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SCREENDANCE: CORPOREAL TIES

BETWEEN DANCE, FILM, AND AUDIENCE

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UNIVERSITY OF SUSSEX

PhD FILM STUDIES

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AUDIENCE

SUMMARY

I explore the sensuous, kinaesthetic experience and analysis of screen dance and the interconnectivity between our bodies, film, and heightened embodied sensibility. This physicality creates a dialogue between the rich diversity of screen dance genres under consideration, thereby avoiding hierarchical classifications. It also focuses attention on more abstract cinematic qualities, investigating how cinematic technique (as well as thematic content) generates emotional impact; allowing for the enjoyment of film as a material and sensual medium.

However, since our senses have been trained according to the regulatory controls within our socio-historical/cultural contexts, equal attention is given to the ideology of representation, and to the links between embodiment, identities, meanings, and broader relations of inequality. I am particularly interested in how dance and film can function politically, both expressing and disrupting norms and ideologies. But I am also interested in how the presence of dance (and/or choreographed movement) can enhance a film's agency and its ability to cross time and space, "touching" the viewer and thereby working to transform historical objectification into embodied interaction.

I combine a phenomenological lived-body experience of viewing with the epistemological functions that characterise it, using *my own* somatically felt body as a methodological starting point and a creative practice, and theoretical text-based and socio-historical contextual analyses. This balance between lived-experience and critical discussion is used to explore chapters on the deconstruction of national, cultural, and gendered identity through Flamenco dance and film; dance and physical disability; and avant-garde feminist screendance. A final chapter brings these key themes together by investigating how (psychiatric) disability, feminism, and national identity are treated in a contemporary Hollywood dance film.

Whilst embodied perception is *never* "innocent" and *always* shaped, I show how the movement of affect and emotion between the film and viewer's body can constitute an ethical experience, encouraging progressive and self-reflexive political and ideological engagement.

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Introduction

Affective experiences: emotional and physical encounters with film and television

I have numerous and vivid childhood memories of my mum's perplexed expression and anxious assertion that "it is only a film Frances", after witnessing my complete and utter emotional absorption in my favourite film of the moment, often wholeheartedly sobbing and/or deeply affected in some way and for quite some time after the viewing event. Whilst many different genres could (and still can) elicit this type of response in me, it is the magical combination of dance on screen that has quite *literally* been able to move me in more ways than one. Indeed, I can still remember the heightened level of excitement my sister and I would feel as the theme tune to the American TV spin-off, *Fame* (1982-87) would begin, religiously dressed for the occasion each week in our red and gold glittery *Fame* jumpers, matching ra ra skirts and stripy leg warmers, we would be perched on the arm of the sofa ready to leap off into the air with arms and legs spread wide open in a star shape as we and Erica Gimpel (who played Coco Hernandez) belted out the lyric…"Fame, I'm gonna live forever" for the first time in the chorus. The numerous dance scenes that would follow in any given episode never failed to get us up on the (living room) floor, as we imagined *we were* two of the kids from *Fame*, emotionally invested in the characters and their narrative development, as well as being literally moved by the sight of them dancing and singing. And for the duration of the programme (or film), I felt a powerful sense of freedom through my dancing body as I was in command of time and space, transported "out" of the confines of my family home and into my own creative world of expansive imagination.

This film and television-produced emotion felt (and continues to feel) real as opposed to "as if real", engaged as I am in a kind of physical, emotional, and deeply loyal

relationship with these much loved "texts." So despite a dominant critical opinion that
this popular narrative dance genre is of "low" cultural worth, my enduring emotional
attachment is grounded in my direct bodily experience, as thought, for me,
(momentarily) surrenders its centrality in relation to the affective dimension of
screendance.[1] It is, then, the physicality of this genre, combined with my own love of
dance that induces this visceral response, and at thirty-eight years old, I am not ashamed
to admit that I *still feel* the same bodily sense of joy and elation every time I hear the
first bars of the theme tune to *Fame*, or watch my favourite character, Leroy (Gene
Anthony Ray) dance.

This thesis is therefore driven by my interest in this kind of immediate and imaginative
lived-body experience of film, since viewing is a creative process that can be as much a
material as it is a psychical experience. For whilst screendance can be "read" like a text,
it is, for me, first and foremost "felt" with my entire body involved, addressed,
conceptualised and (re)formed in relation to what I am watching/feeling. Film induced
emotions undoubtedly rely on cognitive evaluations, but their strength and meaning *also*
rely on this kind of embodied participation and response, a crucial element of a film's
evaluation, interpretation, and expression of meaning. And so my aim is to explore the
role of embodiment in meaning making through the sensuous, kinaesthetic experience
and analysis of screendance and the interconnectivity between bodies, film, and
heightened embodied sensibility. However, because we do not all participate bodily or
are necessarily able or want to engage materially with other objects in the same way, I

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[1] It is not only popular Hollywood dance narratives that elicit this kind of experience and response in me,
these are simply the films, along with the Golden era of Hollywood song and dance with the likes of Fred
and Ginger, that first inspired my interest in the synthesis between dance and film. I will therefore engage
with films from across the spectrum of this multi-faceted genre, including avant-garde screendance,
choreography that has been created for the camera, and adaptations of existing dance performances for
the screen.

