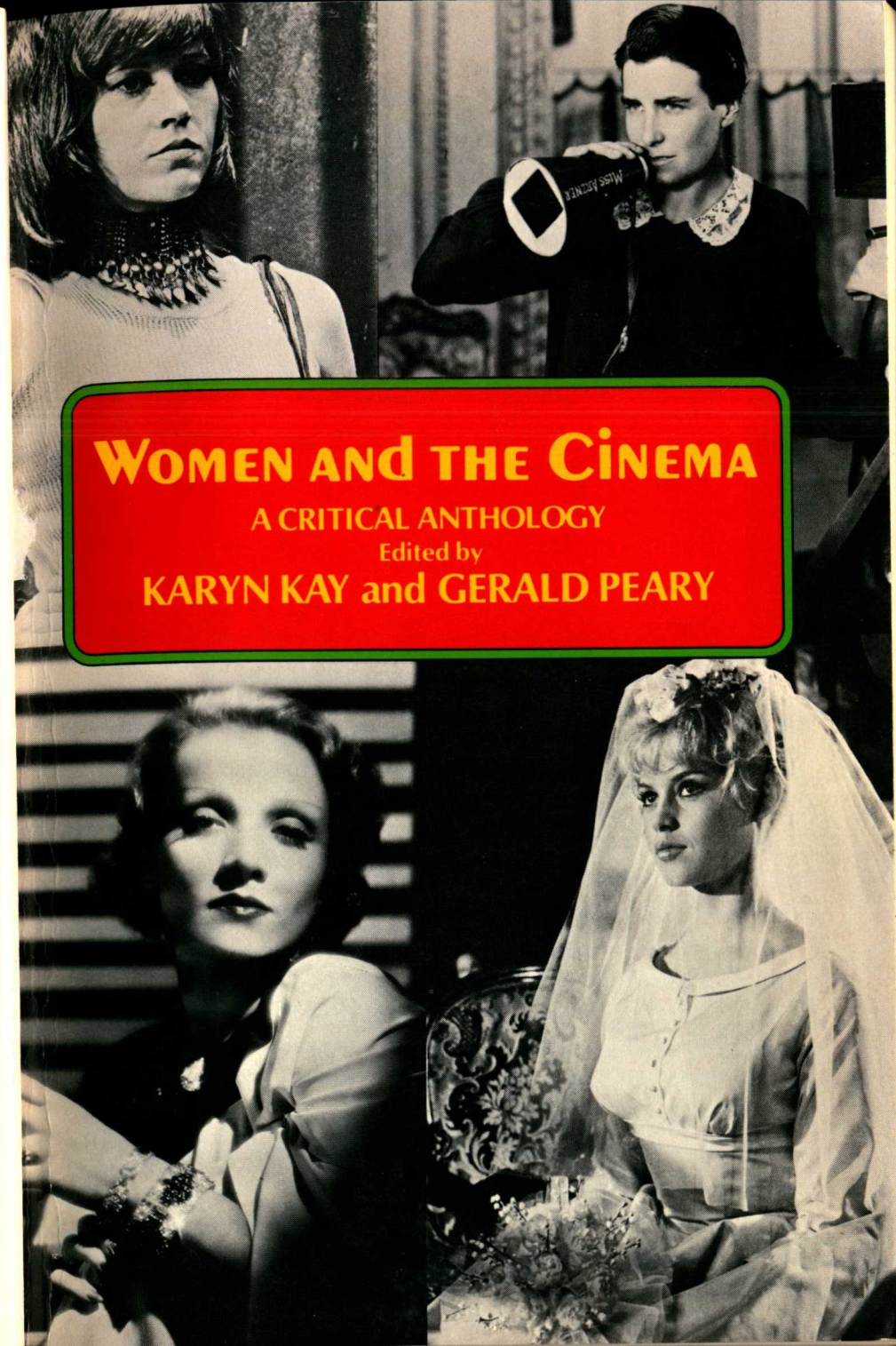

Women and the Cinema

A CRITICAL ANTHOLOGY

Edited by

KARYN KAY and GERALD PEARY

Interview with Joyce Wieland*

Kay Armatage

This interview was taped and transcribed early in October 1971. Since then, Joyce Wieland has rewritten some parts of the interview, and has added some explanatory material. –K.A.

