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(2010-2016)**

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**Experimental Film – Catholic and Feminist Readings of my Films (2010-2016)**

**REGINA DANINO**

**A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the University  
of Westminster for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

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## **Abstract**

The commentary addresses the works in the Research Portfolio (2010-2016) which consists of three films and one multi-media installation. These films are experimental but look very different from my previous work. This reflects my decision to address figuration and realist representation in order to expand and develop my experimental film language. The works are collective and individual portraits of women in monastic life, and one is a portrait of a young girl in a Catholic iconography. In these new works I find out what happens when you insert direct works about religion into an art space that is not expecting them and has no context ready for them. My aim is to see how that changes and tests the binaries of religion/art, traditional/experimental.

The commentary investigates the works through a Catholic framing/perspective; close reading as a method of viewing the work, and a feminist analysis that provides gendered readings of the works. These three come together to open a space of reflection and a critical perspective on the films. The commentary shows how the works open a space for a religious subject to emerge: one not hitherto represented in the context of experimental film.

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## List of Works

1. *Communion* (2010) 35mm (transferred to digital) black and white, silent, 10 minutes
2. *Sorelle Povere di Santa Chiara* (2015) single channel video, 40 minutes and Publication: Transcript and Translation of Interviews 12Pp
3. *Jennifer* (2015) 2K, DCP, colour, 5:1 sound, 72 minutes
4. *Sorelle Povere di Santa Chiara* (2016) 16mm, black and white, silent, 12 minutes

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## **Author's Declaration**

I declare that all the material contained in this thesis is my own work

## Introduction

The Research Portfolio 2010-2016 discussed in this commentary consists of four works: Three of the new works; *Sorelle Povere di Santa Chiara* (2015) multi media installation *Jennifer* (2015) and *Sorelle Povere di Santa Chiara* (2016) 16mm film deal with women in monastic life, and *Communion* (2010) is a film portrait of a young girl which stages the iconography of Communion photography.

The aim of the commentary is to investigate how Catholic discourse informs my new works and to find out what happens when the religious subject intersects with experimental and feminist film.<sup>1</sup> The commentary explores feminist and gendered perspectives of the monastery as a woman's space. My aim is to bring into view the lives of women which have been hidden and to discuss the effect of their presence, including the effect on the viewer in the different works and exhibition contexts. The works open spaces for a new Catholic subject to emerge in the field of experimental film and art. My aim in the commentary is to develop a Catholic perspective and understanding for reflecting on the works and their feminist and experimental structures.

Catholicism in the context of the commentary is not a fixed, monolithic practice or set of ritual orthodox beliefs (although I do not reject these) for example, my experience of Catholicism is continental in the context of Spain and Gibraltar. However, this commentary is framed by what to Catholics is the "one true religion".<sup>2</sup> Yet, being a believer or non-believer is irrelevant to this argument. What is relevant is that religion is specific and is the frame for this discussion on the works and their impact on the viewer and space of contemporary art.

In this Commentary I refer to concepts that have given meaning making agency to my film practice, such as 'presence', 'authenticity', 'materiality'. This time, rather than thinking these concepts through the terms of abstract modernist film

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1 In this commentary I refer to Christian or Catholic interchangeably in different contexts. For example: I refer to Christianity in the discussion of the *Sorelle Povere* in section 2 and 4 as they were founded in the medieval 12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> century Christian Revival movements of the pre-Reformation and to Catholic in section 3 on *Jennifer* because the Discalced Carmelites are framed by the 16<sup>th</sup> century spirit of the Counter-Reformation. *Communion* (2010) refers to a specifically Catholic iconography. I refer to Christianity to invoke the inclusive broader aspects of the tradition.

2 I adhere with Lacan, to the perspective in this commentary that Catholics see Catholicism as the true Christianity. Jacques Lacan, *The Triumph of Religion*, trans. Bruce Fink, 1 edition (Polity, 2015).P.66

theory and aesthetics, I also use Catholic theological approaches. Catholicism also provides an understanding of the importance of interconnectivity and correspondences of the layering of meanings in my work. This is a new step that furthers the post structuralist lens of inter-textuality which governed the previous works.

On a sociological front, I have found Andrew Greeley's account of, the Catholic imagination very convincing, especially as it chimes with my own religious and cultural experience of Catholicism as a form which permeates all aspects of lived reality, for example through how it privileges the social, the creation of community, and the importance of place.<sup>3</sup> His concept has been very helpful to me in identifying how my Catholic imagination, is played out as a discourse not just in the content but is in the structures of my work – as I will trace. Robert Orsi's discussion of presence has also been enlightening. He grounds the heightened sense of the co-existence of a spiritual and visible world as inculcated in Catholics not only in theology but imbibed through early education.<sup>4</sup> This has a great resonance to me and has also helped me to understand why I often make films with a strong sense of presence extracted from the reality of the world, even the highly experimental films. Both these studies have been very helpful in supporting my own voice and approach.

My cinematic gaze therefore, is informed and embodies Catholic perspectives. 'Presence' is intrinsic to the Catholic doctrine of the Eucharistic actual presence but my experience of the Mass was a predominantly social one, not religious (although as a growing child, I experienced religious intensity in my imagination outside of this institutional rite – as do many Catholic children) and I felt a powerful sense of 'presence' as the co-existence of the visible and invisible world. Orsi elucidates how Catholics live in the presence of the saints and angels from a young age as did I, and where the world is imbued with the presence of the invisible realm. I touch on this in section 4 and it is a powerful experience behind my experimental films. I combine this Catholic notion of the 'presence' of the invisible with the materialist presence offered by the tenets of modernist film theory, specifically structural materialist film, where it is the material presence

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<sup>3</sup> Andrew Greeley, *The Catholic Imagination* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

<sup>4</sup> Robert A. Orsi, *History and Presence* (Harvard University Press, 2016).

of the film image itself that can have a stand alone impact on the perception of the viewer through duration, framing, brought about by the full force of technological focus.<sup>5</sup> Feminist filmmaking drew on these structural, formalist and materialist principles and my realist works here do too to produce a sense of filmic ‘presence’ in some aspects of these documentary-like works. In the case of *Communion* I discuss the presence of the image through the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century French film theories of André Bazin, Henri Agel and Amédée Ayfre, grounded in Catholic phenomenology. Therefore my notion of ‘presence’ intersects across these experiences and theories and is also informed by Orthodox theology and by an Orthodox understanding of the role of the presence of the icon in the art of contemplation as I shall touch on in section 1 on Communion.

These works rehearse for the first time in my work an engagement with a spectrum of accounts of the spectator’s reception of and engagement with, the works. The effects of the presence of the image on the viewer, from alienation to familiarisation, is discussed in relation to the feminist film strategies of the installation Sorelle Povere. I also examine the move from structural film’s prerequisite of an active self-reflexive spectatorial participant to a more meditative and even contemplative engagement with the image. I discuss the positive effects of the image’s mark or in Agel’s terms, ‘impression’ on the viewer. Whilst these works do not all fully perform or embody all these concepts of materiality and presence (being or having a document or documentary-like form and therefore a too direct relationship with recorded reality), they discuss Catholic spiritual life in the interviews and my close readings make a case for how contact with the work also shifts attitudes.

They are experimental works and I actively resist an ‘objectivising’ study position. Roman Catholicism in my work incorporates diverse experiences: geographical, cultural, social, community, auditory (in particular), aesthetic and so on. I work *within* the material, not in a devotional, uncritical sense nor in a scholastic sense; rather, the material forms my psychological landscape. The Catholic sensibility perceives the world as permeated by mystery and grace, and I am concerned at how the richness of this aspect of the Catholic imagination, so directly connected

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5 Peter Gidal, ed., *Structural Film Anthology* (London: BFI Publishing, 1976).

to a source of creativity and enabling access to a wealth of resources, is being eroded through increased homogenisation and secularisation and there are many but I cite one other filmmaker Lucrecia Martel also indebted to this imagination.<sup>6</sup>

In my experimental films of 1990-1997, Catholic iconography was intertwined with the concept of the 'feminine' underpinned by French Feminist writings such as Julia Kristeva's semiotic and *jouissance*.<sup>7</sup> My work showed how it was the *specificity* of a Catholic imagination and the wealth of Catholicism(s), in its (their) inter-textual and intellectual, aesthetic, cultural and religious bodies of knowledge that gave rise to new visual expression. Such expression contributed to the canon of British experimental film, however, it is difficult to convey the rupturing intervention of these works in the context of secular experimental film at the London Film Makers' Co-op since they have now successfully established this ground. For me, it had been exciting to produce my iconographically rich work of the 1990s in a previously uncharted area which referenced Catholicism and which gave it its singularity.<sup>8</sup>

## 2. Definitions of the feminine, feminism, feminist

Since my first project *First Memory* at the RCA in 1980, I have always made a distinction between social feminist practices in film and the element that I then developed and called the 'feminine' which has a more psychoanalytic approach as outlined above. This second path informed my practice focusing on desire, materiality, expressivity, abstraction and a sensory register which is difficult to capture, indeed, evades representation. I refer to the 'feminine' in this commentary only once as a form of visuality after Svetlana Alpers' own use of this phrase to denote a form of seeing and an attitude of de-dramatisation in 17<sup>th</sup> Dutch genre painting.<sup>9</sup> However, it could also refer to my method throughout as a director which was a stance of openness towards my subjects, of giving space and enabling the women to speak. However, I feel that the strongest characteristics

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6 Greeley, *The Catholic Imagination*. P3 and see section 3 *Jennifer* (2015)

7 Julia Kristeva et al., *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1981).

8 I would now argue for other Catholic inflected works at the Film Co-op, such as Cordelia Swan's, John Maybury's, Jean Matthee's, David Larcher's and others although these works have not been analysed nor necessarily made from this perspective.

9 Svetlana Alpers, *The Art of Describing: Dutch Art in the Seventeenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983).

of these works are the explicitly realist documentary content and therefore they call for an approach predominantly from a social feminist perspective for the first time in my practice. I refer to feminism as the historic women's movement commencing in the 1970s (in film history) and to those feminist film theories (see section 2) which aimed to emancipate the filmic and cinematic representation of women as social subjects. I also use the concept of feminist as a method and disruptive element, which unsettles the normative expectations. For example, in section 2 where the nuns give their own names and tell their personal stories. Or in *Jennifer* (section 3) where the disruption stems from her circumnavigation of being a historical female subject and not being caught by the trope of Woman as sign as understood in feminist film theory. The decision to make and mount these works in the gallery stems also from a feminist engagement in rupture and disruption as well as with intimacy as a strategy to cause consciousness raising. I describe how these feminist methodologies engender and present Catholic subjects and brings the viewer to a greater understanding of the women's existence and lives and of the presence of Catholic thinking.

### **3. Catholicism and Feminism**

Any discussion of Catholicism and feminism would need to acknowledge that there are debates and ruptures within Catholicism itself around issues raised by feminism. For example there are social activists such as the nun Teresa Forcades who understands feminism as a form of liberation theology or the activist debates within the church regarding the ordination of women. I could have taken a different path in this commentary by making visible the tensions between the women I interview within religious communities and the disruptive feminist subject of religion.

The fact is that there is no straightforward correspondence between some of the questions that a feminist approach would posit to the subjects of the films and their own self-representation and consciousness. My aim was to engender a relationship of trust to enable the sisters to participate in the work in order to give an account of themselves that would satisfy a feminist enquiry but without imposing myself on them. My aim was to resist a feminist 'corrective'

ideological position towards the women. My aim was not either to reduce them to any psychologising interpretation or appropriation of their world for feminist commentary. In approaching the women I had to find a method which would go further than respect – it sought not to question their devotional world (indeed I don't). The originality of the work is that it challenges the boundaries between the subject of study, feminist perspectives and my role as a director/feminist. My aim was to find out how far I could make the work from within Catholicism for an art audience. Indeed, I considered that in the case of the project with the *Sorelle Povere*, I gave myself up to their ethos as I discuss in section 4. My focus of critique is weighted towards secular feminism and stands in solidarity with the women who are 'hidden' from its view. My feminist/feminine method was to discover the possibility of the furthest place where I could position the work from where it is not devotional but to go as far as possible within the furthest possible limits allowed by the norms of secular enquiry. I did not see the function of the work as utilitarian in order to promote issue-based debate. My emphasis in reading the works is sociological but also phenomenological and I give an account of the effect on the viewer. My aim is not to question the women's place but to balance this with works which also question the viewer's.

A different focus would have produced a different project. However, I have to choose one particular focus and my main objective is to question the assumptions of secular feminism and its blind spot in relation to Christianity as emblemised by the religious women and their identity depicted in these works. In this respect they are counter-cultural works. As an experimental filmmaker I am also referring not just to the Catholic subjects but to a Catholicism embedded in my practice in the structures of the work as a discourse of the feminine and feminist within the context of these documentary-like experimental works. In this commentary, I will appraise how a critical and aesthetic Catholic discourse operates in my new works.

#### **4. The new visual experimental direction of the work, 2010-2016**

The Portfolio of works is experimental towards the emergence of a new film language. After a gap of some years between *Temenos* (1997) and *Communion* (2010) I felt that the tropes of experimental film seemed already historical and too

established and I did not want to repeat the originality of my established visual language of the 1990s, thus turning it into a trope. My aim in these works was to deal with figuration within experimental film.

The Portfolio brings us face to face with the ‘unthinkable’ – the figurative representation of a Catholic subject in the art space and experimental film. The works use realist and documentary language for the first time. The new works position “the dignity of traditional representations” and mix mainstream forms within an experimental art form.<sup>10</sup> Cinema as cultural memory and film as an analogue medium are all forms of traditional representations in the works. Experimental methods, such as the use of duration, come together with evidentiary recording methods to open contemplative and reflexive spaces. Contemplative spaces have connotations of forms of resistance but also of forms of communication and healing. The works are portraits of religious iconography, places, individuals and communities and open ideologically foreclosed spaces that enable a religious subject to come among a contemporary art and film audience. I use the concept of the feminist secular gaze as an ideological blind spot in relation to the vast Christian space outside its field of vision.<sup>11</sup> This commentary shows how the presence of the works ruptures this foreclosed secular and feminist gaze.<sup>12</sup> I will show how the new works reflect back to the viewer this blind spot in the ideological field of vision and open spaces for different Catholic subjects: the iconographic subject, the religious space of community, humanist communication, and the ideal exemplary space are presented in experimental film and art.

## 5. The Research Portfolio

This Research Portfolio, 2010-2016 consists of four key works: two short analogue, silent films, one is on 35mm (transferred to digital) and a 16mm film (on print and transferred to digital); a multi-media installation consisting of a single channel

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<sup>10</sup> Paul Coates, *Cinema, Religion and the Romantic Legacy* (Aldershot, Hants, England ; Burlington, VT: Routledge, 2003). P.21

<sup>11</sup> Lacan uses the metaphor of the scotoma: the gaze is a blind spot in the field of vision. Anneke Smelik, *And the Mirror Cracked: Feminist Cinema and Film Theory*, 1998 edition (Madras: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001). P. 83

<sup>12</sup> By ‘secular’, I refer specifically to the space in contemporary visual culture alienated from the history of the image in the context of Christian culture.



video and a publication of the transcript and translation of the video interviews and a 6 channel sound installation, and a documentary feature-length film.

## 6. Method

My method is to provide evidence for my claims by looking closely at aspects of the image and how it makes meaning, and to give an account of a viewing experience of the works. This analysis provides empirical insight into how the work operates as a visual sensual, signifying and experiential object, which opens awareness and shifts perception.

This commentary is drawn from a number of critical analyses. While the films in the Portfolio mix experimental with mainstream film language, critical analyses are applied against the grain of those categories. For example, I apply the Catholic-inflected film writings of mid-20<sup>th</sup> century French critics, which reflect on the cinema of their era, to consider the experimental film, *Communion*. Through this method I also investigate whether future films can produce something new through this encounter.

The commentary is divided into four sections, each dedicated to one work. Each work is analysed through at least two of the three intersections of feminism, experimental film structures and Catholicism; each is assisted by a key critical text and focuses on thematic context, or comparative visual works. Through this method, I develop a Catholic critical discourse to discuss the new works. For the first time, I write about my work from the perspective of a realist, social feminist and humanist perspective rather than a post-structuralist and psychoanalytic perspective.

I have been interested in the writings of Henri Agel and his contemporary Amédée Ayfre since the 1990s. As their work is not translated into English, I consider selected aspects of their thinking about spirituality in cinema, through Sarah Cooper's study *The Soul of film Theory*.<sup>13</sup> I use their lens of Catholic phenomenology and I apply their insights and those of Bazin's on the films of Bresson, to a study of *Communion* (2010). Thus, I make a Catholic reading of the post-modern mix of mainstream and

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13 Sarah Cooper, *The Soul of Film Theory*, 2013 edition (Houndsmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire; New York: AIAA, 2013).

experimental film. In this section, I pay attention to the presence of the image and the emergence of a Catholic subject in experimental film.

I analyse the video *Sorelle Povere di Santa Chiara* (2015) (abridged henceforth to *Sorelle Povere*). This is centred on interviews with the community of Poor Clares, through reference to selected feminist film strategies by Teresa de Lauretis, Anneke Smelik and Claire Johnston. The latter provide entry points for feminist readings.<sup>14</sup> I discuss the work through the importance of narrative to women's representation and the second wave feminist concept of 'placing into view.'<sup>15</sup> I also refer to feminist strategies in video art to analyse the direct address of *Sorelle Povere* as a feminist gesture. The work brings the actual presence of the sisters into the gallery. Thus feminist readings are applied to a video on religious women and reveal how the impact of the work enables a shift in the viewer's perspective. In this section I discuss the video's humanist communication as central to its feminist and Christian perspective.

The third key study is Andrew Greeley's sociological text, *The Catholic Imagination*.<sup>16</sup> The commentary draws on Greeley's definitions of the Catholic imagination to analyse the Catholic structures embedded in the feature documentary *Jennifer* (2015) discussed through the sound of the film. I refer to Greeley's ideas in order to show how the film inscribes a Catholic discourse in its production methods and how it builds a Catholic and gendered acoustic space, for example, through the importance of 'real' place to real meaning in the construction of the film's sound. In this section I describe how the film's sound constructs the women's religious space of community.

Giorgio Agamben's *The Highest Poverty – Monastic Rules and Form of Life* is a study of the medieval Franciscan philosophy and theology of poverty which is not addressed to film but sheds light on the relationship between poverty, innocence and simplicity in Franciscan theology.<sup>17</sup> I reflect on how these Franciscan monastic

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<sup>14</sup> Alison Butler, *Women's Cinema: The Contested Screen*, vol. 14 (Wallflower Press, 2002).

<sup>15</sup> Representing and celebrating women's presence, contributions and participation became a major part of cultural politics of the second feminist wave in the 1970s.

<sup>16</sup> Greeley, *The Catholic Imagination*, 2001.

<sup>17</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *The Highest Poverty: Monastic Rules and Form-of-Life*, trans. Adam Kotsko (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2013).

precepts provide not only a reading but also inflected my choice to film on analogue 16mm which is the medium of the work *Sorelle Povere di Santa Chiara* (2016) (henceforth abridged to *Sorelle Povere* 16mm), but also my way of filming, thus showing how the principles of theological analysis apply both to form-of-life and to a materialist analysis of the film. Making the film allowed me to revisit the craft of filmmaking in all its stages before the medium disappears. In this section I also describe how the film portrays the ideal exemplary religious space through a form of feminine visuality.

There now follows the commentary on each of the four works in turn, beginning with section 1 on *Communion*, moving to *Sorelle Povere* video, then *Jennifer* and finally *Sorelle Povere* 16mm film.

