

Breaking the Cycle: Establishing New Feminist Phenomenology within Movement-Image in Maren Ade's *The Forest for the Trees*

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Abstract

*Since Laura Mulvey's corner stone essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1975), feminist film theories have analyzed the depictions of women's bodies in film. These theories, however, continually utilize the semiotics similar semiotics and stand the dangers of reiterating the discourse of corporeal female lack. In my essay, I call for a new film theory that breaks the cycle of the mind-body divide in an effort to change the discourse surrounding the female both in film analysis and without it. In this paper I combine the formal, fluid aspects of Gilles Deleuze's movement-image and the very physical, existential elements of Vivian Sobchack's phenomenology to analyze Marian Ade's breakout, feminist-oriented film, *Der Welt vor Läuter Bäumen* (2003). Using this new combination of film theories, I emphasize moments in Ade's film in which the movement-image facilitates negotiation and collaboration between film and the spectator as a mind-body whole. Within such a method, the feminine body does not become re-centralized, but rather collaborates with the mind to form a cohesive whole in which the spectator, in all her physical and mental capacities, finally receives the agency to produce meaning, opening up the possibility to break out beyond current feminist film semiotics.*

Keywords:

The Forest for the Trees (*Der Wald vor lauter Bäumen*) – Maren Ade – Gilles Deleuze – Movement-Image – Vivian Sobchack – Film Phenomenology – Feminist Film Theory – Modes of Spectatorship

In this day and age, a time in which so many different groups of the queer community have fought and gained great strides within both German and American society, the question arises: have the theories which professionals use in academia to analyze pieces kept up with these strides? In this essay, I will look at Maren Ade's first film, *The Forest for the Trees* (*Der Welt vor Lauter Baume* 2003) and show the necessity of moving beyond feminist film theory and into a new age in which the film audience, in all of their forms, are given agency to produce film while watching. I show the necessity of providing a method of analysis that gives way to a new way of thinking about the role of spectators in all their physical and mental capacities.

Although feminist film theory has multiple roots, one of the most famous cornerstones of feminist film theory, Laura Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1975), uses psychoanalysis to discover and demonstrate the ways in which film structure unconsciously perpetuates patriarchal power structures. As per psychoanalysis, the conscious mind has no place in the development of physical symptoms, and as such, there is a divide between conscious mind and body. She explicates how scopophilic shots and narrative structures that enforce the idea of active, changing masculinity and passive, eternal femininity objectifying women. Within the psychoanalytic framework these women become a castration threat, needing to either be punished or fetishized to neutralize their power.

Mulvey ends her essay with a possible way to subvert traditional, gendered film conventions that relies on rearrangement of film structure and its logical analysis by a particular type of spectating audience. She writes, "The first blow against the monolithic accumulation of traditional film conventions (already taken by radical film-makers) is to free the look of the camera into its materiality in time and space and the look of the audience into dialectics and passionate detachment" Mulvey believes that radical filmmakers both in and before 1975 had succeeded in delivering this subversive "first blow" against the build-up of patriarchal traditions within film by changing the structure and production of film. Furthermore, with this statement, she calls for others to do the same: to free the camera so that the spectating audience can detach from the image, to make the audience aware of the camera's presence in time and space (Mulvey 47). What Mulvey proposes is a

feminist cinema that relies on a logical, straight analysis. She proposes an audience spectatorship that ultimately depends on friction between the spectator and camera, both as apparatus and as a physical entity outside of the film image itself.

In her follow-up essay, “Afterthoughts on ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’ inspired by *Duel in the Sun* (1946)” (1981), Mulvey expands upon her first essay with an analysis of the film *Duel in the Sun*. Still pulling from structures fundamental to Freudian psychoanalysis, she contends that a female spectator may derive pleasure from identifying with the “masculine perspective the camera offers, but only by going back to the pre-oedipal phase in which both boys and girls are actively ‘masculine’” (30-31). Thus, Mulvey asserts that the female spectator can become “transvestitive” in her identification. This transvestitive identification, however, is only temporary as the female spectator must go back to being feminine upon the film’s conclusion (31-32). The female spectator’s female body and mind, then, still fits within a dialectic psychoanalytic framework with a newly emphasized limit, only allowed to passively identify with the “masculine perspective” for so long.

Since Mulvey’s famous essay, feminist film critics such as have critiqued, reshaped, and evolved feminist film theories of feminist and minority feminist spectatorship. Contemporary, well-known, and influential feminist film critics such as Mary Ann Doane, Kaja Silverman, Christine Gledhill, and others¹ have built on Mulvey’s theory or have developed different systems of significations altogether to uncover ways in which certain films’ structure, content, and production conform to or subvert gender and racial norms. However, feminist theories using the similar semiotics and dualisms as psychoanalysis continue to perpetuate a discourse in which the female spectator’s mind is pitted against the eye of the male, constantly reinforcing these dualisms in different manners. One cannot create a subversive cinema that continually fixes meaning making to the same male significations.

¹ See, for example: Doane, Mary Ane, “Film and the Masquerade: Theorizing the Female Spectator.” Silvermann, Kaja. “Lost Objects and Mistaken Subjects.” Johnston, Clare. “Woman Cinema as Counter Cinema.” Gledhill, Christina. “Pleasurable Negotiations.”

