

Between *Les Rendez-vous d'Anna* and *Demain on Déménage*: m(o)ther inscriptions in two films by Chantal Akerman.

Alison Rowley

I

In the opening sequence of Chantal Akerman's 2004 film *Demain on Déménage* (*Tomorrow We Move*) a grand piano hangs upside down high in the air against a clear blue sky. Sharp intakes and exhalations of breath register tension and anticipation (like the delicate beginnings of an orgasm), as the instrument sways and creaks on its straps in its movement through the air. The sounds issue from the mouth of the actress Aurore Clément, and right away I recognise her as the character Anna Silver from *Les Rendez-vous d'Anna*, a film made by Akerman in 1978 in which Clément plays the role of a daughter. The flash of recognition collapses nearly two decades of Akerman's films in an instant as the actress' roles as daughter and mother are superimposed in the mind. Simultaneously it involves, unavoidably, the perception of the gradual work of time on Clément's physiognomy. I am affected by its subtle reconfiguration of her beauty, a fascination that offers a counter movement to the exchange of Clément's fictional role from daughter to mother, one that stretches rather than collapses time in contemplation of the actual biological process of aging on the actress's face as the camera moves in close to register its responses to the progress of the character's beloved piano swinging towards its new location.

Clément, playing Catherine, watches the move from the centre of a frieze of faces of interested passers-by, more men than women and a mix of racial types. The scene recalls the way in which Akerman introduces Anna in *Les Rendez-vous d'Anna* when the character walks into shot on a station platform amidst a crowd of people, in this case filmed from behind. As the crowd disappears into the subway, Anna breaks away to walk alone down the platform carrying her bag, an image familiar from the history of cinema. It recalls the opening shot of Hitchcock's *Marnie* (1964), a classic movie tale of mother trouble. Like Marnie, a peripatetic secretary, Anna is a working woman on the move, travelling across Europe to introduce screenings of her films. The presence of Anna's mother in her life is established in the first piece of dialogue between Anna and the hotel receptionist, when he hands her a note and she responds with a question: 'my mother rang, how does she know

where I am?’ In Hitchcock’s film it is Marnie who phones home to her mother, anxious to maintain a connection in which the money she sends her, necessary to support the material life of a disabled woman, also stands in for love, and as such makes of Marnie, in her final admission, ‘a cheat, a liar and a thief’.¹ In *Les Rendez-vous d’Anna*, home is a place and marriage a state from which Anna keeps her distance as if the wellbeing of her whole constitution depends upon it. The idea is encapsulated in the bleakest and most affectively over-determined episode of the film. It is the conclusion to Anna’s unsuccessful sexual encounter with Heinrich, a German school teacher, that takes place in the desolate, wintry garden of his home on the outskirts of a German town, a house that has been in the family for three generations and in which he now lives with his mother and five-year-old daughter. Anna has been invited to the daughter’s birthday party, having disclosed that had she not terminated two pregnancies, her daughters – to be called Judith and Rebecca – would have been close to the same age. In the garden the failure of a marriage and the collapse of a nation that has involved the loss of a close friend with whom the man shared a love of German culture are condensed and narrated by him to an attentive but passive Anna in a monologue of acute loneliness, melancholy and resignation. When she leaves the house, taking a path through the fallow vegetable garden with its metal stakes and bare training wires towards the horizon formed by a raised railway embankment along which a train is travelling, Anna is a figure in the landscape of a historical catastrophe in which a fascist ideology of home and motherhood has played its part.

