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Futures of Film Criticism: Aesthetics, Cinephilia, Philosophy, and Politics

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Abstract

This is an "integrated-article" dissertation that examines new approaches to academic film criticism following what has been called the "philosophical turn" in Film Studies. By arguing that philosophical research has as much to offer film analysis as films can contribute to philosophy, each chapter proposes a method of film criticism influenced by debates in Continental Philosophy. Chapters one, two, and four put prominent thinkers such as Georges Bataille, Jacques Rancière, and Theodor Adorno into a dialogue with films by directors such as Claire Denis, Staub-Huillet, Jean-Luc Godard, and Terrence Malick to account for various creative choices and critical interpretations. Chapters three and five curate a series of imagined philosophical conversations together on cinephilia in an attempt to imagine a new film criticism that engages with what I call "cineroticism," and "cool cinema." Chapter six takes a more formal approach to film criticism, moving beyond questions of meaning to appreciate narrative play in the films of Korean auteur Hong Sang-soo. These chapters each address new debates in Continental Philosophy and film criticism. The last chapter ties all these approaches together, blending philosophy, film and literary analysis, and auto-theory to meditate on the cinephile that I am, and to self-reflexively examine the experience of my gender transition. Godard has said, "I think that an interesting book on film would be for a viewer, not to be a film critic but to tell their story as a viewer, to make a kind of cinephile film if you like." My final chapter, and the dissertation as a whole, is an attempt to realize this idea.

KEYWORDS**:** Film Studies, Film Criticism, Cool Cinema, Cinephilia, Cinerotics, Contintental Philosophy, Film Philosophy, Claire Denis, Godard, Malick**,** Hong Sang-soo, Straub-Huillet**,** Adorno, Bataille, Cavell, Deleuze, Elsaesser**,** Rodowick.

Summary for Lay Audience

This dissertation examines new approaches to academic film criticism in light of developments in research that bring together film studies and philosophy. By arguing that philosophical research has as much to offer film analysis as films can contribute to philosophy, each chapter proposes a method of film criticism influenced by debates in Continental Philosophy. Chapters one, two, and four put prominent thinkers such as Georges Bataille, Jacques Rancière, and Theodor Adorno into a dialogue with films by directors such as Claire Denis, Staub-Huillet, Jean-Luc Godard, and Terrence Malick to account for various creative choices and critical interpretations. Chapters three and five curate a series of imagined philosophical conversations together on cinephilia, the love of cinema, in an attempt to imagine a new film criticism that engages with what I call "cineroticism," and "cool cinema." Chapter six takes a more formal approach to film criticism, moving beyond questions of meaning that have predominated throughout the history of academic film analysis to appreciate the narrative structure and storytelling devices in the films of Korean auteur Hong Sang-soo. These chapters each address new debates in Continental Philosophy and film criticism. The last chapter ties all these approaches together, blending philosophy, film and literary analysis, and autobiography to meditate on the lover of film that I am, and to also examine and theorize the experience of my gender transition. Godard has said, "I think that an interesting book on film would be for a viewer, not to be a film critic but to tell their story as a viewer, to make a kind of cinephile film if you like." My final chapter, and the dissertation as a whole, is an attempt to realize this idea.

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Introduction

I believe in film criticism. By that I mean that I believe that film analysis, interpretation, and even *readings* of film offer valuable insights into both films themselves and debates within other academic fields or disciplines, and that the pursuit of these insights constitutes a valuable intellectual pursuit, whether in more popular film criticism or within academia. It is in this spirit that the following chapters that make up this dissertation have been written. The question of film criticism has often been related to what films *mean*, or when, in more ordinary language, someone asks what a film was *really* about. I want to argue there is another way to do criticism, where meaning functions less as a goal than a kind of play.

I want to begin by explaining what I mean by "film criticism." Film criticism, in the popular sense, has often been put at odds with film studies. Film critics are often seen as writers for either a popular or specialist (i.e., cinephile) audience. Film critics evaluate whether a film is "good" or "bad" and attempt to persuade their readership to either go see it or find something else to watch. This is not exclusively the understanding of film criticism that I have, although the legacy of film critics, particular the major French auteur critics, is undoubtedly an influence on my work and this dissertation. I want instead to draw my reader's attention to the history of academic film criticism, or film criticism that happens as a part of film studies. One of the most prominent practitioners of academic film criticism was the late German film historian and professor, Thomas Elsaesser. Elsaesser was a prolific writer, producing more than a dozen books of film theory and criticism since 1989. A work of his that inspired me was *Fassbinder's Germany: History, Identity, Subject* (Amsterdam University Press, 1996). Like most of Elsaesser's work, it was an attempt both to explicate and understand the work of a specific filmmaker while also utilizing, and perhaps unconsciously testing, currently circulating film

studies methodologies (in this case, a perspective that I will refer to below as cultural studies). Elsaesser often seemed motivated by the desire to test the latest methods in film theory and film studies.[1] Rather than subscribe to a particular school or orthodoxy, Elsaesser consistently probed the usefulness and interest various approaches could bring to cinema, particularly European art cinema.

This disposition has always struck me as being fundamentally that of a film critic. Elsaesser always looked for the ways film theory (or Theory) related to our experiences of watching films. The concepts needed to be grounded in something experiential, whether the history of cinema or more often, the experience of a film itself. In what follows, I hope to undertake a similar procedure. My work is not a monograph like *Fassbinder's Germany*. My work is not focused on a single filmmaker, though certain chapters certainly are. My focus is not even exclusively European, or falls within the realm of cultural studies, per se. But, in the same spirit as Elsaesser, I draw on a heterodox variety of philosophical and film theoretical inspirations in my attempt to carry forward the spirit of (an) academic film criticism. That is why this work is called "Futures of Film Criticism" with future in the plural tense. My approach is deliberately heterodox, an integration of separate articles that pursue lines of flight that could lead to different film criticism destinations.

So far, I have described my approach as heterodox and as a form of play, as if the typical approach of film studies is more rigid or determined. Like all disciplines, film studies has a history of uneven development. Film studies came of age during the 1970s, when texts grounded

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[1] *See* his *Film History as Media Archaeology: Tracking Digital Cinema* (*Film Culture in Transition,* Amsterdam University Press, 2016), *European Cinema and Continental Philosophy: Film as Thought Experiment*. (*Thinking Cinema*, London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018), and his introduction to film theory co-written with Malte Hagener, *Film Theory: An Introduction through the Senses* (Second Edition, New York: Routledge, 2015).

in interdisciplinary theory from France, particularly the works of *Tel Quel*, were first being translated into English, which means that film studies itself was destined to become a highly interdisciplinary field. Film criticism is only one of its areas of practice. However, in the academic sphere, film criticism has been historically limited in its interpretative, and often even formal and historical dimensions, by its methodologies, i.e., certain methods of analyzing films have placed heavy restrictions on what one can say about a film. However, more recently the tide has shifted. New approaches to film studies have done away with all limitations as to the possibilities of film meaning. What has happened to film criticism is less that its practice is too proscribed, but rather that the emphasis has shifted so far away from the intimate understanding of specific films to areas of concern that will be addressed below, but include social and cultural histories, testing grounds for theoretical elaboration, and thought experiments for philosophical concerns. To illustrate this vast history, I need to introduce what I consider to be a longstanding concern in film studies regarding what films mean, or more specifically, what films are allowed to mean.

Film studies as an academic discipline, in what is sometimes called the post-classical age of film theory (roughly after 1970), arguably first emerged when the question of what films mean changed to *how* films mean, i.e., Christian Metz's famous dictum "the fact that must be understood is *that* films are understood."[2] The focus on models drawn first from structural linguistics (Saussure, as read by Barthes), and then from psychoanalysis (Lacan, as read by Althusser) and Marxism (Althusser), in this early period immediately restricted what films *could*

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[2] Christian Metz, *Film Language: A Semiotics of Cinema*, trans. Michael Taylor (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), 145. One should also consult Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen, "From Cinephilia to Film Studies" in *Inventing Film Studies*, eds. Lee Grieveson and Haidee Wasson (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008) among other sources.

mean. However, if cinema's forms of enunciation, of communicating to audiences, inherently

relied on existing models of desire and expression, if they were inextricable from certain forms

of production, then the specific subject of a film mattered little compared to the larger

ideological effect it had on its viewers. While newer, more *radical* films could challenge these

assumptions from outside the industrial models that codified them, they could only do so by

fundamentally altering the viewer's relationship to the projected image. D.N. Rodowick called

this model of critique "political modernism," although it has also been called SLAB theory after

the initials of its major influences and its perceived monolithic hold on the discipline.[3]

There are several major texts that one could point to as forming the basis for this

tradition. For instance, one should acknowledge the work *Cahiers du cinema* critics produced in

its most radical period under the editorial leadership of Jean-Luc Commoli and Jean Narboni

(roughly from 1969-1972). Specifically, this includes essays such as

"Cinema/Ideology/Criticism," "John Ford's *Young Mr. Lincoln*" and the early essay on Suture by

Jean-Pierre Oudart.[4] Contemporary to this criticism is the work of Jean-Louis Baudry in *Tel

Quel*, particularly the two essays on the apparatus.[5] While there are some major differences in

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[3] *See* D.N. Rodowick *The Crisis of Political Modernism: Criticism and Ideology in Contemporary Film Theory* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994) and David Bordwell and Noël Carroll, eds. *Post-Theory: Reconstructing Film Studies* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996). It should be added that political modernism was not the only approach to modernism film studies could have adopted. Those interested in considering another tradition would be encouraged to consult Daniel Morgan, "Modernist Investigations: A Reading of *The World Viewed*," *Discourse*, 42 1-2 (2020): 209-240.

[4] "Cinema/Ideology/Criticism" and "Cinema and Suture" can be found in Nick Browne, ed. *Cahiers du cinema Volume 3: 1969-1972 The Politics of Representation* (London: Routledge, 1990). "John Ford's *Young Mr. Lincoln*" is anthologized in Phillip Rosen, ed. *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986). I would advise any reader interested in film semiology and political modernism to also consult *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology* since much of this volume is devoted to collecting essays characteristic of this style.

[5] *See* Jean-Louis Baudry's "The Apparatus: Metapsychological Approaches to the Impression of Reality in the Cinema," In *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology: A Film Theory Reader*, ed. Phillip Rosen (Columbia University Press: New York, 1986), 299–318 and "Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus" in *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology: A Film Theory Reader*, edited by Phillip Rosen (Columbia University Press: New York, 1986), 286-98.

terms of the approaches taken by the myriad authors at play here, central to all these works is the question of ideology, and more specifically how ideology is imposed on the film viewer. Baudry's work, by linking the projector screen to the primal scene and suggesting that the dominant perspective of the camera is inherently ideological, suggests a limited potential for what films are capable of meaning. For Baudry, the meaning of any given film is limited by the mechanical apparatus; images projected on screen program or impose ideological effects on the viewer. By contrast, the *Cahiers* group are more nuanced in their perspective, though equally concerned with the same theme of ideology. In the *Cahiers du cinema* writings, it is film form, chiefly the stylistic decisions of the filmmakers in question that shapes a film's politics.

With the translation and reception of all these writings, along with the-work of Christian Metz, many familiar traditions in film studies began to emerge. Wollen's writings on counter-cinema, Mulvey's work on the male gaze, the many attempts to write about how space for the spectator was constructed in the film text, and the suture as an essential component of cinema all emerged in response to these ideas.[6] The idea that film form can be used to repress/deny certain subjectivities, but also be transformed to resist that repression also signaled the development of feminist film theory that emerged after the initial political modernist phase of post-classical film theory. As I mentioned previously**,** however, these models of film criticism often adhered to strict limitations in terms of film meaning. A film's politics was not read or contextualized, so much as prescribed by its form or mode of production. Despite certain theoretical influences, this tradition became largely ahistorical, and also did not account for the different distribution contexts that also shaped and molded film in the coming decades.

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[6] Again, these works are collected in *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology*.

There were two major reactions to this model of analysis (though there were also many alternative models which this form of criticism displaced): a new formalism, and a turn to history and culture. I will address the new formalism later.[7] The turn to culture did not eliminate political modernism**,** but insisted that its effects were not all consuming, arguing that viewers in certain cultural contexts received things differently. Even though apparatus theory was not completely abandoned, film viewers were not forced to accept its pretensions and could respond differently, i.e., some viewer**s**, on the basis of their identity or subjectivity, were always already resisting or reading the attempted affects of the apparatus' ideological presuppositions. The important influence to mention in regards to changing the focus to audience reception is Stuart Hall. One of the founding texts of cultural studies, it grew into a unique discipline, Hall's "Encoding/Decoding" shifted media analysis away from an exclusive focus on formal or ideological effects of the technical apparatus to the different ways audiences could absorb and respond to film, television, etc.[8]

However, while many of the theories that formed the basis of political modernism, i.e., Marxism, psychoanalysis, and semiotics were not rejected, what the "cultural turn" displaced where the all or nothing judgments of SLAB theory. Most obviously illustrative of this trend is the use of film in geographer David Harvey's *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry Into the Origins of Cultural Change* (New York: Blackwell, 1989)*,* Marxist literary critic Fredric

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[7] The most obvious examples are Bordwell (1985) and Thompson (1988).

[8] *See* Stuart Hall, "Encoding/Decoding" in *Culture, Media, Language,* eds. Stuart Hall, Dorothy Hudson, Andrew Lowe and Paul Willis (London: Hutchinson, 1980). Media studies scholar Henry Jenkins and the futurist Alvin Toffler also shifted the terrain again in the 1980s and 1990s, by theorizing more active media "prosumers". See Henry Jenkins's work on fan participatory culture, "The Moral Economy of Web 2.0 (Part Two)," *Futures of Entertainment*, 2008, http://www.convergenceculture.org/weblog/2008/03/the_moral_economy_of_web_20_pa_1.php and "Reception Theory and Audience Research: The Mystery of the Vampire's Kiss," in *Reinventing Film Studies*, eds. Linda Williams and Christine Gledhill (London: Arnold, 2000), and Alvin Toffler *The Third Wave* (New York: Bantam Books, 1980).

Jameson's *Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University

Press, 1991) and social theorist and philosopher Judith Butler's *Bodies That Matter: On the*

Discursive Limits of "Sex" (New York: Routledge, 1993). While these works are not explicitly

about film, they contain criticisms of film considering interdisciplinary contexts reflective of

wider cultural processes. For Jameson, films by David Lynch and Jonathan Demme are

characteristic of the cultural pastiche that defines postmodernism. For Butler, *Paris is Burning*

(Jennie Livingston, 1990) shows how queer and trans subcultures respond to images of gender

that circulate in the wider cultural sphere. While these approaches are less deterministic than

those found in the political modernist mode, they are still *readings*. The critic, in both of these

cases, doing interdisciplinary work between art criticism and social theory, projects their

meaning onto the object, rather than thinking with it.

What this cultural move did, using the historical turn as a buttress and in carrying forward

the post-classical project, was retain a focus on film meaning, just with an expanded scope of

reference in terms of a film's possible meaning(s). Films were not only determined by the

apparatus of their projection and reception, but also the contexts in which they were developed.

The "historical turn" was more thorough in its displacement, showing that the post-classical

model was based on very specific contexts and ideas of film spectatorship and distribution.

Research into early cinema proved that it was in some ways already avant-garde, stylistically

speaking, and that film industries did not all work according to the same timeline of

modernization.[9] While specific analyses would vary, the focus was not so much on the context of

a film's production, but the social context in which it circulated. However, by privileging social

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[9] *See* David Bordwell, *On the History of Film Style* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1997) and Ben Brewster and Lea Jacobs, *Theatre to Cinema: Stage Pictorialism and the Early Feature Film* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

context, this academic movement also still limited what films could mean, and often refused to account for the fact that films are *understood* globally.[10] A film can respond to its original context of production, but still be intelligible, and more importantly *meaningful*, outside of that frame of reference. However, a critique of this position can be found in Japanese film scholar Mitsuhiro Yoshimoto's "The Difficulty of Being Radical: The Discipline of Film Studies and the Postcolonial World Order."[11] Yoshimoto argues, using Japanese cinema as an example, that in applying "universal" ideas such as a film form or modernism to traditions outside of the west, critics are still imposing, and in a sense, colonizing, the production of the other. My own practice, which begins from an intimate and personal connection to films, "thinking with" films rather than on them, chafes against this strong culturalist position, but nevertheless the critique is a valuable position to keep in mind.

In contemporary cinema studies, the barriers to meaning have been largely cast aside, especially in light of "film-philosophy." Also sometimes referenced as, following the above, film studies' "philosophical turn," this new-*ish* trend in film studies draws on both analytic disciplines of philosophy and thinkers from continental philosophy who were not included in political modernism. In the applications of film-philosophy, movies are not only utilized as examples to explore pre-existing philosophical debates, but in some cases are seen to make original philosophical arguments. The only limits to what a film can mean are the same as the limits one encounters with thought itself.

The development of film philosophy is a much more difficult journey to chart than that of political modernism. While there are many works from the classical age of film theory written by

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[10] This "universal quality" of cinema is an important aspect of Bordwell and Carroll's work.
[11] Mitsuhiro Yoshimoto, "The Difficulty of Being Radical: The Discipline of Film Studies and the Postcolonial World Order," in *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*, 7th Edition, eds. Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 865-876.

philosophers, social theorists, psychologists, etc., the specific tradition of film philosophy seems to emerge from the gradual popularization of the *Cinema* books by Gilles Deleuze (1986 and 1989). Deleuze's books are highly idiosyncratic. On the one hand, they are packed with endless cinematic references and demonstrate an understanding of film history that only a Parisian cinephile who came of age during the 1960s would suggest (or would get). On the other hand, they are rigorously philosophical, notably starting from what one could call a "deconstruction" of Bergson's critique of the cinema to argue for the importance of Bergson's thought for understanding the types of images and signs the cinema produces. Despite being more conversant in film and film history than many of his contemporary philosophers, Deleuze also famously disavows his work as film criticism (throughout the two volumes, and in his lectures that followed, Deleuze distinguishes between "film people," under which he subsumes filmmakers and critics, and his own work as a philosopher).[12] Film-philosophy as a discipline has largely taken off from Deleuze's remark that philosophy is needed to treat the concepts that cinema gives rise to, which are themselves not uniquely cinematic. Deleuze insists in *Cinema 2* that "a theory of cinema is not 'about' cinema, but about the concepts that cinema gives rise to, and which are themselves related to other concepts corresponding to other practices."[13] He adds that "cinema itself is a new practice of images and signs, whose theory philosophy must produce as a conceptual practice,"[14] which I take to refer to the need for philosophical practice specifically to address cinema's artistic and technical capacity to transform our perception of the world. To explain further, at the risk of overcomplicating things, even if one were to attempt to

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[12] Gilles Deleuze "What is the Creative Act?" trans. Ames Hodges and Mike Taormina, in *Two Regimes of Madness: Texts and Interviews 1975-1995*, ed. David Lapoujade (South Pasadena: Semiotexte, 2007) begins with the clearest expression of this separation.
[13] Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image,* trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 280.
[14] Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 280.

make cinema in the spirit of philosophical practice, Deleuze conjectures a film would not be able to encompass all the concepts its production, images, affects, sounds, and worlds produce.

In the dissertation that follows, I frequently refer to Deleuze, often despite Deleuze's protest that his work should be considered strictly philosophically. As one can find in chapters two, five, and seven, I often extract film criticism from Deleuze, or repurpose his reflections for film critical ends. Unquestionably, Deleuze's use of film lacks the analytical rigor one finds in even the political modernist film critics, but they also provide their own intuitive inspirations that can guide us to a greater appreciation of a number of films. Nevertheless, this is not how his work is traditionally situated, which is as an attempt to make a philosophy out of film, or to draw a relationship between the development of Deleuze's own thinking and the history of cinema.[15]

Deleuze is not the only starting point for film-philosophy though. The work of American philosopher Stanley Cavell, especially his *The World Viewed* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979) is another important touchstone. While for many years, Cavell was seen as a proponent of a photographic ontology similar to André Bazin**;** contemporary readers who are more familiar with the influence of Wittgenstein on Cavell might be more sympathetic to the complexity and philosophical trajectories of his work. Of particular interest is the way Cavell sees cinema as a uniquely modern response to questions of skepticism. D.N. Rodowick sees an affinity between Cavell and Deleuze in their philosophical treatment of cinema.[16] Obviously, given the content of chapter five, I am deeply struck by this connection, but again my use of

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[15] Cf. D.N. Rodowick, *Gilles Deleuze's Time Machine* (Duke University Press. 1997); Ronald Bogue, *Deleuze on Cinema* (New York: Routledge, 2003); and Allan James Thomas *Deleuze, Cinema and The Thought of the World* (Edinburgh University Press, 2019). Explaining Deleuze and his philosophical influences often takes priority over explaining the film critical context in which Deleuze was writing. As will be seen throughout this dissertation, I am less inclined to draw on Deleuze's philosophical inspirations and instead often turn to film critics that inspired Deleuze such as Serge Daney and Raymond Bellour.

[16] D.N. Rodowick, *Philosophy's Artful Conversation* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2015).

Cavell is not to find solutions to philosophical problems, but to use his philosophical musings to help deepen our appreciation for cinema and specific films.

Despite its promising origins in the case of these two unique thinkers, contemporary film-philosophy can remain somewhat staid in its aims. I do not have the space to recount here how the trajectory of film-philosophy predominantly makes use of films as thought experiments, or raw material for working through philosophical problems. Suffice it to say one can use a film to think through problems of ethics, ontology, even aesthetics, but this is often without the contextual or formal grounding one finds in most film analysis. Thomas Wartenberg's *Thinking on Screen: Film as Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 2007), Robert Sinnerbrink's *New Philosophies of Film: Thinking Images* (London: Continuum, 2011), and *Cinematic Ethics: Exploring Ethical Experience Through Film* (London: Routledge, 2016), Noël Carroll's *Philosophy and the Moving Image* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021) among others often treat films as the above mentioned thought experiments or "intuition pumps" for philosophical consideration. While not always as insistent in their disavowal of their work's potential for film criticism as Deleuze, there is nevertheless the sense these authors are less concerned with deepening our understanding of specific films than with using films to do philosophy. In a different way, Rodowick's philosophical writing, which I have referenced above, also maintains a commitment to a conceptual practice pace *Deleuze* rather than embrace a potential for a philosophically-inclined mode of criticism. However, there are also exceptions; Daniel Frampton's *Filmsophy* (2006), now an early work in film-philosophy, treats films as thinking things. Frampton argues that cinema itself also reveals another "kind of thought, a future form of thinking" and also calls for an "empathetic form of film-thinking" (145) and an

emotionally activated spectator.[17] In contrast to film-philosophy that works around its object, this approach makes films and filmgoers active philosophical agents. For Frampton, the filmsophical filmgoer can think "with and against the film."[18] On the one hand, I relate to Frampton's "playful" and "kinetic" film-thinking (203), and understanding of philosophy itself as a "creative practice" (11), while at the same time wonder-if it does not exaggerate the philosophical content of films. Finally, the recent work of Nico Baumbach is interesting for the way it attempts to revive certain traditions of political modernism alongside more contemporary philosophical considerations of film.[19] Even if I am hesitant to embrace Baumbach's enthusiasm for apparatus theory and its possible continued relevance, his turn to the philosophies of Jacques Ranciére, Giorgio Agamben, and Alain Badiou to address the continuing question of politics in relation to the cinema is a palpable influence on my writing.

And yet, all of these meanings, whether delimited by ideological concerns, or more devoted philosophical research, whether interested in politics, identity or history, however they are produced, remain within the category of implicit or symptomatic meaning. For David Bordwell, meaning is fundamentally intersubjective. In *Making Meaning: Inference and Rhetoric in the Interpretation of Cinema*, Bordwell argued that the meaning of a film is inseparable from a critic's inference and dominant rhetorical standards (in the context of film studies, read: academic fashion). This was not to say that any film could mean anything, but that to arrive at the meaning of a "text" (to use the dominant discourse of the day), one was not just "reading" it, but actively participating in and constructing an interpretation from the material it presented. For

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[17] Frampton, Daniel. *Filmosophy* (New York: Wallflower Press, 2006), 145. Frampton writes, for example "that for Eisenstein the image of thought is found in found a dialectical image affecting the spectator's body as much as the brain" (134).

[18] Ibid., 160. Cf. "Taking our seats, we are expectant and thus attentive in the cinema—we are thinking with and against it, but we are (also) thinking towards it, not passively positioned."

[19] Nico Baumbach, *Cinema/Politics/Philosophy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018).

Bordwell, the most interesting practices of film analysis were not dedicated to uncovering

"symptomatic meaning." Rather, he thought a critic could better spend their time analyzing how

a film conveyed its most basic meanings, what we might call its denotative and explicit

meanings, i.e., an examination of how even the most summary version of a film's events

involves a degree of cinematic construction, narration, and cognitive reception.

While I am sympathetic to Bordwell and feel that many of his criticisms of interpretative

practice remain valid thirty-three years later, I am perhaps less inclined to dismiss

interdisciplinary approaches to analysis, and I do not share his enthusiasm for cognitive science.

Nevertheless, his model of intersubjectivity remains important to me as it informs how I have

approached film criticism in the following chapters. While I have in many instances borrowed

from the theoretical influences on Political Modernism, I see my use of these models as a playful

and personal, or idiosyncratic, way of responding to a work of cinematic art rather than offering

fixed theoretical explanations for how films function. I consider myself to be criticizing *with* a

film and other thinkers and less as applying thinker X to object Y. My approach in the chapters

that follow is, much as Bordwell argues meaning is, deliberately constructivist.[20] Even though

my work does not always maintain the rigor of Bordwell's poetics, I nevertheless try to keep film

form and structure central to my research. Chapter six, on Hong Sang-soo's *In Another Country*,

is an example of how I combine Bordwell's poetics of cinema model with my own interests in

cinephilia and film analysis. While I am decidedly still "making meaning," I am not trying to fix

it or force the cinematic objects and relations I consider to conform to the meanings I produce. I

am more interested in trying to open up a space between myself, my methodology, and the films

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[20] I am reading Bordwell in a way similar to the French filmmakers and theorists I focus on in the last chapter of this dissertation. Part of Bordwell's model also concerns the spectator-as-subject using patterns, narrative gaps or visual cues on screen to apply and test "schema" and "hypotheses" in the theatre. Cf. David Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985).

in question. It is in this fluid space where meaning and film form can interact with and influence one another without forming a knot or fixed connection.

In contrast to the film criticism traditions and film-philosophy texts I have discussed so far, I would also like to mention the video essay or videographic criticism. Videographic criticism is one, also relatively new, way of film criticism that allows the material of film the opportunity to speak for itself, or to lay bare its material and affective dimensions.[21] Undoubtedly, my own thinking has been influenced by the freedom of digital montage offered by this format, i.e. I attempt to put ideas and films into conversation in the same affective manner one finds in the video essay. Where I resist, or recoil from the video format is in the lack of immediate reversibility one finds in critical writing. To rewind, freeze, or closely examine a video essay is not the same intellectual mode of engagement one finds in traditional film criticism. What I am looking for is a critical text that has the freedom of combinations one finds in video with the conversation or companionship of the written text. This perhaps is what Godard means when he suggests that film critics could produce "interesting novels."[22]

To that end, throughout this dissertation I frame my approach in a variety of ways. I start with the idea of "thinking with," which I would oppose to thinking through a film or trying to affix meaning to it. My "thinking with" is an intimate project, in which I attempt to bring films, filmmakers, and philosophers and theorists together to reflect on one another. Rather than argue that film's narrative represents, or *means*, a given theoretical idea, I try to watch a film with a given thinker or philosopher to place the two into conversation, with the possibilities of meaning for both the film and the text/ideas in question in flux. This method is best illustrated by the title

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[21] Cf. Grant, Catherine, "Dissolves of Passion," *The Videographic Essay: Practice and Pedagogy*, 07 June 2022, 23 December 2019, http://videographicessay.org/works/videographic-essay/dissolves-of-passion-1?path=contents.
[22] Jean-Luc Godard, *Introduction to a True History of Cinema and Television*, trans. Timothy Barnard (Montreal: Caboose Books, 2018) 201.

of the first chapter, "Watching *Trouble Every Day* with Georges Bataille." I take a given school of thought or philosophical tradition as a companion during a film viewing. This method—taking philosophical ideas as opportunities for conversation, investigation and questioning, to engage with cinema in a playful, suggestive and creative way, rather than hermeneutic or normative--continues to inform chapters two, three, and four,

As the dissertation develops, this idea transforms into what Rodowick calls "artful conversation." Chapter four, while still within the domain of "thinking with," moves away from the philosophical-cinematic connection to make a comparative analysis between two filmmakers with the aim of having this analysis transform each other. This suggests a different kind of creative intimacy than that found in the early "thinking with" chapters. While the main difference between these two approaches is in terms of scope and scale, there is also a question of the kind of conversation taking place. Whereas the early chapters that perform "thinking with" are often focused on imagining how certain philosophical political thinkers and positions would respond to specific films and filmmakers, "artful conversation" is much more open and addresses the wide range of possibilities that can emerge by viewing creators and their collaborative works as participating in a shared conversation. Chapter five, "Towards Cool Cinema" contains both a thorough theoretical explanation of this approach as well as an illustration of it. This chapter argues that there is a longstanding personal and creative connection between a group of directors from across North American and Europe during the second half of the 20th century, and this connection unfolds conversationally through the form and thematic concerns of their work. The proposition of possible answers provided by "thinking with" a philosopher gives way to a continual and endless discussion of ideas and their exchange across the history of cinema in works of cinema and their creators.

Finally, I transform "artful conversation" into a kind of cinephilia, or cinephilia as criticism that I call "cinephile perception." As I discussed earlier, chapter six takes a more formal approach to "artful conversation," analyzing the formal connections between the works of a single filmmaker. In many ways, this chapter is a callback to the first, but utilizes a different methodology to reconsider art cinema and its possibilities. The seventh chapter employs "cinephile perception" in a very different way, using an autobiographical approach to create a conversation between my own life experiences and the films and other works of media that have affected me over the course of writing this dissertation. This final chapter shows that the methodological transformation from "artful conversation" to my "cinephile perception" is more self-reflexive, and introspectively documents my interest in an ongoing and intimate exchange between life and cinephilia.[23]

The following is an "integrated article" dissertation, which means the chapters presented here were originally written separately. I have brought them together because they all share an unwavering commitment to film criticism. Even the chapter on "Cineroticism"-is primarily interested in how one can continue to talk about and describe their love of, and fascination with, film. As stated above, I have titled this dissertation "Futures of Film Criticism," with future in the plural sense to represent the different styles of each chapter assembled here, but also their shared aim. I have not written a unified monograph on "the future of film criticism," since my own intellectual trajectory has led me to pursue many different possibilities, or lines of critical flight.

Each chapter presents its own "future" of film criticism, but all partake in my continuous search for a method, i.e., a way of furthering the practice of film criticism. It should also be

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[23] The methodology of this analysis is also presented and explained in detail in chapter seven.

mentioned that because the chapters were written separately, and sometimes originally for different contexts, there is some citational overlap. Hopefully the unique context of each chapter will transform these redundancies into new perspectives and the reader will not feel like they are going over similar ground. This is most apparent in my Georges Bataille citations in the opening chapter and the "Cineroticism" essay, but there are also references to natural beauty, Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory,* and Walter Benjamin that appear in several chapters. The reader should view these repetitions as similar to the use of repeated images in the films of Jean-Luc Godard.

The chapters are here presented in the order in which they were chronologically drafted. While all the chapters have been edited for this integrated volume, placing them in chronological order rather than opting for any kind of thematic pairing allows the reader to glimpse the gradual development of my thinking. Given the chronological narrative structure of the last chapter, I believe this to be the most appropriate approach. As much as this dissertation engages with narrative film, it is also a narrative. It tells the story of my developing attitudes toward film and film criticism. While the final autobiographical chapter makes this process explicit, it is nevertheless present throughout. The rest of this introduction will be used then to "preview" each of the chapters that follow. If the reader wishes, the chapters may be consulted in any order, or individually as needs must, similar to a series of short films.

The first chapter entitled "Eroticism, Transgression, Narration: Watching Claire Denis' *Trouble Every Day* with Georges Bataille" uses Bataille's writings on eroticism to explore narrative ambiguities in Denis' film. This chapter begins with Bordwell's idea that art cinema relies on the use of narrative ambiguities; that there are events or elisions which cannot be causally explained without reference either to realism (i.e., in reality events do not always appear to happen in a cause and effect pattern) or to the guiding hand of the author (the cause is a

creative flourish the author is imposing upon the material). Bordwell argues that these ambiguities act as a demand for interpretation, that art cinema encourages us to provide solutions or fill in these narrative "gaps." Instead of turning to the two common solutions proposed by Bordwell above, I look to the work of Georges Bataille and his theories of eroticism to think together possible explanations for these narrative gaps. I also examine how Bataille's work might be used within film criticism, particularly in regard to the horror genre. It is an example of my way of "thinking with" that I described previously and serves as an affective introduction for the chapters to come. The "thinking with" I perform in this chapter is a move away from strictly hermeneutic criticism, and it demonstrates how my model of analysis involves considering how a given thinker as spectator may react to a film.

The second chapter, "Seeing Politics: Landscape and Montage in Straub-Huillet's *Too Early/Too Late* (1981) and *Antigone* (1990)," is the first attempt in this volume to think with questions of politics and aesthetics. The first half of the chapter considers Straub-Huillet's work alongside various strands of political philosophy which various thinkers have tried to read out of Sophocles' *Antigone*, and considers how their adaptation can be read as a critique of the notion of community. This first section starts with an already critical theory-infused reading of the Greek play, before turning to Straub-Huillet's more deliberately archaeological version to suggest the fragility and futility of contemporary theories of the community.

The second half considers Straub-Huillet as working within a Marxist tradition of montage that can be seen in Marx' own theoretical writings. Looking back to Marx's *Economic Manuscripts of 1844*, I unpack a longstanding concern with montage and juxtaposition in socialist aesthetics, and working alongside classical theorists of montage, I bring this concern to Straub-Huillet's 1981 film *Too Early, Too Late*. While these two sections may seem to have

separate philosophical concerns, shared throughout is an extended meditation on the film style of Straub-Huillet, and particularly the way their work depends on the aesthetics of ruins and empty landscapes. Straub-Huillet's work is inherently dialectical, or for my purposes here, conversational, and the bringing together of two discussions on politics and aesthetics in this chapter helps to effectively illustrate this idea. This chapter foregrounds the relationship between politics and aesthetics, and the way certain philosophical ideas, when brought to film, necessarily give rise to political ideas. It builds on the previous chapter's ideas of "thinking with" but this time in relation to ideas, such as "community," or texts like Marx's *1844 Manuscripts*.

The third chapter entitled "From Cinephilia to Cineroticism: On the Desire for 'Cinematic' Thought" takes the idea of "thinking with" away from individual films and postulates the idea of "thinking with" certain thinkers to consider the possibilities of cinema itself. Drawing once again on Bataille, as well as Byung Chul-Han, I argue that cinema is a concept that should be thought under erasure, or that we are better off thinking that "film is already dead." Whereas chapter one deals with the push and pull of eroticism, the relationship between taboos and transgressions in horror cinema, this chapter probes the question of the limits that eroticism presents. Instead of anticipating the "death of cinema," this chapter argues that we should view that event as having already taken place. I ask what it means to give up "cinephilia" in its contemporary form for something that I call "cineroticism." To imagine this possibility, I consult contemporary research that I argue writes the concept of cinema under erasure. Drawing from traditions in critical theory, I propose that what is needed is to "live filmically," a punning attitude I derive from Jacques Derrida's learning to live *finally*. "Filmically" in this instance is not a synonym for "cinematic," but rather an awareness of film as material stripped of its

previous affects (both in a literal and theoretical sense) asking to be layered again and thought

anew (or thought with in new ways).

While many of the ambitious assertions in this chapter are important to the development

of my thinking, I would also argue that more important than its scholarly claims is the textual

montage method this chapter presents. It is as much an arrangement of ideas as it is an argument,

and thus it merits a place among the other pieces. As I have stated in the previous chapter

summaries, there is a dimension to my film criticism that is as much affective as it is

explanatory. This chapter takes that affective emphasis to the extreme (although chapter seven,

given its personal focus, may rival it in this regard). Finally, this chapter continues my use of

Bataille in cinema studies, finding another angle with which his idea of eroticism can be usefully

used to illuminate and think with cinematic problems. This chapter also looks ahead to the next

chapter on natural beauty.

The fourth chapter, "Ways of Seeing Nature: Adorno's Conception of Natural Beauty in

Jean-Luc Godard's *Hélas pour moi* and Terrence Malick's *Knight of Cups*" builds on the quoted

passages from Adorno in the "Cineroticism" essay but takes Adorno into a different wing of the

cinema, to now analyze Godard and Malick. This chapter returns to questions of politics and

aesthetics raised by the second chapter, conversing with Adorno and Godard to try and create a

materialist reading of Malick's contemporary work. This chapter argues that all three figures owe

a debt to modernist aesthetics, and that this debt is illustrated by the use of nature in their work. I

look at nature as inherently dialectical, i.e., nature in these films is not seen exclusively as

sublime or transcendent, but rather as a commentary or reflection on certain aspects of

contemporary life. Godard's use of associational montage makes his connection to Adorno on

this matter, if not an obvious, then a productive connection. Malick, on the other hand, uses

associational montage in a very different way, but nevertheless, I argue that by comparing his work to Godard's and discussing it alongside Adorno, one detects within it the same concerns with nature and its place as reflective commentary on the contemporary world. This chapter, inspired by Adorno's writings in a way similar to how I deployed Bataille in the opening chapter, is yet another example of watching and thinking with a notable philosopher. It is in this chapter that the idea of "thinking with" starts to resemble Rodowick's idea of "artful conversation," i.e. I am now looking at how filmmakers transform and change a philosopher's work, and each other.

The fifth chapter, "Towards Cool Cinema**,**" like the previous chapters, illustrates how a film critic can think "with" and alongside philosophers. Following from my explanation above, this chapter thinks cinema with Cavell and Deleuze, but also produces an intimate constellation of filmmakers, actors, and artists who are very aware of how they influence one another. This chapter also most clearly articulates when "thinking with" becomes what I will call, following my reading of Rodowick, an "artful conversation." This is an approach to film criticism and philosophy that sees meaning as produced by a constellation of ideas that emerge simultaneously across philosophy, film analysis, and film movements. Putting the cinematic writing of Cavell, Deleuze and Rodowick into an intimate dialogue this chapter defines cool cinema as a cinema of rebellion, deriving many of its affects and attitudes from Nicholas Ray's *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955).

To do this, I begin with a re-examination and recontextualization of film genre, drawing on Cavell's work and Deleuze's conception of the "problematic idea." Then, in order to tie this notion of genre to film practice, to fuse the elements of genre and style that define cool cinema, I turn to the idea of the "philosophical friend" elaborated by Deleuze and Guattari, and then Rodowick's use of "artful conversation." Changing Rodowick's work from a philosophical

proposal to film analytic one, I propose "artful conversation" as the name for the method used to discover/conceptualize cool cinema. Finally, with reference to the undertheorized "impulse-image" from Deleuze's *Cinema 1*, and reference to Nicholas Ray and Wim Wenders, I provide a fuller definition of the idea of "cool" in cool cinema. The chapter closes with the suggestion of further films and filmmakers to investigate, providing a preliminary chart of stars to explore in the cool cinema constellation.

The sixth chapter, "'Whatever You Put into It': Play with Narrative Parameters in Hong Sang-soo's *In Another Country*" is much more formal in its approach than the other chapters. It is the most explicit attempt in the dissertation to avoid making meaning in the ways criticized by Bordwell above. It is also fully committed to film criticism and comparative analysis, drawing on Hong's other films for comparison at every opportunity. If the fifth chapter theorizes the idea of "artful conversation," then this chapter attempts to put it into explicit practice. Here, "artful conversation" becomes a kind of cinephilia in action, seeing one director's work as a constantly mutating and playful constellation and attempting to chart that constellation through one unique point.

The chapter begins by drawing a distinction between what Bordwell calls "art cinema" and "parametric cinema," and then hypothesizes that Hong Sang-soo's work more productively belongs in the latter category. I then try to contextualize Hong's work more broadly within the landscape of contemporary South Korean cinema, arguing that while that market accommodates self-conscious art film directors that distinction should not lead us to misread the style of Hong's work. Finally, I undertake a lengthy formal consideration of Hong's filmography, using his *In Another Country* (2012) as a node to connect the variations on narrative and film style that one finds throughout the entirety of his work. This chapter treats Hong's oeuvre as an ongoing and

open-ended conversation, where different narrative devices, shot selections, and performers are

constantly used and re-used in slightly altered roles. While in some ways this chapter departs

from the previous ones, e.g., there is no extended consideration of any philosophers or social

theorists, affectively and in its engagement with Hong's work however it still captures many of

the tendencies that have characterized my dissertation as a whole. In attempting to articulate the

play with form that one finds in Hong's work, I also celebrate my own play with reoccurring,

flowing forms and images.

The seventh and final chapter is called "A Strange Girl's Bizarre Adventure: On

Cinephile Perception and Self-Presentation." This chapter, inspired by the models of

interdisciplinary critique one finds through the dissertation, also utilizes memoir and auto-theory

to narrate my own cinephile perception. This chapter was originally three separate public

presentations that I gave over the past three years and chronicles the period I spent writing this

dissertation. There are countless examples of "thinking with" and artful "conversations" both

between filmmakers, films, philosophers, ideas, and even myself that permeate this chapter. "A

Strange Girl's Bizarre Adventure" also explores my own theoretical influences and commitments

and offers personal film criticism in addition to self-description. This last chapter blends

philosophy, film and literary analysis, and autobiography to meditate on the lover of film that I

am, and also examine and theorize the experience of my gender transition. Anyone who wants to

understand my personal way of seeing is invited to consult this chapter at length. This chapter

will also serve as the pre-conclusion to this dissertation, although it could be read non-linearly at

another point of the dissertation or even at the beginning.

In the preface to the English language edition of *Cinema 1*, Gilles Deleuze writes that

"the cinema is always perfect as it can be, taking into account the images and signs which it

invents and which it has at its disposal at a given moment."[24] The chapters that follow are written

in the spirit of this remark and attempt to provide a thought or criticism equal to this perfection

or at least informed by it. Each chapter tries to draw some insight from the cinema for cinema,

aesthetics, politics, criticism, philosophy, and even for myself.

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[24] Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema I: The Movement-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), *x*.

Chapter 1: Eroticism, Transgression, Narration—Watching Claire Denis' *Trouble Every Day* with Georges Bataille

"It takes an iron nerve to perceive the connection between the promise of life implicit in

eroticism and the sensuous aspect of death." - Georges Bataille[25]

One of the components of art cinema is that films belonging to that category demand an

interpretative response. This is often accomplished, *pace* Bordwell in *Narration in the Fiction*

Film (1985), by the strategic use of narrational gaps that encourage the viewer to supply further

explanation for events, and even explanations for the style of the film. For Bordwell, the

explanation for these narrational gaps often involves the assertion of a kind of realism (i.e. the

film is trying to represent the unpredictability or contingency of everyday life) or authorial

commentary (this is the director's self-reflexive comment on filmmaking, etc.). In this chapter,

what I would like to do is suggest that these gaps can be adequately addressed by a turn to

philosophical or aesthetic concepts.[26] The aim of this chapter therefore is an examination of how

Claire Denis' film *Trouble Every Day* (2001) presents, interrogates, and subverts the various

conceptions of eroticism described by the philosopher Georges Bataille in his collection of

essays, *Erotism: Death and Sensuality*. What I am suggesting is that by thinking *Trouble Every*

Day with Georges Bataille, one can find interesting and perhaps unexpected answers to the

narrational gaps the film presents.

Trouble Every Day is a visually dense, narratively elliptical film; the longest scene of

exposition (in which the cursed American Shane Brown discusses his past relationship with the

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[25] Georges Bataille, *Erotism: Death and Sensuality*, Trans. Mary Dalwood (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1986), 59.

[26] The way I am suggesting one uses these concepts is less in the service of Theory, or the generalizations typical of film theory, but rather in service of small-scale or "piece-meal" theories limited to specific films.

scientist Léo and his also infected wife, Coré, with the red-headed lab technician) is both delivered in a disinterested monotone and presented with washed-out colors and television static filtered over it. The work discourages the viewer from attempting to establish any narrative coherence for the film purely from its *syuzhet*. Its reputation as a transgressive (or extreme) film is based on the two scenes of intense sexuality and violence that made it a scandal upon its initial release, but which comprise only a small total of the movie's length. *Trouble Every Day* is much more about the affect and tension that gives rise to these moments of violence than it is about their depiction. As a work of art cinema, it is a film onto which it easier to project meaning than to ever "understand" in terms of its *fabula*.