KAY ARMATAGE: Can you tell me about *Hand Tinting* [1967–1968] and about the . . . was it a school or a retraining center?

JOYCE WIELAND: It was a retraining center in West Virginia run by Xerox and we made a documentary–

KA: Who's we?

JW: Another Canadian, Sylvia Davern, who was working in animation at the time and two American girls, one doing sound and another shooting. The job came through Sylvia's company.

KA: Were you commissioned to do it?

JW: Yes.

KA: And where was it to be shown?

JW: TV. Anyway I took some of my own outs from the film—some of which were genuine old-fashioned cutaways, and which I felt very strongly about, and began to make *Hand Tinting*.

KA: It's a lovely film.

JW: I think it has more to do with what was going on at the center than the commissioned film.

* Reprinted from *Take One*, 3, no. 2 (February 1972). Additional material supplied by author.

KA: Some of the images that are repeated . . . I began to feel very warm, for instance, toward that girl with the bathing cap.

JW: Yes, there's a lot of repetition in a small space.

KA: How do you feel about the subjects that you're working with?

JW: I hardly know whether to laugh or cry about those girls. The center was about eighty percent black kids who had come from everywhere. They were lonely, rebellious, funny, restless, and hopelessly poor. What they were offered in the way of education was humiliating to me—some rooms with typewriters, and a machine that spoke to them as they typed. Most of them wanted to make movies when they met us. It was a corporate pacification program. I wanted to do my own film about them. I was sorry—so was Sylvia —to see all their swearing and astounding wit cut out of the final version.

KA: In a film like *Hand Tinting*, how much of your concern is just working with form, or how important is your subject? I'm trying to think of showing this film to my class of women, and to think of the way that they as women would understand that film, women who aren't interested in art or film.

JW: It could be interesting to them to know that I dyed the film with cloth dyes and punctured it with my sewing needles.

KA: The images that you used as well . . .

JW: When I first did it, I thought it might not be useful to anyone. It was a poem. There's nothing out of the way in it, it has mystery and rhythm and some repetitive portraits of some beautiful faces. The editing and the girls are the subject of *Hand Tinting*. The editing and the so-called subject matter are equal. You can look at the editing or you can look at the girls. Just as in *Reason Over Passion* [1967–1969], you can look at the permutations, the images, listen to the beeps, or count on the flag inserts—or, just let it happen.

KA: Well, the feeling I got at the beginning of *Reason Over Passion*—I went through a gradual transition from the feeling that was there when everyone in the room spoke at once and a friend of mine said this is my hometown. We felt very strongly that we were watching Canada. Then gradually all the elements of the film come

together more. But at first it's a very strong surge of feelings for what you're looking at.

JW: Yes, it starts off much more stridently and clearer than the passages of the second half, where it gets into an episodic long white fade.

KA: There's a credit at the end for Computer Photographic Planning. What was that?

JW: Hollis Frampton, who is a wonderful filmmaker, devised a simple and inexpensive method of photographing all 537 permutations of *Reason Over Passion.* I couldn't afford to use an animation stand. And so he invented a machinelike masking device, whereby each permutation was photographed very rapidly on a setup in his darkroom . . . perfect and simple.

KA: How often has *Reason Over Passion* been shown and reviewed?