When Anna meets Ida by chance at the station in Cologne – a close friend of her mother from their lives in Brussels who has returned to live in Germany with her family – and a conversation ensues in which hope for the future and solace in old age are vested by Ida in marriage and children, and we discover that Anna has twice broken an engagement with her son: ‘and when your parents are dead and you don’t have children what is there?’² Ida asks. It is tempting in the light of such a statement to marshal in Anna’s defence Lee Edelman’s uncompromisingly provocative polemic against a ‘reproductive futurism’ in which ‘the fantasy subtending the image of the child invariably shapes the logic within which the political itself must be thought...’ and thus ‘poses an ideological limit on political discourse as such, preserving in the process the absolute privilege of heteronormativity by rendering unthinkable... the possibility of queer resistance to this organizing principle of communal relations’.³

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But it is hardly necessary when Anna's figural position in a film with a title that already names the aleatory logic of its narrative, working in tandem with the entropic tendency of Akerman's formal aesthetics – exemplified in Anna's minimalist, somnambulistic comportment – already recognises and refuses, in Edelman's terms 'the consequences of grounding reality in denial of the death drive' and its power to unravel subjectivity, dissolve identity and disturb social organisation.⁴

Anna meets her mother at a railway station in Brussels and suggests that rather than go back to the family home they spend the night in a hotel. Here, as mother and daughter lie side by side in bed in the dark, Anna recounts the story of her first sexual encounter with a woman in a hotel, so that the *mise-en-scène* in which the story is told by one woman to another, daughter to mother, is also the *mise-en-scène* of the story being told about lovemaking between two women who are strangers to one another. It is useful in terms of what I want to say about *Tomorrow We Move* to consider this structure theoretically in the light of Teresa de Lauretis's analysis of the maternal imaginary in feminist discourse in her book *The Practice of Love: Lesbian Sexuality and Perverse Desire*, which involves a thoroughgoing critique of what she terms the 'lesbian metaphor' associated with it.⁵ De Lauretis takes Mary Jacobus to task for her reading of a poem by Adrienne Rich from *The Dream of a Common Language*.⁶ The poem moves from an evocation of the mother's body in the past of infancy to the present scene in which two women, 'eye to eye', measure 'each other's spirit, each other's limitless desire'. It is Jacobus's reading of this scene of two women *in the present* as 'a desire for the mother' to which de Lauretis objects because, she argues, it misses the poem's articulation of the psychic structure Freud called deferred action (*Nachträglichkeit*), which, to quote de Lauretis, 'describes the operating mechanism of primal fantasies, in particular the seduction fantasy. By deferred action, an earlier scene (here the child and the mother) is recovered or remembered in the light of a later one (here, the present scene of two women "eye to eye")'. 'To read the latter scene as "desire for the mother"', writes de Lauretis:

...is to collapse the psychic movement of fantasy from present to past to future into a retrospective, static tableau, and to reduce the fantasmatic, dynamic triangulation of the subject's desire between the other woman, the mother's body, and her own to the fixity of a frozen memory. On the contrary, the "limitless" desire of the present scene lives inscribed across and sustained on (Freud's *Anlehnung*, anaclisis) the fantasy scenario of the maternal female body, which is a fantasy precisely because *that* body is always lost. This is not will or feminist politics or myth, but lesbian desire. Perhaps Jacobus does not see it as desire, can see it only as nostalgia, because she missed the "third term," the paternal phallus, which is indeed not present in the

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scene. But I would argue ...that the signifier of desire *is* present and, like Poe's stolen letter, quite legible on the surface of the text, underscored in the very lines partially quoted by Sprengnether⁷ and partially by Jacobus:

*I am the lover and the loved
Home and wander, she who splits
Firewood and she who knocks, a stranger
In the storm, two women, eye to eye
Measuring each other's spirit, each other's
Limitless desire.*⁸

De Lauretis concludes: 'the fantasmatic relation to the mother and the maternal/female body is central to lesbian subjectivity and desire, as Rich's poem exemplifies, although seldom expressed in so direct a manner'.⁹ To my mind the mother and daughter episode in Akerman's *Les Rendez-vous d'Anna* is another such example, and in cinematic, audio-visual form it has the advantage of being able to represent at once the dynamic temporality of fantasy *and* its conscious apprehension condensed, in Rich's words, in a 'sudden brine-clear thought'. Furthermore the 'paternal phallus' is absolutely present in the dialogue between the two women in Akerman's scenario. 'If your father knew...' responds Anna's mother as her daughter's story draws to a close. 'Don't tell him', replies Anna.