shall use *my own* somatically felt body as a methodological starting point and a creative practice. This will help avoid making totalising claims about what are subjective (albeit, always situated) experiences. Furthermore, this focus on physicality will create a dialogue between the rich diversity of screen dance genres under consideration, thereby avoiding hierarchical classifications between them. It also focuses attention on more abstract cinematic qualities, investigating how cinematic technique (as well as thematic content) generates emotional impact; allowing for the enjoyment of film as a material and sensual medium into which we can invest so much of ourselves. This will aid an understanding of how film works ontologically, and not merely as a form of representation and signification. And as this material connection between film and viewer collapses binary divisions between object and subject, mind and body, it can further account for the emotional significance and power of films, how they are able to touch and become so much a part of us, and how we can forget ourselves in the duration of the viewing experience even as we know that what we are watching is "only" a fiction. As Stanley Cavell so eloquently puts it:

> We involve movies in us. They become further fragments of what happens to me, further cards in the shuffle of my memory, with no telling what place in the future. Like childhood memories whose treasure no one else appreciates, whose content is nothing compared with their unspeakable importance for me. (1979: 154)

The social and political conditions of embodiment

However, this kind of phenomenological experience of film cannot be taken for granted nor considered autonomous. Embodied perception is *never* "innocent" and *always* shaped, and precisely because our senses have been trained according to the regulatory controls within our socio-historical/cultural contexts, I shall be giving equal attention to the ideology of representation, and to the links between embodiment, identities, meanings, and broader relations of inequality. Even as I explore how the movement of

affect and emotion between the film and viewer's body can constitute an ethical experience, encouraging progressive and self-reflexive political and ideological engagement, I am equally aware that this reflexivity is socially mediated and constituted. I am thus simultaneously both inside and outside of my embodied experience and so cannot, as Judith Butler writes, 'be who I am without drawing upon the sociality of norms that precede and exceed me' (2004: 32).

I will therefore combine a phenomenological lived-body experience of viewing with the epistemological functions that characterise it, incorporating theoretical text-based and socio-political historical contextual analyses. This balance between lived-experience and critical distance/discussion not only reflects the sense of being both inside and outside of my body/experience, but it also demonstrates how textuality and embodiment, or semiotic and phenomenological categories of knowledge do not have to oppose each other. Instead, and as Thomas J Csordas suggests, I shall be using them as 'corresponding methodological fields' and 'dialectical partners' (1994: 12). This balance between approaches also explains the movement throughout this thesis between third and first person writing perspectives. Since I am interested in a more holistic approach to film and to "knowing," my use of the first person effectively renders my investment in these dance films more immediate and embodied. And this interest in the embodied self (that responds in different ways to the pleasures of the text), locates my work within a critical tradition of feminist/other scholarship that acknowledges the self. Examples include (but are not limited to) Audre Lorde, who, through writing about the ways in which her own lived experience of race, class, age and health (as well as gender) played a role in shaping her lived experience, challenged the essentialism in feminist political theory by showing how impossible it is to theorise about women's

lives by considering only one part of their complex and multidimensional identity (i.e., gender). Although she does not recount her personal story in *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture and the Body*, Susan Bordo acknowledges how this critique of the cultural production of eating disorders 'is deeply informed by my experiences as a woman who has herself struggled with weight and body-image issues all her life' (1993: 35). Moreover, whilst she interrogates the normalising cultural practices that produce anorexia and bulimia, she simultaneously resists the (disembodied) notion 'that the body is a tabula rasa, awaiting inscription by culture. When bodies are made into *mere* products of social discourse, they remain bodies in name only' (*ibid*, original emphasis). Thus I have been greatly aided by her form of embodied postmodernism, which incorporates cultural inscription, multiplicity, historical location, and a constant acknowledgement of the self. Richard Dyer's work is also a continuous source of inspiration, since he often considers his own relationship to the topic at hand 'in order to situate what follows in the particularity of the person who is writing it' (Dyer 1997: xiv).

These multiple devices and discourses will be used to explore how dance and film function politically, both expressing and disrupting norms and ideologies in chapters on the deconstruction of national, cultural, and gendered identity through Flamenco dance and film; dance and physical disability; and avant-garde feminist screendance. A final chapter will bring these key themes together by investigating how (psychiatric) disability, feminism, and national identity are treated in a contemporary popular Hollywood dance film. But first I will begin by contextualising how and why I turned towards a more sensuous approach to film, daring to use my own embodied lived experience as a tool to aid scholarly investigation.