JW: It was premiered in Canada at the National Arts Centre in 1969 and in New York at Jonas Mekas's Christmas Festival in 1969. Then I showed it at The Museum of Modern Art. After that it was taken to Cannes for the Directors Fortnight. Then it sat in New York. It had a few write-ups in Italy and Holland. It's been shown at universities in the United States. It had a good response in Canada; there have been quite a few pieces written on it and in the last few months it's been written about in the U.S. and France. The CBC and BBC wanted to show parts of it, but after projecting it, found that the four-times-removed printings in it were too difficult to transmit. They are afraid people will blame them for the grain—grain is dirt in their eyes.

KA: You're very important as a woman artist because you take what women do and make your art out of that. Is that a conscious thing, or have you just eventually come to it?

JW: It has become more of a conscious thing over the years. As I started being an artist I was influenced by many things, artists, et cetera, and by my husband, who influenced me not so much in style as in having my own well-developed outlook, philosophy, and so on. I was on my way in a sense to becoming an artist's-wife-type artist until I got into looking around in history for female lines of influence. I read the lives and works of many many women, salonists, diarists, revolutionaries, et cetera. I started to invent myself as an

artist. I saw only gradually that my husband's artistic concerns were not mine, although I loved Cézanne, Vermeer, et cetera. I still had to look into the lives of women who had made independent statements in their lives. In a sense my husband's great individuality and talents were a catalyst to my development. Eventually women's concerns and my own femininity became my artist's territory.

KA: And you've got this double-barreled thing, being a woman and a Canadian—the underdog in nationality and in sex.

JW: I think of Canada as female. All the art I've been doing or will be doing is about Canada. I may tend to overly identify with Canada.

KA: Do you see this artist's territory that you've staked out opening out to other women besides you?

JW: Sure, why not. I would like to see them in that space, just as much as I would like to see us gain control of our government from the U.S.—or the Canadian Film Development Corporation.

KA: In the past you have involved other people in your artworks, women embroidering, knitting, for you, et cetera.

JW: Yes, in my recent exhibition at the National Gallery—"True Patriot Love"—fulfilled a lot of plans that I've had in my last few years for having other people work on parts of the artworks.

KA: Does that sort of participatory art carry over to the films?

JW: Not very much in my past personal films. But in my future film, *True Patriot Love,* there will be people working on costumes, music, et cetera.

KA: Do the women who worked on your recent work, do they do anything themselves in art, or did you find them because they were good craftswomen?

JW: They were craftswomen who were doing good work, who have won many prizes in their fields.

KA: Did working on your things inspire them to do more themselves?

JW: Yes, it got a couple of women going on to working more original pieces. Less to do with traditional patterns. And on Canadian themes, too!

KA: Are there any women, living or dead, that you've been able to find sources from, or is it more of a general source?

JW: There are quite a few, generally and especially women from

different periods in France, Pompadour, Colette, Madame Roland, the diarists, salonists, mistresses, et cetera. English writers—Austen, the Brontë's, Beatrix Potter. Fictional women like Stendhal's heroines. These people all have had a sustaining influence on me. And also Adelle Davis . . . and my mother-in-law, Marie Antoinette Levesque, who is French Canadian and after whom the character Eulalie de Chicoutimi is drawn in my projected feature film, *True Patriot Love.*

KA: How about the gerbils? I'm trying to find out more and more how the question of women's art affects your work. Is *Rat Life and Diet in North America* [1968] a generally political film, or do you see this as having any connection with women?

JW: It has to do with women in a way. It was a domestic epic made on my kitchen table with my pets, who were gerbils, and my cats too. It's also a political film. But it all came about from reading an article in *Scientific American* about rat behavior under crowded conditions, simulating New York conditions. The film has very little to do with that, however.

KA: You mentioned before that the gerbils were family animals.

JW: Yes. Well, I had lived with them for a long time and found their little family structure very interesting. These little creatures whose lives were lived inside the glass container. One of the many interesting things about them was their acute reaction to sound—their lives were literally ruled by sounds. They were haunted little characters, little prisoners, little victims no matter how nicely they were treated. They were wild creatures, and after photographing them for several months, I started to see what the film was about: their escape to freedom.