Attention to this episode in *Les Rendez-vous de Anna* is important for two reasons. Firstly, it provides an opportunity to reiterate de Lauretis's theoretical point about the maternal metaphor in feminist writings (Julia Kristeva and Kaja Silverman are her key examples); that this metaphor needs to be examined in order to theorise its 'differential construction and effects in heterosexual and lesbian representations of the daughter-mother relation'.¹⁰ De Lauretis's political argument with what she terms 'the maternal imaginary' in feminist scholarship is that it is 'motivated by a long history of equivocation on sexual difference *between* women that not only orthodox psychoanalysis but also a greater part of feminist theory disallows – perhaps,' she writes, 'because they simply cannot see it.'¹¹ Sexual difference *between* women in the very context of a mother-daughter relation is neatly represented in Akerman's film in the final words of the conversation between Anna and her mother: 'Have you ever made love to a woman'? asks Anna. 'I haven't given it any thought,' her mother replies. Secondly, the representation of a bed shared by a daughter and a mother is pivotal in the structural relation between *Les Rendez-vous d'Anna* and *Tomorrow We Move*. But before moving on to *Tomorrow We Move*, there is one more episode in *Les Rendez-vous d'Anna* that needs to be put in place.

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On her return, to Paris Anna is met at the station by a male lover of longer standing. For different reasons, spending the night in the apartment of either of them is a dispiriting prospect so they check into a hotel. The man is exhausted to the point of illness by the demands of a job he finds pointless and the state of a world he feels helpless to change. His desire to stop working and disappear takes the form of a fantasy about pregnancy and temporality marked as such only by the demands of a child:

If I were a woman do you know what I'd do? I'd want to get pregnant and not to think about anything else. Go anywhere, doesn't matter where, live off heavenly dew and feed the child every two hours.¹²

His fantasy of maternity mutates into a childlike desire for maternal consolation when he asks Anna to sing for him. She sings *Les Amants d'un Jour* (Lovers for a Day) standing beside a television set he has switched on but failed to tune in to any transmission so that the screen flickers with white noise. The sequence is amniotic, but we have no sense of its containing effect on the man because the camera remains fixed on Anna and the television screen while she sings both verses in a voice childlike in its amateur rendition of a song associated with the powerful, professional performance of Edith Piaf. Furthermore, the lyrics of the song about lovers who meet only once in a rented room and then die, touch not only upon the present situation of the man and woman in the hotel room who must, in Akerman's cinematic narrative, part and go on with their lives the following day, but are also linked to Anna's thoughts about her night in the hotel with the woman she has met after the film screening. A reverie of lovemaking underscored visually a little later in erotically charged gestures of care across the body of her sick male lover.

The episode encapsulates the structural logic of the film as a whole, as one of shifting subject positions and fantasmatic subjectivising relations structured as a series of encounters. Brief encounters I think we can safely say, deliberately recalling, as Akerman surely intends, Celia Johnson and Trevor Howard's iconic station buffet and railway platform meetings in David Lean's classic 1945 woman's film in which Johnson's responsibilities as mother and wife involving deep ties of loving care, affection and companionship prevail over her desire for Howard.¹³ In Hitchcock's 1964 movie *Marnie*'s mother 'troubles' are resolved by marriage as the 'happy' alternative to imprisonment. Laura Mulvey has noted that 'marriage is the "happy ending" that Hitchcock used in most of his films, not simply', she writes, 'as a gesture to the conventions of production codes but as a profound gesture to the narrative

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desire to ‘end’ the entropy that pursues its dynamic movement.’¹⁴ In her study of *Psycho* in *Death 24 x a Second* she points out that Hitchcock’s ‘killing off’ of Marion ‘makes crystal clear the ‘pathetic’ relation between marriage and death’.¹⁵ In this context *Les Rendez-vous d’Anna* can be understood as a significant rejoinder to Hitchcock’s brutally Oedipal reply to Marnie’s psychological struggle with her mother troubles in the form of marriage as a bourgeois, heteronormative institution with home its regulatory space.

