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Figure 1 *Portrait d'une jeune fille* production photograph. Collections Cinematek / Chantal Akerman Foundation © Jean-Michel Vlaeminckx / Cinergie

Figure 2 *Portrait d'une jeune fille* production photograph. Collections Cinematek / Chantal Akerman Foundation © Jean-Michel Vlaeminckx / Cinergie

Chantal Akerman and the *cinéfille*

Abstract

One of Akerman's lesser-known films, *Portrait d'une jeune fille de la fin des années 60 à Bruxelles* (*Portrait of a young girl in the late sixties in Brussels,* Belgium, 1993) provides a critical lens for discovering the *cinéfille* as a concept for Akerman's cinema and feminist film theory. *Cinéfille* is both conceptually similar and different from its near homophone, *cinéphile* and aligns the moving image (*ciné*) with the girl (*fille*). The article develops the concept in relation to three areas: the possibility of a cine-love before and beyond the masculine frame of cinephilia; Akerman's complex relation to her own cinematic becoming and cinema's historiography; and the distinct temporality and duration of cinema produced by and for the figure of the girl. The article demonstrates that in Akerman's filmmaking, the figure of girl as *cinéfille* is not a position of resistance, nor a scene of perpetual adolescence, but a positive queer feminist creative engagement with the possibility of new forms of knowing, relating and desiring. Attending to the emergence of the *cinéfille* and *cinefillia* allows us to articulate a sense of looking back that is not simply tied to nostalgia and loss. It also reveals a moment of creative discovery and intensity that emerges in the durational aesthetic form for which Akerman's cinema is well known. The *cinéfille* is a form of becoming realized in cinema.

A teenage girl's face is framed in a close-up in which the only other thing visible is the plush red velvet of her cinema seat. The light of the screen dances gently across her face. Strings and percussion clamor, sounds that we understand emanate from the soundtrack of the movie the girl is watching. Michèle (Circé Lethem) is taking in a matinée. She has skipped school for the day, but returns to the school gates at breaktimes to meet her best friend Danielle (Joëlle Marlier). Soon the close-up slides down from Michèle's face to her knee, where a trousered leg rubs against her. The shot then travels back to her face to take in her reaction. Unperturbed, she turns away from the screen to address the young man seated next to her. The soundtrack of the movie they are watching quiets and Michèle tells him he can kiss her if he wants. A short negotiation follows, after which they kiss.

This scene occurs almost ten minutes into the hour-long film, *Portrait d'une jeune fille de la fin des années 60 à Bruxelles* (*Portait of a young girl in the late sixties in Brussels,* Belgium, 1993) and is important not only for introducing Paul (Julien Rassam), a young army deserter with whom Michèle will walk and talk throughout the day, but also for its location. As this article explores, the cinema setting creates a connection to Akerman's narration of her discovery, as a girl growing up in the late sixties in Brussels, of cinema's expressive potential. Soon after we learn Michèle only kissed Paul in order tell Danielle about it later.

Cinéfille is a neologism aligning the girl/daughter (*fille*) and the moving image (*cine*) in relation to its near homophone: *cinephile*. In this article the concept is defined and used to address three areas: first, the possibility of a cine-love before and beyond the masculine frame of cinephilia; second, the relation between Belgian filmmaker Chantal Akerman's (1950-2015) own personal history, her formation as a filmmaker, and the writing of cinema history; third, a sense of temporality elicited by the figure of the girl. When Michèle takes in the matinée in *Portrait d'une jeune fille,* we encounter parts of the *cinéfille.*

My use of the term *cinéfille* was inspired by its appearance in French film scholar and curator Nicole Brenez's contribution to a special issue on Akerman's films appearing in *Senses of Cinema* in 2015.[1] The use of the term is both a nod to the prominence of the figure of girl in the films under discussion and an evocation of, as Mary Harrod puts it, the "wanton 'upstart' impertinence" of the women directors whom she calls *cinéfilles*.[2] The term has been used sporadically in feminist criticism, mainly to identify how gender makes a difference in accounting for the keen knowledge and intense engagements women filmmakers and women film critics have with cinema.[3] Here an in-depth investigation of the *cinéfille* invites a questioning of love, history, cinema, and the girl in the filmmaking of Chantal Akerman. One of Akerman's lesser-known films, *Portrait d'une jeune fille de la fin des années 60 à Bruxelles* provides a critical lens for discovering and understanding the *cinéfille* within Akerman's cinema and beyond.[4]

La jeune fille

From her first film *Saute ma ville* (*Blow up my town,* Belgium, 1968), Akerman has put young women on screen. In *Saute ma ville* a girl-figure played by Chantal Akerman (just eighteen) is engaged in various domestic activities such as cooking, cleaning, washing the floor and, strangely, shining her legs with shoe polish. The location is not a girl's bedroom but the kitchen—a room that will become a recurring space in this oeuvre and which is commonly associated not with girlhood but with the mother. Alongside the erratic activities we hear a girl's voice humming and vocalizing with increasing vigor on the audio track. At the end, the girl turns on the gas on the oven, rests her head on the top and lights a flame. The image becomes still for several seconds, then with an explosion, a cut to black. More sounds of explosions and the title, "blow up my town," comes true, off-screen. Yet, the voice of the

girl emerges once again as the credits play, ecstatically singing to herself after the image has been extinguished.