Contextualisation: from textual dominance to feminist phenomenology

Because of its politicised approach to questions of cinema and affect, feminist film theory (as well as queer theory) has been particularly influential upon my approach to film. Relating spectators' deepest desires and pleasures to ideological concerns has aided and developed an understanding of, and political resistance to classical narrative cinema as a phallocentric, heteronormative, white dominated and racist structure. Psychoanalytic methodologies derived from Jacques Lacan and Sigmund Freud were first used in the 1970s/1980s to explain the gendered structures of the cinematic apparatus, and to affirm the power of the text. As Laura Mulvey establishes in her seminal essay *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*, the pleasures of the voyeuristic-scopophilic male gaze are made possible through the construction of the female spectator as 'the male other, bound by a symbolic order in which man can live out his fantasies and obsessions through linguistic command by imposing them on the silent image of woman still tied to her place as bearer, not maker, of meaning' (1975: 59).[2] Since these patriarchal underpinnings structure, and thereby exploit female spectators' unconscious desires, dominant ideologies are reproduced and inscribed through textual representation and identification, leaving only two viewing positions available for her. Either she 'temporarily accepts "masculinisation"' (Mulvey 1981: 129), by identifying with (and perpetuating) the dominant visual and narrative economy of voyeurism and fetishism, or she narcissistically and masochistically over-identifies with the objectified female, an 'illusion cut to the measure of [male] desire' (*op cit.* 1975: 68).

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[2] Ed Guerrero equates the cinematic gaze with white power, extending Mulvey's work by revealing how 'dominant cinema constructs and positions the black image for "the look" of the norm, for the visual and narrative pleasure of the white spectator-consumer' (1993: 125).

Therefore, *actual* '"women as women"' (Gledhill 1984: 18) in film, as well as a female

viewing subject, and particularly a lesbian/queer female viewing subject who might

complicate the 'rigid distinction between either desire or identification, so characteristic

of psychoanalytic film theory' (Stacey 1988: 129), are all absent. And considering that

the woman-to-be-looked at in classical Hollywood cinema was *always* (and largely still

is) white, then black women are *doubly* absent both from the screen *and* from

spectatorial subjectivity. Indeed, in its failure to acknowledge that identification is not

only masochistic for the black female spectator, but also a negation of her very

existence, this early form of feminist film theory (developed predominantly by white

feminists) did not adequately respond to, or even recognise the exigencies and

specificities of black lives.[3] It thereby ignored the potential for what bell hooks has

termed, a resisting 'oppositional gaze,' by which '[b]lack female spectators, who

refused to identify with white womanhood, who would not take on the phallocentric

gaze of desire and possession, created a critical space where the binary opposition

Mulvey posits of "woman as image, man as bearer of the look" was continually

deconstructed' (1992: 122-123).

But despite the undeniably limited and exclusionary nature of this psychoanalytic

framework for female spectatorship, Mulvey's original yet problematic aim to 'get us

nearer to the roots of our oppression … [and] begin to make a break by examining

patriarchy with the tools it provides' (1975: 59), did help lay the foundations upon

which an ever-reflexive feminist film theory, or perhaps more accurately, a reflexive

feminist subject position, would develop, and a more inclusively fluid queer theory

would be built. Mulvey's answer at the time was to encourage our 'passionate

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[3] Given the fact that black men *as well as* women have long been punished for looking, black feminist film criticism has been less concerned with gender due to this shared oppression under a 'racial patriarchy' (Gaines 2000: 720).

detachment' (69) by radically destroying traditional film form in favour of an avant-

garde filmmaking practice. But this led to a debate amongst feminist film theorists, and

instead of rejecting and destroying dominant modes of representation, many (including

Mulvey: 1981) sought to acknowledge and respond to the limitations and dangers of

this dichotomous and universalising textual determinism, in which white female

subjectivity is only ever the negative to its gendered binary, and viewing pleasure is

only equated with/reduced to ideological indoctrination.[4] For example, Linda

Williams's more sociologically-inspired approach to female spectatorship and the

maternal melodrama attempts to address this lack of complexity, by 'identifying what

pleasure there is for women spectators within the classical narrative cinema, … [and]

developing new representational strategies that will more fully speak to women

audiences' (1985: 483).

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[4] Although Mulvey's *Afterthoughts on 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema'* responds to the 'persistent question "what about the women in the audience?"' (1981: 122), it still works within psychoanalytic paradigms. So whilst she may reject passivity, the female spectator is 'unable to achieve a stable sexual identity, torn between the deep blue sea of passive femininity and the devil of regressive masculinity' (123). However, lesbian/queer identities do not necessarily fit within these rigid binaries of masculine/feminine, and a female spectator who might not be feminine, passive, nor regressive is not necessarily 'restless in [her] transvestite clothes' (129), but just androgynous, dykey, or butch and happy to be that way. Indeed, queer theory developed in order to appropriate subversive sex and gender performance as a challenge to these ontological categories, and female masculinity, whether in appearance or "behaviour", does not necessarily signal a "regressive" fantasy of becoming a man. It is here that the use of psychoanalysis, oppressing and fixing certain identities within rigid binary positions that do not reflect any sense of fluidity, can appear outmoded. However, it is still a useful and important tool in aiding *an* interpretation of the text, and for understanding the power in the history and pathologising of LGBTQ representation. Furthermore, implementing and inverting what is in essence a troubling psychoanalytic perspective can help transform reactionary texts into progressive texts. Indeed, as Paul Burston and Colin Richardson argue, 'Freudianism is open to a wide range of interpretations, not all of them inimical to lesbians and gay men and some positively brimming with potential' (1995: 2). This is why both the theory and politics of the "past" should not be forgotten or negated, since epistemological movements and trends can (or should) peacefully co-exist and nourish each other, seeing as everything seems to be a reaction to what came before. Therefore, I am in complete agreement with Victoria Hesford when she writes that feminism will always be haunted by its past, 'complicating any simplistic commitment to political "progress" or evolvement' (2005: 232). This provides a convincing rationale for why I consider it important to include this theoretical contextualisation/development in my introduction, since this project is built upon all of this feminist and queer work that has come before and made it possible.

