, nor any other filmmakers with regard to her work. She may have felt their films were not comparable. Also, without a forum or funding to nurture connections between local filmmakers in Scotland at that time, independent filmmaking remained an isolated practice for those who were keen to maintain their distinctiveness and develop a film practice as 'lone' filmmakers.

Evidence of Tait's self-identity as detached from other filmmakers also appears in a Q&A session she held with students at Goldsmiths College of Art, London (Lewandowska 1986).[104] Given her insistence on maintaining control over her work, it is reasonable to assume that Tait approved of Susan Foale's introduction:

> [Filmmaker Margaret Tait] … reveals that she works in a naturalistic manner, seldom throwing away film footage and following her instincts. Perhaps best known for her portraits of localities, she confesses it was never her intention to draw attention to the local exclusively but allowed for a point of difference with other filmmakers, that helped to distinguish her work. (Foale cited in the Women's Online Audio Archive. Appendix 2: xxxv)

The stance of this summary continued into the Q&A session:

> **Student** Do you get to see other independent films? Do you find that you can't really get to see many other Independent filmmakers?
> **MT** No, not a great many no – they keep to themselves. I see them on television of course – some of them – I mean I don't suppose I've seen anything only a few-people are making but, ah, after a bit – you don't have to keep on seeing films.
> **Student** Did you have any contact with artists in Scotland?
> **MT** Do you mean painters? Slightly yes, they weren't – I don't think they were terribly interested in film at that time.
> **Student** What about Ian Hamilton Finlay?
> **MT** Yeah, well, he had some ideas for various films, but they didn't seem filmic to me, what he was suggesting. You know, someone else had done it – actually, I suppose – they were very sort of [indecipherable].
> **Student** How much do you think you were influenced by Neorealism?
> **MT** Er, I like the films … I didn't feel the principles about it that they did. I didn't feel that on principle you should be Neorealist in your approach.
> …
> **Student** Have you seen any films by Bill Douglas?
> **MT** … I've just seen one of that … [do] you admire his films?
> **Student** Yes, I felt the third one you showed was like Bill Douglas.
> **MT** … Ah, you felt that was like Bill Douglas?
> **Student** Yeah, … I can't remember the name of the film.
> **MT** Er, *Tail Piece*? That was made as a coda to a longer film called *Place of Work* (cited in Appendix 2: xxxix)

As with the discussions regarding the Films of Scotland, EIFF and LFMC, Tait avoided allegiances with these and other film coteries because she knew that if she mentioned in passing an interest or affinity with filmmakers or organisations, her work would be evaluated in

[104] Tait's seminar with students from Goldsmiths (where Malcolm Le Grice was a lecturer) was recorded while Tait took part in an International Film Programme called 'Art in Cinema – the International Avant-garde Film (1986-89) held at the National Film Theatre. The range of filmmakers and styles of working in experimental film culture can be seen in the exhibition catalogue. See Appendix 12 for a list of avant-garde filmmakers Tait's films were screened with.

relation to this and the distinctiveness and nuances in her innovative films would be lost. Additionally, her voice and identity as an independent Scottish filmmaker would be absorbed into other film frames and detract from the reflective boundary-breaking filmmaking she was keen to pursue and sustain, locally.

Colin McArthur also notes that there was a lack of critical engagement with 'the discourses of Marxism and modernism' (1982: 67) in Scottish Film Institutions. Whereas many of Tait's films can be seen to connect with Marxist underpinnings and the politically informed experimental amateur and independent film culture of early European and British filmmaking. This, together with her reflections on place and gender, problematised the ideological stance of standard film production in Scotland in her time. Her 'lone' circumstances and incentives for filmmaking more fittingly corresponded with the 'self-financed', 'enthusiastic amateurs', and 'a tiny clutch of artists using film as their primary medium' (Nowlan and Finch 2015: 35-36) of expression in Scotland in the 1950s-1970s. Or, as Scullion states, 'other groups [who] were equally examining film-as-art' (cited in Dick 1990: 49) elsewhere in Scotland.

In the next chapter I examine these influences more closely, particularly with reference to Neely's observation that, 'it may be that Tait was in the wrong place, but in many respects, it may also have been the wrong time' (2009: 317). Tait might have been more comfortable in the liberal environment of Scottish film/culture prior to the second Films of Scotland or with those who were examining 'film-as-art'. But equally, her foresight is noted by Pirie who, in their discussion on the 'dialectic between the avant-garde and convention' said of Tait's films:

> **AP** Sometimes things have to wait to find their time because their essence and their value, and in a sense their permanence, depends on being separated to some extent from the time of their making. … [which has] been absorbed then in some sort of way into the generality of consciousness of the generality of response. Now this is not a doom-laden thing, it's not that we're waiting for you to drop dead, but it's just that there's something in that. Do you think there's any of that? No?
> **MT** [laughs]
> **AP** This residue – think about that.
> …
> **MT** The opposite thing of derivative is derivation (end of tape) (cited in Appendix 1: xviii).

Tait's reference to 'the opposite thing of derivative is derivation' indicates that, on some levels, she was aware that her films interconnected with the imagery and ideas in extant film classifications, thinking and practices, both modern/ist and local.

In the next chapter, using theories and approaches unavailable in her time, I place Tait's word 'derivation' within the context of contemporary 'intertextual' practices as this provides a frame for evaluating Tait's way of negotiating meanings in the early counter-cultural elements of Scottish film.

Chapter Five: The Anxiety of Influence and Intertextuality

Tait's hesitation at being incorporated into film coteries or organisations that did not suit her vision for her work parallels a characteristic in Modernism inherited from Romanticism's need to be original. In *The Anxiety of Influence* (1973), Harold Bloom describes the pressure felt by some modernist artists to present themselves as, if not original, then at least not illustrative or 'derivative'. As discussed in Chapter Three regarding Greenberg's quest for originality in modern painting/art, this anxiety was linked to a desire for (canonical) status and posterity. But as these accolades did not interest Tait, per se, the reasons for her innovative but detached inter-connections with prevailing film discourse can be re-viewed differently.

In Tait's era women's creativity was often perceived as derivative, inferior or in relation to their male colleagues. This was something Tait wanted to avoid. Although women engaged with current ideas and developed their practices in ways that were relevant to Modernism and other frames, their work was not perceived in cultural consciousness as having equivalence with their male counterparts at that time (Dusinberre and Rees 1979, Chicago 1979, Nochlin 1989, Battersby 1989, Penley 1989). It is through a close examination of Tait's connections with existing, often 'male-authored' texts that her difference from, and innovation with, dominant film production, social politics and the work of other fe/male artist/filmmakers, that her importance is revealed.

Tait's use of the word 'derivation' points to her awareness of art/film as a collection of practices and open-ended processes, rather than/as well as one that had definite conclusions or that could be organised into classifications and types. This awareness can also be linked to the double-consciousness of displaced filmmakers whose films 'are created with awareness of the vast histories of the prevailing cinematic modes' (Naficy 2001: 22), including the production, exhibition and reception of film.

The Oxford dictionary describes ‘derivation’ as, ‘the formation of a word from another word or from a root in the same or another language’. Within contemporary ‘art’ discourse, Julia Kristeva’s concept of ‘intertextuality’ (cited in Moi 1986: 34- 62) sheds light on how we might understand what Tait might have meant by ‘derivation’.

Kristeva uses the term ‘intertextuality’ to describe the post-modern process of art/film/texts as a systems of signs in which one text can be moved into another and where, ‘each word (text) is an intersection of other words (texts) where at least one other word (text) can be read’ (cited in Moi 1986: 37). New words/texts are enriched by their references to those they appropriate through the incorporation of the original context of the borrowed text into their new text’s meanings. Kristeva also explains ‘intertextuality’ in terms of a mosaic:

> Any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another. The notion of intertextuality replaces that of intersubjectivity, and poetic language is read as at least double. (cited in Moi 1986: 37)

The marvel of this for women is that their appropriation and re-creation of the formal strategies of their peers and precursors do not require an obligation to state or defend their references or influences. Rather, their un/conscious ‘borrowing’ from and innovative contributions to extant work goes some way to counter evaluations of women’s female-centred work as derivative, amateur, marginal or idiosyncratic.

Lev Manovich (2005) suggests that women’s innovative ways of articulating their subjectivities and perspectives in the 1960s and 1970s, heralded post-modern notions of hybridity, pluralism and deconstruction. However, in Tait’s time, the idea that women’s films/artwork could (also) be a process of quotations from existing work, or a skilful layering of meanings and cultural references in outcomes that were on a par with male-authored work, was not part of cultural discourse. So, where progress in male-authored texts was a key enterprise and focus for modernist (male) creativity – female-authored texts and creativity which involve more fluid (intertextual) approaches is comparable with Tait’s term ‘derivation’.

Intertextuality currently describes the textual strategies contemporary artists employ to make their work autonomous, distinctive and relevant. In some ways this might also explain the

recent interest in Tait. Not only because her filming of place, transformation and modernity is relevant to changes currently affecting local and global communities, but also because audiences are familiar with 'texts' that involve fragmented editing and open-ended narratives. Contemporary media practices and the imagery which appears on social networks, for example, comprise forms of signification and communication based on hybridised images, sounds, practices, references and ideas through time and across cultures. Much contemporary art/film similarly involves the skilful borrowing and appropriation of historical 'texts', in ways that involve pastiche, parody, homage and hybridity across a range of inter-related forms and references. Additionally, current audience reception relies, to a large extent, on audiences being cognizant of the references and strategies used for the 'reverberations' in post/modern 'texts' to be activated and acknowledged (Cixous 1976, Irigaray 1985, Hutcheon 1989, Nicholson 1990, Bauman 1992, Bonifazio 2007).

In the sections that follow, I demonstrate Tait's intertextual engagement with, and contribution to the work and ideas of her contemporaries in experimental areas of filmmaking in Scotland. I show how she negotiated equivalent perspectives with those who also used film as a medium of expression in amateur and counter-cultural filmmaking circles in comparable ways. Although Tait said, ' the only other thing around in Scotland … would be …with a sort of amateur outlet in mind, and I wasn't interested in that' (cited in Appendix 1: xix), connections with this filmmaking can be seen.

Tait and Counter Cultural Film in Scotland

In recognition of the popularity of 'amateur' film in Scotland, the first Scottish Film Council (1938) selected 'amateur film' as one of its four main panels thereby 'keeping the balance between what you call the national purpose and the satisfaction of the producer' (Hardy cited in McArthur 1982: 90). Indeed, the Scottish Amateur Film Festival (SAFF est. 1934) was an annual event attracting 'several hundred entries in over a dozen categories from participants around the world' (McBain 1997: 97). Its inter/national acclaim was on a par with the EIFF.

(Scullion 1990: 49-52, Nowlan and Finch 2015: 31-33). SAFF also provided an outlet for local and inter/national filmmakers who used 'amateur' film progressively or in opposition to prevailing discourses and film practices. Zimmermann describes the range of films in 'amateur' productions at that time:

> Amateur cinema can be redefined as a plurality of practices: home-movies, surveillance, narratives, experimental works, travelogues, documentaries, industrials, sites for emergent subjectivities, sites for emergent subjectivities. (cited in Ishizuka and Zimmermann 2007: 275)

Prior to the first Films of Scotland Committee, several independently funded film clubs and societies provided popular exhibition spaces for amateur and radical filmmaking in Scotland. Between 1920 and 1940, many politically charged and pioneering Soviet and European films were screened in progressive film clubs and in Worker's Film Societies which had branches across the main towns in Scotland, particularly in Glasgow. They were also screened at Glasgow School of Art's Kinecraft Society (GSAKS est.1933). Students were particularly active in forming anti-establishment alliances with the worker's causes at that time and using film as a vehicle for raising consciousness about propaganda, poverty and fascism (Allen cited in McArthur 1982: 93-99).

Tait's contemporaries, art students Helen Biggar (1909-1953) and Norman McLaren (1914-1987) were founder members of GSAKS. They also made the iconic, silent agitprop documentary *Hell Unltd* (1936 16mm) which won £10 at SAFF in Glasgow in 1937 where Grierson was an adjudicator. Their film was completed just as the Spanish Civil War began.[105] This conflict (1936-39) became an international symbol for left-wing thinkers outraged by the irrationality of combat and the power of government to overrule the wishes of ordinary people and erase an identity they wanted to sustain. It attracted volunteers among students, poets,

[105] Grierson awarded McLaren the first prize for his student film *Colour Cocktail* (1935) at the Amateur Film Festival in Glasgow. He later offered him work at the GPO then as a cameraman and assistant to left-wing filmmaker Ivor Montagu's filming the Spanish Civil War. McLaren migrated to Canada with Grierson to work with him with the National Film Board where he created an animation studio and trained Canadian animators. McLaren's animated films are still cited as pioneering examples of experimentation with film. Helen Biggar was not offered the same opportunity but, like Tait, remained in Glasgow and made one more film *Challenge to Fascism/Glasgow's May Day* (1938). She joined the Glasgow Worker's Theatre group as a designer and political activist (Ewan 2006: 34-35).

artists and the politically minded from Britain and elsewhere. Biggar and McLaren integrated this revolutionary fervour into their ground-breaking experimental film *Hell Unltd* which exposed the realities of war, profits in armaments and the rise of fascism in Europe using actuality footage, maps, statistics, animations, acted scenarios, diagrams and written words to promote their argument. *Hell Unltd's* explicit anti-capitalist and anti-war themes contravened the prominent use of film as propaganda, including the British Ministry of Information-type films which typically fostered more hostile perspectives against the 'enemy', encouraged the conservation of home resources, endorsed the manufacture of weapons and promoted British victories. They did not include the cost of war and its harsh actualities in their films, which Biggar and McLaren were keen to expose.

There are several intertextual formal and political connections in Tait's films that engage with counter-cultural film in Scotland and echo Kristeva's description of intertextuality as a 'mosaic of quotations'. Artists of Tait's standing often un/consciously 'borrow' signs, techniques and connotations in work that already exists. This echoes Kristeva's premise that rather than standalone objects, art is a system of practices and processes in which artist/filmmakers and audiences play an important role in the selection of imagery that is appropriated and examined. This includes the 'texts', sounds, images, techniques and connotations that artists 'borrow' and extend in their artworks and which audiences select to engage with. Kristeva highlighted the significance of these interconnections in the reproduction of meaning and subjectivity (Lechte in Fletcher and Benjamin 1990: 24-25).

For example, in *Hugh MacDiarmid: A Portrait* (1964) Tait 'borrowed' the iconic wireless set from Biggar and McLaren's *Hell Unltd and* used sounds from BBC radio broadcasts on the soundtrack of *Colour Poems* (1974). The 'wireless' in all three instances, symbolises the partiality of single-channel BBC radio transmissions, mass communication and the suppression of 'other' voices.

Biggar and McLaren likewise 'borrowed' a chess-set from René Clair's anti-fascist film *Entr'acte* (1924) (figure 99). The game of chess in both films metaphorically signals the awful

(male) ‘game’ of power, destruction and exploitation and the manipulation of everyday people by the authorities as if war was (also) a ‘game’. In their film, Biggar and McLaren replaced traditional chess pieces with miniature symbols of war and spliced stop-motion animation sequences of the adapted chess-pieces into the propagandist messages in the film (figure 100). Tait also used stop-motion in her hand-drawn animations in *Colour Poems* as a signifier for altered time and perception and used stop-motion filming in a sequence of the building and collapse of a structure made from playing cards in *Where I Am Is Here* (1964) (figure 98) for similar reasons.

Fig. 98: Tait 1964. *Where I Am Is Here.*

Fig. 99: Clair 1924. *Entr’acte.*

Fig. 100: McLaren & Biggar 1936. *Hell Unltd*

Tait’s use of ‘playing cards’ with their connotations of a ‘game’ correspondingly become a metaphor for the power of authorities to make corporate decisions that ‘play’ with everyday lives and the environment. The stop-motion filming in all three instances, alters continuity in these films by implementing a succession of sharp single frames to purposefully engage the audiences with the gravity of the imagery they are viewing.

Tait’s intertextual associations and creative appropriation of cinematic imagery, in both standard and conventional filmmaking, link her with accredited uses of film, language, ideas and techniques that were used by experimental and conventional filmmakers of her day. Her films have a sense of interiority, as noted in her deliberations on subjects such as life-cycles, death, time and legacy as previously noted in *These Walls, Place of Work, Tail Piece, Rose Street,* and *Ga.* Tait’s thoughts on these themes are noted in a 1956 notebook held in the Tait Collection, Orkney Library and Archive:

> Reading about Rilke & his sense of the importance of the dead – It’s not so much the dead as dead who are important but the dead as existences which have occurred. That a thing once happened has happened for always. We are the result of people who once

> lived – a sort of accumulation of the centuries of heredity, evolution, and through records. (Tait cited in Neely 2016)

These reflections together with her assimilation of the filming techniques, iconography and associated connotations in Biggar and McLaren's film *Hell Unltd* are examined in my analysis of *Colour Poems*.

Case Study: *Colour Poems* (Tait 1974)

Colour Poems was inspired by Tait's memories of Gaelic-speaking local poet Sorley MacLean (1911-1996) [106] whose, 'bitter, hard and precise memories about NOT having gone to the Spanish Civil War 'clicked' as I put it, for me, with what Lorca, who died in Spain during that war, might have meant, in premonition, by "Numen of the Boughs"'(Tait cited in Letter to Leggett 07/08/1979. Held at the BAFVSC, London).[107] Tait's film draws on the film language developed by Biggar and McLaren in *Hell Unltd* to discuss 'war' and its legacy. This includes, stop-motion animation, hand-painted imagery, creative intertitles, scratching into the film's surface, montage editing and actuality footage. But where Biggar and McLaren' added diagrams, statistics and maps in the manner of an expository documentary, Tait added indigenous sounds, colour film, and her reflections on war in her locality.

Both are anti-war films, but where Biggar and McLaren channelled their revolutionary fervour into *Hell Unltd*, in *Colour Poems* Tait offered retrospective and free interpretation of the repercussions of war and conflict in the later stages of modernity.

By transporting some of the themes and textual/cinematic strategies from *Hell Unltd* into *Colour Poems*, Tait posthumously transferred Biggar and McLaren's discussion of the Spanish Civil War into a differing context forty years later. In doing so she formed a visual dialogue

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[106] See Dr. Susan R. Wilson (ed.) 2010. *Correspondence Between Hugh MacDiarmid and Sorley Maclean.* Edinburgh University Press for an account of the correspondences and friendship between these two Gaelic speaking poets. MacLean's poem can be found in Sorley Maclean.1971. *Dain do Eimhir.* Northern House Publishing.

[107] The Spanish poet Frederico Garcia Lorca (1898-1936) was also a playwright. He was killed one month after the outbreak of the Spanish Civil war after being arrested on the orders of the military authorities in Granada, [online]. Available at https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2015/apr/23/federico-garcia-lorca-spanish-poet-killed-orders-spanish-civil-war [accessed 29 March 2019]

between the two films, two time periods and their generational experiences of that Civil War. (This 'conversational' film strategy was previously noted in *The Leaden Echo and the Golden Echo, Land Makar, Place of Work and Tail Piece,* and *On the Mountain* and *Rose Street)*.

Tait explained her struggle to articulate the complex ideas in *Colour Poem,* 'I had started a poem in words, and I tried to complete it on film, that's what I was doing' (cited in Krikorian 1983d: 18). Indeed, the structure of the film echoes a carefully crafted poem which comprises nine interwoven stanzas within a collage of seemingly unrelated images and sounds, and linked by thoughts of war and its legacy:

> Numen of the Boughs
> Old Boots
> Speed Bonny Boat
> Lapping Water
> Incense
> Aha
> Brave New World
> Found Objects
> Terra Firma

The first stanza, *Numen of the Boughs* (after Lorca) was originally a distinct film but is included in the longer film (a familiar strategy). It consists of animated black-and-white line drawings of boats, birds, trees and abstract lines and shapes alternating between white and black, and black and white. The hand-drawn images and trembling words scratched into the film's emulsion echo Tait's 'shaky memory … of what of course in world terms was a very significant time in this century, the time of the Spanish Civil War … I couldn't quite take it all in at all, really' (cited in Todd and Cook 2004: 83). On the soundtrack, an air raid siren opens the film then as this quietens, Tait's slow vernacular voice-off reads her poem over abstract animations, to enable the viewer to focus on her words.

Colour Poems

> Well, yes
> I do remember
> the young men
> going off to fight in Spain
> but not Sorley McLean.
> not Sorely McLean in his pain –
> then them coming back, changed,
> and yet not changed enough

for my notion then,
of what war might be.
frozen soldiers of the plains,
stiff in trees,
in photographs
the black showing through the thin snow
on the hard plain of Madrid
as shown to us in newsreels
stick in my vision
and click now with Maclean's poem 'to Eimhir'
and Lorca's Numen of the Boughs
busy with studies then
and enjoying ourselves,
How much did we notice?

I remember the look of young men
Coming back
who had been in Spain
And wondering about them
what took them there?
what brought them back?
What had they learned?
what sad knowledge was for evermore
buried deep inside them?
(Tait cited in Neely 2012: 165-166)

Over the last five lines, Tait cuts to a local remembrance ceremony. The regular drum beat and the sound of feet on the gravel mark the veterans' presence in time and place as Tait's camera films their marching, poppies, medals and uniforms as a montage of symbols of war via a sequence of medium shots.

Fig. 101: Tait 1974. C*olour Poems*

Fig. 102: Tait 1974. *Colour Poems*

In the second stanza, the title *Old Boots* appears hand-written in chalk on concrete (figure 101) the camera then cuts to a pair of Wellington boots in a garden shed in a shot which is held for longer than is comfortable (figure 102). The boots barely move in the wind while on the soundtrack crows squawk. At other times the soundtrack is silent, leaving space for the

audience to (also) reflect on absence, mourning, war and its legacy. Towards the end of the film in the section *Found Objects*, Tait thoughtfully connects the rallying outrage of *Hell Unltd* with the present day via a montage of discarded objects, rubbish, a rusting petrol sign, Green Peace activism, local people, a young girl, graffiti, sound bites from a radio about oil prices, home rule and inflation, thus presenting a view of the post-war world of the 1970s in her locality. In the final stanza *Terra Firma*, she splices images of nature, poppies in bloom and in seed into the repeated sequence of veterans marching, while on the soundtrack she reads a poem about light and perception.[108] The camera then cuts to a cross-section of the earth showing the strata beneath its surface as if testing the word 'firma' and probing notions of stability. On the soundtrack a low flying aeroplane is heard. This sound is reminiscent of air raids – and was heard at the start of the film – while on the screen a series of shaky jump-cuts mimic the ground shuddering.

The closing credits of *Colour Poems* 'Fin, Fine, End' point to 'the pervasive irony and humour of films by women' (Blaetz 2007: 8) that is often misread. In this instance, the sounds of upbeat traditional jazz and Tait's play on words contrast with the sombre tone of this film. It is again indicative of Tait's critique of the dominant use of film as entertainment and information rather than/as also, a vehicle for reflection and for expressing complex issues.

Tait's intertextual 'borrowing' of modernist film techniques and socio-cultural references can again be interpreted as her way of aligning her 'voice' with the film culture of her time, and its progressive and reflective thinkers/filmmakers. This is also evident in her film animations which I examine in the following section.

[108] The prose Tait reads over the last film stanza *Terra Firma* is as follows: 'An ocean big drift net [indecipherable] to capture the sea water, to capture the light/No instrument nor implement is necessary, the light is there, look./Look into all that is illuminated by the light and see the notes, songs and words and colour and sleep./All the colours and all the dreams there in the beam./A beam of notes, a cord of [indecipherable] colours, white music, melodious light / Sparkling, spangling skin flicking brave sun./The light the banner the blush.

Tait and Avant-garde Animations

Interestingly, Tait's film title *Colour Poems* (Tait 1974) intertextually links with the titles of earlier films *Colour Box* (Lye 1935) and *Colour Cocktail* (McLaren 1935).

David Curtis upholds Len Lye's *A Colour Box* (1935) as 'perhaps the most radical avant-garde film of the 1930s' (2003: 175). This brightly coloured animation contains hand-painted lines, circles, stencilled patterns and graphic shapes that form repetitive abstract movements to an upbeat Cuban dance music on the soundtrack (figures 103-105).

Len Lye (1901-1980) studied art and technology in the Wellington Technical Institute in New Zealand and later experimented with direct or camera-less filmmaking, hand-painting directly on to film, using stencils and scratching film's surface. While in London he saw the work of avant-garde filmmakers of the 1920s such as Hans Richter, Viking Eggeling, Fernand Leger and Oskar Fischinger. He integrated their animation techniques alongside his own innovations into the advertisements he was commissioned to make for the GPO film unit (under Grierson), creatively assimilating their logo and prices into the film (figure 104).

Fig. 103: Lye 1935. *A Colour Box.*

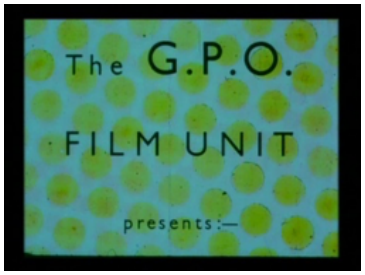

Fig. 104: Lye 1935. *A Colour Box.*

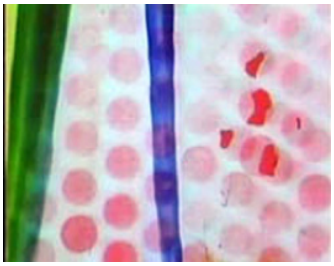

Fig. 105: Lye 1935. *A Colour Box.*

Joss Winn (2002) acknowledged the influence of Lye's *A Colour Box* in Tait's short film animations *Calypso* (1955) (figures 110-112), *John MacFadyen* (1970) and *Painted Eightsome* (1970). [109] *Calypso,* for example, was made using 'a surplus piece of 35mm soundtrack given to

[109] For a discussion on Tait's short animations see Kayla Parker. 2014. 'Blobs in Tartan Colours: Margaret Tait's Painted Eightsome'. *Frames Cinema Journal.* Issue 5, [online]. Available at: http://framescinemajournal.com/ [accessed 12 January 2018].

Tait by a technical officer at the office of the British Information Office in Rome' (Moving Image Archive 2017c). She merged her hand-painted abstract forms with the existing magnetic soundtrack of calypso music, 'I think the calypso music is quite an authentic rendering of "cricket lovely cricket" among others'. She also wrote of her familiarity with Lye's work:

> I had always enjoyed the Len Lye short films which used to appear in cinemas, in the thirties I suppose, programmed along with 'the big film', the 'wee film', the newsreel, a cartoon and so on. The use of sheer colour, screen-wide, coloured my idea of film (and, perhaps, of colour) from then on. (Letter to Leggett 07/08/1979. Held at the BAFVSC, London)

In his film animations, Tait's contemporary and fellow Scot, Norman McLaren (1914-1987), co-maker of *Hell Unltd,* developed the technique of painting directly onto the film's surface from the early Soviet and European avant-garde filmmakers who pioneered camera-less, hand-painted abstract short films which he came across while at Glasgow School of Art Kinecraft Society, and later working alongside Lye under Grierson at the GPO film unit. His work such as figures 106-107 for example, links with earlier animated films such as *Rhythmus 21* (Richter 1921), *Circles* (Fischinger 1933) and *Composition in Blue* (Fischinger 1935).

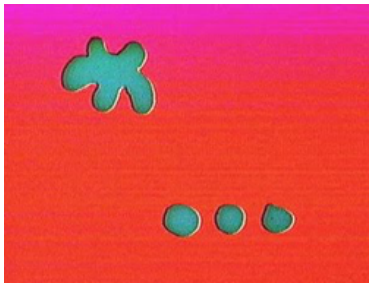

Fig. 106. McLaren 1940. *Dots.*

Fig. 107: McLaren 1939. *Stars and Stripes.*

Tait was critical of McLaren's more stylised aesthetic:

> When I first saw some of his films, in the late forties and early fifties, I found them highly entertaining in themselves, & imaginative. Something about editing to a musical beat or using a musical length to determine an in-film length, was in accord with some thoughts of my own at the time. … What it was, about the work of McLaren for instance, was that the painted-on-film-stock didn't seem to go very far, and one thought – alone, and in discussion [my emphasis] – that perhaps it just wasn't possible to take it very far. Not that the particular film maker wasn't taking it very far so much as that the method in itself didn't allow for a further dimension appearing (so to speak). I used it myself in CALYPSO and later in PAINTED EIGHTSOME, particularly to create a 'product' which would be humorous, entertaining, and perhaps saleable, and partly to attune myself to duration as represented by film length. (cited in Letter to Leggett 07/08/1979: 2. Held at the BAFVSC, London)

As a 'lone' independent filmmaker exploring modernist techniques from her marginal stance, Tait was free from the restrictions that guided McLaren's and Lye's motivation and filmmaking styles. She could therefore experiment more imaginatively with the creative possibilities of film animation:

> I had seen some film … and found it slightly appealing and thought I could do something better than that and it was possible I mean just economically you can do that type of thing that was the least part of it and you do it on 35 and I thought I might be able to do something that I could actually get distributed, I mean commercially distributed, but I also thought it might be more interesting. (cited in Appendix 1: xxv)

Tait also explored the concepts of time and duration in her abstract painted animations. For example, of *Calypso* she said, 'I was trying to keep my picture still, over a number of frames' (Tait cited Todd and Cook 2004: 83). She also added emotional depth and complexity to the amorphous and anthropomorphic abstract forms which playfully intertwine in momentary relationships then separate, throughout the film (figures 108-110). The circular movements of beautifully painted dancing shapes merge into each other to the rhythms of popular jazz music.

Fig. 108: Tait 1955. *Calypso*.

Fig. 109: Tait 1955. *Calypso*.

Fig. 110: Tait 1955. *Calypso*.

Green, brown, red, yellow and lilac lines fluidly metamorphose into a bird in a field or a fish in water before returning to abstract shapes and back again in ways that resemble visual streams of un/consciousness:

> I don't suppose anyone has ever done it quite as madly as I did it really, doing it frame by frame spread out on the table. It drives you crazy of course. But I always thought I was doing it because … it would give me a very intimate feeling of just duration and what's contained in the frame and what's going to end up in four frames in 16 frames and 34 frames and that sort of thing. I don't know if it's very useful from that point of view, to follow one's own invented movements by hand through the lens of however long is *Calypso* is. (cited in Appendix 1: xxvi)

Tait also admitted that she 'borrowed' the colours and design in *Calypso* from the Australian painter Sydney Nolan (1917-1992). His *Leda and the Swan* (Nolan 1960*)* and *The Ship* (Nolan

1947) for example, reveal the surreal gravity-defying figurative elements, muted colour palette and layering of thin coats paint to form depth of colour which inform Tait's use of colour in *Calypso*.

David Curtis explains that McLaren's more graphic approach to abstract filmmaking:

> What does … disqualify his work from participation in the avant-garde debate … is the one element he shares exclusively with his commercial colleagues – his conscious adaptation and dilution of ideas to make them accessible to some notional average audience: "I wanted at first to make an abstract film but … considered I wouldn't be able to hold the spectator's attention". No Modernist filmmaker could operate within such restraints. (2003: 180)

This points to some of the differences between sponsored and independent filmmaking despite emanating from similar 'texts' and sources. It also signals the differing motivation for making films. It may be that McLaren had no ambition to be a modernist filmmaker/artist in ways that attracted Tait. Also, his films were influenced by John Grierson's no-frills approach to using film as a commercial and didactic medium. For example, when commenting on McLaren's entry *Camera Makes Whoopee* (1935) at SAFF in 1935, adjudicator Grierson said of this film, 'it's got no sense of form or organisation, it's got no development and is totally zero as far as being a work of art' (cited in Dobson 1999). He advised McLaren to make films that used simple and direct shots rather than distracting ploys, which echoes the advice he gave Tait in Rose Street in the 1950s. But where Tait ignored this guidance, McLaren accepted it and went on to become a world-famous pioneer in film animation while Tait worked in 'relative isolation'.[110]

Interestingly, Neely cites another instance when Tait remained true to her 'vow of derision' (Woolf 1993: 205). In 1956, she asked Forsyth Hardy for help with a letter of application for funding from the BFI for a film animation. Hardy suggested that if she added, '[t]he experiment I propose is a development of work done in the field of abstract filmmaking by Norman McLaren and other artists painting directly on film' (Letter from Hardy (1956) cited in

[110] As a result of screening their films in amateur festival competitions McLaren and Lye would 'later benefit from the exposure of their work to professional scrutiny' in Canada and America' (McBain 1997: 98). Similar advice was given to Jenny Gilbertson (1902-1990). At the premier of *A Crofter's Life in Shetland* Grierson wrote of Gilbertson's film 'it gives you very beautiful pictures of Shetland … and brings a naturalness to it'. He upgraded Gilbertson's camera, offered her editing space at the GPO film unit and bought five of her films for their library for £40.

Neely 2017: 210) to her proposal, she would have a better chance of funding. Tait did not include this addendum and her funding application was precluded, as was her potential for 'fame and praise' Woolf (1993: 205).

Tait's affinity with inter/national avant-garde filmmaking is also evident in her connection with Stan Brakhage, as previously discussed in Chapter Three. Brakhage was (also) a 'lone' but acclaimed American 'amateur' filmmaker of lyrical films and abstract animation. In a letter to Curtis Tait wrote, 'thank you for the Stan Brakhage booklet, last Christmas. I read it with interest. (I see I got a mention, even)' (Letter 24/06/1981. Held at the BAFVSC, London).

In the opening credits to *Colour Poems* Tait 'borrows' Biggar and McLaren's technique of scratching into a film's surface in an agitated manner in the film's emulsion in *Hell Unltd* (figures 115-118).

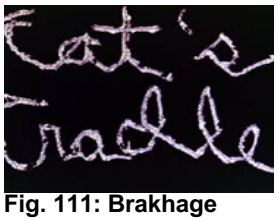

Fig. 111: Brakhage 1959. *Cat's Cradle*

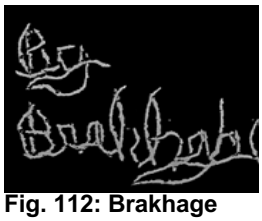

Fig. 112: Brakhage 1959. *Cat's Cradle*

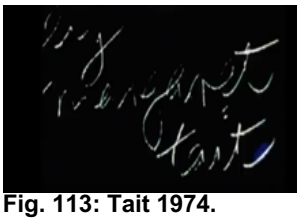

Fig. 113: Tait 1974. *Colour Poems.*

Fig. 114: Tait 1974. *Colour Poems.*

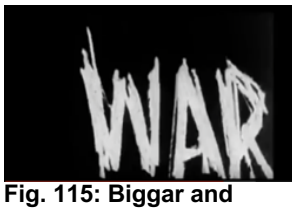

Fig. 115: Biggar and McLaren 1936. *Hell Unltd*

Fig. 116: Biggar and McLaren 1936. *Hell Unltd*

Fig. 117: Tait 1974. *Colour Poems.*

Fig. 118: Tait 1974 *Colour Poems*

Tait also 'borrows' Brakhage's signature quivering writing scratched into a film's surface (figures 111-112) in *Colour Poems* (figures 113-115). But, rather than derivative, this shared technique becomes an intertextual homage among these filmmakers in which the connotations of the techniques they 'borrow' take on new meanings within the contexts of each separate film. In Tait's case, it also reveals how she aligns her work and herself with critically acclaimed filmmakers who similarly began their careers as self-funded, amateur cinéastes. Tait's shared

interests and innovative achievements with modernist film practices and concerns form a significant contribution to film culture, albeit from her 'lonely furrow'.