## Section 1

### *Communion* (2010)

In this film, my objectives were to work with figuration, to erase narrative and sound altogether and to focus on the iconographic and indexical strength of the image alone. The film is a portrait of a young girl and it represents a key shift in my practice, as it is the first time I directed a living subject using realist film language with attention to art direction and technical staging. Having no narrative, *Communion* was made as a short experimental film for installation, which could be shown in continuous projection. Although in this section, I refer to the 2-part installation of the film in a church and cinema, the film was first made for and installed, in a gallery space. This was important in my aim to bring the subject



Figure 1 - Installation view of *Communion*  
(Nina Danino, 2010)  
Photo: Jonathan Mañasco  
*From Floor to Sky – British Sculpture and the  
Studio Experience*, Ambika P3, London 20

of religion into the gallery where it was not expected. Its religious iconography transposed into the gallery as an experimental film presented an intrusion. When I made it and when it was shown, *Communion* had the same impact on me as did my film *Stabat Mater* (1990). It not only initiated a new visual language which had not been seen before but it had a rupturing effect which was also alienating and a shock to me as well as to an audience. *Communion* in being explicit in its religious references and iconography is on the far boundaries of where realist experimental images can go in terms of religious iconography and forms of representation. This section opens the discussion of how a fluid, plural, meaning-making Catholic subject, represented by the young girl in the film and its iconography, appears in the field of art.

### **A Catholic critical discourse**

Communion combines two standard visual languages - the 35mm mainstream studio codes of classical Hollywood and European cinema - to stage the religious iconography of the genre of Holy Communion photography. The Communion portrait is meant to capture in the rhetoric of lighting, poses and the emblematic white dress, an external representation of a pure internal state. I will consider terms that the French film critics Henri Agel and his contemporary Amédée Ayfre use to discuss how Bresson's Catholic spirituality is manifest in his films and how these ideas also help to analyse *Communion* and to position it as a Catholic work beyond religious iconography and how the film leaves its impression on the viewer. I am interested in corresponding with their ideas in my contemporary work and I reference their ideas about spirituality in mainstream cinema as a critical lens for reading and reflecting on *Communion* as an experimental film.

Agel and Ayfre's work is relevant to my focus on experimental methods because they combine an interest in the material *and* ineffable aspect of cinema; further, they attempt to describe the metaphysical experience of film as a way to the spiritual potential of cinema. As neither Agel nor Ayfre's work has been translated into English and as stated in the Introduction, I use Sarah Cooper's work as a primary text throughout this section.<sup>18</sup> For them, films which have a spiritual dimension "take

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<sup>18</sup> Sarah Cooper, *The Soul of Film Theory*, 2013 edition (Houndsmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire; New York: AIAA, 2013).



Figure 2 - Film Still from *Mouchette*  
(Robert Bresson, 1967)

on a religious meaning that signifies communion with both the material world and a spiritual beyond.”<sup>19</sup> They take the secular ‘existentialist phenomenology’ of their time in a spiritual direction, taking on religious meaning in film: “It is here that the soul acquires its most direct and consistent connection in the history of film to orthodox religion, specifically Catholicism.”<sup>20</sup> It is in this precise moment that their work opened the way to a Catholic understanding of Bresson’s films because it opened the path to readings which I feel are now important to revisit in a contemporary setting. They were the first to make a spiritual connection in Bresson’s films and the potential of the spiritual in cinema but the rise of structural and post- structural theory meant that it became no longer critically respectable to consider film in relation to a spiritual or religious dimension. As a result, their

<sup>19</sup> Cooper, *The Soul of Film Theory*, 2013. P.70

<sup>20</sup> Sarah Cooper, *The Soul of Film Theory*, 2013 edition (Houndsmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire ; New York: AIAA, 2013).P.70

theories were swept away or discredited by the “new fashionable disciplines of semiotics, linguistics and psychoanalysis”.<sup>21</sup>

### Impression

For Henri Agel, the spiritual potential of cinema and what he calls the soul is in all aspects of the *conception* of the film, “from its inspiration and its production through to its interpretation.”<sup>22</sup> It is neither unlocatable nor locatable in representation but manifests itself through *the impact* on the viewer.<sup>23</sup> This impact leaves its trace as a deep impression on the viewer. In the same way, the impact or impression of *Communion* is not locatable in one aspect: here I will undo several layers of the work to show how it creates what Agel calls ‘impact’ or how it ‘leaves an impression’ on the viewer through its stages of inspiration, production and interpretation.

My aim was to create a standalone, singular image; to elevate this image in film into an auratic object through two routes: reconnecting art to its traditional, ritual religious roots through iconic presence and secondly, through the notion of authenticity.<sup>24</sup> As Greeley illuminates, “The aura is an effect of a work of art being uniquely *present* in time and space. It is connected to the idea of *authenticity*.”<sup>25</sup> The image in *Communion* captures its authenticity partly through a representational route, through its cinematographic lineage to the master craft of cinema and its 35mm analogue, photographic, indexical relationship to reality and the material world. In Catholic thinking, reality or what Bazin calls ‘materiality’ is linked to the sacramental and the sacred. The film also represents the subject at its most whole and figurative at the limits of experimental film. My other approach to the image is informed by an Orthodox understanding of the icon which is charged with a presence. The presence of the icon “is a channel of grace and sanctifying virtue”.<sup>26</sup> My cinematic gaze focuses on serenity, interiority and beauty rather than on conflict and tension. The notion of presence in

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21 Ibid. P.69-70

22 Cooper, *The Soul of Film Theory*, 2013.P.83

23 Ibid.P.83

24 See Walter Benjamin's *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*

25 Greeley, *The Catholic Imagination*, 2001. P.140 and Robert A. Orsi, *History and Presence* (Harvard University Press, 2016).

26 Paul Evdokimov, *The Art of the Icon: A Theology of Beauty, Illustrated*, trans. Fr Steven Bigham (Oakwood Publications, 2011). Loc 2912

experimental abstract film has been understood through modernism and I draw on these principles in these works to some extent but here in this film I position the image as a focus of outwards contemplation rather than an active or agitated self-reflexivity. *Communion* positions the image transparently, legibly, without defacing the religious content or meaning of the work and this is its claim to opening a new visual phenomenon in experimental film.

My aim in *Communion* was also to centralise the human subject through a unified, non-fetishised, realist incarnation, particularly through the religiously- inflected aura of the face with its simultaneous associations with a Christian discourse and the evocation of a collective, cultural memory of a 20<sup>th</sup> century cinema of art and of spectacle. I transposed that history, transmitted by the lighting techniques used for film stars from the classic film era, to the child's face, which is held in stillness, bathed in 3-point studio light at the hands of a master craftsman.<sup>27</sup> Through the lighting, the beauty of the child's face resonates with the haunting palimpsests of the faces of women stars and girl saints, with the sacred and the shadow cast by the religious side of the profane iconography of the star (who is both diva and divine): see Dreyer's *Joan of Arc*, the secular beauty of *Queen Christina*, the allure of Garbo, or the mystical melodrama played out on the face of Jenny Jones in the *Song of Bernadette*.<sup>28</sup> Laura Mulvey localised the pleasurable structures of looking in classical cinema around the presence of the woman, the close up of the face and other parts of the fragmented body.<sup>29</sup> The images in *Communion* are beautiful to look at but they do not fetishise the subject because the looking instigated is closer to contemplation and not a controlling gaze. Also, although the film does have close ups, there is no continuity narrative and the child is not cut up but presented whole by reference to stasis and the quality of an icon. The close ups are part of a serene series of images without hierarchy because the duration of each shot and pacing is even throughout. In representing this Catholic subject, the film opens a space of encounter which is not stripped of its religious meaning nor is this meaning meant to be transformed, transgressed or lost in its positioning within its intended context of exhibition circulation within cinema

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27 See Appendix B: *Communion* (2010) Background to the Cinematography

28 Theodore Dreyer, *The Passion of Joan of Arc* (1928), Rouben Mamoulian, *Queen Christina* (1933), Henry King, *The Song of Bernadette* (1943).

29 Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1975) in *Visual and Other Pleasures* (London) 1989.



and contemporary art. This encounter is radical because the image demands to be read within its context of a Catholic religious meaning. For those viewers who do not have Catholic references to hand, the film can be enjoyed and can be read in other ways not least for its aesthetic qualities and cultural reference to cinema, and through the layers of other themes present, (for example, artist and child, mother/daughter, performativity of the body, children in films etc.,).

The film is also positioned on the far boundaries of where experimental film can go in terms of female religious representation and of the mother-daughter relationship. It asserts a maternal lineage as Sarah Cooper points out, through “a maternal bond, in keeping with both the positioning of the Madonna in Catholicism and the film director’s loving approach to her subject. A Marian line is introduced through the first cut from the young girl to the stained glass window, showing the Madonna and child”.<sup>30</sup> How does the maternal relationship sit alongside my role as filmmaker when it is my daughter who is the subject? Directing a child especially from the position of mother as artist is fraught with ethical, artistic, feminist and practical difficulties. Maternal responsibility is called into question as it sits alongside my role as a director/artist for the sake of making art. The child is held in an intense cinematic gaze. As feminist artists showed, motherhood is also about power and control. Was it cruel to submit a child to such an arduous regime of cinematographic attention? Is the maternal gaze, unprotecting of the unrelenting stare of the camera, the duration of the shots and the sadistic technological regime of cinema? Is the transcendent beauty of the images themselves, the price of a more loving and idealising maternal representation? After all the film deploys in fragment form, all the forces of patristic cinema turned over to a maternal gaze. Is a girl model more biddable? Could I have made the same film about a boy’s Communion (a question which has also been asked by the audience).<sup>31</sup> The answer to both is no. My daughter is strong in the film, she stands on her own ground and confronts the camera – looks back in direct address - with a strength of purpose beyond her years. It is not a feminist mother as artist statement, it is a portrait of my child and it can also sit in the tradition of men and women artists who painted or photographed their child (yes, especially daughters it has to be said), (although less so in video and

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<sup>30</sup> Sarah Cooper, *Communion*, catalogue essay, published by Temporal Films, London (2013) ISBN 978 0 9926883

<sup>31</sup> Public discussions : *Comraich/Sanctuary*, Mount Stuart (2013) and “Art Cinema and the Soul” with Sarah Cooper, Gilda Williams, Euan King Heath Street Baptist Church London (2013).

photography since many feminist artists used these contemporary media in works with their children to explore their own social positions as mothers and artists) in order to capture the fleeting beauty and transience of childhood.

One way that the film can be read is through the history of lighting techniques and its authenticity of production as part of the conception of the film which is highlighted by its cinematographic excellence.<sup>32</sup> The analogue craft of black and white cinematography on 35mm (transferred to digital) is paradoxically intrinsic to its temporal instability. To some it resonates like “a film by Bresson” or “an Italian film of the 50s”.<sup>33</sup> This temporal indeterminacy and its silence sets it apart from ordinary linear time and reality. Laura Mulvey suggests that the encounter with cinema from the past holds back “the rush of new technology towards the future and its indifference to the past” which can be a radical gesture by providing a space “for holding onto and reflecting”.<sup>34</sup> *Communion* opens a space for contemplation and reflection which combines and unfixes categories of past and present. This space is dialectical and fluid in an experimental vein, opening a new space through this startling encounter.

*Communion* is also framed by the perspective of the need for the image’s potential as a space of reflection in contemporary film practice. I reflect on Ayfre’s and Agel’s work here for a Catholic-inflected paradigm of how a space of contemplation and perception is produced in *Communion*; one which challenges the “widespread assumption of religion’s anachronism in the context of modern secularisation,” seeing it “as something new, as something that does not fit into what still may be a widespread oversimplified assumption of linear, history and secularisation.”<sup>35</sup> André Bazin’s work has been reexamined in contemporary film theory for this reason.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> See Appendix B: *Communion* (2010) Background to the Cinematography

<sup>33</sup> Public discussions : *Comraich/Sanctuary*, Mount Stuart (2013) and “Art Cinema and the Soul” with Sarah Cooper, Gilda Williams, Euan King Heath Street Baptist Church London (2013).

<sup>34</sup> Laura Mulvey, *Death 24 x a Second*, Reaktion Books, (2006) P.24

<sup>35</sup> Jenna Actaboski and John Fox, “New Perspectives on Religion Today: An Introduction, Re-bus issue 3, Spring 2009, University of Essex. [https://www.essex.ac.uk/arthistory/research/pdfs/rebus/rebus\\_issue\\_3.pdf](https://www.essex.ac.uk/arthistory/research/pdfs/rebus/rebus_issue_3.pdf) [Accessed 24 July 2016]

<sup>36</sup> Bazin and Kracauer were “previously characterised as naïve realists or technological determinists for their insistence upon the ontology of the photograph as a material trace of reality” but there is a shift to their work because “semiotic methodologies prove inadequate to the task of accounting for the potentiality of film and photography”. Tom Gunning and Timothy Corrigan, *Still Moving: Between Cinema and Photography*, ed. Karen Beckman and Jean Ma (Duke University Press Books, 2008). LOC 346.



Figure 3 - Film Still from *Communion*  
(Nina Danino, 2010)

As discussed, Agel's emphasis is on the experiential potential of cinema and this potential is visited in *Communion*, in the light of the need to create non-co-optable contemplative spaces of viewership. The religious subject of the film opens a counter space of viewing within an art film context as a form of resistance and healing.

### Figuration

Sarah Cooper writes on *Communion* that 'The portrayal of innocence and the sublime beauty of youth on the face of the child, which reveal mystery, is perhaps closer, however, to the impassivity of Robert Bresson's filming. Bresson's approach to Nadine Nortier's face in *Mouchette* and to that of Claude Laydu in *Diary of a Country Priest*, for example gives no sense of psychological depth and the soul as inner light does not so much disappear, but is displaced onto the external world'.<sup>37</sup> As a portrait, *Communion* explicitly takes up the representation of the face, understood as "the most legible trace of the soul," through the metaphor of light

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37 Sarah Sarah Cooper, *Communion*, catalogue essay, published by Temporal Films, London (2013) ISBN 978 0 9926883

migrated from Christian iconography to 20<sup>th</sup> century cinema. *Communion* disperses a Christian conception of the face, which is ultimately the face of Christ in its fluid transposition to all faces.<sup>38</sup> This approach to the face was most appositely expressed by Dr. Ewan King, pastor of Heath Street Baptist Church, London where the film was installed in continuous projection for two weeks.<sup>39</sup> Through the continuous exposure to the presence of the film, the image undergoes a further and slower transformation and also becomes the face of a sacrificial Christ-like figure beyond the initial cultural palimpsests of woman star and visionary child saints of cinema to a spiritual dimension.<sup>40</sup> *Communion* urgently takes up figuration, and the image of the face is central as a form of resistance to its destruction.<sup>41</sup> The face thus lit, reflects and disperses the sacramental (the subject matter of all Communion photographs) into the space of viewing. Photographed in realist, metonymic figuration, the image is produced cinematically, indexically, in stillness and as silent. For Agel, the silent image in cinema can often lead us to what lies beyond the material to the immaterial world.<sup>42</sup>

The idea of ‘authenticity’ as important meant that the image in *Communion* should not be a facsimile of a period or style of art direction but be produced from an authenticity of knowledge.<sup>43</sup> Integral to the concept of *Communion* was that it should be photographed by a cinematographer from this era. This knowledge is inscribed into the conception of the film and is one of the aspects that supports what Agel calls “leaving a deep impression.”<sup>44</sup> The image of the young girl resonates with the echo of the black and white experiments in cinema studio lighting; in fact, the film can be viewed as an exercise in lighting by a master of this craft. Here, material ‘authenticity’ is part of a religious Catholic

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<sup>38</sup> Cooper, *The Soul of Film Theory*, 2013. P.78

<sup>39</sup> *Communion* (2010) was exhibited as a film installation in Heath Street Baptist Church, London, Artprojx, November 2013. See Appendix A: List of Publication and Exhibition of the Works (2010-2016).

<sup>40</sup> Anneke Smelik defines semiotic feminist film analysis of signification referring to Pierce’s ‘semiosis’ as a triadic process in which the sign mediates between representation and reality. We form an interpretant (knowledge) by mediation of a sign (icon, index or symbol). This process is dynamic because each interpretant itself becomes a sign which sets off a new process of signification. Therefore semiosis is unlimited and infinite Smelik, *And the Mirror Cracked*. P 100

<sup>41</sup> Year Zero: Facialisation, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013). P185-211 and Judith Butler, *Prearious Life: The Power of Mourning and Violence*, Reprint edition (London; New York: Verso Books, 2006). Facialisation problematizes and seeks to eliminate the Christian notion of the face as the central reference point in human relations and representation.

<sup>42</sup> “Cooper, *The Soul of Film Theory*, 2013. P.74

<sup>43</sup> The child is not an actress in costume. See Appendix B: *Communion* (2010) Background to the Cinematography

<sup>44</sup> Cooper, *The Soul of Film Theory*, 2013. P.83

sensibility. The film's crafted perfection embeds this 'authenticity' through which it inscribes its religious auratic register. Agel's notion of the spiritual in cinema is related in Bresson's films not to the representation of the protagonist's and cinema's interiority but to the surface of the medium and the world. This register of spirituality and materiality is dispersed across all aspects of the film through its interpenetration of "inspiration, production and interpretation."<sup>45</sup> The soul is dispersed also in Ayfre's terms, into everything that is connected in the *meanings* of the film and on the surface of the film, its material and medium. This could represent an experimental understanding of the materiality and immateriality of the image itself. Its spiritual dimension is not represented as depth but as surface in "phenomenological realism."<sup>46</sup>



Figure 4 - Film Still from *Au Hazard Balthazar*  
(Robert Bresson, 1966)

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<sup>45</sup> André Bazin, Henri Agel and Amédée Ayfre reflect on Bresson's films particularly *Diary of a Country Priest* (1951) Ibid. P.83

<sup>46</sup> Ibid. P.77

### Existential Physiognomy

I asked myself the question for the first time – how do I direct a subject in front of the camera? I had previously organised my footage in post-production, having control of all levels of production and using self-inscriptive, embodying methods such as the use of my own voice. In *Communion*, the method was to not give directions but in Ayfre’s terms to allow “the minimum intervention and the simple description of behavior (to) permit(s) the emergence of meanings” without forcing a direction<sup>47</sup> and therefore expressivity is kept at a restrained level of dramatic signification.<sup>48</sup> For Bresson, the subject is never knowable and the child in *Communion* is an impassive subject as Sarah Cooper also describes.<sup>49</sup> She embodies and stages (through restrained expressivity, gesture etc.) Ayfre’s “existential physiognomy,” also present in Bresson’s films. *Communion* does not represent her interior life as a psychological subject but as an iconographic subject. She is not the fragmented subject of psychoanalysis nor a ‘play of signifiers’ but the whole, untraumatised subject of the religious icon.



Figure 5 - Film Still from *Communion*  
(Nina Danino, 2010)

<sup>47</sup> Cooper, *The Soul of Film Theory*, 2013. P.80 and See Appendix B: *Communion* (2010) Background Research.

<sup>48</sup> Cooper, *The Soul of Film Theory*, 2013. P.80

<sup>49</sup> Sarah Cooper, *Communion*, catalogue essay, published by Temporal Films, London (2013) ISBN 978 0 9926883

The young girl is presented whole as a religious subject within a religious genre and although towards the end of the film she is chafing with exhaustion, she emerges as a new Christian subject like those in the films of Bresson. In a Christian text such as Bresson's, disturbance is played out as the invisible, internal existential condition of the protagonists rather than through overturning cultural codes, as would be the case in standard experimental tropes or artists' film.



Figure 6 - Installation view of *Communion*  
(Nina Danino, 2010)  
Photo: John Bugeija  
Film Installation, Part 2, Queen's Cinema, Gibraltar 2013

She is represented in the exquisite language of classical cinema but she is not captured or fixed entirely by it. As a 'non-professional' she does not have perfect facial nor bodily stillness. In Amédée Ayfre's account, the actors' bodies reveal "what is unknowable and shrouded in mystery" and are also "the mirror of the soul" and her body performs its own "existential physiognomy."<sup>50</sup> Although the

50 Cooper, *The Soul of Film Theory*, 2013. P.79

terms are essentialist, Ayfre's mirror perfectly reflects and points me to how a realist language of representation can be conceived in an experimental modality in future works. The stylisation of the body for Ayfre can articulate the soul in a performative way and join the order of the sacred. The young girl's body chafes under the conditions of filming; she sways under the pressure of holding the poses for such long periods of time and of being surrounded by lights and technicians. Her body subverts the perfection of the ideal, fetishised portraiture of the cinema star, which has been re-sited in an experimental film. It is the combination of these registers, secular and spiritual, woman and child, past and contemporary, that creates the 'soul' of the film i.e., the aspect that induces an enhanced experience and leaves a deep impression on the viewer.