Six years later, Akerman played another young woman, identified in the credits as Julie, in *Je, tu, il, elle* (*I, you, he, she*, Belgium, 1974). Akerman's characteristic long duration shots and minimalist formal style structure the journey of Julie in three parts, from solitary moments at home, on a road trip meeting a truck driver, finally in bed with a former girlfriend. In the short film *J'ai faim, j'ai froid* (*I'm hungry, I'm cold,* France, 1984), one of Akerman's comedies, the escapades of two teenage girls in the city are framed by their attachment to one another as much as their constant hunger and cold. Michèle is the girl who leads *Portrait d'une jeune fille,* a film commissioned for television about *une jeune fille* exploring the boundaries of desire and freedom on the streets of Brussels—the filmmaker's home city.[5] We can also include *La folie Almayer* (*Almayer's folly*, Belgium/France, 2011), Akerman's re-imagining of Joseph Conrad's novel from 1895 of the same name, which focusses on a girl named Nina's complicated relationship with her father, Almayer.

Girl-characters, whether on journeys or in love, are figures to which Akerman's cinema often returns. Akerman's filmmaking career literally begins by blowing one up in *Saute ma ville*. Significantly, the figure of the mother, so central in other films by Akerman, is largely absent in these works, Zahira Almayer (Sakhna Oum) being the exception. The girls in these films are often poised at a moment just preceding political and cultural upheaval (*Portrait d'une jeune fille* and *La folie Almayer*) and they are figures who exercise new personal freedoms that tend to "speak back" to absent mothers.[6]

In a 2010 interview with Akerman, Brenez asks the filmmaker about the appearance of *la fille*:

NB: You always talk about yourself in terms of a fille, girl, daughter; one of your self-portraits is titled *Portrait of a Young Girl in Brussels at the End of the '60s*, and the main female character in *Almayer's Folly* is named Nina, petite fille or little girl. Fille signifies youth but most of all a filiation, a heritage. For you does fille mean not to be a femme, a woman?

CA: Possibly. Probably. I don't know. I never grew up. I was always an overgrown child. Almayer is a father who has a dream for his daughter and maybe for himself in regard to her. I never followed my father's dream, to have a family. I stayed a girl, the daughter of my mother. In the end, I don't know. My sister, yes: she started a family in Mexico. She has two beautiful, intelligent children. My niece is getting married soon and the line will continue. Sometimes I regret not having kids. Maybe I would have gone from a daughter to a woman—but whether that was possible for me, I don't know. Probably not.

NB: So you determined to remain the girl.

CA: I wouldn't say determined. But it's what happened.[7]

In the exchange there is an implicit assumption made about the positions women occupy in the patriarchal social order. Brenez draws out what *la fille* or girl/daughter (the French does not distinguish between these terms) can mean, deemphasizing the girl as a temporal stage and focusing instead on the other aspect of *la fille*: a filiation and a relation to the family. There is also a sense that change comes when a woman is placed in relation to a new generation, "has kids," and comes to share a position with the mother as mother herself. If

one stays outside this move to wife and mother, you may remain *la fille,* or *la vielle fille,* meaning old maid or spinster in French. Maintaining a filiation or not, having kids or not, is both a reality and (only) a metaphor for a bigger question of being, remaining, in the *fille* position or not. To an extent, Akerman's niece is also her *fille,* continuing the "line", in a wider definition of filiation.

Chantal Akerman did not follow her father's dream in more ways than by not having children; indeed, this non-compliance is also a metaphor for a deeper break. The notion of not following the father's dream is described as remaining "the daughter of my mother," which is contrasted with the social structure of the girl/daughter becoming or replacing her mother (becoming woman). This underlines that filiation is not a question of age but of position within this linguistically defined exchange system. Brenez asks her: "does *fille* mean not to be a *femme*?" In response Akerman says: "I don't know." This exchange echoes Monique Wittig writing on the lesbian position in "The Straight Mind":

> What is woman? Panic, general alarm for an active defense. Frankly, it is a problem that the lesbians do not have because of a change of perspective, and it would be incorrect to say that lesbians associate, make love, live with women, for "woman" has meaning only in heterosexual systems of thought and heterosexual economic systems. Lesbians are not women.[8]

Wittig's certainty about what lesbians under heterocentric systems are *not* resonates with Akerman's ambivalent answer to what *la fille* is. Both suggest that to stay outside given terms produces a position, a grown woman, a creative adult, who, in a critical and queer way, is linguistically unnamed as woman.

What does it mean to remain the girl/daughter, for *la fille* to persist? Simone de Beauvoir's existential-phenomenological investigation of the girl in the chapter *la jeune fille* in *The Second Sex,* offers a perspective on this question. Beauvoir understands the moment of girlhood as an existential situation, a unique dimension of formation, and as a phenomenological constant, whose ontological effects, while arising at a certain moment,

exist way past girlhood.[9] Beauvoir also describes femininity as a vocation that calls upon the girl, providing a sense of lifelong dedication. Thus girlhood is not a rite of passage but, due to the structures that implicate the girl in her own division and alienation, a constant fissure and a double bind of conflict and existential ambiguity.[10] Thinking Beauvoir's *la jeune fille* as we explore the concept of the *cinéfille* unlocks a structural and temporally persistent sense of the girl alongside an articulation of cine-love, to which we will turn later in the article.