The film thus hystericizes its viewers and forces them to account for its narrative obliqueness and sudden bursts of violence.[27] I have chosen Bataille's writings to serve as this essay's anchor, as the concept I have chosen to give the movie narrational coherence is "eroticism," even in its most extreme forms. Eroticism in its simplest definition refers to "assenting to life even in death,"[28] affirming life while also being exposed to the negative void of personal destruction. *Trouble Every Day*'s connection with violence, sexuality, and death make its story an ideal subject for the examination of Bataille's concept. Furthermore, it also illustrates Bataille's concepts of taboo and transgression, which play a pivotal role in achieving the sensation of eroticism, which this chapter argues that the film reaches in its most graphic and horrifying moments. However, in addition to examining the story alongside Bataille, this chapter will also examine how the movie plays with conventions of genre, and how it is constructed to address questions of eroticism and transgression directly to the spectator. Bataille writes that

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[27] See Judith Mayne's reading of the film, in her *Claire Denis* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2005) as an extended AIDS metaphor as one possible reaction to this hystericization.
[28] Bataille, *Erotism*, 11.

the stirrings within us have their own fearful excesses; the excesses show which way

these stirrings would take us. They are simply a sign to remind us constantly that death,

the rupture of the discontinuous individualities to which we cleave in terror, stands there

before us more real than life itself.[29]

Trouble Every Day exists between genres of the art cinema and the horror movie. By looking at

how it fluctuates between these two poles and how it plays with these distinctions, further

evidence of Bataille's ideas at work will be demonstrated. How the genre of horror irrupts into

the film and challenges both the viewer's taste and how it alters their expectations will provide

this analysis with an opportunity to criticize the role of eroticism in the reception of the movie.

The first half of this chapter will examine how the film's narrative can be viewed alongside

Bataille, with special attention paid to when his concepts emerge in the narrative and whether

they are affirmed or subverted. How does the film's narrative encourage me to use this reading

of Bataille's eroticism, both in terms of the concept, and the text? What gaps does the concept of

"eroticism" satisfy in the film's narrative structure? The second half will focus on how the film's

generic structure and its relation to the spectator can be examined using Bataille's notions of

eroticism and will also examine what reactions were provoked by its sudden irruption of gore

into art cinema.

Much of what is observed in the story of *Trouble Every Day* are transgressions; some are

petty, others more serious, and in two (seen) fatal moments they are rather extreme. The opening

shot of the film is a medium close-up framed through a car window of an anonymous couple

behaving amorously. Neither of these characters will have a role to play in the story that follows.

All the shot provides is an erotic gesture that sets the tone for what follows. However, what is

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[29] Ibid., 19.

transgressive in this image is not simply the action of the couple but the way that the gaze of the camera lingers: it shows too much, and the way the man's hand rubbing against the woman's neck is given center framing suggests the vampiric (sub-)text that will linger throughout the film. Shortly afterward, Coré is introduced in a long shot that shows she is wearing a tight-fitting black dress, although at this point she is not named and no exposition is provided for her behaviour. She wordlessly seduces a truck driver, and the main implication seems to be that the scene appears to be a case of banal prostitution (unless we are already familiar with the eventual developments of the film, it is not narrated in a way that encourages one to view it ominously). For Bataille, prostitution is an inevitable result of desire, "not every woman is a potential prostitute, but prostitution is the logical consequence of the feminine attitude. In so far as she is attractive, a woman is a prey to men's desire."[30] However, Denis' film immediately subverts this observation. This woman is not prey to the man's desire. From the event of the seduction to the aftermath, when Léo arrives on the scene: there is blood on the reeds in the field, a wounded corpse, and Coré with her mouth caked in blood (Figure 1). Denis presents the sequence utilizing a mobile camera and focusing on medium close-ups on the characters suggesting a degree of intimacy between Léo and Coré. There is also a darkly lit close-up of the corpse, making it appear uncanny enough to awaken our unease, but also obvious enough in its trauma in order to make clear the implied violence of the situation. It is clear from how it is presented that this is not the petty *jouissance* of conventional prostitution. Something has gone wrong, to say the least; the type of transgression here has shifted from *Eros* to *Thanatos*. Already in these opening moments, an example of Bataille's "connection between death and sexual excitement"[31] has been presented.

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[30] Ibid., 131.
[31] Ibid., 11.

Figure 1: *Trouble Every Day* (Claire Denis, 2001).

What follows is the introduction of an American couple preparing to set off on their honeymoon, and they are a seemingly banal pair (the name Brown is itself fairly innocuous), but even this image is upset. Framed through the window of the plane, this couple mirrors the amorous one from the opening shot, suggesting visually a latent eroticism that their interaction does not show. The husband, Shane, rushes to the restroom, plagued by some sort of nightmare/fantasy/vision of his wife, June, covered in blood (Figure 2). This sequence is presented in a series of close-ups that makes it seem as if June has been cut to pieces. The quick editing between the shots further makes the images seem like intrusive thoughts that Shane is struggling to repress. However, while these visions may seem to torture him, it is also possible to read them as an unconscious fantasy, particularly if it is acknowledged that "the urge towards love, pushed to its limit, is an urge towards death."[32] This, as will be learnt from watching the movie, is particularly the case for the kind of creature that Shane is becoming.

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[32] Ibid., 42.

Figure 2*: Trouble Every Day* (Claire Denis, 2001).

It is also worth noting that despite the oblique narration presented up to this point, what has been explicitly depicted in the film is blood. Bataille makes the point that "blood in itself is a symbol of violence."[33] This film's treatment of blood is unique; in many films blood is synonymous with the color red, often in bright or exaggerated hues. In *Trouble Every Day*, the blood in Denis' mise-en-scène clots, it sticks, it drips. It has a textural capacity that many films often choose to omit. This is what makes Shane's intrusive thoughts on the airplane so disturbing**;** the blood on the woman's body seems internal, decaying; one can almost imagine the way it would feel to touch it. This haptic treatment of blood can be further observed after Coré disembowels the young robber, the way the walls become painted with blood that has a caked-on appearance. It is visibly dried, much like the blood on Coré's mouth that Léo is often seen wiping away. The blood also serves as a shocking juxtaposition to the extreme cleanliness seen throughout the film, something that Martine Beugnet has remarked on:

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[33] Ibid., 54.

cleanliness appears as an important and recurrent motif in the film; it weaves itself

through the film's multiple narrative threads, from the cleaning of blood after the

murders, to the tedium of the maid's job, as she tidies up room after room in the hotel

where the Browns have settled, to the sterile and pristine environments of the

laboratories.[34]

This cleanliness, however, is often interrupted. There is always temptation to kick-up a well-

organized pile of leaves, for "beauty is desired in order that it may be befouled; not for its own

sake, but for the joy brought by the certainty of profaning it."[35] In this film, sterile spaces often

similarly become desecrated in some way. The brains get dissected in the lab, occupying sterile

tables with marks of infection; the maid fills the room she has just cleaned with cigarette smoke,

and ultimately, Coré's chambers become marked with the blood of the young man (Figures 3, 4

and 5). Cleanliness is another taboo that seeks to cover over a kind of innate violence. Léo cleans

up Coré not only to hide the crimes she has committed but to restore the clean image of the wife

he has lost. It is a way of establishing order which in the face of the unending desire for

destruction can never be maintained. Shane, for example, is unable to completely wash away the

blood from the maid he victimizes; he can only run, back to a home that will now be as fraught

with danger as Paris has been.

Figure 3: *Trouble Every Day* (Claire Denis, 2001).

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[34] Martine Beugnet, *Cinema and Sensation* (Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 46.
[35] Bataille, *Erotism,* 144.

Figure 4*: Trouble Every Day* (Claire Denis, 2001)

It will suffice to briefly summarize what follows without specific attention to film's form and merely address the information presented by the *syuzhet*. After the couple lands in Paris, the narrative returns to focus on a series of petty transgressions as opposed to the extreme violence that has been suggested, but still not explicitly depicted, so far. Two young men attempt a robbery of Léo's home as Shane and June arrive at their Parisian hotel and he spends more time staring at the maid's figure than that of his wife. These minor transgressions are not simply foreshadowing, but atmosphere building. Bataille writes that "the main function of all taboos is to combat violence,"[36] and through the representation of minor transgressions, the film establishes a general undercurrent of petty violence that will explode into the torturous eroticism of its most gruesome moments. The pursuit of transgression presents a building violence, which is also made clear in Bataille's lengthy observation about the relation between transgression and taboo when he writes that

> we can even go as far as the absurd proposition: 'The taboo is there in order to be
>
> violated.' This proposition is not the wager it looks like at first but an accurate statement
>
> of an inevitable connection between conflicting emotions. When a negative emotion has
>
> the upper hand we must obey the taboo. When a positive emotion is in the ascendant we
>
> violate it. Such a violation will not deny or suppress the contrary emotion, but justify and

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[36] Ibid., 41.

arouse it. We should not be frightened of violence in the same way if we did not know or

at least obscurely sense that it could lead to worse things.[37]

By constantly giving ground to broken taboos, there is an affirmation of the violent force of

transgression. The minor pleasures of the maid who smokes in the bed she has just put together,

or of the thief who wants to unlock the neighbor's door are violations that prefigure the more

destructive actions that follow. Coré's erotic consumption always begins with the basic

transgression of infidelity, and then the violence percolates to its cannibalistic extremes.

Figure 5: *Trouble Every Day* (Claire Denis, 2001).

After the two thieves successfully break into Léo's house, one of them ends up going

upstairs to where Coré is being kept and ends up being seduced by her. She offers a further

transgressive thrill to the burglar who has arrived expecting to pillage a safe or some money but

has instead only found the remains of Léo's experiments. He has not been satisfied and thus he

wanders upstairs where he knows that something "other" awaits. Coré's strips for him between

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[37] Ibid., 64.

the bars that Léo has nailed on to prevent her from escaping. This gesture fulfills for the thief the

message Bataille attributes to nakedness:

> stripping naked is the decisive action. Nakedness offers a contrast to self-possession, to
>
> discontinuous existence, in other words. It is a state of communication revealing a quest
>
> for a possible continuance of being beyond the confines of the self. Bodies open out to a
>
> state of continuity through secret channels that give us a feeling of obscenity.[38]

The thief assumes that he is receiving an offering. However, what he does not realize is that it is

he who is going to provide the marker of continuity for the erotic monster that is Coré. The

sequence is presented primarily through medium close-ups from both sides of the boarding. The

thief transgressing the boards in order to kiss Coré is placed in the centre of the frame. We are

directed to give all our attention to the act of transgression, that which for the young robber will

become fatal.

Here arrives the predicament of any analysis that centers on the themes of transgression

and eroticism in this film, particularly following a reading of Bataille. Do Coré and, as is

eventually discovered, Shane, still obey the laws of human eroticism? Or are they monsters, thus

participating in an inherently nonhuman pleasure. My analysis suggests that they are monstrous

agents of the extremes of human desire; they are monsters of purely unlimited transgression and

eroticism, in some ways all *too human*. Bataille at one point observes that "in exceptional cases

unlimited transgression is conceivable."[39] What this film offers then is an example of people who

have become capable of experiencing and creating unlimited transgression. Beings whose desire

becomes embodied as a literal combination of sex and death. In generic terms, they are both

vampire-cannibals who feast on their lovers/victims during sex but who do not convert them or

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[38] Ibid., 17.
[39] Ibid., 65.

devour them totally. This is not cannibalism in the traditional sense, as film scholar Florence

Martin observes in her examination of the film; writing in regards to Denis' understanding of the

movie that "she insists that she does not film cannibalism, but, rather, the continuum between

love and violence, between the amorous 'I could eat you up' and a form of vampirism that is

never a rape (both partners are always consenting adults) but that, nonetheless, ends up in a

murder."[40] While her assertion that what is filmed is "never a rape" is dubious in the cases of

both the young burglar and particularly the hotel maid (surely they do not consent to the violence

visited upon them), nonetheless, Denis' "monsters" are seducers, but like the lover in Bataille's

sense, they are concerned primarily with themselves and their own eroticism, which is both

destructive and consumptive. These human monsters, these creatures who acquire a kind of

"living death," present an interesting challenge to eroticism, for they achieve the excessive

affirmations of continuity that the average man appears to have lost; as Bataille notes, "we are

discontinuous beings, individuals who perish in isolation in the midst of an incomprehensible

adventure, but we yearn for our lost continuity."[41] Coré and Shane achieve this continuity, but it

is inevitably a singular, other-conquering process. Their eroticism is pure, but explosive, its

power is an affront to the establishment of any symbolic or societal order, and they pursue the

most destructive form of eroticism, demonstrated by the disturbing observation that

> at bottom we actually want the impossible situation it all leads to: the isolation, the threat
>
> of pain, the horror of annihilation; but for the sensation of nausea bound up with it, so
>
> horrible that often in silent panic we regard the whole thing as impossible, we should not
>
> be satisfied.[42]

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[40] Florence Martin, "*Trouble Every Day*: The Neo-Colonialists Bite Back," *The Films of Claire Denis: Intimacy on the Border*, Ed. Marjorie Vecchio (London: I.B. Tauris & Co. 2014), 126.
[41] Bataille, *Erotism*, 15.
[42] Ibid., 60.

The two characters thus offer a realization of the deep-seated desire that appears in acts of transgression and eroticism, but witnessing the truth of that desire repulses most viewers. The focus on mouths throughout the film also contributes to this repulsion. In *Visions of Excess,* in the short article, "Mouth," Bataille writes that "the mouth is the beginning or, if one prefers, the prow of animals; in the most characteristic cases, it is the most living part, in other words, the most terrifying for neighboring animals."[43] Mouths in animals function as a warning for predators, for humans, the mouth primarily however is a conversational tool, the source of speech and the participation in linguistic exchange (it is still used for eating, but in the human context, meals also serve a function of mutual exchange and understanding). Bataille however, brings to light the unconscious danger contained in the mouth as a metaphor, writing that

> among civilized men, the mouth has even lost the relatively prominent character that it still has among primitive men. However, the violent meaning of the mouth is conserved in a latent state; it suddenly regains the upper hand with a literally cannibalistic expression such as *mouth of fire [bouche a feu],* applied to the cannons men use to kill each other.[44]

For Coré and Shane however, the mouth returns to its animalistic roots as a predatory construct. It is inhuman (animal) for the mouth to be a center of destruction rather than communication. Both Beatrice Dalle and Vincent Gallo, cast in the roles of Shane and Coré have such striking faces; their mouths seeming to stretch wider than normal (Figures 1, 6, and 7). Their celebrity beauty has been repurposed by Denis as a marker of superhuman desire and cannibalism. The focus on mouths also ties directly into the issue of which part of the victim both characters

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[43] Georges Bataille, *Visions of Excess*, Trans. Carl R. Lovitt and Donald M. Leslie Jr. (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 2008), 59.
[44] Ibid., 59.

devour. Coré feeds on her partner's neck, both alluding to classical vampiric fiction but also seeming more playfully amorous and destructive. Shane's attack on the maid, however, leads to him consuming her genitals, thus completely effacing her sexual difference through cannibalistic consumption. This is one of (and perhaps the most horrifying) the striking juxtapositions that Denis creates that suggests a fundamental split between male and female eroticism. One would imagine that their pleasures would be complementary, given their shared singularity as monstrosities, but rather Coré and Shane are at times presented as antimonies.

Figure 6: *Trouble Every Day* (Claire Denis, 2001)

Figure 7: *Trouble Every Day* (Claire Denis, 2001)

The repulsion generated by the appearance of these characters is shared by them as well. Shane cannot stomach the sight of Coré when he arrives after her feeding, and he kills her because of the disruption and horror she provokes. Shane embraces Coré in a medium-long shot, but as their embrace turns violent, the film cuts to a medium close-up, suggesting that their intimacy and their violence are inextricably linked. Their interaction moves from one extreme of passion to the other, and they never communicate directly in words. Their pleasure is enormously

excessive, which is other to the dimensions of capital and work the average person has to endure, which Bataille establishes when he remarks that "by definition, excess stands outside reason. Reason is bound up with work and the purposeful activity that incarnates its laws. But pleasure mocks at toil, and toil we have seen to be unfavorable to the pursuit of pleasure."[45] For the remorseless capitalist Shane, her existence is unbearable. Shane is an altogether different beast than Coré, and this is tied up in his own actions and masculinity.

On the surface, Coré's eroticism is inherently more animal, more excessive than Shane's. She is a more animalistic figure as seen in the early scene where Léo has to trap her in her room; it is more like he is trying to subdue an animal than playing seductively with his partner. She is excessive, hidden away, and restrained. On the one hand, her infection makes her almost purely destructive; she plays into the sense of eroticism Bataille describes when he writes "our only real pleasure is to squander our resources to no purpose, just as if a wound were bleeding away inside us; we always want to be sure of the uselessness or the ruinousness of our extravagance."[46] In this reading, Coré is like the gothic "madwoman in the attic" as figured in novels such as Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre*. She is locked away because her condition makes her no longer able to be understood by the man who loves her. Her status as an undead being makes her dangerously other and thus she must be contained. Is this a being worthy of eroticism? I would suggest that much like the prostitute as God, Bataille's own *Madame Edwarda*, that this character is an overwhelming source of eroticism. It is the various embodied transgressions and excess erotic force that makes this figure (the seeming madwoman) such a figure of fear (particularly to the Victorian mindset). Bataille writes in his "Preface to Madame Edwarda" that "but what mysticism cannot put into words (it fails at the moment of utterance), eroticism says;

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[45] Bataille, *Erotism*, 168.
[46] Ibid., 170.

God is nothing if he is not a transcendence of God in every direction; in that of vulgar being, in that of horror and impurity; even in that of nothing at all in the last analysis."[47] Coré, and many other figures who share these same characteristics, are all examples of an unleashed eroticism that cannot be contained, and for the ages in which they live, they represent the greatest threat to propriety. It is no coincidence that much like the madwoman in *Jane Eyre,* she too ignites the fire that leads to her demise (Figure 6). Her surplus eroticism is so intense that she is unable to withdraw its dangers even from herself, and thus it ends up consuming her. Her final victim is in many ways herself.

However, this reading of Coré does the character a degree of disservice. It suggests that she is reducible to a primal figure completely lacking in subjectivity, which is not the case at all. In complete contrast to Shane, she shows guilt for what happens to her victims**;** she feels the force of her transgression in a way that pushes her to self-destruction that is completely absent from her opposite number. Furthermore, in the way she paints the walls with the blood of her victim, which while admittedly horrifying, there is also demonstrated a kind of artistic subjectivity that Shane not only lacks but completely condemns (Figure 5). It is perhaps not correct to say that she is purely animal; she rather opens onto a dimension of sensuous eroticism without *telos* that Shane will sublimate into a masculine and capitalist mode that rejects this affective drive. Coré is thus not killed exclusively by the fire, but by also by Shane, who as has been touched upon, represents an altogether different but equally dangerous incarnation of excess eroticism.

If Coré's eroticism is characterized by unlimited sensational eroticism, then Shane's can be said to resemble the eroticism described in the example of De Sade's sovereign man. Shane is

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[47] Ibid., 269.

someone who embraces the notion that "the man who admits the value of other people necessarily imposes limits upon himself."[48] In contrast to Coré, who always has to be cleaned by Léo, whose frenzies induce a state of satiated catatonia tinged with guilt; Shane wipes himself clean after his crimes. He is able to express the same monstrous transgression as Coré, but then he is also able to reintegrate himself into the social order out of which he has fallen. It is no surprise then that he is characterized as a remorseless capitalist; his attitude suggests that "the kind of sexuality he has in mind runs counter to the desires of other people (of almost all others, that is); they are to be victims, not partners."[49] While the maid may be drawn to his sense of spontaneity and power, this is no more than the journey of a moth to a flame. The scene is presented similar to Coré's seduction of the young robber. Shane seduces the maid in a medium long shot, but then Denis moves into medium close-up to capture the burgeoning erotic intimacy between the characters. But as Shane begins to consume her, we are shown a medium close-up of the maid's face, as her ecstasy turns to horror and pain. The maid is drawn into Shane's sphere, seduced by his approach, but then she is annihilated by him, with no hint of remorse. By this point, he has witnessed Coré in her most monstrous state, but rather than extinguish himself, he instead chooses to persist in his form; willingly disregarding the destructive obscenity of his limitless desire; effacing it as a form of pleasure and reinscribing it as a form of power. It is no wonder then that he is content to return home at the end of the film, he is ready to return to the States and channel his vicious monstrosity into being a more vicious capitalist.

The preceding section focused on viewing the events of the film *Trouble Every Day* through the lens of Bataille's concept of eroticism. The concept of eroticism grants a kind of consistency to the narrative of the film, helping connect the narrational gaps deliberately created

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[48] Ibid., 170.
[49] Ibid., 167.

by Denis' technique. As an examination of eroticism, and one that ultimately condemns the capitalist excess of its most terrifying character, this reading has not only served to clarify the reason for the film's narrational gaps, but offered a moral justification for them as well. Both Shane and Coré embody a different pole of eroticism, and understanding the characters through this lens allows the viewer to account for the limited character sketches provided by the film. Eroticism thus offers us a way to address the film's narrative gaps in a way that does not necessarily motivate but helps to clarify the actions of the main characters. I have argued that the film does not celebrate transgression but allows its viewers to contemplate its limits and excesses. In the process of considering eroticism as a supplement to the formal decision of the film's narration, this chapter has also arrived at an ethical consideration of the narration's implied themes and ideas.[50] Coré and Shane's monstrosity, however, only partially accounts for the horror and discomfort the film provokes. In order to explore what makes *Trouble Every Day* so discomforting, even repulsive, one must consider the film in terms of its negotiations with genre.

Following this shift, what this chapter will now do is turn away from using Bataille to examine the narrative of the film and treat his work in relation to the genre of the horror film and then turn more specifically to the unorthodox "art-horror" narration of *Trouble Every Day*. Bataille, in many ways, seems like an ideal critic for an embrace of the horror genre, concerned as his work is with the intersection of death and sexuality, which is made especially evident when he states that "in order to reach the limits of the ecstasy in which we lose ourselves in bliss we must always set an immediate boundary to it: horror."[51] Horror, read through Bataille, is thus

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[50] I would suggest that Denis, regardless of what she might depict, is much more of a moralist than immoralist. Her work never celebrates the extremes of eroticism it may consider, and therefore it is worth considering ethically rather than **as** a celebration of immoralism, as in Eaton (2012).

[51] Ibid., 267

situated at the crossroads of eroticism. It is the force that must be endured to reach it, but also whose innate repulsive qualities keep one from reaching it. For the spectator of the horror film, this means facing up to the shock of violence and grotesquerie. Writing about the spectators of a primitive sacrifice, Bataille observes that

> a violent death disrupts the creature's discontinuity; what remains, what the tense onlookers experience in the succeeding silence, is the continuity of all existence with which the victim is now one. Only a spectacular killing, carried out as the solemn and collective nature of religion dictates, has the power to reveal what escapes notice.[52]

The horror film spectator watching along with others in a packed theater may feel a similar affirmation. The communal viewing of the modern Horror film, in which spectacular death is not only inevitable, but also advertised and guaranteed, surely recalls the same sensation.

This should not be viewed as a case of a simple sublimation of primitive desire, however. Following Bataille, horror is not an easily consumable form of transgressive *jouissance*; rather, it is something dangerous, something that mortifies us even as we seek it out. Bataille writes that "on the one hand the horror of death drives us off, for we prefer life; on the other an element at once solemn and terrifying fascinates us and disturbs us profoundly."[53] Watching horror in this way becomes almost homeopathic; something that we must consume, but gradually and within certain limits. The quote at the beginning of this chapter described the iron nerve necessary for the participation in facing death. It is not something to be looked at lightly, but rather it is a coming face-to-face with the very annihilation we usually seek to avoid but secretly desire, for "life is none the less a negation of death. It condemns it and shuts it out. This reaction is strongest in man, and horror at death is linked not only with the annihilation of the individual but

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[52] Ibid., 22.
[53] Ibid., 45.

also with the decay that sends the dead flesh back into general ferment of life."[54] This

observation by Bataille seems to offer a two-fold reason for watching the horror film; a desire to

challenge our personal sense of order, and a homeopathic resistance through gradual integration.

Bataille elaborates on this point further when he explains that

> man must combat his natural impulses to violence. This signifies an acceptance of
>
> violence at the deepest level, not an abrupt break with it; the feeling responsible for the
>
> rejection of violence is kept going in the background by this acceptance. Moreover the
>
> urge to reject violence is so persistent that the swing of accepted violence always has a
>
> dizzying effect.[55]

It also suggests a fascination with an impossible world, one in which death is somehow

transgressed and rewritten into the social sphere. The contemporary fascination with the undead

(as either vampires or zombies) suggests the horror of decay in the world of living flesh. That

many horror films simultaneously make women's bodies the particularly fetishized object of this

ritual sacrifice needs to be addressed in further detail than can be handled here. Nevertheless, it

seems evident that these rituals which emerge from deep-seated desires for transgression and

violence are easily appropriated into the dominant social order and its power dynamics. Thus,

while the form and horror of sacrifice are necessary and yet find themselves sublimated into

contemporary misogyny and exploitation, its destructive power as such should also be able to be

harnessed to explode the conventional taboos that restrict feminine sexuality to object of

masculine consumption.

As has been discussed, *Trouble Every Day* is both of this tradition and not. While its

characters seem to exist in a state of living death because of their extreme condition, they are not

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[54] Ibid., 55-6.
[55] Ibid., 69.

the generic living dead of much contemporary horror fiction. Furthermore, the film is not a conventional horror film, as Beugnet rightfully points out when she writes that "the film sits awkwardly at the crossroads between art and popular cinema; there is either too much or not enough gore."[56] Its seeming formlessness perhaps explains its negative critical reception. In the short paragraph from *Visions of Excess* entitled "Formless," Bataille describes the crisis of something which cannot be categorized by writing

> Thus *formless* is not only an adjective having a given meaning, but a term that serves to bring things down in the world, generally requiring that each thing have its form. What it designates has no rights in any sense and gets itself squashed everywhere, like a spider or an earthworm. In fact, for academic men to be happy, the universe would have to take shape.[57]

Its reception deemed it appalling, not simply due to the horror it presents, but due to its inability to satisfy the expectations of its viewers. *Trouble Every Day* refuses to be easily integrated into any conventions and thus it is resisted for its generic amorphousness. Before any examples of horror take place; the film seems much more like a kind of erotic thriller, as Beugnet writes: "for all the force of their impact, the scenes of cannibalistic killings that drew so much attention are not meant to emulate the strategies of successful horror or gore features (that rely on the sheer accumulation, variety and flamboyance of gory effects to captivate their amateurs)."[58] Of course, as Bataille points out in his short section on the "Eye" in *Visions of Excess,* "extreme seductiveness is probably at the boundary of horror."[59] Horror exists as a shadow behind that of the erotic thriller we initially think we are watching. It emerges and brings to light not only the

[56] Beugnet, *Cinema and Sensation,* 37.
[57] Bataille, *Visions of Excess*, 31.
[58] Beugnet, *Cinema and Sensation*, 37.
[59] Bataille, *Visions of Excess*, 17.

dark void of desire hidden within the characters, but also the thrill of the danger that the audience seeks within those confines. Horror for the art film functions as a kind of phantasm, which following Rudolphe Gasché's writings on Bataille, brings to light the truth of the image. Gasché writes "what appears in the phantasm is a light in which only an image, a mirage, a shadow image of the truth comes to light."[60] Horror, as it is employed by Denis in *Trouble Every Day* is a shadow image of the traditional erotic art film, it is the unspoken desire that wades underneath the erotic impulse of its usual presentation. As demonstrated by Martin's quote mentioned above, the cannibalistic killings the film presents are merely an outgrowth of the amorous desire present already in much of Denis' work. Here that same consuming desire is given its most literal manifestation through the cannibalistic actions of the characters in the film. Denis' use of the literal consumption of the other in *Trouble Every Day* as opposed to its more elliptical or metaphorical deployment in her other work nonetheless brings the viewer into contact with a horror element that seems unwelcome and evokes the same distress and anxieties described in our reading of Bataille above. *Trouble Every Day* provokes mixed reactions both for its inability to be categorized generically and also because the horror it introduced to the art film brought an unwelcome and disturbing truth. In a way, the logic of the film's reception mirrors the relationship presented between Coré and Shane; the unleashed and sensual eroticism of the film was condemned by the critical demand for order and rationality. It was lambasted by those who could not bear its excess and conventionally repurpose it for their own ends.

The aim of this chapter was to provide a reading of Claire Denis' film *Trouble Every Day* and the narrative strategies deployed therein that intimately links the film to French philosopher Georges Bataille's writing on eroticism. The film presents the viewer with an elliptical series of

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[60] Rodolphe Gasché, *Georges Bataille: Phenomenology and Phantasmatology*, Trans. Roland Végsö (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012), 284.

images of petty transgressions punctuated by scenes of surprising and overwhelming violence. Bataille's writings help make sense of the force of these images, how they precede and follow one another, and what symbolic power they have embedded within them. Furthermore, the film provides a visual representation of Bataille's ideas of eroticism, of seeing it function in (an)other space that allows one to reflect on their own desires and spectatorial expectations. Situating Bataille as a viewer of the horror genre also allowed this analysis to bring to light both the fascinations and repulsions that attract viewers to these works of art in the first place. In conclusion, the danger of eroticism is part of its allure, and-transgressive and horrific works of art serve to satiate, but also provide a warning of the extremes of society's hidden desires.[61]

However, Bataille's writings on eroticism and transgression also deal at length with the way these behaviors have been sublimated into the experience of the everyday. Horror films tend to deal with the descent into the extreme, not how the extreme situates the experience of normalcy. An almost identical chapter could be written on Claire Denis' next film after *Trouble Every Day*, *Vendredi Soir* (henceforth: *Friday Night*, 2002). That film follows the erotic misadventures of a young woman caught in a traffic jam who is anxious about moving in with her boyfriend, but the same concepts (transgression, eroticism, consumption) re-occur, only now in the register of an erotic and romantic (rather than horror) film. Vincent Lindon's lover in *Friday Night* offers the same promises of release and continuity that Shane and Coré present in *Trouble Every Day*, in a much different context than one of horror and disgust. Indeed, the dialectic between the congestion of the traffic jam and the erotic release and anonymous erotic encounter carries forward Denis' focus not just on taboo and transgression, but also the pleasures

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[61] Robin Wood also sees the horror film as a manifestation of repressed desires, c.f. Robin Wood and Barry Keith Grant, eds., *Robin Wood on the Horror Film: Collected Essays and Reviews* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press: 2018).

of *jouissance* that lie underneath seemingly banal or everyday restrictions. Providing a more complete reading, building on the few ideas suggested here, of *Friday Night* with Bataille would perhaps offer a "twee" reading of the philosopher that treats the sublimation of his concepts rather than their demonstration. But that analysis, like this one, would remain a fantasy of the philosopher who continues to escape his reader's grasp. Horror produces a shadow image of Bataille's thought that can be read in line with the extremes of language to which he pushes himself; but his writing is more heterogeneous than this accreditation; it is also a mysticism that prefigures that relationship between possibility and impossibility that characterizes much of post-structuralist thought. This analysis has dragged Bataille along to the screening of one specific film, but in matters of Bataille and his relationship to cinema, there are more viewings to be done.

Chapter 2: Seeing Politics—Landscape and Montage in Straub-Huillet's *Too Early/Too Late* (1982) and *Antigone* (1990)

What do I mean by "seeing politics"? By seeing politics, I am referring to an aesthetic experience of Jacques Rancière's political concept *dissensus*. *Dissensus* is defined as "not a quarrel over personal interests or opinions. It is a political process that resists juridical litigation and creates a fissure in the sensible order by confronting the established framework of perception, thought, and action with the 'inadmissible', i.e., a political subject."[62] The films of Straub-Huillet in, what following Daney and Deleuze, I will describe as their "geological," or "meteorological," dimension, provide a demonstration of the kind of *dissensus* that can be evoked via aesthetic means. Which is to say that Straub-Huillet's work, particularly in the gap they open between the image and the soundtrack of their work, stage a kind of cinematic *dissensus*. Their work allows the viewer to engage with the political content of their films in a way that is primarily based on sense and reception, rather than on didactic lessons of "correct" politics.

This chapter thus sees two Straub-Huillet films through a similar lens, starting from the relationship of the landscape to sound, from the Earth to the sky. The following analyses are taken from two separate presentations on the work of Straub-Huillet that attempt to locate their work in relation to larger aesthetic histories and related political concerns. The first section of this chapter, comprised of several subsections, deals with Straub-Huillet's adaptation of Brecht's version of *Antigone* and its relationship to the idea of community presented by the original play and how it has been received over the years. It suggests that *Antigone* stages a fundamental fissure in the conception of community, that there is a hole at the center of communal being that

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[62] Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, trans. Gabriel Rochhill (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2006), 85.

earthly and divine laws attempt to conceal. Community should not be understood here as referring to any practical or living community, but treated conceptually, i.e., how the idea of community stages problems for thought and formalization. This question of community is the one to which *Antigone* and Straub-Huillet, in their adaptation of it, respond. The second section, titled "Proletarian Ghosts", attempts to account for the open question at the end of the first section, i.e. how can a new community emerge from within the cracks of the old one and what possibility is there of this being an emancipated one? It stages an encounter between Straub-Huillet's work and Marx's *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844* to consider another line in the history of Marxist aesthetics, and one which opens a *geophilosophicallly*-inclined line of political resistance.

This chapter continues the project of "thinking with" inaugurated in the previous chapter. However, whereas that chapter was attached to the perspective of a single thinker, this chapter attempts to think the work of Straub-Huillet from various positions of political philosophy, and particularly the field of leftist, or Marxist, aesthetics. In this chapter I focus on the work of a single pair of filmmakers, with specific attention devoted to two of their films. While there are several general remarks on Straub-Huillet's work in what follows, my analysis should mainly be considered in terms of the films in question.

Both these sections are attempts to respond to and work through a question that haunts "leftist" aesthetics in general: that of transcendence in a work of art. How can we explain the gaps, narrational gaps, but also ones between sound and image, that Straub-Huillet's work show to their viewers without recourse to a kind of religious or spiritually derived aesthetic formulation? Another way to ask this question would be that of how to formalize or explicate creative lines of flight that do not depend on a transcendental or immaterial sense of salvation or

interruption? Part of seeing politics, i.e., seeing *dissensus*, involves placing it within the realm of the material and not leaving it to the dimension of the spiritual or the ideal.

Faut rever Antigone

In 1996, Jean-Luc Godard released a film called *For Ever Mozart*. Pronounced with a French accent and given a little bit of linguistic generosity, this title becomes *faut rever* Mozart, or: "one must dream Mozart." Unfortunately, the rest of the film, which ham-fistedly attempts to satirize "bourgeois" relief efforts in the Balkans, is not as clever as this title. Nonetheless, I have decided to paraphrase (and not for the first time in what is to follow) Godard's naming structure for this prelude. One must dream *Antigone*.

Why is it that *Antigone* has become the recurring dream (or nightmare) of ethics, in theory and practice, and as a result, of the community as such? Hölderlin, at the point of madness, attempted a translation of Sophocles' major works, completing *Oedipus* and *Antigone*. Hegel's discussion of the ethical order seems to largely be an attempt to translate *Antigone* into the language of spirit.[63] Community for Hegel is entirely derived from Antigone and its surrounding mythology. Brecht re-staged and supplemented Hölderlin's version of *Antigone* in the wake of the second world war. He added a prologue set during Nazi Germany, and re-imagined Creon as an imperialist warmonger (on which, more later). Jacques Lacan also saw *Antigone* as staging the fundamental crisis of ethics in his seventh seminar, which itself seems to necessitate the shift to "other side" of psychoanalysis in his later work. George Steiner has attempted to chronicle and interpret all these readings and more in his mammoth study, *Antigones*.

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[63] This can be found in Part C, Section (BB), subsection A of G.W.F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press. 1977).

What I want to do in this section is suggest that (i) *Antigone* opens a fissure in the relationship between what following Hegel, might be called human law and divine law, or in less theological terms, between symbolic law and the law of the outside, between ethics as inscribed in the law and the sensation of right that exists beyond that space or between the edicts of man and the force of the absurd (to use an expression from Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling,* while insisting on its more material, or an atheistic dimension), and (ii) that Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet's 1992 cinematic adaptation of Brecht's version of Hölderlin's *Antigone* provides a *geological* study in the various contradictions and distinctions the text carves out. Which is not to say that the film merely demonstrates the issues with *Antigone* that will be addressed during the first part of the chapter, but rather that its cinematic form actively re-presents and draws the viewer's attention to further sensations buried within not just the text of the play, but the legacy of *Antigone* as such. Nonetheless, all I have space to do here is trace the contours of this map, which itself is drawn on top of topologies that have already been traced and is destined to be covered over by others, those waiting to be found.

A Crack in the Earth

While it may be somewhat unnecessary to say, *Antigone* only ever appears via a process of translation and deferral. There is no original version of *Antigone*, as even the reader of ancient Greek is only reading a version dubbed "extant;" already a trace of some eternally lost object. *Antigone* exists purely in a state of ecstatic disjunction. It belongs simultaneously to the past, present, and inevitably the future. To encounter the play is to be brought face-to-face with a continually irrupting crack in the earth, a disruption that collapses the notion of any possible foundation or fixity, for community or otherwise. This ecstasy finds itself at work in the text of the play itself: it splits the world while taking place in a split world.

The play begins in the aftermath of a civil war; already there is a pre-existing division whose markings have been covered over by violence, which is necessarily present at the moment of any foundation. During the conflict, Antigone and Ismene's two brothers, the sons of Oedipus, have murdered one another, "our two brothers, on a single day,/poor wretches, themselves worked out their mutual doom./Each killed the other, hand against brother's hand."[64] This has effected a crisis for Antigone, who despairs that by Creon's edict, only one of the brothers has been given a proper burial. The one who fought against the kingdom must be forced to rot as a symbol for their fallen enemies,

> For Eteocles, who died this city's champion,
>
> showing his valor's supremacy everywhere,
>
> he shall be buried in his grave with every rite
>
> of sanctity given to heroes under earth.
>
> However, his brother, Polyneices, a returned exile,
>
> who sought to burn with fire from top to bottom
>
> his native city, and the gods of his own people;
>
> who sought to taste the blood he shared with us,
>
> and lead the rest of us to slavery –
>
> I here proclaim to the city that this man
>
> shall no one honor with a grave and none shall mourn.[65]

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[64] Sophocles, *Antigone*, trans. David Grene. *Sophocles I*, *The Complete Greek Tragedies*, ed. David Grene and Richmond Lattimore (The University of Chicago Press, 1991, pgs. 159-212), lines 63-65. I have opted to refer to these citations using line, rather than page, numbers. I should note that this conflict finds itself dramatized in Aeschylus's *Seven Against Thebes*, whose events, if brought to bear on this play here, would likely deepen the disorder further as it is Eteocles who motivates his brother's revenge in that work.

[65] Sophocles, *Antigone*, lines 213-23.

Creon enacts his sovereign power to celebrate the brother who died heroically for his kingdom, while also executing his powers in condemning his enemy to humiliation in death. The Chorus affirms his right do so, observing that "to use any legal means lies in your power,/both about the dead and those of us who live."[66] Creon has the rightful claim to temporal power, and by punishing the dead who stood against his kingdom, he believes that he is correctly asserting that right. Antigone acts against Creon's edict, and invokes a divine authority in order to justify her actions,

> Yes, it was not Zeus that made the proclamation;
>
> nor did Justice, which lives with those below, enact
>
> such laws as that, for mankind. I did not believe
>
> your proclamation had such power to enable
>
> one who will someday to override
>
> God's ordinances, unwritten and secure.
>
> *They* are not of today and yesterday;
>
> they live forever; none knows when first they were.
>
> These are the laws whose penalties I would not
>
> incur from the gods, through fear of any man's temper.[67]

This forms the antagonism which dominates the play: the relationship between the temporal authority and constructed right of man against the divine authority which wills a sensation of right through a force that exists beyond/outside human thoughts or codifications. It is important to emphasize here**,** however, that this is not a clash between two material forces. The divine law of the Gods is not a figurative presence which will draw arms against Creon, either personally or

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[66] Ibid., lines 232-233.
[67] Ibid., lines 494-503.

through a human surrogate, rather it is a power which exists outside representation. It is unwritten and secure; its force emerges from the gaps and tears in traditional modes of legal codification. Its status as an outside is what gives it the authority to intervene in the conflicts that emerge in the actions of men. Antigone exists as a fold through which this divine law is brought into collision with Creon's sovereign power. In this way, Antigone, through her absurd commitment (she believes she is right in direct defiance of the temporal law), is able to almost stop time, or enact the violence of a force outside of human temporality.

Following Walter Benjamin in his "Theologico-Political Fragment," one can ascribe to this divine law the function of the Messianic, which is to say that it is outside history in so far as "nothing historical can relate itself on its own account to anything Messianic" (312).[68] To follow this law, to commit one's self to its application in the face of this impossible state of being, is to give one's self over to the absurd (that which cannot be observed or conceptualized), or to continue using Benjamin's language, "nihilism."[69] This nihilism, however, is not a commitment to emptiness, but to a liminal point out of which all possibilities can emerge. Antigone expresses this liminal state when she laments, "pity me. Neither among the living nor the dead/do I have a home in common--/neither with the living nor the dead"[70] and observes that "for indeed/because of piety I was called impious."[71] She is thus on the one hand condemned, but in having been so, evokes a Messianic cessation of the unjust legal code. Antigone's transgression of Creon's law

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[68] Walter Benjamin, "Theologico-Political Fragment," trans. Edmund Jephcott, in *Reflection*s, ed. Peter Demetz (New York: Schocken Books, 2007), 312. Benjamin's "Critique of Violence," and Jacques Derrida's lengthy analysis thereof, "Force of Law: The Mystical Foundation of Authority," trans. Mary Quaintance, in *Acts of Religion,* edited by Gil Andijar, 228-298 (London: Routledge, 2001), 228-298, no doubt has a bearing on this analysis as well. It will have to suffice for now simply to mention that Derrida's description of justice as "the impossible," also inspired my connection between the sovereign law of man and the divine law of the gods which remains forever out of reach.

[69] For more on this valence of Benjamin's, see Paul de Man, "'Conclusions': On Walter Benjamin's The Task of the Translator" in *The Resistance to Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 73-105.

[70] Sophocles, *Antigone*, lines 905-907.

[71] Ibid., lines 980-981.

thus shatters his authority, as he relents to her demands, albeit too late, therefore condemning him to a lonely and depleted death, and thus reducing the community once again to a state of chaos.

There are several moments**,** however**,** when this destruction is presented less as a tragedy and more as a predestined inevitability. The Chorus observes that "but for those whose house has been shaken by God/there is never cessation of ruin"[72] and that "no generation frees another, some god/strikes them down; there is no deliverance."[73] There is thus neither origin nor end except through the imposition of violence; there is no eschatology, and no origin except an archi-violence that precedes the petty conflicts between communal emissaries.[74] To a more modern reader, the community is always already doomed, the bond between the house of Cadmus and Thebes is going to forever haunt the city, and that the passage of this generation to another, inevitably brings with it the force of the divine, a Messianic obliteration of one temporal code or order, leaving only ruins upon which to construct another. In *Antigone*, the ground upon which the foundation of the community is built is already split, the earth having been marked by an insoluble fissure blasted open by a divine thunderbolt.

The Earth is the Stage of History

> He it is again who wears away
>
> the Earth, oldest of gods, immortal, unwearied,
>
> as the ploughs wind across her from year to year
>
> when he works her with the breed that comes from horses. (Sophocles, 373-6)[75]

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[72] Ibid., lines 642-643.

[73] Ibid., lines 650-651.

[74] *Antigone* therefore strikes me as a "mourning play" *avant la lettre,* rather than a classical tragedy. It mourns for the lost possibility of community, rather than attempting to bring about a cathartic reconstitution.

[75] Sophocles, *Antigone*, lines 373-376.

Jean-Marie Straub and Daniéle Huillet (Straub-Huillet)'s 1992 film *Die Antigone des Sophokles in der hölderlinschen Übertragung für die Bühne bearbeitet von Brecht 1948 (Suhrkamp Verlag)* (henceforth: *Antigone*) brings together the observations of *Antigone* discussed so far with the use of a cinematic *mise-en-scène* that further elaborates upon and makes evident the communal fissures that the play presents. As the title makes clear, Straub-Huillet's film is an adaptation of the version of *Antigone* written by the playwright Bertolt Brecht in 1948, which itself follows within a very specific lineage. This title, which is also somewhat ironic by also including the name of the publisher and the date, already hints at the way *Antigone* itself functions as almost a mimetic image of community; the play inevitably carries with it intertextual traces of previous attempts at adaptation. In an equally playful move, the film modifies Brecht's work on the text even further, excising the Nazi-Germany set prologue that he added to the play, thus immediately defying the specificity applied to its title (even though, as Barton Byg explains in his monograph on the German films of Straub-Huillet, they are much more faithful to Brecht than he was to Hölderlin).[76] This is further complicated by the decision of the filmmakers to shoot their adaptation at the Teatro di Segesta: the ruins of an ancient Greek theatre in Sicily. So not only does the film trace a German lineage of *Antigone*, it also connects it back to one of its potential ancient sites of production, adding further stratification to the layers of history at work.