### Contemplation

Finally, for Agel, films that possess what he calls 'soul' take the experience of the viewer from thinking to contemplation by slowing down the activity of thought in the process. Agel's 'soul' of film is the process of contemplation which goes beyond reflexive thinking into a religious dimension. Stillness and as discussed earlier in certain exhibition contexts, the persistence of the presence of the image in *Communion*, allow us to enter, through duration, into a contemplative relationship with the image. In early cinema, this stillness was associated with the divine<sup>51</sup> and has been considered a passage to an altered state in other film theories including structural film, not to mention the current interest in what is being tagged as Slow Cinema.<sup>52</sup> *Communion* asserts "the importance of slow paced thought at times of swift change."<sup>53</sup> However, the contemplative gaze is a theology of duration and cannot be reduced to mere recording of duration or to the 'slowness' of cinema.<sup>54</sup> It is one contributing factor but this profound joy is not reducible to any one technological practice; it is accumulative on different levels.<sup>55</sup>

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51 Cooper, *The Soul of Film Theory*, 2013. P.22

52 The Theory of Structural Materialist Film also proposes duration as a way of foregrounding self reflexivity as a process of thinking (it rejects contemplation which it considers a passive path) Peter Gidal, ed., *Structural Film Anthology* (London: BFI Publishing, 1976). However, in *Visionary Film*, P Adams Sitney discusses the structural film in a modernist language of 'presence' and as an analogy to consciousness itself. In 'mystical contemplation' where the 'cinematic drama of the gaze, reaches(ing) its final and reflexive development" P.373

53 Gunning and Corrigan, *Still Moving*. LOC 242

54 For example, Lav Diaz, *Death in the Land of Encantos* (2007) lasts 9 hours. The Art(s) of Slow Cinema is a dedicated website to this form. <https://theartsofslowcinema.com>. [Accessed 8 July 2016]

55 Cooper, *The Soul of Film Theory*, 2013.P.83



One of these for Agel was “spatial continuity rather than discontinuity (which) was a source of spiritual enrichment” and facilitated a contemplative cinema of filmmaker and audience.<sup>56</sup>

Through its un-co-opted Catholic imagery, *Communion* insists on its space of isolation as a form of resistance but also leaves an impression through the means described. *Communion*, like Bresson’s films, presents a Catholic subject – a young girl who enters a life of conscience, indeed one who has just been initiated into the Catholic sacrament. I like the analogy given by Sarah Cooper of Agel sewing back together the fragmented and dispersed subject of structuralism as a play of signifiers.<sup>57</sup> In Bresson’s films, as in *Communion*, a new Catholic subject emerges, one who is unknowable and whole. She resists being converted into the signifying chain, co-opted into the normative spaces of contemporary art, and she stands alone, trembling.

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid.Pp.82-83

<sup>57</sup> Cooper, *The Soul of Film Theory*, 2013.P.75

## Section 2

### ***Sorelle Povere di Santa Chiara* (2015)**

*Sorelle Povere* was filmed with the enclosed community of Poor Clares in the Monastery of Santa Chiara in San Marino. It added new skills to my practice and tested my ability to work with multiple participants and to represent them both individually and as part of a community. My aim was to engage with them to allow a portrait of them as a community to emerge, and then, to see what this could mean in terms of the methods used to realise the project collaboratively. I didn't know what form the results of this collaboration would take and I was open to the findings.

The multi-media installation resulting from this collaboration continued to expand my practice as did *Communion* (2010), also shown in installation. The components of the installation of *Sorelle Povere di Santa Chiara* consists of two stand alone pieces; a 6-channel sound installation (site specific with regards to the design and sculptural acoustics) sited in a vault and a single channel video displayed on a cube monitor with headphones and accompanying publication of the interviews shown in another vault.<sup>58</sup> In the context of this portfolio I am only presenting the single channel video.

### **Method**

My method was to gather materials through audio recordings and interviewing; I sent questions in advance. My intention was to produce the work through a shared decision-making method. The sisters were invited to share the questions amongst themselves and/or to add their own. The questions were deliberately simple in their phrasing, to reflect the ethics of their form-of-life, to put the sisters at their ease and to solicit individual responses. My only request was that they all address three questions at the start of each interview: What is your name? Where were you born? What is your baptismal name?<sup>59</sup> These three

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<sup>58</sup> See Appendix A: List of Publication and Exhibition of the Works (2010-2016). *Sorelle Povere di Santa Chiara* was commissioned by Little Constellation for *Listen to the Sirens*, Montagu Bastion, Gibraltar, 2015. Curated by Alessandro Castiglioni, Pier Paolo Coro, Rita Canarezza

<sup>59</sup> See Appendix C: *Sorelle Povere di Santa Chiara*, Publication: Transcript and Translation of Interviews (2015)



Figure 7 - Installation view of *Sorelle Povere di Santa Chiara*, (Nina Danino, 2015) Single channel Video (40 minutes)  
Photo: Stefano Cagol  
*The Voices of the Sirens*, Montagu Bastion, Gibraltar, 2015.



Figure 8 - *Sorelle Povere di Santa Chiara*, Publication: Transcript and Translation of Interviews. (2015) 12pp.

questions are a key to unlocking the narrative – and are a feminist methodology from which the research emerges.

As a commission for an art space, it furthered my research aims to position the subject of women in religious life within a contemporary art context to find out what happens when the two spaces intersect. Other artists have made work about and with, religious communities of women, but I intended to present the interviews as unmediated as possible and without a contextualising narrative. My aim was to claim a space for the Sorelle Povere through their *physical presence* in a contemporary art space by doing *as little as possible* except to resist any exploitation of the participants by the work. One of my concerns was that the art piece should not use the community as “material.” For example, in Bertille Bak’s *O Quatrieme* (2012) the interview with the elderly nun is inserted into a fictional narrative. The artist exerts control of the material for her purposes and another context. My aim was to raise consciousness about religious women within the context of an artwork, and to bring the testimony of the sisters for reflection and engagement by the viewer.

### **Community**

Participation in the interview recordings brought benefits to the sisters: it gave them the opportunity to share previously untold narratives with the audience and with *each other*. In the video, there are ten individual interviews which build up a collective portrait of the community. As they tell us about themselves, the work tries to hold on to the viewer for as long as possible of the 40-minute duration of the video through *human* interest. The act of narration expands the community outwards to include the viewer who wishes to engage with the video.

### **Placing into view**

This video continued the move in my work away from fragmentation to a holistic approach; to the representation of the subject in the form of unedited testimony. The act of continuous speaking grants to the sisters a self-authorising individuality and to the viewer, the space to be able, for the first time probably, to listen to

enclosed women who are normally ‘hidden’ from view, speaking in public, on video. My argument in this section is that the work is feminist through two routes: that of the woman-centred, one-to-one address in the narrative and by placing the women into view. It also frames and validates the spiritual life of the community of women as the feminist subject of the work.

Enclosed communities are not only ‘hidden’ for religious reasons but are also ‘erased’ by secularisation. The video gives the sisters a platform from which they bring the viewer’s awareness to the meaning of their ‘hidden’ lives. First, the video *Sorelle Povere* centres on interviews with the nuns, and presents the Christian subjects in an art space. Secondly, it opens the nuns’ lives to us within the feminist objective of ‘placing into view’. Thirdly, it combines that feminist strategy of making visible, a Catholic and more generically, a Christian space of the women’s spiritual community whose presence ruptures the secular feminist gaze itself. Fourthly, the work brings the contemporary religious community to the attention of other women researchers considering feminist studies of religious women and collectives.

### **Feminism and narrative**

I now discuss the role of narrative as a feminist strategy in the work. In the 1970s, and for me in the 1980s, narrative had a central position in the debates on the representation of women in film. I approached narrative from a literary perspective rather than from the debates within film theory as my work in the 1980s started using expanded media such as slide-tape and audio and I brought my interest in image and narrative to 16mm film using my voice and positioning the woman as an impassive subject within the work. I use some concepts from feminist film theory which were mainly focused on classical and mainstream film for the first time in my practice as a context for the new works. Feminist film theorists such as Anneke Smelik situated narrative as an important feminist strategy because of the “centrality that it grants to female subjectivity”.<sup>60</sup> Teresa de Lauretis also “comes to see narrative as essential” because “narrative is the structure within which positionalities of desire and identification are worked

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60 Butler, *Women’s Cinema*. P.17 Smelik, *And the Mirror Cracked*. P.3

out.”<sup>61</sup> Anneke Smelik proposed that the feminist strategy of ‘focalisation’ in narrative films inscribes women’s perspectives.<sup>62</sup> An important call from Teresa de Lauretis, using Elizabeth Cowie’s idea,<sup>63</sup> was that feminist representation must “enact(s) the contradiction between women as historical subject and Woman as sign.”<sup>64</sup> The video *Sorelle Povere* particularly addresses this concept because the person of the nun is often portrayed either as part of a group or as an enigma or both. The strategy of ‘focalisation’ on subjective individual testimony in the video produces results, which shifts the perception of the removed figure of the nun as an unknowable cypher and presents each sister as an individual. Through the duration made available to them by my method, they are given a feminist, woman-centred ‘space of their own’, which, through narrative, enables them to take up this space in the video. Regarding debates in feminist film theory about women’s representation in mainstream cinema and feminist film as an alternative, narrative is seen as a way of overcoming the power of the gaze, but it also presents a dilemma. It was reclaimed by feminism because it offered one route to visibility while it potentially caught women in the dominant patriarchal language and structures of representation. My work at the RCA and later my work in the ambit of experimental film at the Film Co-op in the 1980s and into the 1990s developed in a separate space from these debates within representational feminist film theory. The relationship between narrative and women’s experimental film centred on self-inscription and placed emphasis on subjectivity, film as a material, medium and forms of structure. Representation itself was a highly contested site but even so, narrative was considered one of the most effective routes to visibility and self-representation and the means for the voice of the female subject to be heard. A very effective antidote to the dominant gaze was the form of direct address adapted from feminist filmmaking by video. Direct address meshed in with the political aims of feminist video artists because of the particular conditions of the medium as I shall describe: precisely the feminist strategy that *Sorelle Povere* uses.

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61 Butler, *Women’s Cinema*. P.14

62 Ibid.P.17

63 Parveen Adams and Elizabeth Cowie, eds., *The Woman In Question: M/f* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1992).Pp117-133.

64 Alison Butler, *Women’s Cinema – The Contested Screen*, Wallflower Press 2002). P.14 Ref: Teresa de Lauretis, *Alice Doesn’t: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema*, London: MacMillan. 1984 P.36



Figure 9 - Still from *Sorelle Povere di Santa Chiara*, (Nina Danino, 2015) single-channel video

The static camera in which the speaker faces the viewer, has an urgent and subjective feminist antecedent in video art (via feminist filmmaking) and is an intimate communication which serves to enhance the humanity of the speaker not to drain the narrative. Catherine Elwes points out that in video art “While most men were busy attempting to drain images of any meaning beyond the sign, early feminists excavated the stories of their own lives in an attempt to develop a new feminist aesthetic of the personal”.<sup>65</sup> This form of direct and personal address was used by woman artists such as Jayne Parker in her video tape *Almost Out* (1984) in which her mother speaks to the daughter off frame about their relationship. *Sorelle Povere* draws on this feminist method to enable the viewer to engage directly

<sup>65</sup> Jeremy Welsh, Lisa Steele, and Catherine Elwes, *Catherine Elwes: Video Loupe a Collection of Essays by and About the Videomaker and Critic* (London: KT press, 2000). P.138

with each sister as she speaks. As I only visited the monastery for a short time, video also offered me an immediacy of access to their testimonies. One of the effects of personal address in women's work was sincerity. This is not a common form of communication in contemporary art and my video draws our attention to this lack in the face-to-face encounter with their testimonials. Catherine Elwes cites Chantal Akerman who points to the humanising effect of this position, "When I am facing you (...) we have a strong relationship', one that is non-threatening."<sup>66</sup> Speaking to the camera to validate the personal in the context of feminism was not just for self-expression but also for political purposes. The one-to-one form of address is a form of visual politics.



Figure 10 - *Almost Out*  
(Jayne Parker, 1984)



In the video *Sorelle Povere*, each woman introduces herself through the first three questions. She is not speaking through a conventional, de-territorialising, spiritual discourse but through her personal biography and experience. Localisation is central to a Catholic understanding of the possibility of community making.<sup>67</sup> The feminist process of ‘focalisation’ (narrative perspective) and Catholic structure of localisation are central to how each sister speaks as an individual but is also positioned within the video as part of a community. This further reflects the feminist principle in which personal stories simultaneously have a political purpose through having resonance in a wider social sphere. Feminist art had the urgency to communicate a message or to share an experience and thus create a sense of community. Direct and subjective speech was for the purpose of consciousness-raising of the viewers’ and for community building. The sisters speak to camera without being edited. Their speech is not hurried or urgent, but as they speak to us, the *Sorelle Povere* raise our consciousness about the religious life.

If our consciousness is raised, the secular gaze becomes open to the religious space through the formal means of the work, together with the recording of testimony through a process of humanisation. Narrative is even more important to women today in asserting their humanity because the ideological context of secularism has shifted to further exclude religion i.e., Christianity, which protects the humanist space so important to women. In critical theories of the subject, post-structuralism’s anti-humanism “is a problem for women who do not have a voice and risk being further marginalised without narrative.”<sup>68</sup> Women need humanisation because they are the most adversely affected and captured by the problem of ‘Woman as sign’. Materialist culture (though not exclusively) for example, de-humanises women’s bodies by extreme forms of objectification. The status of the woman as nun can be emblematic for a position of resistance and healing of these problems for woman and the work is framed by the feminist practice of narrative and humanisation to this end.

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<sup>67</sup> “Normally, three distinguishing characteristics are associate with Catholicism: sacramentality, community and hierarchy. Greeley, *The Catholic Imagination*, 2001. P.137

<sup>68</sup> Maud Jacquin, *Narrative Unrest: The Politics of Narrative in Women Artists Film and Video*, PhD Unpublished Thesis UCL (2013).

### Feminist strategies of productive alienation and familiarisation

The work then, opens a space for feminist and humanist communication in contemporary art. The Christian-religious subject is speaking to us in a sincere address which some say, has no place in the art world.<sup>69</sup> The formally simple presentation that communicates an *unproblematised* humanist narrative is startling. Furthermore, the women are not talking about dramatic subjects such as violence, the domestic or childcare which was often subject of feminist consciousness raising. They are talking positively about their religious form-of-life. Whilst feminist film theory and feminist video art have offered points of entry to show how the work performs a feminist gesture through strategies of narrative and placing into view, here, such strategies are in the service of opening the space for Christian subjects to speak in a video work.<sup>70</sup> Claire Johnston proposed defamiliarisation as a feminist strategy in film to unsettle the patriarchal discourse through the artistic device of estrangement as a strategy of productive alienation. I apply this concept to the narrative and presence of the Sorelle Povere in the art space. Initially their presence is unsettling – something which ought not to be there – women talking about prayer, about their religious life in a sincere way – in a feminist form of communication. But the humanist form of narrative foregrounds the women’s personhood - they are warm and engaging. For those viewers who are willing to listen, they begin to have a relationship to them. Through the face-to-face, unthreatening encounter, they become humanised and accessible to us. Through the stories that they tell, they can open up horizons and questions to the viewer which unsettles normative assumptions. The supposed art/religion binary which makes them estranged, unfamiliar and exilic, recedes and the act of communication through narration comes to the foreground. At the same time, this habituates us to their presence as we listen to them.<sup>71</sup>

69 Elkins, *On the Strange Place of Religion in Contemporary Art*. P.39

70 I did not draw on Anglophone film theory for my work in the 1980s as it seemed to lead to literal and illustrative solutions in feminist film practices. My experimental film practice was contextualized by the ‘feminine’ and by French Feminist writings. See Introduction.

71 “The artistic device of ‘ostranenie, or estrangement, as described by Victor Shklovsky” in Dorothy Aznar: Critical Strategies’ Claire Johnston, ed., *Work of Dorothy Arzner: Towards a Feminist Cinema* (London: Imprint unknown, 1975). P7. Cited in Alison Butler, *Women’s Cinema – The Contested Screen*, Wallflower Press 2002). P.10.

## Interactivity

By facing the monitor and listening to the sisters, the viewer becomes a participant and interpretant in the work through the channel of narrative communication and the immediacy of the recording in video. As stated, the frontality of the video and the direct address opens this route. The interviews cause the viewer to reflect on their position to the Sorelle, which initially may have been estranged but slowly becomes familiarised and engaged. This interactivity and approximation between the viewer and the work has a Christian dimension because Christian art places the “emphasis (is) on the viewer as co-creator of the work, which may mirror the Christian insistence on the divine as immanent in each person.”<sup>72</sup> Aaron Rosen, locates the Christian dimension for example in the devotional purpose of interactivity in art such as the Stations of the Cross.<sup>73</sup> The devotional aspect of art has a function, which is to stimulate reflection rather than only critical thinking. The video also negotiates the nuns as Woman as sign and places them as historic subjects through localisation. This further establishes a Christian dimension to the feminism of the work because Christian art is firmly located in history and places great stress on living in the present “appreciating the ‘nowness’ of now.”<sup>74</sup> In the same way that feminist art insisted on the personal as a route to the political, the video recordings emphasise the immediacy of the ‘now’ in a digital medium which is similarly direct and immediate.<sup>75</sup> The testimony of the sisters and their sincerity – a form of feminist communication par excellence - can move the viewer. Sincerity allows a relationship to emerge in to-camera speech. In a religious sense, interactivity can have a highly humanising connective effect – enabling a religious subject within the spectator to emerge through coming into contact with the video.

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<sup>72</sup> Rowena Loverance, *Christian Art*, First Edition edition (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2007).P.22

<sup>73</sup> Aaron Rosen, *Art & Religion in the 21st Century*, 01 edition (Thames and Hudson Ltd, 2015). P.49

<sup>74</sup> Loverance, *Christian Art*.P.16

<sup>75</sup> See Raymond Bellour, *Raymond Bellour: Between-the-Images*, ed. Lionel Bovier (Zurich; Dijon: JRP Ringier, 2011).

The sisters' speech is an act of *communication* – it is one of the key tenets of feminist practice that these strategies of narrative are not for the sake of experimentation, but in order to produce 'coherence' i.e. meaning.<sup>76</sup> The sisters are a lacuna in the foreclosed secular and feminist gaze but the video presents them through a feminist form of communication which expands and raises the viewers' awareness. I have argued that this is the importance of the presence of the Sorelle Povere in the contemporary art space from a feminist perspective of women's practice. I have evidenced how the formal decisions of the work, the humanist framing of spoken narrative to-camera and the feminist strategy of 'placing into view' presents each sister as a religious subject and as part of a community that speaks in the space of contemporary art and brings the viewer into a new awareness of their lives.

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76 Butler, *Women's Cinema*. P.14

### Section 3

#### *Jennifer* (2015)

*Jennifer* is a feature-length documentary about a Carmelite nun. The soundtrack for *Jennifer* is a key aspect of the experience of watching the film. It is subtle and was designed for a 5:1 speaker distribution for a cinema auditorium to give an immersive auditory experience. In this section, I focus on how the sound constructs the monastery as a gendered space, a women's household and as a sacred cenoby in relation to the secular exterior. I argue that the monastery and the secular exterior in the sound are not separated but intertwined in a reading of this interconnection of space as feminist and Catholic. I refer to the sound in relation to the importance of place, to the notion of authenticity and to how the sound builds a community, by referring to Andrew Greeley's *The Catholic Imagination*.<sup>77</sup>

*Jennifer* herself can be read as a feminist subject. She is not a submissive, she is the subject of the film and also directs it from within the monastery, staging herself in scenes of her daily life and 'performing' two long interviews to camera. She is a good story teller, outspoken, funny and highly engaging, and this also undoes essentialist preconceptions of what a nun is or should be. This is the first time that the subject of prayer and the life of an enclosed nun is featured in an experimental film.