Hesitation following straight lines of lineage and temporalization underscores Akerman's *la jeune fille*. British film scholar Jenny Chamarette has named this effect in Akerman's work "queer agelessness."[11] "*Agelessness*," she says, as "a suspension of life and death, refuses the indexical links between ageing, vivacity, and mortality. And that suspension is closely linked to a space of intimacy and displacement in Akerman's work."[12] For Chamarette, daughterhood is aligned with agelessness in the sense that one does not grow out of it. Deferral and interruption, elicited by the suspension of life and death, constitute a resistant force towards straightforward temporalization or the urge to position daughterhood in a fixed or specific form. Chamarette continues: "Each young female figure in her films is childless, wandering, often connected but even more often displaced."[13]

Although not addressing *Portrait d'une jeune fille* directly, this passage describes the lead character in the film: Michèle, a fifteen-year-old girl who rebels against the confines of school and family in search of freedom on the streets of Brussels. *Portrait d'une jeune fille* is set twenty-five years before its production, in April 1968, a setting that film theorist Patricia White has described as maintaining a "position of not quite, not yet", it being "not quite" Paris and "not yet" May '68.[14] "Not quite" and "not yet" also, she notes, evoke aspects attributed to the generic subject of the title: "*une jeune fille"*.

Across a day and a night, Michèle skips school to explore the city, where she meets Paul, the young army deserter from Paris. Together they walk the city, kissing occasionally

but mostly talking, discussing everything from family and politics to philosophy. Towards the end of the film, Michèle has sex for the first time with Paul, travelling afterwards to a party with her best friend, Danielle.

Portrait d'une jeune fille is a film about a girl in Brussels. It is not, however, simply a story of Chantal Akerman's girlhood or a thematization of adolescence. Michèle both is and is not Akerman, for as Marion Schmid suggests: "In Akerman's work 'je' is resolutely 'une autre', even if her oeuvre accumulates references to her family and her personal life."[15] The film deals with love and loss and the intertwining of intimate events in the effort of self-discovery (however fraught). Michèle, our *jeune fille* who journeys and searches but ultimately goes nowhere much, is an ageless girl in this sense. What is more, she has relinquished the social role of daughterhood, casting herself adrift, departing in the first few minutes of the film from her home uttering the words "*au revoir Papa*" and killing him off when she writes her absence note for school: "*il est mort.*" The mother, as already mentioned, does not feature in any significant way.

The title sequence of *Portrait d'une jeune fille* informs us that the film is set in April 1968, yet the mise-en-scène is anachronistic. As Michèle visits a record store filled with compact discs, prevalent in 1990s Brussels of the film's production but not in its 1968 setting, the film is imbued with a sense of being out of time, or between times, and in this way the film refuses to "look back" in a straightforward manner, becoming a loose evocation of a moment open to different temporalities. While Michèle and army deserter Paul's relationship takes up most of the narrative time, throughout the film Michèle's interaction with Paul is qualified by her time with school friend Danielle. Despite quitting school, Michèle structures her day around Danielle's school routine. The two meet at lunch, after school, and later in the evening to travel to a party together. Michèle relishes any time spent with Danielle, and it is her unspoken yet evident desire for Danielle that forms the palpable

undercurrent of the film. Yet *Portrait d'une jeune fille* ends, not with an expression of her desire, but with Michèle leading Danielle, after the party in the early hours of the morning, to meet Paul. The final moments of the film depict Michèle, a lone figure against the blue light of morning, retracing her steps through the empty field from which she and Danielle had come moments before.

A Portrait of a Young Girl

In *Portrait d'une jeune fille* one scene crystallized the concept of the *cinéfille* for me. The scene opens with a group of young people dancing in a circle, in the center of which different couples move to dance. When Michèle and Danielle arrive together, the party is lively and full of movement and music. Amid the jubilation of the party *mise-en-scène*, the camera holds specific positions and traces movements that lay preparations for, and begin to stage, the devastating separation of Michèle and Danielle at the end of the film.

At the scene's opening, the camera is positioned inside the circle, so that the central couple drift in and out of shot while the others slide across the mid-space of the background. In the center of the circle, a tall young man with brown hair chooses Danielle as his partner, and she enters the frame as he spins her into the center of the group. Instead of tracking Danielle and her new dance partner, the camera holds its position, eventually finding Michèle, linked by her arms in the group circling around Danielle and the young man. Remaining fixed on Michèle, the camera tracks as she moves as part of the outer circle. Here, a medium close-up invites us to consider not the action in the room, but Michèle's expression. Without the eye-line match we might expect, the shot gives time to register Michèle's expression, first stoic and then more open. The frontal shot, which moves with her, establishes a connection to what she is looking at without actually showing it. The indirect

form of "showing" and the lack of editing creates an enigma. The formal pattern established in this moment is repeated later in the film.

Michèle, of course, cannot help but look at the scene before her, of Danielle dancing with the young man. During this time, she smiles occasionally when, we infer, she makes eye contact with Danielle. Danielle and the young man appear briefly in the frame, then disappear as the circle keeps turning. The next time Michèle smiles, we immediately find out why; Danielle has chosen her to dance in the center. The friends meet with delight, their eyes locked on one another. When Danielle returns to the circle, the camera cuts to a reverse-shot, a close-up of Michèle's face looking out at the people in the circle as they move around her. She assesses the scene, taking time to choose, slowly turning three-hundred and sixty degrees before us. As she comes to face the camera once more, her expression changes from concern to a smile: she has chosen Danielle. Danielle's expression displays concerned bewilderment at first, since this is not the way the game goes, but she soon relaxes back into the dance as the camera loosely circles their movements. It is as if the camera and Michèle's intense gaze have willed Danielle back into her orbit. They continue to dance together until the end of the song, Trini Lopez's *La Bamba* (1963). The song ends and the next one begins.