Anna returns to a Paris apartment more Spartan than the hotel rooms she has occupied on her travels to find amongst the messages on her answer machine one from her agent with arrangements to attend more film screenings in Lausanne, Geneva and Zurich. Akerman is keen to distinguish Anna’s journeying from the road movie tradition with its narrative of search for identity. ‘Anna’s trip through Northern Europe is not a romantic initiation voyage’, she has said, ‘it is her work that makes her travel, but one could almost say of Anna that she has a vocation for exile’.¹⁶ Anna’s mobility, writes Ivone Margulies, ‘designates her as a “mutant being,” a woman who truly rules out the values of domesticity’.¹⁷ Her apartment is as much a space of transit as the hotel rooms she occupies when she travels. As Anna rests on her bed the second from last message on her answering machine takes the form of a question asked by a woman first in Italian, ‘Anna, dove sta?’, and then in English, ‘Anna where are you?’ Failed attempts to make a telephone call to Italy have distracted Anna throughout the film, and while the voice on the machine is temporarily settling, nonetheless the relationship, initiated as an encounter whilst travelling, continues as one of connection at a distance defined by Anna’s work which involves constant movement.

In *Cinema I: The Movement-Image*, Gilles Deleuze writes:

...the essence of cinematic movement-image lies in extracting from vehicles or moving bodies the movement which is their common substance, or extracting from movements the mobility which is their essence.¹⁸

In the context of exploring the inscription of Freud’s concept of the death drive in narrative cinema Laura Mulvey extrapolates:

These attributes of cinema’s movement dovetail with narrative’s form and structure...Linearity, causality and the linking figure of metonymy, all crucial elements in story-telling, find a correspondence in the unfolding, forward moving direction of film.¹⁹

Yet the cinema’s fundamental mechanical movement involves a paradox; the contradiction between the film strip made up of a succession of still photographs taken by the cine camera and the illusion of movement produced as it passes through the gate of the projector at 24

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frames a second. Mulvey discusses the photograph's early associations with death and the supernatural, and how for Andre Bazin, and the Roland Barthes of *Camera Lucida*, photography 'touches the complex human relation to death'.²⁰ In cinema it is as though the still frame's association with death fuses into the death of the story. Mulvey writes:

Throughout 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle', the stimulation to movement, inherent in the death instinct, jostles with its aim to return, to rediscover the stillness from which it originally departed. Freud's metaphors, 'paths' and 'depart' alongside 'return' and 'initial' state, resonate with the topographies of narrative structure.

There are two grand conventions of narrative closure, devices that allow the drive of a story to return to stasis: death or marriage. Marriage as closure also brings with it the topographical stasis conventionally implied by the new home, the 'palace' in which a hero settles, after his travels, balancing the family home from which he had originally departed.²¹

In *Les Rendez-vous d'Anna*, Akerman exploits to the full the conventional affinity between vehicles – trains, a car, a taxi – and cinematic movement in a narrative structured entirely as a journey, whilst avoiding the 'two grand conventions of narrative closure': death or marriage. At the end of the film, the narrative is open-ended; stillness in *Les Rendez-vous d'Anna* is embedded *throughout* the movement of the narrative at the level of formal decision-making. Strict avoidance of moving camera work and shot reverse shot, the use of monologue in preference to dialogue, and choreography of the character's movement are just a few of many techniques employed by Akerman to pattern differently the play of motion and stasis that functions to position the film on the side of life, a position confirmed explicitly nearly 26 years later in *Tomorrow We Move*.