I came to make a film with Jennifer because I knew about her as she is also from Gibraltar. Indeed as young children we would go to the same part of the beach and I had memories of her spending most of her time with an elder boy cousin spear fishing. Her decision to enter an enclosed Carmelite order in Ronda, Spain, fascinated me. It seemed to be a very radical decision to choose an enclosed life and it seemed very removed from the outdoors girl I remembered. I had already done work on Carmelite spirituality and St. Teresa of Avila in my film "*Now I am yours*" (1993) centred on the Bernini statue in Rome and I wanted to continue this research and to find out how an enclosed life is lived today, this time in realist visual language. Of course, enclosed religious communities are an object of

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77 Andrew Greeley, *The Catholic Imagination* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

fascination to the outside world but I wanted also remake Jennifer's acquaintance and hoped that a project might be possible and I asked her about this at our first meeting.

The process of getting consent for the project from the prioresses took seven years in which we continued to build trust and friendship and this was key to the documentary's ethics and in the method of filming as I shall describe. Originally I was given a limited permission to film an interview with Jennifer at the grille. I accepted this as the centre of the work but felt that more would have to be done to take the film further from an interview-based documentary to an art film. However, the prioress did not give permission for me to enter the monastery. My work as a director centred on working to expand this limit outwards to enable a different kind of film to be made on this subject. Anecdotally and in jest I was told that the community avoided women entering the cenoby due to their curiosity, whereas some men entered freely.

This does not reflect a good feminist consciousness on the part of the nuns, and in the Introduction I deal with the fact is that there is no straightforward correspondence between some of the questions that a feminist approach would posit to the subjects of the films and their own self-representation and consciousness. Instead, I circumnavigated these boundaries by working within them and by creating a feminist framing and developing my own directorial skills in the process. I realised that one of the men who entered to help the nuns would be able to act as a cameraman. We trained him and I directed the project from outside the monastery. The method of directing involved piecing together an accurate topology of the interiors through recce photographs and this allowed me to 'build' a filmic monastery and space around the person and protagonist of Jennifer. The filming took a period of six months in a process of collaboration between Alejandro Román the cameraman (who is referred to as Alex in the film), Jennifer and myself. There was a moment of hiatus when the equipment was brought into the monastery and it was realised that a large project was being made. The community consulted again and gave permission on condition that they did not appear in the film. My intention was to centre on Jennifer but this restriction also meant that the camera and sound become witnesses

to the absence of the community but engendered feminist and experimental methodologies and visual strategies. Throughout these restrictions my position was to enable Jennifer and the women to make their life, presence and labour of prayer, visible to the outside world and not to 'exoticise' or critique their choice of life or perspective. I show how the sound in the film is positioned experimentally through formal and other feminist strategies which gender the space and construct it and through a Catholic perspective.

### **The interiors of the monastery**

There are two portraits in the film, that of Jennifer and of the monastery itself. Here, I focus on how the sound constructs a portrait of the monastery both as a physical building and as a sacred cenoby. Greeley cites the importance of place in Catholic films and novels in which "the setting is not only a background but also a character in the story, a structured place which is part of a larger structure and which imposes its order not only on the characters but on the story itself – not to mention the reader."<sup>78</sup> As stated, the conditions imposed on the filming meant that I directed the film from the outside as the crew were not allowed to enter the monastery nor did the community wish to be filmed. However, through the plans and recce photographs obtained, I was able to direct the shots of the interiors and to reconstruct the monastery as a presence in the documentary film. The interiors are constructed in long static camera shots devoid of human presence and the voices of the community are heard in prayer and in other exchanges in sound off. The purpose of the camera and sound in *Jennifer* is to gender and to construct the space of social community and to bring us into the sacred space of the cenoby. In *Jennifer* the accurate mapping of place is itself a meaning-making Catholic process as Greeley points out, making the structure of 'place' Catholic.

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<sup>78</sup> Greeley, *The Catholic Imagination*, 2001. Pp.140-141.



Figure 11 - Film still from *Jennifer*  
(Nina Danino, 2015)

### Authenticity and place

I hadn't until now fully understood why 'authenticity' was so important in my work. Filming in 'real' places added to the meaning(s) of the work.<sup>79</sup> Andrew Greeley's study enabled me to see the importance of 'real place' without which there can be no meaning to a Catholic sensibility.<sup>80</sup> It follows that for the production of 'meaning' it was important that the (image and) acoustic reconstruction of the monastery should be authentic.<sup>81</sup> This principle is important even when the 'authenticity' of the recordings is unknown to the viewer because it forms an underlying logic and foundation to the concept of the film and its

<sup>79</sup> *First Memory* (1981), *Temenos* (1997) *Meteorologies* (2013) (audio) *Close to Home* (1985), *The Silence is Baroque* (1997), *Stabat Mater* (1990) recreate or refer to place or to particular places.

<sup>80</sup> Greeley, *The Catholic Imagination*, 2001. Pp138-140 He cites the importance of Catholic structures of play and exuberance in James Joyce's writing and at the same time, the accurate mapping of the real Dublin (structure) which always underlays Joyce's playful reconstruction.

<sup>81</sup> For example, by using Google Earth to re-create an accurate spatial and acoustic reconstruction of the building and its surroundings. All the sound for example, early morning, lunchtime, evening and Divine Office were recorded within the monastery by Jennifer.



construction. Why is the accurate re-creation of the acoustics of the monastery so important? To my mind, the ‘authenticity’ of the sound recordings have a higher purpose i.e., meaning making. In addition, Greeley points out that the layering of meanings corresponds to a Catholic sensibility and this too has been a structuring principle in my practice. This Catholic sense of meaning is then both localised and situated in real place.

### **Localisation and detachment in soundscape**

The sound in the film’s soundtrack has all been recorded from within the monastery itself and is *connected* to the particular location and place. They are not library or sound effects. This localisation has implications for how the monastery is constructed as a gendered space. This method resists the principle of detachment in ambient soundscape, in other words, a method of sound design where sounds flow into each other to deliver an auditory utopian and spiritualised space or otherwise, the manipulated individual sound effects which add ‘local colour’ to a soundtrack. Tim Cawkwell describes this method in the documentary *Into Great Silence* (2007) by Philip Gröning, which treats ‘nuggets’ of sound, for example, footsteps or snowfall, and individually detaches and enhances them to create the transcendent space that the film evokes.<sup>82</sup> The ambient sound in *Jennifer* has an entirely different and radical purpose: the experimental and feminist film insists on localisation (in the context of representing a woman’s monastery) to its source. I will show how, through comparison with the genre of soundscape which spiritualises by eliminating specificity and which, by definition, is an immersive, acoustic style of composition.

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<sup>82</sup> Timothy Cawkwell, *The New Filmgoer’s Guide to God: From the Passion of Joan of Arc to Philomena*, Revised edition (Kibworth Beauchamp, Leicestershire, UK: Matador, 2014). LOC 3278



Figure 12 - Left: *St. Jerome in his Study* (Antonello da Messina 1474-75)  
 Right: Installation view of *St. Jerome in his Study* (Janet Cardiff, 2015)

The sound installation *St. Jerome in his Study* (2015) consists of a soundscape of an imagined medieval monastery and a scale model of the monastery reconstructed from the one shown in the painting of the same title held at the National Gallery, London.<sup>83</sup> The removal of the figure of St. Jerome from both the scale model and the absence of human voices from the sound, dehistoricises and idealises the sound into a deterritorialised spiritual natural ecology of wind, birds, animals and so on. The sound becomes uncritical i.e., immersive, because it is cut off from the historic and religious ‘meaning’ of the painting. The audio recordings from La Merced reflected a less pious and more complex acoustic reality than the idealised soundscape might suggest and showed that monasteries in fact, can be

<sup>83</sup> Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller, an aural narrative in response to Antonello da Messina’s small painting *St. Jerome in his Study* (1474-75), Soundscapes, National Gallery (2015).

noisy places.<sup>84</sup> From a Catholic perspective, sacred spaces have the propensity to be full of noise, and noise has the potential to create a rich, religious and socially connective space.<sup>85</sup> Other connective acoustic spaces are made by the voices the visitors heard at the turnstile out of visiting hours carrying out exchanges with the voices of the enclosed women of the community on the other side. In *Jennifer*, the sound method and design grounded the monastic ideal in *local* space, incarnation and time. The filmic and real monastery is the space that the protagonist Jennifer and her unseen community inhabit and the sound therefore maps out the presence of the community through the local dimension of the sound.



Figure 13 - Film still from *Into Great Silence* (Philip Gröning, 2007)

<sup>84</sup> *Jennifer* was filmed in the Discalced Carmelite Monastery of El Corazón Eucarístico de Jesús, Ronda, Spain known as La Merced after the church of Nuestra Señora de la Merced which is the public part of the monastery. There has been a monastery on the site since 1585.

<sup>85</sup> Greeley, *The Catholic Imagination*, 2001. P.33

### The monastery and relations of sound in community building

Women's enclosed communities are usually situated (for historic reasons of safety) in the middle of the urban population.<sup>86</sup> The sound, even though heard from the perspective of the interior, positions the monastery in the middle of the social, noisy and lively sounds of the town which merge with and penetrate the interior. The cenoby is not cut off: the sound design stresses the idea of silence yet is filled with textures of human activity and the sounds of the hustle and bustle of the Spanish town outside. This expands the borders of the monastery *outwards* in a Catholic sensibility where "Place must always be part of another place. (...) borders are sacred and hence both dangerous and promising."<sup>87</sup>

In *Jennifer*, I take the *decision* to represent the sound of the exterior as penetrating the monastery in an experimental, localising method rather than idealising the monastic space through the trope of nature and isolation. This makes the space accessible and feminises it by making it into a quotidian household which is not as removed from us as we might have expected. The sound positions the women's monastery as *in contact* with the secular urban space which surrounds it and indeed, the monastery has an important social role in the town. The sound fosters *relations* in a Catholic sense of connection between the secular world which intrudes and disrupts the *ideal* of the cenoby. The camera is usually positioned by windows or where the sound from the outside blends with the sound and shots of the interior. The monastery as a community and household does not just look inward; it is not sealed or isolated in a pristine world, but in a messy and community-based one. This demystification and despiritualisation of the space of the monastery is a feminist strategy.

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<sup>86</sup> There are three enclosed convents in Ronda; Discalced Carmelites, Clarissians and Augustinians.

<sup>87</sup> Greeley, *The Catholic Imagination*, 2001. P.140



Figure 14 - Film still from *Jennifer*  
(Nina Danino, 2015)

### **Diegetic sound and the monastery as a gendered space**

The sound and camera position the viewer *within* the walls of the monastery- we never go outside. This renders the space intimate and cenobitic for the audience as well. In sound off, we *hear* the voices of the unseen community in communal social engagement and in prayer. For the first time in my work, I position the human voices within diegetic space.<sup>88</sup> This also genders the space as a house of women (it is women's voices that are heard). Within the space itself there are degrees of inaccessibility to the viewer. The voices of the community in prayer are situated in the deeper spaces within the building beyond the camera frame, whereas social exchanges are heard in the shallower spaces just out of frame. The viewer is situated on the borders of the sisters' social space but is not plunged into the deeper spiritual prayer space which remains private. This gives each party a measure of shared borderspace and proper distance too. It also gives the

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<sup>88</sup> For example, in *The Silence is Baroque* (2007) the speaking voice is set over the diegetic voices of the crowd.

viewer time to familiarise themselves with the interior and to being welcomed within the cenoby.<sup>89</sup>

The cenobitic space is also constructed as gendered through St. Teresa's *Way of Perfection* quoted in the inter-titles which refers to the monastery as a 'casa,' a female noun in all Romance languages which carries the sense of a home, a household of women.<sup>90</sup> The *Way of Perfection* was written as a practical spiritual guide; in it, Teresa, addresses herself to the sisters in the vernacular, rather than in the mystical language of her literary writings.<sup>91</sup> The second person address to the sisters also draws us in as part of the community (both male and female).

### **The voices reciting the Hours - a Catholic auditory world**

Despite the porous inter-relations of the monastery with the outside, and whilst the Catholic sense is to believe that all space is sacred, the monastery is ultimately a space set apart for the purpose of the sacred activity of prayer. In sound off, the voices of the community, heard in unison in prayer (Lectio) sacralise the real and filmic space of the monastery and inscribe an experimental and Catholic embodiment of the 'real' place.

The voices reciting the Hours of the Divine Office in Spanish are a recurring feature of the film's soundtrack. Although the prayers may sound generic to a viewer unable to understand the meaning of the prayers either culturally, religiously or linguistically, they communicate 'real' meaning and this meaning is discoverable. The experimental method is dialectical, both inscribing specificity and universality and creating a reflexive, image, even a contemplative one of the static, durational interiors, which resist complete passive immersion.

The sound of women's voices in prayer exceed the frame of the camera's vision but are localised *within* the diegetic space but not so far away or detached as to become voices *over* the image. The exception is one scene where the voices in prayer spill

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<sup>89</sup> The camera becomes an implied diegetic narrator taking on a life of its own, simultaneously drawing us in, drawing attention to itself and maintaining a distance. These were positionalities used in the constructions of feminist film in the enactment of gendering 'focalisation' Smelik, *And the Mirror Cracked*.P.51

<sup>90</sup> Teresa Of Avila, *The Way of Perfection*, E. Allison Peers, *The Complete Works of Saint Teresa of Jesus Volume II*, First Thus edition (Sheed & Ward, 1946).

<sup>91</sup> See *The Interior Castle*, (1577).

out from the Oratory through the connecting grille to the upper church. In these cinematic conditions of penumbral light and the cavernous structure of the dome of the church, the echoing voices appear to float in the space and they begin to acquire the status of voice-over. The sound of nuns' disembodied voices in the church create an unsettling homeless, floating acoustic experience in a Catholic auditory space, blending the psychoanalytic, religious and affective spaces together.

The filmmaker Lucrecia Martel refers to just this experience with which many Catholics would identify, when she cites the sound of nuns' voices reciting prayer in a church as a haunting, foundational, acoustic childhood memory.<sup>92</sup> She rebuilds this transporting power of sound in an "aurally constructed cinema"<sup>93</sup> which is Catholic and where the ordinary world is everywhere permeated with grace.<sup>94</sup>



Figure 15 - *La Ciénaga*  
(Lucrecia Martel, 2001)

<sup>92</sup> Lucrecia Martel. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mCKHzMzMIzo> [Accessed 11 October 2015]

<sup>93</sup> Deborah Martin, *The Cinema of Lucrecia Martel* (Manchester UK: Manchester University Press, 2016). P.10

<sup>94</sup> Greeley, *The Catholic Imagination*, 2001. P.2

### Final synchronisation

However, in *Jennifer* the Catholic imagination is inscribed in social structures including the documentary form – rather than evoking a metaphysical realm.<sup>95</sup> The predominant spatialisation of the voices are in screen off and therefore *localised* within the diegetic space itself and this indicates that they will be recoverable by the field of vision at some point in the narrative.<sup>96</sup> Kaja Silverman suggests that the embodiment of the female voice in sync is a form of disempowerment.<sup>97</sup> Synchronisation happens at the end of the film where the hitherto absent community is presented in vision for the first time. I was extremely excited and surprised to receive the footage of the community gathered together in the Oratory for prayers which is placed as the climax of the film. The Oratory is the innermost part of the cenoby and the centre of their communal life of prayer. The cameraman would not have been allowed to enter certain parts of the monastery and this would have been one. But he set up the camera and left it in place and Jennifer recorded this scene, herself also taking up her place in the shot after the camera was left running. This scene lasts for 8 minutes in real time. This is experimental because it is unexpected and constitutes a shock to the language of absence in the film. It also places us within the heart of cenoby with the community - a very rare privilege. This drama brings the film's full meaning into an experimental, feminist and humanist discourse. However, despite the presence of the camera, the nuns ignore it. Latecomers interrupt the camera's vision and others 'cross the line' and interrupt their ritual in gestures of care for those more elderly or frail on the opposite side of the room. This exercise was first rehearsed in Michael Snow's *Wavelength* (1967) where human events interrupt the camera's vision and draw the viewer's attention to the means of production and the 'presence' of the camera as an experimental method. At the same time, duration induces the 'presence' of the image and enables us to partake of the sublime labour of prayer through the recording.<sup>98</sup> Catholic performance of prayer is co-joined within the feminist and structural framework of the filming.

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95 See my films 1990-1997

96 Silverman, *The Acoustic Mirror*, 1988. P.48

97 Ibid. P 49 "it loses power and authority with every corporeal encroachment" and P141 "the female voice is often shown to co-exist with the female body only at the price of its own impoverishment and entrapment."

98 St. Teresa calls this 'the great enterprise which we are trying to carry out' Teresa Of Avila, *The Way of Perfection*, Reissue edition (New York: Image, 1991). Peers, *The Complete Works of Saint Teresa of Jesus Volume II*.P.15



In *Jennifer*, synchronisation becomes the fulfillment of an experimental film strategy (because film duration is an important part of this strategy which has included the interviews and the interiors) and the point at which it delivers its sublime religious message.

The subtitling of the words that the nuns are reciting in Spanish is an act of solidarity with them and their unceasing practice of prayer as an act of ‘meaning-making’. The specificity and localisation of the spoken text of the Psalms is not a generalised chant that *represents* prayer. In *Jennifer*, it is the prayer itself in duration that the camera records and that we are part of, within the Oratory, with the community. The English subtitles transform the prayer from something opaque (prayer is translated into the language of the viewer) to a teleological narrative (the deliverance of the repentant subject by an Old Testament God). The synchronised, durational, uninterrupted recording of the community in prayer renders the scene ordinary and evokes a sublime awe more strongly than in tropes of disembodiment because of its extreme localisation in time and space. The recital of the Divine Office connects this small group of women in their Oratory in the present of recording and of viewing to a millennial history of other monastic voices through the ages. The enormity of the meaning of their labour of prayer (*Lectio*) is conveyed all the more strongly in the immediacy of 1:1 time-based recording and duration. The recorded and real activity of prayer creates a sacramental and gendered space performed by the collective body of women which is also experimental through the formal aspects of filming and duration. Synchronisation here does not disempower the women because it combines with the reflexive space of duration. In the theory of structural materialist film, duration clears a space for the viewer to reflect on themselves watching the scene and the sublime labour of unceasing prayer in vision and sound, in the ‘unthinkable’ space of enclosure. Unceasing prayer is the central purpose of their lives, unlike the finite performances of secular art this performance never ends, it takes up the scansion of a whole life. Represented by its 8 minutes of duration, it is a performance which has never been seen or heard before in experimental film. The viewer is brought into the space and meaning of the activity taking place; into the religious space of the community through experimental film and the Catholic imagination.

As a coda I would like to add that many people have asked me whether Jennifer and the community have seen the film and what their reaction is. Jennifer is happy with the film but one of her comments was that the film 'was not spiritual enough'. The reason for this is that Jennifer herself undoes and circumnavigates the trope of woman as nun as sign which makes the film feminist. I have shown how my methods also 'de-spiritualise' the genre which are an aspect of its radical feminist and experimental approach in order to meet Jennifer the individual woman.

## Section 4

### *Sorelle Povere di Santa Chiara* (2016)

In this section I focus on the 16mm film I made in the monastery of Santa Chiara, San Marino. The film is a silent portrait of the enclosed community of Sorelle Povere di Santa Chiara, and conveys their Franciscan spirituality.



Figure 16 - Film Still from *Sorelle Povere di Santa Chiara*, (Nina Danino, 2016)

Religious communities of women have been the subject of several artists' films e.g., *Presentation Sisters* (2005) Tacita Dean, *Little Works* (2007) Andrea Buttner, *O Quatrieme* (2012) Bertile Bak. My film adds to the study of women in religious life through a short realist document-like work - a film study of the community through their Franciscan way of life.