In the pause between songs, the circle of young people disperses. The next song is slower and heavier than the previous upbeat dance tune. The opening refrain plays, and couples pair off in the background to slow dance while the young man from earlier sweeps into frame and takes Danielle into an embrace. As the strings of the song's introduction sound, Danielle and her partner whirl out of frame, spinning like before but now holding each other with renewed intimacy. Behind them, as before, the camera seeks out Michèle. The scenario seems to repeat itself, except Michèle does not have the chance to choose Danielle again. Her expression is inscrutable at first glance. A slow-moving track-in to frame Michèle's face finds its final position at the same moment as the first lyric of the song— *It's*

a Man's Man's World performed by James Brown (Betty Jean Newsome and James Brown, 1966)—declares itself as part of the simmering groove.

The melodramatic tone, the change of mood, and separation from the group are all intensified by the poignant first lyric of the song, which speaks profoundly to Michèle's situation. We become suspended in the close-up, attempting to reconcile the different dimensions of the scene. As the camera holds its position framing Michèle, we share in a sense of what is unfolding. There are couples, each a boy and a girl dancing close together, registering what her separation from this world really means. The lyrics of Brown's song imbue the scene with heavy pathos, as Michèle gazes steadily at what, positioned out of frame and behind the camera, would likely be Danielle dancing with the boy. As Michèle holds her gaze outwards, the camera lingers on her face in three-quarter profile. The refrain goes: "This is a man's world, this is a man's world / But it wouldn't be nothing, nothing without a woman or a girl." In these lyrics sung by Brown we feel the weight of the scene pressing on Michèle. The close-up is held for more than a minute without camera or figure movement. The shot extends long past a conventional reaction shot, allowing us to register Michèle's expression and building our own imagined picture of the scene that we do not see. It is a powerful performative cinematic effect that forces us to participate as/like Michèle: a feeling of being stuck, frozen, forced to see but not participate, tightly framed or hemmed-in with no possible escape (from heteronormative phallocratic patriarchy), both seeing and unseen. This close-up in *Portrait d'une jeune fille* calls for attentiveness and makes us linger on the face, while never bringing us so close that we cannot "see" the character before us. The close-up evokes a transformation in emotional register, yet an aspect remains inexplicable and remote. The shot remains remote in the sense that the rest of the scene, or more specifically the action of the scene, is obscured and pushed back. Michèle's face is all we are given to "read".

This is the scene where we glimpse the articulation of the *cinéfille* in the character of Michèle. For Patricia White, the long duration close-up holds us at a distance and yet still "speaks" to the viewer: "For me these shots are not primarily about identification with the protagonists' subjectivity or interiority; they keep us at a distance even as they address us."[16] The close-up does not reveal so much about Michèle as an individual, yet in this moment, which exceeds notions of interiority but is tied deeply to affect, a shift happens that releases her from her final tie to school, family and Brussels—namely Danielle. Critic Amy Taubin, also writing about this close-up, comments: "we are watching Chantal Akerman at the moment she discovers her vocation as a filmmaker."[17] Taubin understands that in the pathos of this moment of Michèle's profound aloneness and social exclusion we also find the kernel of her "vocation", not in femininity as analyzed in relation to the girl's situation by Simone de Beauvoir, but in an as yet unnamed position and in the vocation of a filmmaker.[18]

Held within or underneath the reserved surface action of the close-up is a layering of processes: alienation, realization and discovery. With *Portrait d'une jeune fille* as her subject, Patricia White theorizes a mode she calls, in a queer feminist appropriation of Deleuze and Guattari, Lesbian Minor Cinema.[19] *Portrait d'une jeune fille* underscores the different facets of what comprises a minor cinema: the literal minor (child) subject, the minor (hour-long televisual) form, the classic Akerman focus on seemingly minor or insignificant moments, and the minoritized status of the desire (queer, lesbian) explored. In its Deleuze and Guattarian modality, however, minor cinema is also distinctly about the creative act of becoming. Importantly, then, *Portrait d'une jeune fille* is a pronouncement on, as White writes, "how a young girl at the end of the 1960s in Brussels came to make 'Chantal Akerman's films' and to establish through them a unique and renewable relation with a 'public' itself still in the making".[20]

For film theorist Maureen Turim, the film "poses a fascinating return to adolescent sexuality and friendship as a fully philosophical enquiry" combining "highly personal revelation with an artistic self-consciousness."[21] Adolescence is conceived as a rewriting of the self through what she calls a "personal pronouncement" on screen: focal points for elaborating aspects of subjectivity and self-representation that "conjoins autobiography and enunciation to point towards a revelation of the intimate".[22] In the psychoanalytic framework used by Turim, this suggests the play of unconscious motivations, motivations and processes the film both does not recognize and, conversely, knows all too well.[23]

> The goal for the long term seems to be avoiding fulfilling a traditional analyst's sense of who one is, in order to challenge the theory to accommodate the shifting politics of newly possible identities, one that can only emerge as a culture becomes ready to let them be and develop, rather than suppressing them or turning them into the already known.[24]

Portrait d'une jeune fille (and *Je tu il elle*, also discussed by Turim) maintain a space between the authorial voice and characters' expressions of desire where the rumblings of the unconscious are not forgotten. The weight of desire and alienation in these "personal pronouncements" are fully felt in the film's pared back form, as in the long duration close-up and also the silent scene at the end of the film, where Danielle leaves Michèle to meet Paul out of shot.