Inspired by Stuart Hall's (1980) trail-blazing work on encoding/decoding, these developing representational and analytical strategies would therefore assert the agency of the female spectator.[5] Accustomed as she is to more radical opposition as well as imaginative and dialectic cross-identifications due to her marginalised status, particularly (but not necessarily) if she is a person of colour or queer, whilst never losing sight of the dominant structures that construct and (attempt to) contain her. This kind of critical resistance involves locating moments of fissure, incoherence, and contradiction that enable a (patriarchal) text to be read as subversive, offering the space in which a plurality of feminist politics and female desire may be located. This is basically the same recuperative tool as queer's theory's method of reading against the grain, which, as Cherry Smyth acknowledges, 'began as a wish for inclusion by marginalised, underrepresented people and ended up as a strategy essential for our survival' (1995: 123).

A burgeoning interest in the complexities of female, as well as other marginalised groups' experiences with cinema and television, led to a body of politically motivated feminist and qualitative research into audiences. Ien Ang's (1985) study of how a (Dutch) female audience experiences pleasure in the U.S soap opera, *Dallas*, is read against the potentially damaging ideological power of such a popular and dominant text. Similarly, Jacqueline Bobo's (1988) reclamation and validation of the pleasures that the black female audience of her study found in the 1985 film, *The Color Purple*, offers an alternative to the overwhelmingly negative critical response to the film at the time of its release. Valerie Walkerdine's (1986) analysis of a working class family's viewing

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[5] Stuart Hall's encoding and decoding model argues that meaning is not fixed in the text, but resides in the negotiation between the reader and the polysemic text, producing a range of dominant, negotiated, or oppositional readings. Whilst this does recognise the power of both institutions and texts, it has been criticised for not acknowledging that texts, as well as audiences, may themselves be complex and contradictory.

pleasure in the film *Rocky II* (1979), and Jackie Stacey's (1994) study of female fans of Hollywood stars, both attempt to explore the links between psychoanalytic theory and empirical work on audiences, as well as being reflexive about the politics and ethics of their research. Inspired by this trajectory in feminist film theory and cultural studies, and having enjoyed writing many essays that read deliciously queer subtexts into films, I culminated my MA in Film Studies with a multi-disciplinary dissertation investigating the complexities of lesbian representation, desire, and identification within popular Hollywood cinema.

Combining analyses of audience, text, and context, I scrutinised and challenged the dominance of theoretical text-based constructions and definitions of the lesbian spectator, but not to simply replace textual determinism with a celebration of autonomous audience activity, which would be equally monolithic, but to explore queer complexity and contradiction by opening out the study to these different approaches. So instead of stating my allegiance and loyalty to either feminist film theory and its typical reliance on psychoanalytic paradigms, queer theory, a cultural historical approach, or audience research, I explored the insights and possibilities that these critical approaches offer in their own right as well as in dialogue with each other, investigating points of ambiguity, intersection, and/or contradiction, whilst acknowledging that neither of them can ever offer any "truths" of a lesbian audience, or of meaning and interpretation, since a lesbian (or indeed, any) audience is not a homogeneous mass and meaning and identification will always be multiple and shifting. This integrative structure avoided privileging one discourse over another, or of conveniently fitting the audience study into a structure defined by textual readings, by creating a dynamic and dialectical relationship between the chosen texts, their contexts, and the viewers.

However, whilst the ethnographic aspect of this study helped to avoid the narrowness of theoretical abstraction, I became acutely aware of the methodological limitations of questionnaires, which have been both designed and interpreted. Indeed, although I don't agree, critics might argue that audience research is nothing more than displaced textual analysis, in which words, rather than images, are interpreted and "fixed" by the researcher.[6] More significantly, I found myself increasingly interested in the creativity and complexity of individual encounters with films, and how they are framed by more phenomenological questions. Even as I knew that my interest in (and the importance of) locating the material body in relation to its socio-political context, and addressing questions about sexual identity, gender, race and class etc., would continue to inform my research, I started to question whether the bodily and emotional aspects of viewing, so pertinent to me, were being permanently deferred and immobilised behind the imposition of discourse. Whilst a Foucauldian-inspired approach to the discursive body has undoubtedly aided a feminist deconstruction of sex and gender norms, revealing the power of ever-changing disciplinary systems to produce "normalised" embodiment from the outside, it does not consider how the body *itself* might react back and influence discourse. In this sense, the body is only ever epistemological and never a material, physical, and biological object that can itself be a focus of investigation and a location of experience and meaning. As such, Vivian Sobchack writes that 'scholarly interest has been focused less on the capacity of films to physically arouse us to meaning than on what such sensory cinematic appeal reveals about the rise and fall of classical narrative, or the contemporary transmedia structure of the entertainment industry, or the desires of our culture for the distractions of immediate sensory immersion in an age of pervasive mediation' (2004: 57).