### Franciscan spiritual discourse and 16mm film

Here I discuss the film through the theological discourse of Franciscan spirituality and its precepts of joy, poverty, innocence and simplicity and an analysis of the material and aesthetics of the 16mm film medium. Through this, I address two of my primary aims: a material and a theological reading of the film. It is one of the primary aims of this commentary to show how my work opens a Catholic spiritual reading of realist experimental film. Secondly, I felt it was important that I engage with the community through the principles by which the Poor Clares lived and that the film itself should reflect the nuns' Franciscan ideal of simplicity, innocence and poverty.<sup>99</sup>

The emphasis on photographic composition and a traditional human subject (women sewing) represented by 16mm medium was intended to be visually uncomplicated and accessible.<sup>100</sup> The film with its artisanal, hand crafted method, spare camerawork and durational pacing, performs the ideals of simplicity, poverty and innocence to produce a woman-centred work. The simple form and spatial continuity represents the community of *Sorelle Povere* in a unified way. The methods I use to film are reflected in the exemplar of Franciscan form-of-life, and the form in which I filmed represents them within a material analogue aesthetic but positions them outside the fetish of materialism and the fetish of 16mm film as a medium.

When I first met and later visited the Poor Clares in the monastery of Santa Chiara in San Marino, I was intrigued by their disposition of joy and simplicity which is the particular characteristic (or charism – a word which denotes that it is the gift of the Holy Spirit) of their Order. They came across as innocent but without naivety. My questions to them in the recorded interviews for the single-channel video work discussed in section 2, attempt to understand what these spiritual qualities mean in their lives, where they come from and what it means for grown women to adopt a 'minor' status and innocence as a form of being and to square this with a feminist position for a work about them. I wanted to reflect this visually through the film's aesthetics and how it presents a feminine visuality but the feminist

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<sup>99</sup> See Appendix E: Background to the Orders of Poor Clares and Discalced Carmelites

<sup>100</sup> See Appendix D: The Bolex and 16mm Medium

aspect of the work also shows through in the depiction of women at work as I shall describe.

Agamben's study *The Highest Poverty – Monastic Rules and Form-of-Life* (2013), was helpful in my understanding the particular quality of Franciscanism which I have described by identifying the foundational precepts of their Franciscan spiritual ideals. These ideals began with the mendicant orders of the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> century, which formed part of the Christian revival movements. The aim of the mendicant orders was to move away from the asceticism and mortification of the early monastic tradition to place emphasis on following the message of the Gospel and on joy and simplicity as a form-of-life.

Secondly, to lead a holy life, they embraced material dispossession. Sr. Chiara Pia answers the question on poverty in the video discussed in section 2:

“Poverty for us has a name (...) it is Jesus in person (...) I haven't sold anything because I didn't possess anything (...) but what I have sold and given to the poor, I would say, is my youth because I was twenty when I entered the monastery” (...). I prefer to stay next to the poor”.<sup>101</sup> Poverty is now “an inseparable and constitutive part of the ‘apostolic’ or ‘holy’ life, which they profess to practice with joy.”<sup>102</sup>

Thirdly, the followers of Francis maintain that in order to achieve spiritual or holy poverty, they must live as ‘minors’ ‘outside the determinations of the law’ in a state of innocence granted by the abdication from ownership. This is because it was in a state of innocence prior to “the construction of a city” before the Fall that there was no ownership but everyone had use of things.<sup>103</sup> The Franciscan concept of poverty encompasses a striving for simplicity, and a state of innocence through self-disenfranchisement from material goods and from ownership.

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**101** *Sorelle Povere di Santa Chiara*, Publication: Transcript and Translation of Interviews (2015) 12pp.

**102** Giorgio Agamben, *The Highest Poverty: Monastic Rules and Form-of-Life*, trans. Adam Kotsko (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2013).P.92

**103** “...the premise of the Franciscan strategy on the question of poverty is to be sought in (...) the doctrine of the originary communion of goods (...) According to this doctrine, approved in Gratian's *Decretum*, (367 – 383AD) in the state of innocence “for natural law all things are everyone's”(...); property and all human law begin with the Fall and the constructions of a city on the part of Cain (...) just as in a state of innocence human beings had the use of things but not ownership, so also the Franciscans following the example of Christ and the apostles can renounce all property rights whilst maintaining however, de facto use of things” Ibid.P.112

### Filming the community living ‘outside the determinations of the law’

The film opens with a quote from one of the few letters of Clare where she exhorts the virtues of poverty: “*O holy poverty! Those who love and embrace you will procure eternal riches.*” My choice of materials, medium and methods was intended to reflect the principles of their theological life which is governed by the principle of poverty. However, 16mm is not a poor medium but rich in both history and especially Black and White in the aesthetic patina that can be achieved through its material qualities of tone, grain etc., - it is now a luxury medium. However, the Bolex, the simple camera which I used to shoot the film, can be hired cheaply and is a humble instrument now which has lost its ‘cutting edge’ associations with the virility of the modernist artisanal film avant-garde of the 1970s and beyond. As the historical avant-garde has slipped into the past this medium and apparatus have been ‘feminised’ i.e, prized for its aesthetics rather than for their political agency. I therefore focused my use of this medium and means on the potential of aesthetics to reflect the spiritual ethos of the community and to create a sense of serenity, beauty and detachment – and importantly to also make the life of the women visible in circuits of exhibition.

The scenes of the women in various forms of work, are filmed in a documentary-like form where the camera frame is like a window to their world. For the mid 20th Century realist film theorists cited in section 1, Bazin, Agel and Aysre reality itself is sacred. For Kracauer, reality and art combine to make an ideal and “Documentary was to be privileged, of course, because of its alleged and humble retreat before reality.”<sup>104</sup>

In the same way that my modest and simple means were intended to reflect their theological stance, my method of filming mirrors something of their form of life. The Sorelle Povere live a Franciscan ideal in which they practise a life of ‘following’ and ‘living’ the Gospel in simplicity.<sup>105</sup> Even when in front of the camera, they offer an example of ‘following’ and in the same way, my aim was to follow rather than

<sup>104</sup> Paul Coates, *Cinema, Religion and the Romantic Legacy* (Aldershot, Hants, England; Burlington, VT: Routledge, 2003). P.47

<sup>105</sup> “It is thought that the Franciscans invented the syntagma ‘form of life.’” Agamben traces this new combination of practice and life as a “living the Gospel” and life lived as an exemplar. Agamben, *The Highest Poverty*, 2013. P.94



Figure 17 - Film Still from *Sorelle Povere di Santa Chiara*, (Nina Danino, 2016)

impose myself on them. I filmed using spare camerawork and I paced the shots in the camera to capture a sense of their duration in scenes from their daily life lived outside 'the determinations of the law,' which I also interpret as materialism.

The film appears to be completely legible, it has no conceptual twists and is led by the means of production, the simple aspirations of craft and the indexical photographic reality of the world of the nuns and the timeless depiction of the nuns (women) at work. Does it essentialise the nuns through aesthetics? I believe not because of its address to work, to a feminine visuality and the place of the film as a counter-cultural object and window to their world as I shall describe.

The film depicts the community in the emblematic feminine iconography of sewing (and other forms of domestic labour). The *Sorelle Povere* live by the work

of their hands – as do many women - mending for the public and embroidering ecclesiastical garments for the Franciscans. In the ‘laboratorio’, a large sunlit workroom, the Sorelle Povere are filmed working quietly. The scenes depict them in their everyday ‘form of life’ of which every act is an exemplar.<sup>106</sup> The Sorelle Povere sacramentalise the space through ‘virtuous work’.<sup>107</sup> In the interviews discussed in section 2, Sr. Chiara Agnese answers the question about work: “My main job is to sew, I mend jumpers, jackets, trousers, whatever they bring, I am very glad to be able to make those who bring the stuff happy because they feel they have been helped.”<sup>108</sup>



Figure 18 - Film Still from *Sorelle Povere di Santa Chiara*, (Nina Danino, 2016)

<sup>106</sup> Basil interprets St. Paul’s exhortation: “Whatever is being done, whether you eat or drink, whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God” 1 Cor, 10:31. Ibid. P.23

<sup>107</sup> Svetlana Alpers calls women in “the depiction of sewing in painting as “the embodiment of domestic virtue”. Alpers, *The Art of Describing*. P.8

<sup>108</sup> *Sorelle Povere di Santa Chiara*, Publication: Transcript and Translation of Interviews (2015) 12pp.



Agamben traces the monastic ideal of manual labour as ‘divine work’: it is considered a form of spiritual labour and the work of the hands “an indiscernible part of the Opus Dei.”<sup>109</sup> The principle of holy work is equally applied to women’s as men’s labour since it has a spiritual value but the manual labour which nuns carry out as menders, embroiderers and in baking, for example, is centred on craft as something mundane and unintellectual.<sup>110</sup> In the Franciscan spirituality of the Sorelle Povere, it is the ‘simple’ form of marginalised craft that is a form of ‘divine work’. Rather than fine art and the striving for intellectual achievement, it is the humble work of the hands that is more important. Traditionally, for leisure too, nuns engage in ‘simple’ forms such as woodcraft or candle-making; activities which are not colonised by the intellectualism or conceptual twists associated with fine art, and this even extends to the production of meaningless trifles. Sr. Marina made “little hearts for the children” which occupy the hands and her time (she was a very elderly nun). In the final scene, Sr. Chiara Pia works on an icon in the technique of pyrography.<sup>111</sup> Filming reveals this daily work of genteel quietism, practised in near silence and by the women’s hands as unpaid or underpaid labour.<sup>112</sup> The nuns are depicted tracing designs for embroidery and ironing, cooking and planting but the emblematic image of the film is the depiction of women in the act of sewing.

The religious and the feminist are combined as they embody a pre-industrial social history of sewing and the role of the seamstress as “part of a social and cultural enterprise that we have come to consider distinctly feminine” and as the “object of study (...) of female labour par excellence.”<sup>113</sup> Maria Tamboukou’s study also shows the emancipatory side of the seamstress who unionised women’s labour in one of the first steps towards modernity in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The past

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**109** Agamben, *The Highest Poverty*, 2013. P.23

**110** The separation of embroidery and craft from art also marginalized women from the higher function of fine art discussed in, Rozsika Parker, *The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine*, New edition (London; New York: I B Tauris & Co Ltd, 2012).

**111** A technique of decorating wood or leather by burning a design on the surface with a heated metallic point.

**112** Buttner and Baks’ videos also centre on the nuns’ production of craft objects but do not dignify the activity but rather represent it as eccentric. *Jennifer* discussed in section 3 is depicted in craft pursuits in her leisure hour. Labour and (Mediatio) are represented in scenes where she is seen baking and mopping the floor – women’s domestic housework.

**113** A study of women’s social history as seamstresses, centred in Paris in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Tamboukou, *Sewing, Fighting and Writing*. P.1



Figure 19 - Installation view of *Reel Time*  
(Annabel Nicholson, 1973)

and the future also mix in this image. The depiction of sewing reminds us of other histories of women's work, including the craft of film editing associated with women's work of sewing and cutting, which led to the division of gendered labour roles in the early film industry.<sup>114</sup> It reminds us of the experiments and rare examples of women's place within the 'laboratorio' of structural film at the Film Co-op. Annabel Nicholson exploits this connection in *Reel Time* (1973). In the live performance, the film image of the filmmaker at a sewing machine is perforated repeatedly as it passes through the sewing machine and is projected in a loop.

In painting too it is a familiar motif, and Svetlana Alpers calls the depiction of sewing in Dutch 17<sup>th</sup> century painting the "embodiment of virtue."<sup>115</sup> In my film, the depiction of the Sorelle Povere sewing is more than a moralistic display of

<sup>114</sup> Women were pioneering film editors having often been relegated to this job because it was associated with women's roles in cutting and sewing as seamstresses.

<sup>115</sup> Svetlana Alpers, *Art History and Its Exclusions: The Example of Dutch Art*, Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard, eds., *Feminism and Art History: Questioning the Litany*, Icon Editions (New York; London: Harper & Row, 1982) P.8

virtue. This activity is placed within the social history of women's labour and subservience both outside and within monasteries but here, it is something carried out within the theological concept of the meaning of exemplary service, not servitude, in their apostolic life.<sup>116</sup>

The nuns don't view themselves as disempowered because self-disenfranchisement brings them spiritual riches and is an important part of their theology. As seen earlier, holy innocence is a constituent part of achieving the highest poverty. However, on further reflection, it can also be considered a radical form of resistance bound to the particular notion of Franciscan Holy Poverty. The filming reflects on these two qualities in the use of 16mm and in the style of filming.

### **A feminine visuality**

The use of a simple camera, the use of the high photographic quality of analogue technology and a minimal style focusing on composition, was intended to achieve and create a memorable 'impression' of the film. *Sorelle Povere* leaves a gentle kind of detached and open visual impression (which Svetlana Alpers ascribes to a feminine visuality) by exercising "a kind of patient contemplation" and not forcing the scenes or the meaning.<sup>117</sup> The scenes are filmed like tableaux-vivant resembling a staging of groups of sisters working quietly in scenes with some, but little movement, evoking a sense of stillness rather than the frozen aspect of photographs. Stillness as discussed in section 1 enables the viewer to enter into a contemplative relationship with the image and in early cinema, silence and stillness were associated with the divine.<sup>118</sup> Through the making of 16mm film, I too as a filmmaker and as a woman am using the craft of filmmaking and participating as an artisan reflecting the women's activities in their sewing and in my own version of holy work: memorialising the increasing disappearance of the medium and the 'hidden' life of the community.

There is no intellectual or conceptual twist in the film nor the way in which the religious subject is treated. The craft of film and indexical photographic register of the image is dominant. But they are not made to fit into my signature or

<sup>116</sup> See Appendix C: *Sorelle Povere di Santa Chiara*, Publication: Transcript and Translation of Interviews (2015) 12pp.

<sup>117</sup> Svetlana Alpers, *Art History and Its Exclusions: The Example of Dutch Art*, Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard, eds., *Feminism and Art History: Questioning the Litany*, Icon Editions (New York; London: Harper & Row, 1982).P.198

<sup>118</sup> Cooper, *The Soul of Film Theory*, 2013. P.22

forced into the lexicon of visual experimental tropes such as spatial/temporal discontinuities; I did not want to interrupt the sisters; my intention was to frame them and provide a window. I aimed to clear a space for a reflexive study based on an aesthetic enjoyment of the medium and spiritual engagement with the theme for the viewer. Its legibility addresses itself to a non-specialist reception as well as to a specialist framing of the knowledge of the history of 16mm experimental film.<sup>119</sup>

What does it mean for contemporary women in the Franciscan form-of-life to become 'minors', subordinates and to adopt the symbolic status of innocence? Self-disenfranchisement is a path to perfect joy. Through this logic, the sisters are incapable of engaging with materialism in the same way that their 13<sup>th</sup> century founders (both Francis and Clare) rejected property ownership and familial wealth. However, it would be a mistake to think of the theological attempts at innocence as a simple kind of Christianity. As Agamben's study shows, the ideas of Franciscan poverty were part of complex struggle to achieve the 'unthinkable' and form the basis of the revolutionary ideal. Simplicity and innocence was, as Agamben points out, the genius of Franciscanism. I read the disposition of innocence of the *Sorelle Povere* through self-disenfranchisement from materialism as offering the possibility of a life lived entirely outside of its determinations even in the modern day. In this sense, it might not be understood or take a disruptive feminist form, but their quiet and 'hidden' form-of-life of contemplation is a form of resistance.

I used a medium which has lost its 'virility' as it slipped into the past and which has now become feminised i.e., used for its aesthetic qualities rather than for its cutting-edge associations. The *Sorelle Povere* as a community of women, living out their own time represented in a past medium, can open a new space of encounter and reflection. This is what I experienced making the work amongst them. The analogue medium and the emphasis on craft, depicting the women at work in silent compositions, engage with the desire for pause, stillness and a space for reflection. For Bazin and Kracauer, although all reality is sacred, they write predominantly through the black and white celluloid reality of their era, lacking the seductiveness of colour, which becomes a sign of the presence of the

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119 See Appendix D: The Bolex and 16mm Medium

divine. Thus, they are “set apart from (crucially unlike) ordinary reality and so ‘sacred’”<sup>120</sup>: in parallel, black and white sets the Sorelle apart from ordinary reality through black and white celluloid reality and communicates in a transparent uncomplicated form in a material-based vernacular, like craft. I placed the community of Sorelle Povere within a filmic space of detachment of the camera’s patient contemplation. It is filmed within the aesthetics of the craft of the medium. The production of the film is sacramentalised by holy work and the camera is a window to their spiritual reality outside the determinations of contemporary materialism. The form of a short documentary brings to a contemporary audience the existence of their exemplary, humanist Christian space.

The simple visuality which is closer to genre (women depicted silently at work in interiors) than to the drama of individuation<sup>121</sup> opens a space for us to encounter these ‘hidden’ women’s lives, which are valued by my filmmaking in a gesture of solidarity with their communitarian space outside materialism. The film inscribes and reflects their Franciscan ideal and is simultaneously a study of the medium and of their spirituality of ‘poverty’ and ‘innocence’. The latter, a radical feminine practice and theology of gentle resistance, which is contemporary.

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<sup>120</sup> Coates, *Cinema, Religion and the Romantic Legacy*. P.47

<sup>121</sup> As argued by Alpers, *The Art of Describing*.

## Conclusion

I have created an insight into the wealth of Catholicism as a critical discourse. The commentary has identified Catholic structures, and the concept of the Catholic imagination has been key to this. I have shown how these works intersect feminism, experimental film and Catholic themes of community, the expansion of borders, the importance of place and localisation. How they use feminist forms of address such as consciousness raising, sincerity of communication and religious-imaginative structures such as presence, authenticity, sacramentality and meaning-making. Humanism and the traditional image are also forms in the experimental work. The films represent communitarian space, exemplary ideal space and the presence of the image as both an Orthodox concept which informs Catholic representation and as a concept within experimental structural film. The commentary forms research on this lens of religious discourse, which can be applied to readings of other art and experimental film.

I have produced works about religious subjects and produced contemplative spaces which have implications as forms of resistance as well as forms of healing. The art of experimental film is renewed by reconnection with its religious roots.<sup>122</sup> It was Pasolini who “Began to conceive of religious feelings as the authentic antagonist to bourgeois materialism.”<sup>123</sup> I have shown how the religious can be a form of resistance to materialism. I have argued that the works about the religious subject represent non co-optable spaces outside of materialism par excellence and the religious subject(s) represent a progressive resistance, for example, to the speed of technology, as does the use of analogue or the return to the cinema of the past when brought into the present. My works are not defending any notion of a ‘pure’ medium since these works are all expediently produced across formats as I have done since the 1990s but rather an experimental method where combination creates a whole vision of the subject and the Other and enables new phenomena to emerge; a method which enables reflection.

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<sup>122</sup> Coates, *Cinema, Religion and the Romantic Legacy*. P.3

<sup>123</sup> Maurizio Viano, *A Certain Realism: Making Use of Pasolini's Film Theory and Practice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993). P7

The works have opened the monastic space to the contemporary art world and I have analysed how they bring into contact hitherto separated spaces. The viewer is brought within proximity of subjects whom they would not normally encounter. They allow us entry into previously hidden or ideologically foreclosed spaces. I conclude that, in the art space, there is a *transformation* from ‘productive alienation’ into familiarity through the presence of the work i.e., through healing and connectivity. This and the opening of the shared space from the perspective of the viewer, are the radical effects of the work. I have further shown how the personal form of address in the works demystify normative perceptions of nuns and how this expands the viewer’s knowledge. I conclude that film is a powerful medium to communicate ideas, and that these works are new because they are legible, accessible, as well as being experimental.