KA: How do these concerns—women, Canada—work in *Reason Over Passion?*

JW: *Reason Over Passion* is part three in a series of artworks. The first two were a pair of bilingual quilted wall hangings. The words *Reason Over Passion* and *La Raison Avant La Passion* attached in big stuffed letters. But in the film *Reason Over Passion,* in making this film and particularly while editing I had the fantasy that I was a government propagandist, churning out the government line. I thought I was Leni Riefenstahl, you know *The Triumph of the Will*

[1936] and *Reason Over Passion.* But I put Trudeau in the middle of my film almost as an exercise, similar in a way to male artists always having had their odalisque, throughout the history of art and in their films, as stars.

KA: Do you think of it as a process of objectification of Trudeau, in the way that women have always been objectified in movies?

JW: You mean like what they did to Marilyn Monroe? No. I guess what I'm doing to Trudeau is putting him on for his statement "Reason over passion—that is the theme of all my writings." Taking the words *Reason Over Passion* in the beginning of the film, treating them as a propaganda slogan, and through permutation, turning them into visual poetry, into a new language.

KA: If you were doing that to Trudeau, how do you feel about that sequence where you photograph yourself singing "O Canada"? Didn't you do that in *Water Sark* [1964–1965] also?

JW: Yes, I used the same idea in *Water Sark* as in *Reason Over Passion* of photographing myself—talking, making faces, et cetera. This idea makes the audience aware of the filmmaker and especially in *Water Sark,* where the whole film is about me making the film. In *Reason,* the self-portrait says I predict, I make the film, I am a character in the film. The whole film is a bit of a primer on Canada and my singing lends a quality of dutiful schoolchild flogging the anthem. And as I carefully sing the words, my camera is beneath my chin photographing, mostly the lower part of my face, and especially the lips. This soundless singing is the overture to the film. Almost announcing the death of the country, which is what this film is partly about—a last look at Canada.

KA: What are the films correctives to?

JW: That's the title of my film company. It was very funny to me when I thought of it seven years ago. Since then we put the Corrective Film logo on all of my films. A lot of people have wondered what a corrective film would be.

KA: Are you involved with this group of women filmmakers in New York?

JW: No, I didn't know they existed until there was something about it in *The Village Voice,* and it said there was going to be a Feminist Film Festival.

KA: Yes, that's all I know about it too so far. Have you worked with other women filmmakers?

JW: I worked with Shirley Clarke a couple of times. Once she was doing a film which dealt with Tim Leary. It was fun to do. And I don't know what became of it. I did photography for it. Then I worked on her film about André Vosnesensky, who seemed a bit of a jerk. Then later Mary Mitchell, the Canadian playwright, and myself decided to do a film on Norman Mailer. We have lots of footage of that boring neurotic existentialist. The best part is a conversation Mary has with Mailer. We got Normie pounding Freedman's head in Brooklyn Heights in front of his house—it looks like a typical vignette of U.S. social problems. Then Jane Bryant and I did a half-hour film on Ed Blair, the New York poet—it's not finished. Ed died three weeks after we did the final shooting of the film. He was such a wonderful poet, and would open his poetry readings with a singsong, choosing songs like "After the Ball Is Over." In the four years since we did the shooting I haven't had a minute even to think of finishing it. In 1965 Betty Ferguson and I made a collage film called *Barbara's Blindness*. It's very funny, and is distributed through the New York Film-Makers Co-Op. Wendy Michener and I started a film about each other's lives about eight months before she died. I hope to finish this film somehow.

A lot of women have had problems in film. It hasn't been easy for Shirley Clarke either. She should have had a few of the things that Agnes Varda got, or Chytilova for that matter. She should have gotten something out of Hollywood. She's equal to Varda and Chytilova. But what an absolutely brutal scene to try and raise money from.

KA: Have you gone through the same sort of struggles?