The contemporary theorist, Judith Butler, attempts to break free of this problem in her essay, "Gender is Burning: Questions of Appropriation and Subversion" (1999). In her article, Butler analyzes the film *Paris is Burning*. She focuses on the ambivalence of drag in the film and argues that it is neither subversive nor mimicry of dominant gendered culture. Instead this drag sits in a space that is uncomfortably both. Most importantly, Butler defends her thesis using Louis Althusser's concept of *interpellation*, emphasizing that the film subject exists neither prior to the construction, or 'calling,' of a subject or before the subject is determined by these constructions. Rather, the subject is a non-space center of cultural tensions. These tensions create a demand for resignification, which ultimately leads, Butler asserts, to ambivalence that produces possibilities for reworking the terms of subjecthood (338). Instead of cementing the film subject in meaning that seems fixed by the apparatus, the film structure, and the spectator, Butler contends that the film subject is whittled by societal tensions, allowing for an ambivalence of character and resignification of cultural norms that determine the film subject. The drag in *Paris is Burning*, for example, can have a subversive or normative function depending on: the film character, the setting (that often reflects real places outside of the film), the real-life, societal connotation of certain types of dress, and the "realness" or believability of performance (341). Furthermore, she insists that the spectator must have a role in shaping the film subject, as the spectator is the "performance" or "call" that creates subjecthood (348).

Butler's focus on flexibility of subject allows for a less teleological analysis of film that opens a possibility for meaning making instead of static signification. The film's subjects are given agency in their interaction with culture and film structure. Yet, the core of Butler's argument still relies on resignification, which inherently relies on *signification*. Although she stresses a reworking of the filmic language system--of structuralist *langue*--a reworking would merely facilitate moving around the structure and pieces of the very signifiers built on the separation of mind and body. How is one to create a feminist cinema that not only uses the same *langue* as non-subversive film but also divides the feminine mind from the feminine body? Doing so reaffirms Mulvey's revelation that the image of woman in cinema embodies lack because it does not look at woman as a cohesive whole. To separate mind from body in feminist critical theory is to constantly reiterate the corporeal female

lack, to admit that the female body does not deserve both the time and space in the film and from the spectator.

Moreover, Butler necessitates the role of the spectator for the creation of the film subject but gives little to no agency to the spectator itself. Rather the spectator is merely a passive vehicle that serves to validate the position of the film's subject. While this is perhaps a more active role than the spectator plays in most feminist film theories, in order to create truly subversive cinema, the spectator must be allowed to actively play a mental and *physical* part in meaning making. Without this pivotal step, the feminist spectator risks becoming the new lack, the new psychoanalytic embodiment of existent absence that plays a role but only to support the cinematic space. The feminist spectator is not allowed an experience and subjectivity.

Just as these theorists have built and changed feminist theory, it is time to continue to search for new ways to conceptualize feminist film theory, one that encompasses interaction between both physically and mentally active film subject and film spectator calls to be created to avoid this cyclical affirmation of female inferiority. In an interview about feminist film aesthetic with feminist theorists Michelle Citron, Judith Mayne, B. Ruby Rich, Ann Marie Taylor, and Julia Lesage, the co-editors of *New German Cinema* pose this very dilemma to these contemporary theorists: How can film critics, as women and women in women studies, create, support, and reinforce subcultural resistance? B. Ruby Rich provides her opinion:

I think that relates to what was said about the dismissal of the female spectator, in e.g., the psychoanalytic criticism that's been done. The implication is that too much credit has been given to the notion of values being imbedded in production when, in fact, the values have been imbedded in the reception. If values are embedded in our reception then the order is less immutable than supposed, and in that case, there's a lot more importance in criticism than we may have thought. This is of course an optimistic forecast. (Citron, et al. 112)

Yet, perhaps this forecast of optimism is one that can become an optimistic reality. In this essay, I argue for a new conceptual way to conceive feminist theory that emphasizes the fluctuating meaning

in film and meaning making within film reception. Rooted in Gilles Deleuze's movement-image and film-phenomenology, this combinatory hybrid provides space for the union of mind and body, a full spectator who is allowed to imbue values within the reception and perception of experience and subjecthood. I demonstrate how to rethink this idea of full, dynamic spectator using Maren Ade's feminist film, *The Forest for the Trees*.

Unlike theories rooted in psychoanalysis that position the spectator as passive and subservient to the omniscient, omnipotent power of the apparatus, both Deleuze's theory of movement-image and Vivian Sobchack's film phenomenology give the spectator an active role in the creation of meaning within a film text. Because the movement-image allows for the spectator to produce images within the mind while also being stimulated by them, Deleuze generates a spectatorship that negotiates² between the individual spectator and the formal content of the film. Phenomenology then grounds Deleuze's theory firmly in relation to the physical act of spectatorship, placing the subjective and the individual body at the forefront of this negotiating process. This give-and-take, the negotiation, between producing the image on screen through the expression of its perception and being stimulated by this image in the perception of the movement-image's formal expression necessitates that the viewer themselves be fluid and rhizomic. Thus, using this eclectic method of analysis, I examine the awkward, sometimes ambiguous nature of the formal elements that constitute the movement image in Maren Ade's *The Forest for the Trees*. Ade's film explicates this new method as it lends itself to an analysis grounded in fluid, rhizomic spectatorship. This positions this film as neither subversive nor compliant in terms of male spectatorship, for to do this would be to preserve the psychoanalytic dichotomy. Rather, such ambiguity and awkwardness allow for phenomenological interaction because of movement image, situating this film as one in which the spectator and film constantly interact and produce each other in accordance with the mind and body of the *individual, experiential* viewer.

² In this essay, I use "negotiation" as in Christine Gledhill's essay, "Pleasurable Negotiations" (1988). Meaning arises from the *struggle, or negotiation*, between competing frames of reference within the production and reception of a film.