The concept of stratigraphy is essential to an understanding of Straub-Huillet's work, as it participates in what can most succinctly be described as a kind of cinematic geophilosophy.[77] The title of Byg's work, *Landscapes of Resistance*, also draws attention to this aspect of their

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[76] Barton Byg, *Landscapes of Resistance: The German Films of Danièle Huillet and Jean-Marie Straub* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 215-218.

[77] Cf. chapter four of Deleuze and Guattari's *What is Philosophy?* Trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).

work in a very literal way, although it is Gilles Deleuze who describes their style best: "to the question: what is a [Straub-Huillet] [78] shot?, one can reply, as in a manual of stratigraphy, that it is a section comprising the stippled [*pointillees*] lines of vanished features and the complete lines of those that are still touched. The visual image, in [Straub-Huillet], is the rock."[79] Consider that when the Chorus speaks their odes, the camera turns to the ground and lingers, splitting the sound and the image in two component parts. The viewer is then forced to juggle these two components: to look at the empty, ruined earth while also listening to the lament of the people. The viewer is transformed into an archaeologist; forced to discover within the very direct image of the ground the significance of the choral remarks. The two do not settle into an equilibrium; there is no dialectical saving grace that makes clear the relation between these two elements, simply a void into which possible meanings both flow and escape. The people, and by extension the community, are already entombed within the confines of their tragic destiny; the experience of history has already been fossilized, and as a viewer one can only gather one's proverbial shovel and begin unearthing it through speculation and interpretation.

To return to Deleuze, in Straub-Huillet's work, "history is inseparable from the earth [*terre*], struggle is underground [*sous terre*], and, if we want to grasp an event, we must not show it, we must not pass along the event, but plunge into it, go through all the geological layers that are its internal history (and not simply a more or less distant past)" (*C2* 254-5).[80] Thus, to plunge into the event of *Antigone* means to hold the play in suspense, to stratify the language of the text, the body of the performer, and the ruins of the location in which is being recorded. And yet,

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[78] Deleuze has this awful habit of primarily referring to the duo using only Straub's name and referring to the couple as the Straubs. In the spirit of properly acknowledging both sides of the "artful conversation"/collaboration, I have chosen here to refer to the filmmakers, following Byg and others, using the hyphenated Straub-Huillet and have altered quotations from Deleuze to maintain their mutual accreditation.

[79] Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema II: The Time-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 244.

[80] Deleuze, *Cinema II*, 254-255.

there remains an element of affectation at work here. The landscape functions as the "face of the community:" it is what the viewer must look towards and interpret to experience the communal meaning that the filmmakers are attempting to construct (Figure 8). [81] This affectation however runs counter to the soundtrack, which disrupts the viewer's gaze with a summons to the ear, thereby forcing a choice upon the spectator, and eliminating the singular affectivity of the earth. As a result of this method, Straub-Huillet's adaptation of *Antigone* is therefore not some banal staging of a community, but the staging of its disparate components and contradictions; a *lesson* in its destined failings and necessary demise. The separation of these elements does not cause them to orbit around a fixed core, but to overlap, reach across, and shift places with another through a kind of sedimentary drift. There is an interstice in which the components of the film both cut across and recede from.[82] Simply put, the spectator is constantly challenged to juggle their gaze, their ear, and their cognitive attention, and through this method the division or suspension becomes a kind of competitive flux.

Figure 8: *Antigone* (Jean-Marie Straub and Danielle Huillet, 1992)

It may be asked then to what end is this lesson being taught? Simply put: like Brecht, Straub-Huillet are Marxists, and their staging of *Antigone* aims not only to once again confront

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[81] See the chapter on the affection-image in Deleuze (1986).
[82] Cf. Christina Elle Burke, *Tracing the Interstice: Godard, Deleuze, and The Future of the Cinema*, MA Thesis (University of Western Ontario, 2017).

the play's dramaturgy on ethics, but also to appropriate it into a critique of Western violence and

imperialism, particularly Capital's drive for accumulation. In Brecht's adaptation, Creon

becomes an imperialist warmonger, desperate to rob Argos of its valuable metal ore. This

becomes the spiralling force by which the filmmakers shake the bones of history:

> In [Straub-Huillet], the class struggle is the relation which keeps circulating between the
>
> two incommensurable images, the visual and the sound, the sound image which does not
>
> tear the speech-act from the speech of the gods or bosses without the intercession of
>
> someone who could be described as a 'traitor to his own class' (Fortini's position, but it
>
> might also be said of Bach, Mallarmé and Kafka), and the visual image which does not
>
> take on its stratigraphic values without the earth being nourished by the struggles of
>
> workers and particularly peasants, all the great resistances.[83]

Antigone herself becomes a catalyst of change and germ of ruin not just to the relationship

between sovereignty and the divine; she also obstructs the exploitation of the people and the

imperialism of tyranny. Her refusal of Creon's edict now serves as the basis for a contemporary

communal resistance to Capitalism and its excesses, even if it is "a utopian future with no hope

of progress and no security of meaning."[84] The sedimentary disjunction in the adaptation of the

text becomes a historical disjunction through its ties to the history of resistance to capital and

imperialism. In Brecht, a trans-historical connection emerges between Antigone and a figure

such Rosa Luxemburg, a "class-traitor" to the Polish and German bourgeoisie who similarly

critiqued capitalism's imperialist drive,[85] and died fighting for her revolutionary cause. Because

of these connections, Straub-Huillet's geophilosophy is accompanied by a resistant strain of

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[83] Deleuze, *Cinema II*, 259.
[84] Byg, *Landscapes of Resistance*, 230.
[85] *See* Rosa Luxembourg, *The Accumulation of Capital*, trans. Agnes Schwarzschild (London: Routledge, 2003).

Marxist hauntology; there are unsettled spirits buried within the earth.[86] The filmmakers end by

showing a remark made by Brecht in 1952 that warns of future violence and destruction that the

global proletariat must prepare themselves to rise up against (Figure 9). Through this quotation

Antigone is returned to its place as an apocalyptic text, one that warns of the destruction and ruin

that awaits all formations of community, as Byg observes when he writes that the film responds

to the idea that "with the unification of Germany has come a reassertion of continuity, to which

the film *Antigone* responds" and that it seeks to ask, "can we trust the planet to the care of those

who have power?" (231). This quote from Brecht, a "'shudder' at the thought of the future" (Byg

231), almost functions a summons, an invocation that will hopefully call upon the specters of the

past to resist the disaster that awaits. The arrival of this resistant community seems always

postponed, though more optimistically one could say that it is always yet to come.
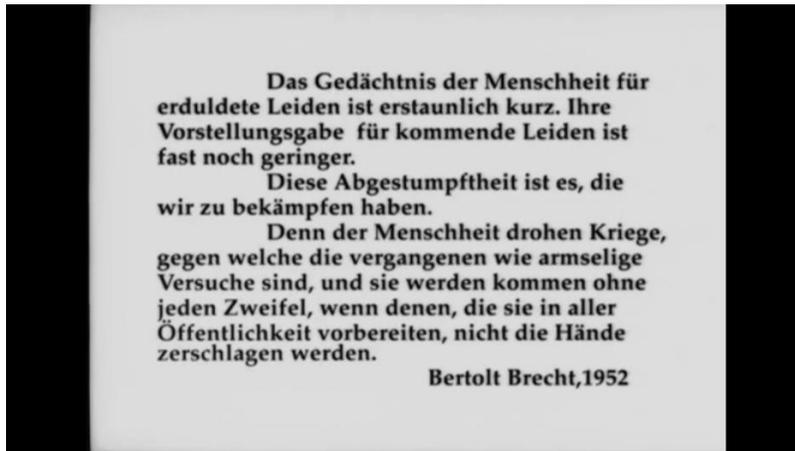
Figure 9: *Antigone* (Jean-Marie Straub and Danielle Huillet, 1992)

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[86] This concept finds itself initially articulated in Jacques Derrida *Spectres of Marx*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (London: Routledge, 2006).To broach an idea that will need much further expansion, it seems to me that geophilosophy and hauntology, if not identical, are at the very least kindred sciences. The meeting of the two sets forth a "bizarre adventure" for philosophy: it must map its territory while also facing up to the ghosts summoned by that cartography. Additionally, as suggested in *Tracing the Interstice*, hauntology and the cinema are certainly complementary disciplines.

Proletarian Ghosts: *The 1844 Manuscripts* and Marxist Film Aesthetics in Straub-Huillet's *Too Early/Too Late* (1982)

In this section, I want to (i) briefly gloss the relationship between Marxism and montage, particularly in filmmaking practice, (ii) re-introduce Deleuze's notion of the interstice also using Gary Tedman's "Marx's 1844 Manuscripts as Art: A Hypertextual Reinterpretation" to illustrate this technique at work in Marx's writings themselves, (iii) show how this technique or practice finds itself "embodied" (to borrow a phrase from Steven Shaviro**'s** *The Cinematic Body*) or actualized in Straub-Huillet's *Too Early/Too Late* (1982), and (iv) question the relationship between the interstitial void and Marxism's commitment to materialism.

At this point, in using the term "montage," I am referring primarily to a style of aesthetics in which a variety of images, objects, and ideas (sometimes from wildly different places or sources) are assembled and placed in opposition to one another for a kind of "shock" effect (usually for pedagogical reasons, i.e., to challenge false consciousness). In brief, the relationship between Marxist aesthetics and montage can be found most explicitly in the Soviet filmmaking practices of the 1920s, particularly the works of Sergei Eisenstein (*Battleship Potemkin,* 1925; *October: Ten Days that Shook the World*, 1928) and Dziga Vertov (*Man With a Movie Camera*, 1929), and in several of the more experimental literary projects of Walter Benjamin, such as *One-Way Street* and his unfinished and unpublished *Arcades Project*, which exists today generally as a mammoth literary montage of details about 19th century Paris. All of these works, with the exception of the *Arcades*, prefigure the 1932 publication of the *1844 Manuscripts*, and by the release of the *Manuscripts*, the Soviet Union would have already prescribed socialist realism as the State aesthetic. The *Manuscripts* thus arrive on the scene as a kind of specter, a ghostly affirmation of the practice of montage as inseparable from Marxist *praxis*. This is a note that would also be struck by Benjamin in his "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical

Reproduction," when he affirms a mode of filmmaking that much more closely resembles the work of Vertov and other 1920s avant-garde directors than the work of the popular front, which is emblematized by the films of Jean Renoir, whose works at the time fall under the category of poetic realism and are characterized by longer takes and the illustration of various social milieu (for example *The Crime of M. Lange*, 1936; *Grand Illusion*, 1937). Benjamin observes that

> our taverns and our metropolitan streets, our offices and furnished rooms, our railroad
> stations and our factories appeared to have us locked up hopelessly. Then came the film
> and burst this prison-world asunder by the dynamite of the tenth of a second, so that now,
> in the midst of its far-flung ruins and debris, we calmly and adventurously go travelling.[87]

This remark immediately brings to mind Vertov's *Man With a Movie Camera*, whose cuts link together parts of the city in an impossible manner and whose superimpositions place the cameraman himself in the midst of the most microscopic objects.[88] As Tedman demonstrates at multiple points in his article, it is possible to read a similar kind of structure at work in the *1844 Manuscripts*. One such example calls attention to the way the columns of the original manuscript has been presented, as Tedman explains that

> the three columns of text thus refer to "Wages of Labor," "Profit of Capital," and "Rent
> of Land." These, after reading the text and noting the parallel arguments, split into two
> columns, as Fay explains, when one of the components of commodity price, "Rent of
> Land," is theoretically refuted. This change in the design is clearly a formal feature that

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[87] Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," trans. Harry Zohn in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections* (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 236.

[88] Hansen, in *Cinema and Experience* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2012), persuasively argues that Vertov's "kino-eye" film provided a powerful intertext for Benjamin's influential essay and even fantasizes about an imaginary city film that could be shot according to Benjaminian aesthetic principles. It is of course no coincidence that Benjamin's aesthetics recall Vertov, given the explicit citation of *Three Songs About Lenin* (Dziga Vertov, 1934).

occurs when Marx proves that profit of capital and rent of land are not independent, but

are two manifestations of the more fundamental category, private property. (431)[89]

In this way, Marx's text seems to mirror the dialectical principles one finds in the montage

techniques of Eisenstein, Vertov, Benjamin, et. al. [90] However, it is not the dialectical montage of

the *Manuscripts* that is of interest here.

Rather, it is the way Marx is able to juxtapose the relationship between philosophy and

political economy in the text in order to produce a kind of "gap" or void between the two of

them. Tedman writes that "in the EPM we really have two kernels, as it were, with two husks.

The second manuscript provides the link between the first and the third, Economics and

Philosophy, and extrapolates what is found in them,"[91] and that "considered in the modern

context we might say, therefore, that the EPM is equivalent to an avant-garde Left modernist

artwork, but with a rather postmodern, hypertextual, deconstructive textual strategy."[92]

Extrapolating from this, I would suggest that what we find in the structure of the manuscripts is

not simply a work of proto-montage, but rather a forerunner to the technique that in *Cinema II*,

Gilles Deleuze will define as "the interstice." For Deleuze, regarding the interstice, "the question

is no longer that of the association or attraction of images," but rather "a spacing which means

that each image is plucked from the void and falls back into it."[93] This can be further elaborated

as a

> Method of BETWEEN, 'between two images', which does away with all cinema of the
>
> One. It is the method of AND, 'this and then that', which does away with all the cinema

---

[89] Gary Tedman, "Marx's 1844 Manuscripts as Art: A Hypertextual Reinterpretation" in *Rethinking Marxism* (Vol. 16 No. 4, October 2004), 431.

[90] Though one can certainly debate how conventionally dialectical Benjamin's notion of the dialectical image actually ends up being.

[91] Tedman, "Marx's 1844 Manuscripts as Art," 439.

[92] Ibid., 440

[93] Deleuze, *Cinema II*, 179.

of Being = is. Between two actions, between two affections, between two perceptions, between two visual images, between two sound images, between the sound and the visual: make the indiscernible, that is the frontier, visible.[94]

What this means as far as the *Manuscripts* are concerned is that rather than fully embrace Tedman's reading of them as a complete dialectical assemblage, I'm inclined to see them more along Althusser's lines as presenting the text as the work of incomplete science torn between the fields of idealist philosophy and political economy. But rather than see this as a reason to dismiss them, I find it to represent a kind of "holding in suspense" between these two fields. To borrow another Deleuzean term, the *Manuscripts* function as a kind of "dark precursor" to the later Marx; they are the lightning bolt created by the affective clash between the two disciplines Marx is trying to bring together. The second manuscript is structurally therefore like a medium who attempts to channel the two spirits, not necessarily the point of clarification Tedman makes it out to be. This holding in suspense can also be seen on a textual level as Marx brings Smith's theories of labour from *The Wealth of Nations* into close contact with Schulz's empirical studies (in "Profit of Capital" Section 4: "Accumulation of Capital and Competition Amongst the Capitalists," for example), which has the effect of ironizing and alienating the former from its supposed demonstration. While this obviously lacks the audiovisual element sketched by Deleuze, there is a visible frontier between capital and its empirical process, a gap: a formation which Marx will eventually attempt to map further with the development of historical materialism. To put it in geophilosophical terms (Deleuze and Guattari's *What is Philosophy?*), the *1844 Manuscripts* see Marx discovering the territory for the cartographical work of his later volumes.

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[94] Ibid., 190.

I would now like to turn from an examination of how this void is opened up in the *Manuscripts* back to how it becomes elucidated in Marxist film practice. While Deleuze initially situates the technique within the oeuvre of Jean-Luc Godard, that director's ambiguities and contradictory positions make using his work as an example in an explicitly Marxist schema problematic. Instead, I will turn to a later one of Deleuze's examples, again the work of Jean-Marie Straub and Danièlle Huillet, particularly their "landscape" film (though as later citation from Serge Daney will demonstrate, it is more of a meteorological film), *Too Early/Too Late*.

The first thing one notices in the sections of the film shot in France are that the people are missing. They exist only as implications in the buildings of the landscape, in the movement of vehicles, in the sound of children playing, or in the graffiti about revolution scrawled on a house or barn wall. This already finds itself in contradistinction to the revolutionary cinema of directors like Sergei Eisenstein, because

> in American and in Soviet cinema, the people are already there, real before being actual, ideal without being abstract. Hence the idea that the cinema, as art of the masses, could be the supreme revolutionary or democratic art, which makes the masses a true subject. But a great many factors were to compromise this belief: the rise of Hitler, which gave cinema as its object not the masses become subject but the masses subjected; Stalinism, which replaced the unanimism of peoples with the tyrannical unity of a party; the break-up of the American people, who could no longer believe themselves to be either the melting-pot of peoples past or the seed of a people to come (it was the neo-Western that first demonstrated this break-up). In short, if there were a modern political cinema, it would be on this basis: the people no longer exist, or not yet…*the people are missing*.[95]

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[95] Ibid., 216.

Even Vertov, who made the city his subject did so only with recourse to his notion of the *kino-eye*; man persisting as a kind of ghost in the machine **w**ho was-granted privilege accessed to the proletarian sites the camera is able to occupy. In *Too Early/Too Late* the only actor is the landscape, and "this actor has a text to recite: History (the peasants who resist, the land which remains), of which it is the living witness. The actor performs with a certain amount of talent: the cloud that passes, a breaking loose of birds, a bouquet of trees bent by the wind, a break in the clouds; this is what the landscape's performance consists of. This kind of performing is meteorological."[96] The camera no longer operates according to the principle of the eye, but rather of the wind; it does not move to reveal some hidden (because placed there according to the logic of *mise-en-scène*) object**,** but rather is carried along by the flux of the environment itself which witnesses the rejection of the peasantry by the Bourgeoisie, who built the revolution on their backs. Nature here, part of what Serge Daney calls a larger "cinemeteorology," undergoes a becoming-witness: "starting off with sounds — all the sounds, from the most infinitesimal to the subtlest — they too identify a crime. Scene of the crime: the earth; victims: peasants; witnesses to the crime: landscapes. That is, clouds, roads, grass, wind" (Figure 10).[97]

Figure 10: *Too Early, Too Late* (Jean-Marie Straub and Danielle Huillet,, 1981)

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[96] Serge Daney, "Cinemeteorology," trans. Jonathan Rosenbaum, 6 October 1982, 20 January 2018, https://www.jonathanrosenbaum.net/1982/10/cinemeteorology-serge-daney-on-too-early-too-late/.
[97] Daney, "Cinemeteorology."

The gap that is opened up here is that of history itself, and in the French section of the film, the history of the failure of the revolution to grant the necessary autonomy and assistance to peasant classes. Again, as Deleuze crystallizes, the "Straub-Huillet shot is a rock," and this is literalized in this film. The landscape serves as a witness to which the voice of the text eventually responds before drifting off. The villages and cities exceed their summary by the spoken supplement**;** there is more to mine from their setting than merely what can be described. The people may be missing, but their attempted realization leaves its mark on the earth. The territory is haunted by the attempts of history to stamp a personality upon on the land. These landscapes are not empty but emptied, leaving the viewer, as with their adaptation of *Antigone*, with the archaeological task of mining this significance from the combined sensoria of sound and image. In figure 11, we see graffiti scrawled on a wall with red paint (*"paysans se révolteront" [*"the peasants will revolt, 1976"*). This is not a paralyzing or petrifying inscription, but a silent witness to a call for revolution. Deleuze's observation that the "people are missing" is perfectly captured within the image. On the one hand, the graffiti would not exist without someone (or multiple someones) having inscribed it, but at the same time, the inscription has not yet been answered or taken up by a people. Straub-Huillet take the image as the sign of a people to come, i.e., a subterranean people who are currently repressed but will rise to answer the call of the surface. Revolution here becomes a seizure of the territory, or a rising to occupy the space that has already been carved out for a people on the image of the Earth itself. Similar to Antigone, the Earth is the stage of the history between the people and justice; it just awaits its players.

Figure 11: *Too Early, Too Late* (Jean-Marie Straub and Danielle Huillet, 1981)

This approach to Straub-Huillet's work leaves open an interesting problematic**,** however.

Serge Daney touches on this in his review, writing

> to see and hear at the same time – but that's impossible, you'll say! Certainly, but (1)
>
> [Straub-Huillet] are stout-hearted, and (2) voyages into the impossible are very
>
> instructive. With *Too Early, Too Late*, an experience is attempted, with us and in spite of
>
> us: at moments, one begins to see (the grass bent by the wind) before hearing (the wind
>
> responsible for this bending). At other moments, one hears first (the wind), then one sees
>
> (the grass). Image and sound are synchronous and yet, at each instant, each of us can
>
> create the experience in the same order in which one arranges the sensations.[98]

What is being dealt with in this journey into the interstice is a notion of impossibility or an

experience that defies a certain degree of articulation. It puts the film into the category of a

liminal experience insofar as "one may find the experience unbearable; that sometimes happens.

One may stop finding the very idea of the experience bearable; that happens every day."[99]

Straub-Huillet not only find themselves making visible a certain unnavigable frontier of history,

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[98] Ibid.
[99] Ibid.

but one that seems completely detached from material experience. Jonathan Rosenbaum rather self-consciously articulates this impulse when he explains that

> many American critics, myself included, have committed the error of identifying the mysterious aspect of the film as "religious" – an assumption I believe a European critic with more familiarity with a Marxist tradition would be less likely to make. It is ideologically interesting that Americans find it difficult to recognize any intense practice that is not capitalistic under any category except religion or mysticism. The intensity of Straub-Huillet's materialism may indeed seem "religious" and/or "mystical", but such labels in this case may well run the risk of confusing more than they clarify.[100]

This is the problematic alluded to above: how to talk about Marxist aesthetic practices without recourse to mystical/transcendental ideas. The *interstice*, conceptually, seems to be grounded in the material experience of sound and vision, but this material disjunction opens onto to rather post-structuralist notions of a crime without origin (or whose origin would simply be capitalism itself, which viewed in epochal/epistemic terms amounts to the same thing) and a kind of forbidden representation of the people whose historical resistance was unable to persist against the march of the Bourgeoisie. Following Jason Read in *The Micropolitics of Capital*, it is possible to view Straub-Huillet's work as demonstrating the "recognition that abstraction itself has very real material conditions and effects."[101] However, there remains, particularly in regard to aesthetics, the question of "how is it possible to think invention or resistance without recourse to a dimension of transcendence?"[102]

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[100] Jonathan Rosenbaum, "On *Too Early, Too Late*." 23 September 1983. https://www.jonathanrosenbaum.net/1983/09/on-too-early-too-late/. Accessed 20 January 2018.
[101] Jason Read, *The Micropolitics of Capital* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), 63.
[102] Ibid., 90.

Chapter 3: From Cinephilia to Cineroticism—On the Desire for "Cinematic" Thought

"In a world of unlimited possibilities, love itself represents an impossibility. Passion, too, is said to have grown cold."[103] These remarks which open Byung-Chul Han's *The Agony of Eros* could just as easily be found in a book called the "Agony of Cinephilia." That is to say, the love of cinema is just as much in crisis in the digital age as any other mode of experience. Cinema finds itself going through yet another death**,** a transformation that not only sees it competing with other new media for audience attention, but also has completely altered its modes of production, distribution, and exhibition. This crisis has transformed the question of cinema from a prescient present tense to a past question of history:

> As film disappears into the electronic and virtual realm of numerical manipulation we are suddenly aware that something *was* cinema. The history of film theory has produced more than ninety years of debate on the question "What is cinema?" Yet suddenly we feel compelled to ask the question again, but in the past tense.[104]

What *is* cinema has given way to what *was* cinema? The question this chapter seeks to ask is more along the lines of what *was* cinephilia? What is it becoming in the 21st century when cinema itself has become a point of contention? I will begin by defining what I understand by the term cinephilia and explaining how it refers to more than a kind of film fandom and functions as a mode of thought. This will be followed by an explanation of the current "death of cinema" and how it presents new challenges to cinema culture that have not been dealt with in the past. Finally, I want to propose a new approach to cinematic thinking that I call "cineroticism"; a demand for a "cinematic" way of thinking and theorizing that survives the death of cinema itself.

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[103] Han, Byung-Chul. *The Agony of Eros*, trans. Erik Butler (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2017), 1.
[104] Rodowick, D.N. *The Virtual Life of Film* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 31.

This chapter picks up on points raised in the previous two chapters, again indebted to the mode of analysis and operation that I have called "thinking with." In contrast to the two previous chapters, however, this chapter mobilizes traditions of eroticism and the practice of putting ideas "under erasure" to theorize a new approach to cinephilia. While there are some mentions of specific films in what follows, the focus of this chapter is primarily theoretical, and thus I am not including film stills as part of my analysis. In another departure from previous chapters, my method here is less analytical and more rhetorical, by which I mean that I utilize certain metaphors or descriptions of cinema that may seem old-fashioned, or clichéd. These moments are meant to convey a passing affect of a kind of cinema and are not always meant in the most literal of terms. We know that no one ran from the *Arrival of the Train at La Ciotat* (*L'arrivée d'un train en gare de La Ciotat*, Auguste and Louis Lumière, 1895), and yet the image still has something to teach us about how we wish to regard the power of cinema.[105] If I rely on similar paeans to the history of cinephilia, it is in the same wishful, and wistful spirit.

Cinephilia literally means a love of cinema, but from its emergence as a term of pride within film culture it has often symbolized much more than that. Cinephilia does not just refer to a general love of cinema, but a particular approach to and appreciation of cinema. The word earns its comparison to other paraphilias in many ways: "the term 'cinephilia', finally, reverberates with nostalgia and dedication, with longings and discrimination, and it evokes, at least to my generation, more than a passion for going to the movies, and only a little less than an entire attitude toward life."[106] As a way of life, it refers to a way of watching cinema and

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[105] For example, see Martin Loiperdinger "Lumière's Arrival of the Train: Cinema's Founding Myth," trans. Bernd Elzer, *The Moving Image: The Journal of the Association of Moving Image Archivists* 4: 1, Spring 2004, 89-101.

[106] Elsaesser, Thomas. "Cinephilia: Or the Uses of Disenchantment," in *Cinephilia: Movies, Love, and Memory*, Eds. Marijke de Valk and Malte Hagener. (*Film Cultures in Transition*, Amsterdam University Press, 2005), 27. As the title of Elsaesser's article makes clear, there was always an element of magical thinking to cinephilia that film

learning from it: one sits down in the theater, watches a movie, likely on 35mm film, and by consuming multiple films at a time makes connections both between the two films and the ideas they present. It is a mode of relationality, both of how viewers relate to films, and how they relate to one another as viewers and/or critics. This produces not only a system of critical evaluations, or film cannons, but something like an ethos, or an ethology: a way of living through film culture. In this way, cinephilia becomes a way of thinking *with*, theologizing *with* and ontologizing *with*, one perhaps best illustrated by Elsaesser

> The story of the *Cahiers du Cinéma* critics and their promotion of Hollywood studio employees to the status of artists and "auteurs" is too well-known to require any recapitulation here, except perhaps to note in passing another typically French trait. If in *La Pensée Sauvage*, Claude Levi-Strauss uses food to think with; and if there is a time-honored tradition in France – from the Marquis de Sade to Pierre Klossowski – to use sex to philosophize with, then it might not be an exaggeration to argue that in the 1950s, the cinephile core of French film critics used Charlton Heston, Fritz Lang, and Alfred Hitchcock, in order to theologize and ontologize with.[107]

Cinephilia transforms films into rich material for different forms of philosophy: cinema produces ontology, ethics, and even a kind of epistemology: a way of producing knowledge about the world.[108]

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studies as a discipline sought to correct or *disenchant*. See further Mulvey and Wollen's "From Cinephilia to Film Studies."

[107] Elsaesser, 31. The introduction of Georges Bataille later in this chapter will hopefully stage a meeting between these two French forms of thought, which is to say that a philosophy based on sex and on cinema are not so different.

[108] My definition of cinephilia as a form of thinking departs from "postcard" cinephilia, i.e., cinephilia as the experience or attachment to specific moments in cinema that one finds in Christian Keathley, *Cinephilia and History, or The Wind and The Trees* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: University of Indiana Press, 2005).

In his essay, "Goodbye Cinema, Hello Cinephilia", American film critic Jonathan

Rosenbaum suggests that "if we start to think of cinephilia less as a specialized interest than a

certain kind of necessity" it could become "an activity making things possible that would

otherwise be impossible."[109] Cinephilia produces not only an idea of cinema but other concepts

that could be deployed for and within philosophy.[110] Perhaps the best way of thinking about it

though is not through written explanations but with an example of cinephilia at work in film.

What I consider to be the methodological basis of this cinephilia is best illustrated by an iconic

nighttime sequence shot on black-and-white 35mm in Jean-Luc Godard's *In Praise of Love*

(*Èloge de l'amour*, 2001). A line of people wait outside of a movie theater with posters

advertising three very different films: Robert Bresson's *Pickpocket* (1957), Samira

Makhmalbaf's *The Apple* (1998), and the Wachowskis' *The Matrix* (1999).[111] Godard's decision

to link these three films is not just a narrative device, but an attempt to invite the viewer to

recognize an affinity between these three movies; an affinity that a viewer who went to see this

triple feature would be forced to produce.[112] This approach deliberately recalls Godard's youth at

Henri Langlois' French cinematheque, a repertory film organization that would frequently run

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[109] Rosenbaum, Jonathan. "Goodbye Cinema, Hello Cinephilia," in *Goodbye Cinema, Hello Cinephilia*. (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 5.

[110] This is the basis for Gilles Deleuze's interest in film in his *Cinema* books.

[111] This sequence begins with a long shot of the Gaumont cinema and the pulsating "Gaumont" sign leads us into the scene. Godard's citation of Gaumont, a company that he has collaborated with on several occasions, suggests one of Godard's perpetual returns to the mainstream cinema, i.e., in this sequence Godard is considering what ideas circulate in mainstream cinema today, rather than trying to make an "accessible film." *In Praise of Love* marks yet another of Godard's attempts to start over, following from *Numéro Deux* (1975), *Sauve qui peut (la vie)* [1980], and possible others.

[112] Film Studies scholar Steve Dillon, in contrast, has argued that one should read the side-by-side posters of *Pickpocket* and *The Matrix* film posters in this iconic sequence in hierarchical terms, not in terms of a curated, artful constellation, but as a scathing comparison; Dillon argues that in this sequence and in the film as a whole (later a woman reads from Bresson's "Notes on Cinematography") "it is very clear which film he sees as the thief." I would argue against Dillon that Godard here in this cineplex sequence and film is curating a "dialogue" or artful conversation between spectator and filmmaker, inviting Bresson as theorist-director back into the theatre to guide the movie-going experience. *See* Steve Dillon, *The Solaris Effect: Art and Artifice in Contemporary American Film*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010.

older films in what would otherwise be strange or nonstandard pairings and was particularly influential within French film culture, leaving a lasting impression on the future directors of the *nouvelle vague*.[113] These screenings introduced these directors to a didactic potential of cinema that would greatly inform their own film practices. These cross-cultural and transhistorical encounters would necessitate the viewer articulating a sensual experience no longer confined to the limits of historicism and periodization, and instead produce a more varied and possibly personal reading that cuts across the parameters of culture and history.

This version of curated cinephilia, however, has become threatened by the current "death of cinema." Godard's almost utopian conception of film viewing has been threatened by changing sites of film exhibition, transformations in the medium of film production, and larger changes in the modes of film distribution and production. D.N. Rodowick provides the most thorough description of the present crisis when he writes that

> The next ten years may witness the almost complete disappearance of celluloid film stock as a recording, distribution, and exhibition medium. For the avid cinephile, it is tempting to think about the history of this substitution as a terrifying remake of *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*. In the course of a single decade, the long privilege of the analog image and the technology of analog image production have been almost completely replaced by digital simulations and digital processes. The celluloid strip with its reassuring physical passage of visible images, the noisy and cumbersome cranking of the mechanical film projector or the Steenbeck editing table, the imposing bulk of the film canister are all

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[113] See Richard Roud's *A Passion for Films: Henri Langlois and the Cinematheque Francaise* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1999) for a more detailed history of Langlois' life and film practice.

disappearing one by one into a virtual space, along with the images they so beautifully

recorded and presented.[114]

The cinema that survives, that goes from being *the* medium of the 20th century to only one mode

of "entertainment" among many in the 21st century, is an uncanny reflection of what came

before. The experience of watching films in movie theatres no longer feels the same as it once

did: one can no longer hear the click of the projector running, or see the prompts for the reel to

be changed.[115] Film-viewing obviously does not stop, but transforms into something else

entirely, which alters the definition of what cinephilia was:

> Looking back from cinephilia take two to cinephilia take one, it once more becomes
>
> evident just how anxious a love it has always been, not only because we held on to the
>
> uniqueness of time and place, in the teeth of cinema's technological change and altered
>
> demographies that did away with those very movie houses which were home to the film
>
> lover's longings. It was an anxious love, because it was love in deferral and denial.[116]

The fleeting pleasure of cinephilia, the singularity of an encounter with a film or a series of films

is replaced by a home-video market (itself at this point a somewhat antiquated term) that makes

all (marketable) works immediately available, where film curation is no longer a public activity

but a personal pursuit managed by an individual. For Rodowick, this is hardly cinema in the

classical sense at all. He writes that

> By "cinema" I mean the projection of a photographically recorded filmstrip in a theatrical
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> setting. In the 1970s, it was still possible to believe in film as an autonomous aesthetic

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[114] Rodowick, 8.

[115] As David Bordwell points out in Chapter 1 of his *Poetics of Cinema* (Routledge, 2007), narrative strategies were often structured around reel changes. Without reel changes, this material dimension of film narrative disappears entirely.

[116] Elsaesser, 39.

object because the physical print itself had to be chased down in commercial theaters, repertory houses, and film societies. Film history was a pursuit founded on scarcity, for any film not still in its commercial run was difficult to see, and the only way to see a film was to see it projected.[117]

Cinema is now immanently present; Netflix supplies us with "new films" available on our home screens without even providing a theatrical run.[118]

For many people, the cinema, the movie theatre itself, is no longer the primary site of cinematic experience. We also leave even the Platonic model of the original home video market, in which movies would become available on low-quality or altered VHS tapes after an extended theatrical run, a simulacrum of the initial theatrical viewing behind. Cinema is no longer attached to its site of exhibition, but dispersed among many sites and media to which its original values are perhaps foreign or counterintuitive (it is not possible for a home screen to grab one's attention in the same manner as the cinema). Elsaesser productively contrasts "the love that never lies (cinephilia as the love of the original, of authenticity, of the indexicality of time, where each film performance is a unique event)" with the new competing "love that never dies, where cinephilia feeds on nostalgia and repetition, is revived by fandom and cult classics, and demands the video copy and now the DVD or the download.[119] This split in cinephilia represents a division between looking at cinephilia as a way of life and framing it instead as a mode of consumption. The love that never dies does not have to leave the movie theater and distance itself critically from what it has seen. When one watches films at home one can just endlessly

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[117] Rodowick, 26.

[118] This situation has only been further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

[119] Elsaesser, 41. This description of contemporary film culture has echoes of what Byung-chul Han, in the *Topology of Violence*, calls the violence of positivity. Film theory in this sense becomes depressed, that is flattened out and misses the sense of uniqueness that originally accompanied film spectatorship.

keep watching**;** there is no space to make connections across the movies one has viewed. There is no need for any interruption or *interstice* between film viewings. Furthermore, the home viewer can watch the same film any number of times. There is no longer any demand to remember, to recall, to retell what one has seen; everything can be double and triple-checked and analyzed in greater detail than before.

Of course, cinema's death is not a new idea. Canadian film historians and theorists André Gaudreault and Phillipe Marion somewhat playfully remark that the present crisis of cinema is "not the only death of cinema that commentators have remarked throughout film history. We will identify a total of eight deaths since the advent of moving pictures."[120] Despite this turn, I want to argue that there is something unique about this "death of cinema," particularly in terms of the transformation that it has brought to cinematic ways of thinking. Cinema has had to "compete" with other media in the past, it is not simply the fusion of cinema into other forms of consumption that is at stake in this crisis. As has been stated, "cinema had been down this road before. In response to the explosive growth of television in the 1950s, for example, cinema represented itself as a spectacular artistic and democratic medium in contradistinction to television, whose diminutive image belied its potentially demagogic power."[121] Cinema has fought and won other battles, but frankly its power does not lie in its commercial dominance over other artistic media. I am also not arguing *for* a regression to classical ideas of cinephilia, as personally invested in them as I may be. What actually concerns me is what this love transforms into when its object disappears?

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[120] Gaudreault, André and Marion, Philippe. *The End of Cinema? A Medium in Crisis in the Digital Age*, trans. Timothy Barnard (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), 12.
[121] Rodowick, 4.

Cinephilia without cinema is no longer about love, in the romantic or fanatical sense, but transforms into an erotics of cinema, or what I prefer to call "cineroticism." For Han, "eros, in contrast, makes possible experience of the *Other's* otherness, which leads the One out of a narcissistic inferno. It sets into motion freely willed *self-renunciation*, freely willed *self-evacuation*. A singular process of *weakening* lays hold of the subject of love—which, however, is accompanied by a feeling of strength."[122] Cineroticism is the demand for a cinematic mode of thinking that exists after the medium of film has been completely destabilized or destroyed, a cinematic "assenting to life even in death."[123] It is a demand or desire for the ontological, ethical, and aesthetic knowledge produced by cinema even after cinema no longer has the same power that it once did. Han best describes this scenario when he writes that "in the inferno of the same, the arrival of the atopic Other can assume apocalyptic form. In other words: today, only an apocalypse can liberate—indeed, redeem—us from the inferno of the same, and lead us toward the Other."[124] Cinema without a place, *atopic*, radically effects the kind of thought that can be produced by cinema, a possibility radically seized on by cineroticism: "eroticism always entails a breaking down of established patterns, the patterns, I repeat, of the regulated social order basic to our discontinuous mode of existence as defined and separate individuals."[125] This breaking down of cinema is its digitization and its diffusion. In many ways, this "death of cinema" provokes its most aggressive defense, or to put it another way, that its "catastrophic fatality abruptly switches over into salvation."[126] As Bataille explains: "assenting to life even in death is a challenge to death, in emotional eroticism as well as physical, a challenge to death through indifference to

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[122] Han, *The Agony of Eros*, 3.
[123] Bataille,, *Erotism,* 11.
[124] Han, 3.
[125] Bataille, 18.
[126] Han, 8.

death;"[127] cineroticism confronts the "death of cinema" as a theoretical challenge to be answered by cinema and film studies. Instead of mourning it aims to achieve "fusion, all barriers gone, but its first stirrings are characterized by the presence of a desirable object."[128] Cineroticism is a different kind of undead cinephilia, it takes the demands and scarcity of cinephilia and heightens them to new degrees; it creates a way of life or a cinematic philosophy out of the decaying medium, or "instead, the impulse to live, heightened to the utmost and affirmed, approaches the impulse to die."[129] This mode of approaching cinema thus finds itself at odds with Elsaesser's "cinephilia take two." It sees the endless consumption of cinema and the modes of thought it produces and demands something more: it wants cinema to have meant something more to life than just a singular mode of entertainment production, more than having been recognized as the seventh art among all the others, "erotic life-impulses overwhelm and dissolve its narcissistic and imaginary identity. Because of their negativity, they express themselves as death-impulses."[130] Cineroticism uses the "death of cinema" as an opportunity to theorize cinema and to produce new ways of cinematic thinking. It does not mean trying to preserve film culture as it was but accepting its possible death, that is to say, "on the one hand the horror of death drives us off, for we prefer life; on the other an element at once solemn and terrifying fascinates us and disturbs us profoundly."[131]

This idea made a germinal appearance in film studies before. The film curator-qua-archivist-theorist-filmmaker Paolo Cherchi Usai writes: "the ultimate goal of film history is an account of its own disappearance, or its transformation into another entity. In such a case, a

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[127] Bataille, 23.
[128] Ibid., 130.
[129] Han, 24. Perhaps instead of the consumerist zombie, its image would be the vampire, a figure at once undead, seductive, and tragic.
[130] Han, 25.
[131] Bataille, 45.

narrating presence has the prerogative of resorting to the imagination to describe the phases leading from the hypothetical Model Image to the complete oblivion of what the moving images once represented."[132] However, this model is still concerned with the relation of cinema to itself. It sees *the* cinematic thought as one that meditates its own demise. It is a fatalistic approach, somewhat similar to Rodowick's summation that

> Cinema is inherently an autodestructive medium. Every art suffers the ravages of time, of course. But structural impermanence is the very condition of cinema's existence. Each passage of frames through a projector—the very machine that gives filmophanic/projected life to the moving image—advances a process of erosion that will eventually reduce the image to nothing.[133]

The cinerotic is not concerned with the fate of cinema, which has already been fulfilled, but rather sees in this death the opportunity for new ways of thinking about cinema. It is not about finding a place for cinema, because cinema is now without one, "the Other, whom I desire and who fascinates me, is *placeless*."[134] Another way to describe the cinematic in cineroticism would be as formless. For Bataille,

> *Formless* is not only an adjective having a given meaning, but a term that serves to bring things down in the world, generally requiring that each thing have its form. What it designates has no rights in any sense and gets itself squashed everywhere, like a spider or an earthworm. In fact, for academic men to be happy, the universe would have to take shape.[135]

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[132] Usai, Paolo Cherchi. *The Death of Cinema*: *History, Cultural Memory and the Digital Dark Age* (London: The British Film Institute, 2001), 89. Also see his film *Passio* (2007)*,* which meditates on the "destruction of moving images" (pressbook). It opens with a corpse and ends with a reversed birth.
[133] Rodowick, 19.
[134] Han, 1.
[135] Bataille, "Formless," 31.

The cinerotic refuses the attempt to redefine cinema, to salvage it through a marriage with animation, the televisual, or the digital, for example. It theorizes cinema through its passing. In so doing, it allows us to reflect on both cinema and cinephilia in the past tense, and to produce new conceptual vectors of cinematic thinking.

This desire to produce a thinking of something after it has been lost is not a new idea. In the rest of this chapter, what I want to describe are the previous models and relationships that make this kind of thinking possible before turning to two examples of cinematic thought "beyond" cinema. I want to do this to demonstrate how each of the following models demonstrates one aspect or character of the cinerotic. Firstly, it places the concept of cinema under erasure in order to generate a new conception of cinematic thought (Benjamin). Secondly, it allows us to grasp what cinema was more clearly than when it was the "dominant" mode of experience (Adorno). Finally, it allows us to find in its approach an ethical demand that involves learning to live with the past rather than attempt to repress or overcome it (Derrida).

One classical example of this mode of thinking is Walter Benjamin's development and deployment of the concept of "aura" in his writings on "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility (or Mechanical Reproduction)". Miriam Hansen best describes the trajectory of Benjamin's project, writing that

> At the same time, the nexus of memory and futurity, the capacity to both remember and imagine a different kind of existence, is key to his effort of tracking at once the decline and the transformative possibilities of experience in modernity—in the face of a political crisis in which not only his personal fate but the survival of the human species seemed at stake.[136]

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[136] Hansen, Miriam Bratu. *Cinema and Experience* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press), 113.

The important thing Hansen notes is the simultaneous decline and transformative potential that operates in Benjamin's thinking. The end of something need not necessitate a cause of renewal but the production of something different altogether. But this production also allows us to reflect on what came previously**;** the past and future become co-determined by the present. Thus, Benjamin can produce a diagnosis that "no investigation of the work of art in the age of its technological reproducibility can overlook these connections. They lead to a crucial insight: for the first time in world history, technological reproducibility emancipates the work of art from its parasitic subservience to ritual."[137] In this observation, one can acknowledge that an age of art has passed, and that another has emerged, and yet this emancipation also addresses the question of what art *was* previously.

This becomes especially potent in relation to the essence of ritualized art, i.e., the aura. For Hansen, Benjamin's use of aura serves as a double function:

> One strategy of preserving the potentiality of aura, of being able to introduce the concept in the first place, was to place it under erasure, to mark it as constitutively belated and irreversibly moribund; in other words, Benjamin had to kill the term, mortify and blast it to pieces, before he could use it at all. [138]

This principle is also at work in cineroticism, in describing the death of cinema, it places the possibility of cinema under erasure. This death leads to the production of new possibilities for thinking cinema and for using the cinema to think about other issues. Benjamin's use of aura did not destroy the aura, did not eliminate the concept completely. Rather, Benjamin's use of the

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[137] Benjamin, Walter. "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility: 2nd Version," trans. Edmund Jephcott and Harry Zohn in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Works Volume Three*, eds. Howard Eiland and Michael Jennings (Cambridge, MA: Belknapp Press, 2006), 106.