JW: No, not the same in the U.S. But after I made *Reason Over Passion*, my first long film, I was made to feel in no uncertain terms by a few male filmmakers that I had overstepped my place, that in New York my place was making little films.

KA: Do you think it's a different problem in underground films, or do they parallel the problems of women making ordinary feature films?

JW: I don't know. I guess it's just a general problem.

KA: Have you had trouble raising money for your films?

JW: I have only raised money for one film. The rest I paid for myself, by sales of my artworks. And I had a grant to do one film.

KA: I think that Sylvia Spring talks about her problems in raising money; that seemed to have a lot to do with the fact that she is a woman.

JW: Well everyone knows what she went through, but it's amazing that she finally got the money. I guess only two or three women have ever made a feature film in Canada, and up until the last few years, men have successfully kept women out of filmmaking at the National Film Board.

KA: Do you have any hope for women artists getting together, like at the Whitney last year?

JW: Well I don't know about last year. I heard they threw their Tampax around the Whitney and that they wanted Nancy Graves's sculpture removed because they thought a man had done it. But they were right too in some ways. Books dealing with women's problems like *Sisterhood Is Powerful* [1970] are the most unifying of all. They just turn your head right around overnight. You feel differently, you just aren't the same after those books.

KA: Do you feel that coming back to Canada will ease problems or create new ones?

JW: Well you see in New York I've become part of a movement called Structural Films. This movement involves seven people and has evolved over the last four years. I've given a lot, and learned a lot from these filmmakers, and I don't like to leave that scene but I have to, to go on with what I'm about. My subject matter has been bringing me back to Canada for a long time. I've been thinking and working and researching for the feature film I want to do.

KA: What's it about?

JW: It's a film about Tom Thomson, the Canadian landscape painter. It involves Quebec and Ontario, and his fictional lover Eulalie de Chicoutimi. It deals with the French and English language and is a play on subtitles. It's about the last days of a great country and is placed around 1919, the days before Canada lost control of its destiny. Dennis Reid, a curator of the National Gallery, has done extensive research on Tom Thomson, and has been

able to give me much more understanding of this great artist who is so much the spirit of Canada, as she was. His information has enabled me to go on with scripting this film.

KA: Do you think there will be any change in the way you'll treat Canada now that you are here?

JW: No, because I've been on this path a long time. I wrote the outline for this film two years ago in New York.

KA: Will *True Patriot Love* be an avant-garde film?

JW: That's complicated. I have made nine short films in the last seven years, all of which could be termed avant-garde, and three of which are considered to be Structural Cinema. These personal films mean more to me than any of the documentaries I've worked on. Films like *Catfood* [1968], *1933* [1967–1968], *Sailboat* [1967–1968] are all working in new areas of seeing and thinking. But *Rat Life and Diet in North America* contains the seed of something else. It had a message and a very accessible story. It was bought by German and Netherlands television, and was shown on the Canadian network. After it was shown on Canadian TV people I know or didn't know told me how much they liked it, including a man who drove a truck for Pepsi-Cola, whom I met at the Pilot Tavern. He offered to invest $100.00 in my next film. I was so knocked out! After making *Reason Over Passion,* I wrote the outline for *True Patriot Love,* which is a traditional narrative film. It will be a well-researched, tragicomic historical love story.

What follows has been edited from a long conversation, so that parts of it have been rearranged and parts left out. This 1976 interview was done four nights after *The Far Shore,* the release title of *True Patriot Love,* premiered in Toronto.

KA: When we did that interview in *Take One* that ends where this one begins, you were describing *The Far Shore* [1976] as the next film you would make. You wanted to make a narrative film that would tell a story that would be important to Canadians and to tell it in a way that would be accessible to Canadians.

JW: Yes, in a traditional narrative form.

KA: But then after that you made *Pierre Vallieres* [1972] and *Solidarity* [1973]. What was happening there? Was this film kind of developing in the background while you were still going on?