Deleuze's Movement-Image and Spectatorship

In 1983, the poststructuralist Gilles Deleuze published his essential work of film theory, *Cinema 1*. Utilizing the framework created by philosopher Henri Bergson, who contended that movement and image could no longer be opposites, Deleuze opposes Bergson's thesis that perceived movement is a consecutive string of still images. Instead, he argues that film immediately presents a movement-image in which movement and image are inseparable (2). Deleuze contends the movement-image then provides consecutive movement. Consecutive movement describes an "any-instant-whatever," which may often appear to have "privileged instances" or culmination points. However, because they are a part of an open system that constantly changes through relations to other any-instant-whatevers, it becomes impossible that these are true privileged instances that transcend form (5-6, 8-9). Rather form structures and shapes these "any-instant-whatevers."

Extremely important to the movement image is Deleuze's concept of the 'Whole' and its relation to movement and change. The 'Whole' is a constantly changing, open system that consists of movements, or translations in space, that influence the 'Whole.' This movement happens necessarily within duration, or time, which constitutes the entirety of relations and thus, the Whole (8). Yet there also remains something that goes beyond movement and the 'Whole.' Consisting of energies and vibrations that pass through constant states of becoming this "something" lends a spiritual and mental nuance to the movement-image, as ceaseless becoming happens without the sets, or closed systems and objects within the parts of the open-system 'Whole.' This becoming therefore happens beyond them "in another dimension without parts" (10).

More concretely, Deleuze identifies the shot as a closed system within the movement-image. The mobile camera and transitions between shots produce the movement image, and each movement within this closed system creates change within the open 'Whole' (56-61). There are three types of shots with which Deleuze identifies three variations of the movement image and that I will later use in my explication of the hybrid theory: perception-image, action-image, and affection-image. Deleuze associates the perception-image with the long shot, which emphasizes the mis-en-

scène. The action-image consists of medium shot and focuses on duration and movement through time. Lastly, the affection-image is associated with the close shot and expresses emotion, relating movement to a quality, transforming it into adjective (65).

While Deleuze does not specifically address the spectator in *Cinema 1*, he does write the spectator as part of the movement-image as he often addresses perception and the functions of the body and mind in the production of movement-image. In a concise analysis of the Deleuzian spectator, Felicity Coleman argues in her article “Deleuzian Spectatorship” that the Deleuzian spectator is not a spectator in the traditional, psychoanalytic sense as often used in film criticism. Rather, the Deleuzian spectator is one whose “...role is to produce, as well as to be stimulated by the images” (Coleman 324). The spectator absorbs, refracts, and overlaps with the movement-image, generating a mental image produced by the perception of chains of movement-image of which the spectator’s body plays a part (Coleman 325; Deleuze 65-70). Because the spectator’s body becomes and becomes part of movement-image, the Deleuzian spectator must also, like the open ‘Whole,’ remain open to a constant change in interaction with the film text. While centered in the body as image and mind that produces mental-image, the Deleuzian spectator’s center is turbulent and flexes as it negotiates producing the movement image as well as being produced by the movement-image.

With a nomadic center, the Deleuzian spectator fits quite well with Deleuze’s other philosophies about literary text, specifically his work *A Thousand Plateaus*, co-authored by Felix Guattari. Like Deleuze’s theory of movement-image, his philosophy of literary texts is one of concepts that transcend form and formal elements, moving into the realm of creative intensities of affects and precepts (Coleman 324). A text, according to Deleuze and Guattari, is a rhizomic assemblage of these creative intensities and vibrations, that much like the concept of the Whole in *Cinema 1*, is constantly in motion and thus constantly becoming. Text as rhizome is then a “Body without Organs,” fluid in its continuous creation (Deleuze and Guattari 1455). Because the Deleuzian spectator also necessitates fluidity, ceaselessly becoming and producing in its interaction

with movement-image, it consequently is also rhizomic in its nomadic center, situated in body but without organs in its turbid fluidity.

Film-Phenomenology and Spectatorship

Phenomenology as a philosophy is originally transcendental in nature, going on the physicality of the tangible moment in time and space. As Deleuze discusses in Chapter 4 of *Cinema 1*, both his "philosophical tutor" Bergson and the founder of transcendental phenomenology, Husserl, developed their theories around the same time in response to the conflict between materialism and idealism (56-58). Stemming from this idea of material idealism, both philosophers 'overcame' this conflict in different ways. Husserl focuses on intentionality of consciousness, which implies that consciousness is never a blank canvas in any human experience. It builds itself in relation to the subject's experience of its world (Stadlar 61). However, film phenomenology differentiates itself from transcendental phenomenology after this founding principle. Film phenomenology is not transcendental but rather existential, as Vivian Sobchack argues in *Address of the Eye*. A transcendental notion of subjectivity makes it inherently objective and contradicts, according to Sobchack, the purpose of phenomenology, which is to study things as they appear and are grounded in the world (Stadlar 61; Chamarette 314).

Vivian Sobchack's centers the contemporary rendition of film-phenomenology on Merleau-Ponty's existential phenomenology. Ponty's subject is not transcendental but remains subjective in its perceptions and is firmly rooted in its worldly embodiment. This embodiment influences its perceptions of the world and vice-versa, thus constituting a subject that concurrently influences its environment and is shaped by that very same environment (Chamarette 312). When viewing film, the spectator and film take part in a similar intersubjectivity (Sobchack 5). Yet unlike the environment with which the subject interacts, film and filmmaker³ also participate in perception. There is then a duality of intersubjective perception between spectator and film and filmmaker,

³ Vivian Sobchack defines filmmaker as all who had a part in realizing the production of the film (*Address of the Eye* 9).

which allows for a simultaneous perception of expression and expression of perception by both the film and spectator. Like Deleuze's movement-image, movement here is key. Instead of a translation in space, however, film-phenomenology emphasizes translation of mind and existence, an interaction between film and spectator that ultimately leads to simultaneous perception and creation of cinematic space (Sobchack 13). This constant creation and perception are concurrently mediated through body (of the spectator and of the film) and intentionality of consciousness (or the spectator's previous experiences) and are consequently rooted in body and mind (Stadlar 65).