I end this chapter with an interview between Forsyth Hardy and Scottish film academic Colin McArthur (1982) in which Hardy reflects on the gaps in Scottish film that Tait was working to fill.

'I did not recognise … the ultimate importance of it' (Hardy cited in McArthur 1982: 91)

Tait confirmed her disillusion with Scottish film and the lack of a national cinema in interviews with Wilson (1978, 1979) and Krikorian (1983). She also reflected on this for the *Desperately Seeking Cinema Conference* held at the Glasgow Film Theatre in 1988 which focused on responses to Scottish film at that time including the work of Bill Douglas, Bill Forsyth and Channel 4 funded films. Colin McArthur, whose work was a catalyst for the conference, felt that the lack of support for art and progressive filmmaking in Scotland was due in part to Scotland's institutional apparatus. Tait wrote a report about six films to be chosen as 'models for a representation of Scotland on Screen' for this conference from her perspective. In it she says:

> A 'Scottish Cinema' can only come from what's welling up in people to make. In the dreadful days of the Films of Scotland Committee everybody was expected to turn out the same sort of stuff; and it was awful, friends, and could be no other under the remit people were given. (cited in Neely 2012: 8)

As early as 1956, Tait's attempt to establish progressive filmmaking in Scotland is evident in a letter to Malcolm Nixon at the Glasgow Art Centre in which she promoted the merits of her enterprise Ancona Films as 'one of the few companies in Scotland who make films with serious artistic intentions' (cited in Neely 2017: 18). But with no alternative infrastructure or equivalent to the American or London film co-operatives, for example, experimental and progressive filmmaking in Scotland, particularly from the 1950s-1970s, relied on an independent, self-funding 'clutch' of 'lone' filmmakers. In an interview with Hardy (1982), McArthur suggested that it was an oversight not to have formed a national cinema in Scotland, Hardy replied:

> Yes, I think that is a very fair point, and especially looking back on it today, it might seem a strange absence there. But I don't think we were ready to discuss even the potential or the potential emergence of a national cinema at that time. I don't remember us ever discussing it as something that we ought to be doing because it didn't seem practicable at that time. (cited in McArthur 1982: 77)

When asked if he thought the Films of Scotland or Scottish film holistically re-presented the lives of people in Scotland in the twentieth century, Hardy replied:

> My worry at the end of that time was that we had not reflected the human story of Scotland as fully as I would have liked to have done. I think that one reason for this that was a simple one: that with no general fund available for filmmaking, we could very seldom go outside the range of our sponsor's interest in tackling a subject. If we could have had a general production fund (as I hoped we might have, and as Grierson asked the Secretary of State at the time) we might have been able to make films with … a different level of approach to life in the country. … I felt that that somehow or other, there was one aspect of the work that I had not been able to accomplish, primarily for economic reasons and not because I did not recognise either the need for it, or the desire for it, or the ultimate importance of it. (cited in McArthur 1982: 90-91)

Hardy conceded that the Films of Scotland's output neglected parts of 'the human story of Scotland' and that he tried to rectify this by financing films that highlighted the difficulties experienced by many Scottish communities. He explained, 'all sorts of other films of a social content which were really quite important films in the history of the documentary movement. They were not made in Scottish Units, but they were made for the Scottish Departments' (cited in McArthur 1982: 85).

The 'films of a social content' included *Highland Doctor* (Kay Mander 1943), *Children of the City* (Budge Cooper 1944) and *Waverley Steps* (John Eldridge 1948). These are important and well-made films, however, they reiterate the same ideas and rely on similar aesthetics and sound-image techniques as those chosen for the 1938 Empire Exhibition and the Films of Scotland Committees. They include generic viewpoints, narrative structures, emotive music, authoritative and moral undertones and ethical values which Tait was keen to check, via her more poetic and realist observational stance. When McArthur specifically asked about 'art' films as part of this omission, Hardy recalled that later,

> [T]here was an instance … in Eddie McConnell. I remember giving him the opportunity of making a film of his own and saying to him 'Here you are … All I'll say is, make a film on the colour of Scotland' … And he came back with a beautiful little film called *A Kind of Seeing* (1967) which was as near an avant-garde film as you can possibly have. (cited in McArthur 1982: 91)

Hardy's understanding of 'experimental film' differs from Tait's commitment to developing film as an art form and an expressive, rather than commercial, medium in Scotland. McConnell's film, *A Kind of Seeing,* appears as an experimentation with film but it has little critical or formal engagement with prevailing avant-garde film practices or social politics in the informed and imaginative manner of Tait's short films. This aspect of Hardy's considerations on local film production demonstrates the situation in Scottish film production that Tait found when she returned to Scotland to make films from the 1950s. She said, 'there is [sic.] no Scottish film industry, as such, and anyone who means to work in a Scottish film idiom must encounter among other things, the formidable task of the pioneer' (from a promotional clipping cited in Neely 2017: 22). Indeed, Tait's pioneering experimental body of work generated ideas that reflected on and expanded local and other film practices produced by organisations whose output primarily circulated male perspectives and corporate inclinations.

In fairness, the BFI points to the benefits of standardised film production in Scotland, 'on the other hand, it acted as a disciplined film school for the ambitious who began to emerge in the 1970s and gradually defined a Scottish national cinema, (BFI 2009: 36), which Tait may have agreed with given her comment on the opportunities the Films of Scotland offered young filmmakers, 'I think that some … of the younger Scottish filmmakers coming on after that did earn their bread and butter and learn the craft of filmmaking through that. A chance for them to go into better things ... (cited in Krikorian 1983b: 2).

Arguably, Tait's independent and innovative appropriation of aspects of avant-garde films and the New Wave cinemas, and her intersections with British Free Cinema and Dawn Cine Group film productions suggest that her films do contribute to the New Scottish Cinema that emerged in the 1970s. Duncan Petrie's work in this area highlights many of the ideas that previously preoccupied Tait. This includes dispelling romantic myths regarding Tartan and Kailyard stereotypes, a holistic focus on the effects of industrialisation on Scottish culture and identity, and the need to draw attention to Scottish modernism, its history and culture. Petrie writes that the films that evolved in Scotland from the 1970s reawakened,

> a sense of national self-awareness and cultural confidence … a greater focus on an urban post-industrial environment framing narratives concerned with various aspects of contemporary existence and social change. Rural depictions are still in evidence, but these tend to eschew romance in favour of darker, more unsettling preoccupations. … it is significant that many Scottish films continue to posit a critical engagement with the negative aspects and limitations of contemporary society and identity. (2009: 167)

I devote the whole of my last chapter to a close analysis of *Where I Am Is Here* (Tait 1964) which examines the realist and 'darker, more unsettling preoccupations' that Petrie refers to. This film embodies Tait's reflective and observational approach to filming the impact of modernity on everyday lives in 1960s Edinburgh in ways that parallel the work of other thinkers and filmmakers of her time.

Chapter Six: *Where I See From Is Here* (Tait 1964).

The title for *Where I Am Is Here* is taken from Tait's unpublished poem *Hilltop Pibroch.*[111] This film incorporates many ideas discussed in this thesis and was made after Tait decided to make films at the level of poetry, rather than with standard film outlets in mind. The film's form and content are difficult to grasp, particularly on a first viewing, as there is no overall message or perceivable logic to Tait's observations of 1960s Edinburgh. As with all her films, Tait invites audiences to be open to responding to images and sounds beyond literal associations and preconceived ideas. Accordingly, her visual and auditory visual film 'collage' encourages audience to try,

> listening with another ear, as if hearing an "other meaning" which is constantly in the process of weaving itself, at the same time ceaselessly embracing words, but also getting rid or words in order not to become fixed. (Irigaray 1985b: 29)

Where I Am Is Here takes place mostly at night or in twilight when Tait 'stalked' for images of the transformations taking place in Edinburgh where she was living at the time. Like most of 1960s Britain, it was in various stages of neglect, repair and expansion. The soundtrack comprises field recordings, a Scottish Pibroch by Hector MacAndrew and a rendition of Tait's poem 'Here is Where I Am' sung by local music hall singer Lilane (Gunn).[112] It echoes the cityscapes of Walter Rutman, Joris Ivens and Dziga Vertov who combined vanguard strategies with 'actuality' filming to make the visible the invisible in various cities in Europe and Russia in the early twentieth century.[113] Tait used similar methods to weave personal insights and

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[111] The music for Tait's Hilltop Pibroch is by Hector MacAndrew, who performs parts of it on the fiddle intermittently throughout the film. The words of this poem are *Here is where I Am – Here on the hill I am alone and can see far out / **Where I see from is here** / I see this hilltop here / I see only a hilltop and myself here. / But I can see far, far out / I can see some of myself / I see no-one else here. /I am here on the hill alone.*

[112] Tait explains: 'I had over the years … been looking for a singer for this song, which people seem to find difficult to sing … then in the Lex Maclean Show at the Palladium we heard Lilane singing … sort of popular music' (cited in Wilson 1978: 18).

[113] Examples of the 'city film' include *Rien que les Heures* (Alberto Cavalcanti 1926), *Berlin: Symphony of a Metropolis* (Walter Ruttmann 1927), *Man With a Movie Camera* (Dziga Vertov 1929) and his experimental 'city symphonies' of Paris, Berlin, and Kiev, respectively. Also, Joris Ivens' *Études de Mouvements à Paris (1927), Rain* (1928) *The Bridge* (1929).

observations of Edinburgh under the conditions of modernity in the 1960s. Regarding realism in modernist literature, Georg Lukács (1885-1971)[114] noted that some form of abstraction is necessary to recall something beyond what can be seen:

> It goes without saying that without abstraction there can be no art for otherwise how could anything in art have representative value? But like every movement, abstraction must have a direction – his [sic.] goal is to penetrate the laws governing objective reality and to uncover the deeper, hidden, mediated, not immediately perceptible network of relationships that go to make up society. Since these relationships do not lie on the surface, since the underlying laws only make themselves felt in very complex ways – the labour of the realist is extraordinarily arduous, since it has both an artistic and intellectual dimension. (cited in Jameson 1997: 38)

Tait established an 'artistic and intellectual dimension' in her film through her innovative and challenging use of animation, asynchronous sound-image connections and montage-as-linkage editing. She told Tamara Krikorian that the working title for *Where I Am Is Here* was originally 'Clockwork Movie in Seven Parts, I think' (cited in Krikorian 1983d: 16). She explained:

> Starting with a six-line script which just noted down a kind of event to occur, and recur, my aim was to construct a film with its own logic, its own correspondences within itself, its own echoes and rhymes and comparisons, all through close exploration of the everyday, the commonplace, in the city, Edinburgh, where I stayed at the time. (cited in Moving Image Archive 2017d)

Elsewhere she said:

> I made this film in Edinburgh, a film which I wrote down quite brief[ly] … just a few lines of things in a notebook of what I wanted to get out and then worked on variations, development, repetitions of those half dozen things with seven separate titles to contain in sections … movements ... although that's not really how they work out. (Tait cited in Wilson 1978: 18)

The film's title and its seven stanzas are 'written' with a mixture of inexpensive plastic letters which more usually personalise everyday homes or help children to 'master' the language of the symbolic (figures 119-122). Thus, from the start, Tait fragments a key component that sustains the symbolic's dominant principles and thinking.

[114] Georg Lukács' major writings from 1931-1963 were concerned with literary criticism or political philosophy. In *The Specificity of the Aesthetic* (1963), Lukács explores abstract philosophy and high aesthetic theory. An examination of Lukács wirings about film can be found in Ian Aitkin. 2012. *Lukácsian Film Theory and Cinema. A Study of Georg Lukács' Writings on Film,* 1913-71. Manchester University Press.

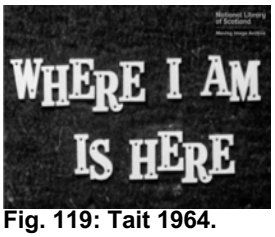

Fig. 119: Tait 1964. ***Where I Am Is Here.***

Fig. 120: Tait 1964. ***Where I Am Is Here.***

Fig. 121: Tait 1964. ***Where I Am Is Here.***

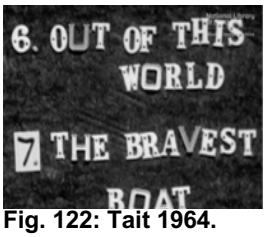

Fig. 122: Tait 1964. ***Where I Am Is Here.***

She continues to counterbalance rational order by incorporating sounds of water, wind, a Pibroch, cats, birds on the soundtrack and splicing shots of nature and the elements among sequences of man-made [sic.] municipal developments and neglect. Into the gaps that form between sound/image, nature/culture, men/women, modernity/tradition, progress/history Tait inserts the voices and experiences that were missing from dominant film production and local interest-type films, from her perspective. She establishes her (authorial) presence in the film via the words of her poem, her careful placing of plastic letters and her hand-crafted inter/titles.

Tait's playfulness with language continues into the first stanza where her hands arrange its title, *Complex*, setting the tone of this film under her guidance (figure 123).

Fig. 123: Tait 1964. ***Where I Am Is Here.***

Fig. 124: Tait 1964. ***Where I Am Is Here.***

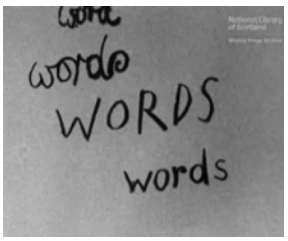

Fig. 125: Tait 1964. ***Where I Am Is Here.***

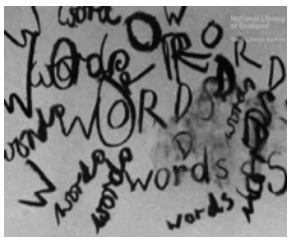

Fig. 126: Tait 1964. ***Where I Am Is Here.***

She then then cuts to a male writer (possibly Pirie) who is poised to write in the traditional manner, pen and paper, line by line (figure 124) (echoing a scene in *Hugh MacDiarmid: A Portrait)*. This is followed by a montage of images of buildings, puddles, reflective surfaces, builders mixing cement, an animated card scene, chimney smoke, new high-rise buildings, a bare light bulb, wire fences, a woman walking alone, danger signs, a gas ring, a dead bird and a sand-piper to a soundtrack of flapping wings, running water, cats meowing, machinery. In support of her decision to use 'film' as her primary form of expression, this visual/aural stream of consciousness ends with a series of animated shots of 'words, words, words' which are

haphazardly spelt out in handwritten charcoal marks until they cover the page, to the sound of MacAndrew's Pibroch on the soundtrack (figures 125-126). It's as if Tait is indicating that words, even when arranged in a non-linear way, cannot articulate what she wants to say. This interpretation is further suggested by a later shot of the male writer who starts writing then is not seen again while for the next thirty minutes, Tait's mindful assemblage of imagery, sounds and 'actuality' filming flow in an innovative arrangement of thought-provoking insights and poignant observations of life in Edinburgh, guided by seven seemingly unrelated intertitles (figures 127-133).

Fig. 127: Tait 1964. *Where I Am Is Here*.

Fig. 128: Tait 1964. *Where I Am Is Here*.

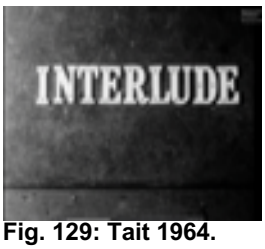

Fig. 129: Tait 1964. *Where I Am Is Here.*

Fig. 130: Tait 1964. *Where I Am Is Here.*

Fig. 131: Tait 1964. *Where I Am Is Here*.

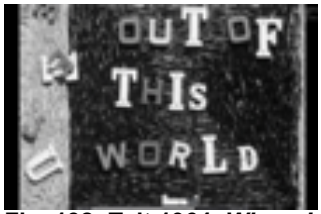

Fig. 132: Tait 1964. *Where I Am Is Here*.

Fig. 133: Tait 1964. *Where I Am Is Here.*

James Monaco suggests, 'film is very much like a language' (1981:122) and that it is possible to 'read' a film through its syntax, mise en scène, spatial composition, editing, types of shot, sound, colour, sequential arrangement, framing, camera work and duration. Time in film is experienced differently by filmmaker and audience. Each imposes their own rhythms to the film's continuity and cadences. Tait experiments with this variability by altering the pace throughout the film using asynchronous sound-image connections, stop-motion sequences and montage-as-linkage. These techniques challenge the preferred viewing positions that audiences typically rely on when watching moving images and offer an alternative experience of film, and ways of looking at life.

For example, five minutes into the film the words ‘an end’ suddenly appear in lowercase in chalk on a blackboard, closely followed by ‘A START’ in uppercase placed above it. By reversing these two axioms and writing ‘an end’ first in lower case and then ‘A START’ in upper case above it, Tait re-orders a ‘known’ sequence since ‘A START’ more typically appears first and signifies ‘the capacity of beginning something anew’ (Arendt 1958: 11) or to take a chance and ‘an end’ follows, usually signalling a conclusion. However ‘an end’ is placed before ‘A START’ in this stop-motion sequence, but in the final shot, the logic appears in place and ‘A START” is seen to precede ‘an end’ (figure 134). Consequently, in the static shot, and thus the surface of appearance, order appears to be in place and the process by which it was achieved, is obscured or possibly unnoticed. By writing the lower-case ‘an end’ first, the aspiration that ‘A START’ typically signifies is deflated before it even begins. In this way, Tait delivers a covert cautionary note to her audience implying that opportunities for chance and new beginnings are desired in this film but thwarted, just as they are sometimes in life.

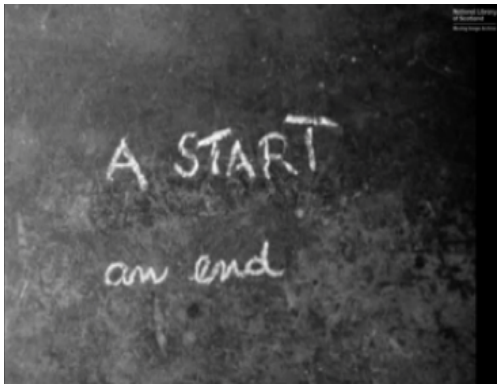

Fig. 134: Tait 1964. *Where I Am Is Here.*

Tait uses stop-motion animation again in a line-drawing, in the building and collapse of a house of cards, and in a ‘classic’ still-life composition of an apple, a pen, and a bottle of ink. In the latter she sets up a traditional formal arrangement then instantaneously destabilises it by repeating the same shot, via a jump cut, this time with a bite taken from the apple. Then, to the increasingly loud sound of a clock ticking on the soundtrack, the film jump-cuts to an image of burning paper before returning to the still-life where, in ‘real’ time, a hand reaches for the complete apple, takes it away and replaces it with the bite taken out. The film then randomly cuts to a woman on a bus. This ‘sleight of hand’ filming (Reynolds cited in Todd and Cook: 2004: 57) signals the close attention that is required while watching this film and that what is absent or overlooked in film (as in life) may be as important as that which is seen or assumed to be present.

To help with further analysis of *Where I Am Is Here* I draw on aspects of *The Human Condition* (Arendt 1958) published six years before Tait's film. This volume, written by the political theorist Hannah Arendt (1906-1975), echoes much of Tait's thinking about modernity, its legacy, the thwarting of ambition and the possibilities that are achievable via free access to speech and action. Pirie makes a passing reference to Arendt in Leggett's taped conversation which suggests that her work was known to Tait (cited in Appendix 1: xxxi). Some critics have argued that Arendt's writing style is often open and contradictory. This echoes Tait's open-ended approach to filmmaking.[115]

In *The Human Condition* Hannah Arendt identified modernity as a significant socio-political movement which emerged from extensive post-war socio-cultural dislocation, technological innovation and growth in commodity markets. Elsewhere Margaret Tait considers and observes the effect of these events and policies in her *Where I Am Is Here.*

This film is set at the time Britain's prime minister Harold Macmillan (1894-1986) declared, 'most of our people have never had it so good' whilst simultaneously calling for wage restraint among workers and warning against high inflation (July 1957). The capitalist lobby at that time was pre-occupied in inaugurating health, employment and education for everyday people who, despite needing these social programmes became caught up in systems of development and dis-location in which they had no say. The 'never had it so good' element in Macmillan's speech referred to the government's impetus to supply wider access to education, health and improved living conditions. In some areas of Scotland, as elsewhere in Britain, these good intentions involved social upheaval and the increased mechanisation of industry and bureaucracy. These transformed the localities, environments, trades and lifestyles of everyday people and made it difficult for many to find and retain paid employment. In Edinburgh at that time, large numbers of people were moved from the tenements, which although detrimental on

[115] In his introduction to *Hannah Arendt and Political Theory: Challenging the Tradition,* Steve Buckler writes Arendt' 'was no respecter of … established conventions. She wrote in an eclectic style, involving a mixture of idioms, and she did not shy away from investing her work with elements of paradox and perplexity. It is a stylistic mix that for some has been a source of profound insights, for others, simply baffling' (2012: 2). Arguably this forms parallels with Tait's filming style and methodology and suggests that some of their perspectives on life also overlap.

many levels had worked socially, into new high-rise buildings on the outskirts of the city. The unevenly distributed redevelopments and renovations in the inner city dispersed the very places where local people had once formed alliances. These included film clubs and cinemas which were among the spaces people could meet to discuss ideas that encouraged thinking and action. As discussed previously, local film production and reception was an important part of Scottish culture but was altered by the impact of World War II and the changes made by the Films of Scotland Committees. New cinemas, public houses, community halls and clubs were scant in the new housing developments. In a democratic society, spaces are needed for everyday people to meet and contribute to debates about issues that affect their lives and interests. To sustain such alliances and to continue or form new communal interactions, the people of Edinburgh had to return to the city – if they could. As a result, doorstep communities and other social groups, as noted in *Rose Street, On the Mountain* and *Hugh MacDiarmid: A Portrait,* disintegrated or transformed into other configurations.

Arendt's concept of 'the rise in the social' (1958: 35-45) under the conditions of modernity provides a frame for the circumstances Tait draws on in *Where I Am Is Here*. Arendt argued that in the early to mid-twentieth century, government policies and politics were involved in the welfare and management of post-war immigration, displacement and repatriation. At the same time, modernity's regeneration depended for its success, nationally and globally, on investment in technological and capitalist development. As the pursuit of fiscal abundance and increased production became the measure of achievement, funding became available for councils to develop inner-city areas and this altered the occupations and identities of the workforce. Urban expansion attracted large numbers of labourers and workers from rural areas and elsewhere, and this also affected local communities and the infrastructures of the locality.

Arendt based her thinking on the 5th BC century Greek *polis* – the birthplace of Western democracy. She observed that the modern workforce was correspondingly made up of 'labourers' (*animal laborans)* whose repetitive toil left no tangible record of their actions, and workers (*homo faber)* who produced durable artefacts and environments which, because they

left evidence of their maker's existence and thinking, were perceived as superior forms of work/action. Arendt explains, 'unlike *working,* whose end has come when the object is finished … *labouring* always moves in the same circle … whose end comes only with the death of this organism' (1958: 86).

In *Where I Am Is Here*, labourers (*animal laborans)* are observed as more visible and appear as street cleaners, firemen, bus conductors, lorry drivers and newspaper sellers for example (figures 135-139), while workers (*homo faber*) such as builders, craftsmen and planners feature less prominently (figures 140-141).

Fig. 135: Tait 1964. *Where I Am Is Here*.

Fig. 136: Tait 1964. *Where I Am Is Here*.

Fig. 137: Tait 1964. *Where I Am Is Here.*

Fig. 138: Tait 1964. *Where I Am Is Here.*

Fig. 139: Tait 1964. *Where I Am Is Here.*

Fig. 140: Tait 1964. *Where I Am Is Here.*

Fig. 141: Tait 1964. *Where I Am Is Here.*

Tait's thoughts on the changes to the traditional trades and skills of the 'worker' is noted in her filming of the re-building of the city of Edinburgh. In one sequence for example, she juxtaposes the building of a brick wall with the construction of a high-rise building against a soundtrack of loud, discordant mechanised noise. The patterns of the bricks echo the grid-like scaffolding of the new office blocks.[116] These juxtapositions suggest that traditional building skills co-operate in conjunction with new materials and methods and are therefore still necessary in the

[116] For a discussion on the grid as a key feature of modernist art see Rosalind Krauss (1986:1-11) and Margarita Tupitsyn. 2009. 'The Grid as a Checkpoint of Modernity', [online]. Available at: https://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-papers/12/the-grid-as-a-checkpoint-of-modernity (accessed 12 November 2018)

construction of modern high-rise buildings and new infrastructures (figures 142-144). While elsewhere she questions the stability of these rapidly constructed buildings by splicing stop-motion filming of the building and collapse of a house of playing cards in between shots of bricklaying (figures 145-147).

Fig. 142: Tait 1964. *Where I Am Is Here.*

Fig. 143: Tait 1964. *Where I Am Is Here.*

Fig. 144: Tait 1964. *Where I Am Is Here.*

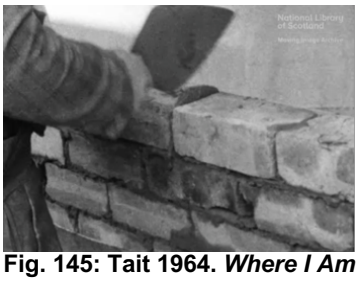

Fig. 145: Tait 1964. *Where I Am Is Here.*

Fig. 146: Tait 1964. *Where I Am Is Here.*

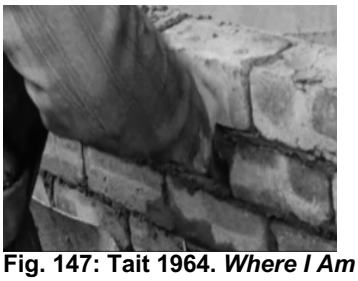

Fig. 147: Tait 1964. *Where I Am Is Here.*

These filmic patterns, interventions, and changes in pace and technique, invite audiences to reflect on the long-term effect of urban modernisation and extensive commercial building programmes and to consider the impact of fast-moving plans and new management structures on the/ir community and environment. Each frame in the animated playing-card/brick-laying sequence, for example, highlights the fabricated nature of civic and commercial building programmes. It also allegorically points to the smoothing over of decisions made by the administrators who coax the public into corporate decisions. In relation to film as a plastic medium, Tait's use of animation checks the continuity editing and synchronised sound-image connections which suture audiences into the dominant ideologies in popular films. Tait also changes the pace of her film by repeating sequences, using montage editing and discordant sound/image connections.

Close-ups of the structures and textures of building materials on walls, roads and pavements draw attention to the haptic surface of the screen, as well as the surface of appearance, as if to emphasis the materiality of these changes and their interruption/integration into the fabric of local life. Figure 148, for example, is a screenshot from a slow pan across a collection of older buildings in a neglected area of the city, yet to be redeveloped.

Fig. 148: Tait 1964. *Where I Am Is Here*.

These older buildings contrast with the entrepreneurial office blocks, luxury flats and renovated insurance companies in Edinburgh's commercial St. Andrew's Square and elsewhere in the city. Their topsy-turvy rooftops, eclectic construction materials, differing facades and non-standardised architecture, present an assemblage of constructions that evolved over time and through need rather than opportunism and corporate development.

While investment in financial schemes and commercial development supported social and other 'modern' improvements thought necessary for the welfare of the city, the juxtaposition of old and new in Tait's film points to the layering of modern developments over a pre-modern past and the communities that created them. Her filming of these dis-locations and transitions considers the merits of a future based on capital investment at the expense of local communities' identity and traditional accomplishments. Signs of the overhauling of Edinburgh's history and the skills that built the city are evident in shots of 'workers' laying tarmac over old road surfaces metaphorically obliterating evidence of their predecessors, their folk-tales and

local-narratives (figures 149-152). This is something Tait also considered in *Rose Street* and *On the Mountain.* Arendt correspondingly observes:

> The whole factual world of human affairs depends for its reality and continued existence, first on the presence of others who have seen and heard and who remember, and second, on the transformation of the intangible into the tangibility of things. (1958: 83)

Fig. 149: Tait 1964. ***Where I Am Is Here.***

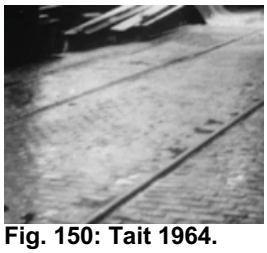

Fig. 150: Tait 1964. ***Where I Am Is Here.***

Fig. 151: Tait 1964. ***Where I Am Is Here.***

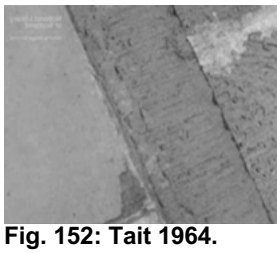

Fig. 152: Tait 1964. ***Where I Am Is Here.***

Interestingly, the significance of Scotland's history during the Enlightenment and Britain's Industrial Age was discussed on a BBC radio programme (2019) in which Misha Glenny revealed the influence on Britain of the hundred years or so after the Acts of Union (1706-07) which led to the creation of the United Kingdom of Great Britain:

> What's really striking now about British life, is the enormous influence that Scots intellectuals, engineers and capitalists … the impact they have on British life, and indeed on life around the world as the British Empire starts to flex its muscles. You can see it here in Edinburgh, which was the centre of the Scottish Enlightenment – grand buildings, social projects, a real sense of the power of Scotland's intellectual tradition.
> …
> Scotland was a more powerful driver than England in the Industrial Revolution in coal mining, ship building, in pretty much everything. (Glenny 2019)

Later in the programme, historian Thomas Devine stated:

> At the same time this [modernisation] was happening, a new romantic identity, what I call Highlandism was being born, which gave the impression to the outer world that Scotland was a Highland country of the past, not of the present. Whereas it was possibly the greatest example in Europe of the fastest rate towards modernity towards Modernisation which existed in that C19th period [and that] if Scotland was to distinguish itself as different from England in what I call sartorial nationalism, it had to be a form of nationalism that did not threaten the union but actually consolidated it. (cited in Glenny 2019)[117]

[117] Devine also reveals the extent to which the Industrial revolution in Scotland relied on Slavery which only became evident due to the greater depth of compensation given to Scotland after the Slave Trade was abolished in 1834. This has only recently begun to be dealt with. In fact, Devine adds, 'The First academic reliance on slavery in Scotland was published as late as 2015'. Arguably Tait would have approved and/or un/consciously included these voices among her 'stalking' Edinburgh for signs of experiences that were overlooked in the history of Edinburgh, as they too were among the in/visible signs and narratives of the city's landscape. The inclusion of all ethnicities and genders is a focus for Third Wave feminist strategies, which I have argued Tait thematically pre-empts.

Tait's ways of filming her environment invite questions about the speed at which modernity was developing, but also what was disconnecting people from their past and knowledge of their considerable achievements in British/Scottish history.[118] She thus moots ideas concerning modernisation as progress and/or improvement as evident in the lives and actions of the people she observes and films in her locality.

From Arendt's perspective, Mary Dietz explained that Arendt felt that as the modern workforce adapted to corporate development and other expansions considered necessary for modernity to progress, employment was directed 'ever more steadily to an existence governed by the instrumental calculations of *homo faber* and the process mentality of *animal laborans*' (1991: 237). Seyla Benhabib also notes that Arendt felt that economic self-interest transformed post-war urban landscapes 'into a pseudo space of interaction in which individuals no longer "act" but merely "behave" as economic producers, consumers and urban city dwellers' (1992: 75). Thus, under the conditions of modernity Arendt felt,

> society expects from each of its members a certain kind of behaviour, imposing innumerable and various rules all of which tend to "normalise" its members to make them behave, to exclude spontaneous action or outstanding achievement. (1958: 37-38)

Like Arendt, Tait recognised that modernisation's streamlining of production and increase in bureaucracy merged the skills of the workforce so that workers, labourers and administrators became components of, and thus compliant with, the mechanistic wheels of progress. Tait filmed her observations of the lack of 'spontaneous action' in Edinburgh's modern workforce through a montage of traffic/road surfaces/cars/people/ wheels/buses/pedestrian crossings/signage/shoppers/lights/traffic jams/railings/taxis against a soundtrack comprising MacAndrew's Pibroch, Lilane's lament and mechanised street sounds (figures 153-160).

[118] See Appendix 1 xxviii-xxix for Pirie's discussion of *The Big Sheep* and the lack of education regarding the Highland clearances in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Fig. 153: Tait 1964. ***Where I Am Is Here.***

Fig. 154: Tait 1964. ***Where I Am Is Here.***

Fig. 155: Tait 1964. ***Where I Am Is Here.***

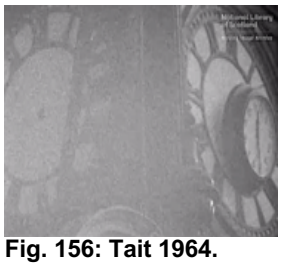

Fig. 156: Tait 1964. ***Where I Am Is Here.***

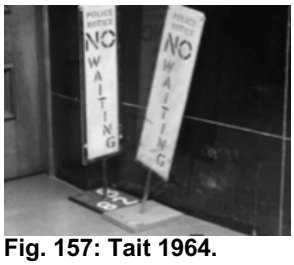

Fig. 157: Tait 1964. ***Where I Am Is Here.***

Fig. 158: Tait 1964. ***Where I Am Is Here.***

Fig. 159: Tait 1964. ***Where I Am Is Here.***

Fig. 160: Tait 1964. ***Where I Am Is Here.***

The cacophony of sounds and images in this section of Tait's film reveal scant opportunity for the 'contingent and unpredictable' (Arendt 1958: ix) occurrences which Arendt considered necessary if people were to abandon cyclical routines and actively take part in a meaningful world. To counter this, she felt that a 'space of appearance' (1958: 178) was needed for a 'body politic' to materialise and enable the type of interaction that occurs '[w]herever people gather together' in public. Arendt observed that these opportunities are 'potentially there, but only potentially, not necessarily and not forever' (1958: 178). Thus, in order to contribute to the production and management of ideas, culture and occurrences that affect their community and environment, citizens must/must be able to voice their opinions and connect in an inhabited world of inter-action:

> Speech and action reveal this unique distinctness. Through them, men distinguish themselves instead of being merely distinct; they are the modes in which human beings appear to each other, not indeed as physical objects, but *qua* men. This appearance, as distinguished from mere bodily existence, rests on initiative, but it is an initiative from which no human being can refrain and still be human. (Arendt 1958: 176)

In *Where I Am Is Here*, Tait correspondingly observes scant public spaces where creativity, spontaneity, innovation and free speech could materialise in 1960s Edinburgh. Her 'actuality' filming of its urban streets reveals the public's seeming compliance with corporate institutions

that direct their city along specific lines – including a playful reference to the GPO (figure 160). In her film, Tait shows that even in a crowd, people lack the ability or motivation to act 'in concert. … The force that keeps them together … is the force of mutual promise or contract' (Arendt 1958: 220). Arendt also states, '[i]t is the faculty of action that interferes with this law because it interrupts the inexorable automatic course of daily life, which … interrupt[s] the inexorable automatic course of life …[and] … the cycle of the biological life process' (1958: 222).