JW: It was developing in the background but both of those films were from my immediate response to coming back to Canada. You know, the revolutionary in Quebec being Pierre Vallieres and then just the women's problems at the Dare cookie factory.

KA: In the films you did before, you weren't dealing with narrative, except in *Rat Life and Diet in North America.*

JW: And that was an awakening too, the sudden joyful thought that this was not barred from me. Even though I was part of the underground that didn't like to tell too many stories because it was involved with opening up our vision. I thought, Jesus Christ, I could make this into a little story you know—it wouldn't have to be just an incredible image that would burn itself on your mind.

KA: How did you find the task of working with narrative?

JW: Well it's very difficult. I mean I would have made a much different film had it just been in 16mm and all my own dialogue.

KA: How would it have been different? Actually this is leading to another question. Ian Christie and I talked about the film, and he mentioned scenes from *The Far Shore* that seemed to have more to do with your other films than with traditional narrative films. The picnic scene, for example, where all of the crucial stuff happens out of the frame—the very way that *Solidarity* works, focusing on the feet when you knew that everything was going on outside the frame.

JW: Yes it's very much like my other work I think.

KA: That scene or the whole film?

JW: I think the whole film because I really love those camera movements. I really like the color, I really like what's in the frame, the kind of texture, the kind of lighting—what I feel is just a continuation of my own development.

KA: You said before that with the editor you fought to leave the frame empty, not cut on action. Why?

JW: I wanted you to be able to feel their absence for a few seconds rather than use another device to get from one scene to another. To empty the frame and hear the footsteps disappear or

something like that, and then make the direct cut to the next scene. It's nice to have this moment; it's sort of a pulse in the film.

KA: Do you have any philosophical rationale for things like that? Do you think that has any special effect on the viewer?

JW: I think there's always a question. It brings something up in the viewers' minds for a moment. It's on the viewers for a few seconds and it makes them pause and wait for the next thing. They're brief pauses but they're used quite a few times. It throws the spectators back on themselves. And the film does that many ways because there's an aspect of tragic comedy within the film and that leaves the audience on their own. You're standing outside it but everything is going on in it in a very intense way. But the audience is left—they have to find their own way through this film. And they're not getting what Richard Foreman calls instant gratification. They're just being asked to float with it or relax. Just saying come along if you want to. But it has some kind of a pull in it because people have talked about it—that there is a pull like a current and it gets stronger as it goes along.

KA: But that seems to me to have everything to do with the rhythm of the film. It moves, as you say, like a current in a river, goes along quite slowly with a kind of heartbeat.

JW: It's a tide. It has a lot to do with water. Many of my films have a lot to do with water, and this is a real Pisces film and the motif of the fish is throughout the film.

KA: What about the magnifying-glass scene?

JW: In the silent scene when they speak through their magnifying glass, her text is from Madame Roland who is a French revolutionary. It simply says something like when the people have had enough, they will make revolution and they will turn on the government or something like that. But it's really what Eulalie is saying about herself: I am in the state of revolution because of what I feel. . . . He says as an answer to her a poem from Wilfred Campbell, who's one of the great Canadian poets that we all read in school. It's about a drowning in a lake up north, so his reply is that it can only end in a drowning, it can only end in death, what you feel.

KA: But this is never in the film. You never know what they're saying.

JW: No. That scene is a secret between the two of them. That's what makes the audience start to—they get very restless in that scene because you know why? Because it's not for the audience, it's for those two people in the film. But it doesn't matter that we don't know what they say because it's their unspoken love. And I feel that the film has a lot of mystery in it. It doesn't come out and give you everything in the stupidest possible manner. And all the films that I've admired have so much mystery in them . . . That's what cinema once was: it was concerned with magic and shamanism and the evocation of spirits you know.

KA: I was interested in what you said on Saturday about your film being slow and women responding to that—the film allowing you to breathe. And the film breathes.

JW: And that's the comment that nearly every woman at the opening said. Did I tell you that? The most amazing thing. One after the other said I like the pauses, I like the chance to look and think about what's happening.