Sobchack's spectator is thus one inherently a part of the meaning-making process. She calls for an active spectator who does not passively sit but actively creates. This creation need not be active in the form of bodily movement and cannot, in fact, be performed in any way seeable by an observer. A detailed observation and description of film experience is itself a critical engagement with film text, as reflective awareness is both perception and expression that considers contextual, relational aspects of spectator and film (Chamarette 314-15). Because of this constant interaction between film and spectator and the consequent shaping and reshaping of both, the film-phenomenological spectator is also one that is necessarily fluid. Like the Deleuzian spectator, Sobchack's spectator is rhizomic. However, unlike the Deleuzian spectator, it cannot be reduced to mere vibrations. It must inhabit a concrete body. Thus, Sobchack's spectator is one who is fluid in mind but stable in body: centered in its personal experience yet decentered in the encompassing multiplicities of experience.

Complimentary Different Theories and Feminism

Although Deleuze's strong critiques of phenomenology seem to render his movement-image and film-phenomenology incompatible, these theories nevertheless possess striking similarities, particularly in the language used to by both authors⁴. Both Sobchack and Deleuze emphasize

⁴ Current research has also connected the Deleuze's theories to Merleau-Ponty's notion of the flesh, an integral part of his existential phenomenology. In *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image* (1995) Deleuze critiques Bergson and Merleau-Ponty, seemingly opposed to existential phenomenology. While Deleuze and Guattari claim in their seminal work, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1987), that the notion of flesh is still caught in a hierarchical relationship and thus a closed system that limits movement and interaction, Jack Reynolds and Jon Rolfe (2006) argue for a reading

movement and exchange. While these relationships differ according to the theory—for Deleuze a relationship between movement-images and the constantly changing Whole and for Sobchack a constantly adapting relationship between film and spectator—they still encompass a relationship within the film text and without it.

Furthermore, these relationships both necessitate and assign a role of production for the spectator. Deleuze's movement-image may seem to give the spectator a more passive role in the production and meaning of movement-image in comparison to the role of the spectator in film-phenomenology, yet, as Boaz Hagin argues in his article "Inverted identification: Bergson and phenomenology in Deleuze's Cinema Books" (2013), "...in the [*Cinema*] books, the existence of movement-images in cinema depends on the spectator's *experience* of watching films" (emphasis my own 262). Though Deleuze out rightly rejects phenomenology in *Cinema 1* because of its centeredness in the spectator's body and emphasis on consciousness, the role he assigns the spectator of movement-image overlaps with film-phenomenology's spectator. In movement-image the spectator must absorb, refract, and reflect movement-image, all of which are related to the experience of watching film (Hagin 263; Deleuze 56-60).

Sobchack also address Deleuze's perceived difference between the two. She asserts that the main difference between film-phenomenology and movement-image is not what Deleuze coins as "lack of rigor" on film-phenomenology's part. Rather the difference lies in the expression of

of Merleau-Ponty that resists this notion. Flesh, they argue, is Merleau-Ponty's way of providing "an analysis of the transcendental as a condition for actual experience" (241). The flesh is not a Kantian object aligned with sense but rather an expression of being that involves articulated differences on the same plane, just like Deleuze and Guattari's concept of univocity of being, or smooth spaces (241). The concept of body in Merleau-Ponty's existential phenomenology encompasses the "body image," which exists neither exclusively in the mental or physical domains, but rather in involved (encompassing both mental and physical) *action* with perceived people and objects (Smith, 2013). Just as in Deleuze's movement-image, Merleau-Ponty's existential phenomenology requires *action*--as seen from the concept of body image--and *affect*. Although Merleau-Ponty's works are still intertwined with hierarchical and rigid notions of the Western philosophy Deleuze critiques, Reynolds and Rolfe argue that Merleau-Ponty resists a purely Kantian reading. He instead only occasionally resorts back to such notions, something that Reynolds and Rolfe argue all philosophers face. Actively trying to avoid detached Kantian notions of Western philosophy "...is a difficulty that Deleuze and Guattari themselves note in their final work and one we must all vigilantly confront. It is ultimately this plane of immanence, this attempt to make thought and life intertwine, that both philosophers set as the horizons of philosophical activity" (248).

relationship between subject and object, expressed in time within movement-image and, Sobchack argues, grounded within space in film-phenomenology (Hagin 263). Yet, as I have pointed out, both Deleuze and Sobchack emphasize movement in relation to film and spectator in their theories. Because "... movement is a translation in space" that necessitates time (Deleuze 8-9), both theories require, at some point within their analysis, time *and* space.

This is not, however, to say that movement-image and film-phenomenology are the same. On the contrary, for their differences actually contribute to the creation of a well-rounded, critical feminist theory. A well-rounded theory grounds itself in formal, technical analysis while also endowing the spectator with the possibility to move beyond the psychoanalytic model and finally connect body and mind. This combination has the possibility to encompass a full, fluid range of feminine experience in the production of film meaning. Movement-image allows for a formal grounding within the film text and aides the spectator as she describes her bodily feelings and emotions. Moreover, to encompass spectator within the ceaselessly becoming 'Whole of movement-image' serves to highlight the constant interaction between spectator and film, in which each simultaneously shapes the other. Accordingly, the ever changing 'Whole' accentuates the fluidity of spectator as human, as woman, while also valuing the worth and influence of the gendered body through phenomenological description.