[138] Hansen, 118. One should consult Hansen further, particular Chapter 4, "Aura: Or the Appropriation of a Concept" to understand just how particularly fraught this term was even before Benjamin's use of it. In some ways, killing it was the only way to set it free.

concept gave it a new life, as a site of contestation for thinking its aesthetic and political deployment. For Benjamin to harness the capability of aura for aesthetic thought, it was necessary to position modernity in a time afterward.

This process is also evident in the conception of natural beauty found within Theodor Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory*. [139] Natural beauty is not a Rousseauean conception of nature that precedes civilization and the aesthetic, but rather a product of artistic production. As he explains,

> The rigid concept of natural beauty thereby becomes dynamic. It is broadened by what is already no longer nature. Otherwise nature is degraded to a deceptive phantasm. The relation of appearing nature to what is inert and thinglike in its deadness is accessible to its aesthetic experience. For in every particular aesthetic experience of nature the social whole is lodged. Society not only provides the schemata of perception but peremptorily determines what nature means through contrast and similarity.[140]

Cineroticism does not make of cinema a contemporary and persistent phantasm, nor does it insist on classical cinephilia's boundaries of cinematic experience. To privilege the movie theater and 35mm film as "authentic" modes of cinematic experience is to Edenize film culture, to imply some kind of lost innocence of cinema and film culture that one can no longer reach towards. Cineroticism also does not attempt to emulate classical cinephilia through digital technology, as if the experience of a curated film program at home could present the same experience as that at the cinema. Rather, cineroticism defines the cinematic through its passing. We learn to understand what cinema was, and practice a theory of it through this knowledge, not by

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[139] Adorno's "Transparencies on Film," would be interesting to consider here as well. In this **e**ssay, Adorno recognizes a (most unfulfilled) potential of cinema to serve as a form of *écriture*, or a graphic presentation of thought. In some ways therefore, Adorno precedes the following writers in recognizing cinema as a nonhuman representation of thought.

[140] Adorno. Theodor. *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (New York: Continuum, 1997), 68.

attempting to resurrect it in the present. To return once more to Adorno, "the image of nature survives because its complete negation in the artifact—negation that rescues this image—is necessarily blind to what exists beyond bourgeois society, its labor, and its commodities. Natural beauty remains the allegory of this beyond in spite of its mediation through social immanence."[141] Cinema survives cineroticism through its negation rather than through endless attempts at redefinition or through an emulation of older film practices. By treating cinema as *placeless* and seeing its capacity to offer a mode of thinking to interrupt the present moment, cineroticism challenges the contemporary rather than indulging in its consumerist impulses. Benjamin diagnoses this deferral in artistic practice when he writes that

> It has always been one of the primary tasks of art to create a demand whose hour of full satisfaction has not yet come. The history of every art form has critical periods in which the particular form strains after effects which can be easily achieved only with a changed technical standard—that is to say, in a new art form.[142]

This death of cinema produces the desire for new ways of cinematic thinking.

The desire to think cinematically both exceeds and influences the life of cinema as such. Perhaps this death will end up producing something new, that no longer bears the name of cinema, an eighth (or ninth, tenth, etc.) art that makes itself out of cinema's demise. Cineroticism thus makes an uncanny gesture. As Benjamin writes

> Our taverns and our metropolitan streets, our offices and furnished rooms, our railroad stations and our factories appeared to have us locked up hopelessly. Then came film and

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141 Ibid., 69.
142 Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility: 2nd Version," 118.

burst this prison-world asunder by the dynamite of the tenth of a second, so that now, in

the midst of its far-flung ruins and debris, we calmly and venturously go traveling.[143]

This explosion is now taking place in the realm of cinema itself. That is to say, the death of

cinema opens onto a vast archive of cinematic materials, modes of exhibition, cinephile

behaviors, etc. that now become more visible in their disappearance than people were

consciously aware of when they were taking place. The death of cinema gives to film history its

own close-up and lays bare the unconscious drives of film culture and production. To return to

Godard briefly, his entire *Histoire(s) du cinema* (1988-98) project is an illustration of how any

attempt to reflect on the history of cinema shatters into multiple competing histories and virtual

possibilities. For Godard, this relation between cinema as history and its microhistories becomes

a dialectical conflict and, in many places, Godard holds cinema responsible for its inability to

properly engage in the world. This is particularly evident in his view of cinema's complicity with

the Holocaust. If cinema could really have offered a total reproduction of history, it would not

have failed so spectacularly to depict what was taking place. Godard, using a combination of

film and video, is able to interrogate and theorize virtual possibilities of what cinema could have

been. This method becomes the general practice of cineroticism. Cineroticism seizes on or mines

these ephemeral microhistories, micropossibilities, and multi-media materials to realize the once

impossible possibilities of cinema, forging its own demands for a post-cinematic mode of

cinematic thinking. Cinerotics is thus also a spectral task.

This spectral task of cineroticism is defined by an attitude of "learning to live filmically."

Why filmically and not cinematically? Filmically evokes the death of celluloid film that is so

immanent to the current death of cinema. "Filmically" suggests this presence of death or

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[143] Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Mechanical Reproduction," (1968) 236.

haunting in this mode of living. It is also free from the association of the cinematic with the visual that one might presuppose otherwise. To live filmically is to learn to live with cinema as something past and no longer with us. To live filmically is to live in a way between life and death. As expressed in this dissertation, to live filmically is also to open oneself up to collaborative possibilities, artful conversations (even those about to expire), and the art of the Other. As Derrida writes in the exordium to *Spectres of Marx*, "to live, by definition, is not something one learns. Not from oneself, it is not learned from life, taught by life. Only from the other and by death. In any case from the other at the edge of life. At the internal border or the external border, it is a heterodidactics between life and death."[144]

Cineroticism is also thus a heterodidactics between life and death; it is the attempt to learn a way of thinking, a way of life, from something that is passed and must be consigned to the past. It also submits itself to cinema as the other, *an other* without place in the contemporary world but rather situated beyond; in the past as a medium and in the future as a way of thinking but within the present as a spectral presence to be encountered. Cineroticism thus learns to live with cinema as it is, not as one would wish it to be or as it was:

> So it would be necessary to learn spirits. Even and especially if this, the spectral, is not. Even and especially if this, which is neither substance, nor essence, nor existence, is never present as such. The time of the 'learning to live,' a time without tutelary present, would amount to this, to which the exordium is leading us: to learn to live *with* ghosts, in the upkeep, the conversation, the company, or the companionship, in the commerce without commerce of ghosts. To live otherwise, and better. No, not better, but more justly. But with *them*.[145]

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[144] Derrida, Jacques. *Specters of Marx*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York, NY: Routledge Classics, 2006), *xvii.*
[145] Derrida, *xvii-viii*.

Cineroticism, like *hauntology*, is not an exorcism. It does not ask of us that we cast the specter of

cinema into the dustbin of history. It does not free us from cinema. On the contrary, it teaches us

to live filmically, i.e., *with* cinema as a ghost, as the *atopic* other of the contemporary. It teaches

us a cinema that we have not yet encountered, a cinema that is perhaps truer to our present

situation than the uncanny reproduction of digital cinephilia. Cineroticism thus flirts with the

anxiety described by Derrida in his final interview,

> I have simultaneously—I ask you to believe me on this—the double feeling that, on the
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> one hand, to put it playfully and with a certain immodesty, one has not yet begun to read
>
> me . . . in the end it is later on that all this has a chance of appearing; but also, on the
>
> other hand, and thus simultaneously, I have the feeling that two weeks or a month after
>
> my death there will be nothing left. Nothing except what has been copyrighted and
>
> deposited in libraries. I swear to you, I believe sincerely and simultaneously in these two
>
> hypotheses.[146]

It is only after the "death of cinema" that cinema has its chance to appear, or perhaps it will not

appear at all. It remains possible that cinema itself was just the waiting room for an artistic

practice or medium that is on the verge of appearing. Cineroticism lifts from cinema's

disappearance its capacity to appear anew, to become something *other* than what it has already

been. In my conclusion, I would like to briefly examine two ways of approaching "film studies"

that demonstrate this cineroticism, through two analyses that attempt to articulate a post-

cinematic mode of thinking that does not correspond to a narcissistic theorizing of the medium.

For Tom Cohen, the death of cinema bears a resemblance to the Anthropocene, "one can

read this today, perhaps, because the 'era' of cinema is technically dead, over and accomplished,

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[146] Derrida, Jacques. *Learning to Live Finally—the Last Interview*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas (Brooklyn, NY: Melville House, 2005), 33-4.

like a species getting to have a geological era named after it."[147] For Cohen, as we have

discussed so far, what cinema was only becomes clear after it has already happened, and the

same holds true for ecological disaster. The *Anthropos* in Anthropocene for Cohen is a

disingenuous title that suggests an attempt by scholars and climate activists to take responsibility

for the disaster. For him, this is dishonest, as it implies the potential of a Parsifalian reversal, that

we who have caused the wound can also heal it. This affirms human dominion over the Earth, in

one way or another. For Cohen, the Anthropocene must be rendered as a non-human

phenomenon,

> Given the hyper-accelerations of 20th century techno-media and the coincidence of any
>
> era of 'cinema' with that of exponential growth, techno-genocide, hyper-consumption
>
> and global financialisation — that is to say, the totalising mediacratic trances of today —
>
> we could instead trope this as the cinemanthropocene or cinanthropocene era, the epoch
>
> without 'epochality'.[148]

Here the death of cinema becomes synonymous with a broader climate disaster and the loss of a

medium becomes coeval with the loss of the medium of the human, i.e. the planet. Cinema and

climate disaster in this formulation are both informed by human behavior but also question and

displace that behavior. The capacities of both modes of thought are thus disregarded because

they imply a power beyond that of human thought, "it would be disavowed in a similar manner

to how 'climate change' would, or a certain ineluctable and nonbinarised 'materiality', or a

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[147] Cohen, Tom. "*Polemos*: 'I Am At War With Myself" or Deconstruction™ in the Anthropocene," *The Oxford Literary Review 34.2* (2012), 249.

[148] Cohen, "Polemos," 249. It is worth mentioning the unspoken influence of Bernard Stiegler on passages like this one. For Stiegler, the cinematic is not something to be saved, but an influence that needs to be resisted and serves as a further alienation of possible experience. More work could be done on Stiegler's understanding of 20th-century "cinema" in *Technics and Time 3: Cinematic Time and the Question of Malaise* and my understanding of "cineroticism."

machinal trace that implacably drives (and displaces) 'psychism.'"[149] Cohen's essay, which also

involves an extensive and far-ranging critique or understanding of Derrida's thinking in addition

to climate change and cinema serves as an example of what I call cineroticism because he sees in

the death of cinema a way of thinking more broadly about the world that does not efface or

disavow the possibility of annihilation. For Cohen, no one, no *thing* survives, and the question is

one of using cinema, Derrida, and the Anthropocene to confront this radical and immediate

finitude: "Is *survival* really *that* necessary to assert (I mean, *today*?)— and, once it is asserted,

does that not guarantee ethical contaminations, calculation, simulation, that is, failure? One need

only begin with an affirmation of extinction— and proceed to unriddle the aporia of a Western

parenthesis read, now, from the *cinanthropocene*."[150]

This positioning of cinema as a nonhuman power is also at work in John Ó Maoilearca's

All Thoughts Are Equal, which attempts to use Lars von Trier's *The Five Obstructions* to explain

Francois Laruelle's non-philosophy. As Ó Maoilearca describes his project, "this will be an

attempt at making a 'Film of Philosophy' rather than a 'Philosophy of Film'" (p. 38).[151] This

inversion is not as radical as the author makes it seem. Even the non-philosopher wishes to

extract from cinema a mode of thinking, whether it be viewed as evidence of a philosophy or to

use Laruelle's jargon, as philosophical material. Ó Maoilearca thus produces an overcautious

foreword, arguing

> Again, be it taken as art, entertainment, or both, that cinema might think for itself and in
> its own audiovisual structure (taken here as shot length, foreground and background
> structure, recording format, animation, and performance) will be anathema for many

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[149] Ibid., 249.
[150] Ibid., 253.
[151] Ó Maoilearca, John. *All Thoughts are Equal: Laruelle and Non-Human Philosophy* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 38.

philosophers. For these, film can only think by proxy of the human artists who make it,

be they philosophers manqué or no. It is truly nauseating for them to see philosophy slip

away from its textual, human hands into the paws of something inhuman.[152]

This diagnosis is imminently possible in the shadow of the death of cinema. Indeed, both Ó Maoilearca and Cohen are working within different frameworks to arrive at the notion of cinema supplying a pathway into inhuman or non-human thought. Both of these approaches are broadly possible because of cineroticism, because cinema is no longer tied to specific modes and sites of production or even to specific people.

Because cinema is placeless, *atopic*, it is no longer necessary to treat it as confined to realm of human production. For cineroticism, the death of cinema is the birth of the desire for endless definitions and redefinitions of cinematic thinking; it is only inevitable that these projects would exceed the boundaries of the human. This is not to say that these two projects are identical, or that they are easily retroactively consumed under the heading of cineroticism. Cohen's project much more deliberately embraces the "death of cinema" conceptually, both as a subject and a theoretical force. Ó Maoilearca's work on the other hand just demonstrates the further demands for a cinematic mode of thinking in the 21st century, and that he also arrived at cinema as belonging to something machinic and nonhuman was an interesting point of comparison. Ultimately, both works demonstrate that what lives beyond the "death of cinema" is a desire for cinematic thinking.

In conclusion, this chapter sought to examine the shift from classical cinephilia to what I have called cineroticism. Classical cinephilia was not just an expression of fanaticism in an older generation of film culture, but a way of living and thinking about the world. In the environment

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[152] Ó Maoilearca, *All Thoughts are Equal*, 43.

of the current "death of cinema," classical cinephilia transforms into a zombie cinephilia that reduces its knowledge and modes of production into a cinematically narcissistic framework that no longer reflects an ethos or attitude toward life itself. Cinema thus goes from being the emblematic medium of the 20th century to the placeless, *atopic* other of the 21st century. By affirming this death of cinema, what one discovers, however, is the persistence of a desire for cinematic thought**;** cinema as a concept appears anew in light of its own passing. Affirming this way of approaching cinema teaches us how to "live filmically," to learn to live with the ghost of cinema and create new possibilities out of its passing rather than try to exorcise it or restore it to its previous forms. Several analyses prompted by this cineroticism have positioned the cinema as a nonhuman mode of thinking, liberating the thought of cinema from its previous contexts of production and reception. To return briefly to Rodowick, "one consistent lesson from the history of film theory is that there has never been a general consensus concerning the answer to the question "What is cinema?" And for this reason the evolving thought on cinema in the twentieth century has persisted in a continual state of identity crisis."[153] If the question "What is cinema?" produced a constant identity crisis, hopefully the question "what was cinema?" produces a plurality of possible definitions for cinema that can inform new avenues of thinking, rather than limiting us to categories designed to stabilize and pigeonhole the practice of film studies. Cineroticism is the affirmation of the death of cinema that teaches us how to live filmically, that is, it teaches us to learn from what cinema was and not endlessly remake it in the present.

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[153] Rodowick, *Virtual Life of Film*, 11.

Chapter 4: Ways of Seeing Nature—Adorno's Conception of Natural Beauty in Jean-Luc Godard's *Hélas pour moi* and Terrence Malick's *Knight of Cups*

The aim of this chapter is two-fold. On the one hand, I want to examine the role that

Theodor W. Adorno's conception of natural beauty, as explained in his *Aesthetic Theory*, plays

in the films of Jean-Luc Godard and Terrence Malick. This chapter seeks to make a comparative

analysis between the works of these three thinkers, not just documenting how Adorno's concepts

are illustrated by Godard and Malick's work, but discussing how these two directors can be

viewed as contributing to an aesthetics of nature, more in conversation with Adorno's work than

qua a demonstration of it. The second aim of this project is to transform the context in which the

work of Terrence Malick is often examined. Contemporary readings of Malick's work are often

overdetermined by a either a Heideggerian or theological impulse, reading his filmography as

being inherently of a certain philosophical school or emblematic of given religious principles.[154]

In this chapter, I want to de-theologize and to a certain extent subtract the emphasis on

Heidegger from Malick's work. Instead, I wish to place the American director in conversation

with two more traditionally "materialist" thinkers, and thus respond to Malick's work as engaged

with the material world and not with a transcendent beyond.

While placing Malick in conversation with Adorno would likely be enough to re-center

the reception of his work in a materialist/Marxist vein, the inclusion of Godard represents an

attempt to describe an affinity that I have detected in the two filmmakers' work. Both Godard,

particularly in his later period (his films from 1979 onward, which, now in terms of its scope,

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[154] One can find examples of these impulses in Robert Sinnerbrink's "A Heideggerian Cinema?: On Terrence Malick's *The Thin Red Line*," *Film-Philosophy* 10.3 (2006), 26-37, and Barnett and Ellison's *Theology and the Films of Terrence Malick* (New York: Routledge, 2017). The impulse to view Terrence Malick's work in the light of Martin Heidegger can be traced back to Stanley Cavell's additional foreword in *The World Viewed* (1979).

exceeds the earlier period), and Malick, seem to share a variety of themes and ideas in addition to a certain commitment to elliptical narrative styles. While visually their films may appear to be very different, beneath their formal techniques, I believe both Godard and Malick are asking many of the same questions and arrive at, if not the same answers, an almost shared destination. In this chapter, I will argue that that destination relates to a relationship to natural beauty, a thematic that plays a dominant role in both directors' relatively contemporary films.

I do not just want to use Godard to flesh out the more materialist aspects of Malick's work but also use Malick as a guide to understand what we might understand as the more theological/idealistic aspects of Godard. Just as Godard materializes Malick, it might be the case that my reading idealizes Godard somewhat. If there is an affinity between these two directors, as I have suggested, it makes sense that this analysis would, by necessity, cause some resonance to echo in both directions. I should note that the two films that will be prominent in this chapter have not been chosen arbitrarily. Godard's *Hélas pour moi* (1993) has a religious quality, the story's retelling of several Greek mythological themes that makes it ideal to relate to Malick's work, which in its later stages seems obsessed, and I would argue this is mostly a semblance, with divine concerns. Although Daniel Morgan's volume *Late Godard and the Possibilities of Cinema* overlooks *Hélas pour moi*, I wish to extend several of his observations to the film, which will be useful for the discussion of natural beauty in this chapter. My analysis of Malick's *Knight of Cups* (2016) springs from a similar comparative spirit. It is perhaps the most elliptical of Malick's contemporary works, being divided into numerous episodes, which resembles Godard's divisional practice, but it is also set in around Los Angeles and the world of film production, adding a self-reflexive dimension to the film missing from Malick's other work. By creating a

new conversation between *Hélas pour moi* and *Knight of Cups*, I have chosen, loosely, a Godard

film that could be said to best resemble a Malick work, and vice versa.

The reason for choosing the writings of Adorno to bridge and mediate between these two

directors may also seem arbitrary, but it is actually the result of careful consideration in terms of

how the concept of natural beauty is deployed in the work of the two directors. For Adorno, film,

"the technological medium *par excellence* is thus intimately related to the beauty of nature

[Naturschönen]."[155] Adorno's remark on film and natural beauty, not elaborated on in the essay

in which it is written, seems to me to be best explicated by the two filmmakers in question. Of

course, this elaboration is not simply a celebration of nature or an expression of what could be

called its inherent religiosity. As has been observed, too often "at one extreme the sentiment of

nature becomes a jocose fancy, a banquet, while at the other it develops into the most devout

religion, giving to a whole life direction, principle, meaning."[156] For Adorno, "the path to nature,

seen as the mute record of the stigmata of history, leads *through* technology, aesthetically

instantiated by cinematic technique."[157] When we watch a film by either Godard or Malick, the

images of nature are not presented simply for the viewer's amusement; they form an important

relational component of the narrative the films construct, dialoguing with the meaning the

filmmakers are trying to create. As Morgan observes, "Godard's interest in nature and natural

beauty, however, does not take place in a vacuum, or even within a cinematic inheritance alone,

but emerges from a tradition of philosophical aesthetics."[158] I would extend Morgan's

observation to Malick as well; his employment of nature is also concerned with the history of

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[155] Adorno, "Transparencies on Film," 201. This statement is not included in the original German essay, see Adorno, Theodor, "Filmtransparente. Notizen zu Papas und Bubis Kino," *Die Zeit*, 18 Nov. 1966.

[156] Novalis. *The Novices of Sais*, trans. Ralph Manheim, (New York: Archipelago, 2005), 31.

[157] Hansen, *Cinema and Experience*, 231.

[158] Daniel Morgan, *Late Godard and the Possibilities of Cinema* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2013), 70-71.

aesthetics and is a conscious attempt to respond to and partake in that history. For the purposes

of my analysis here and for reasons already outlined above, the central philosophical aesthetic

that will be drawn upon is that put forward by Adorno in his aesthetic theory, given the

prominent place Adorno gives to nature. As Daniel Morgan argues, "natural beauty may have

been actively denied and rejected but it was by no means superseded. It is still present, hidden

yet recoverable by the appropriate techniques of analysis or artistic production. For Adorno, such

a project of recovery is of central political (as well as aesthetic) importance."[159] I also aim at

such a project of recovery, though my analysis will extend beyond Morgan's reference to

Godard's work to include Malick both conversationally and perhaps contrapuntally.

This chapter will thus present an ongoing conversation between Adorno, Godard, and

Malick. It will begin by meditating on Adorno's writings on natural beauty, then introduce the

place of natural beauty in Godard's late work following the analysis of Daniel Morgan, and

finally conclude with a careful consideration of these concerns as seen throughout Malick's

oeuvre. Along the way, I will also conduct a close reading of nature in *Hélas pour moi*, and will

examine a more materialist conception of nature in *Knight of Cups* together *with* Adorno.

Throughout, I will bring the two works in dialogue with Adorno to probe the place of nature

within them and attempt to draw out the affinity I see at work in Godard's and Malick's

filmmaking practice. This chapter represents the culmination of my work that employs the

strategy of "thinking with," and shows it beginning to transform into "artful conversation." Like

previous chapters, this chapter involves bringing together a thinker and a pair of filmmakers in

order to concentrate on the use of an Idea, in this instance the aesthetics of nature, for film

analysis. Where it becomes artful conversation and no longer just thinking with is the way I want

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[159] Morgan, *Late Godard*, 72.

to suggest that by putting these thinkers into conversation with one another transforms their work. Godard and Malick give a practical account of ways to imagine Adorno's theory of nature, while Godard and Adorno unlock new political possibilities in the oeuvre of Terrence Malick. It is this shift from film analysis to a more propositional mode of address that characterizes the move from thinking with to artful conversation, the culmination of which will be considered in the next chapter.

Natural Beauty and The Cinematic Artwork

In the last section, I cited a quote from Adorno's short essay "Transparencies on Film" describing the intimate relationship that he sees between filmmaking and natural beauty. As mentioned, Adorno does not elaborate on this remark during the essay in question. In order to flesh out this remark, it will be necessary to turn to his more complex *Aesthetic Theory* and the idea(s) of natural beauty and its relation to the artwork found therein. In that work, Adorno outlines a potential paradox facing any consideration of the topic of natural beauty,

> That the experience of natural beauty, at least according to its subjective consciousness, is entirely distinct from the domination of nature, as if the experience were at one with the primordial origin, marks out both the strength and weakness of the experience: its strength, because it recollects a world without domination, one that probably never existed; its weakness, because through this recollection it dissolves back into the amorphousness out of which genius once arose and for the first became conscious of the idea of freedom that could be realized in a world free from domination. The anamnesis of freedom in natural beauty deceives because it seeks freedom in the old unfreedom.[160]

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[160] Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 66.

As with many of the concepts Adorno wrestles with throughout his *Aesthetic Theory*, natural beauty is a disputed and bifurcated concept. On the one hand it contains the possibility for freedom from domination, while on the other, it places that freedom within an agency without consciousness. Adorno approaches this problem dialectically; rather than abandon natural beauty as an impediment to aesthetic thought, he attempts to move through it. Adorno wishes to seize on the kernel of freedom promised within nature, while also restoring a conscious awareness of its limitations.

Daniel Morgan sees in Godard's films of the late 1980s and the early 1990s a similar self-aware presentation of nature. He devotes several chapters in *Late Godard and the Possibilities of Cinema* to the relationship between nature and technology in *Soigne ta droite* (1988), *Nouvelle Vague* (1990), and *Allemagne 90 neuf zéro* (1991). For Morgan, the question of nature is ever present in these Godard films, which are "suffused with shots of nature. Images of the sky, of waves, of trees, of the sun and the moon, and of fields of grass billowing in the wind appear with striking frequency in the midst of sequences; indeed, that is one of the most recognizable authorial signatures in these films."[161] However, his analysis does not treat these images without a greater contextual understanding, rejecting the common approach where "critics have tended to treat these images of nature, in the absence of diegetic motivation, as more or less independent from the rest of the film, a topic all their own."[162] Following Morgan, it is clear that for Godard nature is part of narration. He also rejects the idea that Godard's focus on nature is necessarily a shifting away from politics, "once the idea of nature is taken to be distinct from the urban and industrial world—the world in which the film was made—it's an easy step to treat Godard's interest in nature as tantamount to an escapist retreat from political and historical reality, a

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[161] Morgan, *Late Godard*, 70.
[162] Ibid.

vacation by means of cinema."[163] Godard's use of nature, and its prominence in his later films, also retains a political emphasis, even if such a focus is not always explicitly present in the narrative; indeed, "Godard enacts a turn to nature to rethink and reconceive an approach to the historical world in which nature (along with its appeals) is embedded."[164] Following Morgan's analysis then, it is not unreasonable to suggest that Godard explores the tensions of natural beauty as Adorno does in his analysis. As Morgan suggests, "in a sense, Godard provides his own version of Adorno's turn to natural beauty in *Aesthetic Theory*: if there are dangers associated with a renewed interest in nature, there are also genuine possibilities that can be exploited for new ends."[165]

Malick is a more complicated case. As mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, recent writing on Terrence Malick's work is often overdetermined by an emphasis on either the director's philosophical background or on theological elements that have been found within his films, "the filmmaker's biography has been used to analyze the films or even suggest their particular philosophical provenance – in German phenomenology and American empiricism, though also in Christian existentialism and ordinary language philosophy" (Flaxman 83).[166] There has been some resistance to these dominant readings, and the just-cited "The Physician of Cinema: Terrence Malick's *Tree of Life*" will be an important framing device for my analysis.[167] Before addressing the question of nature in Malick's films, I want to argue that there is another

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[163] Ibid., 96.
[164] Ibid., 99.
[165] Ibid., 105.
[166] Gregory Flaxman, "The Physician of Cinema: Terrence Malick's *Tree of Life*," *New Review of Film and Television Studies,* vol. 17.1 (2019), 83.
[167] Gabriella Blasi's "The Cinema of Entanglement: How not to Contemplate Terrence Malick's *To the Wonder*, *Voyage of Time*, and *Knight of Cups*," *New Review of Film and Television Studies*, 17.1 (2019), 20-37, also tries to think beyond the dominant paradigms of contemporary Malick scholarship, although they attempt to do so using concepts from theoretical physics, which goes beyond the scope of this chapter's focus on philosophical conceptualizations of natural beauty.

mistake being made in the reception of Malick's films, and one that would position him as antithetical to Godard's style of filmmaking, rather than a fellow traveler as I hope to demonstrate.

Robert Sinnerbrink writes that "the most productive way of approaching Malick's later films (…) is as evoking moods – joy, wonder, anxiety, restlessness, boredom, longing – inviting sensuous immersion and meditative contemplation."[168] While I do not wish to dismiss wholesale Sinnerbrink's observation, I want to argue, pace Morgan on Godard, that there is a self-conscious engagement with questions of aesthetics in Malick's later work, particularly on the aesthetic possibilities of cinema, that Sinnerbrink's remarks do not acknowledge. I do not believe that Malick's goal is one of immersion, of becoming lost, but of contemplation, reflection, and to a certain degree, alienation. Instead of evoking moods (which is, if one translates *Stimmung* as mood, another Heideggerian idea), I want to argue that Malick's use of nature is also concerned with the history of aesthetics and is a conscious attempt to respond to and partake in that history. In this way, Malick is not so different than Godard**;** he is making films to provoke his audience into thinking about what they are being shown. If Godard can be seen as investigating nature in a way analogous, in terms of a dialectical tension, to how Adorno approaches the question of natural beauty in the *Aesthetic Theory*, however, Malick does not seem to present the same self-consciously rhetorical presumptions. In *Tree of Life* (2011), the narrative teases out a dialectical relationship between what "the way of nature" and "the way of grace"; a plea to God precedes a montage depicting the birth of the cosmos. One inference to draw from this scene is of the unity between the transcendent and material worlds, the idea that grace works through or alongside nature and the two cannot be fully separated from one another. A further inference I would like

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[168] Robert Sinnerbrink, *Terrence Malick: Filmmaker and Philospher* (London: Bloomsbury Press, 2019), 168. One could also read this as part of a Heideggerian influence, with its focus on *Stimmung*, or mood.

to draw is that Malick believes the cinema is, perhaps uniquely, equipped to capture this moment, that through a combination of special effects, deep-space photography, and associational montage, Malick can use the cinema to represent this birth of grace through the pre-history of the world. While Malick is not explicity self-reflexive in his film technique, the camera movement in his films, especially in his work from *Tree of Life* onward, draws attention to itself, and to the construction of the film. Malick uses this floating camera, and the audience's awareness of it, however, for very different purposes than other, more traditionally "Brechtian" filmmakers do. Rather than offer an interpretation of Malick's camera movement, however, I want to focus instead on the dialectic present between cinema and nature's representation that this style creates, and it is this aspect of work that leads me to link Malick to both Adorno and Godard.

Adorno begins his reflection and attempt to redeem natural beauty by restoring a sense of contingency missing from many discussions of the concept. For Adorno, "natural beauty, purportedly ahistorical, is at its core historical; this legitimates at the same time that it relativizes the concept."[169] It is not possible to speak of natural beauty outside a given context, and it is often shaped by its relation to the representation of nature within artworks, as further evident by the remark that "in the experience of natural beauty, consciousness of freedom and anxiety fuse. The less secure the experience of natural beauty, the more it is predicated on art."[170] However, art is defined by its relation with nature, its differences from it rather than a conflated identity. As Adorno explains, "art is not nature, a belief that idealism hoped to inculcate, but art does want to keep nature's promise. It is capable of this only by breaking that promise; by taking it back

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[169] Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 65.
[170] Ibid.

into itself."[171] Art carries within it the same "promise" of nature while at the same time turning

what is natural into an artifact. Art in this way both mimics and determines nature. Art strives

after "the dignity of nature," which "is that of the not-yet-existing; by its expression it repels

intentional humanization."[172] It incorporates natural beauty into itself and communicates not only

its visual, but its affective qualities.

Godard takes up this utopian power that art borrows from nature, and one could say that

Godard's use of nature has a particular epistemological function. The moments of natural

contemplation in Godard's work relate directly to the ideas of philosophical aesthetics that he is

working through in a given film. As an example, Morgan states "Godard, in other words, draws

on images that have an aesthetic history of the sublime in order to describe the experience of

modernity."[173] This is not emblematic of all of Godard's later films, however. For Morgan, there

is something like an epistemological break between the use of nature in the early films of 1980s

and the later ones, "starting with *Soigne ta droite*, Godard takes up and reworks images of nature

he used earlier to invoke the experience of the sublime, transforming them into a different

aesthetic mode, one that is best described as the beautiful."[174] This shift introduces a change in

the types of images of nature that Godard chooses to employ; the later Godard moves from the

sky and the sublime to images of the Earth and the beautiful, "where the shots of the sky had a

tendency towards a stark purity, the shots of the earth generate a quiet messiness: the profusion

of colors and objects blocks any tendency toward abstraction or the absolute. It's this world, not

the heavenly one, that matters."[175] It is of course not the case that one approach should be viewed

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[171] Ibid.
[172] Ibid., 74.
[173] Morgan, *Late Godard*, 76.
[174] Ibid., 77.
[175] Ibid., 79.

as superior or more innately political than another, "in Godard's late films, it's not that the beautiful deals with history while the sublime does not, each aesthetic mode deals with history; it's just that they do so in different ways, and with different sets of concerns."[176]

If Godard seizes upon nature to raise epistemological questions, to use images of nature to introduce new questions of knowledge, then Malick seizes upon the power of nature to dissipate human meaning, to work from the other side of Adorno's dialectical framing. The question of the presence of nature in Malick's work is relatively self-evident, but its importance also cannot be overstated, "in Malick's films, nature cannot be relegated to a backdrop, a setting, or even a milieu: human lives seem to shrink before a scope, scale, and age of the natural world or, alternately, give way to close-ups of diminutive creatures (a spider, locusts, a newborn bird) that reveal worlds within the world."[177] Nature is ever-present in his work, but also often considered in relation both to the grandest possible images (sweeping vistas, the swarm of locusts in *Days of Heaven* (1977)) as well as the most minute. The natural world itself becomes something like a perpetual secondary character in Malick's films, which leads to Flaxman's definition that "if Malick is not a metaphysician but simply a 'physician' this is because his films have unfailingly sought to express the natural world, to reveal to its forces, and explore its modes."[178] Of course, as with Godard, it is important that any analysis of the role of nature in his work does not separate it from the narrative in which it appears; Malick's use of nature is also not incidental. This can be seen especially regarding the later films, "in his second phase, when budgets and run-time become more generous, he decidedly steers his narratives into a kind of

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[176] Ibid., 85.
[177] Flaxman, "Physician of Nature," 85.
[178] Ibid.

montage whereby the pretense of human motivation occasionally dissipates before the infinite theater of nature."[179]

As should be clear at this point, Adorno's theory of natural beauty is one that rejects the trite pastoralism often associated with contemporary images of nature, "natural beauty, in the age of its total mediatedness, is transformed into a caricature of itself; not least of the causes for this is the awe felt for natural beauty, which imposes asceticism on its contemplation for as long as it is overlaid with images of being a commodity."[180] Nevertheless, this beauty is reflective rather than practical, "like the experience of art, the aesthetic experience of nature is that of images. Nature, as an appearing beauty, is not perceived as an object of action."[181] What this beauty is reflective of is a melancholic wound.

The affect of natural beauty is one of pain or melancholy, "the concept of natural beauty rubs on a wound, and little is needed to prompt one to associate this wound with the violence that the artwork—a pure artifact—inflicts on nature."[182] This is elaborated further when he remarks that "consciousness does justice to the experience of nature only when, like impressionist art, it incorporates nature's wounds," when nature is recognize as mutable and transformative, capable of loss and change, "otherwise nature is degraded to a deceptive phantasm."[183] For Adorno, the injurious experience of loss is "nowhere more visceral than in the experience of nature, is as much the longing for what beauty promises but never unveils as it is suffering at the inadequacy of appearance, which fails beauty wanting to make itself like it."[184] Nevertheless, "its essential

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[179] Ibid., 87.
[180] Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 67.
[181] Ibid., 65.
[182] Ibid., 61-62.
[183] Ibid., 68
[184] Ibid., 73.

indeterminateness is manifest in the fact that every part of nature, as well as everything made by man that has congealed into nature, is able to become beautiful, luminous from within."[185]

At this point in the chapter, I would like to introduce the two films that I said would be at the center of my analysis in this conversation. Looking at the stories and plot construction in Godard and Malick's films can help us see how they each stage their own dialectics between the melancholy of contemporary life and the luminosity of nature that persists around it. Godard's *Hélas pour moi* has a narrative that blends the sacred with the profane in a manner not found in the films Morgan chooses to analyze: loosely, the story of the film concerns a god/God possessing a man (Simon Donnadieu, played by Gerard Depardieu)'s body in order to sleep with his wife, Rachel (Laurence Masilah).[186] This plot is framed by an investigator trying to ask their friends and neighbors about whether such a mysterious event actually took place. The film ends without the investigator having received a satisfying answer to his inquiry. This mythological focus would incline one to initially think that this work then represents a turn back towards to the sublime and away from the focus on the beautiful that Morgan locates in the films he analyzes. Additionally, there is no larger political focus explicitly present in the film the way there is at least *Nouvelle Vague* and *Allemagne 90 neuf zéro*. I would contend, however, that despite these observations, the question of nature is more prominent in *Hélas pour moi* than in the other films.

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[185] Ibid., 70.

[186] Sally Shafto, "Myth and Narration in Godard's *Hélas pour moi*." *Framework*, 46 (1), 2005, 04-28, provides a thorough summary and analysis of the narrative of the film. It is worth mentioning here that the structure of the film contains five uneven sections, a structure Godard does not employ elsewhere, often opting for two or three-part structures, perhaps another reason why the film has not been considered at length by other scholars. Laetitia Fieschi-Vilet "Investigation of Mystery: Cinema and Sacred in *Hélas pour moi*" in *The Cinema Alone: Essays on the Work of Jean-Luc Godard 1985-2000*, eds James. S Williams and Michael Temple (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2000) is also focused on the narrative, though they introduce the sacred as a third term and intermediary between the beautiful and the sublime. As far as I am concerned, the film's path to sacred is one that moves through natural beauty, and as I will argue later, a sensory awareness of the sacred is something that necessarily emerges from this kind of engagement with nature.

Malick's *Knight of Cups* also follows in this vein, even if its concerns initially seem more urban than natural. Much of the film takes place in and around Los Angeles, and many scenes take place in downtown streets and buildings or an empty film lots. Nevertheless, nature has a way of asserting its influence on the film, whether it is through the dramatic earthquake in the opening of the film, the trips to and from the waterfront, or the California and Nevada deserts that occupy what might be described as the film's most transcendent moments. This seeming natural absence, which is more, in true Los Angeles fashion, a subterranean presence, then has a way of demonstrating that "through its duplication in art, what appears in nature is robbed of its being-in-itself, in which the experience of nature is fulfilled. Art holds true to appearing nature only where it makes landscape present in the expression of its own negativity."[187] *Knight of Cups*, out of all Malick's films beyond just the recent ones, with its seeming emphasis on the urban and a turn away from nature, is actually suited to a discussion of the negative dialectic Adorno ascribes to natural beauty, particularly through the important moments in which nature's ephemeral yet ever-present power is felt within the film. The city is at once the site where nature disappears, but its limits and borders are also what signal the point of its return, where its influence (even in its absence) can be felt the most strongly.

Returning to Adorno, we find that is in art that the pain and luminosity discussed above can be somewhat translated into human experience, "as a human language that is both organizing as well as reconciled, art wants once again to attain what has become opaque to humans in the language of nature."[188] Those melancholy pains of nature "[reappear] in relation to artworks."[189] Or, to put it more directly, "art does not imitate nature, not even individual instances of natural

[187] Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 67-68.
[188] Ibid., 77.
[189] Ibid., 73

beauty, but natural beauty as such**."**[190] To elaborate, "the primacy of the object endows the perception of natural beauty with both a compelling authority and incomprehensibility that awaits resolution, a double character that has been transferred to art."[191] The artwork inherits the ambiguity of natural beauty, its desire for something beyond its material limitations while embodying in an artifactual form. For Adorno, this relationship between the artwork and natural beauty has not only aesthetic, but also political dimensions**:** "the image of nature survives because its complete negation in the artifact—negation that rescues this image—is necessarily blind to what exists beyond bourgeois society" but this blindness is its strength as "natural beauty remains the allegory of this beyond in spite of its mediation through social immanence."[192]

Given that Godard is more methodologically similar to Adorno, *Helas pour moi* offers a very direct consideration of the question of natural beauty posed in the *Aesthetic Theory*. The film begins with something of a lament**;** a narrator recalls that "we used to go a spot in the forest to pray, and we would light a fire." This lament is repeated several times throughout the film, but each time an element of it is forgotten, first how to light the fire and then how to pray. While it may be tempting to read this as a theological paean, it can also be read as establishing an immediate identity between nature and the divine. It is only in nature where the miraculous takes place, not in any heavenly sphere. This is consistent with Morgan's analysis of Godard's later turn towards the earthly. Much of the interstitial shots of nature throughout the film contain a visible pathway amidst the trees (Figure 12). This suggests not a turn back towards the sublime or divinity but an understanding of nature as itself the guide, or connection to grace or the

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[190] Ibid., 72.
[191] Hansen, *Cinema and Experience*, 232.
[192] Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 69.

miraculous. This reduction of the divine, its connection with the earthly, is also demonstrated by

the other prominent nature topoi which dominate the film.

Figure 12: *Helas pour moi* (Jean-Luc Godard, 1993).

Figure 13: *Helas pour moi* (Jean-Luc Godard, 1993).

Much of *Hélas pour moi* takes place in a harbor, a point where the land meets the water.

There is thus a perpetually transient quality granted to the setting: this location is one where the

divine and the natural meet. Adorno writes "even in the past the portrayal of nature was probably

only authentic as *nature morte*: when painting knew to read nature as the cipher of the

transhistorical, if not as that of the transience of everything historical."[193] The setting of *Hélas*

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[193] Ibid., 67.

pour moi seeks to exist in or paints out this transhistorical place of flux where miracles can occur between man and nature. This is illustrated perhaps most explicitly by a sequence at the hotel after we have seen a variety of characters engaged in various conversations. The camera pans with a man as he walks away from the hotel to a pinball machine that is draped by a large section of overgrowth (Figure 13). In many of the locations used in the film, nature and world are fused.

In *Knight of Cups*, the question of a beyond, of a meaning to be found in natural beauty is stated much more existentially. The film begins by showing Rick (Christian Bale) wandering through the California desert while on the soundtrack a recording of John Gielgud recites the opening of *The Pilgrim's Progress*. Immediately, there is a connection between being lost in the wilderness and setting off on a journey. Of course, there is some question as to whether these images of Rick wandering through these abandoned valleys and canyons are part of the *fabula* created by the *syuzhet* or a metaphorical expression of the spiritual ennui he feels living in Los Angeles. This an aspect of the film that raises a similarity between Malick and Godard, but we can also recognize a key difference. Both filmmakers rely on associational montage, i.e. both filmmakers introduce imagery from outside the current action of the *syuzhet* as a commentary on what is being seen. For Godard, these images, which can be received metaphorically, are often still images of nature, paintings, etc.; still lifes or lives as a commentary on the action. One image that represents an idea, or an action, can take the place of another.[194] Malick often inserts images that seem to suggest an aspect of the fabula we have not seen, but which may in fact just be fantasies, daydreams, or at their extreme, visions of grace. In *Tree of Life*, when Jack (Sean Penn) questions whether there can be a world beyond time, Malick stages a grand sequence of

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[194] Godard's most recent film, *The Image Book* (*Livre des Images*, 2018) is the culminating project of such an idea, wherein the action is assembled from different images coming from many sources, where there is no "profilmic" into which the associational montage is inserted, there are only associations, or metaphors.

people gathering at some desolate beach, where Jack is able to reunite with his family as they are in his memories. Throughout the film we see clips of this beyond interspersed throughout the other memories the director explores. Rather than constructing an incredibly ambitious non-linear *syuzhet*, Malick favors a form of cinematic metaphor. We see this in *Knight of Cups* with the images of Rick wandering in the desert (Figure 14). This image of him lost in the landscape occurs several times throughout the film, each time as a transition between episodes depicting Rick's encounter with a character associated with the Tarot figures that symbolize his journey. These moments wandering in the emptiness suggest two things: that it is in nature where a kind of soul-searching takes place, but also that there is also something of a pathetic fallacy within it, the sense that its terrain can mirror the soul of the individual. These sequences literalize a kind of spiritual emptiness experienced by the character. Speaking in a more stylistic sense, if Malick's images of nature are moments of contemplation and reflection, they signal a transition in Rick's story; they break up the episodes of Rick's life throughout the film.

Figure 14: *Knight of Cups* (Terrence Malick, 2015).

Adorno argues that it is on film that his negative dialectical understanding of natural beauty is even more insistent, since images of nature are not limited to the metaphorical or

descriptive but retain a record/representation of living nature. As Adorno explains, "Even where

film dissolves and modifies its objects as much as it can, the disintegration is never complete.

Consequently, it does not permit absolute construction: its elements, however abstract, always

retain something representational; they are never purely aesthetic values."[195] In cinema, images

of nature are never fully reduced to the level of the artefact**;** there is an auratic trace of nature

itself which persists within its images and sounds. Miriam Hansen sees this as an opportunity to

elaborate on why film is particularly suited to nature for Adorno,

> film comes closest to such a negative aesthetics in a 'radical naturalism' suggested by its
>
> technology, thereby 'giv[ing] itself over to the blind representation of everyday life.' By
>
> renouncing intentionality, such an experiment would result in a diffuse and outwardly
>
> inarticulate creation alien to the visual and acoustic habits of the audience; it would
>
> amount to something like a secondary mimesis toward a reified world that does not return
>
> the gaze. Yet it would at once negate and preserve that negativity by constructing its
>
> images according to the immanent logic of the 'associative stream of images,' the
>
> subjective mode of experience that film 'resembles and that constitutes its artistic
>
> character.[196]

Of course, not every film follows this process in its depictions. It is in the work of filmmakers

such as Godard and Malick that one finds nature absorbed into an associative stream of images,

where representations of nature are transformed into images of thought. The artistic character

and the representative character, the natural character, in their work is made indistinguishable but

in such a way that one is forced to contemplate this division. Nature, as a part of a stream of

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[195] Adorno, "Transparencies," 202
[196] Hansen, *Cinema and Experience*, 236.

associative images, becomes for Godard and Malick, an ephemeral object for philosophical

speculation and contemplation.