In the section *Crocodile,* Tait finds a gap where automatic functioning as guided by clock time was suspended and where free thought and action were momentary possible – or 'potentially there' (Arendt 1958: 178). As a seasoned filmmaker/flaneuse 'stalking the image' in Edinburgh*,* Tait observes/films a clock tower on which two clock-faces have no hands (figure 156). However, on one of the clock-faces the council has attached a makeshift clock thus (metaphorically) curbing the potential for public intervention and thus a possible interruption to corporate city life. Tait repeats this shot twice in the same sequence as if to highlight this as a missed opportunity for intuitive spontaneity, chance or action, while the substitute clock ensures that the workforce continue to synchronise with the mechanisms that enable the city to function smoothly. This again recalls Bergson's writings on the streamlining of spatial time which, under the conditions of modernity, amalgamates people's differences and coerces them into corporate ways of thinking and acting.

In *Time and Free Will* ([1913] 2012), Bergson explained that with increased mechanisation people's experience of 'time durée' becomes less conspicuous. By supplanting the original handless clock (time durée) with a makeshift clock (spatial time), a momentary chance of breaching the system has been municipally thwarted. Dietz summarises Arendt's perspectives on clock-time, urbanisation and modernity:

> The critique of the modern world that *The Human Condition* advances rests on the claim that we are witnessing an unprecedented era in which the process driven activity of labour dominates our understanding of human achievement. As a result, we live in and celebrate a world of automatically functioning jobholders, having lost all sense of what constitutes true freedom and collective public life. (1991: 234)

In her volume, Arendt coins the term ‘plurality’ to describe the condition of living in spaces where active social engagement provides possibilities for people to share their differing experiences and perspectives and to contribute to decisions which affect their lives. She maintains that ‘plurality’ has the potential to disrupt the uniformity of modern city life by highlighting that we live in a world occupied by people who are different and have a potential ‘of living as a distinct and unique being among equals’ (1958: 158). But to activate ‘plurality’, people need to (be able to) freely act, speak and screen films that offer differing perspectives and gain the consent of others by making democratic contributions that influence the decisions which shape lives and environments:

> Men, not Man, [sic.] live on the earth and inhabit the world. While all aspects of the human condition are somehow related to politics, this plurality is specifically *the* condition … of all political life.
> …
> Plurality is the condition of human action because we are all the same, that is, human, in such a way that nobody is ever the same as anyone else who ever lived, lives, or will live. (Arendt 1958: 9-10)

Without free speech (and alternative film screenings) in public spaces, the discursive and political dialogues and action which personify the concept of ‘plurality’ remain, or become, thwarted. For without social spaces that are either provided, or able to be self-implemented, the city’s ‘voices’, re-actions and opinions can only appear in the gaps that civic life allows.

In *Where I Am Is Here*, Tait shows how the speech and actions of the workforce manifest in other, less recognisable ways. Differing typefaces and forms of writing conjoin and contrast and are manifest on printed, handwritten un/official signage, on notice-boards and in newspaper headlines which report ‘strikes’, ‘workers downing tools’ and ironically, ‘bank notes found on beach’ (figures 161-167).

Fig. 161: Tait 1964. ***Where I Am Is Here.***

Fig. 162: Tait 1964. ***Where I Am Is Here.***

Fig. 163: Tait 1964. ***Where I Am Is Here.***

Fig. 164: Tait 1964. ***Where I Am Is Here.***

Fig. 165: Tait 1964. *Where I Am Is Here.*

Fig. 166: Tait 1964. *Where I Am Is Here.*

Fig, 167: Tait 1964. *Where I Am Is Here.*

They also appear on the personalised fronts of family-run shops and small businesses, some of which are under threat of closure. Industrialised upper-case corporate signage on robust brass plaques on civic buildings in Edinburgh's commercial square claim their ground. Elsewhere, loud upper-case printed letters announce, 'personal liability', 'no waiting', 'no parking' and 'footpaths' which guide people's complicity with the city's vision of progress, consumer capitalism and modernity's rational and exclusive thinking. Other less prominent voices can be heard on the soundtrack via street calls, cats meowing, fire crackling, streams gushing, children shouting, mechanised hammering, typing and the sounds of MacAndrew's Pibroch and Lilane's lament. This combination of visual, gestural and aural semantics makes the 'speech' and 'action' of the workforce in Edinburgh known. This joint eloquence of complicity and rebellion is simultaneously expressive, faltering, in/audible and in/distinctive. It circulates in proclamations, headlines, stories, songs and via the sounds of nature and the elements. Tait's montage of this plethora of 'speech' and 'action' reveals both the acquiescence and resistance of the citizens of Edinburgh negotiating ways to voice their opinions from their specific standpoints within the spaces that modernity both allows and overlooks. Regarding this Arendt writes:

> In acting and speaking, men [sic.] show who they are, reveal actively their unique personal identities and thus make their appearance in the human world, while their physical identities appear without any activity of their own in the unique shape of body and sound of the voice. This disclosure of 'who' in contradistinction to 'what' somebody is - his qualities, gifts ... which he may display or hide – is implicit in everything somebody says and does. (1958: 159)

In her film*,* Tait echoes Arendt's thinking that, under the conditions of modernity, 'labourers' and 'workers' are 'bound to the recurring cycles of nature and have in themselves, no beginning and no end' (Arendt 1958: 86). She intimates this by filming boys fishing in the same rivers as men

(figures 168-169) and girls entering the same shops as women (figures 170-171) suggesting that under the conditions of modernity, each generation follows the same cyclical patterns of behaviour and aspiration.

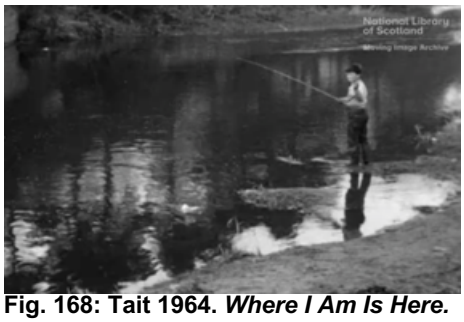

Fig. 168: Tait 1964. *Where I Am Is Here.*

Fig. 169: Tait 1964. *Where I Am Is Here.*

Fig. 170: Tait 1964. *Where I Am Is Here.*

Fig. 171: Tait 1964. *Where I Am Is Here.*

Elsewhere in her film, Tait looks beneath these patterns of behaviour and pays attention to the unnoticed 'qualities' and 'gifts' which she feels are personified in the 'actions' of unseen 'workers', via her observations of a local road sweeper whose image and 'actions' she spliced at intervals throughout the film as he carries out his 'cyclical' routines (figures 172-174).

Fig. 172: Tait 1964. *Where I Am Is Here.*

Fig. 173: Tait 1964. *Where I Am Is Here.*

Fig. 174: Tait 1964. *Where I Am Is Here.*

It's as if Tait is suggesting that his 'labour', thought to leave no noticeable record of existence or thinking also sustains the city, unnoticed. In her volume, Arendt concurs, '[t]he protection and the preservation of the world against natural processes of growth and decay are among the toils

which need the monotonous performance of daily repeated chores' (1958: 87). In Tait's film this is noted via her 'actuality filming' of men sweeping, cleaning, polishing and taking care of their environments in domestic and public spheres (figures 175-178).

Fig. 175: Tait 1964. ***Where I Am Is Here.***

Fig. 176: Tait 1964. ***Where I Am Is Here.***

Fig. 177: Tait 1964. ***Where I Am Is Here.***

Fig. 178: Tait 1964. ***Where I Am Is Here.***

Yet, at that time, domestic and caring roles such as these were more typically associated with women in/and the private sphere. In the public sphere, Tait observes/films women as corporately dressed in boots, overcoats, scarves and handbags, signalling their lack of individuality. She finds no evidence on the streets of 1960s Edinburgh of their speech, care, hobbies, resistance, or 'active' presence (figures 179-182), and thus their 'plurality'. So, where men are witnessed working, labouring, taking leisure time, caring for the/ir environments and their voices are 'heard' on banners, buildings and newspaper headlines, women are observed as silent, alone or in small groups, shopping, walking, riding on buses or married (figure 185).

Fig. 179: Tait 1964. ***Where I Am Is Here.***

Fig. 180: Tait 1964. ***Where I Am Is Here.***

Fig. 181: Tait 1964. ***Where I Am Is Here.***

Fig. 182: Tait 1964. ***Where I Am Is Here.***

They thus lack the two qualities Arendt feels are central to an active life in the city, that is a voice and an operational presence (speech and action), which also appear to be missing in Tait's observation of the public sphere. In the section *Interlude*, for example, Tait films a line of women crossing the road which she later mirrors with a line of uniformed schoolgirls supervised by two adult females (figures 183-184) – possibly something Tait herself experienced at an all-female boarding school in this city.

Fig. 183: Tait 1964. *Where I Am Is Here.*

Fig. 184: Tait 1964. *Where I Am Is Here.*

Fig. 185: Tait 1964. *Where I Am Is Here.*

This female corelation arguably signals modernity's indifference to educating women to become co-producers in the civic or imaginative life on a par with men, and that women when seen in the public sphere appear self-less, complicit and homogenous.

As previously noted, in *The Human Condition*, Arendt uses the Greek *Polis* as an allegory for a city under the conditions of modernity. The division of labour in the city/polis, sustains the hierarchical relationships between gender, as well as culture and class. In the *polis* '[t]he public realm … was reserved for individuality; it was the place where men [sic.] could show who they really and unexchangeably were' (Arendt 1958: 38). Whereas women occupied the 'shadowy interior of the household' (1958: 35) and laboured below the surface of the 'power and the space of appearance' (1958: 178-190). Arendt writes:

> Hidden away were the labourers … and the women who with their bodies guarantee the physical survival of the species. Women and slaves belonged to the same category and were hidden away not only because they were somebody else's property but because their life was 'laborious', devoted to bodily functions. (1958: 64).

By describing women as 'labourers' connected to the household (household labourers), Arendt un/consciously incorporates them into her general discussion of people acting and speaking together beneath the 'power and space of appearance' (1958: 178) because, as she explains:

> The polis, properly speaking, is not the city-state in its physical location; it is the organization of the people as it arises out of acting and speaking together, and its true space lies between people living together for this purpose, no matter where they happen to be. (1958: 177)

Her generic reference to 'people' and 'no matter where they happen to be' provides a gap beneath the 'power and the space of appearance' where women as household-labourers have

an active presence in ways which parallel men in the public realms, and who themselves, do not live there 'all the time':

> This space does not always exist, and although all men [sic.] are capable of deed and word, most of them – like the slave, the foreigner, and the barbarian in antiquity, like the labourer or craftsman prior to the modern age, the jobholder or businessman in our world – do not live in it … all the time. (1958: 177-178)

Here, Arendt pinpoints a space in the interconnected public/private realms where '[t]he least durable of tangible things are those needed for the life process itself' (1958: 84) – and thus includes the domain of labourers, workers, and household-labourers, despite seeming to exclude them from her notion of 'plurality' in the public realm.

It is for this reason that Dietz suggests, 'the feminist critic is well advised to give *The Human Condition* a second look' because it 'admits of no definitive interpretive conclusions' (1991: 238). It is full of paradox and irony and provides gaps for researchers (journeyers) who 'must learn to identify those moments of rupture, displacement and dislocation in history. At such moments language is witness to the more profound transformations that take place in human life' (Benhabib 1996: 94).

Arendt's feminism is found in the gaps in *The Human Condition*. Like Tait, she did not openly align with feminist principles, however she writes:

> The fact that the modern age emancipated the working-class and women at nearly the same historical moment must certainly be counted among the characteristics of an age which no longer believes that bodily functions and material concerns should be hidden. (1958: 64)

Elsewhere, as previously noted, Arendt links the toil of labourers and household-labourers in the private realm with 'world protection, repair and preservation' (Benhabib 1996: 135):

> The earth is the very quintessence of the human condition, and earthly nature, for all we know, may be unique in the universe in providing human beings with a habitat in which they can move and breathe without effort and without artifice. (Arendt 1958: 2)

Arendt combines care of the earth and new beginnings in a concept she calls 'natality'. This refers to the condition of being born and 'the capacity to begin, to start something new' (1958: 9) which the earth, babies and children exemplify. It is therefore safe to assume that beneath the

public city/polis, the nurturing roles of household-labourers 'who with their bodies guarantee the physical survival of the species' (Arendt 1958: 64) have a valuable role:

> The reward of toil lies in nature's fertility, in the quiet confidence that he [sic.] who in "toil and trouble" has done his [sic.] part, remains a part of nature in the future of his [sic.] children and his [sic.] children's children' (Arendt 1958: 93).

Arendt further states that 'natality, and not mortality, may be the central category of political, as distinguished from metaphysical, thought' (1958: 9).

Despite or because of not having children, both Arendt and Tait understood that new life epitomised the potential for new forms of interaction and socio-cultural re-form:

> Labour and work, as well as action, are also rooted in natality in so far as they have the task to provide and preserve the world for, to foresee and reckon with, the constant influx of newcomers who are born into the world as strangers. … the new beginning inherent in birth can make itself felt in the world only because the newcomer possesses the capacity of beginning something anew, that is, of acting. (Arendt 1958: 10)

Arendt's concept of 'natality' presents a central and political force for change which is dependent on 'household-labourers' who (also) 'care' and 'maintain' the city, as well as raising children into new deeds, actions and the speech of their community – beneath the 'power and the space of appearance'. Through their close link with 'natality', 'household-labourers' have a key role in nurturing 'the newcomer [who] possesses the capacity of beginning something anew, that is, of acting … [which] is inherent in all human activities' (Arendt 1958: 9). Even though women and children are not the focus of her attention, in her volume Arendt acknowledged that 'natality', in its most inclusive sense, depended on the actions of women who, like all labourers, were crucial to the ongoing maintenance of society, despite seeming to leave no physical evidence of their presence or thinking in public in tangible ways – as also noted in Tait's film.

Tait's maternal concern for children is evident in many of her films, as noted in her home films and *Rose Street.* In *Where I Am Is Here* this care is also discernible through her filming of children typically from a distance and behind wire fences or bare branches (figures 186-187).

Fig. 186: Tait 1964. *Where I Am Is Here*

Fig. 187: Tait 1964. *Where I Am Is Here*

Longshots through barriers, signal Tait's concern that children's welfare does not feature strongly in the council's plans for the city. There is a particularly poignant scene at the end of the *Here and Now* section which makes this point. It marks the entrance of Lilane's maternal singing voice accompanying a slow panning shot across a school shed, a hopscotch game chalked on the tarmac, a discarded lobster pot and unkempt school buildings to where children play in the distance (figures 188-190).

Fig. 188: Tait 1964. *Where I Am Is Here.*

Fig. 189: Tait 1964. *Where I Am Is Here.*

Fig. 190: Tait 1964. *Where I Am Is Here.*

Here, the ratio of children to neglected buildings (figure 190) signals the low regard in which children are held in the modernisation of the city and highlights its neglect of 'natality', from Tait's perspective. Lilane's heartfelt singing the fragmented and repetitive words of Tait's poem in this scene can be 'heard' as a form of caring 'speech [which] becomes the echo of the primeval song she [they] once heard, the voice of the incarnation of the 'first voice of love which all women preserve alive…' (Cixous cited in Moi 1985: 114). The combined 'feminine' voices in Tait's poetry and Lilane's singing subvert the symbolic Law of the Father which typically

sustains the type of progress contingent on common-sense law – such as capitalist expansion and industrial development. By contrast, Lilane's singing and Tait's poetry fluctuate between decipherable and indistinguishable sounds bringing to life a pre-symbolic language which stems from the 'mother' and manifests via lullabies and unspeakable emotions. Kristeva calls such eloquence the 'semiotic chora' (cited in Moi 1985: 161-162), a form of language that connects people through early experiences of the maternal body. Although it cannot be identified as a separate entity, the 'chora' permeates all forms of speech through sound, differing language-use and intuitive drives. However, it is repressed as society becomes reliant on the symbolic's common-sense logic which has primacy in the more visible public sphere which Arendt described as the 'power and space of appearance' (1958: 178). As Toril Moi explains:

> Once the subject has entered into the symbolic order, the chora will be more or less successfully repressed and can be perceived only as pulsional pressure on or within symbolic language: as contradictions, meaninglessness, disruption, silences and absences. (1985: 162)

The traditional Scottish Pibroch also forms part of the chora in this film. It is a local folk tradition handed down through generations by voice and sound as Tait explains:

> In listening, [to it] you don't quite know how much you are taken over by this sound and how much is the music being made with it. Perhaps the secret, or 'genius' is that the music is made so utterly for the instrument … I suppose the pibroch of MacCrimmon's time was all composed <u>on</u> the instrument and not at all on paper or in any kind of notation separate from the player and the pipes. (Tait letter to Leggett. 04/04/1975. Held at the BAFVSC, London) [119]

Thus, the voices of the three 'mothers' – Lilane, MacAndrew and Tait – collectively perform 'a song before the Law, before the breath [le souffle] was split by the symbolic, re-appropriated into language under the authority that separates. The deepest, most ancient and adorable of visitations' (Cixous cited in Moi 1985: 114).

This 'indecipherable' pre-language re-appears in a scene in the section *The Bravest Boat* in which unsupervised children run around a wasteland fire. Their spontaneous whooping and rebellion connote the type of 'acting together in public' that Arendt noted occurs when the

[119] Robert MacKinnon (1875-1902) was a bagpipe maker and master Pibroch musician working and living in Brown Street, Glasgow.

rules (Law of the Father) are lapsed or challenged by communal action. The children (boys and girls) temporarily abandon rational thinking and throw discarded objects on to a fire while dancing around this volatile natural element with delight and enthusiasm, momentarily venting their frustrations and joy in being in voices that are incoherent, impassioned and laughing (figures 191-193).

Fig. 191: Tait 1964. *Where I Am Is Here.*

Fig. 192: Tait 1964. *Where I Am Is Here.*

Fig. 193: Tait 1964. *Where I Am Is Here.*

In terms of Arendt's 'natality' and Tait's 'A START', the youngsters' actions signify 'new beginnings' by 'active-ly' (and allegorically) burning the past to clear the way for a new era. Lilane's voice, Tait's filming, Tait's poetry, MacAndrew's Pibroch and the children's 'shouting' unite in these sequences in a pre-symbolic language which emanates from their bodies in a place/space where the symbolic has little or no place. The children instinctively chant in unplanned unison, a semantic mix of frustration, knowledge, experience and joy unmediated by authority. Their untutored voices evoke the omnipresent semiotic chora which remains active under the logic and rational order of the symbolic of their time. Their unbridled enthusiasm also intimates what might happen if children are left to their own devices in environments that do not nurture their lives and potential.

The lack of precedence given to nurturing and educating young people about their culture, environment and history intersects in Tait and Arendt's concern for succeeding generations who must make sense of the world they inherit. This is clear in their conjoined deliberations on the effect of modernity's focus on civic issues and urban development at the expense of other infrastructures, including the environment. In *Where I Am Is Here,* this manifests in Tait's filming of neglected and stale rivers (figure 194) and exposed tree roots

(figure 195). These images signal the inattention and neglect which are the result of *homo faber's* systematic production of objects for consumption and the reification of the labour that went in to making it. As modernity races to achieve its goals, its residue is left to be cleared by a*nimal laborans* from their invisible positions beneath the power of appearance.

Fig. 194: Tait 1964. W*here I Am Is Here.*

Fig. 195: Tait 1964. *Where I Am Is Here.*

From her perspective Arendt explains:

> If nature and the earth generally constitute the condition of human life, then the world and the things of the world constitute the condition under which this specifically human life can be at home on earth. Nature through the eyes of *animal laborans* is the great provider of all "good things" which belong equally to her children, who "take [them] out of [her] hands" and "mix with" them in labour and consumption. [sic.] (1958: 116) [120]

In her film, Tait correspondingly indicates that the 'good things' in nature belong to the domains of the 'labourer' and the 'feminine' world of 'household-labourers' whose allocation to the nurturing realms heightens their awareness of issues discounted in the more visible public realms.

In addition to the shots of the road sweeper who personifies the unseen work of the labourers in the city, Tait intermittently splices images and sounds of water, fire, earth, moon, wind indigenous sounds, voices, images of nature and the natural elements amongst her observations of capitalist development (figures 196-203). She mindfully re-affirms that the balance in modern life is contingent on the 'feminine' and the 'invisible, as well as the symbolic's more perceptible modern industrial development and capitalism.

[120] The bracketed words are cited by Tait as taken from John Locke *Second Treatise of Civil Government*.1690.

Fig. 196: Tait 1964. ***Where I Am Is Here.***

Fig. 197: Tait 1964. ***Where I Am Is Here.***

Fig. 198: Tait 1964. ***Where I Am Is Here.***

Fig. 199: Tait 1964. ***Where I Am Is Here.***

Fig. 200: Tait 1964. ***Where I Am Is Here.***

Fig. 201: Tait 1964. ***Where I Am Is Here.***

Fig. 202: Tait 1964. ***Where I Am Is Here.***

Fig. 203: Tait 1964. ***Where I Am Is Here.***

Water is the most recurrent natural element in Tait film/s. When speaking about Helen Cixous' affinity with the elements, Toril Moi says, 'water is the feminine element par excellence' (1985:117). It is the ultimate feminine symbol that connects the fluidity, nurturing and safety of the womb with spaces that are free from the fixed subject positions or the Law of the Father, and the symbolic. Luce Irigaray also addresses the neglect of the natural elements in the symbolic's scheme of things in her work:

> We still pass our daily lives in a universe that is known to be composed of four elements: air, water, fire, and earth. We are made up of these elements and we live in them. They determine, more or less freely, our attractions, our affects, our passions, our limits, our aspirations. (cited in Garry and Pearsall 1997: 473)

Irigaray's attentiveness to earth and nature signals a need to bring to life a 'deep, dark and necessary intuition dark even when it is shared by other thoughts' (Irigaray cited in Garry and Pearsall 1997: 471). This echoes Tait's apprehension that modernity's emphasis on mechanisation and corporate development is in danger of causing an imbalance in nature, the elements and the environment. In her prologue Arendt also writes, '[t]he earth is the very quintessence of the human condition' (1958: 2). Also, that unless modern notions of progress are checked, 'society, dazzled by the abundance of its growing fertility and caught up in the smooth running of a never-ending process would no longer be able to understand its own futility' (1958:117). By 'futility' Arendt implies that the unmediated mastery of *homo faber* over nature is meaningless unless spaces are provided for a 'plurality' of speech and actions to become part

of a balanced modern life. Additionally, she questions the idea that securing excess and abundance improves people's lives, and that although it might seem that 'every issue can be solved, and every human motivation reduced to the principle of utility' (Arendt 1958: 279) what is produced is tied up with consumption rather than value. She notes that a change of emphasis regarding this is contingent on reflection:

> And while it may be true that his strongest impulse towards this liberation comes from his "repugnance to futility", it is also likely that the impulse may grow weaker as this facility appears easier, as it requires less effort. (Arendt 1958: 121)

Once the order, abundance and profit that modernity seeks to achieve collapses (cf Tait's house of cards), Arendt suggests 'the only way out of the dilemma of the meaningless in all strict utilitarian philosophy, is to turn away from the objective world of use things and fall back upon the subjectivity of use itself' (1958: 136). This is contingent on a 'plurality' of people having unrestricted access to spaces where their 'speech' and 'actions' can contribute more inclusively to ideas regarding the greater good, rather than being overlooked or judged as expendable.

Tait makes this point in the section *The Bravest Boat*. Here, accompanied by MacAndrew's Pibroch, she repeats the montage of images of exposed roots, the chalked hopscotch and discarded lobster pot in the school yard (figure 204). She then cuts to a sequence in which two large birds are (seen to be) resigned to not flying (being able to fly) – and the prospect of altering their situation seems unlikely (figure 205).

Fig. 204: Tait 1964. *Where I Am Is Here.*

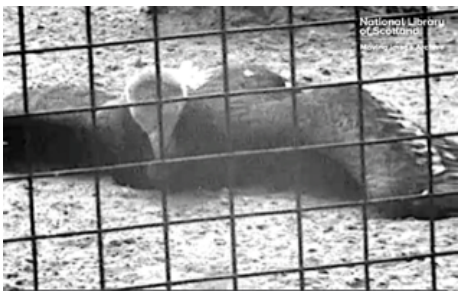

Fig. 205: Tait 1964. *Where I Am Is Here.*

Tait's camera then cuts to a lioness and lion in adjacent cages as if to signal her thoughts on modernity's short-sightedness regarding gender divisions (figures 206-208). The lion sits passively staring out of his cage while the lioness actively paces up and down while

also looking out of her adjoining cage. This is a reversal of the gendered stereotypes, men active: women passive that were allocated to the sexes in modernity.

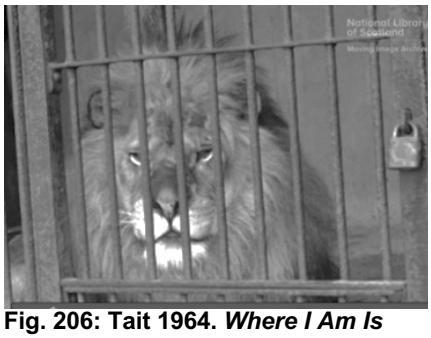

Fig. 206: Tait 1964. *Where I Am Is Here.*

Fig. 207: Tait 1964. *Where I Am Is Here.*

Fig. 208: Tait 1964. W*here I Am Is Here.*

Just as the modern workforce is organised according to gender, among other things, so the lion and lioness are compelled to adapt to spaces not of their making and in ways that thwart their potential and being together as equivalents. Interestingly, close observation of this sequence shows that the lioness has an extra layer of wire mesh across her cage. In 'stalking' this image Tait metaphorically reveals her awareness of the subjugation of the 'feminine' within the symbolic, and the repercussions for society if female-centred perspectives and voices are supressed. By filming the lion and lioness locked in adjacent cages, Tait implies that while both are imprisoned the nature of their containment is different. Additionally, their separation inhibits a mutual, productive and loving exchange. Her slow pan across the undersized locks on their cages reveals how little it would take to alter this situation (figure 207). Since modernity's discourses were 'man-made' they have the potential to be re-formed.

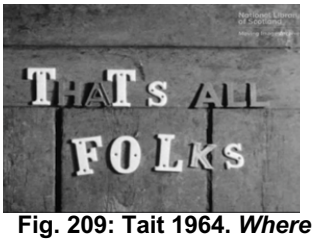

Fig. 209: Tait 1964. *Where I Am Is Here.*

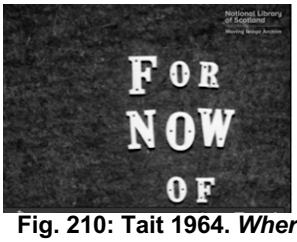

Fig. 210: Tait 1964. *Where I Am Is Here.*

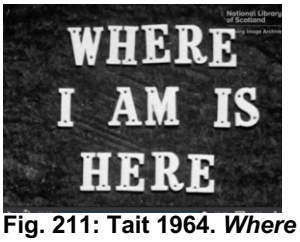

Fig. 211: Tait 1964. *Where I Am Is Here.*

Tait ends the film by using her signature plastic lettering in the closing credits while Lilane sings her lament (figures 209-211). The slow pace of this 'performative' filming offers space for audiences to reflect on issues mooted in the film and is another ironic nudge at popular

narrative and informational films. By 'writing' *That's all Folks – For Now of – Where I Am Is Here,* Tait de-constructs a familiar ending to popular commercial films as a comment on the primary use of film as a form of entertainment.

It is strange and perhaps coincidental that at intervals throughout the film, a (tear) drop of water falls down the left-hand side of the screen as if reinforcing the laments which underpin this film.

Finally, I return to Tait's 'relative isolation' in her 'lonely furrow' from where she developed ways of filming her reflections on the changes wrought by modernity. Both Tait and Arendt worked in relative isolation. Born twelve years apart and living very different lives, both women recognised that 'to be isolated is to be deprived of the capacity to act' (Arendt 1958: 167). From their differing standpoints and despite working against the odds, they felt that it was important to create 'texts' which checked dominant trends and encouraged people to think (differently). Arendt wrote that where *homo faber*-as-worker satisfies the needs of humanity physically, *homo faber*-as-artist does so emotionally, 'something immortal achieved by mortal hands, has become tangibly present, to shine and to be seen, to sound and to be heard, to speak and to be read' (1958: 147). Elsewhere she wrote,

> speaking men [sic.] need the help of *homo faber* in his [sic.] highest capacity, that is, the help of the artist, of poets and historiographers, of monument-builders or writers, because without them the only product of their activity, the story they enact and tell, would not survive at all. (1958: 173)

From her perspective, Tait felt that 'it was necessary to do something more than just simply bringing people back to bodily health' (cited in Appendix 4: xlix). In relation to this Pirie explained that most people, 'go through life nipped in, held back, not open to experience, not open to the experience of themselves' (cited in Appendix 1: xviii) and that this was something Tait addressed in her films. Tait would have liked her contributions to film culture to have been acknowledged in her lifetime, but her work was not taken up by critics to the same extent as

Arendt's. Instead, she left her large body of work in Orquil studio for the fates to decide its outcome after her death.[121]

There is a poignant scene in the section *Here and Now* in which Tait points her camera through a window to the world outside Buttquoy House to the sound of MacAndrew's pibroch. She then cuts to Pirie who is leaning against the left-hand side of a fireplace, tracks across a dividing wall into the next room, echoing the lion and lioness in adjoining cages, and pans upwards again to Pirie who is standing in the same stance but seemingly on a different side of the same fireplace as if in a different room (figures 212-214), in her sleight of hand filming technique.

Fig. 212: Tait 1964. *Where I Am Is Here.*

Fig. 213: Tait 1964. *Where I Am Is Here.*

Fig. 214: Tait 1964. *Where I Am Is Here.*

Tait then moves to a close-up of Pirie's profile and as he turns to face the camera, he closes his eyes for several seconds, or the camera speed slows down, before cutting to a frosted window and thus out to an imprecise world. This complex scene lasts less than a minute and can be interpreted in many ways, but within the context in this thesis, it is indicative of Pirie's role in Tait's life and his consensus with her autonomy, privacy, work and perspectives which were important to her achievements with film.

[121] The three Fates were the personification of destiny, inevitability, and fortune. They were often presented as weavers of a tapestry, and who assign individual destinies to mortals at birth.

Conclusion

The films I have chosen to discuss in my thesis represent the range of Margaret Tait's insights into everyday life in her locality and her innovation with this medium. By evaluating her work within the specific socio-cultural contexts of modernism and the twentieth century's insouciance to women, my thesis presents an important contribution to Tait studies and women's film studies.

As Tait was reluctant to explain what her films were about, my close and contextual analysis of her work is underpinned by archived interviews and correspondence in which she discussed ideas that are adjacent to her films, including how they were made and her thoughts on local film production. Her testimony provides lines of inquiry which I have explored by placing her work within the specific contexts of standard and experimental film cultures of her time. My interpretive analysis of Tait's films extends her current standing as a consummate filmmaker of the overlooked and the everyday.

I have supported my interpretations with reference to artists, filmmakers, poets, and thinkers including Henri Bergson, Julia Kristeva, the women at the LFMC, Hugh MacDiarmid and Hannah Arendt. This contextual and theoretical underpinning has enabled me to uncover the dialectic connections Tait formed with vanguard and standard film production and the political and philosophical nuances in her films. Indeed, close analysis of the form and content of Tait's films reveals a destabilising presence that combines knowledge and irony to form a kind of raw truth and a socio-cultural appraisal.

My research outcomes are contingent on Second and Thirdwave feminist thinking which, I discovered, interconnect with many core issues in Tait's film oeuvre. This has informed my interpretation of her marginal position in film culture and her insights into modernity from her local standpoint. Griselda Pollock suggests that when re-evaluating and re-placing women's work from the twentieth century into current art/film discourses and history:

> It is not a matter of mere re-inclusion because the manner of the exclusion itself forms a system that must be contested to create other terms of analysis that can remain faithful to the qualities of the artworks that themselves already contest the dominant modes. (cited in de Zegher 2014: 19)

Accordingly, my research into the mechanisms for the selection, organisation and exhibition of film in Tait's time sheds light on her marginal status and provides a frame for understanding why she insisted on maintaining creative control over her work and refused to adapt her films to suit current trends or commercial outlets. It suggests that Tait was aware that her films were 'saying' something different differently and that if her 'voice' and the reverberations in her films were to be distinguishable, they needed to remain in their original format. It is within these frames and those involving standard and experimental film production of her era that Tait's female-centred films become distinct, and her significance as a modernist filmmaker materialises. It has also helped to understand what Tait meant by thinking of herself as a 'lonesomes' [sic.] 'pioneer'.

My feminist and interpretive methodology draws on the work of Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber, Liz Stanley, Sue Wise and Kim England who suggest that the connections between the female researcher and the texts she selects is informed by her own interests, curiosity and experience. Rather than reaching a definitive conclusion, the open-ended approaches, which these sociologists advocate, enabled me to explore and contextualise Tait's coded and layered films and her often contradictory statements in ways that could not be fully addressed using standard terms or methods.

In the process of writing this thesis, I was interested to discover how popular film was in Scotland, particularly in Orkney and Kirkwall, Tait's hometown, which suggests an(other) influence in her choice of film as a vehicle of expression. This perspective is supported when examining Tait's assimilation of actuality filming, home movies, amateur, counter-cinema and local interest-type into her work within the context of Scotland's historical relationship with film and local-narratives (Heath 2014). The distinctiveness of Tait's films becomes clear when watching them in the original format or on a large screen. It is then that the materiality of her films becomes palpable. Relayed sounds and shots, scratched surfaces, collaged imagery, asynchronic sound-image combinations, repetition and play with language, are part of a visual-

aural-sensory experience that circumvents the emphasis often placed on sight and information in popular narrative films. Sensory cinematic qualities and frictions in work like Tait's, are described by Laura Marks as 'haptic':

> Haptic looking tends to move over the surface of its object rather than to plunge into illusionistic depth, not to distinguish from so much as to discern texture. It is more inclined to move than to focus, more inclined to graze than gaze. … While optical perception privileges the representational power of the image, haptic perception privileges the material presence of the image. (2000: 162)

Given this, it becomes clear why some of Tait's audiences found her films challenging to watch and why sponsors of her time thought they were unmarketable. Even now, despite our familiarity with ubiquitous moving imagery and increasing levels of media literacy, many of her films are hard to view and still have the capacity to astonish and delight.