Before I continue, however, I must explicate and expand upon the terms I will use for the rest of this essay. From this point in the essay, I will cease to use the word 'spectator' to refer to the individual who views film. Because the term is closely associated with psychoanalytic and apparatus theories, it has accumulated a passive connotation. A film is watched by a spectator, as a spectator does not even have the agency to watch. In keeping with movement-image and film-phenomenology theories, for the purpose of my essay I wish to endow the person in this role with a more active part. Thus, I shall use the words 'collaborator' and 'collaboration' to refer to what would traditionally be called 'spectator' and 'spectatorship.' A collaborator not only watches but also has agency to create, both on its own and in conjunction with another. In my explication of collaborator in Maren Ade's *The Forest for the Trees*, I will use myself--mind and body--as female collaborator, and in the tradition

of Sobchak's writings, will use the subjective, experiential word 'I,' as woman, to emphasize the phenomenological expression of movement-image within my body, my mind, and the film.

Secondly, I would like to address the term 'feminist.' By clearly defining woman, one necessarily organizes woman into concepts in which she fits, bracketing off 'normal' experiences or traits and creating minorities within the category of already oppressed minority. More contemporary feminist theorists such as bell hooks, Tania Modleski, and Jackie Stacey have attempted to address exclusion within feminist theories by focusing on different representations of women's race and sexuality in film⁵. While recognition of women's cultural, racial, and sexual differences and their varied life experiences is crucial for an analysis that does not wish to further solidify minority and lack, additional infinite subcategories of 'woman' within 'feminism' serve only to define norms and experiences in which a woman feels she must fit.

Instead of organizing woman into endless subcategories, contemporary third wave feminists such as Judith Butler, Monique Witting, and Eve Kosovsky Sedgwick theorize that the category of woman—both as gender and sexuality—is a social construction⁶. While this may seem to diminish and dismiss the effect of all sexual, gendered, class, racial, and ethnic differences, recognizing the construction of gender and womanhood, in all its forms, can help to acknowledge woman and female corporality as she exists in all her multiplicities (Damlé 34). As Amaleena Damlé argues in the introductory chapter of her book, *The Becoming of the Body*, the body and construction of woman consists of multiple layers and interconnections that complicate even the most basic of human experience (35). These layers and multiplicities do not have a center but rather shift in their interaction with the world and with self. It is with this idea that I consider the fluid, rhizomic, individual collaborator as a feminist one. While it is recognized that an individual collaborator does

⁵ Refer to: hooks, bell. "The Oppositional Gaze: Black Female Spectators." Modleski, Tania. "Cinema and the Dark Continent: Race and Gender in Popular Film." Stacey, Jackie. "Desperately Seeking Difference." u

⁶ Refer to: Butler, Judith. "Preface." *Gender Trouble*. Witting, Monique. "One is Not Born a Woman." Sedgwick, Eve Kosovsky. "Homosexual Desire."

not inherently imply a multiplicity of *woman*, a wider focus of study on different types of collaborators lies beyond the scope of this essay.

Ambiguity and Awkwardness in *The Forest for the Trees*

Utilizing ‘movement-image’ in its three varieties, with a special focus on ‘affect-image,’ Maren Ade’s first film, *The Forest for the Trees*, is a film in which the main character and her environment are often awkward and ambiguous, opening itself up for creation with and of the collaborator. As a film of the Berlin School⁷, *The Forest for the Trees* deals with the unassuming personal story of Melanie Pröschle who, freshly finished with her own schooling, moves to Karlsruhe to start a new teaching position. However, laden with Maren Ade’s characteristic long takes and, as I argue, a building of ‘any-instant-whatevers’ in movement-image, things quickly turn south for Melanie as she demonstrates her lack of social skills through her interactions with her class, colleagues, and neighbor, Tina. These interactions ultimately capitulate to a cringe-worthy awkwardness and resulting ambiguity in both the plot and nature of Melanie’s character. I choose Ade’s film to demonstrate the ways in which movement-image and film phenomenology open a space for the collaborator to actively participate in the making of feminist subjectivity because of its awkwardness and resulting ambiguity.

Awkwardness and resulting ambiguity play a large role for the phenomenological participation of collaborator. Judith Butler already describes ambiguity as something that is neither subversive nor compliant with “male spectatorship” (338), which allows for one to move beyond the psychoanalytic dichotomy of male/female spectatorship and focus on the idea of collaboration. Maren Ade echoes these views and expands upon them. In an interview with Ade about her new film *Toni Erdmann* (2016), Megan Ratner of the magazine *Film Quarterly* asks Ade about her “unusual sensitivity to awkwardness” in all three of her films (47). Ade responds that awkwardness is a result, something that happens at the end of shooting and can often lead to ambiguity (47-48). Referencing

⁷ For more on the Berlin School and its connection with everyday protagonists, see *Berlin School Glossary: An ABC of the New Wave in German Cinema* (17-18) and *The Berlin School: Films from the Berliner Schule* on feminist protagonists (46-57).

an awkward scene in *Toni Erdmann* in which the main character belts out an uncomfortably long Whitney Houston song at a stranger's family party, Ade explicates upon this "result," saying that awkwardness allows for different emotions from the viewer: sympathy, amusement, embarrassment, etc. (45). If awkwardness is a result of shooting film and not within the shot itself, it is not inherent in production. This means that awkwardness and ambiguity are something imbued within the reception. Thus, a collaborator helps to create awkwardness and ambiguity in her interaction with the film, which spurs an experiential phenomenological array of emotions that, in turn, also produce awkwardness and ambiguity.