Figure 15: *Helas pour moi* (Jean-Luc Godard, 1993).

In Godard's later work, it is water, particularly images of lakes and oceans, that become**s**

a reoccurring source of contemplation. In *Helas pour moi*, open water is viewed as a site of

blessing. Morgan has observed the role waves often play in Godard's work, "the shots of the

waves are not meant to literally overwhelm the viewer. The work they do is at the level of

iconography, as a way to bring into the film a set of intellectual associations having to do with

the sublime."[197] In this film, the water is not presented with the force of an overwhelming

sublime, but as granting sublime qualities to certain individuals. The image of Rachel Donnadieu

swimming, and then coming out of the water towards the land reoccurs throughout the film

(Figure 15). Godard does not just repeat this image untouched however; it is repeated several

times, and often sped up and slowed down. These alterations call attention to her uniqueness, her

position as the object of the God's affection; her image is not presented as solely being of the

earth, but altered and transformed, influenced by a force beyond the screen. Similarly, after the

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[197] Daniel Morgan, "The Place of Nature in Godard's Late Films." *Critical Quarterly*, vol. 51.3 (2009), 6.

encounter between Rachel and the God, he wanders into the water and disappears christening the water a site from which the divine arrives and into which it returns. The water may be a site of sublimity, but it is also one of constant flux, endlessly transformative. When the God speaks the lines "made in my image," it is over another image of the trees, which once again places nature at the site where knowledge of what is beyond humanity exists. Godard grants an ephemeral potency to nature, one that is mirrored by the film's plot of searching for a miraculous event that may or may not have happened. Following Adorno, nature is something that can never be contained or fixed, but in its fluctuations, glistening and flickering, presents something worth considering.

This positioning of nature in the film suggests that it is a site where knowledge comes from, but this knowledge is not something that can ever be fully grasped. There is something in nature that even God himself cannot know without himself taking the place of man. That the voice of God recalls Alpha 60 from Godard's science fiction film *Alphaville* further suggests the inhuman quality of the divine, emphasized by its misery at the experience of being human. Alpha 60 was also an inhuman force, an artificial God overcome by its inability to grasp human ideas of love. This "twist" however, that the God is made miserable rather than fulfilled by its natural journey, gives the film a register that matches the dialectical tension Adorno finds in nature. God simply cannot stand the ephemeral, material, doubting qualities of being a human being. Rather than be granted a definitive knowledge of human experience, all God is given to experience is endless questioning and self-doubt. Perhaps this can be related back to the question of nature and chance. Natural beauty can reveal something about the world, but it is also limiting**;** its power and possibilities are never fully grasped or conceptualized.

As stated earlier, *Hélas pour moi* starts with a lament or opening tale about a man who takes refuge in the forest and immerses himself in "silent prayer" when he has a "difficult task to accomplish." Generations later, his father's father as the essayistic voice-over narrates, states: "we no longer know the mysteries of prayer, but we still know the exact place in the forest where it occurred; finally, the narrator admits now "We don't even know the place in the forest. But we do know how to tell the story," although the camera continues to catalogue bushes, trees, rivers, waters, also cataloguing viewers absorbed by natural beauty, contemplating the beyond. Godard's film would thus seem to be a film about retrieving this place, a film that addresses the divine but is actually more concerned with the miraculous knowledge of nature or narrating nature. However, this miraculous quality means that the knowledge nature provides cannot be perfectly retold or (re-)presented. Even God is overwhelmed by the limitations of "natural" experience. The seemingly theological finds itself most explicitly realized in primarily earthly concerns and settings. The setting then, a supposed limit point between the earthly and the divine, instead becomes a transient site of knowledge where meaning can be realized or overlooked (as in the case of the investigator)**:** "these natural settings provide spaces in which transformations of the self (both internal and external) can take place, eventually allowing the characters to discover their companions (again) as worthwhile partners. In nature, miracles—of life, of art—are possible."[198] Of course, these miracles are human ones, and not for the divine. That one of the final images of the film involves two townspeople throwing rocks after a train leaves one lasting ironic image of the influence nature can have on the world and what it can offer people, even in its futility (Figure 16). The men throw rocks aggressively after the train, and against the imposition it (and by extension, contemporary technology, with its metaphysics

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[198] Morgan, *Late Godard*, 116.

of knowledge that goes chasing after explanations for miracles) makes upon their village. The

gesture, as stated is futile, but it nevertheless shows the desire to (re-turn) to nature, and its

seeming sacred power, against modernity. Godard, of course, is ambiguous in his view of this

gesture. It is presented as much as a comic afterthought as it is a profound disagreement. This

ambiguity in the filmmaker's own attitude brings out further contradictions in nature, ones the

film itself has not explored.

Figure 16: *Helas pour moi* (Jean-Luc Godard, 1993).

For Malick, the power of nature to introduce a shock that leads to contemplation is

manifestly clear in the sequence of the earthquake depicted early in *Knight of Cups*. It literally

shakes Rick out of his stupor, throwing him off-balance and in voice-over he asks a question that

will be repeated throughout the film, "how do I begin?" Adorno writes that "authentic artworks,

which hold fast to the idea of a reconciliation with nature by making themselves completely a

second nature, have consistently felt the urge, as if in need of a breath of fresh air, to step outside

of themselves."[199] Before Rick can reflect on his experiences in Los Angeles, he has to be

awakened from a kind of stasis, and it is nature which pulls him outside, forcing him to confront

his existential purpose. This same feeling of "stepping outside" can also be applied to Rick's

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[199] Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 63.

wandering in the landscape, if one approaches them literally. It is a refuge for both Rick and the viewer, from the urban sensorium of downtown Los Angeles. It can also be extended to the many scenes Rick shares with other characters at the beach or the oceanfront. These are some of the happiest and most serene moments in the film, when Rick no longer finds himself claustrophobically encased in his LA apartment but is allowed to visit a space at the limit of the city and its influence.

For Malick, not all images of nature are necessarily positive. The palm trees in both Los Angeles and Las Vegas do not offer the same refuge as the desert landscapes or the water. They are elements of nature that have adapted to the city and its needs. They function almost as a symbol of a kind of denatured nature. The most complicated thoughts on nature in the film take place during the "Death" episode in which Rick begins an affair with the married Elizabeth (Natalie Portman). This section follows the "High Priestess" where Rick goes to Las Vegas and completely loses himself in spectacle and debauchery. The sequence begins with a coyote wandering in suburbia, which suggests a certain foreboding, that this relationship will not be the one to satisfy or complete either character. But what I want to call attention to is the sequence in which Rick and Elizabeth visit a Japanese garden. On the one hand, this location seems outside of the city, a natural refuge within civilization (Figure 17). But Malick follows this sequence by showing Rick and Elizabeth in a contemporary art gallery, staring at an installation of an urban metropolis (Figure 18). The garden and the art gallery seem to represent two sides of the same issue: they are both artificial attempts to contain beauty, they are not necessarily the spaces of enlightenment that Rick is searching for. Much like his relationship with Elizabeth, these artificially preserved moments of nature and beauty are not going to complete him.

Figure 17*: Knight of Cups* (Terrence Malick, 2015).

Figure 18: *Knight of Cups* (Terrence Malick, 2015).

The film ends during its "Freedom" episode with Rick seemingly married to a woman named Isabel (Isabel Lucas) and attempting to raise a child. His new home has a garden with a tree not dissimilar to the Japanese gardens. Is this Rick having found a way to settle down and find contentment? Has he made peace by letting nature into his life, if only piecemeal? Malick is not content to end the film here. The final shot is of Rick driving out of the city, once again suggesting that the only way to go forward is to step outside (Figure 19). In an Adornian sense, this inability to become happy in an enclosed space, the desire to always step out and beyond is the chief characteristic of natural beauty. Thus, even in a film like *Knight of Cups*, which is concerned with alienation in contemporary LA, natural beauty remains a philosophical and aesthetic concern.

Figure 19: *Knight of Cups* (Terrence Malick, 2019)

Conclusion

I began this essay with two goals in mind. The first was to examine Theodor Adorno's idea of natural beauty as it appears in the work of Jean-Luc Godard and Terrence Malick. This investigation included a close consideration of how nature appears and is treated in Godard's *Hélas pour moi* and in Malick's *Knight of Cups*. The second was an attempt to provide a reading of Terrence Malick that did not rely on familiar approaches from theology or Heideggerian phenomenology. Reading Malick through Adorno's writings on natural beauty removes the emphasis on nature as a divine presence or a spiritual revelation and makes it something that shapes meaning through its evasion of definitive capture in the artwork. Understanding Malick and Godard together, as operating toward similar artistic goals, sees Malick as engaged less in a project of sensuous immersion and instead engaged in a process of filmmaking that provokes conceptual thinking. Adorno writes that "what Hegel chops up as the deficiency of natural beauty—the characteristic of escaping the fixed concept—is however the substance of beauty itself."[200] Escaping from fixed conceptual determinations is something that Godard, and Malick,

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[200] Ibid., 76.

though formally perhaps quite differently, incorporate into their work**,** even as they seek to

provoke a conceptual response.

Chapter 5: Towards a Cool Cinema

The aim of this chapter is to theorize an attitude towards filmmaking that is characteristic of what I have chosen to call "cool cinema." In describing cool cinema as an attitude, I am characterizing it as something that borrows from various ideas of genre, style, affect, and impulse, while being irreducible to any of those descriptions. As an attitude, it is something adopted by its practitioners, but is also communicated in their films; it is historical, in so far as it emerges in concrete contexts of film practice, but is also formal, in that it is characteristic of films that come out of those contexts. Despite this inherent amorphousness, despite the fact that cool cinema may function more as an Idea, in the aesthetic sense, rather than anything concrete or fully capable of being conceptualized or categorized, I nevertheless hope to demonstrate that is a useful, and indeed enlightening descriptor for a diverse set of films and filmmakers, periods and styles, and finally, perhaps unexpectedly, different philosophical approaches to film I am bringing together here. For Immanuel Kant, perhaps the most unexpected name one expects to hear in relation to the idea of *cool*, the Aesthetic Idea is "that representation of the imagination that occasions much thinking though without it being possible for any determinate thought, i.e., concept, to be adequate to it, which, consequently, no language fully attains or can make intelligible."[201] While "cool cinema" admittedly sounds conceptual, I hope that by describing it as an "attitude" that I have been able to bring it in line with Kant's description of his Aesthetic Idea. Cool cinema will always remain collaborative, defined by the works that ground it; it emerges as a product of exchange, of conversation, with and between filmmakers, camera

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[201] Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of the Power of Judgment*, trans. Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews, ed. Paul Guyer (Cambridge University Press, 2013), 192.

operators, and actors. Without this illuminating exchange cool cinema itself would be impossible.

So, what in a cinematic sense, is "cool cinema"? My idea of cool cinema emerges from a connection I noticed, which surely has not gone unnoticed by others, between the classical Hollywood filmmaker Nicholas Ray, the New German Cinema director Wim Wenders, and the independent American filmmaker Jim Jarmusch. Like many directors of the new European cinema(s), Wenders had a particular reverence for Ray that led to the American director being cast in films such as *Die Amerikanische Freund* (*The American Friend*, 1977), and Wender**s'** decision to make a documentary about Ray during the final days of his life, called *Lightning Over Water* (1980). [202] What interested me was not just the connection between these two filmmakers, but the presence of a third, Jim Jarmusch, who can be seen in Wenders' documentary and was Nicholas Ray's personal assistant. Here was a coincidental coming together of three filmmakers whose work all had what I found to be visible similarities. Or, to put it another way, I have always felt a certain affinity between Wenders and Jarmusch's films, and here was a moment when they were actually brought together. I found this an interesting avenue for investigation, but somewhat minimal; three hardly being enough to constitute a movement or style. It was only later, however, when I saw the Finnish director Aki Kaurismäki's film, *Leningrad Cowboys Go America* (1989) where Jarmusch makes a cameo (Figure 20) and learned that the French director Claire Denis had served as Wenders' assistant director on a number of films, including *Paris, Texas* (1984) and *Wings of Desire* (1988) that I began to see a much wider web, and to make connections across a much more culturally diverse set of films and filmmakers. Here were a group of film directors who I felt shared, if not always a sense of style,

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[202] One especially recalls here Jean-Luc Godard's famous review of Ray's *Bitter Victory* (1957).

then an attitude, who had also meaningfully interacted with each other in some way throughout their careers. What I perceived began to coalesce in front of me as a constellation of shared cinematic ideas, forms, and influences, no word seemed adequate to include them all, except "cool."

Figure 20: Jim Jarmusch in *Leningrad Cowboys Go America* (Aki Kaurismäki, 1989)

While these four filmmakers who follow from Ray can all be said to belong broadly to the practice of "art cinema," they are not solely determined by typically intellectual or "highbrow" pursuits. Each director willingly borrows from a variety of cultural sources and imagery, from familiar forms of film genre and popular music to national histories and traditions. What particularly struck me was the way certain rock musicians became part of the director's work, from Nick Cave in Wenders to Tom Waits in Jim Jarmusch, to Claire Denis' collaborations with the band Tindersticks and its members. There is a certain self-conscious deployment and association of culturally revered and admired figures in these directors' work that, combined with their unique film style, and indeed, personal presentation (something I can vouch for having spent a brief period in the presence of Denis at the Toronto International Film Festival), can only adequately be described by the word "cool."

How does one begin to write about and explain "cool cinema" then? To convey something as fleeting and impressionistic as an attitude may seem difficult. After all, is not the

idea of "cool" something unspoken and unseen, that emerges *between the images*?[203] Perhaps the

best way to convey it would be to instruct my reader to simply go watch the films themselves.

Consider again Figure 20. If the words "Leningrad Cowboys" do not immediately convey

a sense of ironic distance, the band themselves, outfitted in over the top fur coats and extreme

pompadours certainly do. However, the film is not interested in making fun of them. Rather, the

people the band encounters seem to embrace them, or at the very least, are congenial to them. In

the scene, Jarmusch's cameo almost functions as an endorsement, someone we are supposed to

recognize as a "cool" indie filmmaker recognizing a fellow traveler. What makes these films

cool, rather than absurd or mocking, is this mutual recognition, this refusal to look on these

stranger or outsider characters in judgement. Instead, we are often asked to share their gaze, and

see the world with them, rather than look at them.

In this chapter, I hope I can show that an attitude, and this attitude of "cool" in particular,

is also something that can be usefully theorized and deployed as a critical approach to film

viewing, or as a kind of film analysis in Raymond Bellour's sense. Cleverness aside, I want to

show that "cool cinema" is more than a personal shorthand for a group of films and filmmakers;

it can have intellectual value. I want to ground my attitudinal, what I will define according to

Gilles Deleuze as my impulsive approach in a philosophically-minded mode of film criticism-

philosophical and not theoretical. At the same time, I do not want to discount the personal,

conversational, and open-ended pursuit of this task; I will try and present what I am defining

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[203] I am referencing Bellour's film theory, in particular his illustrated essay collection *Between-the-Images* trans. Allyn Hardyck, ed. Lionel Bovier (Zurich: JRP/Ringier, 2013),and his *Analysis of Film*, ed. Constance Penley (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2000). Bellour's shift from a rigorous, semiological and psychoanalytical approach to film criticism to a more personal, philosophically inflected style inspired this piece.

here as in terms as academic as possible, while also including my own personal enjoyment of "cool cinema" in the analysis.[204]

This chapter first seeks to playfully define the idea of a cool cinematic attitude or impulse. This discussion will begin through a kind of fusion of the philosophical elaboration of genre by American philosopher Stanley Cavell and Gilles Deleuze's problematic Idea. It will begin by considering how Cavell explains his theory of genre in his essay "The Fact of Television" and *Pursuits of Happiness* and discuss how it differs from standard conceptions of genre, turning it into a more open and contestable concept. This will then be supplemented by Deleuze's thinking on the problematic Idea as it is expressed in his *Difference and Repetition* and *Cinema* books. By aligning these two ways of thinking, I imagine a way of thinking about cinema that is less defined by definite cultural or historical boundaries, one that can produce new ideas or constellations for cinematic study.[205] The second part of this chapter will then consider Cavell and Deleuze according to D.N. Rodowick's "artful conversation," a concept itself heavily inspired by the two aforementioned thinkers. Given that my idea of cool cinema is heavily based on notions of exchange and friendship between directors, it is important to ground both the notion of the "friend" as it is explained and theorized by Deleuze (and Guattari) and the idea of "artful conversation," articulated through Cavell by Rodowick. This exposition of artful conversation marks this chapter's turn from "thinking with" to a new approach. Finally, the last section will clarify the choice of the terms "attitude" and "impulse" to define this project, and

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[204] The distinction between "philosophy" and "theory" that I am working from here finds its thorough explication in D.N. Rodowick, *Elegy for Theory* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2014) and *Philosophy's Artful Conversation* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2015). The latter will be cited at length in this chapter. It will suffice for my purposes here to say that philosophy here stands for the pursuit of an Idea, while theory would mean a fixed conceptual determination.

[205] Here, as in the chapters on Cineroticism and the following chapter on Hong Sang-soo, I try to theorize, or give a philosophical justification for a cinephilia-informed methodology.

also define how I see "cool cinema" through an all too brief consideration of Nicholas Ray's film, *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955).

Genre and Problematics

Before I begin to speak about "cool cinema," it is necessary to define how it emerges from ideas regarding film genre, while at the same time is irreducible to such a description. As Bordwell and Thompson succinctly summarize, "the word *genre* is originally French, and it simply means 'kind' or 'type.' It's related to another word, *genus*, which is used in the biological sciences to classify groups of plants and animals. When we speak of film genres, we are indicating certain types of movies."[206] By this description, it would be fairly easy to assert that cool cinema refers to a certain type of movies, albeit one with a significant number of overlaps across other types. Genre, in this description, functions as a kind of heuristic, further elaborated by Bordwell and Thompson's other observation that "genres are convenient terms that develop informally."[207] The purpose and usefulness of film genre is to prepare and guide an audience's expectations. While Bordwell and Thompson use the word "informal" colloquially rather than as a rejection of any formal characteristics (narrative in a structural sense, mise-en-scène, cinematography, etc.), it nevertheless suggests that genre should be seen as a primarily descriptive, and in a literal sense, co-incidental with any formal characteristics, insofar as the characteristics that determine genre are not typically based on any technical standard. By this determination, cool cinema would perhaps be a "poor genre" compared to certain already established tropes, given its relatively minor status (as previously mentioned, I am primarily using it to refer to a small group of filmmakers).

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[206] David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, *Film Art: An Introduction*, 10th Edition (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2012), 329.
[207] Bordwell and Thompson, *Film Art*, 329.

Bordwell and Thompson's definition of genre serves as what I call, and I do not think they would object to this, the *common-sense* definition of genre, and it is this model, in various forms of explication, that has been investigated in many classical studies of genre over the years. Film Scholar Steve Neale takes a similar, though more theoretical, and perhaps more definite approach, when the author writes "genres are not to be seen as forms of textual codifications, but as systems of orientations, expectations and conventions that circulate between industry, text and subject."[208] Here we find an expansive description of genre capable of describing everything from musicals, westerns and melodramas to looser categories like screwball comedy or film noir, but also touching on industrial and spectatorial context and engagement. Neale offers a *theory* of genre. As with Bordwell and Thompson, Neale is also concerned with the expectation, or the heuristic function of genre, but with a further emphasis on patterns of exchange. For Neale, genre is something that circulates, in a commodity sense, among the elements of a series of films. He writes, "bearing in mind the nature of the economy of genre, an economy of variation rather than of rupture, a better formulation as far as genre is concerned would be: difference *in* repetition" (perhaps importantly: not difference *by* repetition).[209] Bearing these two observations in mind, genre from this perspective is a unique avenue we can use to understand the different forces of production at work within cinema, particularly Hollywood, or any kind of industrial, cinema. Neale's focus on terms like circulation, economy, and variation points toward a system of genre in which the films produced may, one expects, bear a certain degree of formal similarity**,** but

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[208] Steve Neale, *Genre* (London: British Film Institute, 1980), 19. Neale's work here may seem a somewhat dated target. However, despite his somewhat out of fashion terminology, I find his approach to encapsulate the broader model of genre I believe Cavell to be responding to. Similar examples can be found in Rick Altman, *Film/Genre* (London: BFI Publishing, 1998), and Barry Keith Grant *Film Genre: From Iconography to Ideology* (New York: Wallflower, 2007). It should also be mentioned that Neale's focus on convention also brings to mind Thomas Schatz *The Genius of the System* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988), whose anti-auteurist approach to Hollywood film production is of little interest here.
[209] Neale, *Genre*, 50.

these "textual codifications" are also secondary to the role played by systems of production and distribution in labelling certain films and how audiences receive them; here genre is an unconscious, or at the very least reified concept, in addition to a combination of a tropes. For Neale, as for Bordwell and Thompson, the function of genre is to answer the question, "what type of film is this?" rather than point to problems for/the need for further investigation. Genres are a figurative shorthand for film description, thus terms like Western, Musical, Crime/Gangster film, etc. feel more useful in their descriptive uses than comedy or drama more broadly because they specify more clearly the kind of audience they expect to attract. Read in this light, cool cinema would not really be a genre at all, given the ambiguity of its descriptive capacity; it is based more on its "textual codifications" than on any kind of existing market practice.

For the American philosopher Stanley Cavell, however, this model of genre is only one approach. For Cavell, this common-sense model of genre, or what he calls "genre-as-cycle," only serve to reduce films to easy and commodifiable entertainments.[210] Cavell instead takes an approach he calls "genre-as-medium" in his essay "The Fact of Television," which guides his method of philosophical investigation in *Pursuits of Happiness: The Hollywood Comedy of Remarriage* and *Contesting Tears*: *The Hollywood Melodrama of the Unknown Woman*. For Cavell, this "genre-as-cycle" approach is purposively reductive, and reduces films to "some familiar kind of commodity" or mere "entertainments" that do not fully capture the "double range of the concept of a medium" as it is used "in the visual arts, in which painting is said to be a medium (or art, in contrast, say, to sculpture or music—hardly, one would think, the same contrast), and in which gouache is also a medium (of painting, in contrast to watercolor or oil or

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[210] Stanley Cavell, "The Fact of Television," in *Cavell on Film*, ed. William Rothman (Albany: State University of New York, 2005), 66. It also limits how we can use the idea of "genre" conceptually. It should be stated that even though Cavell precedes Deleuze in this analysis, I am already reading Cavell after Deleuze, in a sense. For me, Cavell when talking about genre is, like Deleuze, engaged in the production of an open and heterogeneous system.

tempera)."[211] Here we can detect Cavell's move away from an informal, commercial approach to genre based on distribution and reception, and shift towards a highly formalized employment of the concept.

If the common-sense notion of genre is extratextual, i.e., determined as much by factors outside of a given film as within it, Cavell takes the opposite approach. He attempts to "to preserve, and make more explicit—or curious—this double range in order to keep open to investigation the relation between work and medium" which he ultimately "calls the revelation, or acknowledgment, of the one in the other."[212] For Cavell, the idea of genre helps to dictate something about the medium in question, as certain types of paint or brushstrokes alter the working methods of the painter. It is also important to distinguish here that what Cavell means by revelation is the concurrent realization of a work and medium. This is an attempt at a definition of genre that emerges specifically from the works of film in question; it involves "recognizing instead that only the art can define its media, only painting and composing and movie making can reveal what is required, or possible (what means, what exploits of material), for something to be a painting, a piece of music, a movie."[213] For Cavell, genre serves less a categorizing function than a way to interpret, evaluate, even curiously catalogue and understand what film can be. Just as the painterly techniques contained within the physical materials of the painting tell the viewer something about its production and what types of paintings are possible, so Cavell's idea of genre allows me to approach film with a similar kind of curiosity. "Cool cinema" then, as I will define it, is a curious genre that will not only be defined by its formal characteristics, in addition to its tropes and features, but that will also convey something about

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[211] Cavell, "The Fact of Television," 65-66.
[212] Ibid.
[213] Ibid.

film production and the conditions and conversations that shaped how the films in question were made. Or, to cite from Cavell directly, "the idea is that members of a genre share the inheritance of certain conditions, procedures and subjects and goals of composition, and that in primary art each member of such a genre represents a study of these conditions, something I think of as bearing the responsibility of the inheritance."[214]

Cavell defines his process of analyzing "genre-as-medium" through two laws, one internal, the other external. The internal law states that "a genre is constituted by members, about which it can be said that they share what you picture as every feature in common. In practice, this means that, where a given member diverges, as it must, from the rest, it must "compensate" for this divergence."[215] Each film in the genre may be superficially similar, but they actually come to be defined through their "compensation" for their difference from the previous films. In creatively cataloging cool cinema, we could find films about existential loners, popular music, and themes of wandering, or following Deleuze, films with a ballad-like structure. These are tropes and themes that define cool cinema, but each director has a different approach to framing the situations depicted in their films**;** they all internally compensate for their divergence in form by modifying the terms by which we recognize cool cinema. The external law states "a genre is distinguished from other genres, in particular from what I call **'**adjacent**'** genres, when one feature shared by its members **'**negates**'** a feature shared by features of another. Here, a feature of genre will develop new lines of refinement"[216] This practice will be of less concern to us here, but it can be easily demonstrated by the pairing of Cavell's *Pursuits of Happiness* and *Contesting Tears*. For Cavell, the melodrama of the unknown woman emerges in contrast to the comedy of

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[214] Stanley Cavell, *Pursuits of Happiness: The Hollywood Comedy of Remarriage* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1981), 28.
[215] Cavell, "The Fact of Television," 67.
[216] Ibid.

remarriage. Whereas remarriage comedies affirm the institution of marriage as overcoming the

differences between men and women, the melodramas of the unknown woman end with this

separation remaining intact and unresolvable. Despite being formally similar, this massive

thematic divergence signals the splitting and creation of another genre, albeit one adjacent to the

other. Cavell's mode of genre analysis here becomes a kind of endless conversation, a

contestation between films to determine whether they belong to a certain genre or not, as he

demonstrates when he dramatically writes that "belonging has to be won, earned, as by an

argument of the members with one another."[217]

It worth discussing at this point the seemingly dialectical form of genre that Cavell

establishes. While Cavell himself notes the dialectical significance of his language, he also does

not want to enthusiastically subsume his approach under a dialectical model. Even though he

uses this dialectical language, Cavell's theory nonetheless contains what I would describe as a

Leibnizian quality, as illustrated when he argues that "genre emerges full-blown, in a particular

instance first (or set of them if they are simultaneous) and then works out its internal

consequences in further instances. So that, as I would like to put it, it has no history, only a birth

and a logic (or a biology)."[218] Read in this way, Cavell's theory is less dialectical, more

"monadic" and more rationalistic. Like Leibniz's monads, genres are not something that emerge

over time, but are each reflective containers that when apprehended together shape (film) history.

Cavell adds, however, that genres have a "prehistory, a setting up of the conditions it requires for

viability," to which we can ascribe the tools of film production and the situation that leads to

their development, and he says that they have "a posthistory, the story of its fortunes in the rest

of the world, but all this means is that later history must be told with this new creation as a

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[217] Ibid., 69.
[218] Cavell, *Pursuits of Happiness*, 28.

generating element."[219] In this way, Cavell's idea of genre takes on a strange, but not unfamiliar philosophical structure. On the one hand**,** genre is embedded in the material and formal dimensions of a film, but at the same time, it is retroactive, conditioning at the same time how these elements are treated. There is a virtual as well as an actual dimension to Cavell's theory of genre. As Cavell himself puts it, "if genres form a system (which is part of the faith that for me keeps alive an interest in the concept), then in principle it would seem possible to be able to move by negation from one genre through adjacent genres, until all genres of film are derived."[220] Despite his use of the word negation, what is actually taking place here is a mutation. Genres do not emerge via a temporal sublation of previous instances into new ones but exist simultaneously in shifting forms through the changing reflections of one another across their mirrored monadological surfaces. Read in this way, far from being dialectical, genres in Cavell's writing come more to resemble what in *Difference and Repetition* the philosopher Gilles Deleuze describes as problematic Ideas.

Appearing in a wide-ranging text concerned so deeply with the history of philosophy and related to questions of ontology, the comparison of film genre to problematic Ideas may seem somewhat strange, or overreaching. However, what I wish to demonstrate with this comparison is the potency for the category of genre to become an interpretative and self-reflexive way to engage with cinematic work**s**, creatively cataloging the terms of their component parts. The entire breadth of problematic Ideas and Deleuze's use of them will due to space constraints not be addressed here, but the concept nevertheless provides me with a way of generalizing Cavell's idea of "genre-as-medium." By showing how Cavell's concept can be transformed by Deleuze's distinction of problematic ideas, I am trying to turn genre into a method that can be followed and

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[219] Ibid.
[220] Cavell, "The Fact of Television," 67.

applied more freely, suggesting that the form of Cavell's mode of investigation can be extended to other, albeit similar problems. To begin this investigation, Deleuze writes that "problematic Ideas are not simple essences, but multiplicities or complexes of relations and corresponding singularities."[221] To graft this directly onto Cavell's work, it is easy to see this definition taking place throughout *Pursuits of Happiness*. The questions of marriage, divorce, and remarriage serve as the multiplicity which corresponds to the singularities of the films in question, e.g., *Adam's Rib* (Cukor, 1949). This simple affinit**y,** however, does not account for the overlap between the method of investigation of problematic Ideas and Cavell's notions of genre, but it nevertheless gets the matter started. To go further, Deleuze says "a problem does not exist, apart from its solutions,"[222] and it is here that a further connection between Cavell's notion of genre and Deleuze's concept comes into play and perhaps reverses, or makes reversible, the relationship between genre and film discussed above. Are the films the answer to Cavell's questions regarding (re-)marriage or is the action of remarriage the solution to the problem as it is presented by the films? To refer once again to Deleuze, "a problem is determined at the same time as it is solved, but its determination is not the same as its solution: the two elements differ in kind, the determination amounting to the genesis of the concomitant solution."[223] As opposed to thinking of genre as an accumulation of tropes over time, Cavell's notion of genre is co-incidental to the films that correspond to it. The problem and the solution emerge together**,** but are different in kind.

A genre is not a film, it goes without saying, but the two are co-determined**;** the existence of the one is present in the creation of the other. To return to Cavell's favored comparison of

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[221] Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 163.
[222] Ibid., 163.
[223] Ibid.

painting, the genre of painting, say watercolour, only emerges through a painting conceived via that medium**;** painting itself exists through the medium of water colour and the finished watercolour painting. Cavell's "comedy of re-marriage" exists in a similar way. To put this in Deleuzean terms, "the problem is at once both transcendent and immanent in relation to its solutions. Transcendent, because it consists in a system of ideal liaisons or differential relations between genetic elements."[224] The question of remarriage, its circumstances, and the matters of its situation serve as a condition for Cavell's comedies, but it is nevertheless also something we can address on our own terms. Nevertheless, as a condition, it is transcendental, it is that which makes perceptible something about the films in question. But also, a problem is "immanent, because these liaisons or relations are incarnated in actual relations which do not resemble them and are defined by the field of the solution."[225] These actual relations are the films themselves that form the basis of Cavell's analysis.

A question remains regarding both how one encounters either a genre in Cavell's terms or a problem or problematic Idea in Deleuze's sense. The most direct answer is through what Cavell deems personal experience, "a work one cares about is not so much something one has read as something one is a reader of; connection with it goes on, as with any relation one cares about,"[226] or what Deleuze calls *learning*, "to learn is to enter into the universal of relations which constitute the Idea, and into their corresponding singularities."[227] The genre, or the problematic Idea is something that one enters into, that one must become part of in order to experience it. Precisely how one enters into, is baptized or inaugurated into my pantheon of cool cinema will be the focus of the next section of this chapter. Here we should note that both the problematic

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[224] Ibid.
[225] Ibid.
[226] Cavell, *Pursuits of Happiness*, 13.
[227] Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 165.

Idea and genre are both something that emerge from the objects being brought into question, from the act of continuously bringing objects into question. In *Cinema 2*, when Deleuze distinguishes problems from theorems or axioms, he writes that "it is characteristic of the problem that it is inseparable from a choice," and when considered existentially and not mathematically, that "we see clearly that choice is increasingly identified with living thought, and with an unfathomable decision. Choice no longer concerns a particular term, but the mode of existence of the one who chooses."[228] To investigate a problem *qua* problem is not to stand outside of the object and appreciate and evaluate something, to form a heuristic to categorize something, but to engage in detail, to become a part of it. It is also worth adding here that this "choosing to choose" aspect will be even more relevant when it comes to defining cool in the third section of this chapter.

My approach to "cool cinema" attempts therefore to keep all these ideas in play. However, as alluded to above, cool cinema can only be loosely defined as a creative or even reflective "genre-as-medium," as there is no melodrama of the unknown woman in its comedy of remarriage. I do not wish to claim that cool cinema fits neatly into the system of genre Cavell hopes for. Nevertheless, Cavell's method of investigation, laundered through Deleuze's idea of the problematic, gets at how I am approaching cool cinema, when I describe it as both creative and something more akin to an attitude or an impulse**.** It is something pre-personal and affective but also collective and co-determined by, and experienced, or *taught* through the films and filmmakers I am focusing on. Cavell's idea of compensation could also form a part of this approach to analysis, in attempting to show how the films of "cool cinema" diverge from each other but while also introducing new elements that affirm the same stylistic attitude. Even though

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[228] Deleuze, *Cinema II*, 176-177.

I do not see my investigation participating directly in his system, i.e., I do not wish to copy Cavell, I would argue that cool cinema teaches us something about the production of films the same way Cavell wishes to do by using painting and visual art to describe film itself as a medium. By drawing a connection between Cavell and Deleuze, I hope I have shown, if not logically, then at the very least affectively, what methods have laid the groundwork for my approach. My understanding of "cool cinema" was inspired by a creative study of genre, one which rejects common-sense notions of the idea, and which instead is based on an alternative philosophical epistemology and open interpretation.

I can hear, however, the objections to this approach. From a side more concerned with film study and analysis, one could object that this reading of the term of the genre obfuscates the general uses of the term, stretching its meaning to a point unrecognizable to most approaches to film study and unfairly dismissing the legacy of work in that field. That is not my intention. I do not wish to imply that Cavell's understanding of genre in some way supersedes or is more authentic than the common-sense one. My interest in Cavell's use of genre is more in its hermeneutic dimension, i.e., how it allows for a different interpretative approach to film study and analysis based more on the contents of a film rather than its context, which was seen to be Neale's concern. Westerns, musical, etc. are still "real," I am not denying the history, or the legacy of work devoted to what Cavell refers to "genre-as-cycle," but attempting to approach the question in a different register, in a way that allows one to produce answers that are less familiar and well established. By departing from Cavell's strict use of genre, by playfully laundering it through Deleuze's problematic Idea and using the terms attitude and impulse rather than "genre" proper, I can hopefully avoid the sense that I am being purposefully insolent or obtuse. Despite this, I remain insistent that Cavell's approach to genre should not be dismissed or ignored.

There is another possible objection to this, one that could be levelled by someone concerned with film but that could just as easily be made by someone primarily concerned with philosophy. Even though I have arrived at this pairing of Cavell and Deleuze through the writing of D.N. Rodowick (and his work will be more important in the next section), Rodowick nevertheless typifies the objection I am imagining when he writes that "like Deleuze, Cavell's cinema books are not studies of film but rather philosophical studies— they are works of philosophy first and foremost."[229] This objection, perhaps more formally put, would be that both Cavell and Deleuze's interests lie chiefly in philosophical questions that also address questions of ethics, ontology, etc. Cavell's work, for instance, is not really about remarriage comedies, but a certain American tradition of Emersonian conversation that Cavell is able to demonstrate using the films. Deleuze's cinema books are not about cinema, but instead about how cinema allows us to grasp the thought of Henri Bergson more clearly, or about thinking through the relationship between art and philosophy. I would never deny that this is certainly the case. The "philosophical turn" in film studies has demonstrated that complex ideas regarding ethics, aesthetics, and even ontological and metaphysical problems can be addressed through film. My interest, however, is not in using film for philosophical ends. My interest is in open and creative film criticism, forms of analysis that can teach us something about films and filmmaking. I see no unique value in film philosophy if it all is meant to do is to rehash grand historical debates in the philosophical cannon using cinematic examples. These thinkers, Cavell and Deleuze, were avowed film viewers, and their engagements with film betray a seriousness of purpose that shows that if they did not think the films that they examined were unique and engaging, they would not be worthy of philosophical consideration. Yes, as philosophers, their work has much to say about

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[229] D.N. Rodowick, *Philosophy's Artful Conversation* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2015), 179.

philosophy, but that does not also mean it cannot be used to ask questions about and learn things about film. The philosophy of film can bolster an approach to film criticism, if one is willing to put in the work to apply it as such.

I hope I have shown the beginnings of this process by filtering Cavell through Deleuze. Is what I am doing here film theory or is it philosophy? If I may be so bold, what I am doing here is rethinking film criticism. I hope what I have shown is a way to philosophically ground a film critical approach, or a method of film analysis that produces an assemblage of philosophical and critical-creative practice, i.e., that is capable of expressing something ephemeral like an attitude or an impulse. By seeing in these two thinkers a way of thinking that (when it confronts the moving image) becomes a way of seeing, the ground is laid for something like "cool cinema." My aim in this section has been to outline how Cavell's approach to "genre-as-medium" can be read alongside Deleuze's problematic Idea to produce a way of seeing cinema that sets the groundwork for my diagnosis and following analysis of cool cinema. While this work may justify the formal dimension of cool cinema, what remains is to understand how I justify treating cool cinema as a tradition that is transmitted over time and how filmmakers enter the pantheon of cool cinema. For that, I again need to again consider Cavell and Deleuze, but from a different angle.

Artful Conversation as Method

In order to articulate the concept of "cool cinema" as something that emerges historically, but is not articulated within history, this section will attempt to formulate an idea of conversation as an interpretative method. Cool cinema is not just an expression of a problematic Idea, but one that is transmitted historically between filmmakers, through personal and stylistic reference, intertextuality, and on the level of style and circumstance. While this approach may seem to

foreground intertextuality and similar approaches, it differs insofar as the reference does not take

place just through mutual representation and repetition, i.e., through certain motifs, character

types, tropes, etc. that reoccur throughout the works of the filmmakers to be investigated (though

those will undoubtedly be present), rather it refers more to a kind of shared spirit or approach to

films and filmmaking, what I have chosen to call throughout this project an attitude or impulse.

My assertion is that cool cinema emerges from a shared attitude towards filmmaking, an artistic

conversation, most visible in the works of filmmakers who can be shown to have been in relation

to, or making works in reference to, each other over time. It is through this form of conversation

that cool cinema finds itself expressed as an Idea, and it is through this conversation that the

directors *learn* cool cinema in the form of an Idea. In order to explicate this approach, I have

relied on the work of film theorist and philosopher D.N. Rodowick's idea of artful conversation,

presented in his *Philosophy's Artful Conversation*, but transformed from a philosophical form of

speculation into a theoretical working method, which I hope to demonstrate here.

Rodowick never defines "artful conversation" directly, as to do so would be to formalize,

or dare I say, *theorize*, what he intends to be largely philosophical and open-ended concept.

Nevertheless, there are several facets to the concept that I will attempt to sketch out in order to

try and shape it into an approach to reading. One refers to the way aesthetic objects and

experiences always entail a critical discussion, i.e., as a result of their production, they are

already engaged in a mode of conversation *about* art. The question of art is never settled, it only

offers preliminary solutions, and it is this caution but willingness to comment that Rodowick

sees as essential to artful conversation. Rodowick writes that "Cavell thus encourages us to

recognize pattern and agreement as distinctive features of logic—or better, reasoning—and to

recognize that coming to agreement does not necessarily mean assent to inescapable conclusions,

but rather only reaching a partial and flexible accord supported by (again partial) consensus in the grammar of aesthetic conversation."[230] As illustrated by that citation, Cavell is a chief source of inspiration here, and what Rodowick seeks is the way that Cavell's writing encourages an open-ended and associative logic that can be used to address a work of art without reducing it to any presupposition. The conversation is preserved, kept ongoing, by the partial accord of assenting to systems of patterns and agreement. Artful Conversation encourages one to make judgements, but know that these judgements, particularly of works of art, are never final or complete. As Sianne Ngai explains, "for Cavell, then, aesthetic judgments can never be unidirectional. They not only presuppose but must produce an opportunity for "exchange" in which the other may contest what is said and the assumptions that underpin it."[231] One important dimension of artful conversation is learning from works of art how to express a certain creative open-endedness, learning that judgements must be made but that they are always preliminary and open to contestation.

Practically, this approach means foregrounding one's own positionality in relation to other participants. Artful conversation demands of us that *we* take part *in* it. This is a reoccurring theme for Rodowick, "to ask what a photograph knows of me is to request a closer examination of how the conditions of photography or film as media in Cavell's sense solicit responsiveness from me, and therefore to investigate the ambiguity, singularity, and strangeness underlying our ordinary experience of such images."[232] Artful conversation begins from an awareness of the questions artwork demand of us, but also foregrounds our situation in relation to them. If the previous point, the way we talk about art, shapes the structure of artful conversation, then our

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[230] Rodowick, *Philosophy's Artful Conversation*, 194.
[231] Sianne Ngai, *Theory of the Gimmick: Aesthetic Judgment and Capitalist Form* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2020), 25.
[232] Rodowick, *Philosophy's Artful Conversation*, 219.

positionality affirms our participation within it. Artful conversation thus borrows from art, but also necessarily requires an exchange with ourselves and how we relate to the work of art. It is in this space, this gap or interstice, between artwork and receiver, that artful conversation takes place. It therefore becomes a double-reflective gesture, as we are asked to reconsider ourselves while at the same time pondering the possibilities of the/a work of art. As Rodowick explains

> Producing new readings or recovering latent meanings is less a matter of a symptomology, of knowing better than the text what it says, than a function of readers' own productive acts of misrecognition, acknowledgment, or projective imagination, which continually illuminate or darken new informational foci by bringing new contextual situations and ethical perspectives to critical reading.[233]

New informational foci can lead either from the artwork to its receiver, or back to the artwork and other forms and media of art broadly. As is clear from the above, for Rodowick, following Cavell, this an ethical task, one that follows from their use of the idea of perfectionism. Perfectionism, in this sense, derived from what Cavell refers to as Emersonian moral perfectionism, is not refinement in capitalistic or industrial terms, but refers to a kind of self-knowledge, the striving for a greater awareness of oneself and one's possibilities. Perfectionism, rather than bringing to light what is already latent in one's being, should instead be seen here as a striving toward new forms and possibilities of knowledge. Perfectionism leads to the new, not a reformation of what has already taken place. It is something that can arise in misreading and misrecognition as much as through deliberate effort, or as Rodowick puts it, "moments of self-education, in which I grant myself the possibility of change in a new language of perspicuous contrast, or undergo transformation under a new concept."[234]

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[233] Ibid., 262.
[234] Ibid., 263.

However, these are only two sides of artful conversation, ones which specifically relate to the role of artwork and receiver. The other perhaps most important facet of artful conversation is the idea of the friend, in the philosophical sense. Rodowick derives his idea of the friend in artful conversation from the idea of the philosophical friend in Deleuze and Guattari's *What is Philosophy?* According to Deleuze and Guattari, "the friend who appears in philosophy no longer stands for an extrinsic persona, an example or empirical circumstance, but rather for a presence that is intrinsic to thought, a condition of possibility of thought itself, a living category, a transcendental lived reality [*un vécu transcendental*]."[235] The philosophical friend shows that thought is always already determined by difference, i.e., the friend is a point from which the work of philosophy begins.[236] The friend is a claim already staked out, to be disputed or contested, "the basic point about friendship is that the two friends are like claimant and rival (but who could tell them apart?)."[237] What Deleuze and Guattari are suggesting, and Rodowick in their wake, is that thought is not necessarily a dialectical project of negation and sublation, i.e., that there is something like thought which is the result of a progression of conversations, but that conversation itself is already the form that thought should take. There is no idea which is not always already "in-conversation." Deleuze and Guattari summarize this point by writing that "it is thought itself which requires this division of thought between friends. These are no longer empirical, psychological, and social determinations, still less abstractions, but intercessors, crystals, or seeds of thought."[238]

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[235] Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?* Trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 3.