My use of the concept of the *cinéfille* is in dialogue with White's non-representational and gendered sense of becoming through the lesbian position in "Lesbian Minor Cinema." It also draws on Turim's concept of "personal pronouncements", allowing us to think about the specificity of a pronouncement through feminine modalities of becoming and propose that it is only in cinema that the potential of this position can be discovered and, as it were, performed. The use of feminine here attends to the forms of becoming highlighted by the

cinéfille, following Beauvoir's understanding of a feminine (in distinction to masculine) formation of the subject and a form of being/becoming not simply bound to any teleology of "becoming woman." From this reading of *Portrait d'une jeune fille,* I now turn to debates on cinephilia to develop the concept of the *cinéfille* in more detail.

Cinephilia

The term *cinéfille* is both conceptually similar to and different from its near homophone, *cinéphile*: a noun and adjective that can describe a lover of cinema and a state of enchantment or seduction in front of film. The term suggests not only a love of cinema but also a love of watching films to find out what cinema is. For Girish Shambu, reading, thinking, talking, curating and writing—namely the discourse and dialogues around cinema—are also important for cinephilia.[25] The labor of cinephilic love does not just happen in the cinema.

In her polemic and classic essay, "The Decay of Cinema," first published in *The New York Times* in 1996, Susan Sontag suggests that the "decay" of cinema is intimately connected to the end of cinephilia, a condition she laments for movie-goers in New York. Cinephilia, for Sontag, constituted the whole culture around movie-going that was created by and from a distinctive kind of love stirred in response to watching films. Troubled by its decline, she attributes the loss of a special kind of desire for cinema to the degradation of material forms of production and dissemination; the shift toward profit; shorter lengths for cinema release and video itself, all increasing from the late 1970s onwards.

For Sontag, cinephilia, and indeed cinema, hinged upon the fleeting moment of pleasure and awe while watching a film so that, "all of cinema is an attempt to perpetuate and to reinvent that sense of wonder."[26] Wonder invites a desire to know (about cinema), and a feeling of amazement or admiration rooted in the pleasure of images. The space of reflection that carried cinema has been lost. The ubiquity of images, the lack of concern for their

presentation and the dissolution of the cinema-house as the site of film-watching all contribute to her account of cinema's inability to inspire the kind of love named as cinephilia. The way people watched films irrevocably changed.

Sontag's position maintains that what makes cinema "alive" is the spectator, who is more important to her than directors, actors or even the film itself.

> If cinephilia is dead, then movies are dead too...no matter how many movies, even very good ones, go on being made. If cinema can be resurrected, it will only be through the birth of a new kind of cine-love.[27]

Despite her focus on the decline or death of cinema, the hope (however small) for a new kind of cine-love slips into Sontag's argument in the last possible moment. Through her pessimism she calls for a new kind of cine-love.

Thomas Elsaesser, writing a decade later, comprehends a new relationship to cinema. He theorizes two generations of cinephiles, the cinephile of the first generation is fundamentally anxious, caught in the search for a unique time and place, such as the first release or single retrospective screening. This is a search for that which has already passed, making the cinephile doomed to repeat the search for plenitude. The second generation of cinephiles has a relationship to cinema that is not predicated upon the uniqueness of the fleeting cinematic moment in the revered hall of the cinema. This new type of love is characterized as cult fandom, where individuals, feeding on the nostalgia of cinephilia, are interested in collecting objects of cinema that arise with new technologies, such as the DVD or download. The second generation cinephile's "happy perversion", as Elsaesser puts it, is the archivist or collector of cinema in its diverse forms.[28]

As recent contributions to debates on cinephilia show, both Sontag and Elsaesser's conceptualizations of cine-love may be too tightly bound to certain views of what counts as

loving cinema and the place of desire and pleasure in filmmaking. As Shambu's *New Cinephilia* highlights, Sontag's initial lament fixes a specific type of cinema and accordant viewing ritual as universal, when in fact there are many cinemas and many cinephilias. His writing is an ardent call for the theorization of new kinds of cinemas and forms of cine-love. Sarah Keller's work on early cinema's cinephilic inclinations and cinephilia after and beyond post-war French cinema also refutes a singular model of cine-love.[29] Keller understands anxiety to be the affective power that drives cinephilia, produced through intense cinematic encounters and ephemeral qualities of cinema as something hard to possess. She positions filmmaking as an intimately cinephilic practice that cannot only be derived from the *Cahiers du cinéma* auteurs.[30] Both Shambu and Keller imagine a rich landscape of cinephilic affect and labor, beyond and before the singular perspective mourned by Sontag and the two-generation structure theorized by Elsaesser.[31]

While we hear the call to acknowledge many types of cinephilia, what do these differences look like? Elsaesser himself pointed to developments in film theory in the 1970s and 1980s and the journal *Screen* in particular, which deconstructed cinema and cinephilia: "the love of cinema was now called by a different name: voyeurism, fetishism and scopophilia."[32] Following Laura Mulvey's essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" published in *Screen* in 1975, Elsaesser suggests that feminist film theory, in problematizing the question of pleasure and desire in cinema, unveiled cinephilia as a specifically masculine position. While there is a slippage between the psychoanalytic notion of a projected spectatorial position that becomes masculinized in phallocentric culture, as theorized by Mulvey, and unique spectators as affected, dialogic and laboring lovers of cinema, the specific type of heterosexual masculine position built into the system of cinema is still important. Following Mulvey's call for the strategic eradication of this system of cinematic pleasure, feminist film, Elsaesser suggests, remains caught in a provocative bind in terms of

pleasure and cinema. He does not, however, offer comment on any possible reformulation of the notion of the cinephile in relation to feminist interventions into film and film theory.[33] The question of a "new language of desire" for a feminist form of cinephilia remains open.