There are many aspects of Tait's oeuvre that are beyond the scope of my thesis which would be interesting to develop elsewhere. This includes more detailed analysis of the films that I have selected and those I was unable to incorporate as *Palindrome* (1964), *Caora Mor* (1966), the *Aspects of Kirkwall* Series (1974-1981), her final film *Garden Pieces* (1998) and her animations. Also, a more comprehensive focus on the themes I have identified in Tait's oeuvre and her interconnections with the work of women artist/filmmakers was not possible within this project. However, by evaluating of a selection of her films within the specific historical and cultural contexts of her time and place, using theories and critical approaches unavailable in her time, I have established Tait as one of the,

> internationally less-known (women artists) [who] have articulated independent voices. Contributing next to the restrictive main axis of modernism, they have addressed questions of distribution and audience, of participation and the "feminine". … Through repoliticising the body, the ceaseless play of unravelling (hidden) traps of language and challenging the triumphant gaze, some women artists have participated for decades in the development of issues essential in the art of [today]. (de Zegher 1996: 21)

My project has opened lines of inquiry that anticipate further research into Tait's work and life, which will extend Tait studies to new levels of critical evaluation and celebrate her significant contributions to film culture and women's film studies.

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Figure 107: McLAREN, Norman. 1939. *Stars and Stripes.* [Screenshot] Film available *Norman McLaren: The Master's edition. Disc II.* 2007. National Board of Canada. [DVD]

Figures 108-110: TAIT, Margaret. 1955. *Calypso*. [screenshot]. Film available at: https://movingimage.nls.uk/film/6226accessed 15 March 2019]

Figures 111-112: BRAKHAGE, Stan. 1959. *Cat's Cradle* [Screenshot] Film available *By Brakhage: An Anthology. Disc II.* 1959-2001. 2010. Criterion. [DVD]

Figures 113-114: TAIT, Margaret. 1974. *Colour Poems.* [Screenshot]. Film available at: https://movingimage.nls.uk/film/3697 [accessed 15 March 2019]

Figures 115-116: McLAREN, Norman & Helen BIGGAR.1936. [Screenshot] Film available *Hell Unltd.* BFI. 2001. [DVD].

Figures 117-118: TAIT, Margaret. 1974. *Colour Poems.* [Screenshot]. Film available at: https://movingimage.nls.uk/film/3697 [accessed 15 March 2019]

Figures 119-214 TAIT, Margaret. 1964. *Where I Am Is Here.* [Screenshot]. Film available at: https://movingimage.nls.uk/film/3703 [accessed 15 March 2019]

Appendix 1

Transcription of an audio-taped conversation with Margaret Tait, Alex Pirie and Mike Leggett. Bristol, 1977

ML Mike Leggett
MT Margaret Tait
AP Alex Pirie

Tape: KnaTait 1 (37 min)
AP You use the word romantic. I mean in a different context and so on, and you also say referring to [the] 1973 footage of *On the Mountain* to the camera, neurotically?
ML Yes, I mean …
AP… it's a matter of opinion. But on the first two, I mean, I do not think that Margaret is a lyricist in any way. I don't think, I mean, I'm terribly inhibited about toying with Margaret, for all sorts of reasons that I don't want to get pinned on because it's a continuity thing, but on that point, I think very definitely that Margaret is not a lyricist. I don't think that she's a lyricist with words. And I do not think that her poems – that her films – are lyrical
ML Yeah …
AP… my feeling would be that sort of provisional assessment if you could call it that is taking you down the wrong road. And I think that if you feel that the camera is moving 'neurotically' in the sense and implication that there is no intention
ML No, No that's not ...
AP … but I mean I am making that distinction, but I think again that all work, actually Margaret's films and Margaret's approach, as I understand it and feel it, and Margaret's method, and all these things seen separately. One could relate them to your medical training and experience, I think. And, I think you'll have to think of another literary form, and another word for Romantic. And I don't think the 'romantic' informs anything of er, relating her films to other kinds of movements or any kind of concepts in the other arts. I do think that 'romantic' and 'lyric' are very much what they're not. I mean that's really my opinion. I'm not saying it flatly, as you know as a fact, and it's certainly my strong feeling that there's a different kind of gravitas really in the films which to my sensibility really precludes the lyrical. There may be an incidental lyricism, but I don't think that formally or philosophically that they're the words to use or aesthetically that they are lyrical. I think that they're really much more a gravitas thing, it doesn't again exclude the lyrical or the lights or the humorous ... What I see is something more essential, or real, we never talk about it ... although I see I'm meant to … [Laughter]
ML Yes, I can see …
AP This thing about the formal thing. I think there's something graver and more, I mean, it's not classical, but I don't quite know what classical means but there's something else. It's not romantic.
ML Yes
AP ... if one's using the word in that sort of broad sense, it's something more to do with, not the classical, I would say the pre-classical. And there's another word that comes to me, er, it was something to do with instinctive I think you said, and then you used the word logic. I don't think it's instinctive. I think it's a question of intuitiveness and I don't know that the word logic, I don't, I mean there might be a logic of intuition but, it's not a logic, it's not any kind of logic which can be set down as being to do with rationality or any kind of reason. But to return to the two things, I think that when you're developing this, you know, and examining and perhaps relating it to your other thoughts on these other people that I don't know intensively enough, I'd be wary of this lyrical thing … provisional.

4.23
ML Sure. Yeah. I'm the first to say that I don't regard myself as a writer. I regard myself as a filmmaker. But I find it necessary in order to extend the use these films have, all of the films that are being made, any meaning that they might have to individuals or to a debate that is going on, that one is forced into a position of using language which is current if you like. Er, because I've never studied the English language as a subject, or studied philosophy as a subject, if you like I've not had any intellectual training, and am therefore in a state of having to develop this at the same time as looking at work and making work. So, I'm the first one to be conscious of a certain clumsiness in using terms such as these, but they are the terms that are being used in the current debate.
AP I see.
ML … and that therefore it's really a matter of trying to come to terms with these terms …
AP Yeah.
ML … as much as trying to come to terms with the work. If you like, the work is helping me to understand the terms as much as vice versa. That's why I say very definitely that this is the first draft because it might well be that having worked through, and I haven't finished the first draft, having worked through it, then I'll be in the position to actually go back over the whole thing and realise that some of the terms I've used are inappropriate. Why I used lyrical from a fairly early point in that was really – I mean if you notice I've used small letters for these terms …
AP Yes …
ML … in other words I've not wished to connect them to any fixed notion of what the terms mean or wish to attach the terms to any particular group such as lyric poets or the romantic poets, I've tried to use a term from its base meaning, almost its dictionary meaning, and the word 'lyric' for me, springing from the dictionary, has to do with song …
AP Hmm.
ML … and it may be coincidental but music and words with music are quite a part and parcel of quite a few of Margaret's films, the works that I've seen, and certainly the way in which the big four operate, or the big three that I've seen, they're reminiscent, they remind me of the way in which music and the way in which song operates. I mean the first one I saw, *Where I Am Is Here*, the way I described it initially was very much along the lines of being music. And I was particularly interested to read your sheets that you sent down, I mean is that the first time you've actually made, written down a statement about the work yourself or is that or those texts, do they go back some way?
8.04
MT No, I wrote those, yes, for this occasion, I have written notes before, but I haven't written perhaps more successful. … I've written much briefer notes and maybe a different reading of them, you know, just towards them generally, for general consumption.
ML Yes. Yes. But I was particularly interested in *Where I Am Is Here* to see that you regarded that as I kind of breakthrough-type film because you made the connection between what you'd been writing for 15 or 20 years and the fact that you could approach the use of film in a similar way to the way you'd used words as well. In other words, you use poetry, you use the term poetry.
MT Yes, but …. not necessarily in terms of how I use words. But I was saying to you about using a camera, at that time, because I hadn't been using a camera for some years then and … this unintentional independence you know coming back, I really hoped to be working in some sort of film looking at what's going on in television, to get a job or working in films, and these earlier films, it wasn't really that they were made so terribly differently but they were with the intention of trying to get into a kind of filmmaking say. But the compulsion to make films is strong you see, and I just decided well it's no use making anything more … just kind of sort of assorted shorts so to

speak which in a way that line of government [indecipherable] and that one had to approach the filmmaking with the same intensity as poetry. It wasn't that I meant it should be shaped in the way that one might shape one's words or the approach is like poetry in the sense of poetry using words. I was using that as a sort of level at which one did that.
AP Ah yes, you've quoted that in these notes, and that's how I took it, that it was a …
MT Yes.
AP… level of application, if you like a seriousness, a sense that, well what was the point of aiming at less than the highest expressions of what people are capable of.
MT Yes, in other words there wasn't a readymade audience or market just for documentary films … or shorts of any kind. There wasn't a market for films, there was actually no point in doing it just for a serious point of view or some lesser viewing point of view that – just pointless to do it unless you're just putting all of yourself into it as you would be doing in writing. That was more … possibly filming for that and although that was my ultimate objective in any case and there I thought if I was making feature films I would be doing it like that, but possibly with limited resources one couldn't quite achieve that, and that the difference was that perhaps that even with limited resources one still had to do it on that level. It was something like that really I would say.
AP Yes you could equally well perhaps have said in that statement, you might have said – or could you have said – at the level of music?
MT Yes, or painting or …
AP …in other words, at the level of what has to be called in a sense the high arts, whatever unfortunate way that is perceived now for non-aesthetic reasons. I mean for example a few days ago I heard a proposal saying that you would not now think of composing symphonies because he thought that symphony orchestras were <u>socially</u> anachronistic. Nothing to do with a direct sense that the musical form was anachronistic, but that the means necessary to hear the work were anachronistic.
ML Yes right, yeah…
AP … I see the point, I mean I can see it, but it also disturbs me a wee bit. So, it could be the level of music, I mean that's where the word poetry in that context is sort of misleading, it is ambiguous.
MT Yes, I'd have to go back to the Greek, not that I know Greek but what I understand as poetry and poets [indecipherable]
ML … but, I mean when talking about the writing I then go on to make a kind of comparison between some of the lines of poetry and the kind of similarity with the films not only in terms of form but in terms of some of the images which are being dealt with. I mean this piece that I quote, the poem that I quote, the one gathering stones:

> 'I gathered stones for you, smoothed, yellow, glistening grey, some almost pink, some blue. Stones you still could feel if you will, when in your hand stroke the surface of and sense from the weight's surface, the size the inherent shape of them.'

Yes, I mean that could almost read as a kind of shooting-script for a section of one of the films, maybe not exactly like that but it could be. You could have shot a film that worked in much a similar way.
15.04
AP Yes, but that doesn't in itself define or determine or guarantee the film form really does it? There isn't a necessary connection between that as a proposition or even as a working note. It doesn't in itself, to me, guarantee that all, or any of Margaret's films, could be as it were matched with that. I don't think there's a necessary connection between that expressed in words and what is expressed in the exacting film form that Margaret that has evolved.
ML No. No.

AP I mean, it's inevitable that people go down a number of different roads in the films and so on.
ML Yes. You see the comparison is I mean that that is a way of describing certain objects using those particular sets of words, now a journalist would have used a different set of words to describe the same objects and a prose writer would have used a different set of words. I mean a creative prose writer. In the same way as a documentary filmmaker would have used a different set of images and a different time basis to describe …
MT … selection of words [indecipherable] these particular stones, it's that stone, and that stone and that stone which is really similar to the way I pick images I suppose; I mean it is that piece of puddle and surface of water, and so forth.
AP But did Margaret mention the thing, I mean clearly, she must have sent something down in these notes because you quote, you contain this quote of mine, which was just knocked together, in a few sentences for this Kirkwall Film Show. In a sense it was aimed at a different audience if you'll allow that, a different readership. I came across, I don't know when it was, a quote by [indecipherable] about Simone Weil and Margaret mentioned this, about this thing about loving attentiveness …
ML …Yes that was included in your quote yes but it's not in there, no I didn't quote it entirely because …
17.30
AP … No, I'm not complaining. We're cool here. I was going to place that alongside, say, or place it besides this, that, just as you've got on the one hand say something called a loving attentiveness to all the living world. I do think that's a … to me that seems to me to be a clue, an arrow, a way into people, for the use of people, into some of Margaret's films. But at the same time, I am aware that if there is such a thing as this 'loving attentiveness'. I think then of the sequences that you mentioned in *On the Mountain,* where the camera is in amongst the new precincts and the changes taking place and the 'neurotic' thing in this, now I think, if you remember, Margaret is a doctor and although you're not a surgeon, I suggest to you very important that you should consider that in some ways as well as having a 'loving attentiveness' to a living world, in some ways you could be said sometimes to look at things as if you were a surgeon looking at a hideous, rotten, cancerous, organ or something that was going to be operated upon. In other words, not say in anyway 'neurotic' or 'romantic' or 'emotively attached' because a surgeon couldn't operate. I mean as a kind of basic premise of medical operation, one assumes this, one believes as you've said it often enough, that say a surgeon could not presume to do anything if, you've got to be like Jerry Lewis, you know, neurotic identification empathy or you wouldn't be able to hold the scalpel and I think that it seems to me there are two things in something to do with your presence and your looking. Your looking denotes two things, the fact that you, despite what the world says, you're going to look at things and you're going to look at them with great love and attention and respect and trust, and by implication you are inviting other people to do the same, but running with that, I mean they are actually in tandem here, I mean they are almost a symbiosis of looking. Something either in your basic character or temperament, you know sort of emotional constitution, which may be sent you towards medicine anyway, does give you the chance you see to have a curious, not an unloving way of looking, but a particular kind of detachment which in a shorthand seems to be the kind of detachment that as I say a surgeon would have to use for looking at things which might, from another point of view, be causing people to faint or vomit or be incapable of action, or in a basic sense be unable to look you know, and I think, I've just been thinking of Margaret's films over the last few weeks I think. Really, because well, you've said yourself, you asked her was this the first time you've ever made notes, in a sense, over the years you've never presumed to consider making statements or try to work out the principles or some kind of film theory or you know what it is you've discovered. You work in a sense in an intuitive way, just to, er, enjoy

the moment so that just as you haven't done it, I have over the years never thought of attempting anything like this. Not only because I'd be incapable of it, I mean I don't have the resources I don't have the actual need myself and I'm far too close to Margaret actually to do it in those ways I mean I don't have that kind of detachment because I don't have that surgeon's detachment. But, having said all that, in these last few weeks, a couple of months say since the Edinburgh Festival and in that time when we were preparing these film shows in Kirkwall, I was trying to think through what one could say, which was, part of in a sense current terminology you know, and which was humanly inviting people to look at things. To keep the sort of sense that there are things to be looked at and one should look at things as a human being, that's it, you know a human thing of looking and trust and waiting. And out of that came this quote about Simone Weil who is in no way I don't think Margaret's Simone Weil or anything. Nothing to do with that, no connection there just as a [indecipherable] connection between her poetry, her words and her films. Nevertheless, something which I think is, puts a light onto it is – like a thread in a labyrinth – but you've said it yourself, and other people have said it, that you know, these films make demands on people and if people go in cold whether they're active themselves in films or thoroughly knowledgeable about films and you know, highly sensible in terms of aesthetics. Not only those, but just the general audience, this beautiful average audience you get in Kirkwall, they will tend just to be not so much lost as never be found. They can't find themselves. They'll find incidental things, but they won't necessarily just and indeed the simple things. I don't think that the demands that your films make are such that they are, you know, unapproachable by people. I think that people can just, in a sense, get it because it is a matter of just getting it. It's simply being there and watching and waiting and just seeing what happens and seeing how many things <u>might</u> happen. How many things you <u>might</u> see, how in fact one sees so many different things each time you see the film. I went on then, I don't know where did I start from? Oh yes, two things, one at the same time the 'loving attentiveness' and this other sort of 'present detachment'. Does that make sense to <u>you</u> Margaret?
23.39
MT Well, I think maybe the word human is what you were meaning when you used the word romantic. Is that possible? [indecipherable]
ML No, I don't think it was on my mind, no.
MT And I've [indecipherable] another use of the word lyric. This goes [indecipherable] sort of detachment [indecipherable] idea anyway, if you think of lyric, lyric form, but then when you make it into the adjective lyrical, I think that's a word that's been debased rather.
ML Yes, Right. Right. I mean this is the problem.
MT yes, and so that previously lyrical, oh I don't know quite what I mean. I mean I don't think lyrical just works as an adjective from lyric really.
AP No, but I think actually Mike's nearer it, I mean both nearer what people make of the word and also through that maybe further away from a certain [indecipherable] of the films because you said that the lyric songs and so on.
MT I think lyric can be quite severe really ([indecipherable] under AP) …
AP … you see I don't think that Margaret's films are songs, in the sense of statements if you like.
ML Hmm. Hmm.
AP … I mean they're not statements that can be drawn out of them and then turned into words, but I mean I would say that, in a general sense, Margaret's poems are not lyrical. Margaret's poems are – statement's not the right word – I think that they're more speaking
MT No, I don't see them in terms of statements, but I use, I use statements.
25.28

AP I think you speak in your poetry; I mean I think what you do is speak to people, I don't think . . .
MT Hmm. Hmm.
AP … I mean to try and get the thing right I mean I withdraw the word statement because it suggests maybe something too definite and assertive. But I think that if it's possible in the sense that, if we talk in this generalised way I mean about a corpus that either I think that your poems involve your speaking voice, not of any singing voice and that's why I say the lyric, the word lyric [indecipherable] with the definition, the derivation of it and this unfortunate adjectival thing, is a questionable thing I mean it just – it makes me feel uneasy.
ML Hmm …
AP … I wish I could get hold of a word which is not just speaking and not just statement. But I think actually she was, there's more, it seems to me, there's much more, there's strange paradoxes here in your poetry just as there is much more dramatically and extremely in your films because, you do not actually make statements. I mean you never sought to rationalise your method your process, your film processing, the kind of whatever it is a philosophy which is inherent or incoherent or cohering in your time and your work scale. You don't do that. It doesn't mean that – you're not primitive, as Malcolm Le Grice says. You're not primitive. I mean you're a highly sophisticated and highly intellectual, highly ordered filmmaker but all these things of intellect, of philosophy, of statement, of aesthetic, you know, are in the films. I mean, they are – I mean it's the whole thing – they are what the films are about. And if other people want to make the translation, let them make the translation, but you're not going to give people a parallel reading in words.
ML No. No.
AP … when I say you're not that's not an imperative. I'm saying it's unlikely because a) I could never see the need of it and b) it sometimes seems to me that if you're ever sought to do that, that this might in fact have severely inhibited your direct, you know, your direct artistic work on film, which is always a curse. I mean, if one tries to, it always seems to me against a general proposition of work – of creative work, you know that if one intellects at the wrong stage, you've buggered the thing, you know, you've cut off or you've muddied the channel in some sort of way. Well, you've never done that and that's what makes your films among other things what they are. But it's not that they're, that's why I'm trying to get rid of the word lyrical. I do think that the rigour, the intellectual rigour, the spiritual content of the films and the emotional sensibility in the films are in the films. And they are well-clear of what I think of as lyrical productions. It's not to diminish lyrical productions. I just do not see this. I mean it's a different order of intensity, a different kind of weight and it seems to me [indecipherable] if people gave themselves to the films, they would get it. Nevertheless, it's of an order that makes enormous demands on people's thought processes, emotional maturity, and sort of spiritual potential. How does that grab you doctor? There's no chance for that. I mean does that make [indecipherable] I said that at some length, because I usually speak at some length. [Laughter all round]
It's also I think for me, at this stage, there's a difference of approach. I see that what I call the gestalt element in Margaret's films clearly as you know the films are much more than their parts and by my degree of defining it they're much more than what one could say about, perhaps in a very highly developed way and complex way, one could say about all the technicalities of filmmaking you know, and all the things which maybe much more strongly preoccupy you on the basis of your own work method, your work ethic. [indecipherable] I like the idea myself increasingly of asserting for my own purposes, if you like, the central fact of the humanity in Margaret's films. Nothing to do with sentimentality, nothing to do with your average 'grab' of people's feelings, but with a sort of authentic human statement about being alive and being present in the world. Because I think one can move from the microcosm of looking at a stone through the concept of

presence being a stone, right the way through to one's sense of being present in some, whatever we like to call it you know, the sense of being present in a time span …

31.12
ML Sure, well this is something that I try hard to establish when talking about the *Rose Street* film or The Mountain film. This whole aspect of being present in that case within a community. When it comes to the other films *On The Mountain* and *Where I Am Is Here* it's a sense as well, when you come to the other films, the non-Edinburgh films, it's a little more difficult to identify that humanistic element.
AP Well …
ML I know it's present …
AP … I don't mean humanistic Mike, you see it's not that at all, I mean – I don't mean that I think that Margaret is a humanist, because I don't think you are in that way. And it's not that I mean that Margaret this thing of human has to do with Margaret being in a community or not in a community. Let me just stop for a moment and say, you see that I think that whatever film one's talking about, every film that Margaret's made is about Margaret as far as I'm concerned.
ML Hmm.
AP … really, it's absolutely about you in a sense that the films are Margaret for me. *Where I Am Is Here* might apparently be, and it's reasonable to say it's a film about Edinburgh in a sense and can be defined in a certain way, a certain approach of Margaret's.
ML No, I've never described it as about Edinburgh.
AP … I think these films are just you. I mean I just think that's what they are – everything that they – the sort of centrality of the films is really posited on the fact of Margaret's presence but then there's another little paradox that you never see Margaret apart from the statuary, the obligatory mirror shots which you know are just a wee fun trick as far as you're concerned, nevertheless there's a paradox that those films are absolutely Margaret, every film there is, but you never see her.
33.04
ML Hmm …
AP … and that's [indecipherable] I'm never quite sure how to handle that. You see how she just sits there quietly now and she's just going to let us rabbit on. I've seen this you know.
ML Well, it happened last time …
MT … To the extent that Mike wrote and said that 'you and I are going to have a discussion' [laughter all round] but I would be able to keep warm [indecipherable] by the discussion as much as from the fire. [Laughter]
AP Well of course, right enough. Oh well that was a wee slight tongue in the cheek [indecipherable]. I mean in fact just for the record it wasn't related to *Sheepman* or …
MT … exercises in perception.
AP It's nothing to do with …
ML OK, well I was just wondering what other films you'd seen, that's all
AP I was just thinking about that, since … I read your note then that mentioned that, again one would have to, I'll maybe ask you later on to define your terms.
Over the years I suppose I would say that just in the Edinburgh Festival as well, one has seen a great range of things that at that time you know were regarded as, or stated to be, whatever the terms were, you know, experimental or avant-garde.
ML Hmm …
AP … which were the two terms that were broadly used. So, there's that kind of background. Now if you ask me what films I've seen that since apparently something happened. You know, we'll say a major shift within Britain, or a kind of flowering of a genre or a series of redefinitions of a genre, I honestly couldn't name them.

MT …we saw some of them …
AP … I mean over the years you see. Well over the years you see, [indecipherable] it's not that I've obviously not seen the range of films here that were shown at the Hayward Gallery, presumably a fairly comprehensive one, although at the same time limited to films which have been financed largely or totally by the Arts Council.
ML No…
AP …well that's what it said in Dusinberre.
ML Mine hadn't. No there's quite a few films in there, that were shown, I mean, quite possibly virtually everyone's had some kind of contact with the subsidy bodies but not necessarily the Arts Council.
AP Oh I was basing that on what er ….
ML but then just about every filmmaker has anyway who's working in this particular field, even yourself …
AP Well they were saying this you see.
ML … had a bit of assistance from the Scottish Arts Council.
MT …little bit …
AP … well it may not have been Dusinberre who said this, rather that somebody quoted something, and I was partly maybe a misquoted, or done what [indecipherable] did to you, or what Dusinberre did to your perhaps fuller notes, in order to just get them on two sides of a [indecipherable] that it gave the wrong impression.
ML Yes.
MT But when I saw some at Bristol – and there was a television programme. [The] BBC put on a programme of some independent films you know ...
ML Oh but they were student, they did a series of student films.
MT No, Malcolm Le Grice and …
AP The Open University put on shows.
ML Oh that's right.
AP … but I take your point, I mean I would not claim [indecipherable] I can see that absolutely that I …
MT … in Edinburgh we saw …
ML No I was just wondering which films you would actually apply that description to …
MT It starts from this little booklet too of what people say about [indecipherable]
ML … 'cos I remember you were rather critical after Annabel [Nicolson] and I had shown you some films that time in Orkney – you were – I remember you being critical, but I didn't think you were that critical to …
AP I wasn't critical. I remember this particularly because afterwards I think Annabel had been a bit offended or couldn't understand why I should have said what I said … (**end of tape)**

Tape: KnaTait 2 (45 mins)
MT I noticed that the Co–op had a programme of his work, maybe including that one …
ML What did you think of Malcolm's film?
MT Well.
ML Because I haven't seen it.
MT Yes. I found it a bit boring really.
ML You did. Yes. Yes.
MT I didn't entirely [indecipherable] In fact, I saw it twice, saw most of it twice. I went in late [indecipherable] … I didn't realise it was going to be on at the [indecipherable] show till we got tickets for the actual show.
AP Yeah.
ML Have you ever had a response, um, to a show of your work which has been along the same lines, has anyone ever said to you that they found the films boring?
MT No, I don't think anyone's ever [indecipherable]

AP … I once met Ricky DeMarco a few years ago just by chance in Edinburgh, it was at the time that Malcolm Le Grice's little mention of Margaret in *Studio International* came out, and I went in and found myself having lunch with him in Edinburgh in a cafe and showed him this and he was gulping down sausage, egg and bacon and a cup of tea or something, and wolfing this and trying to read this and saying
great, great, great, great, great …
ML Yeah.
AP … and he went on to say, do you know I really must tell you the reasons why people don't like Margaret's films, and then he didn't. [Laughter] I have not found out yet why. I know … I assume and register probably using the word that many people seem not to like Margaret's films, including someone apparently at the *Arnolfini*, who doesn't want to put on the films because he doesn't like them.
ML Yes, that's right. Well I told you about that.
MT …[indecipherable] … he only puts on films that he personally likes.
ML Basically I think so yeah!
AP But last summer …
ML Which is one way of programming …
MT … what criteria? when has he seen my films …
ML At the Edinburgh Festival I think.
AP You mean seven years ago?
ML He's a – he's got the same surname as Annabel (Nicolson)
MT He's from Edinburgh, is he?
ML I think so yes.
MT He's seen them in 1970, has he?
ML No he can't have done, he's too young.
AP He hasn't seen them, because, or rather, if he saw them, he saw…
ML He's probably seen one or two at Ricky's or something.
MT He would have seen them at Demarco's gallery yes.
AP Well he could only have seen one or two. But then they're two of the big four as far as I'm concerned. But do you remember last summer?
MT Or he may have been one of the very people that Ricky was talking
about … [indecipherable].
ML Yeah. Yeah.
MT or the very first one [indecipherable]
AP … but at the festival this year there were all these delegates, many more people were registered I think than I've ever seen before and up on the wall went the list with the box numbers obviously with the names on them to find out who was who. Now, quite a number of people from London were there, in and around the avant-garde. Names I recognised who were there including say [indecipherable], you know, they were all there. Now, none of them as far as I know, turned up at Margaret's films.
MT Well no, I mean …
ML Hmm.
AP Well, as far as I know, I said that. Or rather put it another way, even if they turned up, none of them identified themselves afterwards, now there were all these people whom you'd may be recommended to Margaret in the past, along the lines of why don't you contact so-and-so – just various names – Paul Taylor of the ICA, or various other people whose names we see in different magazines or hear about on *Kaleidoscope* or something and prior to the showing, the Edinburgh Festival people were not privy, there were no press showings it was a matter of coming to a public showing at half past ten at night or whenever it was. So, a couple of days before that I did a very hasty and rather messy photocopy of that section of the *Studio International* article by Le Grice that mentioned Margaret and got the various numbers from this master-board and put in 40 or 50, you see, to the people whom I thought would be more interested or were they going to turn up. Well after the show I went round the boxes and took out the ones that

had who had never been approached, because by this time piles of bumph were forming in these boxes, and briefly, nobody seemed to come up. Nobody that I saw in the show seemed to be armed with one of these. It wasn't a bad wee house actually – it wasn't Margaret's films exclusively there was an Arts Council film about Tom Phillips, then there was this incredible [indecipherable] diary stuff you know, it drove one crazy but, repeating myself, none of these people appeared …
ML … festivals are a crazy time. I mean I wasn't up there this year. I was up there the year before just for a week and attending seminars in the morning and then going to films in the evening, and it was just a handful of us from these heavy seminars that went on all morning, all, virtually all discussing avant-garde work, and it was just a handful of us who actually went to see the films these seminars were addressed to. As far as I could make out, most of the seminar people were all off seeing the kind of, the latest [indecipherable] films, Cannes and Berlin and wherever. I mean we just couldn't work it out, we just couldn't understand it. I mean the [indecipherable] to this show the [indecipherable] who've been making films and been on the current scene since its inception – '66 – have written a lot, had a lot written about them, who have only been very briefly to the States, and there a lot of Americans there for these series, and they had a show of new work, a long two hour show, entirely of all their new work and I think there were a dozen of thus there out of [indecipherable] 100 people registered for the seminars series.
AP It tends to happen. Well we didn't get down last year, it's a pity because we should have somehow managed to go down when we heard there was a section on avant-garde [in the] second week or third week.
ML It was the second week yeah.
AP We couldn't manage it
MT … aiming to get down but er, [indecipherable] I can't remember the things that stopped us
AP Well among other things it's a question of cost of course …
MT Yes, largely the cost.
ML Sure.
MT But it is at the Festival [indecipherable] there were things we would have liked to see but somehow we didn't get to them, you find you don't have quite enough energy to see them <u>all</u>
ML Yes, that's it. I mean the screening started at lunchtime, so quite possibly by half past ten quite a few people had just had enough, or they wanted to go off and have a drink.
MT If you're not going to do justice to film you know, you're better not to go. I think that's what you sometimes feel.
7.45
ML I mean the extraordinary thing is the chances of seeing the independent work is [indecipherable] much more reduced than the chance of picking up all this semi commercial stuff.
MT And I suppose ...
ML Which is the basis of what I choose.
MT If you're going to miss out one or the other, I would miss out the seminar part and see the film actually.
ML Yeah. Yeah.
MT … there was a seminar of some kind going on this year too, but I [indecipherable] thought it fairly elementary
AP ... [indecipherable] popular memory.
ML That's right, the egg heads are quite keen on pursuing this psychoanalytical line.
AP Well that was, well they had 'film and psychoanalysis' two years back didn't they?
ML Yes that's right but this 'memory' was springing out of that.

AP … [indecipherable] some of the references we knew [indecipherable] or source material…
MT … the introduction … in such turgid sort of language wasn't it? [still speaking under AP]
AP I mean Michel Foucault is always being quoted in bits and pieces – interviews. There was a magazine issued this year which contained either the papers that were going to be read or digests or something.
ML It was the background, I think, wasn't it? It was the year before, it was kind of background
MT What was that thing that you were [indecipherable] about exercises and structure [indecipherable] hardly related to the ….
AP It's possibly true, I didn't find it boring. I don't very often find things boring. It's not that at all because you can always, being presumptuous, you can always find something [indecipherable] it did seem to me that it was an exploration of a presentation of, not exactly what was known already, but which was to some extent beside the point. And I think perhaps in the note, the introductory note to the film by Malcolm Le Grice it was printed in the Film Festival brochure/book, he did himself refer to it as dealing with perception. It wasn't that I was then stating that and saying that all the experimental films I'd seen had to do with, you know perception. But maybe this notion of the avant-garde. The word avant-garde wasn't quite used in that way, at the time that I was watching all kinds of films that were called experimental. My memory does tell me that the films seem to be films about the act of perceiving as almost an end in itself. Not in terms of ticking things off in terms of saying well yes, I've seen that like a boy scout in a sweet shop window you know being given 60-seconds to see what's in the window then go around the corner and write them down and win a prize. I don't mean that. Because I could see there is obviously a lot of work seriousness, a lot of practical application and one sees it operating, I mean to say well, I don't mean when I say 'so what?' I don't mean that to be dismissive exactly, but I do think to go back and bring [Jenny ? indecipherable] into it again, I do think that much of what I have seen being presented as experimental film material in the past, has long since been incorporating in the most egregious, mediocre and poisonous of commercial films …
MT ... certainly not only them but in better commercial films.
AP Well yes, but even then, in some ways I can see how some people would say look there's an enormous amount in film which has really never been noticed and I can see that all sorts of things might be produced and made available and it would have an enormously valuable effect on people who somehow or other missed out on what I think of as golden decades of my life when the great, awful, commercial narrative film informed our being and consumed us and yet liberated us or liberated our imagination or encouraged us to dream, you know, and went through the whole gamut of human feeling. I like human feeling. I can see that, and I use the word exercise, and I could see… And I don't mean that in a pejorative way either, but going back to the notion of the gestalt, I don't actually see, if I think of those films, I don't actually think of them as being more than what they are in themselves in a kind of Kantian way. We were talking about this the other day, a sort of thing in itself. In a really important way, some things are just themselves and they're sort of invulnerable. I mean, I do think there are certain films that are just invulnerable because they are there, and they may in some… If they were dug up in a hundred years' time, they would be perhaps the truest kind of icons of our time. I could conceive that type of thing.
MT incoherent in background.
AP they might actually be in their very kind of this-ness, you know, and I don't mean as oddities and I don't mean as museum pieces, but they might actually have something of the living.
ML I never really consider that side of things.
AP You don't? Well, I do.