The four works clear a space for a Christian subject to emerge within experimental film and a within a contemporary art context. I have shown how it is possible to make work about the exilic subjects of Christianity within the markers of contemporary art and film. I have analysed how the subjects in these films and works are iconographic within the language of mainstream cinema; how they appear as a result of consciousness raising where the viewer engages in interactivity; how this engenders the Christian space, and finally, how the subjects are enabled by humanist address and sincerity of communication. The works bring us into contact with subjects who pray, who stage religious identity or who are in a religious community. This contact creates contemplative spaces for the viewer as an interpretant and participant in the work. I have provided this space, for the subjects i.e., those who are filmed themselves and the viewer in Kracauer’s terms, through the ‘humble’<sup>124</sup> reality of documentary which was important as a new development in my work. However, the space opened by the figure and portrait of the young girl was very exciting because it goes beyond documentary into a Catholic metaphysical space discussed by Agel and Ayfre, which had not previously been explored in experimental figurative form.

Women as subjects are at the centre of all my work. I have given a voice to women who are invisible. I have identified and applied feminist historicisation techniques to reveal the women who are 'hidden' from the secular and feminist gaze. I have shown how the presence of the work ruptures that gaze. I have empowered those women who speak by giving them the space and those who don't by not objectifying them. The works also portrayed them in their own milieu and allowed the viewer to enter it and become familiar with it. Further, this address is both a Christian and feminist one revealed through techniques of humanisation and consciousness-raising through direct address to the viewer. The formalist filmmaking techniques of detached visuality and duration are used to a different purpose of gendering the space of the monastery and genre is used to give space for this open form of visuality. I have deconstructed the works to show how they de-mystify and historicise women in religious life transforming them from Woman as sign to women as historical subjects - a feminist outcome of the work. Feminist strategies of making visible meant placement within a broader context. I believe that the works provide a contextual body and open the way for the religious subject (as a discourse too) to be treated further in art and film research. Making the work has also produced social feminist benefits beyond the frame of the art world, such as the production of valuable oral history (*Sorelle Povere*). This has been a very intensive and productive period. I have shown the works, in cinema and art exhibition in the last years, so throughout, exhibition has been concurrent with the writing of this commentary. In it, I have presented a Catholic, feminist and experimental/critical rationale for the works. These ideas additionally contribute to early research on religion and artists' experimental cinema. I now plan to consolidate this knowledge in new art works and films.



**APPENDIX A: List of Publication and Exhibition of the Works (2010-2016)*****Communion* (2010) 35mm (transferred to digital) black and white, silent, 10 minutes.**

- 2017 On Spirituality: including Alexander Sokurov, Maya Deren, David Wojnarowicz. Art Cinema OFFoff, Ghent, April 2017
- 2016 'Shortness' Film Programme, Curzon Cinema, Goldsmiths  
18 November 2016  
*That Which Remains*, Mount Stuart Contemporary Visual Arts Programme, Mount Stuart, Isle of Bute, Scotland. 13-30 August 2016
- 2013 Film Installation (solo) Queen's Cinema, Gibraltar. 12-14 November 2013  
Film Installation (solo) Heath Street Baptist Church, Artprojx. London, 12-23 October 2013
- 2012 Cambridge Film Festival, 2012  
*Comraich/Sanctuary*, Mount Stuart Contemporary Visual Arts Programme  
Isle of Bute, Scotland. 23 June - 31 October 2012
- 2010 *Geography of Proximity*, MCA, Malta Contemporary Art Foundation, 14 October -14 November 2010  
*Little Constellation*, Fabricca del Vapore, Milan. 9 March - 8 April 2010  
*From Floor to Sky - British Sculpture and the Studio Experience*, Including Alison Wilding, Bill Woodrow, Brian Catling, Nina Danino, Carl Plackman, Richard Long, Richard Deacon, Hamish Fulton, Kate Meynell, Boyd Webb, Richard Wentworth.  
Ambika P3, London. 4 March -5 April 2010  
<http://fromfloortosky.org.uk/artists.html> [Accessed 17 July 2016]

## Publications

*Communion*, small book, hand printed with a text by Sarah Cooper,  
ISBN 978 0 9926883 Pp8 2013

*From Floor to Sky, Peter Kardia, the Experience of The Art School Studio and the teaching of Peter Kardia* with critical essays by Hester Westley, Malcolm Le Grice, Peter Kardia. Colour Hardback, A& C Black 2010 Pp 58-62  
<http://www.bloomsbury.com/uk/search?q=From+Floor+to+Sky&Gid=1>[Accessed 17 July 2016]

*Little Constellation Contemporary Art in Geocultural micro-areas and small states of Europe*, Full Colour Publication, Cat. Mouse Publishing, Pp82-86, P254, Cat. Mousse Publications 2010

“The Affects of the Abstract Image in Film and Video Art”: Roundtable discussion Bridget Crone, Nina Danino, Jaspar Joseph-Lester, Rubedo, Chaired by Maxa Zoller Moving Image Review and Art Journal, Vol.1. No.1 2012

#### Interviews

“Nina Danino: Capturing an aura – the human presence on film”  
 Interview with Mo White, Cassone, July 2012 [www.cassone-art.com](http://www.cassone-art.com)[Accessed 17 July 2016]

Jack Boulton, Ritual, Stimulus Respond, Pp83-92, 2011  
[www.stimulusrespond.com](http://www.stimulusrespond.com) [Accessed 17 July 2016]

#### Reviews (Selected)

*Comraich/Sanctuary* by Susan Mansfield, The Scotsman  
<http://www.scotsman.com/lifestyle/arts/visual-arts/visual-art-review-sanctuary-comraich-1-2432997> [Accessed 17 July 2016]

*From Floor to Sky:*

<http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/art/reviews/from-floor-to-sky-ambika-p3-london-1922267.htm>[Accessed 17 July 2016]

<http://www.timeout.com/london/art/from-floor-to-sky>[Accessed 17 July 2016]

web reviews <http://www.theartsdesk.com/visual-arts/floor-sky-british-sculpture-and-studio-experience-ambika-p3>[Accessed 17 July 2016]

Financial Times, Art Monthly,  
*Little Constellation*, Fabricca del Vapore, Milan 2010  
 Over 60 reviews and webmentions : including in Domus, EquipeCo, Il Fatto  
 Quotidiano, Repubblica and Il Corriere della Serra of Milan.

#### Talks and conferences

- 2016 Screening and talk. Research Seminar, Digby Stuart Centre for Religion,  
 Society and Human Flourishing, Respondent Professor Caroline  
 Bainbridge, University of Roehampton. 16 November 2016  
 Screening and talk, Slow Cinema Symposium no 2. UCL. 8 July 2016
- 2012 Screening and panel discussion. Three Faiths Forum, Urban Dialogues,  
 with Aaron Rosen, Rosalind Parker chaired by Paul Bayley, Red Gallery. 28  
 November 2012
- 2010 “Attending to the Other” Critical Theory and Spiritual Practice, Film and  
 Religion panel, “Producing Film, Producing Otherness” Chaired by S.Brent  
 Plate, 15<sup>th</sup> International Conference for the International Society for  
 Religion, Literature and Culture, (ISRLC), University of Oxford, St. Catherine’  
 College. 24 November, 23-26 November. 2010. [www.gla.ac.uk/esrla/](http://www.gla.ac.uk/esrla/)  
 [Accessed 17 July 2016]  
 Screening and talk. Art Writing, Department of Art, University of London.  
 Respondent Professor Adrian Rifkin. 12 May 2010  
 Film Studies Research Seminar, School of Creative Art, University of West of  
 England. Respondent Vicky Smith 27 May 2010
- 2010 “Art, Cinema and the Soul”: Panel Discussion with Dr. Gilda Williams,  
 Rev. Ewan King, Dr. Sarah Cooper, Nina Danino, during the installation of  
*Communion* (2010) Artprojx at Heath Street Church. November 2013



Figure 20 - Installation view of *Communion*  
(Nina Danino, 2010)

Photo: Michael Maziere

*From Floor to Sky – British Sculpture and the Studio Experience*, Ambika P3, London 2010



Figure 21 - View of installation site for *Communion*  
(Nina Danino, 2010)  
Photo: Victoria Proffitt  
Artprojx : Film installation Part 1, Heath Street Baptist Church, 2013



Figure 22 - Installation view of *Communion*  
(Nina Danino, 2010)  
Photo: Victoria Proffitt  
Artprojx: Film installation Part 1, Heath Street Baptist Church, 2013



Figure 23 - Installation view of *Communion*  
(Nina Danino, 2010)  
Photo: Victoria Proffitt  
Artprojx: Film installation Part 1, Heath Street Baptist Church, London, 2013



Figure 24 - View of installation site with billboard artwork for *Communion* (2010):  
Queen's Cinema, Gibraltar, 2013  
Photo: John Bugeija



Figure 25 - Installation view of *Communion*  
(Nina Danino, 2010)  
Photo: John Bugeija  
Film Installation, Part 2, Queen's Cinema, Gibraltar 2013

***Sorelle Povere di Santa Chiara* (2013) multi-media installation:**

**Single-channel video 40 minutes and Publication: Transcript of Interviews 12Pp  
6-channel sound installation 13 minutes**

2015 *Sorelle Poveres de Santa Chiara*, multi media installation (double solo)  
in *Listen to the Sirens*, Montagu Bastion, Gibraltar. Curated by Little  
Constellation, Alessandro Castiglioni, Pier Paolo Coro and Rita Canarezza,  
24 June -30 August 2015

Publication

*The Voices of the Sirens – Space for Contemporary Art, Gibraltar*,  
Colour, Hardcover, Mousse Publishing 2015 Pp 94-97

Reviews (Selected)

Listen to the Sirens

<http://moussmagazine.it/voices-of-the-sirens-ltts/> [Accessed 17 July 2016]



Figure 26 - Installation view of *Sorelle Povere di Santa Chiara*  
(Nina Danino, 2015) single-channel video installation (40 minutes)  
Photo: Stefano Cagol  
*Listen to the Sirens*, Montagu Bastion, Gibraltar, 2015.





Figure 27 - Installation view of *Sorelle Povere di Santa Chiara*  
(Nina Danino, 2015) 6-channel audio installation (13 minutes)  
Photo: Stefano Cagol  
*Listen to the Sirens*, Montagu Bastion, Gibraltar, 2015



Figure 28 - Installation view of *Sorelle Povere di Santa Chiara*  
(Nina Danino, 2015) 6-channel audio installation (13 minutes)  
Photo: Stefano Cagol  
*Listen to the Sirens*, Montagu Bastion, Gibraltar, 2015.

***Jennifer* (2015) 2k, DCP, colour, 5:1 sound, 72 minutes**

- 2017 Glasgow Film Theatre, 30 April 2017
- 2016 PhoenixExeter, Exeter, 14 December 2016  
 Close-Up Film Centre, London 3 December 2016  
 Estepona TV, 16 November 2016  
 ICA, Cinema, London, 13 November 2016  
 Cambridge Film Festival, 20-27 October 2016  
 GBC TV Broadcast, 11 September 2016  
 Alchemy Film Festival, UK 2 April 2016 UK Premiere  
 Leisure Cinemas, Gibraltar, 5, 6, 25 April 2016
- 2015 41 Edición Festival de Cine Iberoamericano de Huelva, Sección Puerta Europa (Spanish Premiere) 19 & 20 November 2015

## Reviews

“The Woman behind the Veil” Joanna Moorhead, The Tablet 17 November 2016  
<http://www.thetablet.co.uk/arts/11/9205/the-woman-behind-the-veil> [Accessed 27 December 2016]

“Cambridge Festival, Where Artists and Archives Meet”, Henry K Miller, Sight and Sound [http://www.bfi.org.uk/news-opinion/sight-sound-](http://www.bfi.org.uk/news-opinion/sight-sound-magazine/comment/festivals/cambridge-film-festival-2016-artists-archives) [Accessed 27 December 2016] [magazine/comment/festivals/cambridge-film-festival-2016-artists-archives](http://www.bfi.org.uk/news-opinion/sight-sound-magazine/comment/festivals/cambridge-film-festival-2016-artists-archives) [Accessed 27 December 2016]

“La Joven que miraba a las estrellas” Sandra Balvin [http://www.infogibraltar.com/info\\_gibraltar/blog/a046-la-directora-nina-danino-sorprende-con-%E2%80%98jennifer%E2%80%99-un-inusual-retrato-de-una-monja](http://www.infogibraltar.com/info_gibraltar/blog/a046-la-directora-nina-danino-sorprende-con-%E2%80%98jennifer%E2%80%99-un-inusual-retrato-de-una-monja) [Accessed 27 December 2016 ]

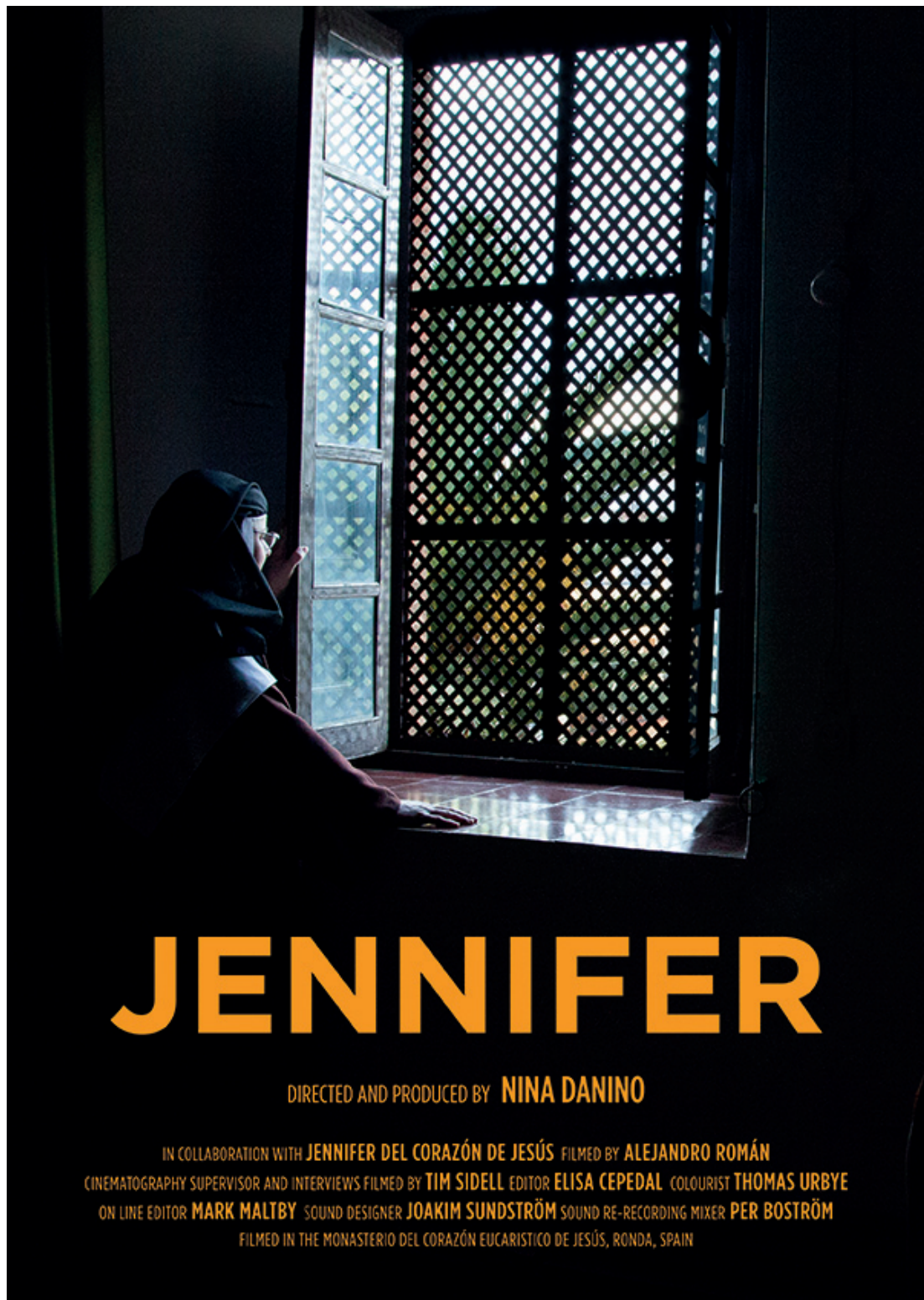


Figure 29 - Film Poster for *Jennifer*  
(Nina Danino, 2015)

***Sorelle Povere di Santa Chiara (2016) 16mm, black and white, silent, 12 minutes***

2016 *Visions in the Nunnery*, 5 October-18 December Programme 3  
1-18 December 2016  
Venice Film Week August-September 2016  
Alchemy Film Festival, UK 14-17 April 2016  
Ann Arbor Film Festival, US 20 March 2016

Conference Screening

“The Artist as Pilgrim, Saint, Scholar?” Presented by Laura Moffat. ACE (Art in Christianity Trust) +ASI (Arts and Spirituality Ireland) Trinity College, Dublin, 4-8 July 2016

Publication

*The Voices of the Sirens – Space for Contemporary Art, Gibraltar*, Colour, Hardcover, Mousse Publishing 2015 Pp 98-99 (Documentation of 16mm filming)



Figure 30 - Filming *Sorelle Povere di Santa Chiara*  
(Nina Danino, 2015)  
*The Voices of the Sirens*, Mousse Publishing (2015)

## **APPENDIX B: *Communion* (2010) Background to the Cinematography**

### **The Communion Portrait**

The Communion portrait photography has social recognition, it is part of family life as a private record and as commemoration and souvenir of an important religious event.

*“I am Spanish myself and I have made my Holy Communion and so have my parents and so forth, I do very distinctively remember the Holy Communion photographs being taken. It really is a major moment within the person who has been brought into the Catholic faith and no matter how poor you are you will do your utmost to get a professional photographer from the village or the city to photograph that very special moment.”*<sup>125</sup>

### **PART 1 Preparation for a photo shoot of a Communion photograph**

This project began with the Communion of my daughter in 2009 at the age of seven. In order to direct the professional photographer (who was not familiar with the genre) at the photo-shoot, I researched into the codes of this type of portrait. I looked at my own Communion portrait, at contemporary Holy Communion photographs on websites and historic portraits in archives. The black and white archive portraits reflected the technical and creative developments in photography. The early 20<sup>th</sup> century studio portraits show the children posing stiffly in full length, standing, kneeling or sitting against painted backdrops and props. With the advent of the faster lenses, three-point lighting and depth of field, the closer, softer lighting of the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s portray the carefully modeled young faces of the subjects in naturalistic lighting. The tighter framing of close-ups and mid shots incorporate small emblematic props such as a rosary or missal and concentrate on the expression and individuality of each face. Depending on the skill of the photographer, some of these portraits in black and

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<sup>125</sup> Comment from the audience at the panel discussion “Art Cinema and the Soul”: Rev. Ewan King, Dr. Sarah Cooper, Dr Gilda Williams and Nina Danino during the film installation *Communion* (2010) Heath Street Baptist Church, Artprojx London, November 2013.

white were very beautiful studies of the individual. The emphasis on the face, the fine grain and the tonal quality of the hand printed black and white photograph brought to mind the studio portraits of the stars in European and Hollywood 1940s and 1950s cinema.

## **PART 2 From Private Photograph to Public Film**

### **Lighting and Cinematography**

My intention was to restage the *Communion* portrait on 35mm for a public work of art in response to the invitation to show an early and a new work in the exhibition, *From Floor to Sky*.<sup>126</sup> My aim was to create a luminous and visually arresting image, which can bring to mind the glamour of the secular star and the quasi-mystical quality of the sacred portraiture of the soul of a young girl. The aim was to achieve this through the cinematography and lighting. I consulted Duncan Petrie's *The British Cinematographer* to research the craft of lighting and the history of black and white cinematography.<sup>127</sup>

Lighting techniques forged in the studios of the 1930s and 1940s dominated till the 1960s when colour film became more widely used. This period saw the standardisation of Hollywood lighting conventions when lighting appears both natural and expressive, and when low key or diffuse lighting, usually associated with Hollywood film noir, was also discovered. The actress' face played a central role in the development of the role of lighting, starting from the invention of the close-up so central to 1940s and 1950s cinema until the 1960s. Lighting the face was a speciality of some cinematographers who developed their own styles creating sumptuous images, such as the French cinematographer Georges Perinal who experimented in devising lighting that conveyed the beauty and glamour of the film and of the actress' face. Georges Perinal was known for giving "the whole film a lavish and glossy appearance."<sup>128</sup> Oswald Morris, who photographed Kubrik's *Lolita* (1962), specialised in creating luminous effects for the leading actresses. So-called 'figure-lighting' was associated with cinematographers such as Billy

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<sup>126</sup> *From Floor to Sky*, Ambika P3, London (2010) Curated by Peter Kardia, February 2010

<sup>127</sup> Duncan J. Petrie, *The British Cinematographer* (London: BFI Publishing, 1996).