Akerman's cinema, in which I include her television films and gallery installations, is generative of a different cinephilic impulse. There is something—perhaps wonder, or at least a feeling close to it— being pursued in the interaction between form and autobiographical dimensions in her films by Akerman that resonates with my own viewing experience. I would not characterize my avid viewership of Akerman films as first or second generation cinephilia, described in Elsaesser's terms of anxious nostalgia or as cult-fandom that desires to know and see all. Is there a cinema that solicits a kind of cine-love (self-conscious or not) that is not just anxious? Is it possible to conceive of a love of cinema in terms of looking back without feeling loss but one of connection or discovery? Can a form of cinema solicit a love that is not about recuperating the past, but sustains a relationship to temporality and generation that is altogether different?

If in his study *Cinephilia and History*, Christian Keathley characterizes cinephilia as a kind of looking that takes in what goes past in a panoramic fashion by an enthusiast for cinema who wants to know more and see all, the *cinéfille* names another dimension of looking besides the desire and ability to "see all."[34] In the case of *Portrait d'une jeune fille* we can characterize this form of looking, produced not for identification, nostalgia or possession, as reserving space for a language of desire in formation through duration.

Moving images and the forms of looking they invite are also connected to the histories of cinema and memory. Catherine Fowler addresses the act of "looking back" in gallery film from the 1990s, including Akerman's work. Her article opens by discussing Akerman's contribution to the forty-ninth Venice Biennial held in 2001. The artwork, *Woman Sitting after Killing,* is a seven-monitor installation that "replays" the ending of *Jeanne*

Dielman, 23 quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles (Chantal Akerman, 1975). Fowler draws on this example of Akerman revisiting her own (cinematic) past and the film's reworking for the gallery space to set up her central argument concerning the reuse of cinema's past by artists.[35] Artist films that reuse cinema's past challenge traditional modes of looking back at cinema constituted by nostalgia, hostility or loss. Artworks discussed, such as *L'Ellipse* (Pierre Huyghe, 1998) and *Zoo* (Salla Tykkä, 2006), advance instead "a fundamental re-enchantment with cinema's past; consequently, the purpose of the look back is to remind us of the ways in which cinema has taken and continues to take hold of us."[36] Fowler contrasts the dominant model of retrospection with a different backward gaze that is instead involved in introspection and circumspection. What it means to "look back" at the moving images of cinema's past shifts when the activity of memory during the viewing experience is considered. Watching a film, Fowler emphasizes, always involves memory in a non-linear manner. Cinema's past is always in conversation with our subjective memory processes.

> Those gallery films that re-enact and remake take images and imagery, spin out scripts and production contexts, expand on a blink-of-an-eye moment, and remind us of how we felt, what we thought, and what we want from a visit to the cinema. Consequently, the notion of cinema's past is extended from the "there" to include the "elsewhere" of the viewing process.[37]

The artworks she analyzes reinsert the subjective "mnemonic acts" that film and film studies have elided. This provides the shift from the "there" of cinema history, to the "elsewhere" of the viewing process, reinvigorating the past with personal resonance and new or different meaning. For Fowler, the emphasis on memory in cinema does not always mean loss and nostalgia: "In place of loss we find a sense of being captured and held once more."[38] The concept of *cinéfille* is connected to the introspective gesture of being held by images that lead us back to ourselves—to "elsewhere." In the case of Akerman's work, as Fowler's opening

comments demonstrate, this is not "elsewhere" from cinema history but fundamentally constitutive of it. In *Portrait d'une jeune fille* the minimal form, reservedness and duration may hold the viewer in this way. Images that do not look back in a straightforward way, but which lead "elsewhere" are central to *Portrait d'une jeune fille*. If, following Taubin and White, the close-up in *Portrait d'une jeune fille* holds the kernel of Akerman's realization of her vocation as filmmaker, then Akerman's look back to a moment of her own history produces a reading of cinema's past as distinctly *cinéfille-ic.*

Cinéfille

Even as Shambu and Keller ask us to rethink the totalizing centrality of the post-war French moment within cinephilic discourses, for *Portrait d'une jeune fille* this moment is crucial. The fact that the particular form of *Cahiers du Cinéma* cinephilia gained huge purchase on the European cultural imaginary and beyond is not insignificant for the *cinéfille* or for Akerman as a filmmaker. It is a well-known and well-rehearsed anecdote that in 1965 fifteen-year-old Chantal Akerman decided to become a filmmaker, having (not unlike Michèle) snuck underage into a screening of *Pierrot le fou* (Jean-Luc Godard, 1965). She says:

> We were just going to the movies to kiss and eat ice cream and eventually look at the movie. But I didn't care. I was much more interested in literature; I wanted to be a writer. Then I saw Godard's film, *Pierrot Le Fou*, and I had the feeling it was art, and that you could express yourself. It was in 1965, and you felt that the times were changing. He was really representing that, and freedom and poetry and another type of love and everything. So as a little girl, I went out of that place, the cinema, and I said, "I want to make films. That's it."[39]

Her comments draw attention to the overlapping of several important aspects. First, the historically "adolescent" moment in Western society in the 1960s, a time of sweeping cultural

change and sense of future possibility; second, the actual adolescent age of Akerman and then Michèle and Danielle; and third, a kind of coming of age of this art form, cinema, at the same time, imbued with freedom and new types of love as embodied by the French New Wave. This is, therefore, not just one example among others. Akerman's narration of her life and vocation as a filmmaker happens through this key moment of European cinema history bringing her biography and cinema history into close relation. *Cinéfille,* insofar as it draws on the love of cinema we get from cinephilia, fits neatly with fifteen-year-old Akerman's new-found interest in Godardian film. *Pierrot le fou* showed Akerman something of what cinema could be as a form of artistic expression, as a work of art that tells stories and makes you feel something. Discovering the promise of freedom in cinema as a girl, so much that it inspired her own filmmaking career, inaugurated her as *cinéfille* and cineaste.