[236] For Deleuze and Guattari, and Deleuze especially, this observation has an ontological dimension in addition to the epistemological one being considered here. Thought's difference from itself mirrors ontological difference.

[237] Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?* 4.

[238] Ibid., 69.

However, for Rodowick, this idea takes a detour through the thinking of Cavell, for whom the idea of conversation informs his understanding of Emersonian moral perfectionism. Indeed, *Pursuits of Happiness* is largely an illustration of how conversation between equals who challenge one each other is a perquisite for the successful reunion of partners in the comedy of remarriage. For Cavell, unlike Deleuze and Guattari, the conversation between friends takes on a more literal, and more contestable air,

> in confronting another with whom your fate is, by your lights, bound up (either generally, as another human being, or more specifically by your cares for and commitments to the other, casual, institutional, or permanent), you risk your understanding of the other as of yourself—it is part of the argument you have initiated, or accepted the invitation to enter, to determine whether you have sufficiently appreciated the situation from the other's point of view, and whether you have articulated the ground of your own conviction.[239]

For Cavell, claims must be made against one anothe**r;** your own understanding must be risked against that of another in order to be properly grounded. There are certainly echoes here of Cavell's ideas about genre, and we might reflect from this back to Cavell's idea of the genre-as-medium pointing to a fundamental division in the idea of genre between art, types of artwork, and the way those artworks are produced. In a different way than Deleuze and Guattari, Cavell also arrives at the idea that thought must be inherently relational, that thought exists only in a relationship of difference from itself. An idea that is not in relation to other ideas therefore has no ground. Where Cavell departs from Deleuze and Guattari is in the element of recognition that his thought alludes to, i.e., where the friend in Deleuze and Guattari is passive yet ever present,

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[239] Stanley Cavell, *Cities of Words: Pedagogical Letters On a Register of the Moral Life* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press, 2004), 235.

for Cavell, there is an active engagement. Rodowick uses Cavell to actualize the virtual

friendship and conversation present in Deleuze and Guattari's writing.

Rodowick therefore extrapolates from these two sets of thinkers the basis for his artful

conversation, which for him exists primarily as an approach to philosophy, "art provokes in

philosophy self-referring inquiries and evaluations of our ways of being and styles of existence.

Here interpretation and evaluation are always turning one over the other as mutually amplifying

activities. This is why I refer to philosophy as artful conversation."[240] For Rodowick, to put it

somewhat reductive**y,** art is the friend that helps philosophy arrive at new understandings of

itself, and through its practice, reflects its writer's self-fashioning. His idea of a philosophical

community, while based in schools and academies must first be virtual, a community of claims

and ideas about the self, before it becomes a real community.[241] In trying to turn artful

conversation into a method then, what I am proposing is a shift in emphasis. Instead of being

guided by a principle of artful conversation, what I want to suggest is that what I have called

"cool cinema" is itself an example of artful conversation in action.

Rodowick writes that through artful conversation, philosophy becomes "a practice of

styling the self and of projecting a world, no matter how unattainable, where that self might find

new expression."[242] Cool cinema is an example of artistic world projection (and styling the self

in the world), expressed through filmmaking. It is something that emerges across the artists I

have mentioned previously as a shared attitude or an impulse. While there is plenty of evidence

that demonstrates empirical or historical relationships among all these directors, that is only part

of the basis for my argument. What I want to suggest is that there is also a shared philosophical

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[240] Rodowick, *Philosophy's Artful Conversation,* 297.
[241] Ibid., 112.
[242] Ibid., 297.

friendship among them, a virtual current which they all partake in, and which their literal friendships and connections actualize in turn. The historical conversations between these filmmakers can be experienced through the comparison of their works with one another. Through the idea of cool cinema, the films become an extension, a virtualization of any actual conversations between the filmmakers. It is not that the historical connection is a coincidence, far from it, but it only forms one node in the conversational network in which all these directors and their works take part. By framing these encounters, simultaneously intertextual and interpersonal, through the idea of artful conversation, I hope to demonstrate the mutual importance of the filmmakers as agents of a network or virtual current based around an Idea to show how the artistic choices they make help influence the existence of cool cinema. but also show that it can also be approached in terms of a larger conversation that can incorporate future possibilities and modifications. To analyze cool cinema then calls for a historical poetic analysis insofar as it is shaped by an active and open-ended approach based on the creative engagement of the filmmakers themselves, always seen in relation to one another, and always inspired by a virtual artful conversation.

My understanding of cool cinema thus has two poles: as the previous section explained, it can be read through the idea of creative genre, particularly Cavell's idea of genre as filtered through Deleuze's problematic Idea. On the other hand, it is an example of artful conversation in practice, a testament to the virtual circulation and formation of communities of ideas and their actualization. As an attitude or an impulse, by its very nature, "cool cinema" is also an idea in flux, and in a sense evades description. What is "cool" is always going to remain contestable, and open to conversation and dispute. However, in what remains, I hope to narrow down further who and what activates the "cool" in cool cinema.

The "Cool" in Cool Cinema

"Cool" is a complex notion weighed down by many competing origins and ideas,

emerging in post-war African-American Hip culture, reappropriated by White authors, and then

potentially overdetermined by commercialism and marketing.[243] While synonymous with the

term "hip," my use of the word cool is a rough attempt to convey a kind of hipness shot through

with a certain detachment or indifference. Cool here thus represents a kind of "keeping one's

cool" while simultaneously also drawing on "cool" as representing a sense of awe or respect.[244]

Throughout this chapter, I have associated "cool cinema" with the idea of an attitude or an

impulse. In order to demonstrate how my fairly standard definition of "cool" becomes "cool

cinema," we will have to both understand what this bipolar definition entails, and then see an

example of it at work. In order to theoretically ground my idea of "cool", what I want to do is not

consider the ordinary usages of the word, although undoubtedly, they are ever present, but

instead look at Gilles Deleuze's discussion of the impulse-image and the films of Nicholas Ray,

particularly *Rebel Without a Cause*, in *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*.

For Deleuze, the impulse-image marks a point between the modalities of the affection-

images and the action-image. It can neither be reduced to the virtual properties it actualizes, nor

the movements it sets in motion. Pace Deleuze,

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[243] For further scholarship on the genealogy of "cool" and its various uses, consult Norman Mailer, *The White Negro* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1959); Thomas Frank, *The Conquest of Cool: Business Culture, Counterculture, and The Rise of Hip Consumerism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), Jerome Neu, *Sticks and Stones: The Philosophy of Insults* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008); Phil Ford, *Dig: Sound and Music in Hip Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), and Lee Konstantinou, *Cool Characters: Irony and American Fiction* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2016). The phrase "cool cinema," particularly in reaction to the phenomenon of "Slow Cinema," has also been discussed by Thorsten Botz-Bornstein *Organic Cinema: Film, Architecture, and the Work of Béla Tarr* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2017), drawing on Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1994)'s definition of cool media. While I share Botz-Bornstein's objection to "slow cinema," my own definition of cool in the proceeding pages presents a very different position. I have not referred to McLuhan, mainly because, as my discussion of Cavell has illustrated, I take a strongly different attitude towards the questions of media.
[244] There is undoubtedly a sublime element to the word "cool." Perhaps Kant knew more about it than one would initially think.

An impulse is not an affect, because it is an impression in the strongest sense and not an

expression. But neither is it like the feelings or emotions which regulate and deregulate

behavior. Now we must recognise that this new set is not a mere intermediary, a place of

transition, but possesses a perfect consistency and autonomy, with the result that the

action-image remains powerless to represent it, and the affection-image powerless to

make it felt.[245]

The impulse-image is outside of the affection-image and action-image, but this in-between state

is not without a consistency. It is also a site of becoming, an image-site sufficient unto itself and

wholly defined as its own category. Nevertheless, it has a transitory character because as an

impression, it is fleeting, passing, consistent perhaps only in its inconstancy. An impulse is

neither an affection nor an action, but the space between the two, the space the virtual must pass

through to become actual, a site of origin. Because it is so difficult to identify, Deleuze takes a

whole filmmaker to emblematic of it, writing that "Nicholas Ray's evolution would be a good

example of this. It is true that his inspiration has often been described as 'lyrical': he belongs to

lyrical abstraction."[246] For Deleuze, Nicholas Ray is emblematic of the impulse-image while also

belonging to "lyrical abstraction," a form he identifies with the affection-image because it is

concerned with virtual expression, with affect, rather than with a state of affairs, which concerns

action.

One of the key elements of Deleuze's lyrical abstraction, what determines its virtual

character, is spiritual determination. Using Bresson and Dreyer as his model filmmakers,

Deleuze discusses how their work shows that "a fascinating idea (that) was developed from

Pascal to Kierkegaard: the alternative is not between terms but between the modes of existence

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[245] Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema I: The Movement-Image*, 123.
[246] Deleuze, *Cinema I,* 134.

of the one who chooses."[247] One of the elements of lyrical abstraction is the demonstration of a

virtual struggle for a mode of existence through the close-ups of faces (Dreyer) or hands

(Bresson). These abstract divisions of the human body through close-up shots acquire spiritual

weight through the determinations of faith they are endowed with. For Deleuze, the work of

Bresson and Dreyer and the tradition of lyrical abstraction is to demonstrate what Deleuze sees

as the lesson of Pascal's Wager: "spiritual determination has no other object than itself: I choose

to choose, and by that I exclude all choice made on the mode of not having the choice. This was

also to be the essential point of what Kierkegaard calls 'alternative', and Sartre 'choice', in the

atheist version he puts forward."[248] However, while Deleuze places Nicholas Ray within this

tradition, he also introduces an important modification.

What makes Ray move from the affection-image to the impulse-image is the nature of the

choice undertaken in his work. No longer is the gesture purely virtual, that of "choosing to

choose," but instead it becomes a choice for rebellion, but that this rebellion precedes any

existing state of affairs. Ray's films thus depict rebellion in the purest sense: neither pure

affection nor action, but impulse. In contrast to the "mysticism" of Bresson and Dreyer, Ray's

films show that "the young man's violence is an active violence, a violence of reaction against

the milieu, against society, against the father, against poverty and injustice, against solitude."[249]

There are a variety of Ray films we could choose from to demonstrate this conflict, although

They Live by Night (1949) and *Rebel Without a Cause* come immediately to mind. Ray's

characters are not content to choose, to make faith a matter of choice; they must rebel, or "it

might be said that the rebel has chosen, not exactly evil, but 'for' evil, and that he attains a sort

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[247] Ibid., 114.
[248] Ibid.
[249] Ibid., 135.

of beauty through and in a permanent upheaval."[250] To be "for evil" is not the same as being evil

itself, rather it is to embody a rebellious posture against the systems of authority, whether they be

patriarchal, institutional, etc. We can trace this throughout the course of Ray's work, from *In a*

Lonely Place (1950) to *Johnny Guitar* (1954) and *Wind Across the Everglades* (1958). Despite

this general consistency, it is *Rebel Without a Cause* that will serve as our chief example because

of the film's focus on adolescence.

While casting James Dean, whose untimely death would ultimately make him a lasting

icon of American masculinity, and would retroactively endow the film with a certain mystique,

Rebel Without a Cause functions as an example of cool cinema on a variety of levels, some

superficial, some more concrete. The look of Dean's character, with his trademark red leather

jacket, undoubtedly carries the impression of cool, but it is on the level of narrative that the film

most clearly captures the impulse that defines cool cinema. To borrow from Deleuze again, "the

young man violently wants to become a man, but it is this very violence which gives him his

only choice of either dying or remaining a child. The more violent he is, the more of a child he

becomes (this remains the theme of *Rebel Without a Cause*; although the hero seems to succeed

in his wager to 'become a man in a day', he does so too quickly to be pacified by it)."[251] Jim

Stark (Dean) wants to be free from his parents, even going so far as to form a kind of surrogate

family with Judy (Natalie Wood) and Plato (Sal Mineo). It is this in-between, or interstitial state,

between being fully adult, but being adult enough to form your own separate understanding of

family, that captures the impulse-image described by Deleuze. Cool itself is created in this state**,**

floating between a kind of rebellion and detachment. It is when Jim and Judy decide to break

away on their own and leave their parents' old world and its authority behind that they stumble

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[250] Ibid.
[251] Ibid.

onto the impulse to create a new one, and it is this birth of the new, this attitude of being disconnected from one world on the way to another that defines cool. Ultimately, the end of the film returns Jim and Judy to the paternal fold, but this does not empty the story before its illustration of adolescent resistance and rebellion captures the attitude and impulse of what it means to be cool. It is the title of Ray's film that is so telling, to not only choose, but to choose rebellion, without cause, without reason, that characterises cool. What makes Ray so emblematic of the impulse-image for Deleuze is the way his films work through this rebellious impulse, even though they are not wholly of what Deleuze calls the "originary world," they move through it, its presence is seen and felt within them.

It is in adolescence that the idea of "cool" becomes an attitude of importance, and in the spirit of teenage angst and a rejection of traditional norms that guides it as an impulse. When I say "cool cinema" then, I mean a cinema that captures the impulse of rebellion and rejection, often for its own sake. It is an attitude, insofar as it attempts to embody this impulse in a figure, to make it a behaviour, both in the characters of Ray's films, for example, but also more broadly, on the level of cinematic style and presentation. However, despite its roots in adolescence, in the adolescent rebellion against the world of adulthood that defines a certain aspect of what it means to be cool, the idea cannot be reduced to the experience of adolescence alone. As an impulse, it moves through and into the adult world, embodied in certain acts of detachment, refusal, admiration, and iconography. Cool cinema, then, is a cinema shaped by this spirit of adolescence, of the tension between an originary milieu, that of youth, as it becomes determined by the world, the fixed milieu of adulthood, and functions as a floating world. In the works of directors influenced by Ray, the attitude that characterizes cool cinema becomes less transitory; it is not something that is resolved at the end of a film as in *Rebel Without a Cause*. Rather,

directors like Wim Wenders, Jim Jarmusch, and others I have discussed, extend the impulse or attitude described above to the very state of the things.[252] "Cool cinema" is thus this impulse to rebellion (that can often only be carried out through collaboration) embedded within the entirety of the film, not just something that takes place within it.

American Friends

If Nicholas Ray's work provides many of the basic elements that cool cinema draws from, if his work functions as a perpetual reference, it is the films of Wim Wenders that serve as the model from which other filmmakers draw. Wenders' road movie trilogy, *Alice in the Cities* (*Alice in den Städten,* 1974), *The Wrong Move* (*Falsche Bewegung*, 1975), and *Kings of the Road* (*Im Lauf der Zeit*, 1976) contains many of the elements of the cool cinema I have discussed throughout this chapter. While the loose, meandering vibes of the first and third entries are prototypical cool cinema, all three take post-war Germany as a kind of impulse-world, where the possibilities for action are limited by historical circumstance, and so the characters, especially those played Rüdiger Vogler, are forced to wander in this country that exists in a between, between the past and the present, between East and West, between European and American culture. While these films also contain the "ballad-form" that Gilles Deleuze describes as a crucial component of the time-image, there is also a resistance toward to the position of the observer that one finds in Italian neo-realism or Godard's 1960s films (Deleuze 1989). Wenders' characters constantly want to do more than see the world; they also want to make it. This desire to choose, to insist upon one's capacity to act, even if it ends in failure as in *The Wrong Move*, is more characteristic of the impulse-image and my idea of cool cinema than the pure optical and sound situations of the time-image.

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[252] And I would be remiss if I did not mention that I have borrowed this expression from Wenders' *Stand der Dinge* (*The State of Things*, 1982).

Wenders' 1977 film *The American Friend* (*Der amerikanische Freund*) pushes these themes further and illustrates more explicitly Wenders' connection to the worlds Ray creates in his work. No longer working within the loose, hangout vibes of the road movie (though I would hesitate to describe *The Wrong Move* as a loose film), *The American Friend* is in many ways an international thriller about competing crime syndicates and art forgery. Jonathan Zimmerman, a picture framer dying of leukemia played by Bruno Ganz, is manipulated into committing murder by a French criminal (Gérrard Blain) and Tom Ripley (Dennis Hopper). When the French criminal wishes to have Zimmerman commit another crime, Ripley, feeling a sense of pity, and/or camaraderie for Zimmerman, helps him reluctantly complete the task and then helps Zimmerman survive an ambush from a competing crime syndicate. Zimmerman discovers Ripley's initial deception, and abandons him to drive off with his wife before succumbing to his illness.

Thematically, one can see the same impulse-world that was present in the Road Movie trilogy at work in Wenders' contemporary Germany. The German character begins the film at the mercy of two international interests, and reluctantly acts only because he believes he is on the verge of death. However, he does not remain a passive character. Alongside Ripley, Zimmerman is eventually able to act on his own, to rebel against the situation he has found himself in. By rejecting Ripley at the end, even though he succumbs to his disease, Zimmerman is able to act purely for himself. That this ends up being a futile gesture makes it an impulsive one, a rebellious cry rather than a complete act. In this way, Zimmerman follows in the futile rebellious gestures of many of Nicholas Ray's heroes, and provides a template for the cool cinema hero, one who acts on impulse for rebellion but does not see it through.

Of course, a work's status as cool cinema does not depend purely on its thematic characteristics. *The American Friend* is also the first film in which Wim Wenders works with many of the American filmmakers who inspired him. The directors Nicholas Ray and Samuel Fuller are both characters in the film. Another successful director Dennis Hopper plays career criminal Tom Ripley. Hopper was well known at the time, as much for directing *Easy Rider* (1969) as being an actor in his own right. These three are not the only directors in the film either; French director Jean Eustache and Swiss director Daniel Schmid also have brief appearances. By filling his cast with filmmakers, particularly those he admired, Wenders is not just paying homage, but collaborating directly with those who inspired him. The movie is somewhat ironically titled *The American Friend*, and yet Wenders has also brought many of his creative friends into the project.[253] It is not only that the movie depicts cool cinema's thematic concerns; it is also made in the spirit of collaboration and cooperation that defines the form.

Conclusion

The aim of this chapter has been to propose a theoretical groundwork for the investigation of what I call cool cinema. It began by showing how the form of cool cinema can be explained using Stanley Cavell's idea of genre in association with Gilles Deleuze's problematic Idea. It then made the case for the history of cool cinema by considering how to turn D.N. Rodowick's idea of artful conversation into a mode of creative, collaborative investigation. Finally, I sought to define "cool" as an attitude or impulse using Gilles Deleuze's presentation of the films of Nicholas Ray. In this final section, I would like to offer an extensive preview of the directions an investigation into cool cinema could undertake, one that I have not been able to

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[253] One should note that Wenders' neo-noir is also a loose adaption of the 1974 novel *Ripley's Game* by American author Patricia Highsmith.

fully sketch out here. Much of this chapter has been devoted to describing a method; in what follows, I want to offer some directions for its practice.

Since *Rebel Without a Cause* is such a rich springboard for the definition of cool cinema, more attention could be paid to Nicholas Ray as the founding auteur of this cinematic attitude: a consideration of Ray's reception in France and Europe, where he is one of the most lauded figures of cinephile culture, would be an interesting start. I would also point towards the sense of "cool" and camaraderie one finds in his work across other films like *They Live by Night* (1947), *Wind across the Everglades* (1958) and *Bitter Victory* (1957). While I chose to examine *Rebel Without a Cause* as a primary case study here, an analysis of *Johnny Guitar* (1954) would also help continue this study, especially granted that its European reception makes it, in my eyes, *the* progenitor of cool cinema. Finally, a discussion that leads this investigation into his relationships with Wenders and Jarmusch, as well as the experimental/teaching phase at the end of his career would help crystalize the idea of friendship in cinema as forging and inspiring continuous creation.

A consideration of Wim Wenders would follow logically after discussing Nicholas Ray, given their association, and that is what I have begun in this chapter. One could consider the relationship between New German Cinema (*Das neue kino*) and Hollywood, and both the antagonistic and inspirational relationships that emerge from their exchange, followed by a consideration of Wenders' own thoughts on Hollywood and his relationship to auteur theory and the *Autourenfilm*. Wenders' use of the "road movie," a topic that has been written about at length, could play a major role in further contemplating "cool cinema" as a creative genre that invokes an "existential" feeling. One could also consider Wenders as an international auteur, someone

who moves between Germany and America and the post-war iconography and popular culture of each nation.

Jim Jarmusch**,** especially an elaboration of his connections to both Ray and Wenders that would discuss his time as Nicholas Ray's assistant, would be ideal for a cool cinema investigation. One could contrast Jarmusch to Wenders and note how they approach similar subjects with a similar influence but in very different ways, and broadly compare New German Cinema and the American Independent cinema of which Jarmusch was a forerunner. Jarmusch, similar to a classical Hollywood director like Ray, also worked in a variety of different genres, but each time applied his own signature sense of cool. One could also consider Jarmusch's later films like *Dead Man* (1995) and *Ghost Dog: Way of the Samurai* (1999), and how his working practice borrowed from and was influenced by Ray's style. One could also examine how Jarmusch prefigures, but also belongs to, the 90s independent cinema boom that would be defined by the Coen Brothers, Soderbergh, Tarantino, et. al.

Throughout this essay, Nicholas Ray has served as the primary icon from which cool cinema derives; yet one could consider other points of origin, particularly in terms of its formal characteristics. The Japanese director Yasujiro Ozu is also an avowed influence on each filmmaker, after Ray, that I have mentioned throughout this chapter. Wenders has *Tokyo-Ga* (1965), Denis has *35 Shots of Rum* (2008), and Ozu is a profound influence on Kaurismäki. While thematically Ozu's work, primarily family melodramas, may sound like the furthest thing from "cool cinema," this influence on the same crop of filmmakers I am connecting to Ray is a digression worth exploring further (particularly in light of my "floating world" comment above).

The work of Finnish director Aki Kaurismäki offers a different spin on cool cinema. Somewhat obviously, a consideration of Kaurismäki's *Leningrad Cowboys* series, and the cameo

Jarmusch makes in the first film, would serve as an entryway for Kaurismäki into the "cool cinema" constellation. Given that Kaurismäki was most heavily influenced by Ozu, this could be an opportunity to more concretely address the relationship between the Japanese director and the pillars of cool cinema. Furthermore, one could examine the proletarian figures and communities that dominate Kaurismäki's work and the understated tragedy that runs alongside those same impulses. One could demonstrate how this is still "cool cinema," given that many of Kaurismäki's films still revolve around the same existential drift and camaraderie that one finds in Wenders and Jarmusch, but with a more explicitly political tone.

Finally, I would point anyone interested in cool cinema to the French director Claire Denis. Denis' work synthesizes many of the conclusions that have been raised throughout this chapter. One could consider Denis' apprenticeship under Wenders, and then then her work with Serge Daney and Jacques Rivette on *Jacques Rivette: Le veilleur* (1994). One might also address her close collaboration with Agnes Godard, her longtime cinematographer, who also worked with Wenders as a camera operator, returning once again to the role that friendship has played throughout my definition of cool cinema.[254] "Cool cinema" is really globalized in Denis work because of her depictions of French colonialism and her desire to capture the African diasporic experience in France. Challenging the "whiteness" of cool cinema as it has largely been presented throughout this outline would be quite useful, as Denis does not center, and in fact often displaces, whiteness in her work. Denis also mixes the history of French cinema through very sly intertextual references into her work. There is a real play in her films between Western tradition and the way it is viewed from outside. Lastly, there is perhaps no ending to a movie that

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[254] The camera can also offer an opportunity for intimate conversation and exchange as can be seen in Denis' collaborations with Agnès Godard. *See* Yonca Talu, "Interview: Agnès Godard," in *Film Comment*, 2 August 2018, accessed 27 June 2022, https://www.filmcomment.com/blog/interview-agnes-godard/.

better captures the attitude I will have hoped to define as cool cinema than that of *Beau Travail*, and it is a sequence that has been in my head throughout the writing of this project (Figure 21). A summary of this scene cannot possibly do it justice. I said earlier in my discussion of *Leningrad Cowboys Go America* that cool cinema does not mock its characters, even if it presents them in a way that is absurd. *Beau Travail* is a film about intense discipline, depicting life and repression in the French Foreign Legion in Djibouti. In this final sequence, Galoup (Denis Lavant), having been consigned to civilian life, begins to dance.[255] Gone are the restrictions, the postures, the rigidity and rigour of military exercises, and instead something spontaneous, chaotic, and purely of the body takes its place. It is a scene of pure rebellion in the way I have characterized it throughout this chapter.

Figure 21**:** *Beau Travail* (Claire Denis, 1999)

I hope this conclusion, indicates the rich possibilities cool cinema can offer as a creative-critical approach to film analysis. There are many other contemporary films and filmmakers one could potentially address under its aegis, whose participation in this artful conversation is more virtual than actual. My own use of the term was motivated by a historical connection, but historical co-incidence does not always guarantee a direct and obvious influence. As to how far

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[255] Lavant, whose collaborations with Leos Carax have ensured him a legacy as a "cool" actor, is perhaps the only person who could have carried out this spontaneous gesture.

that influence extends and who else it may include, and what methods of criticism could be

deployed towards those ends, this is a task I hope future friends will undertake.

Chapter 6: "Whatever You Put into It"—Play with Narrative Parameters in Hong Sang-soo's *In Another Country* (2012)

Hong Sang-soo's filmography is characterized by a play with various forms of cinematic narrative construction. While his film style may appear to be rather austere and dominated by conversations presented with minimal depth staging and highly selective variable framing, he uses this approach as a vehicle for often very elaborate and complex *syuzhet* construction.[256] In this chapter, I want to catalogue the various narrative devices, both in terms of plot structure and film style that are characteristic of Hong's work. Given that Hong is a very prolific director, attempting to survey a broad range of techniques over the course of multiple films would be a gargantuan task (most Hong scholars tend to focus on the storytelling devices present in one film, or the use of one or two specific techniques across several films).[257] What I propose to do is blend both methods: I will choose one film as a central node and will then work outward to examine the rest of the director's filmography. Therefore, while I will not explain the specific meaning or purpose of the narrative devices that exist throughout Hong's work within the context of each film, I can nevertheless demonstrate how they work in one film and then radiate outward to point to their possible significance in Hong's wider filmography**.** To do this then, I

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[256] I am, following David Bordwell's *Narration in the Fiction Film* and *Poetics of Cinema* (New York: Routledge 2008) and Kristin Thompson, *Breaking the Glass Armour: Neoformalist Film Analysis* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988), using the terms *syuzhet* and *fabula*, adapted from Russian Formalism, to refer to plot and story respectively. The *syuzhet* refers to the plot, or the way story material is presented within a film, while the *fabula* refers to the chronological organization of all the information provided by the *syuzhet*. By "*syuzhet* construction" then, I am referring to the way Hong presents narrative in his films in terms of plot structure.

[257] In this way, my work owes a significant debt to Marshall Detelbaum's "The Deceptive Design of Hong Sangsoo's *Virgin Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors*." *New Review of Film and Television Studies* 3.2 (2005): 187-99; "A Closer Look at the Structure of Hong Sangsoo's *HaHaHa,*" *Asian Cinema* 23.2 (2012): 157-66, and "Reversibility as Structuring Principle in Hong Sang-soo's *Turning Gate*." *New Review of Film and Television Studies* 12.1 (2014): 60–65 as well as Marc Raymond's "Hong Sang-soo and the Film Essay." *New Review of Film and Television Studies* 12.1 (2014): 22-36, "Two-Shots and Group Shots: Hong Sang-Soo's Mannerist and Classical Mise-en-Scène." *Style* 49.2 (2015): 196–217, and "Women Stripped Bare: Rape in the Films of Hong Sang-Soo." *Canadian Journal of Film Studies* 26.1 (2017): 45–63. Unlike Raymond, however, I am not interested in the meaning one can make from Hong's narrative strategies.

have chosen to analyze in close detail the one Hong film in which nearly every narrative device that the director employs elsewhere is present. Hong's *In Another Country*[258] (2012) is the most salient film to examine in this respect, given that the movie's episodic structure allows Hong to demonstrate all the diverse narrative techniques, both in terms of storytelling and film style, that one finds throughout his oeuvre, but particularly in the later period beginning in 2010 with *Oki's Movie*.[259] This chapter has two tasks in mind: firstly, to consider the mode of narration proper to Hong's work, and then to perform a stylistic analysis or cataloging of this mode at work within *In Another Country*. Finally, this chapter will close by pointing to future areas of research one could pursue in relation to the cinema of Hong Sang-soo.

This chapter returns to the artful conversation, but spins it (or takes it) in a different direction. By treating Hong's filmography as a series of interactive exchanges of varying ideas, I am turning the artful conversation into a kind of formal cinephilia. Here, the conversation is not between persons, but between films, and more specifically between the stylistic procedures those films undertake. The analysis at work here, unlike previous chapters, is largely formal, although

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[258] I should state upfront that my choice of *In Another Country* is not because it is the "best" Hong Sang-soo film, although it is a personal favourite. Rather, I would say for the purposes of this chapter, that it is the "most" Hong Sang-soo film, i.e., it is most characteristic of his output in general.

[259] Attempting to easily periodize Hong's filmography is a difficult task, given his prolific output. For the sake of this chapter, I have decided to take a broad overview and divide his career in two, with the divide taking place in 2010 between *Hahaha* and *Oki's Movie*. This shift, briefly summarized, involves a move away from films centered primarily around men and their perspectives on life and love to women and their perspectives and experience (this shift is given a more thematic treatment in Raymond [2017]). Of course, this split is not a clean divide. There are still films with male protagonists after *Oki's Movie*, but a feminine presence is almost always presented as well. Stylistically speaking, one could locate a break between *On the Occasion of Remembering the Turning Gate* (2002) and *Women is the Future of Man* (2004). This where Hong shifts from a style resembling that of Michelangelo Antonioni (a style one finds in his first four features, especially *The Power of Kangwon Province* [1998]), towards the seemingly Eric Rohmer-influenced films that he is currently recognized for (especially in Marco Grosoli. "Moral Tales from Korea: Hong Sang-soo and Eric Rohmer," (Acta University Sapientiae) *Film and Media Studies* 3: 95-108 [2010]). However, I find the Rohmer influence to be overstated. Rohmer's films often have a linear *syuzhet*, whereas Hong is interested in much more elaborate forms of *syuzhet* construction. Both directors could be said to have a shift in perspective in their work, with Rohmer shifting from the male-dominated moral tales to the more evenly gendered, or even female-dominated comedies and proverbs, but given that my interest is primarily in narration and narrative form, this connection between the two directors is not particularly useful for my investigation.

that formalism is motivated by a cinephilic attention to detail. Artful conversation**s** persist, but this is now no longer about an exchange between persons, but one among and between films, which raises various possibilities for how we consider film narration and film style.

Art Cinema Narration vs Parametric Narration

Were this chapter devoted to how Hong Sang-soo's films get made rather than how his films work, more space would need to be dedicated to the contexts of production through which the director operates, above and beyond his stylistic choices.[260] While there is no space for this here, it is worth beginning this section with a brief discussion of "art cinema" within the context of contemporary South Korean cinema. Since the turn of the century, South Korean cinema has experienced a veritable renaissance in terms of its output compared to other new film movements and other robust national cinemas. Contemporary South Korean cinema is not only much more prolific than other new film movements (it is practically a new film industry); it also distinguishes itself through its playful use of genre.[261] For my purposes here then, it is worth noting that in terms of production and distribution, Hong's films are not just considered "art cinema" in stylistic terms, but are actively labeled and marketed as such.

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[260] I would describe my approach in this chapter as following methodologically from Bordwell's historical poetics model, which in this context, given Hong's relative creative freedom, will resemble a mix of auteurism and formalism. More broadly, I will be framing Hong's formal choices in line with the "problems and solutions" model Bordwell in *On the History of Film Style* borrows from E.H. Gombrich. However, I do not intend for this model to foreclose interpretations of Hong's work that would follow from a more considered analysis of the South Korean context of his work, whether that is considered in terms of the context of film production or regarding the subject matter of his films. This will be addressed again later.

[261] Other new film movements it would be fruitful to compare contemporary South Korean cinema to include the Iranian New Wave, the new Latin American cinemas of the late 1990s and early 2000s, and the Romanian New Wave. While all three movements could be said to have signature genres (the Iranian art film, the Latin American road movie, the Romanian police thriller), they are not as clearly delineated or prolific as South Korea. For more detailed treatments of contemporary South Korean cinema as an industry, see Darcy Paquet, *New Korean Cinema : Breaking the Waves* (London: Wallflower, 2009) and Sangjoon Lee, *Rediscovering Korean Cinema* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2019).On genre play and parody in South Korean filmmaking see Hye Seung Chung and David Scott Diffrient, *Movie Migrations: Transnational Genre Flows and South Korean Cinema* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2015).

Since Hong's films are marketed as art cinema, one could assume that in terms of his narrative approach, it would be satisfactory to examine his films according to the patterns of what David Bordwell, both in his essay "Art Cinema as Genre" (2008), and in *Narration in the Fiction Film* calls "art cinema narration":

> The art film is nonclassical in that it creates permanent narrational gaps and calls attention to processes of *fabula* construction. But these very deviations are placed within new extrinsic norms, resituated as realism or authorial commentary. Eventually, the art-film narration solicits not only denotative comprehension but connotative reading, a higher-level interpretation.[262]

From Hong's first film (1996's *The Day the Pig Fell into the Well*) up to his most recent (2021's *In Front of Your Face*), this description would seem an adequate summary of his work. Hong's films, including the one that will be the focus of this chapter, rely on narrational gaps, e.g., the frame story of *In Another Country* is unfinished, a gesture the viewer may be encouraged to read as an authorial commentary, or a comment on the creative process as such. Perhaps more upsettingly and against conventional storytelling norms, the ending of Hong's *Nobody's Daughter Haewon* (2014) makes it seem as if the emotional climax between the two lead characters was just a dream, challenging the viewer's understanding both of what they have seen in the film and what the experience was really "about." In addition to these interpretative gaps that challenge and provoke, I want to argue that there is another type of play happening in Hong's films on the level of form and not just at the level of meaning. In doing so, I will suggest that it is Bordwell's definition of "parametric narration" not "art cinema" narration that becomes the most valuable tool in mining Hong's work. Again Bordwell:

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[262] David Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 212.

To sum up: Parametric narration establishes a distinctive intrinsic norm, often involving an unusually limited range of stylistic options. It develops this norm in additive fashion. Style thus enters into shifting relations, dominant or subordinate, with the *syuzhet*. The spectator is cued to construct a prominent stylistic norm, recognizing style as neither motivated realistically or compositionally nor transtextually. The viewer must also form hypotheses and assumptions about the stylistic development of the film.[263]

This may seem like hair-splitting, given that many examples of contemporary art cinema indulge in stylistic flourishes characteristic of parametric style rather than traditional art cinema narration,[264] but I believe that it is relevant here if we consider the larger importance of *syuzhet* construction in Hong's work. Unlike traditional art cinema narration where complex *syuzhet* construction is expressed through a thematically complex use of film style, in Hong's films the complex *syuzhet* construction and his film style often function independently, i.e., the narrative elements and stylistic elements of his work are almost mutually exclusive properties, rather than one directly expressing the other. Hong's style is broadly characteristic of contemporary long-take realism, or following Bordwell (2007), "Asian Minimalism," in that his scenes are typically staged in long shot or a medium long shot with zooms used to direct focus to certain aspects of the scene. However, these zooms do not simply take the place of classical shot/counter shot patterns; they also point to a separate stylistic formula or pattern at work, one which does not

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[263] Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film*, 288-289. It is worth mentioning here that Bordwell's ideas of parameters are influenced by Noël Burch's writings on film, particularly his *Theory of Film Practice* (New York: Praeger, 1973) and are further bolstered by a discussion of the place of serial music that inspired Burch's work. While I believe there are serial components to Hong's work, I would suggest a more accurate analogy in this instance would be the "furniture music" of Erik Satie, rather than the compositions of Alban Berg or Pierre Boulez.
[264] One of Bordwell's examples of parametric narration is Rainer Werner Fassbinder's *Katzelmacher* (1969), although one could counter that Fassbinder's later melodramas such as *The Marriage of Maria Braun* (1978) would fall under the category of art cinema instead. This demonstrates to me that directors can move between the two modes.

service the narrative. When one approaches Hong's work then, narrative and stylistic analysis coincide, but they do not necessarily inform one another in a strict expressive relationship.[265]

Of course, this does not mean that the film style does not depict the *syuzhet* or that there is some secret narrative running alongside what is seen in the film. What I mean to suggest is that Hong's film style is not tailored to the narrative, that his shot selection does not reflect a clear attempt to draw the viewer's attention to the way the narrative is being ordered (the *syuzhet*). The film style still presents the *syuzhet* but it is not interested in expressing its complexity through editing or shot choices that encourage the viewer to concentrate on this aspect of the film. This will become clearer in our analysis of *In Another Country*. By examining Hong's approach as "parametric" rather than adhering to the terms of traditional art cinema narration, I hope to highlight and celebrate the play of narrative form that takes place within his films. Treating his *syuzhet* construction and film style as separate foci will also help me illustrate why *In Another Country* is a particularly productive film to "think with" and will allow me to radiate outwards and weave in additional commentary on his other films. Before I start my analysis, however, I would add that Hong is not exclusively parametric in his approach to individual films. Those familiar with his work would recognize certain authorial touches and pet themes that circulate throughout his oeuvre. After watching several Hong films, a viewer will be more inclined to expect certain stylistic developments. Indeed, the use of certain techniques can

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[265] An interesting juxtaposition would be between Hong Sang-soo and another self-avowed South Korean art cinema director, Park Chan-wook (both Park and fellow director Bong Joon-ho describe themselves as art cinema directors in the supplements to the Criterion Collection's release of *Parasite* [2020]). Park's films, the Vengeance trilogy for example, fit much more neatly into the traditional construction of art cinema narration defined by Bordwell. Park's eclectic style can easily be seen to be in service of conveying the action and eroticism of those films, with hybrid genre play, cinematography, editing, and staging devoted to conveying those emotions. Just by calling the cycle the Vengeance trilogy, Park encourages the higher-level interpretation pointed to by Bordwell above. In Hong's work, in sharp contrast, the film style remains consistent, despite the thematic concerns of the film's narrative.

be anticipated in advance, not only expected.[266] This is why I refer to *In Another Country* as a

salient film for analysis, since it can help guide a stylistic approach to Hong's larger

filmography; like more typical art cinema directors, Hong has a very defined authorial style.[267]

The Narrative Parameters of *In Another Country*

To be clear, when I speak about narration or narrative construction in this chapter, I am

referring to three things: firstly, the structure of the story being told (the *syuzhet*)**;** second, the

information conveyed within that structure in its inferred chronological order (the *fabula*)**;** and

finally the way the filmmaker conveys these elements (film style and its properties: mise-en-

scène, cinematography, film sound, editing, etc.). As I stated in the last section, one of the

notable parameters of Hong's work is his *syuzhet* construction, in that it does not find itself

expressed or supported by Hong's film style. In this section, what I want to show is how Hong's

syuzhet construction is very complex, employing stories within stories and dreams within

dreams, although Hong's film style does not call attention to these complex elements, but rather

draws the viewers' attention to repetitive stylistic gestures. I will begin by mapping the *syuzhet*

of *In Another Country*, while drawing attention to the way Hong uses these narrative patterns in

his other work. This will be followed by a consideration of the style Hong employs in the film

and a close look at its juxtaposition with the *syuzhet* construction.

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[266] One should point out, however**,** that Hong's work also goes through "moods" that themselves create different expectations than one would perhaps expect in a different period of his work. Since his publicized affair with actress Kim Min-Hee, Hong's films have taken on a much darker and reflective tone, and have been filmed in black and white, a strong shift from the colour comedies that marked the period from *Oki's Movie* to *Yourself and Yours* (2016). Nevertheless, there are exceptions within that period, as well**,** such as *The Day He Arrives* (2011), which is in black and white, and *Nobody's Daughter Haewon* (2014), which is melodrama. While this chapter aims to provide a general summary of the narrative and stylistic nuances one finds throughout the director's oeuvre, it nevertheless cannot account for all the specific intrinsic and possibly "extrinsic norms" (Bordwell) across his entire filmography.

[267] This likely helps to contribute to his high-level of productivity, insofar as he utilizes a fixed set of stylistic norms regardless of *syuzhet* construction, though the former likely also influences the latter, as his high-level of productivity also encourages him to employ different kinds of narration in order to create variation within his work.

In Another Country's total *syuzhet* is divided into roughly four sections, three self-contained episodes and then a frame narrative, with each section further having its own self-contained *syuzhet* and *fabula*. The frame story begins by providing us with a dramatic detail regarding its *fabula*: a young girl, Won-joo (Jung Yu-mi) and her mother Park Sook (Youn Yuh-Jung) are hiding from debtors in Mohang, a sleepy beachside town, and through their dialogue, we learn that this is because Won Joo's uncle owes the debtors some money and Park Sook fears them coming to collect.[268] This information is merely set-up however; to pass the time in hiding, Won-joo begins writing a series of stories which all feature a French traveler named Anne (Isabelle Huppert) who comes to stay in Mohang, and whose occupation and reason for being there shift from story to story. Before each Anne story, we return to Won-Joo writing, but Hong never offers a conclusion to this frame narrative, leaving before we learn what happens with the girl, the mother, and her debtors. The total *syuzhet* ends when the last Anne story does, one element of the film that leads me to consider its narrative strategy in terms of the whole film, rather than exclusively as isolated parts**;** i.e., it would feel incorrect to describe *In Another Country* as a series of short films.[269]

Frame stories are a recurring narrative device throughout Hong's oeuvre. *Virgin Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors* (2000), *HaHaHa* (2010), and *Hill of Freedom* (2014) are similar in in their use of a framing sequence that recurs throughout their total *syuzhet*. *HaHaHa* is the most directly comparable in terms of offering a frame story that takes place "outside" of the recounted narratives; yet it remains within the same *fabula*, just sometime after all the events otherwise

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[268] This premise is largely the same as Hong's short film, *List* (2011), which starts from the same basic scenario.
[269] Raymond in "Hong Sang-soo and the Film Essay" sees this film, and the period of Hong's work to which it belongs, as relating to Corrigan's concept of the essay film. *See* Timothy Corrigan, *The Essay Film: from Montaigne, after Marker* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011). As far as I am concerned, this approach goes too far in attempting to provide meaning to Hong's works and moves away from a discussion of his film style. I would also argue, regardless of whether one treats Hong's work as essayistic or predominantly narrative, the question of *narration* and the tools of formal analysis are still useful for any examination of Hong's work.

depicted in the film, and all three eventually tie the frame narrative to fabula disclosed by their parts. Also used throughout Hong's work is the use of narrative episodes that represent the creative projects of the characters within them, i.e., separate narratives containing unique *syuzhet* and *fabula* information between them. This is the case, ambiguously, in *Tale of Cinema* (2005) and, explicitly, in *Oki's Movie*. Given the proximity of *In Another Country* to *Hahaha, Oki's Movie*, and *Hill of Freedom,* I would infer that Hong was particularly interested in these kinds of scenario construction during this period of his work. However, *In Another Country* remains unique in this regard since the characters in its frame narrative do not appear in its other narrative episodes. Although, as if to confound things further, it should be mentioned that the actors themselves do appear in other narrative episodes, playing characters within Won-joo's story with similar names to those in the frame narrative.

As stated previously, the bulk of the film's total *syuzhet* depicts the three Anne stories being written by Won-joo. Episodic construction is a typical element of Hong Sang-soo's work, from the four-part structure of his first film, *The Day The Pig Fell Into the Well* (1996) up until his most recent work. One of the ways *In Another Country* is unique is that different kinds of *syuzhet* construction are played with in each episode; each seems to take place within its own self-contained *fabula*. The first Anne episode strikes us, on first viewing anyway, as the most simplistic. In this story, Anne is a French film director who has come for a film festival and decides to spend an evening in Mohang with a Korean director, Jongsoo (Kwon Hae-Hyo), and his pregnant wife, Kumhee (Moon So-ri). We learn through dialogue that Anne and Jongsoo have had a previous flirtation that Jongsoo seems much more interested in pursuing further than Anne does. His attempts are naturally complicated by the presence of Kumhee, and his

lecherousness is further underscored by her pregnancy.[270] Anne also meets a lifeguard (Yoo Jun-

sang). He is immediately spellbound by her and attempts to flirt with his limited English, which

makes him comes on overly strong, if not somewhat charming in contrast to Jongsoo.[271] Anne

aggressively rebuffs the lifeguard during a barbecue at the inn, but is then further put off by

Jongsoo's hypocrisy, and visits the lifeguard the next morning to apologize with a note that he

struggles to read with his limited grasp of English.