Carrie Smith-Prei and Maria Stehle argue similarly in their essay "WiG- Trouble: Awkwardness and Feminist Politics." Awkwardness, they assert, does not describe the feminist politics of private space but rather the ways in which radically public spaces become intimate ones and are thus constantly involved in a process of creating, doing, and undoing subjectivities (218). Smith-Prei and Stehle define awkwardness as a "search-term," or one that is constantly moving and changing shape, happening in events or between them, in performance or its reception. Awkwardness "[...] draws attention to normative representations of sexuality, gender, race, and the power of prescriptive regimes of representation while also putting on display the collapse of standard discursive or theoretical frameworks that might easily describe these representations" (214). Awkwardness is a form of collision that draws attention to socially imposed boundaries and regimes by being either moments or in-between moments of these regime's collapse. This also makes it difficult to use traditional theories rooted in binaries to describe these dialectical, moving moments as they lie outside the traditional *langue* and break the theoretical sign/signifier connection. While this does not make awkwardness inherently feminine, it opens up space for new theories of representation, including new concepts of feminism, subjectivity, and collaboration, to thrive.

One of the first cringe-worthy moments in *The Forest for the Trees* comes quite early in the film as a result of movement-image. After Melanie's holds a welcome/introduction party for her colleagues, the film proceeds to show the chaotic interaction Melanie has with her younger class.

The scene starts with a close, affect-image of a little girl's face. I⁸, as collaborator, already feel as if the camera is too close for comfort. There is an abundance of background chatter and yelling from both Melanie and her students that transports me back to loud cafeterias of my own childhood schools. My stomach clenches in anticipation of ultimate disorder and chaos. The camera then moves up and back down. In this transition I start to absorb the movement of the camera, which is shaky and possibly handheld, thus intensifying my physical unease and anticipation of disorder. There is then an abrupt cut to an establishing shot where I can finally see a wider scope of the room, a perception image. Immediately my brow furrows as I am confused by the abruptness of the transition. The perception-image confirms my original gut feeling of chaos as I refract the abrupt movement of the shaky camera back into the chaotic room. Yet, in viewing this chaos, my body also relaxes the slightest bit, my tensed shoulders drop away from my ears and I feel like, within the perception-image, I have space to observe and breath, no longer entrenched in the turbulent class activity. I can almost perceive my body in this classroom space. This, however, does not last long as the camera, again at a seemingly random interval of time, cuts to a close up of the students' faces. Hurlled once again into the chaos, my body tenses once more. I want to make myself small, to curl up so as to protect myself from the onslaught of yelling children. Over stimulated because of the abrupt juxtaposition between movement-images, my head spins; I feel overwhelmed. The duration of the shot lasts for almost twenty seconds, and the camera moves up and down, side-to-side. Everything is close, tight, and I can feel the angry stares of the children as the camera pans upward to Melanie's face. An affect shot. My mouth opens as hers does, yet I do not feel what she feels; I cannot. I only cringe to be watching all of this transpire, thinking that no matter how tumultuous I've thought certain classes in my childhood were, none of them were this extreme, none of the children so obnoxious. The camera starts to track the movement of Melanie's arms, yet it does not center them within the frame nor follow them exactly. Unable to see her arms, I am unable to feel what she is doing, Instead, I am merely thrown yet again into a translation through an unknown space. My body is alienated from Melanie, it refracts this movement. However, I as collaborator am

⁸ In the spirit of Sobchack's rhetoric in her phenomenological description of film, I use the first person "I" to describe my bodily reaction and interaction with film text.

not distanced from her, as everything is still an ‘affect-image,’ painfully close and seemingly for no reason. The camera movement itself appears to have a mind of its own. My jaw tightens as the ‘any-instant-whatevers’ prove to be non- equidistant in time or in their translation through space. The lack of cuts provides a sense of whole, but this whole makes my stomach churn. It produces a continuity, disjointed in that it is far too continuous in its seemingly random movements. I need a transition, a cut. I need a space, however brief, to put my body, to breathe. I want to know where the camera will move. I want to see the chaos in its whole, be taken out of it. But the camera keeps moving; my body continually tenses.

And finally, there appears to be a culmination point, a privileged ‘any-instant-whatever.’ A boy yells at Melanie. I recoil, aghast at his disregard for his teacher. There is at last a cut, a transition between movement-image that provides some bodily relief. Still all affect-images, I can now see Melanie’s face, but I am gazing up at it, as if I can see from the eyes of the boy. In psychoanalytic theories of film analysis this would lend itself to rhetoric of identification. However, in this moment, in a collaboration, I instead use my body and my mind to feel and observe. Because I have my own body and mind, I do not need to identify. Instead, I simply realize that the camera is now the embodiment of this boy, surrounded by a ring of his classmates. My body tries to curl up again, expecting the over-stimulation that occurred from the last similar cut to the children’s faces. The camera’s embodiment of boy moves forward as the boy’s yelling escalates, getting ever louder. A simultaneous movement towards Melanie from the students standing behind her starts to enclose her body, invade her space. Absorbing and reflecting the movement of camera and *mise-en-scène*, the muscles in my shoulders, back, legs, and stomach clench in anticipation, expecting to be suffocated. My hands ball up with anxiety as the encroaching movement threatens to swallow Melanie’s space, my space. Awkwardly powerless against a band of obnoxious children, I see Melanie’s face move in fear and feel mine do the same. Now I cannot tell if I feel uncomfortable for Melanie, with Melanie, or in contrast, if I have absorbed the movement so much that I am the one creating this awkwardness, if I am creating my own situational discomfort and fear.