ML I'm more interested in the kind of contribution and artefact, whether it's a film or a poem or a piece of writing about a film or a poem and the contribution that's going to make to whatever's going on at the moment.
MT (indistinct and underneath discussion) …I don't think … they're not meant to be that …
they're not meant to be.
AP No, I'm not saying they're mean to be that …
MT My opinion … I don't suppose Malcolm sees his films as being that either but there was something, not just of the time but also of the place. I mean it seemed to me just the essence of [the work in] London.
AP Can I just clarify that. I didn't mean that that was what the makers thought their films were, I meant rather that people who follow us might project something of that back into them, it's not – I'm not saying that's the raison d'être of the …
ML That's bound to happen, I mean that's what happens when we pick up C19th artefacts, for me anyway.
AP Ah but then there's a question of more or less, some maybe do seem to subsume their time, or subsume something of their time in a way that others don't. I mean, surely, it's not that everything from the past is …
MT No, but in Malcolm's film, I can't [?] expect him to go a bit further from home. I expect him to go further into what he's doing but [indecipherable] he was doing something by means of repetition and slight variations on repetition.
AP …. I think it's a film that you couldn't fault. I think he probably got exactly what he wanted so that in those terms, that's it. It's not a feeling of regret or dissatisfaction that somebody may have – I use the word failed – or just wasn't fully budgeted enough etc. etc. that didn't seem to me to come into it. I feel that this film was probably, he might in fact repudiate this, or prove that it wasn't so, but the film did present itself to me as being
MT indistinct in background.
AP … an expression of what it was meant to be so that counts for something. But, I think there are some films or works of art that have [indecipherable] that have the sort of charge of art whatever [indecipherable] it might be just a tiny charge, even a wattage thing, and for me, if films don't have that, then I am less interested in them. But I think there has to be – I heard Allen Bush a composer again on Sunday, and he's one of three composers who were talking about the difficulties of composers today you know, contemporary music and all the rest of it, and where the money was coming from and whether they had they got their work performed and so on. And there were three composers in a sense from different generations, Allan Bush is now in his seventies, and the middle one, his name escapes me now, the younger generation of composers a man called Michael Finnasay who seemed to be maybe around 30 or something. And inevitably they were talking about the whole range of contemporary music from the use of traditional instrumentation [indecipherable] and all the earlier processes, all the new kinds of instruments as it were or new means of making sound that were available and all the rest of it. And Allan Bush said something that interested me and seemed to me to be central to much of what we're faced with in terms of the whole spectrum of art or artefacts today. He was telling about music, and he was talking about all these things to do with music and organised sound, and he said he put the thing to himself in this way, and this was critical really, a crucial thing to him, when does the sound event become the music event? And that really made my ears ring because I think this can be applied you know, when does the, if you allow it, when does the …
MT … the obfuscation [?] [indecipherable].
AP well, when does, what is the word, when does the visual event become the film event? That's not the right word, but do you see what I mean? I'm trying to get an equivalent distinction or parallel thing between say sound and music and what …
MT When does the recorded event become the 'art' event?

AP Yes, Yes.
ML Phenomenon?
AP I mean, is this a problem for you? Is this something that you think about or draw into your consideration of your work, or do you think there is no distinction there? There's no sort of value thing in there?
18.11
AP I mean do you think there is maybe something maybe just sound.
ML Hmm.
AP … to you for arguments sake. I mean Allan Bush gave us the example, say something that … would take 118 minutes to play and [indecipherable] going up and down the scale in a certain way with possibly hardly any variation [indecipherable] that was it. The work was that sort of thing. And he saw that and defined it as a sound event, but he was not prepared to, and he couldn't see, how it, in those terms, in that way could be a music event.
ML Hmm.
AP And I do think from what I've seen. I'm not talking about what I've not seen. I'm not presuming to dismiss things that I've not seen I mean that's just nonsense.
But generally, I could see that there are many things in film which have an existence as a visual presentation, but they don't make, there's not a little electrical charge or whatever it is from that into the film event. And, I'm not meaning that it has to be tested or checked against some conventional notion you know of narrative cinema or any of the received formerly dominant things because I think these things can operate in a certain – no doubt that in the whole field of something called experimental and the avant-garde, there are bound to be things which finally are remarkable and complete, and do you know, make your hair stand on end. But, I can't think at the moment. Having said that you see I saw this film earlier in the Edinburgh Festival might be regarded as experimental or avant-garde a film called *Heresy* which is directed by David Pearce and had half a dozen camera assistants one of whose names I remember – Anne Rees-Mogg [indecipherable] and some people would say it is avant-garde. I suppose it was flung in as avant-garde by the Edinburgh film people. It [indecipherable] certainly was its own kind of film you know; it just had its own raison d'être and it had this thing which made you get drawn into it. But I mean, and you don't know the film?
ML No I don't.
AP … I don't know whether it would fall into such a category or you might find that it was not in that area.
ML Such a category of avant-garde or … [indecipherable]
AP ... whatever there is – not that category – but as something that might interest you as a worker as a doer more than say as a watcher or even as a consumer.
ML Yes, I'm not quite sure the distinction that you're trying to make, I mean I think, on one level that it's the same question that's always asked, certainly the description is used, making your hair stand on end.
AP [indecipherable]
ML I'm sure everyone who is seriously committed to working in a field is actually after making something which has a strong element of meaning to themselves and they'd been after producing it in such a way that they feel they've made that element of meaning available to other people, but eventually it comes down to 1) whether they're being honest with themselves and 2) whether in fact the film, other film viewers, are going to have that basis from which to work. I mean you've been describing the problem you've been having with looking at a lot of the work because you're unfamiliar with what it's setting out to do with what it has raised in other people, if you like
AP No, but I didn't quite catch [indecipherable] the end of that. What it raises with other people? what other people? You mean people who are involved in it?
ML Yes, not necessarily as makers but as viewers, kind of committed viewers.

AP Well, all I'm saying is. What I'm saying not dismissive and is no way an attempt to dismiss or repudiate at all. I'm simply trying to say what effect certain things might have had on me or not had on me I'm not presuming to dismiss the whole area of serious workings …
ML Yeah, I think to come back to where it all started, I think why I just used that last part of that statement you've written was because that was the thing that that was most directly addressed Margaret's work, whereas your introduction was relevant in so far as you felt. But I actually felt that Margaret actually said it herself much better in those two lines that I quoted. I mean that was another way of saying it if you like but it was her words. And then to leave out the bit where you made reference to other work. I mean the only reference you made to other work was a kind of critical reference. And in a sense was out of context to Margaret's work …
AP Yes, at the time, this was penned because I thought it might have been possible to get it into the Orcadian as a very brief piece. As a sort of gloss on the whole coming programme so that was written in the context of an Orkney situation with the sense that there was going to be an audience some of whom already knew Margaret's films vaguely and who either, I don't mean didn't like them, but were not going to come to them anyway because they'd simply misinterpreted them or did not know really what they were about. I mean to go back to your point about, you know; one doesn't really know what people are about. You may as well bow out which is what I essentially do. It was really the Orcadian reader and the possible Orcadian audience member that I was trying to inveigle into the theatre by just putting in their mind as in that first sentence, the possibility of making a distinction – that was all [indecipherable]
25.42
ML … do you appreciate the way I've used it here though? I mean would you agree that the complexity is further highlighted and then I quote your bit, I mean do you see – why I regard those two sentences as being complex within the context of what I was writing about. This is where I was attempting to clarify the way in which the films can be read?
AP Yes.
ML I quoted these three ways in fact I think there are probably more than that, but for a first draft, there are three ways in which the films could be read, because the notes that Margaret had made about *Where I Am Is Here* I found a little ambiguous in that they didn't actually give a clear way through to what was intended **…**
AP Margaret wouldn't tell, wouldn't say what she thought her films were about [laughing]
ML … and so you know I became speculative and actually pulled out these what I regarded as key words which tended to confuse the way in which the films could be read such as response to the city, the level of poetry and intensity of observation, necessity of the material itself somewhat. I mean they do have a sense but in the context of the way they were used they're a little unqualified and so I was kind of speculating based on that. At which point I'd brought you in again because there was a kind of ambiguity about what you said as well. The whole general direction was going towards the fact that a lot of the film, current film work, thinks it's specific and in what Margaret writes and what you write you're quite prepared to let a level of ambiguity into it …
AP I would say I don't know how anybody [indecipherable]. No that's being too stupid, but in a certain way ambiguity is an inevitable factor, an almost inevitable factor in [indecipherable] I have to start again ...
MT … this might be what's lacking in the less satisfying of films for instance [indecipherable] a lack of ambiguity, you know? Could be. I'm thinking [indecipherable] – a bit too unambiguous, I mean they may be obscure, or intending to be obscure but er …
AP but you see that list is a provision list of what you had there and clearly you could build on those; I mean all sorts of things you grow out of them. I had no knowledge of your draft or your intentions when I wrote those few sentences, that's the limit of what I've ever written about Margaret's films.

ML …I'm surprised at that …
AP Well no, you see,
MT … I actually took a [indecipherable] …
AP … a few sentences, it was no more, as I say, it was written at a certain time and aimed at a certain kind of audience and at the same time it was quite tongue in cheek because I was trying to get certain things in which might encourage those who read it to just think for a moment about themselves and possibly, they'd end up watching the films and getting a lead into it. Having said that, I do think that that it relevant to Margaret's films, but it is not at all definitive and I wouldn't again want to go through a sort of close textual analysis of the thing. I mean I would if I was pushed but I wouldn't want to. Nevertheless, I suppose that at the back of my mind as I was writing that, I did have the feeling that maybe I was remembering reading the, whatever it was called 'The Structuralist' …
ML … Film Anthology …
AP … a thing the BFI sent out to do with …
ML I sent you a copy yeah.
MT Yes you sent us it.
AP Did you? Well thanks very much. I was wondering where we got it from.
ML Well the BFI sent me two copies for some reason, so I thought well you know everyone else can easily get hold of a one but that you would probably have more difficulty, so I thought I would send you a …
AP Yes, that was fine, I did read that. And I read some of the things and had to, more than a few times, and …
ML … oh well yes, that's part and parcel of them. I'm still reading Peter Gidal's piece which he wrote two years ago, but then that's the level on which it operates I'm convinced
AP Well what level is that?
ML … it's a thing you take in short sections and you go back to every now and then. Deke Dusinberre feels the same he's written an essay to the effect.
AP … that you?
ML …that that's not actually an article so much as a kind of glossary right?
AP Ye-es.
ML … as a polemical glossary that …
MT Well that's what I understand of it …
ML … I quite often go to it, sort of every six months because here's something bugging in my head, whether it's a semantic problem or whether it's a trying to formulate a response of some work, and I have this kind of notion of what it is and didn't Gidal say something about that? And go and find the relevant two sentences. And it kind of dislodges something, I find it a very useful article on that basis.
MT Hmm.
ML … I said to him after I read it the first time, that I couldn't really read it, I couldn't make much sense of it just by reading it through and that I treated it more as a piece of poetry and he went 'WHAT?' [laughter]. As a piece of pure writing is exactly what I actually said.
AP I think there is a clear problem here then that when people are trying to set down things which are obviously difficult …
ML … Yeah…
AP … and there's a question to some extent of introducing neologisms and perhaps explaining the meanings of words or dusting off the meanings of words and getting them a new meaning or giving them a new inflection within a specific recognised context. I mean that in a sense is the essence of all philosophy any time, not only in the C20th …
ML I wasn't sure that he was philosophising there …
AP No, well not using philosophy in the terms of systematics, just as any kind of series of statements about the nature of being or truth, or any kind of human action. Having said

all that, there are clear instances I suppose in philosophy or anything else of the necessary evolution of new terms and new processes of thinking or of requiring students to keep their minds open and to study and see what is meant and eventually achieve a full understanding what is meant. [This is the] the basis of all scholarship and all human progress, but more often than not I would say, and this is not directed against that book as such by Peter Gidal specifically because he's not necessarily the worst of all, to use that word. This can sometimes seem to be or end up as a teleology as a creation of a self-sustaining jargon which is not in itself adding to the sum of human knowledge and is not somehow or other going to admit very much to the human mind even, no matter after how much study. Now that's an over statement …
34.12
ML … in Gidal's case I don't think that's happening, I think in the case of a lot of the writers in *Screen* I would agree with you …
AP I don't know *Screen* other than …
MT [indecipherable].
AP … but I've read, and I've re-read, course I do, it's not a matter of opening it and scanning down and saying [indecipherable]. I live by words in the sense that, that's it, and I look at things and I do want to see what people are saying. I do want to try and crack it and I do want to admit either that I am wrong or not up to it and it's not a matter of saying because I am not up to it that it is lacking in meaning or purpose or relevance and that it's not in fact accessible to other people. But in my present state of being and out of my memory, or having done this kind of thing I pride myself, in different very difficult forms of expression as a layman usually, I conclude at the moment that a lot of this will very quickly date, it's not going to be self-sustaining and is not central to the work process which is what art is about, it's about doing things. I mean films are films and films do not in the last analysis it seems to me – need to be – need to have a very quickly cobbled together possibly quasi sophisticated series of film aesthetics or film theories.
ML Hmm, well I …
AP … I don't think that people – and I can see how something might come out of it, but I can also see how this seems to create another sort of – I don't know – er, it's a kind of er – not scholasticism exactly it's just a sort of clotted thing. It offends my sense of form I must say and this may just define me as a traditionalist you know or a pseudo mandarin full of Victorian cadences, but it doesn't stand up to my sort of taste or – I'm not talking about Fowler's good English now or anything – I'm not talking about something which comes out of school primers or anything like that. But incidentally, in parenthesis, it has to be said that much of it seems to lack a certain elementary knowledge of syntax you know and punctuation ...
ML Are you still talking about Gidal?
AP Yes Gidal and these others.
ML Well, it's quite deliberate, it's quite deliberate.
AP Well, yes, I was going to say that. It's deliberate, so why is it deliberate? Partly for some provocation …
ML Alienation. He's a Brechtian.
AP Well yes, I couldn't deduce him as a Brechtian, but I could deduce that this was possibly in some cases maybe not his but in another, that it is part of some provocation or some part of the well-known earlier avant-garde of [indecipherable] or something you know fighting something in the face of the bourgeoisie which I'm not. But I think it demeans scholarship. I think it devalues the potential in such a consideration of serious works or possibly serious work. I think if people are writing seriously about these issues, get it as clear as possible …
ML Well that would make them writers. That would make them philosophers and they're not

AP Well, what are they then?
ML They're polemicists?
AP Yes clotted polemicists who in fact are writing in such a way as to not alienate but to antagonise and obfuscate. Now that's not healthy and it's not sensible.
ML No I don't think it's working there. I mean it might work that way for people in general but it's not working that way for people who are looking at the films and I mean none of that would make sense unless one was looking at the films.
AP None of what would make sense. What I have said?
ML What … appears in Structural Film Anthology.
AP But, would the films make sense if that hadn't been written?
ML Er, some of them would but a lot of them, particularly Gidal's work makes more sense when taken with the writing. I mean it's a whole field which is interesting me greatly, that's why I am particularly interested to be launching into this. I am not particularly bothered, but I haven't particularly been working on a film as such for the last year since I got back from the States.
AP I see.
ML I just haven't I mean, I just haven't…
AP Well, why is that then?
ML Things haven't come about such that I've felt enough drive to push through any of the four or five things that are in process at the moment.
AP Hmm.
ML Nothing's reached conclusion. I mean things have jogged along slightly here and there but, most of the time it's been reading and making notes and this has been the most solid piece of writing I've produced so far, not because its er, as an artefact in its own right because of – I mean in the same way as the films, if you like, it's more of a residue of a particular series of thoughts that I've encountered in the process of attempting to clarify something …
39.50
AP Well residue is another blinding word because I came across something of Pareto, I don't know very much about it. It seems to be name that's quoted, I think he was Italian or maybe he was a historian or a semiologist or something before anyone know what a semiologist was, but he's been dead for 40 years or 50 years.
ML Well, Malcolm said what a semiologist was in a letter to me the other day.
AP He did?
ML Yes, he said, 'semiology is the study of half an -ology. When it's not that then it's the study of things that seem to be or are not what they seem to be.' [Laughter]
MT (background) Semiology!
AP I think he got that from the, from the indoor Australian philosopher Spike Milligan. [Laughter].
MT … well this might be the seeds of what it means.
AP The seeds, yes, well, let me hang on to 'residue' because Pareto [indecipherable] among many other things no doubt, he divided the things in human people's lives – the things that we just are in the presence of in a sense whether it's cultural accumulation of whether it's just nature's way, between things that he called 'residues' and things that he called derivations, now again I'm not exactly paraphrasing him, remember something of what he said – but the residues then relate to myths and to the constants in the species and the constants of [indecipherable] a range of response to that from the highest to the lowest to the most complete to the most narrow and useless. These are the residues of all human experience – of all human history on earth, in time. And the derivations of a [indecipherable] of human experience, but are the things which are passing or er, temporary or [indecipherable] …
ML … ephemeral.
AP … and also on the surface of life generally. I mean the surface of life generally and the surface of individual life, and I think that – and this is Unamuno [who] makes the

distinction between the individual and the personality and also as Neil Gunn talks about, the first self and the second self. I'm doing it very quickly. Then each of us is a first self and a second self, and see, the first self in fact is a part of this constant and this continuity of the species, the continuity of the great mythic surges and ebbing and flowing of humanity. The second self then is that which is subjected to the passing superficialities of life. Now I think that the first, that Neil Gunn's first self, that Unamuno's 'individual' or individuality and Pareto's 'residues' all relate to Margaret's films. Now what Margaret's films are about and what you're speaking to or what you're speaking from, come from that. And not at all from the second self, the derivation and the personality, and because we are in a society, and perhaps any society, just in its nature seems to give precedence and priority to the superficial, which is the personality and the second self and the derivation. That's why, to cut a long story short, people don't like Margaret's films …
MT [laughing]
AP … because they, most people in fact damaged it seems beyond repair for whatever reason, and most people live out their lives incapable of sinking back into those things or to recognising those things which are in us all, you know, I mean they are in us all, and yet most people seem, on the face of it, they go through life nipped in, held back, not open to experience, not open to the experience of themselves …
ML Hmm.
AP … and I think that's why it's er – in the short term – even in a life span – very difficult to think that your films could speak in that way to the generality and this is not an elitist statement – to the generality but – and then [indecipherable] many examples from art. This is where this whole thing of art being avant-garde or people chasing to catch up however you put it. Sometimes certain things have to wait to find their time because their essence and their value, and in a sense their permanence, depends on being separated to some extent from the time of their making. I mean that's in fact is what the dialectic between the avant-garde and the convention is in some ways because the avant-garde becomes then, not the convention of the next sweep, but the orthodoxy because by that time it's been absorbed. It's been absorbed then in some sort of way into the generality of consciousness of the generality of response. Now this is not a doom-laden thing, it's not that we're waiting for you to drop dead, but it's just that there's something in that. Do you think there's any of that? No?
MT [laughs]…
AP This residue – think about that.
ML Hmm. Hmm. That's good you know it's …
MT The opposite thing of derivative is derivation (**end of tape**)

Tape: **KnaTait Tape 3a (6.48 min)**
MT [mid conversation] Some people who may be made a film or two like this which nowadays might be called – might be given the word Structural that at that time it had a different kind of label you know, but not unrelated. There's always been people making films on their own I think, 16 or more than 16 and even if you don't see them somehow or other you hear about them. Just exactly where I have, I couldn't exactly tell you I suppose, I mean somehow, we knew. Some people mentioning them, that sort of thing. I've seen a few, as I said last night at the Edinburgh Festival, some that I saw in Rome ...
ML Yes, but the reason they weren't such that you could remember what they were or such that I could think what they could be, underlines the fact that in those days anyone trying anything different found it much harder to pull anything together unless they had a lot of commitment themselves. Whereas now, because there is some kind of caucuses of interest amongst a variety of specialists, not just other filmmakers, but amongst people who study film, people who write about it
MT In this country anyway

ML Yes it means that these kinds of films have been able to make a kind of space for themselves and also sustain themselves.
MT I think there must have been more of them in say France and Italy [indecipherable] than England and even before this present situation… [loud interruptions – laying the table etc.]
I don't want to get bogged down to the extent to which I was isolated, but I was working on my own. I didn't have anybody else working in film to talk about it to directly. There were some people may be working in something else, you know. See I wasn't working in film at that time [indecipherable] you couldn't talk to about what you were doing, and similarly other people were perhaps writing or painting or something, but
they weren't very interested in **film…**
ML No right, right …
MT … as a serious thing to be working at, you know maybe interested in seeing them but, no but, there's also the thing you see that my intentions at that time were really directed towards films which would be shown in the cinema and to a general public. This was what I was aiming at.
ML Hmm.
MT And this is why I made films. Just to – I mean – I suppose the nature of film more clearly for my own use.
ML But that must have changed after 10 or 15 years when you realised that what you wanted to do wasn't meeting up with what distributers wanted to distribute, and therefore you must have got to some point where you decided well, that that doesn't matter, it still makes sense to me I still want to do it.
MT Yeah …
ML … and in a sense I maintain that if it weren't for the fact that someone like
Alex wasn't around then if you'd got to that point of realisation then you would have then been totally isolated because you wouldn't have even had the kind of cinema market to aim for
MT Sorry? What was there?
ML Er, if you hadn't been aiming for the cinema audience the conventional producing products for the cinema, then you would have been completely isolated. You wouldn't even have had that to aim for.
MT Yes, I agree with that, because the only other thing around in Scotland at the time of anybody say working, would be in an amateur sense with a sort of amateur outlet in mind and I wasn't interested in that.
AP These terms amateur and professional, are awkward ones to use, or to use over a period of time because in a sense professional and amateur might have been very clearly defined 20 years ago or certain people might have sort to define them very rigidly, and now, and indeed my [indecipherable] thought of you is simply being some kind of amateur filmmaker whereas in essence you were / are absolutely professional in terms of your intentions and your resources …
MT Oh! that looks a delicious plateful. Thank you!
ML Is that too much?
MT No I'll probably make my way through it!
ML Knives and Forks. I'll get some pickle.
MT You find a kind of way of enjoining them, you know, a direct cut that works as a dissolve almost. I mean it's not quite right…
ML It depends to some extent on the [indecipherable] where it is …

Tape: **KnaTait 3b (8 mins)**
MT … I [indecipherable] some Kodachrome for printing and at that time I liked very slightly underexposed camera (talking about *Orquil Burn* 1955)
ML Yeah. Hmm.

MT … I mean I don't think they do now, but they did then. And even in the viewfinder I think [indecipherable] the blackness was partly what was appealing to me, spots of light moving around and peaty water.
ML Right. Yes. In other words, when you were shooting it you were pretty certain that there was going to be very little to be seen in those dark areas.
MT … I can't be specific about that. I can't remember [indecipherable] such detail as that [indecipherable] but I knew that some of those really black ones would be as black as that – possibly not.
ML Because you have an extraordinary way of breaking an image down into – I mean some of the images just became sort of abstract designs.
MT Yes. Well, I didn't edit the original. I mean I edited from – copied from a print from the start – a universal print … [indecipherable].
ML Oh Right yes. So that would have given you some idea about how the final print would look. Hmm.
MT I don't know if there was much difference really between the final print and just the first print. Anyway, there wasn't, as far as I remember, getting it [indecipherable] I suppose there must have been. [indecipherable] if I got them all printed at once it might of, in any case, you know similar in look than what it ended up as.
AP When was that made 1955?
MT Well, it was short of '54.
ML At the same time as you were shooting *Rose Street.*
MT No, two years before that.
ML But *Rose Street* was finished in '56 when this was finished?
MT No, this was finished in '55 I think.
ML Was it?
MT *Rose Street* was finished straight away you see. There wasn't a hiatus there.
ML '55 sorry yes. So, what's *Happy Bees*?
MT Happy Bees was made at the same time as *Orquil Burn*. There's no commentary in it. I was trying to get just an impression of what it was like to **be a small child in** a summer in Orkney. I was just trying to get the sort of [indecipherable] endless sunshine in film. And er.
ML What do you mean? Autobiographically?
MT Well my memory of what the summer seemed like, when I was small – plus the observation of other children later. I used children – there's lots of scenes with children. And er, of course the actual rate at which they moved around wasn't like that at all. I found myself having to accommodate to the rhythms I found which were not like the sort of artificial thing I had in my mind and it didn't really turn out quite where I intended. There's no commentary in it actually. It's made at the same time as that. I think I had one line of commentary which I appear to have cut out on the print. So that it's a slight sore thumb effect [indecipherable] rather silly, and it's not er [indecipherable] again there is too much of this rather insistent stuff [indecipherable] music on it. I think I might re-do those two tracks sometime. I wonder if the BFI [indecipherable] to do that?
ML Hm. Both laughing.
MT There is a very nice sequence in *Happy Bees* of the children playing. It doesn't quite fit into the film somehow. I was wanting just to get young animals skipping around but they refused to do it at the sort of rate I thought they should. They look a bit more sort of lumbering than what I had in mind – Shetland ponies and lambs and things.
AP You didn't pay them well enough Margaret.
MT I paid the children in a sense by presenting them with a new game that day and setting them loose. They knew the camera was
there [indecipherable] three or two, three, four in age at the time and I just went ahead. I got an old stove to play with [indecipherable]. The *Happy Bees,* the title, it really should have been *Hammer Happy Bees* which was some phrase that an older cousin of mine was reputed to have – her first words – run around saying *Hammer Happy Bees* … what

I was getting at, again perhaps rhythmically. I must have thought this title sounded too kind of fancy so that – with this scene of the children [indecipherable] everyone calls it *Busy Bees* which was not really what I meant at all. People are inclined to mis-remember the title and say *Busy Bees*.
ML How long is *Leaden Echo Golden Echo,* it's a short one isn't it?
MT Its about 7 minutes, I think.
ML Can I run that one?
MT Yes, if you like. (**end of tape)**

Tape: **KnaTait 4 (46 mins)**
AP [muffled] … I mean we make sure that the time of the collaboration
which is [indecipherable]
MT [indecipherable] co-procreator, colleague, partner …
AP … and yet it's better to just ignore that side of it. I don't see that it counts at all.
MT I don't think you can quite ignore it either somehow …
ML Because we give the impression that Margaret was working in total, absolute total isolation and that's certainly not the case. It's not what I've observed.
MT No.
ML I mean that show we had in Orkney when I was up there you know it was discussion with all four of us about the film. In other words, I can't believe that your contribution to the films is as little as you say. I'm not saying that you have done any guiding or anything like that, that's why I thought that word mentor from this dictionary's definition was good because you're experienced in looking at films and you're obviously in a trusted position, therefore anything you have to say is going to have an effect on the material Margaret's working on whilst it's in progress simply on a level of response.
AP Ah, but that's just investing in me much too strong and clear and continuous a role
MT Well it's just like poets have associated themselves to greater or less degrees and from *Rose Street* on, I mean before *Rose Street* he hadn't anything to do with the any of films. Nothing at all.
ML No that's what I understood *Rose Street* was the first one.
MT Yes, and after that perhaps, not all of them, but some more than others…
AP You may even just say that I was your equivalent of a sneak preview audience, in a way. That's an oversimplification.
ML Except that implies that the films have been finished before you get to see them … Is
that the case?
AP No that's not the case.
ML No, you're seeing stuff as it's developing.
AP Up to a certain point, but only up to a certain point … interrupted by Malcolm Le Grice – introductions …
[cont.]
AP … presuming to pre-empt some function, some [indecipherable]
ML Well collaborator –I always see it as someone who has a kind of fully established kind of area of specialism of their own which then they work alongside someone with another area of specialisation to produce a finished …
AP Ah yes ... I don't think there should be any reference at all in those terms then, because, except for one we might agree between ourselves was a period when I had quite a definable function in relation to a film of yours [indecipherable] apart from that, it is wrong in fact to link me with your films in any way. I mean in any way that could be expressed fairly simply and clearly and wouldn't be too misleading.
MT Yes, but it's mostly not about what you do at all really.
AP Well that's beside the point what I do really because what I do is nothing to do with the subject.
MT How about colleague?

AP Well I think colleague yes, is a nice word that doesn't imply something that is, you know, not the case. In my series of programme talks which will be broadcast in 2013! [Laughing]
AP No. Given the time scale now and in this specific context [indecipherable] I'm not talking now about your provisional notes [indecipherable] I'm talking about its application [indecipherable] before it goes to copy tomorrow.
ML Oh no I'm not thinking that.
AP You're not thinking that?
ML No I'm referring to the larger thing.
AP Oh I see. Well that deserves a chapter in itself. I mean a chapter about say, the coming into being of a particular film series called *Where I Am Is Here* [indecipherable], I think that could deserve [indecipherable]
ML No it's not a book, it's not a book [indecipherable]
ML Actually collaborator could be better. Working in combination with – especially with literary or artistic production.
AP 'Till my dying day I'll regard myself as a collaborator in the matter of *Where I Am Is Here*- although I don't mean that I made any kind of [indecipherable] in the film, but I think I collaborated in that the time it took you …
MT A **touchstone**.
AP A touchstone [laughing] … a bit of litmus paper … [indecipherable]
ML Collaborator. Right collaborator. I mean it's the word I put down originally but crossed out.
MT [indecipherable].
ML Well it was having said Alex Pirie, her husband Alex Pirie.
AP Yes well that's nothing to do. If we're talking about this draft – it is not a piece of information nor does it lead to other bits of information that are relevant …
ML Well, it does.
AP No I don't think …
ML Well we …
AP …it doesn't, not against the background of what you're considering in and through this draft … it really isn't. What you've got are films and a filmmaker, and that's all there is to it.
7.30
ML I'm not denying that, it's not as though I'm bringing you up very much in this piece as it stands at the moment. I just think that in all fairness to yourself as well as to an understanding of the way, of the conditions of the way Margaret's been working it needs to be on record.
AP Well if it hadn't been me it would have been someone else, wouldn't it, Margaret?
[Laughter]
ML What was it like when you first set up in Rose Street. What did Ancona Films consist of? Was is just yourself or were there other people around at the time?
MT It was just myself. I mean Ancona Films still is just myself … [indecipherable]
ML No, I was just wondering if there was a group of people in Edinburgh at that time who were interested in, for instance, the Italian documentary movement and who you met up with to talk about film.
8.25
MT There were people who were two streets away who had found employment with one of these small independent companies making films for the Scottish Film Council and Scotland Committee and things like that who were terribly fed up and used to come round and talk, you know, talk to me about their troubles there and again discuss things and then and what they do and that kind of thing, but not actually – I don't think I ever was then talking about a specific project of mine or bringing them in to what I was doing at a particular time really. It was more that they were talking about their own frustrations of working on camera [apparatus] and what they were going to do next. You know, what

little there was to do – I mean we would do something together if there was the financial possibility. I might – but it was such a – and anytime that there was anybody around there periodically, fairly regularly coming round and [indecipherable] Rose Street and talking away about these things. There was the least hope of getting anything done really.
ML But did you actually show them any of the things that you were working on?
MT … [indecipherable] I wasn't even working on anything.
ML Well, you'd done *Portrait of Ga* by then.
MT Well you see I used this little firm for dubbing and things like that, so in that sense people who were working there would see some of my work. I'd borrowed lenses from them or when Alistair [KYLE?] was there, he had a look at *Rose Street* and something else.
AP That's later though, that was post *Rose Street* – if he was talking about *Rose Street* and he's still talking about '54 or '55.
ML Just after coming back from Italy, the period up to *Rose Street.*
MT During the Edinburgh Festival I put on the Rose Street Film Festival – you've heard about this haven't you?
ML No.
MT … three shows a night for three weeks. Free entrance, free cup of coffee thrown in and
most people – and then they were invited to sit and talk you see. A variety of people came in. Occasionally [indecipherable] you got people who were you know, film-orientated [indecipherable] speaking they just come in to go to something or other and they would talk about the subject of the film [indecipherable] languages or something like that. That went on for 3 weeks in 1954 then in 1955. Grierson of course used to come up.
ML Did he?
MT But he didn't exactly talk about film. I mean he was 'havered'.
AP He was dotty even then. Well not dotty he was 'havering' even then.
MT He tended to be drunk when he partied …
AP The man was just essentially [indecipherable] as far as I can see.
MT I mean I went round some of the other ones to see if I could raise any kind of spark [indecipherable] but they were just, they were very happy doing what they were doing – well up to a point but maybe they weren't quite happy with it but they weren't prepared to make any conservative change. And these younger people who were getting a job as [indecipherable] they usually moved on once they learnt a little [indecipherable] to the BBC in Glasgow or somewhere else. But there wasn't a terribly high level of discussion about film or any of that. Then say, some of Peter Hollander's friends would occasionally turn up from the USA There wasn't an [indecipherable] of talking day to day of anybody to speak to about film –when I think of it now there were people popping up from time to time. But not very often [indecipherable]
AP Yes, not actively – on holiday in fact with his wife – he wasn't over to do any work …
MT No but this picture of total isolation that people get is really excessive – total isolation means that nobody … [indecipherable].
ML No right.
AP Well. Can I just say something here? I might save time by a long-winded way. Obviously the term, the explanation total isolation is relative it seems to me to working to the actual doing of things. It doesn't mean that one was living in a box without seeing somebody. It doesn't mean that one was not seeing people whether it was a generality of people or people talking about films, you said yourself there was a dearth of people. I would say that if you look back there was a clear dearth of people who had any notion or any kind of energy to push anything forward. I mean that is simply evident now if you look at it because in those times at that time – probably nothing happened, no connections, nothing was initiated, and no one was pushing …

MT Nobody was pushing anything and nobody ….
AP ... I mean in terms of work, in terms of intention, in terms of projects –you were in a sense isolated.
MT No, but what Mike was specifically asking was there anybody to show things to or speak about things that was what I was answering.
AP Well, I take it you mean in the working context.
ML Yes. I mean Le Grice used that thing you know –that you receive no echo of support from your generation, I mean, or sympathy.
AP In Scotland?
ML Yes that's right.
AP True or false?
MT Well, that's true enough in a way [indecipherable].
AP Let me put the question another way. Let me start by being ill-natured and switching from 33 to 78. I mean who else in Scotland over the last 20-odd years has made films that are at all approximate to yours in content or theme or formal development.
Who? Are [sic.] there anybody you could name? Is there any group of people you could name? [indecipherable]
MT It depends what you mean by support, obviously. There was nothing – if you think of people like Grierson who I suppose in the first encounter I saw as being somebody who at that point was preparing to associate himself with what was going on in Scotland to some extent he spoke as if he was going to do a great lot. I showed <u>him</u> some films that were in the making for instance. Hardy came up with him to see *Orquil Burn* – an unfinished *Orquil Burn*. He saw *Rose Street* and thought he would like to use a 5-minute clip out of it for something – a programme that he had which was terribly consistent with 5-minute clips.
AP *A Wonderful World* – or whatever it's called.
MT He never did even that and then there was a point at which a the only [indecipherable] of it was attempting to get me some money to make a hand painted [indecipherable] film [indecipherable] I budgeted it for £350 or something like that, Hardy without even putting it forward said 'Oh no that would be, no you'll never get as much as that. Try and get it from the BFI … film fund. BFI people I suppose I would write to [indecipherable] and people turned up at the Edinburgh Film Festival of course [indecipherable] spoke to [indecipherable] I would get a press card for the Film Festival –that level of just half an hour's conversation or something, but as I said there was no – there was nothing else going on in Scotland. There was no other filmmaking that I knew of anyway or that I know of even now, that was at that time going on other than this sponsored type of thing that for some reason or other they called 'documentary' and they're not documentary films.
AP You mean this for the reconstitution of the Films of Scotland Committee which had been in abeyance [indecipherable] until 1954.
19.07
MT I mean some of these people had been already making films at that time for [indecipherable]
AP Yes films for the COI and things like that …
MT well generally speaking instructional films …
AP Tadpole films and that type of thing.
MT … there must at least have been somebody working in films. I didn't know before I went away whether there was [indecipherable] bound to be some small companies that were working in the same sort of way that there were a lot of little companies in Rome making these 10-minute documentaries that went out on every cinema programme and film people would use this to make a sort of experimental films [indecipherable] they didn't use the expression then. Other people make straight documentaries, other people would get some sort of tourist association backing you see. They varied a lot. Well, I thought there would be a similar thing of some kind [indecipherable] I didn't know how it

would be [indecipherable]. So, I contacted some of them – and found them spoke as if making film they [indecipherable]
ML But the Italians would be working in 35[mm] making those particular films.
MT Yes that's right.
ML … so for someone to come over. So, to start making films in 16 at that time would have been rather – because I can remember when I was a student in the middle '60s that 16mm was frowned on. It was regarded then as substandard. I mean the BBC were resisting 16mm for as long as they possibly could. And even when I was working for them, all their drama inserts were still being shot on 35. It was only just as I was leaving that they'd finally gone over totally to 16mm.
MT I see [indecipherable] I mean16 became respectable, but then you forget that how short a time that it really has been absolutely accepted. And then maybe only since Kodak started doing negative positive colour soundtracks really – that's when you had to have a reversal colour soundtrack. That was the turning point. [indecipherable] I mean it was a technical point like that that perhaps really convinced people in the end. Some of these people were working and I think were working in 35 in [indecipherable] field of films that there were in Scotland at that time. Goodness knows where the films were shown [indecipherable] and the Films of Scotland Committee films were made in 35mm with the objective of cinema distribution of some kind or other. And, in fact, they still largely work in 35. Well it depends what it's for …
ML … most cinema distributions are shot on 35, travelogues, and anything that's gonna get a cinema distribution.
AP Because it's got a circuit already.
ML … Harold Baines stuff is all shot on 35 because he's got an assured outlet.
AP But if you've not got the assured outlet – what happens [indecipherable].
MT I don't think there's any [indecipherable] shooting in 16… going up on that sort of deal with the sponsors. The *Big Banana Feet* was shot on 16 [indecipherable].
AP Yes but that was not sponsored, that was just a straight commercial venture which has now got some kind of release as far as I can see. And it's Billy Connolly. I mean he put the money up I mean he was financing it and conceived it etc [indecipherable]
[discussion of this]