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[6] However, I believe that this can be challenged through careful reflexivity and, where possible, by privileging respondents' words over the researcher's interpretations.

So at the same time as fully understanding women's troubled history with the body and reductionism, I do not think that writing about the immediacy of this lived body experience and interaction (which thereby reduces the distance between cinema, perception and the body) is either essentialist or biologically deterministic. Indeed, I am in complete agreement with Chris Shilling when he argues that we can 'conceptualize the body as a simultaneously biological and social phenomenon that is both shaped by but irreducible to contemporary social relations and structures' (2003: 182). What becomes clear, then, as I review the film theories that have influenced and informed my academic development so far, is that I have always been most intrigued by the relationship between film and its audience, and have moved progressively from exterior to interior relationships. If my MA dissertation was about deconstructing the "self" and then putting the fragments back together, aware that these fragments do not form a "whole" but are instead a fiction (a fiction we are, nonetheless, forced into believing and living in order to function and/or to be visible), then the sensuous turn towards my bodily experience is not about "transcending" or denying this fragmented nature of identity, but about exploring how it may be addressed and how it may respond holistically.

A sensuous turn

Momentarily moving away from the (secondary) concepts that are always constructed *after* a lived experience, what about the potential for colour, sound, rhythmic current, movement, texture, pace and the force of a film's body in motion to affect embodiment, challenging and subverting the very social, cultural, and political discourses that attempt to shape and fix viewers into "ideal" form? And thus how film can offer pleasurable and desirous experiences and extensions that are both inside *and outside* frameworks of

image, narrative and representation. Yvonne Tasker makes reference to this in her investigation into the complexities and multiple pleasures of action cinema, another popular yet critically devalued genre:

> Whilst valuable work has been undertaken on, for example, cinema-going as a social practice, *the cinema as a sensuous experience is too often neglected*. Features such as the breathtaking nature of visual spectacle, or the feelings of exhilaration at the expansive landscapes in which the hero operates, are fundamental to action cinema. (1993: 6, my emphasis)

Furthermore, if I respect the kind of feminism that asks questions about the individual, and values the personal voice, then why had I internalised such a distrust of my own emotional involvement in and response to film/aesthetics? Of course, to continue on from Tasker's words above, '[s]uch features are also, inevitably, rather difficult to render in academic prose' (*ibid*), and so, as Gaylyn Studlar observes, '[f]eminists cannot help but be wary that such a leap might, in fact, be a hurling of self into a yawning theoretical abyss' (1990: 77). Concerned, then, about seeing my mum's anxiety reflected in the academic appraisal of my work, and of writing merely descriptive accounts of my embodied experiences with screendance, it wasn't until I came across branches of film philosophy that I discovered, to borrow Andrew Dudley's words, that I could 'restrain the naïve romanticism and exuberance of phenomenological criticism while retaining its goal of going beyond the text by means of fructifying experience of the text' (1985: 630). Therefore, in putting my "self" into this thesis, I am attempting to bring together two sides of my viewing experience, combining the pleasure that comes from identifying and interpreting signs with the immediacy of a sensory and then reflexive experience of and engagement with my chosen films. In so doing, I hope to do justice to the complexities of the viewing experience, avoid the dangers of interpreting other peoples' words, and more significantly, engage in a feminist practice that focuses on the subjective lived experience of my own body. Since society perpetually objectifies

the female body, specifying what "normative" embodiment ought to be, this can be seen as an alternative and more affirmative account of female corporeality. I am thus in complete agreement with Studlar when she writes that a phenomenology of feminist film theory:

> may help reconceptualize women's experience with film in such a way as to permit the unification of theory, social experience, and creative film practice. A descriptive method that illuminates both the structures of textual operation and the quality (dare we say, depth) of filmic experience can contribute to the formulation of alternative, non-sexist modes of expression and must do so if feminist film theory is to fulfil its promise as political praxis.   (Studlar 1990: 76)

Critical summary: film as an embodied epistemology

Important work that addresses the sensuality of the cinematic experience, and has thus informed this thesis, includes Richard Dyer's article on 'Entertainment and Utopia.' This examines non-representational signs in the Musical, and how judgements based on 'taken-for-granted' terms such as 'escape' and 'wish-fulfilment,' are generally made to either dismiss a genre or to resist studying it seriously (1985: 222). He argues that whilst the utopian qualities of this popular genre do not offer any practical or political solutions to the problems and realities of everyday life, it both responds to and mediates socially generated needs through 'the feelings it embodies… [P]resent[ing], head-on as it were, what utopia would *feel like* rather than how it would be organised. It thus works at the level of sensibility' (*ibid*, my emphasis). Yet in responding only to certain needs arising from specific societal inadequacies, it ultimately delegitimises others by ignoring them, and particularly 'class, patriarchal and sexual struggles' (228). As a consequence, and despite popular entertainment always being complex and contradictory, it largely operates in the service of the dominant socioeconomic order: consumer capitalism. Similarly, in her article on 'Dance Narratives and Fantasies of Achievement,' Angela McRobbie acknowledges how '[a]rt is always an emotional

space' (1997: 227), and how visions of a dancing utopia specifically provide young girls

and women with 'symbolic escape route[s] from … more normative expectations'