However, this seemingly privileged ‘any-instant-whatevers,’ is just that: an illusionary culmination point. For after this, there is a cut to Melanie’s apartment where everything is open and

after all that noise, eerily quiet. The next ‘any-instant-whatever’ has already changed the Whole, deescalating the situation in a matter of mere seconds. My body hesitantly unclenches its muscles. But there remains this impression in the film and in me, this anticipation of similar intense scenes. The vibrations of the movement-image remain, and because this transpires so early into the film, these vibrations influence my perception of Melanie. In my bodily confusion, I also created bodily confusion for Melanie just as she did so to me. I saw her face, felt my own move similarly, and echoed her fear back to her, strengthening it. Within this sequence of movement-image, I took and strengthened Melanie’s awkwardness, consequently adding the echoes of these previous movement-images to Melanie’s character. I carry this within me throughout the course of the film, negotiating between these echoes and the new character information presented to me.

While there are a vast array of similar scenes in *The Forest for the Trees*, movement-image within the last few scenes of the film interact and negotiate phenomenologically with collaborator in quite a different way. The last scenes in the film utilize movement-image to interact with the collaborator and produce a film that floats from being cringingly awkward to calmingly ambiguous in its final attempt at meaning making (1:17:11-1:19:17). Melanie, after told by Tina to stay away from her and her apartment and stop meddling in her life, teaches a seemingly normal class. In contrast to the movement-image induced phenomenological chaos from the first classroom scene that the collaborator witnesses and ultimately adds to in its awkwardness, this last classroom scene is extremely calm and orderly. However, Melanie leaves in the middle of class, getting in her car to go to the recycling center in an attempt to throw out bags of Tina’s old things that had been sitting in her car since the middle of the film. After finding out the recycling center doesn’t take household garbage, she angrily drives back to the apartment complex, throws the garbage in the dumpster in a fit of rage, and starts to drive. The ending sequence of shots, then, all occur with Melanie in the car and thus herself engaging in a translation in cinematic space through cinematic time.

As Melanie engages in cinematic movement, this scene, at first glance, appears to have very little movement-image at all in comparison with the first classroom scene. However, if I pay attention to my bodily sensations, these scenes are noticeably rife with phenomenological interaction

because of movement-image. Melanie drives, and I see her hair standing up off her head, moving in the wind. The roots of my hair tingle, as if they, too, recognize this feeling of wind. My muscles are relaxed, and I feel as if I could spread out my arms and be open in the space of the car, even though my mind knows that a car cabin truly isn't that spacious. But if I pay very close attention, I see that camera sways very subtly from left to right, as if with the motion of the car, and for a few seconds, this translation in space allows me to see behind and in front of Melanie, opening the space. My body automatically absorbs this movement before my mind even recognizes there was any, and calmness ensues. Melanie starts to take off her jacket. There is then a cut to a medium shot of Melanie, an action-image. The camera looks down on her from an interesting angle as she begins to take off her jacket within her moving car. I can no longer see her face, only the back of her head. Unlike the first classroom scene, I can see all her movements quite clearly, and the space and time spent on this shot gives my body time and space to feel. As she slides an arm out of her jacket, my arms feel the silky fabric brush up against my skin, and knowing how difficult it is to take a jacket off with a seatbelt on, my other arm aches as it senses the constriction of Melanie's other arm until she succeeds in taking the jacket all the way off. My arms, freed from the sensation of fabric, feel the breeze tickle their fine hairs. Yet, the camera seems to linger here a little too long. Once again there is a feeling of a whole, but this whole also feels strange. I want to look away. I need another transition. Like in the classroom scene, I my muscles tense, but unlike before, I tense in a different kind of awkwardness. My eyes have already spent too much time looking at Melanie. Finally, there is another cut to the forest outside of Melanie's car window. They rapidly move past. Yet, these movements are not due to the camera but rather are a result of the movement of the car. My mind knows this, and my body senses it. I very comfortably absorb the movement-image that fades into this false movement-image, this illusion of movement cinematic movement. Reminded of the many car rides in which a similar view was the last I saw before I drifted to sleep, my muscles relax.

The 'any-instant-whatevers' feel more equidistant in their translation through time and space, and a cut back to Melanie's face--an affect-image--feels natural and thus subtle. My mouth and brow move in anticipation of a smile from Melanie, some sort of resolution to her crying. She scrunches up her nose, and I can feel my upper lip start to ascend towards my own nose. However, for being

an affect-image, it is relatively devoid of emotion. My brow furrows deeper, and a pit forms in my stomach as my mind perceives there is something wrong. Everything is too clean, too fluid. I want solidity. My body wants solid transitions in which it can place itself comfortably without staring too long or too hard at Melanie.

Consistent with the relaxed, calm feeling, the last few movement-images also appear subtle. Much like the first classroom scene, there is a feeling of a continuous whole that feels almost too continuous, as movement-image and movement within *mise-en-scène* blur. From the affect-image of Melanie's almost emotionless face, the camera moves to the left, presupposing Melanie's gaze in that direction. The camera then slowly moves up, and there is a cut to the back seat in which the back of Melanie's head is visible. Then, a cut to show the actual seat, without Melanie in the frame. I reflect this series of movements, my limbs longing to stretch out as if I, too, were slowly crawling my way into the back seat with Melanie and the camera. But I refract this transition, unsure of what to make of the empty seat. Melanie then crawls into the frame, her head once again not visible, reminding me as the collaborator that Melanie was temporarily a part of the whole outside of the frame, a whole that also encompasses me. I see her arm sink into the car seat, and my arm and leg feel the plush compression.

