

# The topic of female abortion in art: analysis of the creation of “It’s Happening”

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**Abstract:** In 2022, the U.S. Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade*, triggering widespread controversy in the United States and around the world. As one of the most controversial abortion cases in American history, *Roe v. Wade* marked the historical process of the power and constitutionalization of abortion issues on a global scale, and became a symbol of abortion freedom in social movements and political debates in many countries.<sup>[1]</sup> Abortion rights have become a core issue of feminism and women’s rights, and the re-examination of *Roe v. Wade* highlights the complexity of this issue in patriarchal ideology and political struggles, reflecting the fierce conflict between judicial decisions and values and beliefs. In recent years, there has been a surge in the number of works directed by female directors, which have frequently won awards at major film festivals, showing women’s struggles and demands and subverting traditional gender images. While revealing gender inequality, it also pays attention to individual differences within genders, presents their real living conditions, and faces the struggles in the shadows. The discussion of women’s control over their body autonomy has become an important issue. The film “It’s Happening” (2021), which won the Golden Lion Award in 2021, is a work that focuses on women’s abortion experience.

**Keywords:** topic of female; creation; “It’s Happening”

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“As It Happens” is adapted from the autobiographical novel of the same name by the famous French writer Anne Ernauld. It tells the story of Anne, a young woman who had an unexpected pregnancy and risked jail time when abortion was not legalized in France in the 1960s. The story of going through an underground abortion alone. The film uses highly realistic techniques, rough and rough images, close-ups with a strong sense of reality, and a 1.37:1 aspect ratio to vividly demonstrate the psychological and physical trauma that illegal abortion causes to women. By tracking Annie’s movements between school, home and abortion sites, the film subtly reveals women’s private and hidden psychological space, and outlines the dilemmas in women’s daily lives through friendship, gender relations and intergenerational relations, and explores Women’s identity and positioning in society. The restraint of camera language and the restraint of emotion replace the traditional way of social accusation, presenting the suppressed “normality” in individual life experience and questioning the daily nature of power oppression. Even today, when women’s rights are gradually becoming more prominent, we still cannot maintain an absolute distance from history, because we are in it, and the tragedies and unspeakable numbness and pain faced by women are still being staged.<sup>[1]</sup>

## 1. Observation from an individual perspective in female relationships

Many films with the theme of fighting for women’s reproductive freedom use narrative structures centered on women’s mutual aid to highlight their determination to fight structural injustice. They explore women’s emotional support for self-salvation and their rational attitude towards their own destiny. Varda’s “One Sings, One Doesn’t Sing” (1977) depicts the mutually supportive friendship between Pauline, a girl singer in the 1960s and 1970s, and Suzanne, a poor single mother, as well as their self-discovery and destiny as women during their growth. The experience of exploration. Varda integrates her personal experience into the historical background of the French feminist movement and explores gender issues such as abortion rights, reproductive rights and freedom of marriage. “Jenny’s Hotline” (2022) uses the perspective of an ordinary housewife to describe the interdependence and support of members of an abortion mutual aid organization in difficult situations, and cleverly incorporates issues related to race and class. The important abortion-themed work “April, Three Weeks and Two Days” (2007) recorded in one day Otilia’s experience of accompanying her roommate Gabita in a secret abortion during Romania’s high-pressure political period. “Never Rarely Sometimes Always” (2021) also focuses on two young women’s difficult journey from a small town to New York to have an abortion in a situation of poverty and isolation.

However, the three abortions in “As It Happens” were almost all performed by Anne alone, making the image more personal and

experiential. This is related to director Diwan's background as a journalist and experience in text creation: she pays more attention to the authenticity, mundanity and current significance of events. Compared with the cold images and rational observation of "April, Three Weeks and Two Days" which indicted and criticized high-pressure politics, "Angel Vera Chux" exposed the unfair resource distribution among British social classes in the 1950s. "It's Happening" downplays the social background of France in the 1960s, emphasizes the "all-the-time" threats in women's lives, and calls for women's collective experience through individual experience. Anne's three abortion experiences directly point to the thin ice situation of women in society: the hypocrisy of power and the indifference of those around them, exchanging body rights at the expense of self-abuse, leading to destructive self-rescue. The audience is caught up in the fast-moving shots and tight narrative rhythm, directly touching the women's physical pain and mental breakdown, but unable to intervene or support. The characters have nowhere to escape within the narrow frame, and the audience can only follow them into despair and suffocation. This approach is similar to "Never, Rarely, Sometimes, Always", in which the protagonist wanders through the bustling night scene but has no place to stay. These two films do not put the two genders in opposition, and the director does not intend to create a narrative of suffering. Instead, they reveal the concealed unfair treatment in women's lives, allowing the audience to personally feel their existence, listen to their silence, and see their desire.