II

Towards the end of *Tomorrow We Move*, a child is born, but not before hetero-normative conventions of relationship, home and family have been loosened and re-jigged. As the film opens, they are already up in the air with the suspended piano as metaphor. The title *Tomorrow We Move* announces that this present move will not be the last – or last long. We enter a film that is already on the move, this time propelled by a woman, Catherine, who is a mother and a wife of 41 years, recently widowed, rather than by a woman and a daughter who in *Les Rendez-vous d'Anna* resists both children and marriage. In *Tomorrow We Move* the daughter, Charlotte (Sylvie Testud), is driven to distraction by the clutter of past domesticity in the form of her parents' furniture – while her mother's piano survives the move, the chandelier that belonged to her father does not. Charlotte drops it: 'lucky he's not

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here to see that,' she remarks, echoing the 'don't tell him,' Anna's answer to her mother's response to her story about making love with the woman in the hotel room in *Les Rendez-vous d'Anna*. Charlotte's nights are disturbed by her mother's loneliness, need for comfort and desire to share her bed. In *Les Rendez-vous d'Anna*, a bed shared in a hotel room between a mother and a daughter in transit through her home city was the space of loving intimacy. At home in *Tomorrow We Move*, the bed-sharing threatens to become an unsustainable routine in which the mother's presence is intolerably persistent, and late in the film her daughter is unwilling to engage with *her* need to confide her thoughts about old age.

The crux of the narrative is that Catherine's presence in the apartment and the ensuing domestic chaos, together with her professional life as a piano teacher, disturbs the peace Charlotte needs in the mornings for her work as a writer. It is the decision to *move* to a bigger apartment and Charlotte's interim solution of renting a room away from the apartment in which to write in the mornings that sets in train a series of meetings with strangers; Samuel Popernick, the estate agent, Michèle, the young woman with whom Charlotte shares the rental of her workspace and the various 'couples' who arrive to view the apartment – in the process of which it becomes a creative space.

Tomorrow We Move reprises *Les Rendez-vous d'Anna* with a difference that is fundamental to its narrative outcome and associated formal decision-making, not least the question of genre; sex and love of a certain kind are separated out. Charlotte's work assignment is to write an 'erotic' narrative, which throughout the film she struggles to construct in various ways; she watches a pornographic movie for inspiration, but within minutes her attention wanders to the curtains and is focused more on their grimy condition than the 'filthy' sexual action on the screen; in a café, she eavesdrops on a conversation between two women about sexual scenarios and makes notes; she listens with her ear to the wall to the sounds of sexual intercourse taking place next door on both sides of her rented work space, and comically she grapples with the *mise-en-scène* and vocabulary of sex between men and women repeating the 'filthy' words, 'prick, ass, dick' – helpfully provided by her mother – as if they belonged to a foreign language to be learned in the course of anthropological field work. This making strange of heterosexuality as sexuality *per se* extends to the treatment of heteronormativity. When a series of 'couples' come to view the apartment, the episode is staged as a hyperbolic comedy of manners – part farce, part musical – of social conventions and gender stereotypes. The distinction between sex and a certain

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definition of love is explicit in a conversation between Charlotte and the young pregnant wife who comes first alone to view the apartment and is happy to find a room that will suit the new baby.



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PW: *Sex in front of the kids isn't Freudian*
 C: *You often make love?*
 PW: *Every day*
 C: *You must like it*
 PW: *You get used to it. And you?*
 C: *I quite like it but I've no lover...but I think about it a lot for my Work*
 PW: *I see, I never think about it... I don't want kids...you're lucky to want sex for work...Why have you no lover?*
 C: *I guess I'm too busy*
 PW: *Ever been in love?*
 C: *I think so*
 PW: *You think*
 C: *I think I'm always in love*
 PW: *With who?*
 C: *No one special. It's an overall feeling. And you?*
 PW: *Me, never! I wasn't even in love with my husband. He asked, I couldn't refuse and before I know it bingo!*
 C: *Maybe it's for the best. Thinking doesn't make kids.*

To my mind this exchange between the two women is marked in Charlotte's words – 'I'm always in love, with no one special. It's an overall feeling' – by the non-libidinal eros Bracha Ettinger has theorized as characteristic of 'an unconscious *feminine, fetal, maternal and pre-maternal*' dimension she has named the *matrixial borderspace*. She writes:

