

of Cahun within the context of Pucill's homage in *Magic Mirror*? Furthermore, what does Pucill's work offer in terms of new ways to understand the tyranny usually associated with mediated forms of images of women?

The reflective eye of the camera and its mirroring possibilities are recurring themes that Pucill has explored in other, earlier films. In *You Be Mother* (1990), she projects the image of a woman's face onto tea cups while the tea is being poured, creating a destabilizing sensation for the viewer while at the same time arch questions about domestication and labour are being asked of the audience. *Stages of Mourning* (2004) features projected images and staged scenarios performed by Pucill and her late partner, the filmmaker Sandra Lahire in which they hold up photographs of each other and of themselves to the camera. Through the object of film, Pucill constructs a performance, a journey of bereavement that she has experienced on the death of her lover. In one sense the images of both women can only be understood in relation to the signification given to them by the very act of filming. For example, Pucill's film with her mother, *Taking My Skin* (2006), sees the women sitting both in front of and behind the camera, as they reflect on and explore the possibilities of being and filming together. In her last film *Phantom Rhapsody* (2010), Pucill stages a series of tableaux usually associated with the naked bodies to be found in western art history. These are evoked through the camera lens, and here, as in some of her other films, we both see and hear Pucill herself within the work.

Chadwick's 1998 essay, 'An infinite play of empty mirrors', published in the catalogue that accompanied the exhibition, *Mirror Images: Women, Surrealism, and Self-Representation* is a good starting point to explore the main facets of what makes up Pucill's compelling feature film and the work of Cahun herself. In her essay Chadwick cites Surrealism as establishing new parameters within which women artists were able to begin to explore the complex and ambiguous relationship between the

female body and female identity (1985: 4). This is a theme Pucill takes up again by restaging some of Cahun's best known works within the moving image format. In *Magic Mirror*, Pucill is also inspired by Cahun's writings, in particular her 1930 text, *Avant non avens/Désavens*, with its nine chapter headings, demarcations that become the overarching structure for the film. Pucill's intention was to capture the spirit of womanliness as a masquerade (Riviere 1991: 91) while also asking pertinent new questions about its function in the everyday. Through a series of theatrical vignettes, Pucill addresses self-portraiture and the masked faces of femininity following a performative path from one woman unmasking herself to the next and the different characterizations being acted out within the film are accompanied by elements of collage and photomontage akin to those used by Cahun and others working in the earlier part of the twentieth century. The cinematic qualities of Cahun's original portraits act as memory banks for Pucill in her re-stagings.

Those familiar with Cahun's work will instantly recognize her photographic self-image, framed as a head-and-shoulders shot, in which she sports a checked jacket, with her blonde hair cropped short (*Self-Portrait*, 1928). She is looking away from a framed mirror where her image is reflected, doubled, and gazes out at the viewer with a defiant expression on her face. This iconic image comes to life in Pucill's film, as do many of Cahun's other well known photographs that are re-staged by the film-maker. In *Avant non avens* (1930), Cahun refuses to be pinned down into being a single type of 'confessor', which gives these writings an anti-memoir quality and her resistance to any fixed identification point is accelerated in *Magic Mirror* in such a way that it is not always easy to recognize Cahun's work. These stagings occur in front of a black curtain that opens and closes throughout the film to reveal a succession of feminine archetypes. Various markers of identity such as wigs and make-up underscore the perpetual 'womanly' masquerades,

and for Pucill the theme of narcissism suffuses her interest in Cahun.

In one of the most poignant sequences of the film, Pucill creates a link between the hand mirror, often associated with close self-scrutiny of a woman's face, and the camera, and the theme of narcissism is once again evoked. The frame closes in on the face as make-up is applied and this association triggers many others linked to modes of femininity that are performed both inside and outside the world of the camera. Three women appear to us in *Magic Mirror*, all as a version of Cahun but none of them can be pinned down into the singular category, the essential 'Cahun'. Dressing up is a consistent feature of the work, in which actors double up in different roles, appearing then re-appearing, embodying another version of the Cahun archetype. Different voices negotiate the array of costumes and time frames are mirrored back to us through performative looks and glances. The dialogue that Pucill is having with Cahun has a third participant, the spectator, and she too is conversing with the staged event that is *Magic Mirror*. The reflections, together with the repetitive distortions in the mirrors that different archetypes of Cahun look into and outside of, reference the daily displays of negotiated femininities that all women are forced to be part of in contemporary culture.

The fourth member of the 'cast', the performer acting as Marcel Moore, Cahun's partner and collaborator, gives credence to the radical life choices made by both women at a time when a lesbian relationship was illegal. This interpretation is furthered in a recent reappraisal of Cahun's *Avant non avens* (1930) by Jennifer Shaw in which she sees *Désavens* as providing Cahun with a platform through which to rethink the autobiographical as the work of something much wider than simply the exploration of a single subjectivity. Shaw suggests that the personal nature of Cahun's writing constitutes a critique of the role of women in French culture as well as highlighting the status of lesbianism and the dominance of French religious conservatism (2013:

30). With this in mind, it is important to note the different cultural contexts that frame their practice, with Cahun working in 1930s Catholic France and Pucill in contemporary British society, while at the same time acknowledging their apparent similarities of purpose in their determination to problematize the notion of subjectivity. The differences and similarities are simultaneously at play in *Magic Mirror*. Many different meanings are projected onto the various faces of Cahun as she is restaged in the film. For instance, the cropped-haired Cahun comes to life and kisses another woman on the lips, in the flesh and through a mirror. The strangeness of the performance is disorientating not because of the shared moment of intimacy but because of its rarity, something that still is not often made visible on screen today.

The lesbian kiss, now an act of transgression on screen, is refigured and lived through a performative staging. The Cahun performer (a woman masquerading) leans into the frame dominated by a woman's torso and the receiver of the kiss does not react but instead remains a steely presence. No emotions are conveyed other than those evoked in the spectator – a kiss is just a kiss or, perhaps in this case, it is an act of political persuasion.

Cahun lived her life under an assumed name (Cahun was her grandmother's family name); she changed the name given to her at birth (Lucy Schwob) at the age of 23. Her stepister and long-term companion, Marcel Moore (the daughter of her father's second wife) also gave up on her birth name of Suzanne Málherbe and the two women lived together in Nantes, then Paris and finally in Jersey where they were put in prison for 'acts of resistance' during World War II (Lepeslier 1992: 273). The taking of a male pseudonym adds to the ambiguity of the multiple identities conveyed throughout Cahun's work and this is exemplified in the knowing engagement of Pucill herself as she appears in *Magic Mirror* as both prop and make-up assistant. In her writings, Cahun asks 'Masculine? Feminine? It depends on the