Despite the linear construction of the *syuzhet* in this episode, it nevertheless also contains

several devices that will recur non-chronologically throughout the proceeding stories, adding a

layer of complexity that we may not expect if we that anticipate the stories will remain separate

worlds. At the beginning of the episode, Anne, Jongsoo and Kumhee are wandering on the beach

and find a broken soju bottle, which Jongsoo blames on reckless Koreans (in the third episode, a

drunken Anne will throw away a soju bottle on the beach, suggesting a metaphysical connection,

a total *fabula* to which the three stories all belong to, shared between the two characters). We

also see Jung Yu-mi, who plays Won-joo in the frame narrative, as the caretaker of the inn, who

gives Anne an umbrella and offers to help her find the lighthouse she goes in search of when

spending time by herself. Additionally, this search leads to a sequence where Anne approaches a

fork in a road and then decides which path to take. This sequence, with some slight variation,

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[270] Infidelities and imagined weak-mindedness of Korean men are a reoccurring theme throughout Hong's filmography. If there is a major shift in his work, it is from films about these men to films from the perspective of the women who have to deal with them. While Hong never sheds his own biases completely, there is nevertheless a constant condemnation of the way neurotic, intellectual men try to take advantage of the women who they believe inspire their creativity. This is addressed at length in Raymond's "Women Stripped Bare: Rape in The Films of Hong Sang-Soo."

[271] Because most of the cast is Korean and Isabelle Huppert's first language is French, most of the film is in English, everyone's (at least) second language. This lends the film both a charming and somewhat amateur authenticity, which adds to the air of good humor throughout. This "device" is repeated in *Hill of Freedom*, which has a Japanese protagonist searching for someone in South Korea, and in *Claire's Camera* (2017), which reunites Hong with Huppert and takes place in Cannes.

will also take place in the subsequent episodes.[272] Even if the *syuzhet* construction in this first episode is the most linear, it nevertheless creates layered "puzzle film" expectations for what we as viewers can anticipate seeing in the future episodes, an important factor that will be considered later in this analysis. [273]

The second Anne story is significantly more complicated than the first because it contains more story layers than the first one (raising the total film to the level of a story-within-a-story-within-a-story). The Anne in this episode is the wife of an executive who has come to the inn in order to carry out an affair with the film director, Munsoo (Moon Sung-keun). When Anne is forced to wait because Munsoo has a last-minute meeting with an actress, we are shown a repetition of the scene from the previous episode where the caretaker walks with Anne away from the inn, and Anne again finds herself at the same fork in the road. This time, Anne takes a different turn and does end up at the lighthouse, where she has a dream of Munsoo arriving, only for her to be awakened by a concerned fisherman. Anne once again meets the lifeguard, who helps her return to the inn. Munsoo arrives and he and Anne head to beach where they run into the lifeguard. Anne's friendliness sparks a debate between her and Munsoo based on his anxieties about his age, and when things have seemingly turned for the worst, this is also revealed to have been a dream. Anne has fallen asleep in her room while it rains outside. Anne awakens and heads down to the beach, where she meets Munsoo and the two happily connect while being observed by the seemingly dejected lifeguard through binoculars.

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[272] These connections lead us to wonder whether the episodes we are seeing are meant to be separate stories, or three drafts of the same story. Nevertheless, the film does not provide an answer to this question. The idea of narrative variations can be seen throughout Hong's work in *The Day He Arrives* (2011), and *Right Now, Wrong Then* (2015).

[273] Despite my adherence to Bordwell's formalism and historical poetics, this sort of language is the furthest I am willing to go in terms of embracing any kind of cognitivism. While I am sympathetic to the philosophical criticism of cognitive film theory in Rodowick's *Philosophy's Artful Conversation*, my own personal objection is that films rarely receive as attentive a viewer as most cognitive studies assume, so it makes more sense to me to speak from the assumed position of the creator of the film (an auteur, for instance) rather than an observer, whose motivations I do not feel comfortable positing.

Not only does *In Another Country* appear to be a film made up of isolated episodes, but Hong further pushes these episodes to have their own unique mini-episodes. The use of dreams throughout Hong's work is not unique, and it is a device that appears in *The Day The Pig Fell Into the Well*, *Night and Day* (2008), *Like You Know It All* (2009), *Nobody's Daughter Haewon* (2014), *On the Beach at Night Alone* (2017), and *Hotel by the River* (2018). However, unlike the earlier films, this is the first Hong film in which he presents a sequence as happening within the previous episode, only to later reveal it was a dream.[274] Hong's ability to stage these "fake-outs" is complicated by his use of film style, which will be returned to later on. It suffices for now to say that this narrative trickery demonstrates the complex degree of *syuzhet* construction presented by this film, and also the degree to which this film presents a variety of the complex narrative games one finds throughout Hong's oeuvre.

It should also be noted here how much this second story seemingly departs from the first. We are introduced to a new character (Munsoo), played by a new actor, and the characterization of Anne is radically different from the film director of the first section. Nevertheless, in addition to the motifs carried throughout each episode, Hong also hides references to other episodes throughout. In the opening of the sequence, one can spot Moon So-ri, presumably as Kumhee, walking in the background, suggesting that she and Jongsoo also exist in this story even though they do not cross paths with Anne. Additionally, in this episode, we see Anne hide an umbrella in a bush while walking to the beach**;** the enigmatic reason for this, if one can call it a "reason," will only be revealed in the third section. The second episode, despite seeming like a much different story, carries on from our expectations of the first, setting up several elements for the

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[274] *Like You Know It All* involves a dream sequence that suggests more serious story consequences, although it does not operate in the same "twist" style as *In Another Country*. *Nobody's Daughter Haewon*, as stated earlier, presents perhaps the most self-consciously irritating example.

third, and contains many of the *syuzhet* elements that connect *In Another Country* to the rest of Hong's filmography.

The third and final Anne story plays like a modified version of the first while integrating motifs from the second. The third Anne is an older divorcee whose children are fully grown and who comes to visit Mohang with her professor friend, Park Sook (played by Youn Yuh-jung, with Hong bringing another actor from the frame narrative into the Anne stories). After visiting a nearby Buddhist temple, Anne and Park Sook meet Jongsoo and Kumhee at the inn and have dinner with them. This Anne falls for Jongsoo's advances, but the two are caught by Park Sook and Kumhee, who both condemn Jongsoo for his perverted behavior. Park Sook arranges for Anne to speak with a monk to provide Anne with some spiritual direction. Anne, however, ends up talking the monk into giving her his most prized possession, a special pen. Anne wanders off by herself, where she meets the lifeguard and the two drink and sleep together. Anne wakes up under the sleeping lifeguard, and both feeling awkward and bored of him, wanders off. Park Sook and the monk look for Anne who is on her own down the main road in the town. It starts raining and she grabs an umbrella from a bush, which seems to be the same one from the second Anne story, and that's where this episode, and the film, end.

Despite also having a largely linear *syuzhet*, the third story is remarkable for the way it depends on the previous sections both to satisfy certain story expectations, and to causally explain certain events. We are not surprised by Jongsoo's advances towards Anne, because we "know" from the first story that Jongsoo lusts after foreign women, even though this would seem to be a different story and not same "Jongsoo" we saw previously. Additionally, there are more direct connections to the worlds of the first and second stories. When Anne is drinking by herself on the beach, she tosses her empty soju empty bottle away, the implication being that this is the

littered bottle that the first Anne finds when on the beach with Jongsoo and Kumhee. Most

notably, in the ending of the story, the third Anne finds the umbrella that the second Anne had

hidden in the bush. As if one Anne had purposefully left the umbrella for the other. We know

that, because of the frame narrative, all three stories are written by Won-joo, which one can

interpret as explaining these seemingly metaphysical coincidences. However, we are given very

little of Won-joo's explicit point of view throughout the third episode, especially compared to

the first and second, which both begin and end with her voice-over. This section, and

immediately after, the film itself, end with Anne walking down the road, without Won-joo's

influence.

The decision to end the film at this point offers not only an open ending to the third Anne

story as well as the frame narrative, but also a poetic, rather than dramatic conclusion. It

explicitly recalls the invitation to meaning that Bordwell describes as characteristic of art cinema

narration. This conclusion is an invitation for the viewer to re-examine their relationship to the

film's overall construction and draw their own conclusions as to the work's consistency, i.e., it is

up to the viewer to decide what *In Another Country* is about, and whether it's three (and a half)

separate stories or one whole, thematically speaking. Part of Hong's complex *syuzhet*

construction therefore opens the film up to further reflection, although not in a way that

constitutes a demand.[275] While Hong's form of *syuzhet* construction plays with our expectations

or narrative development up until the last minute, it is not put in the service of some larger

mystery or hidden profundity. As this discussion has hopefully demonstrated, it is quite easy to

say *what* happens in one of Hong Sang-soo's films. The *syuzhet*'s complications are not a puzzle

box that when solved, reveals an equally dense *fabula*. However, by deploying episodic form,

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[275] As I am, ironically, doing here. Returning to the example of "furniture-," or perhaps ambient music generally, something can be mechanically complex without calling attention to the degree of complexity involved.

stories within stories and dreams further within them, and his willingness to blend and challenge the closure of episodes, Hong treats his *syuzhet* as an opportunity for play and allows us to see narrative as a formal parameter and open possibility of filmmaking.

Part of what makes me treat Hong's work as a play with narration as a parameter, rather than a demand to be solved or addressed is his relatively minimal and direct film style. As I have demonstrated, *In Another Country* has a complicated *syuzhet*, but the film style does not call attention to it, i.e., in a majority of art cinema, a complex or unconventional *syuzhet* is matched by complex, expressive, or thematic use of film style; Hong eschews this strategy entirely, preferring to stick to a much more routine style that he has honed over the course of his career.[276] This simplicity can be seen most obviously on the levels of sound and editing. Hong relies on straight cuts; he does not use obvious editing techniques like dissolves, or even match cuts, etc. to move between story layers. It is only through action such as dialogue or a character's behaviour, or through voice-over, that the film transitions through these different layers. When the film shifts from one Anne story to the next, we cut back to Won-joo writing and hear her voice-over to introduce the next story. Otherwise, Hong offers no distinction between Won-joo's story and that of Anne. This is an early example of what I meant in the previous section when I stated that Hong's film style does not express his *syuzhet* construction.

However, this does not mean that Hong's use of film style is arbitrary. There are norms and techniques which he relies upon from film to film. Hong has a remarkably consistent film style, one that has remained much the same since 2004's *Woman is the Future of Man*, and

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[276] David Bordwell's "Beyond Asian Minimalism: Hong Sangsoo's Geometry Lesson," in *Hong Sangsoo,* ed. Huh Moonyung (Seoul: Korean Film Council, 2007) suggests that this means that Hong accepts wholesale a tradition that Bordwell himself calls "Asian minimalism." I hope to show that even if one can place Hong's aesthetic within such a broader tradition, there remains a self-conscious play with form that it is worth drawing attention to as a separate parameter.

which he does not change regardless of how complicated or linear the *syuzhet* construction of a film may be.[277] However, this style, despite being minimalistic, is just as directed towards patterns and expectations as the *syuzhet* construction. Given how much of his films revolve around dialogue between characters, Hong's film style tends to focus on the framing of two-shots and group shots in consistent patterns.[278] Hong does not seek to present every exchange during his films in the exact same way, but he does choose a series of shots for a given film that tend to be repeated throughout. One of the predominate examples throughout *In Another Country* is Hong's utilization of the medium-long shot to depict the conversations between two characters in a similar manner, for example when Anne and Jongsoo talk on the balcony in both the first and third stories (Figures 22-23). Hong's framing often captures the characters from the side, or at a ¾ angle, allowing us to see their faces, but never fully meeting their gaze. This emphasizes the space between the characters, the conversational space, which cutting across them in a more conventional shot/reverse-shot pattern would not accomplish. Anne and Jongsoo are autonomous, linked interlocutors in an artful conversation choreographed by the camera. This is not a densely layered space or style, but an intimate, yet strikingly open conversation.

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[277] This is not to say that his first four features are radically different, and I am tempted to say that the shift from film to digital video in his work is more noticeable than the stylistic shift. I would just suggest films such as *The Power of Kangwon Province* and *On the Occasion of Remembering the Turning Gate* are more characterized by a long-shot/long take style, whereas after *Woman is the Future of Man*, Hong comes to rely more readily on medium-long shots and zooms.

[278] This framing is discussed at length in Raymond's "Two-Shots and Group Shots: Hong Sang-Soo's Mannerist and Classical Mise-en-Scène." Even though he finds Hong's narrative style to be more pregnant with meaning than I do, I would direct anyone interested in a numerical analysis of stylistic devices in Hong's films, from statistics about average shot length to the number of zooms, to consult the useful appendix to his work.

Figure 22: *In Another Country* (Hong Sang-soo, 2012)

Figure 23: *In Another Country* (Hong Sang-soo, 2012)

This balcony framing is also deployed when Anne is talking on the phone to Munsoo in the second story, and when Anne and Park Sook arrive at the inn in the third episode. This camera positioning and framing predominates throughout the film, regardless of the setting, and it is utilized for many of the characters' conversations elsewhere. Anne's conversations with the lifeguard are also captured in a medium long shot like the balcony shots. Similarly, when two characters are seated at a table, Hong again uses a medium-long shot, with both characters situated on either side of the frame, with the table in the middle. For his group shots, Hong tends to rely again on the medium-long shot, this time depicting the characters gathered around a table, with a noticeable number of soju bottles dominating the centre of the frame (Figures 24-25). Occasionally, Hong will utilize a tilted medium-long shot to depict a group of characters seated on the floor, as in the scenes with the first Anne, Jongsoo and Kumhee, and when the third Anne and Park Sook meet with the monk. The framing in these sequences, with the characters on either

side of the shot, suggests Hong is directing the viewer, at least primarily, to focus on the intimate

exchange between the characters by centering the space between them.

Figure 24: *In Another Country* (Hong Sang-soo, 2012)

Figure 25: *In Another Country* (Hong Sang-soo, 2012)

While Hong does not rely on a lot of camera movement, he does occasionally take

advantage of variable framing and some staging in depth. Throughout his two-shots and group-

shots, he will use zooms either to call the viewer's attention to a specific character or to

introduce another character into the scene. In figure 24, the camera is zoomed out to include

Jongsoo at the barbecue in frame. Hong also uses a zoom to direct our attention to when the

lifeguard arrives to assist with the barbecue. Hong's zooms allow him to explore and expand the

intimacy of the conversational space mentioned earlier without cutting across or through it,

keeping the viewer aware of this divide between the characters. There is not much staging in

depth, with characters deeper in the frame usually just speaking or drinking, as Hong often

prefers static compositions that his camera can rove around by zooming and panning. Nevertheless, there is, as mentioned earlier, the sly inclusion of Kumhee in the corner of a frame when the second Anne is on the phone (she appears in the corner of the medium long shot). There are also the sequences where each Anne walks around the caretaker's office (Figure 26-28), and are presented in the same style each time, as well as the repetition of the various Annes approaching the fork in the road, which is mirrored by the last shot of the film (Figures 29-32).

Figure 26: *In Another Country* (Hong Sang-soo, 2012)

Figure 27: *In Another Country* (Hong Sang-soo, 2012)

Figure 28: *In Another Country* (Hong Sang-soo, 2012)

While these scenes are not staged in a way that is complex, as the camera gently pans with Anne's movements, the change of shot dimension nevertheless makes them stand out

among the more typical medium-long shot framings. Another long shot that stands out is of the lifeguard's tent which he and the first Anne visit. In this shot, Anne and the lifeguard disappear into the tent, which seems very small framed against the beach. Compared to the predominant use of medium long shots, the framing of this scene in particular catches the viewer's attention. The way Hong times his long shots for emphasis is similar to way he uses snatches of music throughout his work. His scores are often silent except for occasional bursts of classical music, which usually plays during the opening and ending credits, and then is only heard perhaps two or three times throughout the rest of film to indicate a change of scene or episode.

Figure 29: *In Another Country* (Hong Sang-soo, 2012)

Figure 30: *In Another Country* (Hong Sang-soo, 2012)

Figure 31: *In Another Country* (Hong Sang-soo, 2012)

Figure 32: *In Another Country* (Hong Sang-soo, 2012)

Given his precise shot selections, Hong pays just as much as attention to the patterns of his film style as he does to the complex patterns of his *syuzhet* construction, with the film style often creating its own rhythmic unity. Part of what connects the different aspects of the *syuzhet*, i.e., that which makes the film cohere as a total narrative regardless of its separate stories, are the stylistic patterns and repetitions that Hong uses. Nevertheless, Hong's film style is not expressive of his *syuzhet* construction, but rather serves as a counterpoint to it. To broadly classify Hong's style of narration then, following from this analysis of *In Another Country*, is to see two strands running parallel: one that is devoted to complex and densely layered *syuzhet* construction and another which is based on simple patterns of framing two-shots and conversations, with several key alterations to grab and focus the viewer's attention.[279] Because of these competing and

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[279] Michael Unger**'s** essay "Hong Sangsoo's Codes of Parallelism."*Asian Cinema* 23.2 (2012): 141–56 is also about the layers of parallelism one can find throughout Hong's work.

parallel methods, I find that is appropriate to consider Hong's work to be more adequately considered as a form of parametric, rather than art cinema, narration.

To close out this section, it is worthwhile to ask why Hong's work is characterized by this parallelism between complex "narrative architecture" (Bordwell 2007) and a minimal, albeit distinctively patterned film style. In an interview with the *New York Times* to promote *In Another Country*, Isabelle Huppert remarks regarding Hong that

> He starts with the place, finds the people, and only then, writes the script. So it gives an enigmatic cast to everything — and to the way we work. He has a curious, atypical relationship to his film. He's very exacting, and precise, and there are lots of takes, he's not ever in a rush.[280]

Huppert's remarks suggest a somewhat improvisational, but also very open approach to filmmaking. The use of a lot of takes and (perhaps hastily written and learned) dialogue suggests that the point of the stable camera position is to not interrupt filming.[281] The parallel strands of Hong's work could therefore be said to arise from the limitations and conditions within which he works, though more research, paying particular attention to Hong and his collaborators' discussions of his working methods, needs be done in this direction.

Conclusion

This chapter has sought to examine and describe the narrational style of South Korean auteur Hong Song-soo using a formal and historical poetic approach. Despite operating in a film culture where art cinema is a self-conscious genre, I have demonstrated that Bordwell's category

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[280] Joan Dupont, "Isabelle Huppert's South Korean Adventures," *The New York Times*, accessed 30 September 2021, https://www.nytimes.com/2012/05/19/arts/19iht-cannes19.html.

[281] The IMDB page for the film suggests that it was shot in nine days, although I cannot find an exact source to verify this claim. Apocryphal or not, it is credible that while Hong works in an "exact" manner, he also works very quickly, given his immense output.

of parametric, as opposed to art cinema narration, better serves as an explanatory framework for considering Hong's approach to film storytelling. This analysis focused on Hong's 2012 film *In Another Country*, which proves a productive, kaleidoscopic node which could connect to the rest of the director's oeuvre through the variety of techniques deployed within its *syuzhet* construction. It has been used to demonstrate that Hong, unlike most typical art cinema auteurs, does not treat narration and film style as complementary, but rather as separate "parameters" that run parallel to one another, and thus offers an approach to narration that I would liken towards the furniture music of Erik Satie, or contemporary ambient music, in relation to Bordwell's (through Burch's) linking of parametric narration to serial music.

My interest in this chapter has been predominantly formal. I have been interested in clearly explicating what it is that Hong does, both in this movie, and in the rest of his oeuvre. I have tried to avoid making meaning, except where nearly impossible to avoid, whether explicitly thematic, implicitly interpretative or cultural/symptomatic, out of what I have analyzed. This was in order to provide the most rigorous possible blueprint of Hong's formal choices and narrative strategies.[282] What *In Another Country*, or any of Hong's films, are "about," is a question that I leave to a differently attuned reader. It is a cliché to say of difficult works of art that one often gets out of them what one puts into them, i.e., there are certain works which demand a certain level of engagement in order to be appreciated. What I find appealing about Hong's work is that they tend to reward *whatever* level of engagement one puts into them.[283] If one is looking for a

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[282] I am borrowing these types of meaning from David Bordwell's *Making Meaning*.

[283] I would find it very unconvincing to include Hong among the "slow cinema" canon, as Raymond does in "Two Shots and Group Shots," also referencing Ira Jaffe's *Slow Movies: Countering the Cinema of Action* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014). I find the term slow cinema a useless category for investigation. There are many kinds of "slow" films, from ones that are meditative to those that instill a sense of creeping dread to those which seek to deliberately bore the spectator; some are narratively abstract while others are linear, some with long running times and others under 80 minutes. To lump such a wide array of world cinema together into one category based on a loose affect seems condescending at best and dismissive at worst. One viewer's boredom is easily another's excitement.

lighthearted narrative distraction, they can be pleasant and undemanding. Likewise, if one is seeking to untangle complex narrative puzzles, they can also serve that purpose. Given that affective spectrum, I did not think that the most rewarding approach to an analysis of his films would necessarily be to isolate any specific meaning. This is not to say that meaning cannot or should not be made from his work, just that my focus has been to explain the different, albeit contrasting levels of detail it offers. Considering the number of films Hong has directed, this chapter has only been able to scratch the surface of his work, and while I have made connections to other films, there are other, perhaps even more complex examples of *syuzhet* construction waiting to be found.

Chapter 7: A Strange Girl's Bizarre Adventure—On Cinephile Perception and Self-Presentation

This chapter marks a departure of sorts. Unlike the previous chapters of my dissertation, it is no longer specifically about film criticism and theory and instead is a work of auto-theory. While auto-theory is very much in vogue in feminist and queer practice, my own use of the concept derives more from filmmakers like Jean-Luc Godard and Chris Marker.[284] Specifically, my methodology in what follows can be best summarized by a lengthy quote by Godard,

> I'd like to find—I think that an interesting book on film would be for a viewer, not to be a film critic but to tell their story as a viewer, to make a kind of cinephile film [*sic*] if you like. There has never been a book like that. Because they fall into film criticism. What's bad about film criticism in books – even in the books they've made out of all my articles – what is bad that there is nothing to show what lies between the articles. If they did they might make interesting novels.[285]

While what I am looking to accomplish here might not be long enough to qualify as an "interesting" novel, I would nevertheless like to present what has happened "between-the-images," what has happened to me while writing the chapters of this dissertation.[286] The following is thus both a memoir and a meditative essay, an attempt to present the story of the last six years of my life, more or less. I should also note that I wrote my master's thesis on Gilles

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[284] *See* Lauren Fournier, *Autotheory as Feminist Practice in Art, Writing, and Criticism* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2021)

[285] Jean-Luc Godard, *Introduction to a True History of Cinema and Television*, trans. Timothy Barnard (Montreal: Caboose Books, 2018) 201.

[286] My use of the phrase "between the images" is also indebted to Bellour (2013) and his illustrated essay collection *Between-the-Images* [L'Entre-images: Photo, Cinéma, Vidéo], first published in French in 1990. Bellour's writing between images is an attempt to come to terms with his self-professed realization that "film analysis," particularly the post-classical film analysis I discussed in my introduction, is no longer possible. Bellour believes that writing on cinema can only ever conjure still-images from films, not the "cinematic signifier" proper. My own use of the phrase is not purely faithful to Bellour's "between", but is a playful attempt to connect different moments from the films in my life.

Deleuze's idea of the interstice, and in many ways I have long been drawn to liminal spaces of creativity and possibility.[287]

What follows deals at length with gender transition and de-transition, and with questions of identity and becoming. While there are many works that deal with gender identity, fluidity, performativity and even trans studies, my citations are primarily from cinema studies. I consider myself a film critic, and if what I am presenting here is something like "the film of my life," then it suits me more to draw on material I am familiar with than try to adopt a discourse that is alien to my way of thinking.

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To borrow again from Jean-Luc Godard, and I'm paraphrasing**:** "what I'm trying to show you is how I see things, so that you can judge whether I am able to see, and what I have seen…and you can see if I see something. I show if there is something to see and how I see it. And you can say, 'No, [she's] wrong, there's nothing to see.' So what I would like to show you is a way of seeing."[288]

In December of 2018, I made a decision. It is not that these things are a choice, but you have to decide when to tell people, and when to start making the changes you need to make. That month I came out as transgender. Had I, or anyone else I knew, known what a denial beard was, maybe I could have made the decision a little quicker, but the important thing was I got there. [289] I did not tell everyone right away**;** I took my time. I never had anything to come out about

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[287] *See* Deleuze's *Cinema II*.

[288] Modification of *Scénario de Sauve qui peut* (*la vie*) cited in Daniel Morgan, *Late Godard and the Possibilities of Cinema* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 49.

[289] A denial beard comes from the idea that some trans women, pre-transition, grow a long beard in order to affirm their masculinity before realizing that they desire transition. In the fall of 2018, I had a full beard that I was maintaining regularly.

before, so the experience was all new to me. Now, I treat "coming out" to people like it is not a big deal.

The first few months of my transition were about getting on HRT.[290] I had to get an MRI of my liver before my doctor would prescribe hormones, which made the process feel interminable, though that was only because I had been wrestling with the idea of being trans for so many years. I definitely watched a few movies during this period (I notably watched *Saló: The 120 Days of Sodom* on the day I had off between my comprehensive exams), but I was not as movie obsessed as I would be post-transition. I say this to be clear about one thing before I continue: I did not transition because of film. I transitioned because I could not imagine living otherwise. I cannot imagine living otherwise. Transitioning does not mean all your problems are solved forever, and it even introduces some new ones, but it sure makes being in the world a lot easier.

I started HRT in March 2019. It began with a month of just antiandrogens, or testosterone blockers, in which I felt a kind of blasé nothingness, then estrogen a month later. Estrogen increases breast development, thins body hair while making the hair on your head fuller and more luxurious, softens your skin, and radically alters your mood (many trans people describe experiencing a second puberty). After only two days on estrogen, my body's reaction confirmed what I had already begun to anticipate: I am a trans woman. I would use she/her pronouns from now on. This was the moment when I went fully from Chris to Christina.

My first encounter with the mood-altering power of estrogen was when I watched Alex Ross Perry's *Her Smell* (2019). I was drawn to the film because it was inspired by Courtney Love and I have been a Nirvana fan for most of my life. The film begins with a long take of

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[290] Hormone replacement therapy.

Elizabeth Moss as Her Smell frontwoman and human disaster Becky Something going on a rampage after a gig. For the first two acts of this movie, I was scared to death of Elisabeth Moss and Becky Something. She managed to capture that hair trigger personality that makes you feel like someone is capable of flying off the handle at any moment. But it's what happened in the third act that really shocked me.

The third act is about Becky Something in recovery from substance abuse having a brief reunion with her young daughter. In this scene, Becky performs a piano cover of Bryan Adams' "Heaven." Now, I am not a very sentimental person, and I would not describe myself as a fan of Bryan Adams. I am, or rather was, not someone who cries a lot at movies. And yet, I wept during this scene. Not tears, not crying, full blown weeping. I had not cried like this at a movie since watching the Charlie Brown cartoon *Snoopy, Come Home* (1972) when I was a child. It was in this moment that I realized estrogen was going to change the way I reacted to the world. That certain emotions were going to come at me with a force I was completely unprepared to experience, a force I had been longing for my entire life. Here was a film that I had admired intellectually, that I had appreciated even if I found kind of off-putting, that suddenly over the course of one scene became a defining moment in my transition. *Her Smell* occupies an important place between the images of my life, but also my own reaction occupies a niche between its images. I cannot think about the film without recalling this profound response I had to it.

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To try and put more theoretically what I have just told you, I have to turn once again to Godard. I remember when I first watched *Pierrot Le Fou* and felt completely overwhelmed, both by its narrative and its style. Reflecting on this film a number of years later, Godard observed

that "gradually I realized that cinema is what lies between things. It isn't a thing, it's what is between one person and another. Between you and me; and on the screen it's between things."[291] Godard took this idea from French art historian Élie Faure's discussion of Spanish Baroque Painter Diego Velasquez, with a passage that he would also cite in the film, "Velázquez, after the age of fifty, never again painted sharply defined things, he wandered around the objects with the air and the twilight."[292] While Godard's paraphrase would seem to shift the focus of Faure's observation from a question of representation to one of construction, it nevertheless defines a method which the director continues to utilize to this very day, one which continues to inform my thinking both about cinema and perhaps even more influentially, my own life.

What does it mean to film "the connections between things"? For me, it means that the impressions films leave on our memories are not purely a result of the projected images, but how we as spectators draw a relation between them. In a recent interview, Godard has tried to axiomatize this formulation, explaining to *Cahiers du cinéma* that "I even coined a very simplistic equation, which I call the axiom of montage, like Euclid had coined his five axioms: x+3=1. To get one, you must eliminate two. It's not really an equation. When I showed it to Badiou, he didn't really know what to do with it."[293] While Godard's formula may not hold up in the face of mathematical scrutiny, it is useful as a way to understand his filmmaking process. I hope it also to a degree illuminates what I am trying to write here, and what my memoir is trying to convey about gender transition.

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[291] Godard, *Introduction to Cinema and Television*, 182.

[292] Élie Faure, *History of Art: Modern*, trans. Walter Pach (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1924), 124.

[293] Jean-Luc Godard, "Ardent Hope," Stéphane Delorme and Joachim Lepastier, *Les Cahiers du Cinéma* no. 759, October 2019, trans. Srikanth Srinivasan and Andy Rector, December 21 2019 https://kinoslang.blogspot.com/2019/12/ardent-hope-interview-with-godard.html.

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Having had this profound reaction to *Her Smell*, I began to start watching films with a certain enthusiasm that I never had before. It was almost as if I was trying to test my new emotional spectrum. One work that struck me in a way that I had never expected it to was Quentin Tarantino's *Once Upon a Time In… Hollywood* (2019). While formally there is much to champion in the film, it may seem strange to talk about the effect it had on my gender transition. The most important sequence of the film for me as newly out woman was when Margot Robie's Sharon Tate goes to a movie theatre to watch the largely forgotten film, *The Wrecking Crew* (Karlson, 1968). During this section, Robie's fictional Tate watches footage of the real Sharon Tate performing in the film. At that same time, I had recently read a very convincing article by Marie-Claire Ropars that insisted that while time could be felt or constructed by cinema, it could never really be seen**;** it is always outside the image, thus making Gilles Deleuze's "time-image" something of a fantasy.[294] This sequence in Tarantino's film changed that.

Tarantino and Robie together restore a subjectivity to Tate that often gets erased in true-crime narratives of the Manson murders. In *Once Upon a Time In… Hollywood*, the filmmakers are concerned much more with Tate's life than her grisly death. In this theatre sequence, when Robie's Tate watches the real actress, something (not so) strange happens. We are given an image of Tate both as performer/actor and as spectator, someone who has watched and appreciated films. Tarantino gives Tate not necessarily cinephilia, but something like subjective self-possession. She is not an ill-fated murder victim or the great image of the counter-cultural decline of the 1960s; she is someone with wide-eyed self-reflection and self-regard, someone

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[294] Marie-Claire Ropars-Wuilleumier, "Image or Time? The Thought of the Outside in The Time-Image (Deleuze and Blanchot)" in *Afterimages of Gilles Deleuze's Film Philosophy*, ed. D.N. Rodowick (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 15-30.

who existed, who lived in the world outside recorded-history. Someone who also had a life

between her popular images or pop-personas: movie star and murder victim. But also, the scene

does not erase the temporal gap, the deep impression of time that unfolds between Robie's Tate

and the one on the screen created by the disconnect between actress-character and the actress's

real person on the screen. It is almost as if Robie and Tarantino are trying to reach into the past

and bring something of Tate back to life, to revive her not in some spectral or haunting fashion

(the way Tate's image is so commonly used), but to resuscitate Tate, now bathed in the beam of

the projector's light, as a human being, a regular everyday spectator or cinemagoer (Figure 33).

Figure 33: *Once Upon a Time In… Hollywood* (Quentin Tarantino, 2019)

Tarantino works like Godard in this way. He has tried to show how in multiple films the

medium has the power not only to show but to actively construct history. This impulse has

unfortunately found itself regularly being put towards a kind of historical revenge fantasy, a

desire to turn the violence of history's most detestable villains back against them. *Once Upon a*

Time… In Hollywood does not fully resist this urge: the last act of the film is gory spectacle of

violence against the Manson family members who in real life murdered Tate. But as the

sequence with Robie shows, and with the coda that follows that closing spectacle of violence,

cinema's capacity to revive and reconstruct history can also be used to resuscitate a figure who is

so often defined by her death. This is the time, a kind of time that was not but could have been, that the cinema is capable of showing, though not without a taste of bitter sweetness.

4

This is cinema's queer temporality, and it is this same temporality that I have constantly experienced since transitioning.[295] As soon as I began transitioning, I would remark that eventually I am going to have to write a memoir. It seems like an obligation all trans people are expected to fulfill. If I have to speculate as to why, it is probably because so much of being trans is about a kind of perpetual self-definition. We are constantly engaged in the writing and defining of our own bodies against socially imposed norms. Grace Lavery has written about trans and queer subjects practicing what the trans- and homophobic see as a kind of "disgusting" freedom in that we insist upon our identities and capacity for self-definition in the face of a traditionally limiting social order.[296]

This freedom is something I really struggled with for the first nine months of my transition. I realized that I had bought into a line of trans thinking, most notably put forward by the Youtube channel *Contrapoints* and a literal reading of Andrea Long Chu, that being trans, but especially a trans woman, requires a certain conformism to socially prescribed and recognized forms of femininity.[297] There's some virtue to this conformity, legally changing my name gave me a sense of euphoria that just adopting an alternate name would not have. Choosing to start HRT as soon as possible only made my transition more comfortable. But this way of thinking also has a darker side. This is how you end up deeply concerned about "passing," about only feeling like a woman when you are recognized by the greater social matrix as doing "things

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[295] Cf. Karl Schoonover and Roslaind Galt, *Queer Cinema in the World* (Duke University Press, 2016).
[296] Grace Lavery, "The King's Two Anuses: Trans Feminism and Free Speech,"*Differences* 30, (3): 118–51.
[297] Andrea Long Chu, *Females* (London: Verso, 2019).

that women do." This not only re-inscribes conventional misogyny but adds to a transmisogny that sees transwomen as grotesque parodies of "real" women because of their desperate efforts to conform. The truth is that transwomen are women, and anything we do, by simple virtue of our being should be seen as what "a woman would do."

That is not to say that the darker side of femininity does not have its appeal. I believe that there is something about female empowerment and the pantheistic rewriting of monstrous femininity in the film *Midsommar* (Ari Aster, 2019) that appeals to trans women (*Vox*'s television critic, Emily VanDerWerff is also a big fan).[298] I am not sure I can generalize why this is, but I can provide my own reasons for being fascinated with feeling represented by the film in ways others might find strange or even upsetting.

Midsommar is about Dani (Florence Pugh, who'll show up again later), a young woman whose immediate family dies in a horrific murder-suicide. Dani is haunted by the grief of this incident, feeling like she could have done more to prevent it, but also feeling paralyzed, unable to fully process the experience. Dani's boyfriend wants to break up with her, but because of her personal tragedy, stays with her out of a misplaced sense of guilt and responsibility. Dani follows her partner and his annoying anthropologist friends/colleagues on a trip to the Hårga, an isolated community in Sweden. What follows likely reads for many viewers as typical horror movie fare. There is an incident that suggests this community might not be the Edenic village it initially seemed to be, and the members of Dani's group begin to disappear one by one in increasingly strange and/or violent episodes. But what happens to Dani is far from expected. Dani, rather than become a victim of this strange community (or the "last girl" in typical horror film fare), ends up

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[298] Emily VanDerWerff, "Midsommar Has a Deeply Trans Narrative Hiding in Plain Sight," Vox, July 2, 2020. https://www.vox.com/culture/21307689/midsommar-trans-review-ending-spoilers. VenDerWerff's reading, and one that I follow below, focuses on the connection Dani forms with the women of the village. She does not, as I do, indulge entirely in the power fantasy, however.

becoming their "May Queen" and in one of the most incredible scenes in the film is embraced by a group of village women who emulate and share in her grief: Dani and the women all scream together in unison. I know people who have found this scene disturbing, but to me there's something strangely affirmative about it. I, maybe in some perverse way, long to have a community that could share in the pain that comes with gender dysphoria in the way the women of the Hårga sympathize with Dani. For me, *Midsommar* isn't a horror film, but a power fantasy. That this moment of empathy is accompanied by Dani being granted the power to sacrifice her boyfriend as a further part of the communal ritual, to take action against the men who have wronged her, is only an added bonus.

Of course, the "power fantasy" that *Midsommar* offers is not an easily acceptable one. Do Dani's boyfriend and his companions really deserve to die for their half-hearted attempts to placate Dani and her grief? Of course not. The film plays it ambiguously enough that I am sure for some viewers it is just a standard folk horror film and Dani becomes something like "the girlfriend from hell." For me though, *Midsommar* appeals to a kind of primal desire for empathy that, while fraught, is also cathartic to tap into.

Given my focus on what happens between images as being crucial to the power of cinema, I have tended not to focus too explicitly on questions of representation and identification. For me, any film can be a trans film or a "woman's film" if its images are able to connect with my experience. And yet, to feel seen, or visible in cinema is also an empowering experience. Given this digression on identification, it is perhaps appropriate that I would now like to talk about my mother.

One of my favorite traditions is that every time I go back to my hometown of Waterloo, I go and see a film with my mother. Sometimes, we see a complete dud like *Jojo Rabbit* (Waititi, 2019), and other times we watch a film that I love but that she's a little lackluster about like *Phantom Thread* (Paul Thomas Anderson, 2017) or *The Favourite* (Yorgos Lanthimos, 2018). Because I always pick the movies, it tends not to end up the other way around. Occasionally, we see a movie we both love, and *Little Women* (Greta Gerwig, 2019) was one of those films.

I waited what felt like a long time to tell my parents about my transition**.** I would estimate I told them two and a half months after I told most of the other people I knew. They took it about as well as I expected, which is to say that they were supportive, but confused. I am glad that I waited until I started HRT to tell them, just so it could feel "real" to me and that there was no being "talked out of it" (there was no chance of this anyway, but dysphoria certainly makes you think anything bad is possible). They have gotten better about it since I told them, though they are still awful with the pronouns. I mention this just to say that *Little Women* was maybe the first time I went to see a movie with my mother where we felt like a mother and daughter. That it was a film by Greta Gerwig of all people made it even more special.

There is something about Greta Gerwig that I have been chasing since I first saw *Frances Ha* (Baumbach, 2012) at TIFF eight years ago. *Frances Ha* felt like the kind of movie I could imagine myself making. Shortly after seeing it, I dropped out of graduate school with dreams of directing. It took me a few years, and several rewatches, to realize that I was more like the character Frances (played by Gerwig, in a role she co-wrote) than I wanted to admit. When I left film school and Thunder Bay, and re-watched *Frances Ha* in the winter of 2014, I was ready to pick up the pieces and go back to grad school, accepting, like Frances, that my abilities lay

elsewhere, not in the dream I was chasing. *Frances Ha* both caused me to drop out of grad school and apply again**.**

My love for Gerwig continued into her next collaboration with Baumbach, *Mistress America*, a relatively minor work but one that refined her voice as a writer and allowed her to play a character similar to Frances, but worn down more by life's responsibilities. When I heard that Gerwig was going to be directing her next film and would no longer be in front of the camera, I was disappointed**;** this "beacon of hope for lesser people," as her character in *Mistress America* is described, could only be limited by taking on a primarily creative role. I was wrong. *Ladybird* (2017) was a movie that I felt more deeply than I could have imagined going into it. How could I relate so much to this teenage girl who seems to clash endlessly with but is also very close to her mother? I would learn the answer in about a year's time. My most striking memory of *Ladybird* is just how much Saoirse Ronan managed to capture Gerwig's spirit and attitude as a performer. Here I was, watching Ronan both expertly perform a character while also subtly, though recognizably, mirroring her director's personality. In Ronan, Gerwig has found not just the best actress for the characters she writes, but also the best performer to continuously express the in-between presence of the director herself on screen. It is almost as if there is a perpetual conversation taking place between director and actor, between one's creative and imagined self, although this imagined self is literally embodied by another person. It feels like instead of following Gerwig's direction**,** Ronan is artfully conversing with her director. This is a quality that continues in *Little Women*: the character is significantly different, but Jo March still shows signs of being a kind of Ronan/Gerwig hybrid, which only served to intimately attach me more to the character.

I regret to inform you that I am Jo March. Perhaps not exactly, but the scene in the film where Jo is laying out the different chapters of her novel on the floor of her room in the March house really reminded me of my own writing process of laying out all my different materials.[299] Jo, who would rather remain a spinster than sacrifice her liberty, whose truly romantic adventure is the writing of her book rather than falling for any man, is a character I deeply identify with.

Additionally, *Little Women* also provided the greatest test of my emotional spectrum since *Her Smell*. How often one can cry during a movie? I counted myself crying eight times during *Little Women*. That the end of *Little Women* takes this story of tremendous feeling and turns into a riff on John Fowles' *The French Lieutenant's Woman* made me feel even more seen. I feel like everyone has that one novel that they read, and re-read, and partially read, that they can never quite get over. For me, that has always been *The French Lieutenant's Woman*. To see my hero Gerwig taking such obvious influence from another work that is deeply important to me was a kind of affirmation I did not think was possible. I imagine that Greta Gerwig is going to continue to surprise me, that I'll always be chasing after something that exists in her work, whether that's in front of the camera, or behind it.

5

My creative attitude is very much defined by this "Godard-Gerwig" polarity. Although I would also suggest that this way of putting it is really just a modification of the classic "Godard-Truffaut" polarity, as I find there to be many creative similarities between Gerwig and Truffaut's work (that likely emerges from her relationship with Baumbach).[300] Though there is also a queer

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[299] It is similar to how this chapter is currently being written, for instance.

[300] Baumbach has an avowed affinity for Truffaut's work, which can artistically be seen in films like *The Squid and the Whale* (2005). In *Frances Ha*, Baumbach uses music composed for Truffaut's films by Georges Delerue. The connection between Gerwig and Truffaut is less obvious, but there are similarities in the rebellious attitudes of Ladybird and Antoine Doinel, and the "literary" style of *Little Women* and Truffaut's films.

diagonal that I think cuts across this divide and is theoretically best represented by the work of Serge Daney. Daney's approach to the cinema has certain affinities with Deleuze and Godard**;** however his model and mode of interpretation differs in fascinating ways.

If I have a stronger affinity with Daney than either of those two thinkers, it is likely because, by remaining a critic, I relate to him more than I can connect to a philosopher and a filmmaker respectively. Not unlike what we see in Deleuze, Daney's cinema seems to provide an index of sensations and images, but for him, these types always seem to carry a pedagogical weight. In Daney, the associations between images, or again the space between images, produce lessons or curricula about the cinema as an apparatus. His collected work of criticism from his time at *Cahiers du Cinéma*, brought together under the title *La rampe*, illustrates Daney's approach to cinematic thinking. He writes that

> The most inventive filmmakers of the 70s have stopped denouncing the illusions of the stage. Less hysterical, more genealogical, they reveal its mechanism, not to demystify it but to give back to cinema this complexity lost with the advent of talking movies. The cinema stage, with its theatrical reminiscences, is complex. The bodies of cinema, real or effigies, are necessarily heterogeneous, unpredictable, made of bits and pieces. (*La rampe [bis]*)[301]

This observation describes, albeit more lyrically, a model of film criticism similar to the one employed by Deleuze, but there is also a self-reflexive and anatomical character to Daney's writing that is missing in Deleuze. The cinema and its bodies are something to be probed and explored; we not only encounter concepts or signs, but lessons, axioms, and reflections about both cinema and its possibilities for other ways of thinking. For Daney, film directors are not just

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[301] Serge Daney, *La Rampe (bis)*, trans. Laurent Kretzschmar and Otie Wheeler, *Serge Daney in English*, 24 August 2013, http://sergedaney.blogspot.com/2013/08/la-rampe-bis.html

thinkers but archaeologists, both of the world and their own medium. The viewer for Daney is equally part of this experience, not someone subjected to it, "the spectator, invited to these film-ceremonies as if in a museum of his own illusions, is no longer the stakes or the target of this laminated and baroque scenography which takes the form of a slide show. He is the spectator in the front row, the one closest to an imaginary footlight, neither theatre nor cinema but this ambivalent place that is the studio."[302] Daney's writing blends an appreciation for the cinema's sensational capacities with a deliberately self-conscious engagement with dismantling the "logic of illusion" that underpins much of classical cinema. Daney's approach then is one that seeks to elude capture by the illusive powers of cinema and simultaneously attempts to extract a pedagogy of transformative possibilities and experiences from it.

While much of what I have written so far was inspired by Godard, I was always-already heeding the critic Daney, pointing to a pedagogy of transformative possibilities in the cinema. So far, I have addressed the first year of my transition, but as I move into the second year, it is important to introduce Daney because the question of pedagogy and education will be crucial for what follows.

6

The topic that defined the second year of my transition is a very old one, almost to the point of being retrograde. It dates back at least to the writings of Mary Wollstonecraft, but likely even precedes her work.[303] That topic is the education of women. Let me be clear, what I mean by this is not some kind of finishing school pedagogy on how to be a proper lady. What I mean is how women become aware of ourselves as women, what we do with ourselves as women, and

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[302] Daney, *La Rampe (bis)*.