The matrix as a psychic field is a transsubjective dimension of coemergence-in-differentiation that occurs already and first of all during prenatality: fetal and pregnancy. Articulating this dimension as psychic is based on the conceptualisation of the originary human encounter-event as pre-natal, with-in pregnancy, first in the real, and as imprint of this (corpo)-real, and secondly as a metaphor, or on the imaginary level and in the symbolic register. Psychic and mental imprints and inscriptions take place within two (or the few) participants of any real or metaphorical encounter as pregnancy. In the maternal psyche during pregnancy, in a

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subject whose experiences are inscribed in mature non fetal “post Oedipal” constituting levels...²²

What better description of the fundamental structure of the conversation between Charlotte and the young *pregnant* wife whose words nonetheless articulate the “post Oedipal” level of psychic development and its sexual and social manifestation?

Consider for a moment some of the key concepts of the theoretical matrixial complex; principally ‘metramorphosis,’ described as ‘the ensemble of joint eventing, of transmission and reattunement in encounters where I and non-I coemerge, co-change and co-fade in borderlinking to each other,’ as well as ‘besideness,’ ‘severality,’ ‘relations without relating,’ ‘co-poesis’ and ‘compassionate hospitality,’²³ and then reflect upon the narrative and modality of *Tomorrow We Move*. Think of Michèle, another young wife, already a mother, who like Charlotte is looking for a peaceful space in which to escape for part of the day from the demands of her domestic life to write her diary perhaps, or maybe poetry. She agrees to share the lease on an apartment with Charlotte on condition that they never meet again, but as they walk and chat on their way into the flat, Michèle quotes a line of poetry, which Charlotte takes up and completes, remarking ‘so erotic don’t you think?’ When Charlotte offers her bed as a place for the pregnant young woman to rest she tells Charlotte ‘you look at me so kindly, no desire, nothing. It’s restful, feels so good’.

The potential of psychic metramorphic borderlinking, of a transgressing and transforming matrixial transmission between I and non-I however, exacts its price. Ettinger calls it fragilization, evident as ‘vulnerability and a particular kind of passivity,’²⁴ a description that would not be out of place as a characterisation of Anna’s comportment in her encounters both with strangers, and with the otherness of people with whom she is familiar in her travels across Northern Europe. Charlotte’s sensitivity is remarked upon notably by two men in *Tomorrow We Move*, early in the film by Samuel Popernick the estate agent, and later by M. Delacre after he has separated from his wife, in a conversation in which it becomes apparent – as Charlotte names them for him – that the qualities of his new girlfriend also apply to her: beautiful, gentle, sensitive, but with the qualification that sometimes Charlotte is too ‘sensitive and too pure’ for Delacre’s taste, a mark perhaps of her talent for ‘fragilization in com-passion.’²⁵ This is a potential named by Ettinger and identified with the ethical principle in psychoanalysis, which, she writes, is ‘revealed in the responsibility to the

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encounter with the other as impregnated encounter and to the process as a joint voyage of pregnancy and com-passionate hospitality.’²⁶

This resonates wonderfully with each meeting between Charlotte and the pregnant wife in *Tomorrow We Move* during the course of which the following exchange occurs:

C: For couples they say moving is the end
 PW: Of what?
 C: The couple
 PW: You reckon? I can’t wait

And indeed it does uncouple three of the pairs involved, Mme and M. Delacre, the pregnant wife and her husband, and Catherine and Charlotte themselves. Charlotte’s discomfort with Catherine’s lonely need and still sexual desire for her recently deceased husband in the bed-sharing scenes casts them in uneasy relation to one another, at the same time as resembling and dissembling the scene in the hotel in *Les Rendez-vous d’Anna* that is closer in tone to an emergence in adulthood of the ‘non-prohibited, pre-Oedipal prenatal “incestuous” relations in pregnancy’ posited by Ettinger as constitutive of the matrixial human subjectivising dimension.