KA: I think more and more that a lot of that is going on in films that women are making. It's speaking from and speaking to a totally different sensibility—and particularly in the sense of time.

JW: It's as though the masculine world in a way—the perception now is changing and the world has to change too. So it's almost as though we're saying, wait a minute, we're calling a halt to the whole thing. By being slow. Contemplative.

KA: Do you see a connection between that whole movement and that sensibility and the romantic nature of your film?

JW: Yes. I think that for me anyway the romantic nature of the film reflects my own nature, that I'm romantic. But the main thing is that I want to go back in time. If I make another film of my own, it will go back further in time. This is also very necessary for Canada because none of the stories has been told about the English Canadian past in features, not to my satisfaction. So in going back, things change, and I imagine the period 1919 in a kind of romantic setting. But the reality lies within it—of the capitalist, the wealthy husband. Nothing has changed but their postures are different. They walk differently, they talk differently, they have a different code of morals. . . . So I guess I've always just liked the past. And I don't

like too much dialogue. I like the feeling to get across you know—like when they part in the cabin.

KA: It's such a beautiful scene isn't it?

JW: I remember you liked it. It takes a long time but the intensity of feeling is there—and his inability to speak because he knows there's no answer.

KA: And the restraint. They're very close together, and the back of the chair is separating them and his arms are on the back of the chair and her hands are there, but they never touch each other and . . .

JW: And he looks at her hand. And you know what's going on. He's a totally introverted Canadian artist—not completely introverted but you know that kind of loner that goes to the woods. And he knows the dangers of Ross. She doesn't know how dangerous her husband is. So that takes a long time but I mean it's a very compelling scene . . . So I wanted to show that. But I also wanted to show what it was like for a woman who was an artist. And her situation is almost—well his situation is almost as hopeless as hers, living in Canada which has never been into the appreciation of the arts. And the fact that as a woman she came from Quebec and she came from the upper class, and was hidden from society literally until she was brought out to have one of those things that you have, you know a party when you're twenty-one and all that. . . . But I know for truth that that's what a woman went through at that time. I know because my mother-in-law (whom the character is based on) told me. But Eulalie shapes up—she has some of myself in her because I know what it is to be an artist, too—but she shapes up in a way that is a bit like a Stendhal heroine. I like his women because they're so courageous and they're so intelligent and they're so individual. . . . I worked with a writer whom I've known for many years, and he likes the same kinds of films I do, so we didn't have trouble communicating. You know he may shout once in a while and I may have been amazed at the way he wanted to portray Eulalie but we certainly ironed that out in a hurry.

KA: How did he want to do it?

JW: Well here's an example. When she goes to Tom's shack, I had all these scenes that I wanted to see which are all there anyway because they're silent—they're mood scenes. He wanted her to clean

it up—to take a broom. And I said listen, this is no groupie coming over to visit a pop star, you know. This is a woman who is all together; she just got the wrong companion in marriage because she had to get out of her situation. It was very common in those days to just go off if you got a rich person to take you out of your village if you're disappointed by another suitor. So he said, well tell me more, what is she like? I said no, she's never been seen before—this woman—on film. Never.

KA: And then how did you find directing the film?

JW: It was a great pleasure. It was terrifying at first, completely terrifying.

KA: And then?

JW: And then, well the first week was the most difficult but even after the third day I was beginning to feel that it was all right and everybody was great. Richard Leiterman [the cinematographer] was really kind.

KA: What do you mean, "kind"?

JW: Well, like we spent a few weeks before going over the storyboards which were all prepared with the camera movements and the color and everything and the kind of paintings that I was interested in showing the lighting from. And he had been very absorbed in this idea and really intrigued and found that here at last was a chance to really use his talent. So on the set he was very nice. There were a lot of women on that set, and they were very supportive too. But the underlying terror was that I knew that the people in that industry for example despised the kinds of films that I had made.