24.44
ML It was around that time that you did the first film working direct onto the film's surface wasn't it? *Calypso* …That was about '56 wasn't it?
MT Yes, I started doing that in Rome – discarded the first attempt and did it again yes about '55 or '56 thereabout ...
ML What was it that interested you about working that kind of way?
MT Directly on film?
ML What was the thing that made you try it out? Was is part of the course?
MT No, not really. I had seen some film and found it slightly appealing and thought I could do something better than that, and it was possible I mean just economically you can do that type of thing that was the least part of it and you do it on 35 and I thought I might be able to do something that I could actually get distributed, I mean commercially distributed, but I also thought it might be more interesting to do [than it] actually was. It was a very limited sort of thing really.
ML … not many people who were actually – certainly the recent generation –very few people that I can think have seriously worked directly on to film. I like Chris Garrett that kind of working with film in short quantities and printing direct on to the print stock, that's the nearest thing it gets to actually using paint on to film and there've been a few people working in that kind of way, but actually working with paint onto film in a controlled and maintained kind of way is – I can't think of anyone.
MT I don't suppose anyone h**as ever done it quite as madly as I did it really doing it frame by frame spread out on the table**. It drives you crazy of course. But I always

thought I was doing it because I thought it would give me a very intimate feeling of just duration and, you know, what's contained in the frame and what's going to end up in four frames in 16 frames and 34 frames and that sort of thing. I don't know if it's very useful from that point of view, to follow one's own invented movements by hand through the lens of however long is *Calypso* – is it 4-minutes, I think?
AP I think the last time you told me it was 4 minutes. [laughing] [indecipherable]
MT Well, I do measure them. I've got it all written down somewhere, I sometimes confuse one with another. I think *Calypso's* 4-minutes, now that's[indecipherable] I suppose Peter Hollander was found that some things about what materials would work. He was a commercial artist before he was in film and he said well Aniline dyes is what you want so I bought packets of Aniline dyes – and mixed them up and now where you get the soundtrack and the beauty is the British Council's viewing room for free to project [indecipherable] at that time. There was an Italian working there [indecipherable] have you got any bits of music [indecipherable] so he pulls out of the wastepaper basket [indecipherable] this is nice [indecipherable] film about Caribbean. I knew it was nice. This was what they called [indecipherable] in Rome. They just use half the width of the film to record soundtrack –they had stock [it was] scarce at that time – must have been expensive or something [indecipherable] maybe he gave me a bit of print too – I can't remember [indecipherable] I worked on with these dyes and it was beautifully bright colours they were, but I just tried out all sorts of things that just came into my head as I was doing it. It was a bit rubbishy kind of effect, So then, some years later I tried again, and I thought this [indecipherable] wouldn't touch it, never seen it before.
ML How do you mean half the soundtrack was used for film?
MT … Half the 35 mm. The film was cut down the middle and then used both sides of it. The negative soundtrack.
ML Oh I see.
MT The first time the track was recorded direct onto the 35mm film.
ML They didn't have magnetic?
MT There wasn't very much – some people were using magnetic but not just abstractly as routine.
ML So all soundtrack material was on this half 35mm and optical and so when it came to dubbing it was a matter of setting – I mean the play back machinery was designed to take half 35mm so it meant in effect that they were able to double up the number of sound tracks they had available without …
MT This was actually something that came out of a dub that hadn't quite worked you see so what he did he clipped out the bits with commentary and gave me a bit of music – several bits of music and he said, don't say where it came from.
ML So what was it you actually worked on to, if part of it was occupied with soundtrack?
MT Well I got a print on to clear leader [indecipherable] I mean bits were part cleared and this part of the soundtrack around the edge. I worked on that as the picture negative. The soundtrack I could sort of see where it was. And then at some point got [indecipherable] to make a print using the half-band stuff as the negative track [indecipherable] positive track on the negative picture. And I suppose in fact it wouldn't be quite the right register – sprocket holes – anyway they did this 35mm print [indecipherable] I had a reduction reversal print of that.

[more talk about the technical aspects of this filmmaking]

40.30
AP Can I congratulate you on that extraordinary diversion and return to the question of isolation – or total isolation.
…
Is there a norm do you see? If one says that somebody is working in some kind of isolation or emphasises it and says total isolation, is there a norm that that comes out of?
…

You're quoting Malcolm Le Grice and, in a sense, I'm inviting you to stand in for him. That in, in this decade, he specifies 1966, … there has emerged a certain kind of a series of film practises in this country that didn't exist before, or if they did they didn't exist in a way that was going to run together, and because running together removes the concept of isolation, so what exactly is non-isolation, I mean is there, sort of not exactly imperative but as it were again a commonsensical assumption that in this area, or these areas of film practice that there will be a kind of meeting of minds, continuity of contact of experience, a sharing of ideas – is that what's meant by 'the norm'? Or is that's what meant by the expectation of work?
ML I think if one is producing work then one is producing it in some kind of context, some people can produce it in a context where it is snatched up immediately. One is obviously talking about the commercial field, otherwise one is working in a context where the audiences isn't quite so available or proximate or whatever for some kind of response to what one is doing. So, the next grade of isolation would be where you are doing it in the company of other people who are interested specifically in that area, and that goes back to what we talking about last night about developing this special kind of language and are we making films that are just shown to other filmmakers. In other words, there has to be some sort of context to produce some work in.
AP Yes. I take that as part of it – coming from that – I would say that you were working in total isolation – in other words I agree with Malcolm Le Grice …
ML He doesn't actually say that actually. He's very careful. He actually says, 'relative isolation'.
AP Yes relative isolation, well yes alright …
ML you know he's careful to say that – the other thing was he says working in the direction in which received no echo of support.
AP Yes, I'm sorry.
ML …in the films of her generation which is also quite carefully put …
AP Yes, we'll go with but I think also, now that I seem to have introduced this idea of total isolation, I think taking what you said just a moment ago, I think in a sense you were working and continued to work in that kind of isolation in where you were working and how you were working. There was no audience, no peers, you were not necessarily sharing or discussing your emergent ideas or intuitions or discoveries that were coming from your actual process of working.
MT … well unless by correspondence – my correspondence …
AP … with whom?
ML … with Peter?
MT … and Fernando to some extent.
AP You mean, that there are actually scores or hundreds of ways
MT No, but you can't pretend that [indecipherable] [travel arrangements to Holland are being made over this conversation]
(**end of tape)**

Tait5_17m *The Big Sheep Discussion*
AP I mean that kind of necessary self-consciousness in [the] use of material, where you know something might be taken in a certain way and that's not entirely the way you want it, and you leave it in, in the hope that people will see the other line of it, the other layer of potential meaning [indecipherable].
MT [indecipherable] use of the [indecipherable] helps to relate the tourist buses coming up and the lorry loads of sheep going down – connecting the one with the other.
AP These were processed tourists coming back down [laughter] [indecipherable] – making another kind of metaphorical point as it were, that if the sheep destroyed a society 150 years ago, then our tourists, do they do the same to the revivified society? What Margaret's talking about last night. [indecipherable] It's not that the Highland is a desert. It's not that it actually is deficient entirely of people. People do live out their lives

there, communities do pick themselves up. They do have a range of occupations. They have all the dreams and hopes and madnesses up there as well as any other [indecipherable]. And here you've got the two things brought very close together, and you've got the link in time between an increasingly recognised historical incident that had disastrous consequences – no doubt about that. But, and at the same time we've got this thing, which is still part of the general fashion – that every place that doesn't have manufacturing industry must somehow or other accept tourists. And what effect does that have on a community? I mean, my limited experience of that suggests that in many ways tourism is a disaster whatever essential and vital in a community is the bringing in of the Cheviots in the second half of the C18th through for the next hundred years. But that kind of thing and the other things that come through in the films of the last 40-minutes can't possibly be picked up by people watching a film like that for the first time. And I suppose there is always the argument that people ought to have that kind of additional information just as part of the [sculptural] equipment, the historical equipment so that a range of references, and different levels of reference can be noted and acknowledged. Is that not pre-empting anything of yours? I think I'm stating the obvious.

MT Complete contrast to the Pibroch – something – you picked this up – I couldn't quite understand…

ML Well, it's the contrast. I mean, that's the main thing it represents to me is the music used throughout the film is used to put the image into a cultural context so that for the coaches arriving, it places the people – and the phenomena of coaches – into the context of the big city, because it is big city music. It's that kind of distinguish-less sound which only comes from cities. Then you have the bit of Lilane, which is as intimate if you like, as looking at the stones of the fallen houses. So, the brash music. I must say I didn't make that connection quite, well not consciously, I mean …

MT Which one?

ML The one where the pop music returns for when the sheep are coming out. I mean I just tended, because the direction of the coaches was right to left, and the direction of the trucks was left to right, I mean, that seemed to make enough of a point there. Here we deal with tourists arriving and the sheep going out. We've got two exports. One where people come and go, and the other where things just go.

MT [indecipherable]

AP Yes, I think one could also say, as many people have said, that if you think of tourists as people going around on bus tours, then there is a sense that they are being herded like sheep. There's a basic assertion about the way in which some people go on their holidays. They don't go on holiday as individuals, they don't seek out an individual itinerary, they don't decide on themselves on what they're going to do. They pay their £50 or £100, or whatever it is, and Wallis Arnold will take them Birmingham to John o' Groats. And they'll know they'll have half an hour in the morning sometime to write postcards, essentially it's all programmed, and few things can be more sheep-like than that – kind of turning human beings into sheep. To organise everything for them. That's not to just inflate that beyond its particular importance in the film, but I think it certainly starts off the film, from my point of view. And I don't know whether, I mean I really don't know what amount of information those people ought to have, you see. I don't know. There's a film called *The Big Sheep.* Firstly, the title comes on in Gaelic, so how many people in Britain, [let alone] Scotland speak Gaelic, and then the film's called *The Big Sheep,* well I mean, The Big Sheep – just that itself – in the Highland consciousness certainly, has always existed hasn't it? I mean it's your whole [indecipherable]

MT [indecipherable]

AP … and increasingly, partly because in the last twenty years the BBC got round to lift its embargo on never referring to the clearances. The BBC made no reference to the Highland Clearances.

ML Was that a directive?
AP Well, it was some kind of directive. This only came out – this was only mentioned what? – a few years ago on the 50th anniversary of the BBC in Scotland. By that time, they were willing to overturn covenance and open some skeleton sort of thing. There was no mention in any programme on BBC Scotland anywhere in Britain about the fact that the Highland Clearances, which was obviously a process that went on over many decades, didn't exist. I mean, I grew up in Scotland – you grew up in Scotland, and in terms of education, one knew nothing about this.
ML Really?
AP Islanders would know about. No, not in terms of what you'd be taught as part of the history of the country. And many people. Until recently there's been a change. There's all sorts of changes taking place in Scotland I would charge … which are irreversible, whatever happens in the short term, or whatever happens in the detail, changes in national consciousness, political consciousness, historical consciousness, for all sorts of reasons – various floodgates have been opened, which of course then create their own sort of myths and distortions about what happened or what didn't happen in certain areas of the past. But there's just been an access [to] an enormous information or scholarship, in areas of the Scottish past which really have not been in the Scottish consciousness for decades and generations. … They'd exist in areas, I mean they call the Highlands an area, a locality, because it was. It was part of their actual history which was being transmitted
MT [indecipherable]
AP [indecipherable] as a popular memory thing. But as for coming into a wider national consciousness, and as for being in the kind of assessment – you know, constant assessment, reassessment, scholarship or education or that kind of thing, no. And the major establishment things, like the BBC, thinking of that as an organ of information, education. No, nothing until I think the early sixties, if that, that anything was ever said about anything. So, to go back to my point, what it is that people perhaps [indecipherable] memory after the event, one can be stimulated then to find out more about things which are not truly central to the film, but there's no doubt that if one has got the basic range of cultural and historical references, then all sorts of things become that much clearer. And in becoming clearer, I think that then some of the layering can become visible. … And people's eyes then can see what they're seeing and maybe they'll see other things within the same show [indecipherable].
And you were once asked by someone who did not go to the cinema at all, as far as I can remember, if in some way *The Big Sheep* was an apologia for
MT The clearances
AP The clearances. An apologia for the forces, the factors, the elements, the individuals the people in power – thinking of them as forming one monolith in time – and was *The Big Sheep* n apologia for that. Um, it isn't.
ML How could it be?
AP No, exactly. But this person looking at it …
MT They thought the implication that [indecipherable] at the end as things go on – something else happens – people then find that they make use of what [indecipherable] …
MT An apologia for human life.
AP … one thing that comes to mind, an absolutely astonishing shot – that when you come back from perhaps the erased point (I can't remember [indecipherable]) and the frame is fully filled by two or three big prams with their hoods down … and there's one bit of the frame where … one or two mothers [at] school sports, and in the background in the top part of the frame there's bits and pieces of children's arms and legs and bits of shirt, an just this appearance of these prams – and just this thing about the generations of continuity. You don't even see what's in the pram! [Laughter] You know their inferences. There's something very beautiful and amazing about the look of the prams.

This is the – the adults in this sports day thing. Their frightening. These teacher people, their hats [indecipherable] something to a Scotsman – that's the real chill of recognition.
MT [indecipherable]
AP The remembrance of something to do with school and that kind of education, that kind of attitude, that kind of entrenched puritanism, [indecipherable], fear, Calvinism. The whole thing that makes us unhappily what we are today. [Laughter] Yeah.
You enjoyed – the wee Union Jack? [indecipherable] … just fluttering above the grass?
ML Yeah! [Laughter] Some little corner of Scotland where the Union Jack flies but it's an awful small one. Presumably it marked the official British hammer-throwing record.
No, the bit I love is hurling the lump. [indecipherable] [Laughter]

[Discussion about Highland Games]

Tait 6_24m
ML That was the other interesting thing you said on Monday was that the decision you had to make about doctoring. The fact that you felt that – doctoring was something that you could only do to a certain extent, I mean in terms of satisfaction and getting across to other people, whereas making films was something that was limitless
MT Something like that. I mean with medicine, the most you can do is bring people back to health, isn't it?
ML Right.
MT Whereas with art, I suppose it's starting with [indecipherable] offering something more than simply bringing people back to health.
ML That's interesting within the context of being a doctor in our society. I mean being a doctor is a very exalted position which has a lot to do with giving ultimately – giving a great deal. What is achieved is very positive and can be measured and can be seen very readily. So that the pressures that exist in society to become a doctor let alone to stay a doctor – well possibly less to stay a doctor – certainly to become a doctor, let alone to become a doctor – or possible less to stay a doctor, is very great because it would almost seem like an instant answer to being able to be useful to one's society.
AP But why should one be only useful to one's society?
ML Well, because that's the fashionable view.
AP Yes, but fashion's fashion. What you said was she either said that medicine didn't go far enough, or medicine didn't take you far enough
ML Didn't go far enough …
AP … but this thing with fashion or usefulness or function, function and value, as defined by some present fashion or by some given trend. I don't see really what that's got to do – I don't see why that has to be seen as an imperative that people have got to go along with. I mean Margaret is an example of somebody who has served her time if you like. If medical practice and its variety, has that status and has all these other things going around it, then Margaret has in fact done her stint. No need to do it and die of a coronary in your fifties, you do it as long as you want to do it, not because society requires doctors to come out at 2 o'clock in the morning and pour some medicine into a spoon for somebody. I don't know about this thing about function and use, because if that was the case then you say Mike might be making Walt Disney films because society might be demanding that they want this whole family entertainment – you know, take the whole family … [indecipherable]
ML But, by and large to be an artist at the moment, to be an artist is losing its glamour, its appeal, its value if you like – what it can contribute. Year by year it seems to me that more and more people are becoming cynical and more and more artists are becoming cynical about their function, but I would say that was characteristic of the British artistic scene.
MT … [indecipherable] the glamour and the pay [indecipherable].

ML Not so much glamour, well yes it's losing its glamour with some people and that's fine, that's good, but it's actually to other people …
MT … they feel like they can't do very much in art you mean or something like that? [discussion about accents and BBC radio programme *Down Your Way*].

[…] 8.10
AP We're a long way from Neorealism.
ML No, I was talking about the contemporary role of the artist. How people in general and even artist's themselves – people aren't doing very much and the reason the give for why they are not doing very much is because they are so disenchanted with the whole scene.
AP Well that's always been the case though – there are always many more people with so-called artistic temperament or some kind of potential which is mostly not realised, and so many more fall by the wayside.
MT Yeah but [indecipherable] … this little gallery situation – who are you painting for? [indecipherable]
AP [indecipherable] were saying last night that needed taking up because he seemed to be saying that he was being inhibited in painting because he had concluded that the only people who would come and look at, respond to or appreciate his painting, his work were people that didn't necessarily like in general terms. Or people that he didn't actually feel he was painting for –
MT [talking in background]
AP … I think maybe that is a dilemma for people with a certain kind of political consciousness but again that's seems to be maybe a constant in work and in doing things.
MT Hmm.
AP … and I think it would be a terrible thing if people actually stopped doing things because of some view they had of a future audience. Really. There are occasions when people have gone into exile because they would actually rather …
MT I thought he meant it was just sort of painters who would come and look at paintings that are [indecipherable].
AP … always been the case. There may be an equivalent of what they called
In Germany in the thirties this 'inner emigration' – not the people who managed to get out – the people who had to get out during the Nazi period – but Germans themselves who were anti-Nazi, but such were the circumstances of the state – such was the authority – such was the totalitarian nature of it that these people, many people endured or decided upon what then became called an 'inner immigration'. That is that they emigrated into their own interior – they couldn't leave physically, couldn't get away from the place, but they went into another part of themselves because actually there was nothing else you could do except either stand up in the street and say I am against this...
ML [indecipherable].
AP Yes something like that or, I may have got that wrong actually in the way of defining it. But Hannah Arendt I think talks about it. The question of an audience, the question of potential, the question of the difficulties of reaching an audience or a question of irritation, confusion, dismay at what's around you and out of that you may be do decide to slacken off or turn your back on it. I think maybe there is a very important kind of non-art when people decide not to do something.
MT [indecipherable].
AP … just something where there is a positive decision not to so something
MT Well funnily enough, in making *Place of Work* once I really got into it I felt [I was getting] further and further and further from an audience and I was making it – really – for myself in a way. And partly that that particular subject matter wasn't going to be available after [indecipherable] trying to describe this kind of garden. And I was really feeling that –

and even as I got it finished, I thought you know, how uncommercial can you get – how [indecipherable] – not unapproachable exactly – in fact when I showed it to you the first time maybe I had the sound on too loud or something, you didn't seem to [indecipherable] with it. You, you thought it was quite inaccessible for some reason …
AP No, no. I thought my first feeling …
MT Well no anyway, what I was going to say was this …
[ML and AP laughing] – well I can tell you!
MT Well actually rather to my surprise – actually – appeared to appeal more directly to people than many of the others.
13.20
AP Well. I remember what I said, because when I thought about it for a minute or two and I told you that I felt it was a very private work if you remember and perhaps too private, but I changed my mind having seen it several times now and had a further chance to think about it and as you said just now even with the evidence even of the last few days, there's no sign that its inaccessible in that way. I think much of it is inaccessible in terms of how just you go about doing it. Why it's that way. Why it actually consists of that number of shots in that order. But that's really beside the point. I don't think there's any doubt that people have taken it in the way you wanted … [indecipherable].
MT [indecipherable] they got lost in it in a sense – they didn't say they were wandering around the garden themselves, they said they became unaware of time passing – something like that – I think I said in some attempt at a note in the Kirkwall showing, that you become, particularly aware of time passing – but you don't [indecipherable]
AP … [indecipherable] the opposite, you see, I think that Margaret put in the note at Kirkwall that you had this almost physical sense of time passing. Well I think in *Place of Work* there is not a physical sense of time passing, it's just a particular and overwhelming sense of time but not something which is passing or flowing but something that – develops there's no notion of linearity of clock time or even season time, though of course in a sense of course the film is constructed.
MT … not quite the seasons although in a sense [indecipherable] it wasn't going directly through the seasons – you went back and followed them up again.
AP … there was an old man who was an amateur gardener and he was really pick up on these things which really did give an excellent insight into the structure of your film
MT Yes.
ML Well, he was actually then able to isolate how this was altering for him. Whereas other people like myself were aware that something was going on if they weren't actually able to pinpoint it. In other words, people sense that time thing whereas he was able to be [indecipherable].
MT … he, on the other hand, he seemed to be saying that he got lost in the story, as he called it, because [indecipherable].
AP No he didn't. He said something that was actually very important. I wish I could get hold of it, but it's locked away now. He said something like this, that at some point he was getting so caught up in the images that what he wasn't exactly looking at, and the colours – that he realised it wasn't important to try and form a story or make a story out of it. And that seems to me to be a very important statement to make. One of the most clear and important statements I've ever heard anybody make just out of the blue like that – from a man who was also being in a sense patronised by this younger [indecipherable].
MT [indecipherable] guile-less sometimes
AP Yes, but in the event, he was making several points. Each time he spoke [indecipherable] but when you listen to him, I was sitting in a corner – he was actually getting. There was a sense here of someone who had actually looked at the film perhaps in the way you want them to look at films you see –getting perceptions pulled away [indecipherable] and you look and look and look.

ML What had he been before he retired?
AP [indecipherable] …
ML … you do get some very unusual people down here in this part of the world. Sidmouth. Exmouth. Retirement areas. Suddenly there's quite an extraordinary – a person who has led an extraordinary life.
MT Well he said that all his life he had been working on history. I don't know whether in an amateur way [indecipherable] he might even have been a teacher – he didn't seem like a teacher. He said that all the time he'd been overpowered by other people's investigations, other people's writings, other people's experiences of the subject, and he was only now in his 70s [indecipherable] getting to his own view of history – and somebody said later that he was also doing something about – local history – or some [indecipherable] period he was working on
AP I didn't see this man as being a professional or being a teacher or something like that [indecipherable]. I felt his own kind of research came out of his individual need and that he ploughed his own furrow [indecipherable].
MT I think he'd lived down here most of his life – I don't think he was a retired incomer [indecipherable].
AP But he was so delighted to have been reminded of W H Davis – and said he hadn't thought of – hadn't remembered this autobiography of Davis for [indecipherable] and he felt that things had been unlocked [indecipherable] partly through listening to the old man the down and out – firewood merchant.
20.22
MT I thought he meant [indecipherable]
ML Have you shown it to older people, such as the Women's Institute [indecipherable].
AP Well. In Kirkwall we gave half price old age pensioners [indecipherable] but you don't get very much except thank you very much. It might have been interesting to try a question and answer in the Orkney [indecipherable].
[…]

HD 6_84_26.09m.
A recording related to the showing of Margaret Tait's film portraits. (Source not known)

MT Of these films shown tonight only the MacDiarmid is strictly speaking a portrait. It's a portrait It's a portrait of MacDiarmid the poet rather than of Christopher Reeve, the whole man. That is, I haven't really brought any other aspects. I've tried to relate it all to his readings of the poems which of course were recorded afterwards. In William Dunbar's poem Lament for the Makars which you'll find in the Oxford Book of English Verse … there are the names of any number of poets, of Makars, of poets, of those days ... and some of them well-known names still, but others whose 'Making' has disappeared without trace.
4.50
In my film *Land Makar*, it wasn't intended as a portrait so much as a landscape. But as a made landscape. A landscape made by somebody working upon it, and inevitably the maker of this landscape came very prominently into the film, and I think that a lot of people do see the film as a portrait of Mary Graham Sinclair. Mary Graham as she's known by her friends. So, you could see it as a kind of accidental portrait…but I couldn't help portraying Mary Graham as I stumped about her land while she ploughed or went to visit the swan. Well, I got her to go along there because I particularly liked the way that she seems to encourage the wild birds and even the wildflowers and things on her land and doesn't just cultivate the whole thing and drain it to extinction. This is part of what she is. Part of what the landscape is, so that it is a kind of portrait I suppose. And then, to continue this, I used her voice for the sake of the sound of her voice. I think you'll probably won't necessarily follow everything that she's saying, although you'll pick up

some of it. But if your ear was tuned to the Orkney accent of course you would hear everything. When I showed it in Orkney the audience is in stitches because some of the things she says are very funny.
6.42
You may wonder why *On The Mountain* is in among portrait films at all. I put it in because I think people have tried to put their finger on just what it is the difference between the black and white film Rose and the ultimate film *On the Mountain.* It struck me that the difference really between the black and white part of the film and the later colour part is that the people in the b/w were mostly people that I knew, and these are like miniature portraits of most of them. In fact, in looking at it you can probably tell the difference between people who are just passers-by and those who belong to that part of the street. Say the 'scar face' [indecipherable] swept that bit the street and he lived there too actually, and one or two shopkeepers, children, a particular accordionist who came along and played regularly and this little girl Frances Rosy dancing to his music. I think she was about three at that time. She was allowed to play in the street. The other children were allowed to play in the street. There were adults around the street keeping half an eye on them I suppose and even the drivers of vehicles coming along expected that there would be some children around … they never got run over anyway.

Now in 1973, when that bit of Rose Street, in fact the whole of Rose Street I suppose, had largely changed its character at that section had become a pedestrian precinct. The people who lived there had been housed somewhere else. The little grocer shops and things had been changed into boutiques selling jeans and pop records and so forth. So, there are not so many portraits in what was filmed in 1973. Perhaps none at all. Unless you could say, yes, the window cleaner who was cleaning the same window in 1973 as he had been cleaning in 1956 and that I did leave it in just a little bit after this other window cleaner's looking astonished. I hope it would come across that he was astonished that this particular thing was unchanged because he was in fact slightly mugging at the camera.

The voices are what linked the two. The wee girl singing *On the Mountain Stands a lady / Who She Is I Do Not Know / All She Wants is Gold and Silver / All She wants is a Nice Young Man.* And the street singer who sings I wish I has someone to love me and some other things. He was actually the man seen in black and white wheeling a barrow of sticks. He also used to sing, as a street singer in Princes Street. He came up to my studio in Rose Street and recorded these songs. Now this style of song incidentally was identified by somebody in Exmouth when I showed the film there in 1977, the style called 'griddling' which was a style for entertainers. I can't remember whether he said street singers in particular singers, but it was also done for the stage – where you held on to a note. So, I hope you'll see *On The Mountain* as interesting in relation to the whole ideas of making portraits.

[Tait then proceeds to read several of her portrait poems]

Appendix 2.

Transcript of Margaret Tait talking with students at Goldsmiths' College, London. 14/05/1986

Susan Foale: Introduction to Margaret Tait.

> *Filmmaker Margaret Tait talks about her training and career. Studying in the 1950s at Centro Sperimentale di Photographia in Rome, Surrealism and Italian Neorealism were formative influences upon her as a young artist. During the 70s and 80S Tait made a series of documentaries; 'Aspects of Kirkwall' about her hometown, a small village in Orkney, Scotland. The films explored global concerns such as the 'No Uranium' campaign, to more provincial issues such as the building of a new grammar school. She reveals that she works in a naturalistic manner, seldom throwing away film footage and following her instincts. Perhaps best known for her portraits of localities, she confesses it was never her intention to draw attention to the local exclusively but allowed for a point of difference with other filmmakers, that helped to distinguish her work.*

MT … I think I put them together just thinking of use of speech in films. There's also other connections in *Tail Piece* [indecipherable] where the [indecipherable] 'Poet in New York' by Lorca and it was out of that book that the line that started off [my] poems ... something about … *Numen of the Boughs* … and that started that film. And the film *Tail Piece* is about, really [indecipherable] another Lorca poem and about *Place of Work* and a house I was living at the time and some of the work that had been done there was *Colour Poems* … that is the relevance of that book, although you don't need to know that actually … that's how it came to be then. Anybody like to ask any questions?

Student: *Are you making anything at the moment?*
MT Not right at this moment except preparing things on paper, it's a matter of getting funding for them really.

Student: *Does that say about being scripted?*
MT… well, say, *Colour Poems* was a result of a competition by the Scottish Arts Council 'artist as filmmaker' and with the prize money I made a film – or it went towards making a film and some of the others, it was just a matter of scraping together anything I could get hold of. I didn't get funding for the others really. You can't, I mean … the stock and stuff was not quite so expensive then … but you can do it now ...

Student: *Do you live on the Orkneys?*
MT I live in Orkney.

Student: *Do you get to see other independent films? Do you find that you can't really get to see many other Independent filmmakers?*
MT [indecipherable] No, not a great many no … they keep to themselves. I see them on television of course – some of them – I mean I don't suppose I've seen anything only a few people are making but, ah, after a bit, you don't have to keep on seeing films.

Student: *Can you tell us about that really inspired moment when Hugh MacDiarmid's walking on the edge of the pavement and on the wall – how did that come about?*
MT Well that was my interpretation of one of his poems [indecipherable] something about *I lo'e the stichie / O' Earth in space / Breengin' by / At a haliket pace,* and it just

made me think of him as a kind of tightrope walker – or circus – I thought of him as balance you know, roaming the earth rather like stones, combined with the tightrope walking and [indecipherable] told you that this was how the poem struck me and he was "oh yeah ... I'll do it." [laughs]

Student: ***He seemed to enjoy it /did he enjoy it?***
MT Yes, he did. The film starts with a translation of his … this is the basis of the film
ya ken no why I am and this is fact
ye canna yet by any word or act made mysel' human.
Then it goes on to say "I'll change into something that you don't know as me, everything you know will disappear and there'll be something else altogether. That in a sense, that is the theme of the [indecipherable] except these, ah these things that he enacted for me are my interpretation of the poet you can say that's another self in
the [indecipherable] rule. And then there's in the opening shots there's all these different portraits of [indecipherable] different people some quite abstract ones … but they're all supposed to be him . there'll be photographs of him and his mother and so on the wall. If you're going to the NFT tomorrow night you'll see that film again and you might notice extra things … that's the only one that's common to both programmes, *Hugh MacDiarmid.*

Student: ***Do you shoot a lot more film than you actually use in the end, or do you cut out a lot?***
MT I use a pretty high proportion [indecipherable] – I usually know what I'm looking for … I don't waste an awful lot of film really.

Student: ***How political? You mentioned home rule? In one of them and there was quite a lot about uranium business in Orkney. Is it just part of the local picture or is there a deeper connection with politics? Is it intentional?***
MT Er. Well it was happening locally and the name of the poem is *Some Changes*. It's the last of a series of films about this little town and just that is one of the deep changes in the – that take place in spite of you. Apart from the changes which people locally might make on their own place. Re-housings come upon you I would say. And you probably noticed the Rainbow Warrior at the end of the pier too. It was up at that time, trying to prevent the culling of the seals on the little island out there. I think they had some effect on that ... and the march – the protest march – about the Uranium mining – er –
the [indecipherable] where they had the march this was supposed to be
[indecipherable] the electricity board had applied for planning permission to make tests for Uranium and er, the country had turned down the application and they made an appeal, so this was a public inquiry because of this appeal. And I rather think they won the appeal. But they didn't go ahead with the tests [indecipherable] perhaps that changed. They sounded local opinion, or they pretended they were – they went away for the time being let's say.

Student: ***Could you expand a little on the importance of song in your films because I mean you use sound continuously for a very long period of time in a lot of your films and you obviously use a lot of singing and a lot of song. Could you talk about that a little?***
MT Well they all have some relevance, say – I mean sometimes it's almost a secret connection you could say, and you hope that it works in that [indecipherable] you obviously don't know some of the connections, nevertheless, it's supposed to work. For instance, a sort of lullaby for the gas works, the gas works were being demolished, the woman humming the lullaby actually lived in the gasworks house when she was a child –

well – I mean, I just put it in because of that. But then the lullaby, the same lullaby appears, you hear it over this public forum that the BBC was doing about the Uranium mining so this … I just thought – well maybe it's a lullaby for all of us – something like that. I mean not just for Kirkwall but it all seems a wee bit relevant now doesn't it? With Chernobyl and things like that … the plight of the world.
Student: ***Was the first film shown the most recent film. The Colour Poems?***
MT That was made in 1974. The most recent one is *Some Changes*.

Student: ***Because I've seen some of your films before and that first one surprised me because it seemed a lot different from the ones I've seen before and it was a lot different from the other ones. In a way it was well obviously less documentary, and I feel that your films are so kind of personal documentary, yet that first film was, I mean personal documentaries about places or people – that first film was much more general but it's not less personal – it just seemed the subject more general.***
MT Yes, although the other ones on the face of it is a sort documentary … they are made in the same way as *Colour Poems* ... I don't know.

Student: ***Have you made – Are there any other things you've made that are similar?***
MT … possibly a very short film called *Aerial* which is on tomorrow night – you'll probably see a similarity in it to *Colour Poems*. No, the – what you call a documentary thing – does tend to come into it … in most of them really. Perhaps the very first film I ever made was an illustration of Hopkins' *The Leaden Echo the Golden Echo,* you'll probably see that, this is the picture I've chosen to march to the lines of the poem, irrespective of him. I mean there's nothing documentary about it. And in a sense, you could say that some of the MacDiarmid you see is done like that – it's not exactly meant to be a documentary about him, but it isn't you see … he rather preferred [indecipherable] which … were more documentary and had him explaining his political views and so on, I didn't want that. I just wanted to make a film portrait. You just get a view at the time, your own personal – in a way it's the picture that's there rather than anything you might [indecipherable]... You obviously take away something of the person too. Yes, I see what you mean. I liked the idea of portraits early on and I've made more of them they're probably been more like what you're talking about and these kinds of films I was trying – to describe a place I don't know whether you could really describe a place with film. So that … there's five films which between them tend to describe this little town of Kirkwall. I still don't – I don't think you can do it. I don't think you do really describe a place in the end. I don't know. You get some picture of a town perhaps from that last one? Something of it, but, er, you get the atmosphere I suppose and that's about it and something about the kind of buildings but then a film's the only [indecipherable] – I only make films … [indecipherable].