The set piece of the uncoupling process involves constant movement around the piano and a tune – *Tea for Two* – in which always more than two characters participate as either pianists or dancers. Catherine and Samuel, already uncoupled in their widowed state, the pregnant woman who has gravitated back to the apartment without her husband, M. Delacre, separated from his wife, and Charlotte, without a lover, all take to the keyboard in a loving, or content, or companionable relay in the midst of which, in an astonishing piece of burlesque where acting style and abbreviated narrative editing mesh to undermine realism entirely, the child is born in one scream, named twice as Simon and Simone by Samuel and Catherine, now in the role of new parents, with Charlotte as midwife – arriving too late with the hot water but moping the new mother’s brow with it all the same, before her husband arrives to claim his property; the child. ‘It’s mine I recognise it,’ he cries, and the woman: ‘where is my wife, what have you done with her?’ he demands.

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Now this is a gloriously comic queering of reproduction and the nuclear model of the family that claims heterosexual sexuality and the stability of the hetero-normative unit of the couple as its origin. To my mind, however, the intensification of the play of inter-subjective exchanges in movement, of which the *whole* film is composed, in this extraordinary sequence staged entirely in the apartment, also has the texture of matrixial trans-subjective relations of co-emergence. Exchanges between participants are conducted primarily through music, dance and comic gesture for example that, as happens in silent movie slapstick and bedroom farce in the theatre, at once extends and abbreviates time – for a moment that lasts forever. Post Oedipal conditions are restored when the husband bursts into the apartment to claim his property, but not before it has become an ‘affective mental and erotic space’ in which the boundaries of each participant – in the narrative terms of the film the roles of each character – are transgressed and extended. Catherine and Samuel, for example, shift between a characterisation of young lovers, parents and grandparents, and Charlotte, so like but not *quite* like M. Delacre’s new girlfriend with whom he wants children, is partnered with him in a duet at the piano.

‘[I]n terms of the matrixial perspective’, Ettinger writes:

feminine difference is not between gendered individuals (male versus female) but in the different kinds of border-linking toward and borderspacing with-in a female affective-mental corporeality.²⁷

This chimes with the structural effect of the birth sequence in *Tomorrow We Move*. Ettinger goes a step further:

The possibility of subjective coming-into-being while differentiating and differenc-iating and borderspacing as a prematernal-presubject encounter of partial subjects in co-emergence in birth *is* a woman.²⁸

That is to say a woman as a matrixial psychic structural potentiality rather than as a biological or gendered individual entity.

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‘I abhor nature,’ says Charlotte, and Akerman stages for her a non-natural, non-biological birth as a structure of co-emergence from the quirky exuberance-in motion of several participants in the sequence around the piano. The birth of the child coincides with the completion of Charlotte’s ‘erotic’ writing assignment and the beginning of a new piece of work of her own entitled *A Day in the County*. It is this manuscript she carries with her as she enters the apartment at the beginning of the birth sequence. ‘Thinking doesn’t make kids’ says Charlotte in her first exchange with the pregnant woman about sex and love. By the end of the film it appears to have played a significant part in it – her emergent creative writing practice is equally an event of co-poesis.

In the case of *Les Rendez-vous d’Anna* I made a point of distinguishing active lesbian desire from desire for the mother because, as Teresa de Lauretis rightly argues, it is too often collapsed in the ‘maternal imaginary’ of feminist discourse, leading to equivocation about sexual differences *between* women and the lived experience of lesbian lives. I want to make it equally clear that at the end of *Tomorrow we Move*, the relation of distance in proximity represented in Charlotte and the still unnamed women’s domestic living and work arrangements with the child of shifting gender is a non-lesbian and non-sexual erotic attraction. It is a formation patterned by the ‘matrixial erotic Life-instinct’,²⁹ not a representation of lesbian parenting.

There is no doubt that *Tomorrow We Move* comes down firmly on the side of life. As such it is an affirmative reprise of *Saute Ma Ville (Blow Up My Town)*, Akerman’s earliest film made in 1968, at the end of which the young female protagonist blows up her apartment and herself with gas from the kitchen stove. As we watch the young pregnant woman make herself at home in the apartment in *Tomorrow we Move* on one of the viewing visits, we hear on the soundtrack a dialogue between her husband and Charlotte that goes like this:

H: I like bright kitchens, less risk of accidents.
 C: And all electric.
 H: Fewer suicides than with gas.