[303] Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Men with A Vindication of the Rights of Woman, and Hints*, edited by Sylvana Tomaselli (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995). Although, one could look back even further to the writings of Christine di Pizan.

how what it means to be a woman changes through experience. However, what I am not

interested is a phenomenology. I do not want or wish to provide a definition of the essence of

woman. This is not an ontological question. What I am interested in is a kind of writing, or

filming, or painting, etc., a creation of woman, new each time. I want to address what it means to

"want to be a woman," and ultimately to be "my own woman," an expression of which I'm quite

fond. The first time I saw a person on film who fit under "the trans umbrella," but who would not

necessarily identify with contemporary notions of gender was Charlotte von Mahlsdorf in Rosa

von Praunheim's *I Am My Own Woman* (*Ich bin meine eigene Frau*, 1992).[304] Ever since

watching the semi-documentary**,** I thought that I might be trans and my own gender dysphoria

emerged between its images; this is the titular expression that I have kept in mind throughout my

trans journey. The film was the first time I ever directly experienced the testimony of a "trans"

(its important to specify that von Mahlsdorf self-identified as a transvestite, or cross-dresser,

although she never sought gender-affirming surgery), and the sequence where she described the

pleasure and freedom of putting on women's clothes for the first time stuck in my mind. The title

itself, and the monologue that explains it in the film, also opened my eyes to the possibility that

one's gender was about practices and presentation, and not something spontaneous or "natural."

I had not thought explicitly about the theme of women's education until I began to read,

and read about, the American philosopher Stanley Cavell's writing on film. For Cavell, the

Hollywood screwball comedies and melodramas of the 1930s and 40s represent the continuation

of a kind of genre, a form related to the question of women's education that is derived from

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[304] The German title of the film can also be read as *I Am My Own Wife*, which is very different than how I have appropriated the title here. I will admit that that alternative translation makes the film a problematic inspiration, but one cannot always choose the images one comes between.

Shakespearean romances.[305] The "comedies of remarriage," as Cavell dubs his chosen films, are an answer to the question of how women should approach marriage, how to find and perfect the ideal partnership. They tell us, in the manner of art of course, what makes a worthwhile partnership. For Cavell, this question begins in Western thought with biblical scripture: Eve created by God from Adam's rib as a "help to meet him" and serve as his devoted partner. Of course, that is just the ancient idea (although it's no coincidence that one of the films Cavell discusses is called *Adam's Rib*), but this question, "what makes a good partnership? What is the woman's role in a marriage?" can be seen and heard again in Shakespeare, through to Ibsen, and then re-emerges in classical Hollywood, and that's just the loose genealogy. The opposite of Cavell's happily (remarried) couples is what he calls the "melodrama of the unknown woman," films where women reject marriage and mu**s**t choose a different path for themselves outside of a (re)discovered partnership**.** It is here where women cannot be *known* in the same way. It's important to note that both of Cavell's genres are related to his ideas regarding Emersonian moral perfectionism.[306] This moral perfectionism is less about process or control than about possibility, of imagining a better version of one's self and working towards that outcome; perfectionism as self-reliance, as growth through education and learning from others for yourself. Both the comedies of remarriage, and the melodramas of the unknown woman, show us how this perfectionism is achieved or experienced by the women in these films, either through happiness in (re-)marriage, or by taking control of their own destiny.

　　To build on Cavell's point, I want to cite a particularly powerful passage from Torrey Peters' *Detransition, Baby*, a comedy of manners that allows its characters some wonderful insights into the experience of being trans,

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[305] C.f. Cavell's *Pursuits of Happiness* and *Contesting Tears*.
[306] I encourage my reader to revisit the discussion in Chapter 5, pg. 137.

In Ames's formulation, trans women knew what trans women were, they knew how to

be, but they didn't know how to *do*. All the intra-trans fights online, all the arguments

with cis people: All of it was just meant to define what it meant to *be* a trans woman; to

say what she *was*. But when you're a trans woman, there's almost nothing out there on

how to actually live.[307]

Meditating on the formulation of another one of the novel's character Ames, Peters captures a

certain hollowness inherent in all those wonderful inclusive slogans we like to carry around,

"trans women are women," "if you think you're trans, then you are," etc. But none of them tell

you a damn thing about what it actually means to live as a woman, "to do womanhood," as

Andrea Long Chu might say, "as a bit."[308]As Grace Lavery demonstrates throughout her

remarkable essay, "Egg Theory's Early Style," poststructuralism and the queer theory it has

inspired lack the imagination to actually question why anybody would want to be a woman.[309]

The desire of trans women, to actually become the opposite sex, is seen as an impossibility. Eve

Sedgwick, one of Lavery's chief examples, sees herself as a woman who most resembles a gay

man, and yet she can never overcome that impasse, as if there were something that makes it

impossible. Except trans women, and all trans people by extension, show that it is immanently

possible. That, to put it in a theoretical register I am more comfortable with, "becoming-woman"

can proceed from "becoming-imperceptible" as opposed to vice versa.[310] The future of gender, in

a revolutionary sense, need not always stop at a kind of indeterminate fluidity, an endless play

with cultural signifiers, or the abolition of gender. Transformation is possible.

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[307] Torrey Peters, *Detransition, Baby* (New York: One World Publishing, 2021), 99.
[308] C.f. Chu.
[309] Grace Lavery, "Egg Theory's Early Style," *Transgender Studies Quarterly* 7.3 (2020): 383-398.
[310] These terms are taken from Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus,* trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), who chart a kind of progress from "becoming-woman" to "becoming-imperceptible."

In my own experience, it's hard to overcome this gender metaphysics, to not get sucked into trying to justify my being. So much of trans theory as it stands, but also as is seemingly asked of it is: why are there trans people? For trans women, especially, we so often end up as objects, rather than the subjects of theorization, even by other trans people and ourselves. The question that interests me is not "why are there trans people?" or worse, "what is the being of the trans subject?" Because none of this actually tells you how to live, to feel, and to grow. It does not tell you what you want as a trans woman. The further struggle is that even if you produce a convincing example of gender metaphysics, it largely falls on deaf ears to the ignorant people who demanded that you produce it in the first place. I believe it would be better if instead, as trans women, we were allowed to ask**:** How we are meant to live as women? What does it means to become a woman? Why is it that what we want cannot be separated from the desires of women as we understand the concept?

Enter Cavell, who gives me the idea that art, and perhaps even more surprisingly, popular art, can provide an answer to these questions. By taking Cavell seriously, what I mean is that through an investigation of cinema, literature, television shows, etc., there is something to learn about what it means to be a woman. These media have the power to perfect us, in an Emersonian sense, even though this dimension of art goes back as far as Plato. Artworks are experimental staging grounds for thought, for thought to become something other than itself. The lessons we learn from art are not taught, but things we take from them, as an act of interpretation. This is the self-reliance, for lack of a better phrase, of the Emersonian approach to art.[311] We should not demand art appear to us a certain way, but nevertheless we can use it to improve ourselves.

7

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[311] C.f. Cavell's *Cities of Words*.

Another pole then, structures this memoire, this time a "Daney-Cavell" pole that attempts to account for the possibility of a pedagogical becoming, a "learning to how to be." This shift from the more affective "Godard-Gerwig" pole in the second year of my transition was likely affected by the change in circumstances that took place, i.e., the global pandemic caused by the spread of COVID-19. Early in my transition I felt somewhat sexless, and you will have noticed how little this memoir has addressed the issue so far. Getting used to hormones, getting used to whatever my style was going to be ensured that I did not feel attractive, or that I even had the right to feel attractive. As I have mentioned, at the start of my journey, I felt like I had to explain myself, to justify my transition, to explain my right to *be*, before I could worry about *being with* anyone. Reading Casey Plett's novel *Little Fish* changed all that. It was the first work of "Trans Literature" I had read. Like my feelings for Jo March, here were, not experiences exactly, but thoughts, anxieties, concerns, and demands that I felt, or that I wish I could feel. I loved this feeling, of being so deeply connected to the characters in the fiction I read. I wanted to read every piece of "Trans Lit" that I could get my hands on. It repaired the part of me that saw desire as distinct from my transition. Having transitioned, I now wanted affection. Having made myself into someone I could start to love, I wanted to give that love to somebody else. Or anybody else really.

I bought new clothes**.** I signed up for all the dating apps, Tinder, Grindr (the less said about it the better). Now was my party girl time, and soon it would be my "Hot Girl Summer 2020." I wanted to go dancing**.** I wanted to be out in the world. I was ready for some romantic misadventures. And then… it was gone. I do not want to dwell on the coronavirus pandemic. It is a small part of my own story, even as it continues to be a global health crisis. It is enough for my purposes here to say that it brought my dream of a party girl lifestyle to a complete halt. I was

living alone when it started. I had days largely to myself. So, I did what I always do when I'm confronted with a stretch of free time: I decided to read Proust. And what always happens when I try to read Proust happened. I grew tired of his seemingly endless description of a church spire and put the book away. This has happened at least four times.

But I wanted to read. So, in lieu of being able to go out and meet other trans people, I read Hazel Jane Plante's *Little Blue Encyclopedia*. The novel tells the story of a trans woman grieving her deceased friend Viv, with whom she was in love but who was herself primarily interested in men. It is about trying to build a monument to someone you have lost. I am reminded of a remark in Errol Morris' *Gates of Heaven* that "death is for the living and not the dead." Morris suggests that loss is for us, that even in experiencing it, we can gain something. While reading it, I could not help but mourn the person I could have been. The person the pandemic of 2020 took away from me. It was a familiar feeling. Being trans seems to involve being caught in an endless mourning for oneself, in addition to all the people one loses along the way. It hurt to read stories about trans companionship and then have my possibility to discover that dwindle away as the lockdown continued, went on and on. Here, a year and a bit into my transition, ready to become a woman, and I had no one to share it with, no community to reach out towards, to celebrate with, to mourn with…

François Truffaut's *The Green Room* (*La Chambre verte*, 1978) is a film that has haunted me for several years. I have been fascinated by it, and yet I have never been able to find the right angle to critically discuss it. The film, an adaptation of Henry James' short story, *The Alter of the Dead*, presents a man who becomes obsessed with honoring the people in his life who have passed away. This starts by keeping a mausoleum of his closest friends and relatives, but begins to deliriously expand into a canon of figures he admires to the point where his life becomes only

about maintaining his altar. The film, and I imagine Truffaut by association, suggests that making these endless associations among the dead and worshipping them leads more towards personal disaster**s** than anything productive or affirmative. While those we have lost should be remembered, we must also make sure we devote ourselves to living our lives as they are. This is another reason why in my second year of transitioning I was so drawn to question of learning how to be, because then more than ever, it would have been very easy to retreat or withdraw into a world of phantoms and previous obsessions.

8

Not all old obsessions should be cast aside, however. There was something in *Little Blue Encyclopedia* that struck me: a throwaway remark about how a therapist recommended to the main character that they watch television shows about teenage girls. That doing so would help them to see their second puberty through the fictional depictions of first puberty. This line stuck with me. Serge Daney, in the 1980s while writing for *Libération*, wrote at length about watching films on television, and was curious about how that context could change or alter a viewer's experience of a classic film. With the pandemic restrictions in place, I also found myself turning to television for pedagogical inspiration, and I ended up latching onto an animated show that I liked a lot when I was younger. I remember watching MTV's animated sitcom *Daria* (1997-2002, Glenn Eichler and Susie Lewis), and appreciating it largely for the reputation it later acquired among its fans: Daria Morgendorffer is a brilliant teenage nonconformist who hangs out with her artsy friend Jane Lane, and the two consistently mock and upset the normie residents of Lawndale, the generic suburban town in which they live. At the time, Daria seemed cool, and I can remember, even as an eight-year-old, wanting to be like her. In high school, a friend and I embraced Daria as a symbol of nonconformity, as a marker of our own teenage rebellion.

However, *Daria* also represents something else. The show belongs to a genre that in a Cavellean vein I call the "becoming of the teenage girl." This genre, a late 90s/early 2000s television phenomenon, whose key examples include *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Gilmore Girls*, are shows that are more about the friendships and relations their teenage characters form, the destinies they write for themselves, rather than the romances they pursue. These shows carry the spirit of Emersonian perfectionism that Cavell finds in comedies of remarriage, but marriage is no longer the goal, a necessity of a woman's education. Instead, it is through friendship that two (or more) women learn who they are meant to be, as they come into their own as women. This genre finds itself today in a show like *Euphoria*, which makes the central relationship romantic in addition to one of friendship and education. Unlike shows of the era that were about teenage boys achieving a kind of destiny—Dawson's filmmaking journey in *Dawson's Creek*, which even the show loses interest in over time—the women in these shows are creative, or if they are given a destiny, it is one that they constantly re-write and re-inscribe in accord with their own desires.

When I returned to *Daria,* I did so less from a position of innate rather than willful nonconformity. I no longer saw Daria purely as a rebellious figure, but also a difficult one, someone whose sarcasm, dismissiveness, and self-righteousness can be as alienating as it is powerful. Watching *Daria*, I began to understand how my transition might have affected some people in a way I had not considered before. Transitioning was always the right decision, but the perspective and attitudes it has given me can also be confrontational and challenging at times. It might seem like I'm miserable all the time because I'm always dealing with some TERF outrage, or because I'm always dealing with some medical misadventure, because I might not have the "right body." But to paraphrase Daria, I'm not miserable**.** I'm just not like most people.

As mentioned, central to Daria's development is her relationship with Jane. If Daria is the intellectual, detached one, Jane is more about feelings. Jane is a visual artist, who complements Daria's writerly persona. Together, Daria and Jane find the best in one another. When Daria cannot understand why people would grieve for the death of a bad person, Jane confronts Daria with the difficulty most people have in confronting their own mortality. In episode 201 "Arts 'N Crass," Daria and Jane create a poster that undercuts the seeming bliss of being a teenage beauty queen, Jane supplying the image and Daria providing the message. It is no coincidence that when Daria gets into a car accident in the final episode of the series, she calls Jane and not her boyfriend. Jane and Daria improve one another in a way that her romantic relationship cannot. In a way, I see this almost as a riposte to Cavell's ideas about women and marriage, that in the later 20th century and into the twenty-first, it is through their friendships that women define and improve themselves. It is a show ultimately about coming to terms with the world, as most of the shows in the genre I have formulated here are. In many ways, I see my interest in Cavell in a very similar light. My interest in theory, or the pursuit of knowledge, is an also interest in learning more about myself and learning how to be a better version of myself. I am forever looking to find myself between images and ideas. Or, in the case of *Daria*, find myself again.

Daria works for me in a way many recent shows featuring trans characters do not. As I mentioned, *Euphoria* is one example. While I'm happy to see more transfeminine representation on television, many depictions of trans characters involve a kind of magic transition. We are made aware of who they were before, or rather that there was a before, and then there is the transition, which is treated as an event, not an experience, not something prolonged, but something that just happens, and then they are completely and perfectly themselves (the *Saved by the Bell* reboot has this same problem). These trans characters are trans in name only to me.

We only see them *being* trans, never *doing* trans. The scene in *Euphoria* when Jules illicitly injects estrogen, and this is made to look like a drug injection, is ridiculous. Perhaps that's why in terms of contemporary trans representation on TV, I much preferred *Dispatches from Elsewhere* where the character Simone is given more of a journey, for whom being trans was not a solution, but merely part of addressing her problems**.** Simone's transition did not end with her physical transformation. Of course, as I have already tried to explain so far, representation by itself is a lost cause. I do not need trans characters to find myself in media. I find myself everywhere between the images. I consider this my primary function as a critic, finding and defining myself in the images I encounter. The mere presence of a trans character is never going to be meaningful on its own. Trans people need to make and represent ourselves.

9

Learning is a technical and not just a theoretical experience. Speaking of Trans people making ourselves, there is a technics to learning to be a woman. [312] While I would extend the category of technics to things like clothing and makeup, what I want to address are gender-affirming surgeries. I had two of them during the second year of my transition. One was fairly simple, and the other was very complicated and involved quite the recovery period. That was my facial feminization surgery.

Facial feminization surgery is a gender affirming surgery in which a trans woman's facial features after natal puberty are cosmetically altered to more resemble the features of "a typical woman." The most famous part of this procedure is a shortening of the brow, or a browlift, designed to make the forehead appear both smaller and less prominent. Other procedures include

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[312]My use of the word technics is playfully and not seriously borrowed from Bernard Stiegler. My familiarity with his work is based on brief samples from the *Technics and Time* series (*see* Stiegler's *Technics and Time 3: Cinematic Time*) and will only have a tangential relationship to what follows.

a nose job to make the nose appear aquiline, eyelid enhancement, shaving of the cheeks and jawline to make both sharper, and a tracheal shave to eliminate an aggressively visible Adam's apple. Facial feminization surgery is an elective procedure. It is not deemed an essential gender-affirming surgery by the Ontario Health Insurance Program and is usually performed by surgeons skilled in aesthetic or, as is it is more commonly known, cosmetic surgery. Unlike sex reassignment surgery, or top surgery for trans men, facial feminization surgery is viewed with a certain degree of suspicion. Is this not the height of a reactionary procedure? Is this not normative to its very core? Even the name suggests a universal idea of femininity that a patient is being brought into conformation with. In her recent work, the Marxist Feminist Silvia Federici included in her new book a condemnation of this procedure, making the incredibly tired comparison between trans women seeking surgery and Dr. Frankenstein.[313]

Cosmetic surgery is often spoken about as something monstrous that happens to women. Even minor cosmetic procedures such as botox injections, which not only wear off after only a few weeks but can also have positive effects on persistent migraines, is viewed by some as an unnatural and freakish indulgence. Women who pursue cosmetic surgery are seen to be upsetting their natural feminine beauty, or of not accepting their inner beauty, or as being prisoners to societal beauty standards. As if seeking to change, and arguably "enhance" one's appearance is some kind of cheat or perversion.

The idea of there being any kind of unmediated natural beauty is fraught, to say the least. One of the most obvious examples is in the way you hear men talk about liking women who do not wear makeup while staring at a picture of someone wearing foundation, blush, mascara, and lipstick. What many people think is natural is often deeply artificial. My own understanding of

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[313] C.f. Silvia Federici, *Beyond the Periphery of the Skin* (Toronto: Between the Lines Publishing, 2020).

natural beauty has been shaped by Adorno's writing in his *Aesthetic Theory*.[314] To briefly

summarize, "in every particular aesthetic experience of nature the social whole is lodged. Society

not only provides the schemata of perception but peremptorily determines what nature means

through contrast and similarity."[315] We are never presented with some innocent, Edenic portrait

of nature. Feminine beauty works in the same way. There is no inherent or natural feminine

beauty**;** there are only mediated ones, shaped both by time and society. Plastic and cosmetic

surgeries are not unnatural**;** they define what natural beauty means, and by extension, what it

means to be feminine.

     In addition to Adorno's contextualization of natural beauty, I am also heavily inspired on

this issue by Alex V. Green's observation that "calls for gender-affirming care like FFS are

therefore not mere recursions to individual choice. Instead, they represent a demand for an

entirely new and better way of life, including a healthcare system premised on bodily autonomy

and opposed to austerity."[316] Because cosmetic surgery is limited to a privileged few, it is often

those with means, or in pursuit of means, that are able to afford it. If it is predominantly

normative, that's because economically it is limited to those with the power to access it. It is

widely acknowledged that facial feminization surgery has positive effects on the trans women

who can afford it. Trans women are well aware of the complicated history of the medical

establishment, and are not its willing experiments, but constantly fighting and negotiating with it.

Anyone who transitioned before the introduction of informed consent had to spend a year or

more in therapy convincing a suspicious psychiatrist of their need for medical transition. Thanks

to the formation of the WPATH standards for health and other changes, we know these

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[314] This has been addressed in chapters three and four.
[315] Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 68.
[316] Alex V. Green, "The Political Urgency of Facial Feminization Surgery," BuzzFeed News, September 21, 2021. https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/alexverman/acial-feminization-surgery-medical-transition.

draconian evaluations do more harm than good. The future of gender and sexual diversity relies on making medical transition easier and more accessible, not restricting its use, or mandating it out of existence.

My own facial feminization surgery included that famous brow lift, and something called a lower face lift: I received liposuction beneath my jaw and a tightening of the neck muscles. The surgery lasted seven and half hours under anaesthetic and I threw up from drinking too much water when I was in recovery. I spent ten days unable to have the full range of motion in my neck and my eyes swelled shut several times. Once I got my initial bandages removed I was nearly back to living normally, though I still have some scars from the procedure that haven't completely healed.

My other surgery was much more minor. It was called an orchiectomy, this one covered by OHIP, where an incision was made in my scrotum and my testicular tissue, or gonadal tissue more specifically, was removed. It took twenty minutes, and I was fully recovered in six days. Again, I still have a scrotum, or as I like to call it re: my eventual vaginoplasty, my future labia. It allows me to not need anti-androgens because my body no longer produces testosterone. Even though I still have some of the parts, I couldn't be a man even if I wanted to be.

The technics of womanhood have as much to do with being a woman as its representations. We make ourselves in the space between the images surround us; we are not forced to conform to them. True bodily autonomy, whether that is gender affirming or reproductive, is a continual part of the feminist struggle. Gender-affirming surgeries for trans women cannot and should not be seen as opposed to women's fight for reproductive rights but should instead be viewed as part of the fight against the forces of capitalism, patriarchy, and racism that shape so much of feminism's struggle for women's right to determine the destiny of

our own bodies. Trans women are not women because of some kind of magically shared essence**;** we are women because our needs, our desires, and our battles for these things align, and we have to resist and negotiate with the same forces to determine ourselves.

10

Despite my second year of transition involving such pronounced physical changes, I cannot help but wonder if it was not a film that caused more change in my life. As I have drawn from Cavell and Daney, works of art change us. It is perhaps difficult to imagine this in concrete terms these days, where so much of our media consumption is instantaneous, and many programs and movies can be "binged" in a weekend. I do not wish to attack the form of streaming, but in many ways, it does not give us a lot of room to consider the significance, especially to ourselves, of what we are watching. There is less room than ever to look between images because their presence is so constant. But even on streaming platforms there are transformative experiences waiting for us that we can watch, discover and that can help remake us, imagine us anew.

On my birthday that year, which I unfortunately had to spend in lockdown, I watched a film I had been wanting to see for a long time called *Céline and Julie Go Boating: Phantom Ladies Over Paris* (*Céline et Julie vont en bateau*, dir. Jacques Rivette, 1974). I considered it a birthday present. I was, almost immediately, convinced it was the greatest film I had ever seen. Perhaps dangerously for a film critic, I had even begun to think this while watching it. For the rest of the year, not a day went by when I did not think about the film, when I did not think about watching it again, and again, but that's not exactly an easy ask for a three hour and twenty-minute film. It does not feel that long. I even died my hair red at one point so I could look like Julie. I still think about it often, maybe every other day.

Céline and Julie came out at that point when the light of May 1968 had completely faded, and yet curiously, the film does not wallow in the melancholy of lost revolutionary fervour. It instead insists on the discovery of a new kind of magic in the contemporary world. To summarize the plot, a librarian named Julie (Dominique Labourier), who is interested in the occult, is struck by the appearance of a magician named Céline (Juliet Berto), who hurriedly drops her scarf while running off somewhere. Julie and Céline form a strange bond, strengthened especially by the discovery of a haunted mansion where each of them is cast in the role of a nurse in a particularly lurid 19th century melodrama that ends with the death of a child. Working together, Julie and Céline decide that they must rescue the child from this story, but it is something that neither of them can do alone, as one of them must always be forced to play a role in the unfolding tragedy. What follows is a strange and magical farce where the two women undo the mansion's curse while making a mockery of the grim melodrama into which they have been cast. The women rescue the girl and then take her boating. The film ends by resetting the chance "meeting", with now Céline cast as the woman chasing after Julie, who runs by and loses a scarf.

There is an inherent queerness to the film; not only does Céline talk about taking woman lovers, but the central relationship between her and Julie plays as an elaborate courtship, as they learn to share and partake in this bizarre adventure they have stumbled upon. In addition to that, both characters are tasked to perform a cabaret routine during the film in an outfit that recalls Marlene Dietrich's famous number in *The Blue Angel*. In 1974, when the influence of May 1968 seemed impossibly far away, and the radical dreams of so many had been shattered, it was maybe enough to be inspired by those words, "falling in love again/what am I to do/can't help it." The film was not improvised, but was a close collaboration between Rivette and his stars, not

just Labourier and Berto, but Bulle Ogier and Marie-France Pisier, who star in the haunted

mansion, and all taking inspiration from the work of Henry James. One can see the joy and

freedom of all the participants rushing through every scene, particularly Berto, who if she hadn't

died of breast cancer at the age of 42, would probably be considered now one of the best

actresses of the post-New Wave generation (and who still is, but maybe is not as famous as she

should be).

If much of my second transition year was defined for me by stories of female friendship,

Céline and Julie was the crown jewel of those stories. It is a story in which the power of being

women together was enough to alter the fabric of space and time itself. It is a film that stages an

active intervention between images, one that suggests we can take the images that surround us

and transform them into something different and affirmative. *Céline and Julie Go Boating* is

perhaps the ultimate "girl power" movie, charged as it is with magic, invention, and play.

11

So far, I have defined myself along a "Godard-Gerwig" affective pole and a "Daney-

Cavell" pedagogical pole. To this, I would also add a third dimension, one that is not tied to film

or film criticism, but that is uniquely my own.[317] Both the above-mentioned poles have been

probes into the question of how I can communicate how I make meaning out of the world. They

also both demonstrate a central dialectic that one finds in my informal film criticism oscillating

between perfectionism and play. The third polarity I want to introduce here will help

contextualize and further illuminate facets of the previous two.

I should disclose that I have obsessive-compulsive disorder. For some people, OCD just

means alphabetizing their shelves. Guattari, reading the OCD habit as an "intimate" but also

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[317] I am not sure what this does to the image of the "Daney-Cavell" diagonal line cutting through the previous one. I would suggest that the following runs through both, even if that makes my use of the concept less diagrammatic.

oddly distant gesture, describes OCD hand-washing as "the feeling that one is in the mapping of

one's self," thus giving one an opportunity to turn the "with" examined in this thesis back on the

self.[318] And, of course, there are others for whom OCD does not describe their patterns of

thought, but a disability, or a debilitation. It is sometimes that way for me. Alternatively, I am

also a big fan of improv comedy, where the central rule is "yes, and…" I am always willing to

"yes, and…" ideas, propositions, etc. Some people will likely think this is condescending, that

certain topics should not be treated like a game. To which I can only reply "yes, and…" Here the

open-ended, additive composing or improvised mapping of the self is not at odds with what

Deleuze and Guattari calls the modernist "disjunctive synthesis" of Godard, a Duras, or a Straub-

Huillet film. This OCD/Improv pole is the third polarity I want to mention in this memoire.

The British have an expression where they call something "too clever by a half." There's

another expression I'm fond of, "gilding the lily.". To add to these two, I want to introduce a

final expression, "don't let perfect be the enemy of good." My new statement reads "I am too

clever by a half, so I gild the lily, because I always let perfect be the enemy of good." That's

probably the best way to describe my thought process. I bring this up because moving into the

discussion of the third year of my transition involves a disruption. The principle of being

between images persisted, but what I was finding and watching was much more difficult.

12

Throughout the first two years of my transition, I was so sure I knew what my experience

meant, or even that it meant *something*. I had something to say about transition, about wanting to

be a woman. I was enjoying making meaning from my life. Now, that enjoyment has curdled.

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[318] As quoted in Anna Munster, *Materializing New Media: Embodiment in Information Aesthetics* (Lebanon, NH: Dartmouth College Press, 2011), 142.

Being trans seemed to open up all these theoretical possibilities for me: new ways to think gender, new ways to relate to images, a new metaphysics, or at least a new of learning about myself. In the past year however, I have learned that despite the positive changes brought about my transition, I missed some of things about my pretransition self.

The most common reason given for detransition is that a subject thinks that there are too many barriers in the world to transitioning. That there are impediments, social, medical, capital, etc. that make it untenable for a person to continue transitioning. Let me to be clear, that is not what happened to me. The world, or my small part of it anyway, accommodated my transition better than I could've ever hoped for. So, why did I de-transition in my third year?

I would like to tell you that my transition(s) have had very clear before and after moments, to say that my transition started with me admitting to myself I would be happier living as a woman. There was a moment when I looked myself in the bathroom mirror, said those very words, and there was no turning back until… there was. But that is not honest; to get to that moment, I have to find all the experiences that prepared me for it, that put the idea in my head, that made me comfortable with it. There was no switch being flipped, but at least **a** decade or perhaps longer of uneven development that led to that moment. Perhaps I could have had that moment when I was 25 instead of 29, but I did not. It might never have happened. So, to talk about my detransition also requires looking not at a moment, but a variety of moments and experiences.

I have a complex relationship with SSRIs, the most common kind of antidepressant.[319] Used in the short term, over a period of several weeks or a couple months, they can do wonders for my mood, or help carry me through a particularly difficult OCD spell. Used in the long term,

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[319] As has been alluded to previously in this chapter.

they destroy my metabolism, fitness, motivation, etc. About a year after I had transitioned, I found myself needing SSRIs after a bad OCD spell occasioned by a poorly timed LSD trip. This, combined with my prediabetic condition led to me at the beginning of this year being on a complicated cocktail of transition medication, SSRIs, and metformin (a pill to lower your blood sugar). When I began to feel out of shape, exhausted all the time, and just generally weak and unfocused, after ruling out infection with COVID-19, I figured it had to be-one or all of these.

It struck me that if I wanted to figure out what was causing these symptoms, I might have to give up taking estrogen as well. I looked up various diagnoses for my symptoms, and low testosterone was also a possible option. What if estrogen was also responsible for my health problems? What if my gender affirming surgery had made me weaker? What if taking testosterone was the only way I could get better? Then in one moment it coalesced into: what if it **is** my transition or my "health"? And that was it. On the one hand, I had my transition and all the meaning that came with it, and on the other, I saw a way to feel better, physically at least, and the possibility of not being so exhausted all the time. I chose the latter. In that moment, I made the decision that I had, perhaps not consciously, but in some form, been considering for a while. That continuing my transition was not as serious as I had thought. It was not life or death. I could live another way, maybe even like the way I used to, but not exactly the same. I was trying to find myself again in a newly splintered self-image.

Unfortunately, images of de-transition are even rarer than trans images. There is not a "if you're trans, and think you're not, then you aren't." I get it, trans acceptance is a lot more than trans desistence. Nevertheless, those of us who have moved through the affirmation, i.e., I thought I was trans, and now I do not, or certainly do not think of myself as trans in the same way, are offered a cold comfort. I lived my life as mostly an unhappy cis man, then I was a

happy but unhealthy trans woman, and now I was no longer a trans woman. Was I cis? Cisgender is typically defined as identifying with the gender one was assigned at birth. I did that. But I also do not produce my own testosterone. I take hormones as many trans people do.

At the time, I realized that was not the gender I was assigned at birth in so far as I was proud to admit that I was a man who has lived as a woman, and depending on the roll of the dice, might do so again, and I had no desire to say that one experience is inherently more innate than the other. I would not say that I'm non-binary because I don't consider myself outside of existing genders, more that I pass back and forth through them. I have a constant relationship between them.

I reject any premise that would use the event of detransitioning, or worse, my having detransitioned to further stigmatize trans people. "I know someone who detransitioned and was fine so being trans isn't that big a deal." I do not, and I do not think anyone else should use my experience as justification for bigotry. Perhaps this anxiety over the meaning of my own actions reveals an unhealthy degree of self-importance. I have no theory of detransition to offer you, I probably would not want to offer one. If you want to understand my experience, then you must look at all the parts that went into it and consider why I made the choices I did when I made them, and not assume there's some larger symptomatic truth to draw from it. And even then, it might not be very meaningful, and that is acceptable.

I also, I want to add, have a growing suspicion of narrative as a social force. The focus on telling stories from politics to Silicon Valley has me skeptical about the value of making sure everyone's story gets told. I was watching a documentary about Elizabeth Holmes and Theranos (*The Inventor: Out for Blood in Silicon Valley*), and what struck me was the way her initial rise to success depended on her ability to tell a good story and to almost promise a different mise-en-

scène when it came to how blood testing and healthcare was conducted. Holmes was telling

investors that she and her company could allow everyone to understand their story through their

own bloodwork, to make their own meaning out of their medical history. Walter Benjamin

famously said that it was Fascism that gave people the power to express themselves artistically,

whereas it was communism that showed how supposedly unique works could be re-distributed

and recontextualized by the masses. Elizabeth Holmes is probably just a remorseless capitalist;

one so extreme the even regular remorseless capitalists are put off by her. However, her focus,

and a wider social focus on the production of unique, specific meanings strikes me as something

to be wary of, and I think rather that we should focus on how meanings are made, and made to be

persuasive, or imaginative, etc. This critical literacy, trying not to just see between images, but

understand how they are constructed, strikes me as a much greater art than telling everyone's

story.

13

I am writing this now well into my fourth year of transitioning, very close to the

anniversary of when I first started taking estrogen (my "tranniversary"). I am comfortably back

on estrogen, and once again, I identify as "gender fluid," more than any other label. My de-

transition felt stranger to me, and not in a positive way, than even I expected. My health concerns

have been addressed, and thankfully, I can return to some of the ways I lived in those earlier,

exciting years of my transition. As with cinephilia, transitioning is also about finding one's self

between images. As I observed above, there is no point where one stops learning how to be a

woman, even if that also means learning that one is not just a woman, and even if that means

trying to live as a man again for a few months.

At the risk of sounding a little bit like Blanche DuBois, I have always depended on what I call my "cinephile perception" to understand and live with myself. Cinephile perception is the attempt to depict not the adventure of watching a film, which would merely be the description or criticism of a film, but the life of the adventurer before and after they set out the journey, to describe the archive of adventures a given traveler through the cinema has taken. In this way, we might want to describe cinephile perception as a bizarre adventure, concerned as it is not with the cinematic journey *per se* but the life of those who undertake it.

A cinephile perception does not erase the subject of the cinematic experience, but foregrounds the subject who makes powerful connections between films, building a new film experience. The cinephile that I am thinks with and also between images. Therefore, I christen the new cinephile film spectator and critic the "strange girl" of cinema. The "strange girl" is not without qualities, is not Jean-Louis Schefer's *Ordinary Man of Cinema,* but is instead at one and the same time described (strange as in distant or critical, but also admittedly queer), gendered (girl, as opposed to woman because of her incomplete sense of self), and "intimate". It is the only formulation of film spectatorship I can propose, given that it is the subject I am and my own speaking position. If I were to describe cinephile perception, it could only be through this figure and these adventures. A history of cinephile perception is, therefore, my own history, an adventure I live with and between filmic images.

The "strange girl" sets out in search of some image like herself. What she wants is an image that is able to "return her to herself." But this is not a representative image. The strange girl, being strange, does not find herself in the filmmaking process itself. She agrees, with Schefer, that the truth of the cinematic experience is "verified in me alone, not through any final reference to reality; it is, first of all, simply a shift in the proportion whose final arbiter I will no

doubt be as its body and experimental conscience."[320] But this body is not a literal body, either represented or lived. It is a self. A self as an arrangement of images and sounds, a *sonimage*, to borrow yet again from Godard. And the only way to discover this self is by describing different ways of seeing/watching. I hope, that by sketching out the cinephilic contours of my "Godard-Gerwig," "Daney-Cavell," and "OCD-Improv" poles, I have accomplished that with this memoir, and that with this dissertation I have shown you many other ways of seeing/watching as well. I will end with another Godard quote, because I just cannot help myself: "maybe I bored you a little bit, but that's OK, because that's creation."[321]

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[320] Jean-Louis Schefer, *The Ordinary Man of Cinema*, trans. Max Cavitch, Noura Wendell, and Paul Grant (South Pasadena: Semiotext[e], 2016), 22.
[321] Godard, *Scénario de Sauve qui peut* (*la vie*).

Conclusion

I began this dissertation by saying that I believe in film criticism, which is to say that I believe in the practice of writing closely with and about cinema. In the chapters that followed, I showed a variety of ways that film criticism could continue to be practiced while engaging with various strands of social theory, philosophy, aesthetics, and autobiography. My goal in this dissertation has been to show that film criticism can still thrive as an academic practice, and that the question of "what films mean" is not as important as thinking about what films *can* mean. However, I have also not tried to be utilitarian in my treatment of cinema either. I have not, as many contemporary scholars have done, attempted to take something, an Idea, a concept, etc. from cinema for a greater philosophical purpose. I have attempted to expand the possibilities of film meaning while still retaining a fidelity to films themselves, to do film analysis that does not limit or restrict its object, but that also does not efface the object entirely, that preserves an important relationship to whatever films, filmmakers, and/or notions of cinema are in question. The expansion of the possibilities for the meaning of films have meant that there are a great number of uses to which film can be put. I have also tried to show that among those uses, film criticism, the engagement with specific films and filmmakers, still contains a valuable degree of promise.

The first and third chapters of this dissertation introduced two approaches to cinema based on the idea of eroticism, as formulated by Georges Bataille. The first chapter specifically thought with Bataille to consider Claire Denis' *Trouble Every Day* and its unique power to both mesmerize and revolt the viewer. I then brought Bataille to a consideration of the horror film in general, again returning to the dialectic of attraction and repulsion. This chapter made explicit

the first prominent methodological theme of this dissertation, the idea of "thinking with." Instead of trying to interpret *Trouble Every Day*, which as an art film contains far too many oblique narrative gaps to settle for such a strict hermeneutic, I imagined what it would be like to watch the film alongside Georges Bataille. This willful viewing companionship established the necessity of forming relationships between thinkers that has proven so crucial to this volume.

The second chapter of this dissertation probed the question of leftist or Marxist aesthetics, beginning from Jacques Rancière's concept of "dissensus." Instead of trying to think with a specific thinker, this chapter attempted to think with aesthetic and ethical traditions from philosophy and political thought. The focal point of this chapter was the work of Jean-Marie Straub and Danielle Huillet, particularly their film adaptation of *Antigone*, and their experimental work, *Too Early, Too Late*. The analysis of each film brought out unique solutions concerning the representation of politics, meditating on images of nature and the Earth. The ultimate question this chapter posed was if it is possible to think a liberation aesthetics without relying on some notion of transcendence and considered Straub-Huillet's work as one possible answer.

As mentioned, the third chapter returned to Bataille's thoughts on eroticism, but this time in conversation with cinephilia and the writings on the agony of eros by the philosopher Byung Chul-Han. Unlike the first chapter, which considered eroticism from the push and pull of attraction and repulsion, this chapter considered its relationship to death in a way to think cinema as already at/past its limits. This chapter then turned to the history of placing concepts under erasure, and posed the possibility of doing the same with cinema. This chapter again employed the method of "thinking with," but instead of "thinking with" in consideration of a specific object, it attempted to think with a variety of philosophers to consider an alternative cinephilia called cineroticism.

The fourth chapter returned to questions of politics and leftist/Marxist aesthetics, but this time was concerned with the question of nature. In addition contemplating the question of nature, this chapter sought to bring three figures - - Theodor Adorno, Jean-Luc Godard, and Terrence Malick together in a fluid, open conversation. By putting these intellectuals into conversation, I showed it was possible to see Malick's work as having materialist possibilities against more common theological or Heideggerian readings of his work. This chapter marks a transition from "thinking with" to "artful conversation." While it is not the complete method of "artful conversation" that would be detailed in the next chapter, it nevertheless is more conversational than the practice of thinking with practiced in the previous chapters.

The fifth chapter theorized Cool Cinema, a hybrid genre and film style that characterized a multigenerational and international collection of filmmakers from the second half of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. This chapter posed a new approach to genre derived from the writings of Stanley Cavell and Gilles Deleuze, and a path to forming critical constellations based on D.N. Rodowick's idea of an "artful conversation." This chapter then defined the "cool" in Cool Cinema using Deleuze's writings from *Cinema 1*, and ended with a collection of possible directions in which to take the investigation of Cool Cinema further. This chapter marked the complete transition from the idea of "thinking with" to the idea of "artful conversation."

In a seeming departure from the previous chapters, the sixth chapter considered the role of formal narrative play in the films of Hong Sang-soo, using his film *In Another Country* as a node to understand the narrative strategies at play throughout his oeuvre. While this chapter does not contain the explicit philosophical engagements of the previous chapters, it does rely on a conversation between the various films in Hong's filmography. Here, an "artful conversation" is not something that only takes place between people, but continuously inspires in and through an

artist's work**;** different films in continuous intertextual play also inspire and inform one another. This metamorphosis shows how artful conversations can curate (or become a form of) critical cinephilia.

The final chapter turned to auto-theory to realize Godard's claim that film critics could perhaps write "interesting novels." Considering a variety of media objects, from films and novels to paintings and the decidedly aesthetic practice of "plastic surgery", this chapter revealed my subjectivity as a critic. Instead of bringing philosophers to the theatre, here I invited the reader to follow me out of it, to let them see the film of my life that takes place outside of the cinema. Through this investigation, I arrived at the key diagram of my approaches and influences. This chapter serves as a mission statement for the dissertation. A personal, but critical, appraisal of my experiences of both life and cinema, and everything that comes between.

Each chapter offered a different approach to film criticism, and to the ways film criticism can blend influences from its own field, philosophy, and memoir to accomplish its aims. Even though the structure of this dissertation was to reflect the development of my thought, each of the chapters integrated here are a possible way to approach film criticism that does not attempt to fix meanings to its objects, or to insist that the use of film is for another discipline or field. Each chapter has sought to present one "future" of film criticism, i.e., a way of continuing to do in film analysis for its own sake.

I do not want to suggest that film studies in its previous incarnations, or that film-philosophy are pointless pursuits. The transformation of film studies into cinema and media studies has broadened the field so much beyond its original scope, introducing new objects, histories, and interdisciplinary approaches not only to film, but to all the media film has influenced. Nevertheless, not unlike literary criticism, film criticism celebrates cinematic objects

and the different textual meanings and understandings we can draw from them, remaining a potent tradition. As long as new cinephiles and students learn about and discover both classic and contemporary cinema, the desire to read about and further engage with those works beyond the screen persists. Film criticism and film analysis therefore still has, and as long as film preservation is continued, will always have an audience who are curious about the myriad of contexts individual films partake in. That one can also introduce this audience to contexts they had not even considered is part of the power or form of film criticism, and reason for the practice to continue.

In my introduction, I praised the work of Thomas Elsaesser, and singled out how his *Fassbinder's Germany* represented, for me, great academic film criticism. I have not been able to reproduce here nearly anything as coherent or unified as Elsaesser's book, but I have striven to find different ways the critical tradition represented by his work can be carried forward. What I hope for is that each chapter of this dissertation has shown the same commitment to considering the possibilities of film criticism as Elsaesser's work. Elsaesser himself produced a prolific body of work, often with the same focus on the possibilities new methodologies and approaches offered for the practice of analyzing and criticizing films. What I have done is to take the same spirit of methodological openness and possibility to craft a series of analyses that focused on thinking with films, on the artful and artistic conversations that implicitly or explicitly take place between filmmakers, philosophers, and even between cinephiles and the works they love. In presenting my "futures" of film criticism, I offer a further paean to the tradition of film analysis and its continued practice.

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Curriculum Vitae

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Education:

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Master of Arts, Theory and Criticism, 2015-2017

University of Waterloo, Waterloo, Ontario
BA Honours Fine Arts: Film Studies Specialization, 2008-2012

Honours and Awards:

Student Writing Award, Film Studies Association of Canada, 2020
SSHRC Doctoral Fellowship, 2019-2022
Ontario Graduate Scholarship, 2018, 2019
Kinema Award, 2011
Princess Cinema Award, 2010

Publications:

"Consumption, Transgression, Eroticism: Watching Claire Denis' *Trouble Every Day* with Georges Bataille", *CineAction* (Dec. 2020): Issue 101.

Review: "Jacques Rancière: The Lost Thread: The Democracy of Modern Fiction" *Chiasma: An International Journal of Theory and Philosophy* 4.1 [Materialism and the Means of Philosophical Production] (2017): 132-139.

Select Conference Papers and Presentations

"Trilogy III. New Gender Gospel 3.0 + 1.0: Thrice Upon A Time," Theory Session, February 2022, Centre for the Study of Theory and Criticism, University of Western Ontario

"Altering Nature in the Reception of Terrence Malick's Contemporary Films," FSAC Graduate Colloquium, Feb. 2022, York University

"Culture/Transition Diary 2: The Eyes with Two Faces," Theory Session, January 2021, Centre for the Study of Theory and Criticism, University of Western Ontario

"The Cinema's Right to (Un-)Death: Filmic Writing Between Bresson and Blanchot," De/Composing Death, Graduate Conference, August 2018, Department of English, Dalhousie University