Student: ***How did you originally start making films – did you train with someone?***
MT I was with the film school in Rome in the 50's and this was at the time of Neorealism and it was a 2-year course and it just took you through the normal way of making films really and [I] saw films and saw people working on films [indecipherable] established directors working and then I came back to … while I was there at this film school there was an allowance for the Italian students to make either the short films or a scene from a film but the foreign students about half were ... Turkish, Yugoslav – well they didn't have money to – I mean we didn't get to make a film at the school so some of us got together and decided we'd make some sort of [indecipherable].

So, with an American and an Argentinian … I made a short film … and then we made another [indecipherable] and then I came back to Scotland and I couldn't find anybody to work with because there just wasn't that climate of course, not in Britain at all really … I would say – just getting ahead and do something – so I ended up just doing it all by myself which I think was [indecipherable].

Student: ***Did you have any contact with artists in Scotland?***
MT Do you mean painters? Slightly yes, they weren't – I don't think they were terribly interested in film at that time.
Student: ***What about Ian Hamilton Finlay?***
MT Yeah, well, he had some ideas for various films, but they didn't seem filmic to me what he was suggesting. You know, somebody else had done it – [indecipherable]. Actually, I suppose … they were very sort of minimal … [indecipherable]. Do you know them [him]?

Student: Yeah –
MT I don't have great contact with painters [indecipherable] at that time. The films in Scotland at that time were mostly promotional films and educational films ... nevertheless it might have been quite interesting to do something else. I mean there wasn't [indecipherable] Art schools [indecipherable].

Student: ***How much do you think you were influenced by Neorealism?***
MT I didn't feel the principles about it that they did.

Student: ***Do you feel now more – was one of the problems coming back to England that the films in England were much more related to American films rather than Europe and it would perhaps have been better for you if you'd worked in Europe?***
MT Yes, I think at that time, but not necessarily Neorealism, but European films seem to come out of something much more real than certainly the British films. But I mean I love Hollywood films too. I've nothing against them. At that time, Neorealism was maybe just slightly dying out and I didn't feel you know – talking about directors that the sort of principles about it, [indecipherable] I didn't feel the principles about it that they did. I didn't feel that on principal you should be Neorealistic in your approach.

Student: ***Maybe you stuck more to their principles than they did?***
MT There was another kind of filmmaking going on in Italy at the same time you see … subsidised short films, which [were] also shown in the cinemas along with the feature and this gave a sort of freedom to people too. These were very – free films I would say because some … were quite imaginative really, and I think we were all a bit influenced by them – by the idea that you could make – a film like that. They tended to be for 10-minutes / 20-minutes maximum [indecipherable] idea keeping your film precisely within 10-minutes … is, I mean some of my films are much longer than that, but [indecipherable] that influences your sort of discipline [indecipherable] to keep it to a certain length.

Student: ***Do you show your films in Orkney?***
MT Sometimes, yes.

Student: ***What sort of response do you get?***
MT Pretty good on the whole yes, I tend to show them with emphasising the local connection perhaps more than I really intend in the film and people tend to look at them

like that you see …and in fact, they think well how on earth would anybody who doesn't know this place be interested in it at all, people tend to say. I think yes, they don't get too [indecipherable]. Some films … when I showed *Some Changes* and another Kirkwall film and the one that's showing tomorrow night *Land Makar* … yes, I got a full house for that, two nights running … little [indecipherable]. Yes, they like them I suppose. They've never been shown more there than anywhere else, come to think of it.

Student: ***Have you seen any films by Bill Douglas?***
MT I've just seen one of that . You admire his films?

Student: Yes. [indecipherable] … ***I felt the third one you showed was like Bill Douglas.***
MT Ah you felt that was like Bill Douglas?

Student: ***Yeah, and … I can't remember the name of the film.***
MT Er, *Tail Piece*? That was made as a coda to a longer film called *Place of Work* which is in colour, so you could persuade Glen to hire it for you sometime and you can see what you think of it. You can get it from the Co-op, *Place of Work and Tail Piece* and they have *Colour Poems* and *Aerial*. That's the four that are there.

Student: ***Do you have any plans to show the five about Kirkwall together?***
MT All together? Er, I'd like to. One of them is an over an hour long, 65 minutes – there's two 10-minute ones, one 65, and two [indecipherable] yes, they could all be seen together.

Student: ***Did you intend that when you made them or did they just evolve?***
MT Yes, they could all be shown together. It would be quite interesting to see how people who don't know the place got taken into this thing. It's just a picture of a little town.

Student: ***When you said earlier about the fact that you don't waste much film that you know what you want when you shoot – do you know really the structure of the film or do you just know the kind of images that you want or the structure as well?***
MT Well I have a plan, a structure of the film that might change in the making but yeah, but I certainly set off with a notion, something on paper that includes the structure of the film. It might be the first thing I think of. But then – although I say I know what I'm looking for, it doesn't come out like that. What you get isn't exactly what you thought you were going to get – ever, so that then the structure might change according to what [indecipherable] I've got. But er … a lot of the [indecipherable]. Well I suppose in *Some Changes* for instance efforts might be followed by chance that I shot this protest march because, I mean I didn't know when I started the film that there was going to be any such thing.

Student: ***And when you say you know what you're looking for, presumably that refers to every method? There's hardly a shot that you could have predicted or is it just that you know what you're looking for in terms of mood?***
MT Yes, and I would say, I'd have gone down the pier several times to get the groups of the shipping and that sort of things and er, one of the times … the Rainbow Warrior was there so I shot it. I liked the general concept of the thing and the look of it – as a stranger in the place and so on.

Student: ***It immediately seemed to change the film so much having that in it?***
MT: Yes, that … having that I suppose did change, not exactly the structure but the feeling behind it all and perhaps, the fact that even the things that people were saying about the time at the beginning whether this has changed or not. You followed what they were saying … the accent wasn't difficult?

Student: ***I found it difficult.***
MT You found it difficult? The wee girl was saying that she was 11 and she thought nothing had changed, and like the older person thought the shops had changed and then this man who was at school at St Anne's [indecipherable] said everything's changed…I don't know that that … as he goes on to say that some things are letting go … [indecipherable]

Appendix 3.
Oliver Mezger interview with Alex Pirie. March 2013.

OM This is part of an interview I made with Alex Pirie Margaret Tait's husband As part of a visit to Orkney, the Orkney Archive to investigate their collection of Margaret Tait's papers. The interview took place at the archive. I first present a section where I ask a question about 91, Rose Street, the location of Ancona films in Edinburgh.

OM ***Was Rose Street Margaret's home in Edinburgh?***
AP Beg pardon?

OM *Was Rose Street where she lived? Where she stayed?*
AP Well yes in that it was a – it wasn't a – it was a rented first floor area which, ah well you see this is, it's another kind of life we're going back. Let's say we're going back er to – I met Margaret in the mid to late 50's – it's coming up to 60 years ago now. And, I can't be sure if I've got this right. There was a time, I think, when Margaret slept in her car which was another shooting box. It was not a big car, not a Chevrolet or anything like that, or a Winnebago. It was just a … It wasn't just an ordinary car, it was extended a wee bit , and she – I think, I think for a time – it was all fitted out. And we're talking about when everything was quieter time and it would be safer and she would just park her car somewhere and it would be quite safe. But I don't want to claim that as something that she did all the time, but in saying that, I have no memory of a bedroom in Rose St, nor do I have a memory of a sitting room or a kitchen because this was essentially a workplace. A lot of Margaret's stuff was in these rooms and, well, I haven't been in it for many years. I don't know what it is now, or whether these things have been adapted and bought by colonists, you know. Well you know [laughs], I'm a foreigner here you see, I think I've told you that before, and there has been an increase in the number of foreigners in Orkney I would think.

OM ***Was she always keen to get out of the city? I was trying to think about her relationship to it. Did it feel like home? Or was she always on the move?***
AP Well, you must remember that she went to school in Edinburgh. She was put away at the age of eight or something … . And of course, there was already an earlier generation of Tait's and Isbister's, that was her mother's name, Isbister. And again, in parenthesis, I think her mother, although she was Orcadian, I think she was – I think her mother was born in Glasgow. I'm not certain of that … that was just one of the things that people did. This was when she was sent away to school, there were already relatives living in Edinburgh so that er whatever shocks she experienced she would be in touch then with people who would take her out at the weekend etc. But she grew up in a city and was taught in a city, no I think that Margaret, er, whatever it was ... whether it was the land, whether it was the sea or a mountain top or a quarry or something, if she was there, she would be attending to it, something would engage her. So that I don't think I'd put it as an either or. You've obviously noticed already that she returned to live in Orkney in the last 30-odd years of her life anyway. I can't remember how this came about, we had tried various places in the islands, wonderful, beautiful places

OM ***Loch Inver?***
AP Yes, Loch Inver. Well on the edge. But the thing about it – I just want to emphasise this or at least draw your attention to the obvious fact, that everything is different now. Just everything. I look back at a time, well I don't mean it was idyllic or anything, but the pace of life, the rhythms of life, the noise of life whether it was in the city or whatever

else. … the transformation of people's sensibilities [through] things like television, which I see as something positively evil [laughs] its …no answer gives you that. I think the question you put there was an unthinking question.

OM ***Well I'm trying to get at what drew her North again. What drew her first to Sutherland and Slow Bend, because I know you were working in Glasgow and Edinburgh weren't you and you were going between?***
AP Oh well, once we got together, we were … again … in saying anything in the same instant I'm saying something as if I'm trying to tidy up something which isn't quite. I don't mean. It's just that having committed ourselves to each other put it that way – mind you I had a separate life you see at that time. I was still married with young children and so on and so that was a factor … or part of it … and I can't … there was a time when Margaret was able to continue as the renter of the – call it a flat above the work area in Rose Street, and then there was a time when that was ended, so that we were … there wasn't anything else that we knew about. We weren't thinking of Edinburgh then at all I would say. And to me and leaving Margaret out of it, because she would have her own reactions to things. But put it another way, starting another sentence, we shared a life together for several years in different parts of the Scottish islands and northern islands up by Cape Roth and Loch Inver ...
We spent more time together when we moved East … to Slow Bend. We were there I think several more years than any of the other places. In the meantime, of course time was passing and I had always had this absolute need, it was at the centre of my thinking and priorities, that I wanted to stay in contact with my two children who were young. And that was something … I didn't have to emphasise it. Margaret acquiesced if you like and we adapted to that, so that once we were at Slow Bend which was a drive … and I would collect the children … and they would come up for the weekend, school holidays and we were adapting to that, both of which of course Margaret sometimes shot some footage and incorporated … slight film. So, as I say Rose Street wasn't Margaret's anymore. I can't remember who owned it – it would be the Scottish Co-operative society or something. And wherever we were – you would understand this that we spent a huge amount of time together … she was working in one end of the house and I was at the other end, but we were there more or less 24-hours a day. And looking back, this is the thing, enormous intensity and engagement with, certainly as I was 14 years younger then. So I was just coming to terms with references to the past which were rather different. Plus the fact that I did have these children. I must say that Margaret was wonderful. She took them in and got to know them and was loving with them and the rest of it. Er, at no time did she bring up the question of whether … it was her or them. I mention it … but it never came up. And over years then as we got into Kirkwall to Orkney, then they used to come up and spend much more time as they had their teens and the like. What the children were making of it – I mean one does know anything about anything. But Margaret was engaging with them and learning from them and utilising certain things. A lovely little film called *Splashing* which I think it exists doesn't it?
It's such a long time since I saw any of Margaret's films. I'm sorry I couldn't get down to the Symposium … that was successful, was it?
OM ***It was great, so we showed The Big Sheep which shows all the buses going by. Do you remember that one?***
AP No
OM ***OK well I could show you some of it. And we hired a bus from 1968, and so we all got on the bus and went …***
AP And did the route?

OM ***Did the route to Slow Bend, now the A9 cuts right through so the Slow Bend doesn't exist anymore.***
AP The house doesn't exist?

OM ***No the house exists but the actual bend … is now the two laybys and the A9 runs right through the middle.***
AP They straightened it out? But it's still on the seaward side as it were?

OM Yes. Yes.
AP But the house would be occupied?

OM ***It is, yeah. Now the headmistress of the primary school lives there.***
AP Oh yeah? In Helmsdale?
OM Yeah. Yeah.

AP You see, I can't. We got to know people. We were trying to keep hold of as much time as possible for working, put it that way, but whether we weren't insular or anything.

OM ***What were you working on and what was she working on at the time?***
AP You mean specific things. Well I couldn't tell you that you see I …

OM ***Do you remember what were you working on?***
AP About 10 years ago, Margaret's been dead now for 14 years quite soon, and in those first 2 or 3 years after her death my priority was to make sure that her films exist and I've mentioned this before the obvious thing of getting things up and down and here and there […] and where they are now, and God willing, as my Granny always said, they will survive. And I want to emphasise this. I am not at all the slightest bit interested in biographies or autobiographies. I think the thing that exists for me, as is the case for Margaret, would be the art , the work of art, the individual works of art and that's why I would emphasise that. I've been in touch in more recent years with people who work in the Scottish Screen Archive. One of them, Kay Forbisher. Have you met her ? Well she's Orcadian, she's [the] deputy curator, Janet McBain. After your time.

OM ***I recognise the name Janet MacBain.***
AP I haven't seen her since then, but I hope, I'm sure I did communicate to her my thanks for the work she did for the attention she gave. She was the curator. But when I look back in that period of what for me would have been anxiety not quite knowing how far I was going with this and what was going to happen. And during those years in which I was working away at it, and still trying to find pieces here and there, that Janet MacBain was an example of somebody who was a supporter and did all the mini-bureaucracy and also happened upon [indecipherable]. I cannot thank her enough. She's now retired I think, but these several people that we got to know. We seemed to be very lucky. And as I say, that's the thing, I want people to be, and this is my ambition my own final ambition that doesn't apply really to Margaret's show, I want the films to be seen, and I want them to be experienced and I want everybody then to be reduced to silence, so that they can at least, if they want to think about something, or if they want to share the nature of their experience. OK. But I'm not particularly interested myself.

And here's another a little digression, and this is an admission, that in this 10-years or so that I mentioned, my son you see at that time had thought that he would like to see some at least of my work, my writing. I said well yes but it's all disorderly in terms of order, chronology and location. But then in the past 10 years or so, that became the center of

my life. I mean, I made a note somewhere that I had written, what was it, about 113 different texts. And it was very hard because it's something one forgets about as you get old, because you get old and you get older and nature gets its own back a wee bit and you begin to get ill.

OM Alec then went on to 'wrap up' [his words]
AP This is a kind of wrap up that there was a time sometime last year. I can remember the surgery in December when I was in hospital, that in the kind of creative tangle I was in then and trying to get things in order so that I could get them down the road, I remember thinking, just in a relaxed way, Alec you really have to free yourself from Margaret and her work. Now that maybe seems a bit extreme, but I had been caught up in Margaret's work as an observer, but I said this before, in saying anything like that, I had no part to play in what came into being as each film as it was completed. I mean I would be useful for something or other say, maybe I did open a door and go through it! No, Margaret's films were Margaret's films, and I was lucky enough in a way to see how she would spend an enormous amount of time. And how many frames should be taken off something or other. Because then we're going into the realm of music you see different kinds of rhythms, different kinds of melodic things if you like or visual melodic. She would never agonise Margaret, no she never got drunk or anything. That reminds me of Stella Cartwright and don't know what happened to her …. what film was she in?

OM *Palindrome.*
AP *Palindrome?* Was she? I liked Stella she was an interesting woman, about my age. I think she's dead long gone. She was notable amongst the intelligentsia of Edinburgh I would say. Er,
… oh, I think maybe a couple of poets fought over her at one point. Now, who was that? Tom Scott? No, I just mention these. I look back and there was this fine thing a person my age. I'd done my National Service, I got back safe and sound and then I was wondering what to do this and that, and out of that time, I look back very fortunate. There was quite a good batch of poets of a generation maybe born about Margaret's age or older than that, who had come through the First and Second World War and there they were, and they were teachers I would say and this kind of thing, and I would meet them you see – I would say, I don't know them, but we would get engaged in some kind of conversation, and there was always Stella to talk about. [Laughs] I'm getting off the point now. I thought we might go down to the Kirkwall and have lunch you see. What's your time now?

Appendix 4.
Transcripts of TV Channel 4. *11th Hour* Broadcasts Featuring Margaret Tait.

1.'Margaret Tait: Filmmaker'. April 25th 1983. (75-minutes)
Interviewer Tamara Krikorian (TK).
Margaret Tait (MT)
Series Editor David Curtis. Directed by Margaret Williams.

MT …The kind of cinema I care about is at a level of poetry in fact it has been in a way my life's work making film poems. There are other uses of film of course, journalistic, teaching and so forth but I don't do that, other people do that. I think my films appeal to people through dreams, the connections in them are felt connections rather than logical connections.

TK *How did you begin making films?*
MT Well, after practicing medicine for some years and doing some writing, I went to the Film School in Rome Centro Sperimentale di Photographia in 1950 for a 2-year course and that was a very good time to be there because we'd follow the work of directors working in Italy at that time and some of them took an interest in the teaching at the Centro. In fact, I remember Rossellini and Ingrid Bergman turning up to show us *Stromboli*.

TK *That was a period when Neorealism was very much to the fore in Italy.*
MT Well it wasn't all Neorealism by that time, and in fact some of the short films being made there were far from realistic. Along with some fellow students at the Centro, I worked on some short films in Italy and then when I got back to Scotland I started making short films by myself.

TK *What sort of opportunities were there for making films in Scotland at that time?*
MT Well nothing much was going on in Scotland in film that I could take seriously, some promotional films and that was about all. I couldn't find any other people that I could team up with. I got premises in Edinburgh at 91, Rose Street and in fact after I'd been there a couple of years I made a film in Rose Street – a film called *Rose Street* about the little bit of Rose Street where I was working.

Film Clip: *Rose Street.*

MT Before I was ever in Italy I had couple of years in the East when I was a medical officer in the RAMC, this led to something contemplative, a way of looking at things – which is something to do with the East.

TK *That fits in with something I felt about the pacing of your films.*
MT Yes, well, *Rose Street,* the film – it's a lost film in a way, it no longer exists as a separate film, because a later film *On the Mountain* contains the whole of the film *Rose Street*. I set about to frame it in colour in a later view of the street. I was a tenant at Rose Street until 1973 and then the last days of my tenancy there, I was down in Edinburgh (we'd moved up to Orkney by that time) clearing out, moving out stuff and there I was in the Street again. I borrowed a camera, ordered some stock and that was when I needed to frame the original film of *Rose Street* – make an entirely new film, *On the Mountain* – which when you talk about pace, I think that is in a sense what that film consists of – different pacings partly from the different time then a comparison of the two times, and

you get this harking back – not just to a previous state of the street but also to a previous film.

Film Clip: ***On The Mountain*****.**

TK ***In recording those places it seems to me it is not propaganda; you're leaving a space for the viewer to make up their own mind.***
MT Yes I like that 'leave a space' – I like something open-open to interpretation you could say – open-ended. In fact, Orcadians like myself are always being accused of leaving doors and houses wide open, not wide open but doors open when they should be closed.
No, it's not propaganda it's more a matter of sheer wonder and astonishment at how much can be seen in any place you choose and in this case it's a street – if you really look. I found this expression Tamara here, about 'stalking the image' – that's *Lorca in a tercentenary lecture about Don Luis de Gongora. And he also says "for Gongora an apple is no less intense than the sea, a bee no less astonishing than a forest. He treats all materials in the same scale and the poet must know this says Lorca".*

TK ***So you think of film as a poetic medium?***
MT Yes I do. The kind of cinema that I care about anyway, is on that level of poetry and I'd say in a way that … my life's work has consisted of making film poems. Of course, when I started doing medicine I thought that medicine would be my life's work, but at a certain … I think I gradually came over to feeling that it was necessary to do something more than just simply bringing people back to bodily health.
I did make a film portrait of a poet in *Hugh MacDiarmid.*

TK ***It seems to me that in the portrait of Hugh MacDiarmid that you've used the structure of the poems to create a form for your film, in fact.***
MT Yes, and say I used Christopher Murray Grieve to create a form for my idea of Hugh MacDiarmid.

Film Clip: ***Hugh MacDiarmid: A Portrait*****.**

MT Well, you see, this poem that I used, it's called "somersault" and the lines:

I lo'e the stichie
O' Earth in space
Breengin' by
At a haliket pace

… suggested to me the poet as a circus performer really enjoying balancing on the high wire, or a very narrow line…

A wecht o' hills
Gangs wallopi' owre
Sine a whummlin' sea
Wi a gallus glower

… and I asked Christopher if he thought he could walk along as if he was balancing the earth, making the Earth turn round with his own feet, and he thought he could do that, so this is what he's doing.

The West whuds doon

Like the pigs of Gadara.
But the East's aye there
Like a sow at the farrow.

… and he walks east, throws his notebook into the wastepaper basket.

Film Clip: *Hugh MacDiarmid: A Portrait*.

TK *You began to publish your own poetry at this time?*
MT Yes I published two books of short stories and then three of poetry and left some poems unpublished.

TK *Including Hill Top People?*
MT Yes including Hill Top People … it had been one that Hector MacAndrew wrote the music me for – and that's a photocopy of his manuscript actually.

TK *Where I Am Is Here is one of the first films where your own poetic style comes to the fore.*
MT Yes, well that's understandable because there had actually been a long interval since I had last made a film. I had been writing. Writing poetry studying so poetry perhaps more than anything. After I finished *Rose Street,* I did attempt to get it taken, Cinema, Television, I think I have a letter signed by Lew Grade politely declining! I started *Where I Am is Here* before *Hugh MacDiarmid,* though they overlapped really in time. By that time, I just felt I wanted to make a film but there was absolutely no point in making it specifically for a market say when there wasn't a market. And that the only point at all in making a film with your own time your own equipment, just making one in that way was to do it on the level of poetry and be as absolutely serious about making the thing as you possibly could – and, who said that the art of cinema is the art of composing in images? Well I would say images and sound are equally important. One thinks of sound in terms of duration, I think you naturally think of any sound in term of duration, whereas you don't necessarily naturally think of an image in terms of duration.

Film Clip: *Where I Am Is Here.*

MT And in fact *The Big Sheep,* although it seems in a way a very different kind of film has the same sort of repetitive structure, and the tourist buses coming North match the sheep going South and then the lambs running down among the pens at the lamb sale. To my mind match the burn running down to the rocks at the end of the film.

TK *What is the significance of the title The Big Sheep?*
MT Well, the full title of the film is *Caora Mor: The Big Sheep* and Caora Mor was the nick name the highlanders gave to the Cheviot sheep which replaced people in the Glens at the time of the improvements what about 200 years ago? Not so long as that. And these memories are still very much alive in the Highlands, of the Clearances and I wanted to make a picture of a place where people still remember those thing

Film Clip: *The Big Sheep.*

TK In *Colour Poems you actually painted on the film.*
MT In *Colour Poems* I was trying to do it rather differently, instead of the usual kind of animation I was doing it as the opposite of animation in a sense. I was trying to keep the picture as still as possible and get the opposite effect of … Duchamp *Nude descending a*

Staircase where you see several phases in the one picture. I was trying to keep my picture still over a number of frames by just allowing for the natural shiver that there's bound to be, and this was to illustrate a slightly shaky memory I had of … the Spanish Civil War. My memories of it were simply off the newspaper reports and off some people who had gone away to it and had come back, and I couldn't quite take it all in really. So that between Sorley MacLean's poem about NOT having gone to the Spanish Civil War and something of Lorca, I got the title from this book of *El Numen de las Ramas* which I translated as Numen of the Boughs. I had started a poem in words, and I tried to complete it on film.

Film Clip: *Colour Poems.*

MT *Aerial's* a very simple film if you allow yourself to respond to it instead of trying to follow it intellectually. There's no narrative and no argument, the theme's more like a musical theme conjured out of the whole rather than presented as points to be taken. There's a general theme of the four elements earth, air, fire, and water and different order, air, water, earth, fire, and then air again with all the elements intermingled but just as a sort of song or even a kind of nursery rhyme – though I don't understand musical structure – I can't really follow the structure of a piece of music when I'm listening to it. But I think that the film structure is more like musical structure than anything else.

Film Clip: *Aerial*

MT That was the whole of *Aerial*, the complete film, it's just 4-minutes long. Plus the other bits we saw were just extracts from the films of course.

TK *Now that you're living in Orkney, do you use the place as subject matter, or do you simply use the material that's around you?*
MT Well some of the films could be made anywhere, the like of *Aerial* or *Colour Poems*, but since I was in Orkney when I was making them I used the actuality around me as I always do use available actuality
KT *And your most recent film Land Makar deals with the making of a landscape in contrast to the destruction and rebuilding of a cityscape in On the Mountain.*

Film Clip: *Land Makar*

MT Did you follow some of the dialogue in the film? Is there anything particular that you did pick up?
TK I think at the beginning I found it difficult to pick up on individual words except for turnips and oats for example, but I found that what was important was looking at the image and that afterwards that one began to understand some of the language and I realise this is the most important way of looking at film and we often do depend too often on language.
MT Yes, this is the sort of thing she says. Do you remember at the end where she's talking about her hens and saying that they don't really pay, that the cost of feeding is so high and that if they live then you get a dinner out of each of them then it's worthwhile? But if something happens to them and they die, then they die in debt. Well I sometimes feel about my films that, if they're seen or not then responded to then they live, but if they're not much seen and just quietly disintegrate into their chemical constituents then they'll die in debt.

Film Clip: *Land Makar.*

Full Screening: ***Where I Am is Here.***

2.'Films by Margaret Tait'. March 9th 1987. 10.55 pm. (55-minutes)

(Some parts of the programme are a repeat of the earlier programme.)

Interviewer Tamara Krikorian **(TK).**
Arbor International production television programme featuring a compilation of films made by Margaret Tait.

MT The kind of cinema I care about is at a level of poetry in fact it has been in a way my life's work making film poems. There are other uses of film of course, journalistic, teaching and so forth but I don't do that, other people do that. I think my films appeal to people through dreams, the connections in them are felt connections rather than logical connections.

No, it's not propaganda, it's more a matter of sheer wonder and astonishment at how much can be seen in any place that you choose. In this case a Street. If you really look. I found this expression Tamara, here, about stalking the image. That's Lorca in a tercentenary lecture about Don Luis de Gongora. And he also says: 'for Gongora an apple is no less intense than the sea, a bee no less astonishing than a forest … he treats all materials at the same scale, and a poet must know this, says Lorca'.

TK ***So you think of film as a poetic medium?***
MT Yes I do. The kind of cinema that I care about anyway, is on that level of poetry and I'd say in a way that … my life's work has consisted of making film poems. Of course, when I started doing medicine I thought that medicine would be my life's work, but at a certain … I think I gradually came over to feeling that it was necessary to do something more than just simply bringing people back to bodily health.
I did make a film portrait of a poet in *Hugh MacDiarmid.*

Film Screening: ***Hugh MacDiarmid: A Portrait*****. (1964)**

MT … the only point at all in making a film with your own time your own equipment, just making one in that way was to do it on the level of poetry and be as absolutely serious about making the thing as you possibly could – and, who said that the art of cinema is the art of composing in images? Well I would say images and sound are equally important. One thinks of sound in terms of duration, I think you naturally think of any sound in term of duration, whereas you don't necessarily naturally think of an image in terms of duration.

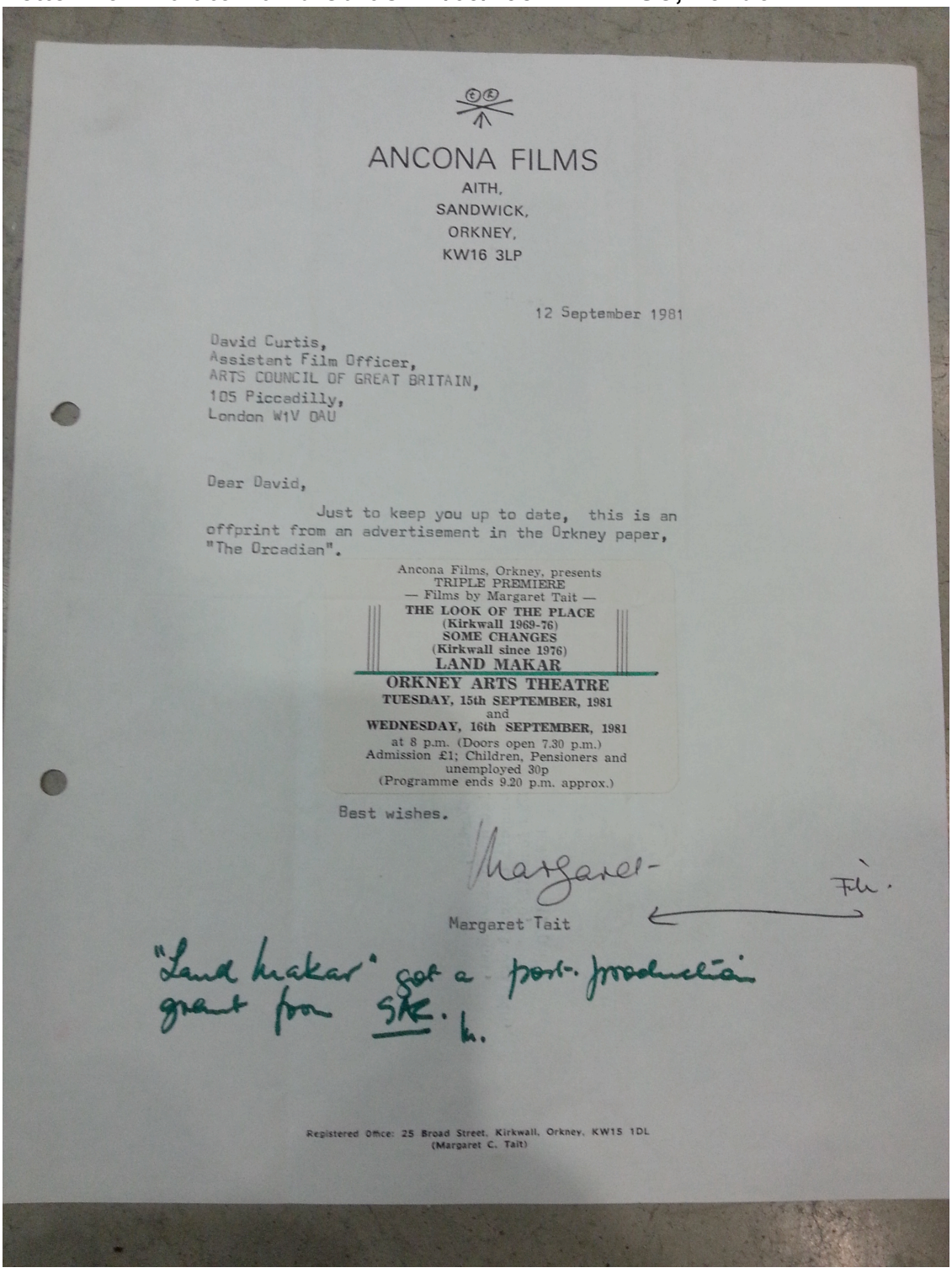
Film Screening: ***Portrait of Ga.*** **(1952)**

MT In *Colour Poems* I was trying to do it rather differently, instead of the usual kind of animation I was doing it as the opposite of animation in a sense. I was trying to keep the picture as still as possible and get the opposite effect of … Duchamp *Nude descending a Staircase* where you see several phases in the one picture. I was trying to keep my picture still over a number of frames by just allowing for the natural shiver that there's bound to be, and this was to illustrate a slightly shaky memory I had of … the Spanish Civil War. My memories of it were simply off the newspaper reports and off some people who had gone away to it and had come back, and I couldn't quite take it all in really. So that between Sorley MacLean's poem about NOT having gone to the Spanish Civil War and something of Lorca, I got the title from this book of *El Numen de las Ramas* which I

translated as Numen of the Boughs. I had started a poem in words, and I tried to complete it on film.

Film Screening *Colour Poems.* (1974)
Film Screening *Aspects of Kirkwall 6. Some Changes.* (1981).

Appendix 5
Letter from Tait to David Curtis. 12/09/1981. BAFVSC, London.



ANCONA FILMS
AITH,
SANDWICK,
ORKNEY,
KW16 3LP

12 September 1981

David Curtis,
Assistant Film Officer,
ARTS COUNCIL OF GREAT BRITAIN,
105 Piccadilly,
London W1V 0AU

Dear David,

Just to keep you up to date, this is an offprint from an advertisement in the Orkney paper, "The Orcadian".

Ancona Films, Orkney, presents
TRIPLE PREMIERE
— Films by Margaret Tait —
THE LOOK OF THE PLACE
(Kirkwall 1969-76)
SOME CHANGES
(Kirkwall since 1976)
LAND MAKAR
ORKNEY ARTS THEATRE
TUESDAY, 15th SEPTEMBER, 1981
and
WEDNESDAY, 16th SEPTEMBER, 1981
at 8 p.m. (Doors open 7.30 p.m.)
Admission £1; Children, Pensioners and unemployed 30p
(Programme ends 9.20 p.m. approx.)

Best wishes.

Margaret-

Margaret Tait

"Land Makar" got a post-production grant from SAC. h.

Registered Office: 25 Broad Street, Kirkwall, Orkney, KW15 1DL
(Margaret C. Tait)

Appendix 6

Tait letter to Leggett regarding funding from Scottish Arts Council. 06/10/1977. Held at BAFVSC, London.

Please reply to

ANCONA FILMS Aith, Sandwick, Orkney, KW16 3LP

Screenplays
Scripting
Production
16 mm Film-List

Margaret C. Tait, B.Sc., M.B.Ch.B.

Telephone: Kirkwall (0856) 3163

6th October 77

Dear Mike,

Many thanks for your letter of 23rd September, received last Friday.

Same day, I got a letter from Deke Businberge about a possible London Film-makers' co-op showing. Their shows are on Wednesdays, so I suggested either November 30th or December 14th , I much preferring Nov 30th, of the two. Will hear, I guess. Maybe neither date will suit them.

But I haven't heard anything from the SAC, and I enclose a copy of a letter I've writeen to Lindsay Gordon & will post tomorrow unless there's anything in the post from him.

Glasgow Film Theatre (Martyn Auty, programmes officer) have late November pencilled in ~~xx~~ for a scottish film-makers' day perhaps to be arranged. So, if that turns out to be ON too, it would fit in rather well.

PLACE of WORK and TAILPIECE were shown at Edinburgh Film Festival, at "Film House" along with a real stinker called "Summer Diary" and a routine Arts Council monograph on TOM PHILLIPS, painter. Ten p.m. and a small audience.