(217). The generic importance of physical movement particular to dance narratives (and

musicals), thereby allow women a certain degree of freedom. At the same time,

however, romantic storylines and fetishistic camerawork act as strategies of

containment, refusing simplistic readings of this popular and derided form as either

subversive or disempowering. Interested in these patterns of marginalisation and

assimilation, McRobbie explores how dance might be considered as 'other', non-white,

working class etc., and so in need of domesticating and taming, but equally how it

might be aligned with dominant identities. Both of these articles, then, address the ways

in which kinaesthetic appeal is set against visual and narrative representational signs,

but they ultimately give more focus to the underlying workings of ideology than to the

meanings that come from a direct embodied experience of and response to cinema. In

other words, whilst they question ocularcentric paradigms, the object of analysis is still

restricted to the film/context itself and not to the entire process of representation, which

would encompass the viewer and her/his process of embodied interpretation.

Tom Gunning (1986, 1989) and Miriam Hansen (1993, 1999) have both stressed the

sensual and immersive qualities of contemporary film by drawing upon Siegfried

Kracauer and Walter Benjamin's early work on cinema as a modernist medium.[7] Instead

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[7] Early film theorists, such as Sergei Eisenstein, Siegfried Kracauer, and Walter Benjamin, all addressed the sensuous qualities of cinema, and how it teaches us through the body. Eisenstein considered film to be a profoundly expressive medium that appeals as much to the senses as it does to the emotions and the intellect. Writing about the effects of montage, he refers to its 'strength of physical palpability' (1942: 32), and Jane Gaines writes that in 'Eisenstein's theory of social change and cinema, the bodily senses *lead* the spectator, whose involvement is not strictly intellectual' (1999: 88, original emphasis). Later, Kracauer contends that cinema 'communicates less as a whole with consciousness than in a fragmentary manner with the corporeal material layers' (Kracauer quoted in Hansen 1993: 462). And in Benjamin's famous 'The Work of Art In The Age of Mechanical Reproduction', he talks about the 'physical shock effect' of film, 'which is … primarily tactile, being based on changes of place and focus which periodically assail the spectator' (1999: 748). This physical contact can 'bring things "closer" spatially

of drawing the spectator in through narrative action or empathetic identification with characters, early cinema worked to "show" something to its audience, interacting with and eliciting powerful physical sensations in them. Similarly, contemporary cinema is concerned with these 'aesthetics of attraction,' since it is both a presentational as well as a representational medium and process (Gunning: 1989). Hansen therefore critiques psychoanalysis in her (1993) essay 'Early Cinema, Late Cinema,' for ignoring this materiality of affect and for focusing solely upon the text's psychical and ultimately dualistic "meanings." In both Gunning and Hansen's view, the sensorium of kinetic thrills, shocks, and excitement presented by cinema, provides an *overall experience* that affects the body of the viewer as much as the mind.

In his seminal book, *The Philosophy of Horror*, Noël Carroll addresses two fundamental (and paradoxical) questions concerning this genre: why are audiences' disturbed by horror (when they know it is fictional), and why do they seek out filmic experiences that disturb them? Rejecting the psychoanalytic explanations of disavowal and identification, Carroll argues that the defining element of modern horror is the audiences' emotional response to it, which he terms '*art-horror*' as opposed to '*natural* [or "real" life, everyday] *horror*' (1990: 8, 13, original emphasis).[8] Through an interdisciplinary investigation that utilises analytic philosophy, cognitive psychology,

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and humanly' and thus, the reaction to filmic/mechanical reproduction is 'characterized by the direct, intimate fusion of visual and emotional enjoyment … Such fusion is of great significance' (735, 744-745).

[8] Carroll addresses critiques waged at cognitive approaches to film by paying attention to the emotions. However, his attempt at constructing a cognitive model explaining the fascination of horror is also a counterargument against the dominant psychoanalytic and ideological models in film studies at the time. This book therefore continues his attack/analysis of these approaches from his previous work, *Mystifying Movies: Fads and Fallacies in Contemporary Film Theory* (1988) and *Philosophical Problems of Classical Film Theory* (1988), despite the fact that both approaches are concerned with increasing the cultural value of horror.

and literary theory, he proposes a 'thought theory' that explores how horror is designed and constructed in order to elicit the appropriate emotional effects in the viewer. He thus suggests that simply imagining horror scenarios, without irrationally believing in them, is enough for the spectator to enter into an emotional state. However, this does not make these emotions any less genuine, because as he writes himself, 'if it were a pretend emotion, one would think that it could be engaged at will. I could elect to remain unmoved … I could refuse to make believe I was horrified. But I don't think that that was really an option for those, like myself, who were overwhelmingly struck by it … And, of course, another reason to think that we are genuinely art-horrified rather than pretending to be in such a state is that we don't seem to be aware that we are playing a game of make-believe' (74). So although focussing on a different genre, this study addresses (in part) one of the driving themes of my own research, in that it places importance on the (active) viewers' experience of film and the genuine emotional response that this entails. This works to collapse many of the distinctions between filmic and textual discourse. However, Carroll prioritises objectivity, and in restricting his study to content analysis alone, can be critiqued for making generalisations that fail to consider actual audiences, or how the body might respond to and influence both the overall experience and meaning of film. Indeed, he argues that the viewer's emotional state is essentially distinct from their physical response, and only considers the former in his model explaining the desire to consume 'art-horror.' Therefore, perhaps it is fair to say that in unearthing the features of the film that give rise to emotions, there is an element of explaining these emotions away in terms of a cognitive disembodiment.