KA: So then how was the reception at the Edinburgh Film Festival?

JW: I think it was good. Except that there were a lot of the avant-garde people there from all over the world, and I think they were absolutely disgusted that I would do a film like that.

KA: Rather than continuing in the structuralist non-narrative tradition?

JW: Not even that, but there are a lot of women in the avant-garde who are making films about feminist things and politics. I don't really know much about what they're doing, but there's something depressing to me about it from what I know. . . . It's so masochis-

tic. We have souls and spirits and we have the job of shamans, not the job of reiterating the misery that's been done to us . . . It's so neurotic, that stuff. What do those things do? You come out feeling even worse—it takes your energy away from you. But we have to transmit our spirits to each other. That's what lives. . . . But in Edinburgh not one woman came to me. Not one woman. I was there for two days after and not one woman—and I know them all—and not one woman writer except a New York critic who had to come over to talk to Mike [Snow, Joyce's husband]. And I've known her for seven years and I said, well what do you think? She wasn't even going to talk about it, she was so embarrassed. She said, well it was really romantic.

KA: Yes, well I saw her in New York and she told me to ask you about the romanticism and the idealization of the artist and the politics of that. She was concerned about that. The individualism of the whole story.

JW: What do you mean, "the individualism"?

KA: Well, the setting up of the artist as the kind of beleaguered soul in a group of crass nonpeople and what seemed a tremendous sentimentalization of the artist and the artist's role in society.

JW: Well why don't they talk about Eulalie?

KA: But there again, she's a truncated artist, an artist who's cut off.

JW: That's right. It's the truth. It's not like a flat-footed feminist movie. And the main idea is—well, I'm not interested in making depressing movies about social problems. And I see that being done over and over again and I can't bear it. I can't bear any more misery. God damn it, I will not go along with it. I want to talk about something that goes on inside us—I mean, Jesus Christ, the worker. I'm a member of CAR [Canadian Artists Representation] where we're working with each other for the betterment of our role in society and our relationship to society. I've been in on all those film briefs, I'm involved in the whole social thing about—we actually work as artists joining with the farmers' union and stuff like that. . . . But I cannot bear any more misery. And my greatest dream is that I would be able to make great comedies. It's a miserable world. And I don't want to make people escape into bourgeois

artists' lives or anything like that, artists who suck around collectors, but I mean I'm telling the truth about what went on here.

KA: What's all this about shamans? Have you done a lot of work on that?

JW: I've read a lot about them and I couldn't really tell you what they are, but I think that art is a religious practice and I think it's an offshoot of the religious thing. And many women were shamans. In another interview I told the story of an Eskimo woman who happened to go out one night to urinate and as she pulled down her drawers, at that moment a meteor came from the sky and entered into her and from that moment on she was given her song. She was given the power to tell the truth to her people and I made a great quilt from that song. It's called The Great Sea: "The great sea has set me adrift/set me in motion./It moves as a weed in a great river. /Earth and the great sky move my inward parts with joy." Something like that. I mean if we're not concerned with that, then screw it. It's a religious practice. And I don't know what I mean by religion even, but I know that there were men and women shamans, and especially in the Arctic, who spoke in tongues and who were in touch with something that we're no longer in touch with. . . . And there's a few visionaries around who aren't afraid to have visions about this.

KA: What are you going to do next?

JW: It's more about that. But I have to go through something to get there. I know it's not going to be given to me. I know I have to go through something.

KA: How is the success of *The Far Shore* going to affect what you do?

JW: Well I want to help produce Margaret Laurence's *The Diviners* with Judy [Steed, coproducer of *The Far Shore*], and she wants to direct it. But what happens to this film will affect that because it's a very large budget film and a very important film. A love story between a woman and an Indian—a Métis. And if this film dies, as they call it, then I don't know how easy it's going to be to do the next one at that scale. But if it's all too impossible, then in a few years I'll do a film. I'll do another feature in 16mm or something like that.