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SP: Outside the market what mattered was the work. It was a cultural event. It had a kind of utopian sense about it. Particularly in the 1980s and 1990s, it felt as if things might change. [Laughter]. Coming out of an emphasis on formalism, there was a focus on different subjectivities that had not had equal representation in art history – in film history. So the cultural politics of difference was unprecedented at least in art history and in film-making. A politics of identity was challenging hitherto privileged voices, and feminism was a huge part of this.

There was an excitement to hearing new voices and new ways of seeing, of talking about what hadn't been considered important, in new ways and with new languages.

It was exciting because it was led by artists, not by curators or dealers. It doesn't mean there wasn't conflict and infighting but there was a sense that the artists were leading something. We could access films, practices and ideas coming from different Co-ops that weren't, to a degree, filtered through institutions. It feels so important now that we can't find this space outside of the market.

MPC: Do you not regard the Co-op as being an institution? Those films were also filtered through the institution of the Co-op.

AS: I think that's because we were inside that culture, so we didn't see it – it's perceived now as being an institution but at the time we didn't experience it as being an institution at all. It was constantly changing.

SP: Do you also see the Co-op as a space that was outside the market?

AS: Definitely. We created our own market. There were jobs within the organization such as running the workshop, cinema, organizing distribution. The Arts Council funded the Film Co-op and we also generated a certain amount of money through the distribution of films, screenings and equipment hire. It was a self-perpetuating thing that existed outside of the mainstream market.

The Co-op came out of all those different revolutions involving Black film-makers, people from India, queer cinema, feminism, and, as I said, if they're not cited they all disappear. So we keep going back to a very white male idea of structuralist film. When people talk about the past, they are talking about the past in relation to manoeuvring their own career.

SP: Are you saying that you talk about the past in order to advance your career? So is that the case with us now here, talking about it?

AS: No. I'm talking about how it's cited by people who weren't necessarily there. They're picking up on the Nicky Hamlyn and Guy Sherwins, but they've forgotten that there were other people who were involved and that it changed over time. My path through the Film Co-op making *Fatima's Letter* led to other people becoming involved; Atif Ghani interviewed me for his Ph.D. at LSE, Paul Sukhija and Khalid Hakim and Alnoor Dewshi became involved. This is not mentioned in the narratives of the Film Co-op. It was a training ground for all sorts of people whose initial route in was not necessarily motivated by experimental film per se.

MPC: The historiographical work that has been done around the Co-op up until now concentrates mostly on its foundation, such as the research and interviews that were conducted around 'Shoot Shoot Shoot'.³ Similar research has yet to be done in relation to what came afterwards. In 2016 we will celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Co-op at LUX and it is important for this celebration to be as inclusive and broad as possible, looking at the 50 years of histories, and not just structural/materialism between 1966 and 1976.

SP: Engagement with film is a big part of feminist theory. Film is the carrier of ideology. Experimental film-makers who were thinking through critical feminist debates were at the forefront of feminist thinking. Yet, this work wasn't picked up very

much in experimental film critical writing, nor in feminist critical writing. Experimental film was by its nature a marginalized practice and most of the writing on the history of avant-garde film has focused on questions of language and form and process from perspectives that figure a large proportion of men relative to women. I did hear the argument that the press circulation for experimental film was so low that if feminist film writers had spent their time researching and writing about obscure, unknown film-makers it would have been career suicide. So this important work was written out of history at least in terms of the wider circulation of feminist critical film study. More recently, the feminist work of the 1970s or those artists who began their careers in this period, to an extent, have been historicized but not the 1980s and 1990s.

ND: Maybe this area was obscure to film academics, but there was critical writing on experimental film. Throughout the 1980s, *Undercut* covered this area of work. It was predominantly artists writing about other artists and their films. As Jean (Matthee) said, she wrote about my film *Stabat Mater* and there are recent anthologies on what is now called artists' moving image.⁴

MPC: Can we talk about current debates around feminism? How does your work resonate with contemporary feminist discourse? [Silence followed by collective laughter].

SP: Feminism is coming back on the agenda, which I think is a good thing.

RN: Feminism for someone like me who's nearly 60 is completely different than it is for women who are in their teens or 20s, who are dealing with rape culture and porn everywhere.

ND: The subject in struggle that we described earlier and a certain sincerity, which is the register in these films of the feminine subject, has disappeared. Contemporary art narrativizes the subject of production as post-modern, ironic and knowing, including strategies to divest oneself of learned codes through deskillering or deliberate naiveté, which in themselves confirm this knowing subject. Much contemporary art is concerned with the game of the semiotics of art itself as a language and commodity, cut off from social issues or conditions. For me, this is not a bad thing but it is essentially a discourse of alienation. Our work of this period is prior to the global art explosion and the pressures of mass consumerism, branding, social media and pornography.

Womanhood as a space for reflection in moving image or art as a productive space of enquiry or speculation doesn't exist in the same way as it did. The dominant masquerade of femininity is of the woman as a pre-pubescent girl, which is pervasive in advertising and pornography. A bit like Joan Riviere's 'Masquerade' except this time, it is a masquerade of girlness rather than womanliness.⁵ The woman in Duras's *India Song* (1975) was young but womanly; the housewife in *Jeanne Dielman* (1975) has a young son to take care of and the film is mainly concerned with chores. That space of the woman is not being explored to the same extent today. The art world encourages a highly individualistic, atomized kind of subject. It is the modernist fantasy of being neutral, which is the very space that we were talking about earlier, which feminism helped us to identify and to reject.

AS: The problem as Naomi Klein talks about it in *No Logo* (1999) is that identities have become marketed, commodified. If you're a woman film-maker you make work about a particular subject, in a particular way, and another if you are a Black film-maker. The experimental continually defies these categories.

MPC: It would be interesting to have some thoughts on what is experimental film now and how you position yourselves as women engaged with experimental film.

SP: In the 1980s, only a minority of artists were working in moving image. Since then, technology has taken a gigantic leap. Moving images are everywhere and can be produced so easily. Similarly, our relationship to photography has changed, where the difference between still and moving is just an option on the menu bar. Moving

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