Linda Williams's now canonical essay on "body genres" explores how horror, melodrama, and pornography are designed to have profound and gratuitous effects on

the body of the spectator, eliciting physical responses (terror, tears, and sexual arousal) by displaying mostly female bodies in the grip of uncontrollable emotions. It is this corporeal connection and mimicry between the body on screen and the body of the spectator that marks these genres as aesthetically disreputable, explaining their 'especially low cultural status' (1991: 4). But then Williams problematizes this process of empathy and mimicry by considering gender-specific cultural attitudes embedded in these responses, arguing that identification is much more complicated than simplistic mimicry. This is because whilst the fantasy scenarios on offer may well appear to be mere 'spectacles of feminine victimization' (6), they actually provide oscillating categories of identification for the female as well as the male spectator, because 'even in the most extreme displays of feminine masochistic suffering, there is always a component of either power or pleasure for the woman victim' (8). Consequently, identification and subject positions 'are not as gender-linked and as gender-fixed as has often been supposed' (*ibid*). And since fantasy is not the opposite of reality, but what reality forecloses, these fantasy-genres tell us a great deal about the ever-changing differences between gendered identities that vary both over time and across cultures. Therefore, to 'dismiss them as bad excess whether of explicit sex, violence, or emotion, or as bad perversions, whether of masochism or sadism, is not to address their function as cultural problem-solving' (12). In seeking to understand the enduring appeal and success of these kinds of body genres, then, Williams explores the body's response to a filmic experience as a valid part of analysis, refusing to simply objectify it or dismiss these genres as either gross or ideologically duplicitous, whilst simultaneously using a psychoanalytic approach to their fantasy structures in order to expose ideological investments. This intervention in film theory thus engages with the materiality of film, paving the way for more experimental approaches to the filmic experience/aesthetics

that recognise the body as a 'sentient, sensual, and sensible ensemble of materialised capacities and agency' (Sobchack 2004: 2).

However, despite all of this scholarly interest in the bodily, emotional, and sensate aspects of cinema being important in its own right, none of it *fully* addresses the complexity of an embodied engagement with and response to film, or as Jane Gaines puts it, 'a body-first way of knowing' (1999: 94). Indeed, in a later article Linda Williams writes about the sense of embarrassment she finds in much of the feminist scholarship on melodrama, including her own earlier work that reveals an 'unwillingness to recognise the importance of melodramatic pathos – of being moved by a moving picture' (1998: 47). And this ties in with Vivian Sobchack's observation that, 'most film theorists still seem either embarrassed or bemused by bodies that often act wantonly and crudely at the movies, involuntarily countering the fine-grained sensibilities, intellectual discriminations, and vocabulary of critical reflection' (2004: 56-57). Within the academy, we are rigorously trained to maintain a critical distance from our object of study, using theoretical constructs to carefully explain our experience, 'or perhaps, more aptly, *to explain it away*' (*ibid*: 52, my emphasis). So whilst it can be difficult to know how to write about a multisensory and sensuous experience of film (as acknowledged by Tasker and Studlar above), to do so works to respect the fact that intelligence(s) are diverse and interactive, that we think about the world in *all* the ways that we experience it, and that scholarship does not have to abstract the mind (so much) from the body.

The phenomenological paradigm

Despite Dudley Andrew's rallying suggestion, originally written in 1978, that 'phenomenology claims to be closer, not necessarily to truth, but to cinema and our experience of it,' there was negligible interest in film phenomenology from the mid-1970s until the 1990s (1985: 632).[9] With increasing importance being placed on the relationship between moving image and spectator, and the need to address questions of agency, pleasure, and the body in relation to the gradual transformation of cinema into a complex and multifaceted form of experience, and a wide range of textual objects and mediums, the renewal of interest in phenomenology was spearheaded by Vivian Sobchack's (1992) *The Address of the Eye*. Moving away from the kind of transcendental and idealist phenomenology previously rejected both from within and without film studies, Sobchack builds upon Maurice Merleau-Ponty's existential phenomenology.[10] And along with her later book, *Carnal Thoughts* (2004) develops a theory of film that is, in her own words, 'a reflective method that is responsive to the viewing experience as it is variously lived, rather than only theorized' (2009: 444). The meanings that come from this are thus 'spatially and temporally embodied, lived, and

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[9] This was largely due to reaction against the phenomenologically inflected work of people like Benjamin, Kracauer, and Andre Bazin, which, by the late 1960s, had led to the dominance within academic film studies of the semiotic, psychoanalytic, and ideological approaches of Christian Metz, Jacques Lacan, and Louis Althusser. Considered more "scientific," rational, and politically important, it was in this context, as Vivian Sobchack writes, that 'phenomenology came under critical attack on both sides of the Atlantic. Not only were its transcendental (and often theological) leanings deemed "idealist" and "metaphysical," but also its foundational grounding in the description of "direct," "immediate," and "subjective" experience and its celebration of the cinema's "revelatory" capacity seemed evidence of "naïve realism"' (2009: 441).