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.* P.132.

Bizer and refined by Charles Rosher for the early cinema star Mary Pickford. Jack Hildyard always paid particular attention to the main star and “when it came to the important close-ups it was always arranged that they were favourable for the star”.<sup>129</sup> I was particularly inspired by the idea of Arthur C. Miller who developed what he called ‘quasi-mystical’ lighting, using back lighting and high key to create aura used in the lighting of Jenny Jones’ face in the *Song of Bernadette* (1943).

### **Cinematographer**

My concept was that the film should be lit by a cinematographer who had trained in the studio system and would have first hand knowledge of the craft of black and white studio lighting. Their signature would be key in setting the look of the film. Of those still working or retired were: Christopher Challis (cinematographer for Powell and Pressburger) who has since died (May 2012), Roger Deakins who is from a younger generation, Walter Lasally (*Zorba the Greek* (1964), Peter Suschitzky, and Oswald Morris who photographed Stanley Kubrick’s *Lolita* (1962).

Billy Williams BSC, is an Oscar winning cinematographer and is considered a master of cinematography.<sup>130</sup> He filmed *Women in Love* (1969), *Sunday Bloody Sunday* (1971) and *Gandhi* (1982) working with Ken Russell and John Schlesinger. He has lit stars such as Lana Turner, Katherine Hepburn, Elizabeth Taylor. He asked me to send him a picture of my daughter. He agreed to photograph the film and came out professional retirement to film the project.

### **Production Method**

The church location was recce’d with Billy Williams and a storyboard prepared.<sup>131</sup> The method was to capture the film’s aesthetic and visual impact at the indexical photographic stage and in the art direction. The method would not only realise the technical ambition of the project but also do so within the means of the budget and meet the exhibition deadline by reducing editing and long post production

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid.P.107

<sup>130</sup> Williams is featured in many publications including Schaefer, *Masters of Light: Conversations with Contemporary Cinematographers*, Reprint edition (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992). Pp267-283 and in *Conversations with Cinematographers* by David A Ellis, Scarecrow Press (2012). See also <https://www.webofstories.com/play/billy.williams/63> [Accessed 27 December 2016]

<sup>131</sup> The film location was Our Lady Star of the Sea, Greenwich a 19<sup>th</sup> Century church with Pugin details in the interior.



schedules. This launched a new method in my work. The film was photographed in a one-day shoot with a 13-person crew. Billy Williams is known for his work in colour but trained in black and white. Associated with soft light, on the set he chose to photograph the subject in soft diffused light, which is his signature, in the manner of tonal black and white cinema. By contrast, the church is illuminated using hard light to emphasise the distinctive details of Pugin's interior. I believe that, through his creative collaboration, these portraits draw directly perhaps mystically, on the history of lighting and black and white cinematography itself.



Figure 31 - Production Still: *Communion*, 35mm  
(Nina Danino, 2010)  
Photo: Jane Atkins



Figure 32- Production Still: *Communion*, 35mm  
(Nina Danino, 2010)  
Photo: Jane Atkins

**APPENDIX C: *Sorelle Povere di Santa Chiara*, Publication:  
Transcript of Interviews (2015)**

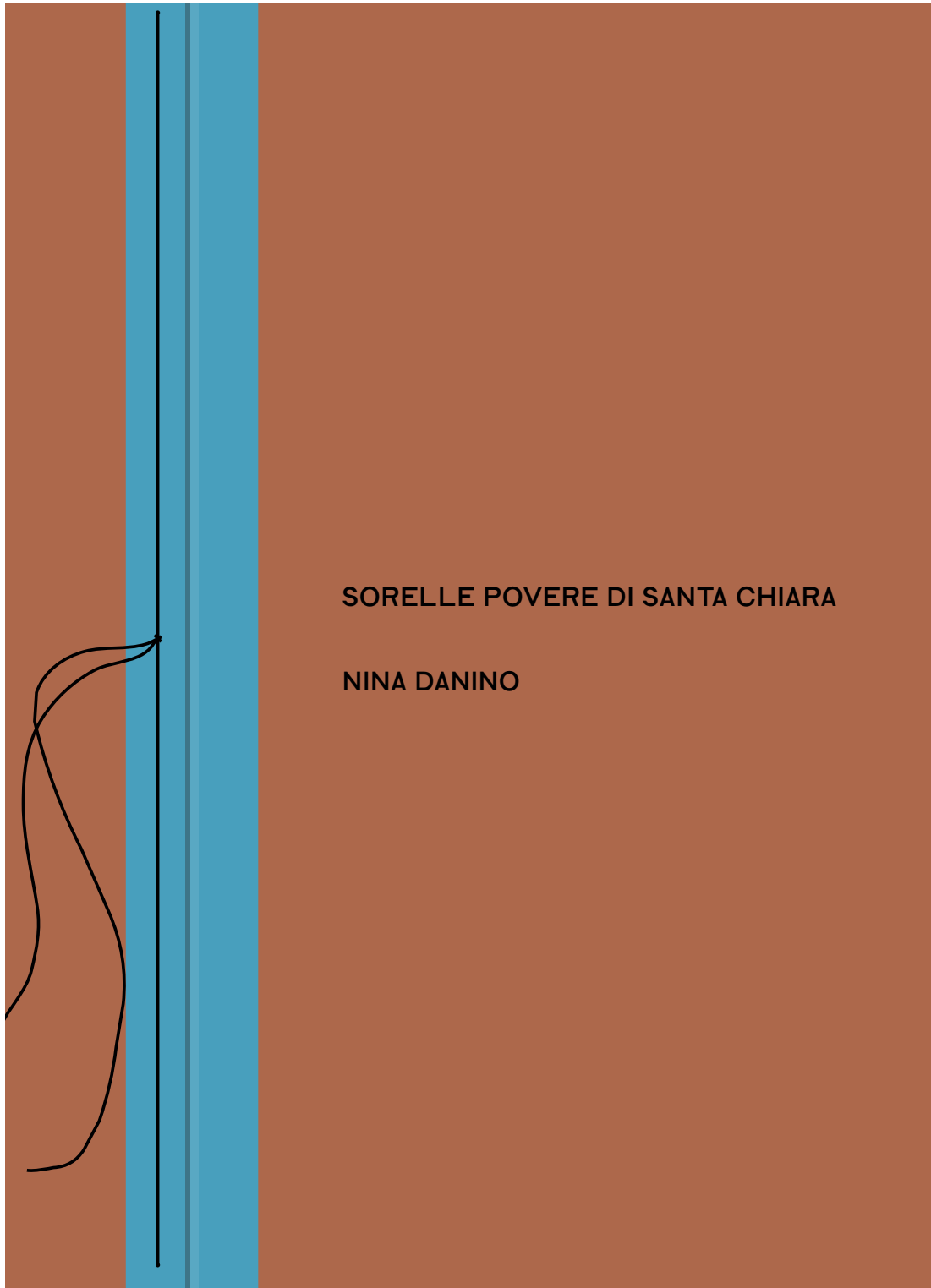


Figure 33 - *Sorelle Povere di Santa Chiara*: Transcript and Translation of Interviews (2015)

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This project is a response to the idea of simplicity and poverty which is the guiding principle of order of Poor Clares. I was invited to spend a few days in the Monastery of Santa Chiara in the Republic of San Marino to film and record the life of the members of the community.

To give a voice and identity to each member of the community, I sent in advance, a number of questions for them to respond to and to divide amongst themselves or to add to, if they wished to speak about other topics. They were personal but not intrusive questions, also about their founder and rule without being too theological. These form the basis of the interviews that I carried out with them.

This is a transcript of the video interviews with each of the ten nuns in the community.

*My profound gratitude to the Sorelle Povere, in the monastery of Santa Chiara, San Marino.*

•

*Questo progetto è stato ispirato dall'idea di semplicità e povertà che sono il principio guida dell'ordine delle Clarisse. Sono stata invitata a passare alcuni giorni nel Monastero di Santa Chiara nella Repubblica di San Marino per filmare e registrare la vita delle suore che vivono lì.*

*Per dare voce e identità a ognuna, un po' di tempo prima avevo inviato alle sorelle delle domande a cui potevano rispondere a scelta, aggiungendo altri temi se volevano. Da un lato erano domande personali ma non invadenti, dall'altro riguardavano la loro fondatrice e le loro regole senza essere troppo teologiche. Queste domande formano la base delle interviste che ho condotto con loro.*

*Questa è la trascrizione delle interviste filmate con le dieci suore della comunità.*

Con la mia più profonda gratitudine per le Sorelle Povere del Monastero di Santa Chiara, San Marino.

Nina Danino  
May 2015

•

- 
- What is your name?
- Where were you born or where do you come from?
- What is your baptismal name?
- Tell us about St. Clare your founder.
- Why did you choose to follow St. Clare?
- What brings you to the convent of St. Clare in San Marino?
- What is your rule of life?
- What is meant by living a life of simplicity?
- What is your favourite part of the day or activity?
- What do you most enjoy about being part of this community?
- St. Clare says that the unity of mutual love is the bond of perfection.
- Can you say something about this?
- St. Clare's writing says that that you have to live without anything of your own. Do you have to sell everything that you have and distribute the proceeds to the poor as St. Clare directed? What is your form of holy poverty or the privilege of poverty?
- What does poverty and exchange mean in how you live?
- In the rule, St. Francis advised that you could have as much land as necessity required but that it may not be cultivated except as a garden for the needs of the sisters. Plants and nature seem to be central to your way of life. Tell us about your garden.
- Are you self sufficient as a community? How do you earn your keep?
- What service do you give to the people of San Marino?
- In 1970 the Poor Clares moved from the historic building within the city walls which the community lived in since 1609 to the new building. Tell us about the monastery you live in the countryside in Valdragone.
- 
-

**SUOR CHIARA PIA**

I am Suor Chiara Pia. I come from Giugliano in the province of Naples, in the region of Campania. My baptismal name is Maria Luisa, like the mother of my father.

Santa Chiara was a woman who followed God but fell in love with the poor crucifix, so that that she is called the passionate lover of the poor crucifix and this aspect touched me a lot, the reality of a God that loved us so much that he died for us. So, I felt it to be very close to my sensibility and to the way in which I followed the Lord.

Poverty for us has a name, is a person, it is Jesus in person so the fact that we have chosen him, in fact, that we have been chosen by him, who is poor, to enrich us, this is the first privilege, then because to be poor is real freedom because we realise today that there are false riches that in the end only make us slaves of everything ... from success to possessions and everything else that seems indispensable but in the end, is not. Therefore my way of living this privilege is to stay united to him. I haven't sold anything because I didn't possess anything in the sense that even if I were living a wealthy life, my parents are still young and therefore they haven't made a will but what I have sold and given to the poor, I would say, is my youth because I was twenty when I entered the monastery and even if I could have had wealth because my parents wouldn't have denied me any of the dreams which I would have wanted to realise ... I preferred to stay next to the poor and I really hope that at the end of life I will have realised my vocation of being a Poor Clare ... and that means to progress from giving to the poor to being fully one of them.

Poverty is simply to live with essentials, those essentials which make one recognise the real worth of life which are relationships ... and from here spontaneously and naturally starts the need to share. We in our way of life share what we in our turn receive. Our desire is to share above all the great good of having met God who has made our lives beautiful and full. We wish that we could really bring this to fruition in practice by giving of ourselves to this space, time and organisation so that people who really want to meet God and with God experience the fullness of life, can find the real wealth that we need.

**ABBESS MARIA CHIARA**

My name is Suor Maria Chiara, I am originally from Rimini and my baptismal name is Ilva.

Santa Chiara was a young noblewoman of Assisi who was a bit seduced by seeing the evangelical experience of Francesco, who is more or less her contemporary and who left everything in order to follow Jesus the Lord. This is the foundation of her vocation, to see Francesco and to see the Gospel incarnate in Francesco's life.

Chiara left her family, all her belongings to follow Jesus the Lord, in the same way as Francesco had done, in a life that is poor, simple and which became a life of fraternity with the sisters whom God little by little gave her, a life where poverty had been her way of following Jesus the Lord. That meant being poor of means and above all, poor from all the goods that she could have had as a person, that is, a life completely given to the Gospel. It is difficult to say in a few words what it means to live a life of simplicity. I would say that the icon that we have behind us of Santa Chiara says it well. The icon's inscription says: 'Blessed are those who are united because they will see the kingdom of God.' Therefore a life in simplicity is a life unified, without dispersions, a life that is united, that is completely focused on the search for God. So this life, becomes a simple life, it doesn't need anything, it doesn't need big relationships, it doesn't need many things because it finds its point of unity in God, I would say in Jesus the Lord and to follow Jesus the Lord in one's life of fraternity leads to a unification. I think that simplicity is in fact this interior unification of a person: all the desire, all the thinking, all the wanting, is projected towards one end only. This I think is a life in simplicity.

To say that our community is self sufficient is not the case in the sense that we are completely dependent but we depend on what we define as God's providence, which manifests itself in the work that we do, in the social help that we receive as other citizens do: social pensions and the providence that manifests itself through donations and in working, gardening, embroidering, mending, making icons, decorating candles etc. All this together makes us self sufficient, so we don't have any other assistance apart from our social pensions.

Our service to San Marino is very clearly explained in the story of the foundation of the monastery itself. We have a manuscript from 1610 which gives an account of how the monastery was founded and the reason why the sisters were called, not so much so that the citizens of San Marino could be economically wealthy or so that they would not fall ill but so that they could lead a Christian life, a life where the Lord was the master, I would say. Our state is dedicated to San Marino, a saint, which is not a little thing and the foundation of the state, comes from him.

We are here for this, we have a very strong sense of our life which is simple, humble, hidden but it's for the good for the people of San Marino, not so much for their material wealth or their health but especially for their Christian life. I think that today this discourse goes against the mainstream. Everybody promises happiness, everybody promises the solutions of problems of the economic crisis, the moral crisis etc., etc., etc. We don't promise anything but our life here started for the good of San Marino.

**SUOR MARIA MARINA**

Suor Marina. I come from Carigo, which is in the Republic of San Marino, it is five kilometers from my house to come here. Irma.

How long have I been here? Long ... they treat me like a child ... they serve me day and night ... I try to help as much as I can ... I do my little things, I sort the vegetables ... the mushrooms. I do all these little things ... I feel happy. When I can help, I say to them: 'When you need me, please tell me when I finish praying' ... because they don't make me get up at the same time as them ... they get up early, they help me to get up an hour later then, I have to say my prayers, as they have done before me. I pray on my own ... I go into the little chapel where Jesus is and I pray there ... then, on the way back I go to the workshop where they all are ... and I work ... I make little hearts for the children and they come to collect them ... I have to work and concentrate ... I'm the only one who makes them ... so I am happy to do something for the community also because they like me, they love me so much and I love them too.

**SUOR GIOVANNA MARIA**

In San Leo, which used to be in the province of Pesaro and now is in the province of Rimini. Sesta Sivigini. My parents called me Sesta because at the time they were making many children and they were afraid they would lose count so they called me Sesta (Sixth) but they didn't use numbers for my other brothers and sisters' names.

I came here to this monastery, actually to the old monastery in 1946. At the time, the sisters of this community had a boarding school and two of my friends went to it, two girls like me. I was ten or eleven and I wanted to go to the same boarding school as them. During these two years of boarding school and I stayed five, six years as a child, I could see the serenity of the sisters who died and that the other sisters in the community were also serene, nobody made a scene, nobody cried.

I saw that at home, when somebody died, the neighbours made a scene and cried, so in my child's mind I thought, it's nice to be a sister ... I see that they die so serenely ... the ones that die and the ones who are left behind are all serene ... when I grow up I want to be a sister ... at least I will die a good death. This is the first thought that brought me to become a sister. Then as I grew up, naturally I grew in awareness of the Franciscan and Clarissian charism, as I didn't even know what Clarissian charism was. So I stayed here in this convent from the age of eleven but when I was seventeen my mother took me home. My father died when I was at boarding school.

She took me home because she said: 'In the future, I don't want you to say that my mother put me in a boarding school when I was a child and left me there, therefore, I became a sister by default because I never got to know the world.' My mother absolutely didn't want me to harbor this idea so she



took me home for a few months but my thoughts were to consecrate myself to the Lord, to live the Franciscan and Clarissian charism. So, at the age of seventeen and a half I came back. I was out for four, five months with my mother with my brothers and sisters. I can't tell you the battle that I had in the family because we were seven children. They tried to take this thought, this idea out of my head ... a thing that neither the brothers nor the sisters succeeded in doing and at the age of seventeen and a half I came back to the old monastery and my mother came with me ... and so I stayed here till today. Today I am eighty and I have always been here serene and happy with the highs and lows of any life but I am glad of the choice that the Lord made me take.

#### SUOR MARIA ELETTA

My name is Suor Maria Eletta. I was born in Gatteo Mare and I come from there. My baptismal name is Forlisi Rosanna.

For me all the activities are equal but I have a special passion for one activity which is cooking. The most beautiful hours of my day are during the morning prayers. I consider this prayer like a strong injection that gives me strength and energy to carry on for the whole day with joy. When I pray I keep in mind all the needs of the world, all my brothers. This is my prime activity.

#### SUOR MARIA RAFAELLA

I was born in Borghi, in the province of Rimini. My baptismal name is Raffaella Vincenzi ... that's it.

I was in the old monastery in the 50s, I was a pupil, then I became a sister. When we came down here it was a paradise because when we were praying up in the old monastery there was a lot noise below the windows, below the church but here it is a paradise ... we pray and pray and we don't hear any noise ... there is no chaos and I am so happy to be here because it is pleasant. My father died ... I came here when I was young because my poor mother could not feed me. I came here as a pupil, they had forty little girls all orphans and I joined them. Then I considered becoming a sister and I became one and there is nothing else. Here I am happy, I don't lack anything ... I have everything. I am happy and I wouldn't exchange my life with anybody's, so there is nothing else to say.

**SUOR MARIA AGNESE**

My name is Suor Maria Agnese and my baptismal name is Pasquina.

In the community I have the role of deputy in charge, I carry out all the duties that Obedience – whom I call the Mother – gives me. I want to call her the Mother because my example is Christ and it is him who was obedient up to his death. In our community the work varies a lot and each of us being a sister, helps each other. When one can't do it anymore, another does it ... and we do it with pleasure ... it could be in the infirmary in the kitchen, in the workshop, in the parlour. Sometimes a group comes to ask us about our experience or some women, some ladies come to the parlour, people who want to talk ... so we have to be available. My main job is to sew, I mend jumpers, jackets, trousers, whatever they bring. I am very glad to be able to make those who bring the stuff happy because they feel they have been helped.

When they say: 'Do you do these things?' We are very glad and I say: 'Yes, we do it with pleasure.' I am really happy. As far as service is concerned, Santa Chiara tells us to be sisters to one another, to be in the service of each other, we must love each other more than our carnal sisters. The spiritual sister for Chiara is superior in love to the carnal sister. It is a journey that we make focusing on the Lord because it is only him that gives us the strength and the capacity to do this ... to live like this.

**SOLANGE UWITUZE**

My name is Solange Uwituze. I am Rwandese, I was born in Rwanda in Africa. I have been here a year and a half.