The camera moves upward towards Melanie's face, as Melanie moves her neck side to side. My own neck gently sways, and suddenly my mind recognizes that the camera, too, sways ever so slightly. As in the first classroom scene, this camera, too, appears to be handheld. The instable camera, like in the first scene, makes me feel powerless as well, but my muscles remain strangely relaxed. I give hesitantly give up control. The false movement-image of the car once more lulls me into relaxation. My neck twitches again as Melanie moves hers to look out the window, and the camera moves closer to her face. My muscles are still cautiously relaxed. Suddenly and abruptly there is a cut, barely perceivable as the shot following scarcely changes, having moved only slightly to the right. In contrast to the transitions in the first classroom scene, my body does not find space or rest within this movement. Rather my body tenses. Although still movement-image, it seems false and

unnecessary, as if there were no real movement to be had. I refract the movement, body still tensed in confusion as flurries of subtle movements flow into seeming movement illusions and vice-versa.

The film ends with another cut to the forest outside, and then to Melanie's face, from a view point outside of the car. The driver's side passenger window frames her face. My hair follicles and my nose tingle, as they feel the wind, and I am almost tempted to scrunch my face, because Melanie once again appears to be over stimulated. The wind almost looks to be too much. But there is a slight smile on her face. The camera tracks the car's translation in cinematic space and allows it and Melanie to drive out of the frame. The camera continues to move at the speed the car was, but there remains only the blur of the trees. Deleuzian in setting, the trees--a part of the whole of the forest--become muddled so that I can only see the whole, the forest. Confused, my body still feels the movement of the car while my mind recognizes that the car just drove out of the frame. Here, the film ends, with a strangely calm discord between mind and body produced within a relation of scenes that blur the line between deceptive, almost false movement and movement-image. Melanie and the car drive out of frame, entering once again the Whole that lives and moves outside of the frame, the Whole in which both film, Melanie, and I as 'collaborator,' take part.

As if reaching out to the 'collaborator,' Melanie herself becomes a vibration beyond this last movement-image. Left with vibrations of character, I am left with my own impressions of Melanie, free to draw my own conclusions about her and her fate. But my previous interactions with movement-image have created such a strange disconnect and muddling of mind and body and their perceptions of movement, this conclusion is, for me, an ambiguous one. The forest fades to black, underscoring the fluidity between me as collaborator and Melanie as film subject, leaving me to negotiate a meaning to this ambiguous end.

Problems, Limitations, and Future Directions

It is possible, then, to insert the subjective 'I' back into film analysis and give collaborator a voice validating both physical and mental interactions, negotiations, and experiences with film through the movement-image. However, there are still very obviously problems and

limitations regarding this method of analysis. Although third-wave feminism recognizes gender and sexuality as social construction and has a more fluid notion of gender and gendered bodies, there remains the question of how truly 'feminist' this theory is and can be. Being phenomenologically grounded in body and fluid in mindful negotiation with film text can create a more open orientation to mind, gendered body, and film that, as Jenny Chamarette suggests, "...can serve as a conduit between film theory and scholarship on the one hand, filmmaking on the other" (315). It has the possibility to separate the criticism from film production, which, as Ruby B. Rich calls for in her aforementioned quote, could be the solution for creating space for woman in all her varieties allowing her to negotiate her own meaning making within film text instead of having it be teleologically fixed in production. However, this opening of space is not limited to women. Rather, it is based on the individual collaborator, who, in any multiplicity of identity, can participate in the meaning making negotiation. Perhaps, then, this method of analysis lends itself more generally to a non-gendered stance.

Furthermore, negotiation of meaning between film, filmmaker, and collaborator must have its limits. Although the collaborator is an active participant in film-phenomenology and a necessary part in the creation of movement-image, the collaborator works within a certain language of experience—social, cultural, bodily, mentally, etc.—that limits the possibilities for negotiation as some of these, like language, function within a closed system. Movement-image itself works within a series of closed, formal systems that open themselves up the Whole, and the Whole, working in relation with movement-image, encompasses other films. Moreover, movement-image is dependent on a certain type of digital film, making it difficult to analyze older, celluloid film in this way. This digital specificity could perhaps make movement-image obsolete in the future. Thus, it follows that this form of analysis may only be able to be so open, and the meaning able to be negotiated may not be as radical with some films or collaborators as it may be with others.

While the only way to answer these specific questions is to do more research and analysis with a wide range of collaborators and a multiplicity of different films, one thing does remain clear; there remains a necessity for a film theory and analysis that grants a role of production to the

traditional “spectator.” To facilitate change, there must be negotiation and movement between film and collaborator, collaborator and criticism, and collaboration and feminism. Deleuze writes very early on in *Cinema 1*, “As soon as the whole is given to one in the eternal order of forms or poses, or in the set on ‘any-instant-whatevers’, then either time is no more than the image of eternity, or it is the consequence of the set; there is no longer room for real movement” (7). In order for real movement, real change to transpire, theory cannot be subjected to the teleological “eternal order of forms or poses” (7). Rather, theory must embrace time and movement and allow the collaborator--the individual in body and mind— the agency to create, experience, and therefore actively *change*.

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