## **2. Pain and self - expression in female body narratives**

The body is not only the basis for women's rights, but also the place where women's emotions, consciousness and desires occur. It is personal and physiological, but also carries social and political significance. In recent years, many feminist films have used the body to express subjective consciousness such as gender and identity. "Unlucky Sex, Crazy Porn" (2021) mocks online violence and political reality, while "Fragments of a Woman" (2020) uses the birth and healing process of the mother's body to symbolize the complexity of female identity. "Titanium" (2021) explores women's recognition and control of the body through posthuman female narratives, as well as their defiance of gender stereotypes.<sup>[3]</sup>

"Just Happening" also deeply touches on the issue of the body. The abortion scene is described realistically and directly, but the director avoids secondary exploitation of the female body. Through limited composition, partial close-ups and the imagination of off-screen space, the director strengthens his reflection on illegal abortion. During the self-abortion scene, the camera follows Annie aimlessly, watching her crudely clean tools in the bathroom. The camera did not continue to capture the center of the action, but instead focused on Anne's ferocious and twisted facial expression. This lens language simulates the anxious state of the viewer. The alternation of warm and cold tones intensifies the emotion, while the gasping, groaning sounds from the body, and the sound of iron objects colliding off-screen virtually expand the expressive space of the image. This approach not only protected Anne's privacy, but also revealed a trace of guilt and shame in her constant avoidance.

Director Dewan mentioned in an interview that the original work of "As It Happens" made her feel a kind of violence and loneliness that she had never experienced before, and also made her aware of the desire and pleasure contained in the body, as well as the freedom implicit in it. The director does not position the characters as absolute victims. They actively fight for body rights, enjoy the eroticism juxtaposed with pain, and get rid of the moral constraints of suffering. In the film, girls dominate the scene, their bodies are tools for their own control, and men are reduced to functional existences. In the sex scenes, Anne is the initiator of desire and the manipulator of the body, and men are downplayed to purely biological flesh. Here, men exist to fulfill functions, while women are the subjects of desire. This treatment method shows women's struggle between desire and pain, allowing the audience to have a deeper understanding of the experiences of individual women on this issue.

## **3. Family history and memory under motherhood**

Beauvoir mentioned in the 1971 Declaration of Women's Rights on Abortion that women have the right to freely choose abortion. This choice allows them to get rid of the heavy pressure on women in society and take steps towards liberation. Fertility is closely linked to a woman's anatomy and motherhood, and although mothers must be women, not all women are destined to be mothers. Abortion should not be a necessary condition for judging women's morality, but we need to reflect on the reasons that lead to abortion, such as sexual assault inside

and outside marriage, unequal family relationships, and oppressive social structures.

The film version of “As It Happens” weakens the depiction of family and social background in the original work. Anne grew up in a poor, lower-class family and was sensitive to her own situation. She studied hard and longed to escape society’s restrictions on women. The female images around her also show typical characteristics that transcend the times: a best friend who talks about Sartre and freedom but chooses to compromise her married life, a female classmate who suppresses her personal desires under “slut humiliation”, and another A working mother who has been suppressed for a long time. In one scene, her mother teaches Anne to wash dishes, but Anne mocks her mother’s cultural ignorance, leading to an argument between the two. The audience can understand Anne’s complicated emotions: she feels anxious and collapsed, not because of washing the dishes itself, but because this trivial housework has become the only skill her mother has taught her, and it has also become her mother’s only remaining dignity.

In more works, we see real-life female images that are different from traditional moral values. For example, Mary in “All About Women” views illegal abortion as a money-making tool and as a matter of pure female will. Post-war France and its declining patriarchal order imposed punishment on women, using women’s bodies to consolidate moral standards and reshape the system. Similarly, *The Reader* criticizes war, religion, and the abuse of morality through ruthless female figures. “*Daughter of the Dark*” creates an image of an escaping mother, internally revealing the imposition of motherhood norms on women’s lives and bodies, and the punishment and torture caused to women. These works highlight the complex mother-daughter relationships in women’s lives, which are not just the sweet and beautiful aspects, but can also contain the spiritual horrors of anxiety, regret and regret .

#### **4. Conclusion**

Looking back at domestic creations, there are very few films that cover the issue of female abortion. The use of abortion plots in early painful youth films also served to portray women who lose themselves in relationships. The body is an individual’s natural property, a weapon to fight against hegemony, and a position that calls for women to unite and develop their potential. It is dependent on our souls for life and death and cannot be compromised or transferred.<sup>[4]</sup> The posters of most of the above-mentioned movies invariably choose to show the heroines looking back or gazing. Their gazes penetrate the viewer’s self-deception and self-comfort. It requires direct viewing of the truth and calls for patience, courage, respect, understanding and conscience when facing images. Women’s pain does not need ostentatious and cumbersome art to prove, but their real lives deserve to be seen and spoken about again and again. As the protesters tearfully complained to the congressmen at the beginning of the documentary “*Overturning the Rose Wade Case*”: “We can sit here and think we know everyone, but we don’t ... they will have abortions, we will have abortions, Women will always have abortions, it keeps happening!”

#### **References**

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