Since I have discovered God's love for me and the merciful love of God it has been a very beautiful experience, thanks to the Sisters of Santa Chiara who have helped me to find and discover God's love, I have decided to give myself totally to Jesus as a response to this love freely given. The sisters talk to me about the life of Santa Chiara, her choice to live hidden and poor. I have been feeling attracted to this life and I decided to live among the daughters of Santa Chiara, following the example of Santa Chiara's life. I am at the beginning; this year, on the 14th of September I will take the habit as a sign that I belong only to Jesus poor and crucified. I am really looking forward to taking the habit because for me it will be like a seal from Jesus in my heart, that means that I will be all his. This is my desire: to give myself totally, to live totally for Jesus and for the salvation of souls. I am happy to live here in the monastery with the sisters who help this desire to grow in me and to give myself totally to God.

## SUOR MARIA GIUSTINA

Suor Maria Giustina. My surname was Cigolani, my name is Edelvina Cigolani. I was born in Argentina. My parents lived in Argentina. I lived with my family, with my parents, we were nine siblings.

We lived near the church and there was a Passionist priest who made us go to catechism classes, they asked us questions and the priest explained them to us. I would always go to him for counseling. I asked him ... I wanted to become a nun: 'I would like to become an enclosed nun.' So he found me this monastery, 'In San Marino there is a monastery that accepts those with a small dowry,' the other monasteries asked for a big dowry. We were lacking nothing but we had to work for our living. So this priest would guide me ... he would counsel me. We would go on Sunday after lunch with other children. He would give us instructions, explain the religious life, the Christian life and so we all desired each of us, to follow in the way of the Lord.

One day, as I wanted to become a nun, I asked my parents first. My father didn't want it, my mother on the contrary was very happy to have a daughter consecrated to the Lord. My father was a bit stingy, he was a good man, he too was a good Christian but he wanted children to stay in his company. So I told the Passionist priest that I wanted to be consecrated to the Lord and to become a nun, I said: 'You Father find me the place.' He probably wanted me to become a non-enclosed nun, a missionary. I wanted to become a nun of prayer, of union with the Lord and to live in silence ... hidden ... so he found me this place. The pain was big because I left my parents but for the Lord ... above all for the Lord ... to follow him where he would lead. I entered the monastery when I was fifteen and I did the novitiate.

I have followed the religious life with my sisters and I never went out since '17 ... wait ... when did I enter? I entered in '33 ... when the monastery was up there ... in the town ... then I came down here. I have always lived in a monastery, in prayer, in the observance of the Rule of Santa Chiara, of San Francesco, in the spirit of poverty, of obedience, of detachment from everything. For prayer we would get up in the night, at midnight ... an hour, an hour and a half of prayer from midnight towards 2am and then we would go to bed.

Ah yes, yes ... I've always been happy, glad ... I pray with the sisters ... we loved each other ... in fraternal charity ... we had our recreation breaks ... we were happy ... we prayed and also we would get up at night as I recall. For the solemn feasts we go to the refectory, the Mother Superior would give us a present, cakes, we would pass an hour like that. We were happy ... we were glad ... we would pray. I entered when I was fifteen and now I am ninety.

Ah the fear of those days during the war when they were bombing in '44. The aeroplanes were coming from Rimini flying over the Republic, just imagine. There was an old lady kneeling who was praying that the Lord would save us, there were bombs everywhere but none fell on the convent. There was bombing all around, many people died. A poor old man who was our factotum in the convent died when a bomb fell. I wanted to cry because

he was a good old man ... he was struck in the head by the shell fragments from the bomb and he died ... dead. After the war a man who was working in our kitchen garden picked up all the fragments, he was a metalsmith and he made knives out of these pieces of iron.

#### SUOR MARIA PAOLA

My name is Suor Maria Paola Asperi. I come from Coriano near Rimini.

I had heard of San Marino but I didn't have good news about the convent in San Marino, I didn't know it at all and it wasn't in my mind at all that the Lord would call me here to San Marino. I only remember one thing, I was still a little girl in boarding school with the nuns at San Clemente which is ten kilometres from Rimini. They were non-enclosed nuns who led an active life, who took care of orphan girls. I stayed five years with these nuns because my mother had already left me. I was in great pain for my mother ... I was five years old ... she died calling me twenty times before she died ... imagine ... my father told me. These things lodged in my heart like a wound, only the Lord knows how to compensate for this ... only the Lord knows how to give back this love that I lacked but then afterwards I found good people who loved me.

A young woman from Coriano ten kilometres from Rimini took me in as a daughter, she took care of me and afterwards my vocation grew ... it was like a Spring shoot that wanted to grow ... in my heart there was this desire ... I felt this ... I don't know ... I was thinking about it today ... on the day of my Communion I felt something that I can't express ... like a voice almost as if it was talking to me ... 'You will become a nun' ... it was a feeling or it was a real voice ... I had that impression ... 'You will become a nun.' This desire has always stayed inside of me. I heard this voice maybe it was my mother's voice who before dying called me twenty times, twenty times she called me before dying ... opening her arms she would call me by my two names: 'Adele, Libera, Libera, Libera.' She opened her arms ... she died. But I say: 'My mother hasn't left me.'

San Francesco is in love, yes in love with plants, with nature, flowers. We have a lot of land but it is divided ... there is the lawn, after lunch to take a little walk on, when we don't have to do the washing up as we take it in turns ... one day the dishes ... one day a walk ... so it is all well organised. Then, there is the kitchen garden, it is indispensable. We and the girls sow a bit of everything, especially lettuce, pumpkins, tomatoes, beans and radishes, it's our food. Then there is the garden which is also very beautiful, not that there is a park. Above all it is our desire to love the Lord and to live for him but in the Franciscan context. San Francesco loved nature very much, when he was walking in the fields he would see the little flowers: 'Quiet, quiet you scold me because I love the Lord,' he would say. San Francesco was loved by nature ...

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For us nature is part of life because in nature there is God's beauty in each flower; when they have that beautiful colour ... multicolours ... they speak to me of God's beauty. God's beauty is immersed in nature, in the sun, in the moon and in the flowers. Not that the flower takes the place of God ... no ... there is God ... we take God to be in our hearts ... but then there is also nature ... there are animals, birds. San Francesco is loved by nature, we feel that spirit in us. We understand nature, the kitchen garden gives us nourishment, whilst we also cultivate the flowers for the church. I saw six varieties of flowers, six pots, this coming year we also want to grow fruit on the land. You pick the flowers, you put them in the church and they last at least ten days, if we buy them they wilt after five days ... finished. Anyway nature for us is important ... the Lord has created it for us, for our nourishment, for our delectation and nature has to be the stairway to God.

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Recorded in the Monastero di Santa Chiara, San Marino, May 2015  
Translated by Francesca Piovano

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## APPENDIX D: The Bolex and 16mm Medium

I took a 16mm Bolex camera to film in the monastery of Santa Chiara. I used a particular Bolex camera rather than a hired one because it had a personal provenance and this added a layer of intimacy to the project.

The Bolex camera is a basic analogue piece of equipment. In the 1970s it was considered basic technology compared to the more sophisticated cameras available for use in commercial and mainstream filmmaking. However, within independent filmmaking the Bolex was not ‘minor’ technology but was key to ‘avant-garde’ 16mm filmmaking in the 1970s. “Let me say that I don’t know if there would have been an independent filmmaking movement without this camera. There is no other machine at such a comparatively low price with so many features and so much quality.”<sup>132</sup>

It was part of the equipment available at the London Filmmakers’ Co-op workshop in the 1980s and had practical advantages compared to the heavier and bulkier Arriflex and Beaulieu, which were also available.<sup>133</sup> The Bolex was uncomplicated, clearly designed, and simple to use, with its hand cranking mechanism – a throw-back to early cinema mechanisms. Although a 400ft magazine could be attached in some models, its defining feature was the 100ft daylight loading spools (which exposed up to 2 minutes 40 second at 24 fps per spool). This set a structure on the filming and I used this mechanical feature as a method in the shooting of *Sorelle Povere* (2016).

In the 1950s and 1960s it had been marketed as a hobbyist cine camera for amateur use but it was always a high-end precision piece of technology, which required photographic skills in its manual light calibration. This professionalised its use and consolidated its association with ‘serious’ filmmaking. This was in distinction to the automated technology of Super8, which came onto the mass market in the 1960s and appealed to a popular consumer like VHS would do the 1980s.

<sup>132</sup> Lenny Lipton, *Independent Filmmaking*, Revised Edition edition (San Francisco: Simon and Schuster, 1972). With introductions by Stan Brakhage and a postscript to the British edition by Malcolm Le Grice.

<sup>133</sup> <http://www.lux.org.uk/blog/memories-london-filmmakers%E2%80%99-co-op-workshop-worker-nicky-hamlyn> [Accessed 27 December 2016]

In the 1970s the material paraphernalia of 16mm experimental filmmaking; cameras, equipment, stocks, printing machines, acquired a ‘cutting edge’ even fetish profile through its association with the ‘virile’ culture of technologically focused structural film. At the London Filmmakers’ Co-op, 16mm was perceived by some to have a more ‘serious’ status to the ‘amateur’ i.e., ‘feminised’ medium of Super8 when it began to be used by some artists, notably in Britain by Derek Jarman in the 1980s.<sup>134</sup> But I believe that 16mm technology itself became less ‘virile’ as it began to be used by women in the explosion of women’s more personal filmmaking starting in the 1970s. I first used 16mm in 1980 when making my first film *First Memory* (1981) at the Royal College of Art.

Outside the ambit of artists’ production at the Film Co-op in the 1980s, 16mm film was also used by independent sector filmmakers (i.e., the sector funded by the British Film Institute, independent TV Channels and the franchised workshops supported by Channel 4 from 1983). It was also the standard medium in television dramas and documentaries – electronic video did not yet provide a high enough transmission quality image. I worked on 16mm on many BBC flagship programmes such as *Arena*, *Timewatch* and *Horizon* as a freelance Assistant Editor in the 1980s to support my practice as a filmmaker at the London Filmmaker’s Co-op.

In the 1980s moving image practices were still divided by medium specificity and video and film had different politics and contexts of practice, streams of dissemination and exhibition. In the 1990s artists’ moving image production began to be facilitated by the new digital technology and this merged these two streams of production to some extent into what became known as moving image. In this decade all my films were made for the cinema exhibition within the context of experimental ethos of the London Filmmaker’s Co-op but used all the digital technology available and mixed these workflows.

A full 16mm workflow now is limited by a depleting base of technical knowledge and infrastructure. The last fully functioning film laboratory in the UK, Soho Images, that had built up a strong artist clientele through the support of Len Thornton, closed in 2012. Cinelab and Idailies, at the time of writing develop

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<sup>134</sup> See James Mackay, programmer at the London Filmmakers’ Co-op in the late 1970s and Derek Jarman’s producer: Roundtable discussion, *The London Filmmakers’ Co-op – The Second Generation MIRAJ Vol 3 No 2* (2015).



16mm negative, telecine (transfer to digital) for a digital post production workflow but do not make prints which would enable analogue post-production. The ‘rush print’ (one light developed print) is used for editing from which, after negative cutting, a graded print is produced. Laboratories DeJonghe in Belgium and Haghefilm in Amsterdam do still make prints.

I planned a full analogue workflow for *Sorelle Povere*. Film and Photo Design, a laboratory run by Tony Scott had printed sections of my film *Close to Home* (1982).<sup>135</sup> Tony Scott, was in the process of dismantling the laboratory but was able to produce a ‘rush’ (work) print of the black and white negative of *Sorelle Povere* before it closed in November 2015. I edited an assembly on 16mm on the Steenbeck courtesy of Nina Wakeford at Goldsmiths. The analogue workflow was part of the concept of making the film.

The front titles and end credits would normally have been produced through an analogue route by filming them on a rostrum (an overhead camera on a flat bed where the printed graphics are placed). Now one would produce the graphics digitally and scan out to 16mm. Frameline which produced rostrum work for many independent films in the 1980s and 1990s including Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen’s *Frida Kahlo and Tina Modotti* (1983) - which I worked on - are still operating, as are Peerless Camera. The rostrum from the London Filmmakers’ Co-op now at No.w.here, a small London based not for profit, artist-run workshop, was under repair.<sup>136</sup> I decided on the scanning out method. The opening of the film involved a superimposed caption on a moving image background which required A and B rolls, inter-negative and inter-positive which put this complex workflow beyond the means of the budget. The disappearance of analogue infrastructure is making it more difficult to produce work entirely on analogue without transferring to digital for post production. Although I did not plan sound on this film, Martin Sawyer Sound Services at Pinewood Studios, who produced 16mm magnetic and optical sound negatives had also just closed his unit there.

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<sup>135</sup> <http://www.film-photo.co.uk> [Accessed 27 December 2016]

<sup>136</sup> <http://www.no-w-here.org.uk> [Accessed 27 December 2016]

*Sorelle Povere* was edited on analogue to an Assembly, transferred to digital for Fine Cut and on-line conformed and scanned out to 16mm negative and positive graded black and white print.

Renewed interest in analogue film culture has sprung up around clusters of artists' workshops such as BEEF, a Bristol sound and film collective <http://www.beefbristol.org> and writers such as Kim Knowles are engaged with 16mm as a medium of choice against the background of its increasing obsolescence.



Figure 34 - Film and Photo Design, being dismantled, November 2015

## **Appendix E: Background to the Orders of Poor Clares and Discalced Carmelites**

My film “*Now I am yours*” (1992) is centred on St. Teresa of Avila (1515-1582). The film’s soundtrack includes lines from Teresa’s mystical writings; her *Life* (1567), *The Interior Castle* (1577), *Conceptions of the Love of God* (1569) and *The Way of Perfection* (1567).

In 2014, I was making a documentary with Jennifer del Corazón de Jesús – a Discalced Carmelite nun in the Discalced Carmelite monastery in Ronda, when I was invited to make a project in San Marino and, at the suggestion of the commissioners, I visited the monastery of Santa Chiara. The nuns gave their agreement the following year and in 2015, I started the project with the community of Poor Clares and made a multi-media installation for the exhibition *Listen to the Sirens*, in Gibraltar 2015.

The two Orders have very different spiritual characters stemming from the personalities of their founders and their spiritual objectives forged at different moments of church history. This gave a framing and influenced how they are represented and how I realised the two projects *Jennifer* (2015) and *Sorelle Povere di Santa Chiara* (2016).

The Discalced Carmelites were reformed in the 16<sup>th</sup> century during the Counter Reformation. The Order has a rich literary heritage through their famous and prolific founder St Teresa of Avila, whereas the founder of the Poor Clares, St Clare of Assisi only left seven letters. The Poor Clares and the Discalced Carmelites, place different emphases on the spirituality that they practice. The Order of Saint Clare or the Poor Clares as they are known (originally the Order of Poor Ladies) were followers of St. Francis (1182- 1226) and of the Franciscans in the new monastic revival movements of the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> century Italy, discussed through Agamben’s study in section 4. Clare runs away from her family to join the Franciscan enclosed order for women, The Order of Poor Ladies and is protected by Francis from her family. Clare establishes The Order of Poor Sisters and Francis gives them the ‘form of living’ “that the sisters have chosen to ‘live according to the perfection of the holy

Gospel.”<sup>137</sup> It is a simple promise to live in “loving care.” “Clare thus calls ‘form of life’ not a code of norms but something that seems to correspond to what Francis calls ‘life’ ‘rule and life.’”<sup>138</sup> This notion of following is stated “even more forcefully, in the so-called ‘last will’ of St. Clare: ‘I (...) wish to follow the life and poverty of our most high Lord Jesus Christ.’”<sup>139</sup> The Poor Clares were the second order to be established by Claire and Francis in 1212. The contemporary Order follow the Rule of St Clare, which was approved by Innocent IV on the day before Clare’s death in 1253.

We know the Francis story most vividly through the early Renaissance fresco cycle in the church of San Francesco at Assisi (1297-1300) ascribed to Giotto de Bondone (1266-1337) which tells the narrative of Francis’ rejection of wealth. Fresco 7 depicts The Confirmation of the Rule and in No 23 St Francis is mourned by St. Clare, which shows the bond between the two founders. The frescos depict the emergence of “The advent of ‘histories of subject’ or ‘biographies’ and the principle of narrative ‘into Christian ideology and art.’”<sup>140</sup> *Sorelle Povere* is framed by the Franciscan spiritual ethos of simplicity based on the founding principle of the Gospel and on how proto narrative representations of the Life of St. Francis in early Renaissance paintings are also framed in terms of pictorial innocence from modern art historical perspectives. This association was interpreted cinematically in Roberto Rosellini’s *St. Francis Francesco giullare di dio* (1950) which was inspired by the motif of pictorial simplicity of the frescos. The film was originally opened by a short documentary prologue featuring Giotto’s Franciscan frescos in acknowledgement of the Franciscan spiritual aims pictorialized by the art direction of the film.<sup>141</sup>

The Discalced Carmelites were founded 350 years later in 1562 at the height of the Catholic Counter-Reformation by a powerfully intellectual and prolific reformer who was also a mystic and writer. Teresa presented herself as an ignorant woman, but she herself mentors the younger friar, poet and mystic St. John of the Cross (1542-1591). I was interested in the art historical framing of these two spiritual movements as a way of understanding how pictorial and sculptural

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<sup>137</sup> Agamben, *The Highest Poverty*, 2013. P.102

<sup>138</sup> Ibid. P.102

<sup>139</sup> Ibid. P.99

<sup>140</sup> Julia Kristeva et al., *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1981). P211

<sup>141</sup> The Masters of Cinema series DVD includes an extra of the prologue

representations can frame the representation of spirituality. The Baroque is the art of the Catholic Counter-reformation and for “*Now I am yours*” (1992), I filmed Gian Lorenzo Bernini’s statue *The Ecstasy of St. Teresa* (1652) in Rome. The folds and flowing shapes of the Baroque interpreted and represented the passionate, militant fervor of the religious and ecstatic fight-back of the Counter-Reformation.

Both Orders are contemplative (cloistered) but their approach to prayer is based on these different foundations. St. Teresa taught and developed an approach to prayer which is passionate, intimate and based on conversation and on different stages of contemplation leading to ‘union’. This mystical approach is elaborated in the *Interior Castle* (1577) and other writings. The quotes in the inter titles to the documentary *Jennifer* (2015) however, are from *The Way of Perfection* (1567) which was written in a more sober, vernacular style as a practical, spiritual guide and manual for her nuns not just on prayer but on how to live a communitarian life.

Clare leaves a much simpler and sparser written legacy and a biography, which is read as contingent to Francis’ life. The monasteries of the Franciscan Friars and the *Sorelle Povere* in San Marino are side by side and the nuns in the interviews refer to both St. Francis and St. Clare interchangeably as their spiritual guides. Clare is not so easily rehabilitated from a feminist perspective as Julia Kristeva has done by mining the work of the towering figure of St. Teresa culminating in her novel *Thérèse mon Amour*, (2008). In contrast to the Spanish Carmelite, Teresa de Cepeda y Ahumada, about whom there is a vast scholarship, Clare’s literary and written legacy is impoverished – she leaves only a handful of letters. One of these was addressed to Agnes of Bohemia (1211-1282) and is quoted in the opening title in the 16mm film *Sorelle Povere* – chosen by the nuns of San Marino themselves; “*O holy poverty! Those who love and embrace you will procure eternal riches.*” Since 1953, her 800th Centenary, there has been an emerging body of recognition of her own stature and contribution to the Franciscan ideal.<sup>142</sup> My approach to filming with the Poor Clares, therefore, was inspired by their particular charism and Clare’s legacy, which is to follow in peaceful joy, quietude and simplicity but which is an equally ‘sublime task’ and endeavour to the passionate energy of Teresa’s Carmelite spirituality.

<sup>142</sup> For example, “A Medieval Woman’s Utopian Vision” – The Rule of St. Clare of Assisi” Elisabeth Petrof, *Feminism, Utopia and Narrative*, ed., Libby Falk Jones and Sarah Webster Goodwin, Tennessee Studies in Literature Vol 32 (1990).

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