The quality of the reality effect projected by Akerman's anecdote is important. In her writing on anxious cinephilia, Sarah Keller describes a connection between adolescence and cinephilia, noting that the difficulty of holding onto cinematic experience can be likened to the experience of adolescence, they are both fleeting. But in Akerman's account, the pleasures are not fleeting but a moment of discovery. There is a weight to this youthful moment that persists beyond the chronological moment. So much so that Akerman makes *Portrait d'une jeune fille* as a tender enquiry into this subjective experience that is also a historical moment. Michèle searches for freedom, for forms of creative expression and a life not only relegated to the social positions of daughter, wife, or mother. We are, as Taubin says, watching a moment of discovery, but it is only through its duration, staging the scene with a powerful performative affect in/as the face of Michéle, that the viewer and Michéle may be led elsewhere, through a revelation of situation and desire, becoming the *cinéfille*.

Saute Ma Ville

Although I have focused so far on *Portrait d'une jeune fille,* Akerman's anecdote prompts me to end with the beginning of her filmmaking career. Stories of love ignited in film, explorations of creative becoming, and modalities of freedom can be discerned in other films by Akerman through the concept of the *cinéfille*. In November 1968, the year in which *Portrait d'une jeune fille* is set, Akerman completed her first film *Saute Ma Ville* (1968), leaving Brussels Film School (INSAS) after only a few months.

The short film is an extraordinary eruption against domesticity and the family, despite being set in her parents' kitchen. Akerman has called *Saute ma ville* "my queerest movie" in its exuberant figuration of a girl who, in equal comic and tragic measure, fails properly to perform the duties of domesticity. The film does a lot of work to hold the energy and gestures of Akerman's performance as the girl failing at domesticity. Appearing in the kitchen, alone and with no concern for the proper method of food preparation, drinking, or cleaning, which would signify her readiness for the vocation of femininity, the exuberant, curious girl holds sway by resisting heteronormative and patriarchal conventions. Akerman has said:

> *Saute ma ville*, to me, is the opposite of *Jeanne Dielman*: the story of a girl who talks back to her mother, who explodes the norms that confine women to womanly tasks, who breaks everything in the kitchen and does everything in a crooked way—and yet, for all that, it is a love story: the film is dedicated to someone.[40]

The film opens with an apartment complex emerging in fog, then the title appears with the small subtitle "*pour Claire*" appearing on the bottom right: a dedication. Amid the dedication of love and exploding of conventional femininity we find the girl figure. She is not placed in a coming-of-age sequence, nor a coming-out story, but articulated in film within the expanded field of queerness, love and girlhood. When the girl blows up, the image turns to black. While Akerman's film career begins with the literal explosion of the girl, erupting in

Saute ma ville is the very possibility of the *cinéfille*—a story of love, creative formation, and new freedoms (of desire, creativity, and pleasure) in cinema.

Cinéfille is a concept developed to explore a relation between cinema and subjectivity that solicits forms of looking and cine-love that journey before and beyond a heterocentric, masculine framework. Used to name a feminist approach to thinking, making and loving cinema and cinema history, *cinéfillia* describes more than the type of viewer, character or filmmaker. *Cinéfillia* does not simply suggest who or what the film is about (i.e. girls), but is inscribed at various levels, including that of the film form, its duration, the kind of looking (back) that it makes possible and its approach to memory, desire and history.

The *cinéfille* is not, I think, exclusive to Akerman's cinema, but it is from her films that it can be theorized. The concept allows us to articulate a sense of wonder, creative discovery and intensity that emerges in the durational aesthetic form for which Akerman's cinema is well known. Different from cinephilia, which is "the quest for plenitude, envelopment and enclosure," *cinéfille* is evoked in and by filmmaking that seeks transformation and difference.[41] In *Portrait d'une jeune fille* and *Saute ma ville* the figure of girl as *cinéfille* presents not a position of resistance, nor a scene of perpetual adolescence, but rather a positive queer feminist creative engagement with the possibility of new forms of being, relating and desiring.

Cinéfille also gestures to the strange temporalities at work: the "not yet" inhabited by *Portrait d'une jeune fille*, and the various forms of looking back, whether nostalgic or not, full or not. Attending to this concept in *Portrait d'une jeune fille* evokes a non-linear form of cinematic becoming and relation to temporality that is produced by and for the figure of the girl. Rather than return to the past as nostalgia, as history, Akerman uses moments like the party scene with its close up of Michèle, or the final scene at dawn where Danielle leaves

Michèle, as durational aesthetic inscriptions that hold us, that lead us elsewhere and back to ourselves. In these moments we can trace the marks of the *cinéfille* as cinematic effect and as a part of writing cinema history differently. *La jeune fille* writes this cinema history. A figure emerges, not a dissident figure who does not grow up, but the girl as a position that holds space for the investigation of what feminine becoming and its cinematic inscription might be.