I'm putting them on in Kirkwall next Tuesday, third of three programmes selected from 25 years of own work. Photocopy cuttings for your archive... and a complimentary ticket, a bit late in the day.

The other photocopies are from stills of PLACE OF WORK, and perhaps your students could do some lettering upon them to make them into window-posters for your show &/or the other 3 locations. I'm typing out some information about the films for them, with copies to you too.

What length of programme do you want? P of W and T together run 40 minutes. Would you like ON THE MOUNTAIN along with that? (That8s the one incorporating the 1956 b/w ROSE STREET enclosed within colour Rose Street of 1973, runs 32 mins.) Anything else that from memory you'd like screened? WHERE I AM IS HERE .. with Hector MacAndrew's music, that you first saw at the Demarco Gallery ? (It's about 35 or 40 minutes.)

Registered Office: 25 Broad Street, Kirkwall, Orkney, KW15 1DL

I plan to bring all those along, and probably also THE BIG SHEEP. (45 min) Perhaps COLOUR POEMS and AERIAL aswell. (CP 12 min A 4 min)

That is, if SAC plays up, plays up and plays the game. If not, if, well, we'll see what they say.

The emergency situation would be the films to you by post and you as film-parachutist in chief projecting them, is that it?

Alex would like to come down too, and we could manage that if the mode of travel is by road, i.e. driving the n mini pickup all the way from almost John o Groats to almost Lands End.

I'll leave this letter now and get some of the stuff typed out for Penzance, Dartington and Exmouth, well, after I've Made The Tea.

Any chance of including Bristol in the tour? I'd like it if there could be a show there too.

Meantime

all best wishes, and thanks for all your organising.

(Mention of Oxford and Norwich in letter to L.G. ... some interest expressed there, but I haven't done anything about arranging shows. Outside your area, but do you happen to know of anyone I could contact ? I'll write to the Newcastle addresses you gave me too. -) (Probably better to do any NE shows on the way back, especially if London can be on 30 Nov. and out of the way at the start.) (But, in organising, you must have had a lot, this summer of "that before this, or this before that?" and such-like.)

Margaret -

Top copy of the time (sign of tiredness :) that I put one of the carbons wrong way round - - - - herewith - Have done it again & will send that sheet, & other things to P. D & E.

Appendix 7
Mike Leggett Flier for Tait in the South West Tour. BAFVSC, London.

...D FILM-MAKERS CO-OPERATIVE 42, Gloucester Ave, NW1 586-4306

...dnesday, 30 November 1977 8.30pm

...lms by Margaret Tait: ON THE MOUNTAIN (1974) -30 mins.
PLACE OF WORK (1976) -30 mins.
TAILPIECE (1976) -10 mins.

...garet Tait has made 26 films over the past 26 years; those of us who are ...ortunate enough to have seen some, not even all, of the work will agree ...ith Le Grice who said in 1975: '...working in a direction which received ...o echo of support in the films of her generation, she has developed her ...deas in relative isolation.....and from the work seen, she must be con...idered as the only genuinely independent, experimental mind to precede the ...urrent movement which began here (Britain) about 1966.' But for a retro...pective at the Edinburgh Festival in 1970 and a brief appearance at the ...ristol Festival in 1975, her work has been rarely seen anywhere. And so ...nowing what to inc ude in a programme is a problem. The film-maker has ...elected three films--ON THE MOUNTAIN, PLACE OF WORK, and TAILPIECE.

...N THE MOUNTAIN was completed in 1974--it is the sequel to ROSE STREET made ...n 1956--and offers something of an insight into the development of the ...ilm-maker by incorporating the original film into the recent one:
'There's a film within a film here. A film called ROSE STREET is enclosed, ...ntact with academy leader, censor's certificate and credit and end titles, ...side a picture of the street in 1973 to make, together, ON THE MOUNTAIN. ...se Street, Edinburgh, is a street I knew well in all the years that An... ...na Films had premises there. I saw it changing from being a place of over...crowded tenants, children playing in the street, pubs and small shops servi...g ...eople who lived there, among others, into a pedestrian precinct with trendy ...utiques and blocks of offices. The Rose Street pubs always having been ...notable part of Edinburgh life, we find, in the stretch of street treated ... the film, that the Kenilworth and the Goblet (once Scarlett's Bar) are ...ill there, one changed much more than the other, and that there's a new ...e called the Galloping Major.
...he film is about the life of the street. In the old days, children playe... ...ever on the pavement and 'chainy tig' in the back lane, and sang skipping ...ngs: nowadays, shoppers can amble along in the middle of the street. The ...oke has gone, but the (seemingly) same rubbish cart collects the refuse, ...d the same window-cleaner is washing the very same window as sixteen years ...fore, although the shop has a different name.
...n 1973 there were still some great gap sites, towards Princes Street and ...wards George Street, with beavering bulldozers in their depths. I have ...ied to catch some of this turmoil, while the ghosts of the budding foot...ballers of 1956 kick a ball around on the cobbles.'

...e comparison between the two parts of the film (ROSE STREET actually occu...pies a midway section toward the beginning of the new film), of course goes ...rther than just any comparison between the street 'then' and the street ...ow' (1973). Instead of the rigidly supported camera with the crisp and pic...turesquely lit black and white street, the camera is loaded with colour ...ock and records the gaudy transformation of the street, neurotically movin... ...ound the pedestrian precinct with its trendy shops and lushed-up pubs, ...ights glinting starkly in the half-light, brash music glaring on the sound ...rack. The form is expressionist in its directness and the same allusion ...de to the mammon of Capital in THE BIG SHEEP is reflected again in the c... ...porary Clearances enacted by the city 'developer' and the city 'planner' ...r Edinburgh, like many other cities, was, and still is, under seige from ...h army of progress. The tone or reference is never propagandistic, but ...h the picture and sound images that are selected this is one meaning, ...applying the imagination, that can be quite clear--a process of identi...

'ication between the perceiving subject and its object that another poet, oleridge, invented the term esemplastic to describe. Of the four other ilms made in the same year, COLOUR POEMS distinctively traverses between the ocumentary-like construction of ON THE MOUNTAIN and the lyrical PLACE OF ORK. It is made up of seven short films, shot in the style of the film ⁄orist, yet assembled with the selectivity and allusiveness of the lyric oet incorporating spoken poems, scratched and painted images, sparkling ictures of native Orkney, memories to do with the Spanish Civil War, 'images f poppies budding, flowering and maturing into pods to bloom another day.'

ppearing in 1976 and in Margaret Tait's own words:

LACE OF WORK was meant to define a place, or the feeling of being in one ace, with the sense this gives one, not of restriction but of the infinite ariations available. Inevitable variations with time, with even quite short tervals of time, and voluntary variations according to viewpoint. The spe- ific thing of that very moment at that very place, within a slightly more eneral thing of thereabout and never very far away, over a period of months ith implications of before and after tha, as well). The place I pick on is house in Kirkwall, Orkney, which was my home from the age of seven, which I ften returned to, (which in fact remained my 'permanent address' during travels lsewhere), and which I latterly made my own place of work, for about seven ears. At the time of filming, I was living there and working there.

'The scheme followed, as the film built up, was to take you from the work ble, out the front door, and round the house in an east, south, west, and rth circling; showing the shape of the garden; and then to repeat this ircle, with excursions in and out of the house, observing on the way with ual gaze the creatures in the garden, human activity outside and glimpses f town, sea and other islands beyond. Into this come some, in a sense ther obvious, observations about flowers budding, flowering, turning into ds and being shaken and broken by the wind. As the trees are battered are, we return to the editing bench, overhearing that the telephone is to e left connected 'until Monday'.

'TAILPIECE, a coda to PLACE OF WORK, is more personalised, more allusive and less naturalistic. The house is being vacated, it is now clear. Children's oices repeating handed-down rhymes and rigmaroles suggest past time as well s now, and there are other reverberations into past and future coming from e handling of objects, revealing of marks on walls, mirroring of myself e room and shadows in rooms.'

ke Leggett
vember 1977

Appendix 8
Carolee Schneemann. Interior Scroll (Performance 1975)

The following is the text that Schneemann read from the scroll during her performance Interior Scroll (1975) which was first performed on August 29, 1975, at an East Hampton, New York, art show titled *Women Here and Now,* honouring the United Nations' International Women's Year:

I met a happy man
a structuralist filmmaker
—but don't call me that
it's something else I do—
he said we are fond of you
you are charming
but don't ask us
to look at your films
we cannot
there are certain films
we cannot look at
the personal clutter
the persistence of feelings
the hand-touch sensibility
the diaristic indulgence
the painterly mess
the dense gestalt
the primitive techniques
(I don't take the advice
of men who only talk to
themselves)
PAY ATTENTION TO CRITICAL
AND PRACTICAL FILM LANGUAGE
IT EXISTS FOR AND IN ONLY
ONE GENDER
even if you are older than me
you are a monster I spawned
you have slithered out
of the excesses and vitality
of the sixties……..
he said you can do as I do
take one clear process
follow its strictest
implications intellectually
establish a system of
permutations establish
their visual set……..
I said my film is concerned
with DIET AND DIGESTION
very well he said then
why the train?
the train is DEATH as there
is die in diet and di in
digestion

then you are back to metaphors
and meanings
my work has no meaning beyond
the logic of its systems
I have done away with
emotion intuition inspiration—
those aggrandized habits which
set artists apart from
ordinary people—those
unclear tendencies which
are inflicted upon viewers……..

it's true I said when I watch
your films my mind wanders
freely……..
during the half hour of
pulsing dots I compose letters
dream of my lover
write a grocery list
rummage in the trunk
for a missing sweater
plan the drainage pipes for
the root cellar……..
it is pleasant not to be
manipulated

he protested
you are unable to appreciate
the system the grid
the numerical rational
procedures
the Pythagorean cues —
I saw my failings were worthy
of dismissal I'd be buried
alive my works lost……

he said we can be friends
equally tho' we are not artists
equally I said we cannot
be friends equally and we
cannot be artists equally
he told me he had lived with
a "sculptress" I asked does
that make me a "film-makeress"?

"Oh no," he said. "We think of you
as a dancer."

Appendix 9
Mike Leggett e-mail Extracts

Mike Leggett
To: Peters, Camilla
Inbox
On: 22 August 2016 15:26

ML….. Margaret talked about how she felt a kind of responsibility to the Orkneys to be not only their documenter of changes but also their poet. She was canny I believe by encouraging local audiences to come and see her visual poems by promising that they would probably spot themselves, mainly in the films that I think were really shot as 'home-movies', the 'Aspects of Kirkwall' series. …..
Mike

_____

Mike Leggett
To: Peters, Camilla
Inbox
On: Monday, 29 May 2017 at 08:23

CP. Did Tait give up being a locum in 1960 when she received her stipend?
ML. I don't think so as I'm sure she told me mid-70s that she occasionally still did locum work.
Mike.

_____

Mike Leggett
To: Peters, Camilla
Inbox
On: Wednesday, 12 September 2018 at 01:59
MT I'm wondering if your research has shown that she was part of the pre-War political movement amongst Scottish university students to 'move back' into the Highlands. I first became aware of this in conversation with Annabel Nicolson's uncle Torquil, during the trip to visit Margaret.

Appendix 10
Mike Leggett Agreement

CONSENT FORM FOR CAMILLA PETERS PhD RESEARCH
TITLE: Margaret Tait: Film Poet in the Margins of C20th Avant-garde Film.

I have been given information about research title and discussed the research project with Camilla Peters who is conducting this research as part of a PhD degree supervised by

- Professor John Hall, Professor of Performance Writing, AIR, Falmouth University
- Dr Anna Misiak, Senior Lecturer in Film Course Coordinator MA Film and Television
- Dr D Ferrett, Course Coordinator and Senior Lecturer in Popular Music

I have been advised of the potential risks associated with this research, which concerns issues of privacy, and have had an opportunity to ask Camilla Peters any questions I may have about her research and my participation in it.

I understand that my participation in this research is voluntary, I am free to refuse to participate and I am free to withdraw from the research at any time until the PhD is complete. Withdrawing my consent will not affect my treatment in any way or my relationship with Falmouth University or Camilla Peters.

If I have any enquiries about the research, or if I have any concerns or complaints regarding the way the research is or has been conducted, I can contact Camilla Peters or any of the named supervisors above at the

Research & Innovation Office
Falmouth University
AIR
Penryn Campus
01326 255831
RIO-Office@falmouth.ac.uk OR

UAL Research Student Administrator
Research Management and Administration
University of the Arts London | 5th Floor | Granary Building
1 Granary Square | King's Cross | London | N1C 4AA

By signing below I am indicating my consent to (please tick):

- ☑ non-recorded conversations with Camilla Peters about Margaret Tait, filmmaker and Orcadian
- ☑ audio-recording our conversation
- ☑ note-taking of our conversation
- ☑ transcriptions of our conversation appearing anonymously for her PhD & Appendix
- ☑ transcriptions of our conversation appearing with my name included in her PhD

I understand that the data collected from my participation will be used for her thesis and for publication and I consent for it to be used in that manner.
A separate form indicates my agreement/non agreement (delete as applicable) for this information to be stored in Orkney Sound Archives for public access.

Signature and Date 20/7/16

Name (please print) .....Mike Leggett.....

Contact details if applicable...+61 0434996211 or address on file.....

Appendix 11

National Library of Scotland Moving Image Archive Permission 1, 2, 3
Application for Use of Moving Images for Educational Use **Ref**

Moving Image Archive
Kelvin Hall, 1445 Argyle Street, Glasgow, G3 8AW
E-mail: movingimage@nls.uk Fax: 0845 366 4601

Name:	Camilla Peters
Address:	10. Frobisher Terrace, Falmouth, Cornwall. TR11 2NB
Telephone & E-mail:	Mobile: 07493067626 e-mail millampeters@gmail.com
Educational institution and course:	Falmouth University, Penryn Campus, Treliever Road, Penryn. Cornwall. TR10 9FE Postgraduate Study (PhD)
Course tutor (if appropriate)	Supervisors: Dr. Anna Misiak. Prof John Hall.
Proposed use of material	To illustrate points that I am making in my close analysis of several of Margaret Tait's short films.
Requested item(s):	Screenshots from Margaret Tait Films held at the Moving Image Archives Website, Glasgow. Including films under copyright such as *All These New Relations* and *Place of Work* for example
Required format:	Online website access.

Terms and Conditions

I/we agree that the materials are supplied to me by Moving Image Archive, National Library of Scotland Archive (herewith referred to as "NLS") on the understanding that the footage will be used **solely for educational (academic) purposes and/or forms part of my course work and will not be used commercially in any way.**

I/we understand that the moving images are protected by copyright.

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- the defamation or alleged defamation of any person or of that person's property: or
- the infringement of any statutory right or common law or other rights by reason of the use of the material in the Production:
- and also against any costs, damages, liabilities and expenses which the Archive may incur in resisting, opposing, compromising or settling any such claims and nothing hereinbefore contained shall prevent this indemnity from being fully effective as a result of any uncertainty on the part of the Producer or the NLS as to the person(s) in whom the copyright in the material is vested.

Unless otherwise agreed, **Scotland's Moving Image Archive** will be acknowledged in the credits to my production.

I/we hereby confirm that I have read and understood the conditions outlined above.

Signature _____
Date: **09/09/2018**_____
Print name: **CAMILLA PETERS**_____
Title: **STAFF/PHD STUDENT**_____
Institution: **FALMOUTH UNIVERSITY, Cornwall.** ____

Please return the completed and signed form to Enquiries, Moving Image Archive by fax, post or scanned e-mail copy.

FALMOUTH
UNIVERSITY

Dear Moving Image Archive,

I am able to confirm that Camilla Peters is a student enrolled on our Research Degree programme (MPhil/PhD).

I confirm that the footage request by this student is solely for educational use and will not be used for any commercial purposes. The materials will not be copied, or supplied to any others nor broadcast or performed publicly.

I understand that the materials have been loaned to the student free of charge on the understanding that the items are returned at the end of the agreed period. I undertake to ensure the student returns these items and accept if the student defaults on returning the items or returns them late, then we, the organisation above will be liable for the replacement cost or the penalty charges.

Signed by: Dr Anna Misiak

Print Name: Anna Misiak

Title: Senior Lecturer in Film/MA Film & TV Course Coordinator
Institution: Falmouth University

Student's Name Camilla Peters	Camilla Peters
Course: Research Degree Programme (MPhil/PhD) **www.falmouth.ac.uk**	

PENRYN CAMPUS, TRELIEVER ROAD, PENRYN, CORNWALL, TR10 9EZ, UK +44 (0)1326 370400
FALMOUTH CAMPUS, WOODLANE, FALMOUTH, CORNWALL, TR11 4RH, UK +44 (0)1326 211077

NATIONAL LIBRARY OF SCOTLAND

Application for Use of Moving Images for Educational Use **Ref**

Moving Image Archive
39 – 41 Montrose Avenue, Hillington Park, Glasgow G52 4LA
Email: movingimage@nls.uk Fax: 0845 366 4601

Name:	Camilla Peters
Address:	10, Frobisher Terrace, Falmouth, Cornwall TR11 2NB
Telephone & Email:	Camilla.peters@falmouth.ac.uk
Educational institution and course:	Falmouth University Research Degree
Course tutor (if appropriate)	Dr Anna Misiak
Proposed use of material	PhD research, viewing and analysis.
Requested item(s):	1 – ALL THESE NEW RELATIONS [Film ref 8824]
Required format:	DVD

Terms and Conditions

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Date: 10 / 03 / 2021

At: *(Place)* 10, FROBISHER TCE. TR11 2NB

E-mail: millampeters@gmail.com

Signed for and on behalf of the library.

Signature: CMackenzie

Print Name: CMACKENZIE

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At: *(Place)* GLASGOW

E-mail: movingimage@NS.UK

Appendix 12
Art in Cinema. The International Avant-garde Film National Film Theatre (1986-89)

This series, which borrowed its title from the famous screenings staged by Frank Stauffacher and others at the San Francisco Art Institute from 1947 onwards, was programmed for London's National Film Theatre by A.L. Rees and David Curtis. It also included Other Visions programmed by Mick Hartney and the Arts Council's Student Art Prizes. The BAFVSC holds programme notes and planning documents for this series.

The screenings were designed in related pairs and showed at 6.15 & 8.30:

1986-01-0? [date missing]
Cubist Cinema (Leger, Eggeling, Ruttmann)

1986-02-26
The Cineclubs of the 20s and 30s: Realism, Politics, Abstraction
(Anstey, Bartosch, Fischinger, Lye, Dekeukelaire, Themerson)
Maya Deren 1917-61 Rituals in Transfigured Time

1986-03-26
Free Radicals- Experimental Animation 1920-80 (Ruttmann, Fischinger, Lye, McLaren, Bute, Smith, Elexieff & Parker, Rhodes, Sharits, Whitney, Breer)
Kurt Kren & Peter Kubelka- Between the Frames

1986-04-07
Surrealism and Film (Cohl, Clair, Bunuel & Dali, Ray, Cornell, Hugo)
Jeff Keen / Gianfranco Baruccello
Additional screening 1986-04-17
Warren Sonbert- Oblique Narrative

1986-05-15
Art in Cinema- From Surrealism to Psychodrama (Richter, Peterson, Anger, Maas, Broughton)
Margaret Tait: Poet / Filmmaker

1986-06-04
Sexuality Re-claimed (Anger, Parker, Potter, Milne, Dwoskin, Keene, Wyn-Evans)
Kenneth Anger

1986-07-23
Artists' Films of the 50s & 60s (Clarke, Balch, Conner, Le Grice, Sharits, Warhol)
Michael Snow and Hollis Frampton

1986-08-18
Beat Cinema and New York Dada (Frank, Rice, Jacobs)
Andy Warhol- The Chelsea Girls

1986-09-01
In the Street New York, Paris, London (Chomette, Brakhage, Levitt, Raban, Bruce)
Stan Brakhage - The Art of Vision.
1986-10-20
The International Film Co-op Movement (Le Grice, Brusczewski, Gidal, Landow, Halford, Sherwin, Lowder, Panteli, Millett & Gawthrop)
Malcolm Le Grice *Blackbird Descending*

1986-12-09
Heroic Landscape- Wyborny, Welsby, Emigholz
Charles Dekeukelaire

1987-01-19
Strong Language- Arts Council Student Film & Video Art Prizes
Prog 1: Phul, Teare, Raphan, Harris, Fionda & Gladwin, Mack-Nataf
Prog 2: Scott, Guler, Matthee
1987-02-03

International Video Art- Other Visions (programmed by Mick Hartney)
America since Paik- from Document to Digital. (Fitzgerald & Sandborn, Wegman, Fox, Viola, Almy, Serra)
Europe since Schum- a Different Drum. (Schum, Von Bruch, Hoover, Abramovic & Ulay, Logue, de la Casiniere)

1987-03-26
International Video Art- Other Visions (programmed by Mick Hartney)
Cut-Ups, Scratch etc. (Birmbaum, Duvets, Hawley, Barber, Gorilla Tapes, Wilcox, Goldbacher & Flitcroft)
Performing Rites (Harding, Schouten, Condit, Bourn, Hawley, Robertshaw, Young, Unwin)

1987-04-28
International Video Art- Other Visions (programmed by Mick Hartney)
News from Home (Atherton, Redman, St James & Wilson, Triple Vision, Julien, Vulture Video, Elwes)
The Cutting Edge (Sandborn, Birmbaum, Wilcox)

1987-05-26
Two Premieres- David Larcher & John Smith (*EETC* & *The Black Tower*)
Maya Deren & John Cassavetes

1987-06-23
Bruce Conner and Collage (Conner, Jacobs, Seeber, Brakhage)
Anna Thew and Anne Rees-Mogg

1987-07-29
Films by Moholy-Nagy 'A Medium of Plastic Expression'
Jonas Mekas's Diaries

1987-08-03
Griersonians Unbound (Anstey, Cavalcanti, Lye. Anderson, Philpot)
Vertov Enthusiasm (Kubelka's re-synchronised print)

1987-09-30
Films by the Themersons
Polish Pot-Pourri (Borowczyk & Lenica, Polanski, Wasko, Bruszewski, Szczerek)

1987-10-12
Magic Theatres (Jordan, Smith, Pitt)
Robert Breer in Person

1988-01-14
Canadian Experimental Film (Hoffman, Grenier, Marin, Rimmer, Rayher, Epp, Hancox, Massarella)
Joyce Wieland in Person

1988-02-25
Ghosts 1 / *Steps* [Ghosts in the Machine] (Logue, Wegman, Almy, Rybsczynski, Campus, Levine, Segalove, Marclay, Condit).
Ghosts 2- The Open Submission (Diaz & McIntosh, Furneaux, Graham, Hawley & Styger, Hill, Keiller, Lahire, Matthee, Snow, Thew).

1988-03-30
Borderline [Kenneth McPherson] (plus Richter's *Everyday*)
Thames Film / So Many So Magnificent (Raban, Bush)

1988-04-19
The Train Rolls On / Happiness (Marker, Medvedkin)
The Dream Machine / A Page of Madness (Jarman, Maybury, WynEvans, Kostiff / Kinugasa)

1988-05-18
Quizzing Game Shows (Nelson, Birmbaum, Braderman, Landow)
Homage to Helen Levitt (Levitt, Meyer)

1988-06-14
Passion of Joan of Arc (Dreyer)
Peter Gidal (*Heads, Clouds, Guilt*)

1988-07-05
Chris Welsby- Boundaries of Landscape
Recent Films by American Women (Strand, Friedrich, Thornton)

1988-08-03
The Synthetic Image (Melies, Lye, Hirsh, O'Neill)
The Cabinet of Dr Caligari (Weine) [Plus Ivan Unwin short]

1988-10-10
Ecstasy- Programme 1 (Anger, Wyn-Evans, Eisenstein)
Ecstasy- Programme 2 (Anger, Paradzhanov)

1989-01-04
Eisenstein & Montage- Programme 1 (Leger, **Tait**, Brakhage, Conner, Deren, Grierson, Eisenstein)
Eisenstein & Montage- Programme 2 (Leyda *Bronx Morning*, Zinnermann *The Wave*)

1989-02-06 [last programme]
Eisenstein Avant-garde- Programme 1 (Lye, Cavalcanti, Montagu, Straub & Huillet, Jarman, Eisenstein)
Eisenstein Avant-garde- Programme 2 *The Mirror* (Tarkovsky)

Appendix 13
Plan of *Where I Am is Here* (Tait 1964).

Sounds	Images
0.00 Hilltop Pibroch (Hector MacAndrew)	0.00 'ANCONA FILMS' Title. *Where I Am Is Here* written in white plastic letters. Section titles 1-7 are written on differing backgrounds with mixture of white and coloured plastic numbers: - 1. *Complex* 2. *Here and Now* 3. *Interlude* 4. *Crocodile* 5. *Come and See This* 6. *Out of This World* 7. *The Bravest Boat*
	0.26 Panning shots to the sky through bare tree branches.
0.34 Silence 0.52 Cars passing by	
1.08 COMPLEX	
1.12 Hilltop Pibroch (Hector MacAndrew)	1.08 Tait's hands arrange the title *Complex* in white plastic letters on a table.
	1.13 Close up of man's hands about to write with pencil on paper (mirrors the sequence above). (Thinking)
	1.20 Soft rain / Puddles.
	1.24 Reflection of street in car hub as wheel turns.
1.32 Mechanised machinery & banging sounds	1.32 Close up of builder mixing cement / Skyward panning shots of new office block with scaffolding.
	2.00 Stop motion / Bricklaying / House built of cards / Collapse / Bricklaying.
2.23. Silence	2.23 Smoke coming from a chimney on a house in woods. / Shot through bare tree branches.
2.26 Street calls for coal / Horn tooting / Traffic sounds	Silhouette of tall buildings and cranes / Upward panning shot of new block of offices / Cladded building materials.
2.50 Hilltop Pibroch (Hector MacAndrew)	2.50 A bare lightbulb.
	2.42 Panning shot of barbed wire fence and buildings in silhouette / Twilight / Street scenes / Riverbank / Woman walking along on the promenade towards the city lights.
3.16 Silence	3.17 Gas ring on cooker / dim candlelight.
3.23 Flapping wings / Seagulls	3.23 Danger sign / River edge / Shots across the wet sand.
3.46 Cat meowing	3.46 Fire in a hearth.
3.54 Water running	3.54 Dead bird's wing floating.
3.59 Hilltop Pibroch (Hector MacAndrew)	3.59 Small wader walking and pecking across the sand, mirror image in wet sand.

	4.11 'Words. Words. Words' are handwritten in stop motion animation / Return to male writer who is now writing.
	4.54 Children playing in snow distance in sliding down a hill filmed through bare branches (as in a Bruegel painting).
	5.04 Slither moon.
	5.09 'An end 'written in chalk on blackboard. Then 'A START 'written above.
Hilltop Pibroch cont.	5.14 Blank black screen.
HERE AND NOW (mixed plastic letters, on a film can, on newspaper, rotates)	
Hilltop Pibroch cont.	5.31 Medium shot of Tait filming out of a window from her room.
	5.35 Pirie leaning on left of fireplace camera pans into adjoining room where he is seen on the right side of fireplace / Close up profile of Pirie / Slowly he turns and looks in the camera and slowly blinks.
	6.06 Frosty window / Flowers outside.
6.15 Street sounds / Muffled voices	6.15 Close-up of the broken surface of the ground / Close-up of car wheel-hub.
	6.40 Woman walking on pavement / People's legs / feet walking / Street vendors / Traffic lights / Zebra crossing / Newspaper seller.
7.05 Crackling fire	7.05 Frosted window looking from inside out.
	7.09 Wildfire / Burning rubbish.
7.24 Water	7.21 Water tumbling fast over rocks etc. / Wet sand / Solitary fisherman on the banks of a river / Eddying water / Boy fishing / More water / Looking up stream / Boy fishing / More shots of water.
8.45 Hilltop Pibroch (Hector MacAndrew)	8.54 Camera pointing across a tennis court to children playing on a slide in a playground through barbed wire fence.
	9.07 School yard and shelter filmed through railings / Hopscotch game chalked on ground / lobster net.
9.27 Birdsong	9.27 Exposed roots of a tree (very grim). 9.32 Bare branches with a single bird in them.
	9.44 Two boys float toy boats on lake.
9.48 Hilltop Pibroch (Hector MacAndrew)	9.54 Builders roadworks hut / Plumbing paraphernalia (Signage: footpaths demolition and construction company) / Brazier / Old concrete steps.
11.07 Lilane joins MacAndrew and sings from *Here Is Where I Am*	10.52 Back of an old sooty building, irregular windows, balconies, roofs / Organic extensions / Back to the shelter in school yard / Camera pans left to smallest window of children in distant playground.
	11.35 Black screen.
INTERLUDE (white plastic letters in straight line)	
Cont.	11.41 Panning shot to the right people walking / Cars passing / People coming out of church / Four women cross the road in unison- in similar outfits.
	11.59 School girls in a crocodile in school uniform.
	12.18 Single cygnet joined by more swans.

	12.35 Litter in river / Boats and reflections in still water.
	12.56 Road sweeper / Truck / Snow.
	13.01 Newspaper open at racing page.
	13.03 Newsagent shop / Posters / Young girl / Woman looks through shop window / Water / Road workers talking / Steam roller flattening tarmac / Young male student (books).
	13.32 Car door shuts.
	13.34 Someone goes upstairs on the bus.
	13.36 Man paints front door (Close-up).
	13.50 Man shines shoes. (Close-up).
	13.59 Close up of teacup / Spoon of sugar / Stirring.
	14.20 Truck lowering sand into container in the docks.
14.26 Silence	14.26 Blank screen / Black leader.
14.35 CROCODILE (white plastic letters apart from the first letter)	
14.33 Clock ticking	14.40 School girls in a crocodile.
14.43 Hilltop Pibroch (Hector MacAndrew)	14.57 Camera points at frosted window / Snowing.
	15.05 Clock face with no hands / Domestic clock placed over hand-less clock face.
	15.24 Silhouette factory at twilight / Smoke billowing across city / Peat burning / Fireman beating fire / Fire in a hearth.
16.11 Clock ticking	16.11 Apple- Ink-Pen (still life composition) / Stop-motion bite out of apple / Flame / Hand takes apple returns it with bite taken out.
6.15 Traffic sounds / Mechanised sound at intervals / Car engines / Drilling	16.15 Woman comes down from top deck of moving bus / Car wheel / hub/ Car moves off / Dark wet streets shiny from rain / Taxis / Traffic / Shoppers / Woman leaves a shop / Shot from a bus of a couple look in jewellery store / Young male students / Close-ups of legs and feet walking / Traffic / Close-up shots on road and car wheels / Bus / People crossing road / Shot of post office sign / Shoppers / Christmas lights in dark street / Road shots / Traffic jam / Shoppers.
17.56 **Lilane** joins MacAndrew and sings from Tait's poem *Here Is Where I Am*	
18.30 Mechanised clacking at long intervals	
18.58 **Lilane** joins MacAndrew and sings from Tait's poem *Here Is Where I Am* .	18.10 Xmas lights / Traffic / Shoppers.
	19.17 Peat fire / Smouldering smoke / House / TV aerials.
	19.38 Clock with no hands.
	19.46 Posters / 'Builders strike' / Advertisements / Headlines: 'Scottish workers down tools' / 'Bank notes found on beach'.
	19.58 Blank screen.
	20.04 Water.
20.11 COME AND SEE THIS (mixed plastic letters)	
20.20 Hilltop Pibroch (Hector MacAndrew)	20.17 Repeated shot of sand loaded, into a container.
	20.44 Shot of the Newsagent.

	20.51 Inside an old building looking down some concrete steps (Like the opening shot to Dulac's *Smiling Mme Beudet*).
	20.58 People passing a closed down shop / Man sweeping up the debris / Man sweeping road / Man painting door again / Man sweeping road / Man sweeping the docks.
	22.05 Small shed in a park / Smoke from the chimney.
22.13 Ducks / Seagulls / Traffic hum	22.19 Ducks / Swans / Boats / Water reflections.
22.37 Silence	
22.40 **Lilane** joins MacAndrew and sings from Tait's poem *Here Is Where I Am*	23.27 Road-workers talking / Car door shuts / Conductor comes down from the top deck of a bus / Close up of a digger emptying sand into a container.
24.06 Silence	24.06 Animated hand-drawn squiggly line.
24.10 Lilane joins MacAndrew and sings from Tait's poem *Here Is Where I Am*	Blank screen.
24.17 OUT OF THIS WORLD (colour letters on rattan matting)	
Lilane cont.	24.20 Croft type bungalow in a street. Wing mirror shot looking at what has passed / Car wheels / Lorry driver getting directions from a worker.
	24.33 Shot from inside a bus looking out of the back window of the bus.
	24.57 Wing mirror shot.
	25.02 Shot from inside the bus.
	25.07 Wing mirror shot.
	25.09 Road sweeper cart parked among the cars in the snow.
	25.14 Looking out the back of the bus.
	25.25 Snow falling against a black wall.
	25.31 Shot from inside house looking through frosted window at the snow.
	25.44 Another Bruegel-type shot of children in the snow in the distance sliding down a hill.
Silence	25.59 Blank Screen.
26.03 THE BRAVEST BOAT (assorted plastic letters)	
26.03 Water	26.09 Single boy floats boat on boating lake / Stream rushing / Toy boat on water / Rippling water running against the tide / Two boys sailing their boats / Rushing water.
26.09 Lilane joins MacAndrew and sings from *Here Is Where I Am*	
	27.25 Large fire in public space.
27.25 Drilling sounds	27.35 Signage for corporate Insurance companies / Banks / Red light / Traffic lights.
27.53 Children shouting	27.53 A wildfire burning rubbish / Unsupervised children dancing round a fire chanting in unison.

	28.42 Notices: ‘Personal insurance’ ‘Liability’.
28.48 Lilane joins MacAndrew and sings from *Here Is Where I Am*	28.48 Looking through a wire fence across a tennis court to children playing in a playground.
	29.02 News vendor with NEWS on his overall / Shoppers crossing the road. Lorry parked across two parking meters.
29.44 Typing and Office sounds	29.44 Mutual insurance / Insurance company logos / New office built for Standard life / St. Andrew’s Square.
30.15 Banging	30.15 No parking signs / Police notice / Bank shots.
30.31 Silence	30.31 Old wall covered in weeds and moss.
	30.37 School yard / Hopscotch / Lobster pot / Eagle not flying.
30.39 Hector MacAndrew Hilltop Pibroch	30.42 Children filmed through wire fencing / Eagle lying face wings outstretched another just sitting / Small birds pick at bones in his cage / Lion and lioness in adjacent cages - lioness pacing up and down in her cage.
	31.43 Single boy floating his boat on a lake / Couple walking in distance across wet sand.
32.02 Lilane joins MacAndrew and sings from *Here Is Where I Am*	
THAT’S ALL FOLKS FOR NOW OF WHERE I AM IS HERE	
	CREDITS

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