At which point there is a momentary shot of the pregnant woman stretched out fast asleep – not dead – on the couch. At the beginning of *Saute ma Ville*, the young woman charges up a flight of stairs carrying a bunch of flowers, racing the lift to her apartment and manically humming a tune (out of tune humming occurs again in *Tomorrow we Move* but here taken up

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by several characters). The episode is echoed in Charlotte's dash up the stairs to the workspace she shares with Michèle with the bunch of flowers picked by her mother on their trip to view the apartment in the country. In this film she leaves the flowers for Michèle and begins a new life as a creative writer.

Not only does Charlotte abhor nature, she also abhors memories, particularly memories connected with grandparents, because they are freighted with traces of trauma linked to experiences of Poland and the camps. In Akerman's reconfiguration of the heteronormative birth event, Samuel and Catherine emerge as 'grandparents' as newly born as the child – the child is therefore not the exclusive image of futurity. In terms of the narrative logic of the film, the birth event in the apartment works more to refigure the enervating pattern of the past that has taken the form of a repetitious need to move house to re-produce the apartment itself as the organising space of future communal relations hospitable to productive life and work – perhaps for years and years, as Akerman has it. *Tomorrow We Move* inflects Lee Edleman's total embrace of the death drive as a queer political strategy of 'no future' with a matrixial movement that opens on to a different concept of futurity, symbolised not in post-natal terms by the child or the mother, but rather as a corpo-real-psychic imprint of the 'originary prenatal encounter event, with-in pregnancy' common to all human beings.³⁰

¹ Not insignificantly in this context, in Akerman's 1976 film *News from Home*, in which a mother's letters to her daughter are read over images of the streets of New York, more than once the mother asks if the small amounts of money she sends by post have arrived safely. Reciprocal letters from the daughter are not part of *News from Home* so that an economic connection, already minimal, with the mother and by extension with home, is never confirmed.

² Transcribed from the soundtrack of *Les Rendez-vous d'Anna*.

³ Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2004), p. 2.

⁴ Ibid. p. 17.

⁵ Adrienne Rich quoted by Teresa de Lauretis in *The Practice of Love: Lesbian Sexuality and Perverse Desire* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994), p. 168.

⁶ Adrienne Rich, *The Dream of a Common Language: Poems 1974-1977* (New York: Norton, 1978)..

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⁷ De Lauretis's analysis of Jacobus's reading of the poem follows a discussion of Madelon Sprengnether's interpretation of it in *The Spectral Mother: Freud, Feminism and Psychoanalysis* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1990).

⁸ Ibid. p. 171.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Transcribed from the soundtrack of *Les Rendez-vous d'Anna*.

¹³ *Brief Encounter*, directed by David Lean, written and produced by Noël Coward, Cineguild, 1945.

¹⁴ Laura Mulvey, *Death 24x a Second* (London: Reaktion Books, 2006), p. 92.

¹⁵ ibid.

¹⁶ Ivone Margulies *Nothing Happens: Chantal Akerman's Hyperrealist Everyday* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1996), p. 162.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ As quoted by Laura Mulvey in *Death 24x a Second*, p. 69.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid. p. 60.

²¹ Ibid. p. 71.

²² Bracha L. Ettinger, 'Diotima and the Matrixial Transference: Psychoanalytical Encounter-Event as Pregnancy in Beauty', in *Across the Threshold (Explorations of Liminality in Literature)*, ed. by C. N. van der Merwe and H. Viljoen (New York: Peter Lang, 2007), pp. 107.

²³ Ibid. pp. 108.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid. pp. 112.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid. pp. 116.

²⁸ Ibid. pp. 119.

²⁹ Ibid. pp. 125.

³⁰ Ibid. pp. 107.

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