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[1] Nicole Brenez, "Chantal and Some Comrades. Fragments," *Senses of Cinema,* no. 77 (2015): https://www.sensesofcinema.com/2015/chantal-akerman/fragments/.
[2] Mary Harrod, *Heightened Genre and Women's Filmmaking in Hollywood: The Rise of the Cine-Fille,* (Cham: Palgrave MacMillan, 2021) 42. In her examination of genre and women's filmmaking, Mary Harrod uses the term 'cine-fille' for the description of a selection of women directors who make Hollywood films of heightened genre that feature in her study.
[3] For other uses of the term see Najet Tnani-Limam, "Duras *Cinéfille,*" in *Duras, Femme Du Siècle,* ed. Stella Harvey and Kate Ince (Amsterdam: Editions Rodopi B.V., 1999). Also blogs and papers by Amelie Hastie, Joanna Arcieri, Emily Gagne and Michelle Medford.
[4] Hereafter called *Portrait d'une jeune fille.*
[5] *Portrait d'une jeune fille* was part of a television series *Tous les garçons et les filles de leur âge,* comprised of nine films by different contemporary filmmakers.
[6] Chantal Akerman and Elisabeth Lebovici, "Lose Everything That Made You a Slave," in *Too Far, Too Close,* ed. Dieter Roelstraete and Anders Kreuger (Antwerp: Ludion M HKA, 2012), 97-98.
[7] Chantal Akerman, Nicole Brenez, "Chantal Akerman: The Pajama Interview," *Lola,* n. 2 (2011): http://www.lolajournal.com/2/pajama.html.
[8] Monique Wittig, *The Straight Mind and Other Essays* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Weatsheaf, 1992) 82.
[9] Simone de Beauvoir, "The Girl," in *The Second Sex*, trans. Sheila Malovany-Chevallier and Constance Borde, (London: Vintage, 2010).
[10] Elspeth Mitchell, "The Girl and Simone de Beauvoir's The Second Sex: Feminine Becomings," *Australian Feminist Studies*, 32, no. 93 (2017), 259-275.
[11] Jenny Chamarette, "Ageless: Akerman's Avatars," *Akerman: Afterlives*, ed. Marion Schmid and Emma Wilson (Oxford: Legenda, 2019), 56.
[12] Jenny Chamarette, "Ageless," 56.
[13] Jenny Chamarette, "Ageless," 58.
[14] Patricia White, "Lesbian Minor Cinema," *Screen,* 49, no. 4 (2008), 417.
[15] Marion Schmid, "Between Literature and the Moving Image: The Cinemato*graphy* of Chantal Akerman?" *Critical Review of Contemporary French Fixxion* (2013): http://www.critical-review-of-contemporary-french-fixxion.org/rcffc/article/view/fx07.06/752.
[16] White, "Lesbian Minor Cinema," 422-423.
[17] Amy Taubin, "Teen spirit," *The Village Voice,* (14 January 1997), 70.
[18] Beauvoir, *The Second Sex,* 359.
[19] White, "Lesbian Minor Cinema," 411.
[20] White, "Lesbian Minor Cinema," 418-419.

[21] Maureen Turim, "Personal Pronouncements in *I…You…He…She* and *Portrait of a Young Girl at the End of the 1960s in Brussels,*" in *Identity and Memory: The Films of Chantal Akerman,* ed. Gwendolyn Audrey Foster (Wiltshire: Flicks Books, 1999), 9-26.
[22] Turim, "Personal Pronouncements," 9.
[23] Turim, "Personal Pronouncements," 22.
[24] Turim, "Personal Pronouncements," 22.
[25] Girish Shambu, *The New Cinephilia* (Montreal: Caboose, 2020), 6.
[26] Sontag, "The Decay of Cinema," *New York Times* (25 February 1996).
[27] Sontag, "The Decay of Cinema".
[28] Thomas Elsaesser "Cinephilia or the Uses of Disenchantment," in *Cinephilia: Movies, Love and Memory,* ed. Marijke De Valck and Malte Hagener (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2005), 41.
[29] Sarah Keller, *Anxious Cinephilia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2020), 15.
[30] Keller, *Anxious Cinephilia*, 27.
[31] Elsaesser "Cinephilia or the Uses of Disenchantment," 27.
[32] Elsaesser, "Cinephilia or the Uses of Disenchantment,"32.
[33] For example, Claire Johnston's article "Women's Cinema as Counter Cinema" (1973) and Teresa de Lauretis's book *Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema* (1984) both advance arguments for the reconstruction of different kinds of pleasure in cinematic spectatorship.
[34] Christian Keathley, *Cinephilia and History, or The Wind in the Trees,* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press: 2006), 41-49.
[35] Catherine Fowler, "Remembering Cinema 'Elsewhere': From Retrospection to Introspection in the Gallery Film," *Cinema Journal,* 51, no. 2 (2012), 26.
[36] Fowler, "Remembering Cinema," 28.
[37] Fowler, "Remembering Cinema," 36.
[38] Fowler, "Remembering Cinema," 45.
[39] Chantal Akerman, "Interview: Chantal Akerman," *The A.V. Club,* (2010): https://film.avclub.com/chantal-akerman-1798218996
[40] Akerman and Lebovici, "Lose Everything That Made You a Slave," 97-98.
[41] Elsaesser, "Cinephilia or the Uses of Disenchantment," 39