[10] I am not grounded in philosophy and so am undoubtedly offering a simple explanation, but from my limited understanding, what separates Merleau-Ponty from the transcendental phenomenology established by Edmund Husserl, is the relation between experience and the body. For Husserl, consciousness and the transcendental ego are separate from reality and the world, and embodiment is constituted through thought, in that we identify our experience as inhabiting our body. Thus, agency and experience are disembodied because they are "thought first." Merleau-Ponty, on the other hand, moves away from this subject/object divide in order to stress the embodied nature of human consciousness. For him, the body *itself* is the subject of perception, and not the mind, soul, or transcendental ego. As Taylor Carmen writes, '[e]mbodiment thus has a philosophical significance for Merleau-Ponty that it could not have for Husserl. Indeed, taking the problem of embodiment seriously, as Merleau-Ponty does, entails a radical reassessment of the very conceptual distinctions on which Husserl's enterprise rests' (1999: 206).

valued by an objective subject' and, as such, are 'always already qualified by the mutable specificities and constraints of history and culture' (2004: 2). It is this experiential methodology in context, that I am most indebted to and inspired by. Making Sobchack the key thinker of the (phenomenological) approaches in this thesis, along with Laura Marks (2000, 2002) and Jennifer Barker (2009), who similarly build upon Maurice Merleau-Ponty's existential phenomenology, to varying degrees.

Merleau-Ponty

In *Phenomenology of Perception,* Merleau-Ponty attempts to describe our lived *experience* of things, suggesting that is through the body that we perceive, relate to, and make sense of the world before we are able to consciously reflect upon it. Or in other words, our consciousness is materially embodied. Often, then, we may know/sense things on a feeling/material (rather than a thought) level, and it is only until we have had time to reflect upon it that we can then apply the theories and discourses that we use to explain what our bodies already knew.[11]

> In short, my body is not only an object among all other objects,
> a nexus of sensible qualities among others, but an object which
> is *sensitive to* all the rest, which reverberates to all sounds,
> vibrates to all colours, and provides words with their primordial
> significance through the way in which it receives them.
> (Merleau-Ponty 1962: 236, original emphasis)

Therefore, the relationship between the self and the world/other objects is mimetic, and since '[t]he body is borne towards tactile experience by all its surfaces and all its organs simultaneously' (*ibid*: 317), this sensuous proximity and material connection creates meaning, enabling the body to "become" what it sees. Or, '[i]n other words: to look at an object is to inhabit it, and from this habitation to grasp all things in terms of the

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[11] I have taken and adapted this term from Vivian Sobchack's chapter, 'What My Fingers Knew: The Cinesthetic Subject, or Vision in the Flesh' (2004: 53-84).

aspect which they present to it…Thus every object is the mirror of all others' (*ibid*: 68). This sense of closeness, of "becoming", habitation, and mirroring, transforms the hierarchical relationship between subject and object so that subjects take on the (material) qualities of objects, and objects take on the qualities of the subject, namely their knowledge and perceptive qualities.

The film's body

Sobchack extends this by stressing the intersubjective and dialectical nature of the filmic experience, in which both spectator, filmmaker, and film are all in communication, 'all *viewers viewing*, engaged as participants in dynamically and directionally reversible acts that reflexively and reflectively constitute the *perception of expression* and the *expression of perception*' (1992: 5, original emphasis). Just as viewers take in films through their bodies (and not just their eyes) *before* reflecting on and processing them, film is similarly embodied, with 'an existential presence in its own right' (*ibid*: 216). This is not merely metaphorical or a reference to a film's mechanical body, because although the camera's vision guides the viewer the film's body is not reducible to camerawork, director's vision, or editing etc. Granted these are all, in part, responsible for choices made and effects rendered, but a film is much more than the sum of these choices/vision. This is evident in the way that a film can have its own attitude towards its subject(s), and one that is not shared with it's writer, director, camera-operator, viewer etc. And evidence of this can be found in the director's regular checking of rushes, since filmed footage does not always correlate to the way in which it has been seen through the camera when shot. To quote Sobchack, '[t]he "film's body" is not visible in the film except for its intentional agency and diacritical motion. It is not anthropomorphic, but it is also not reducible to the cinematic apparatus (in the same way

that we are not reducible to our material physiognomy); it is discovered and located only reflexively as a quasi-subjective and embodied "eye" that has a discrete – if ordinarily prepersonal and anonymous – existence' (2004: 66, f48).

Film cannot, therefore, be reduced merely to a visual, psychic, or ideological experience (although it is all of these), because it is a subject/object that 'locates its own address, its own perceptual and expressive experiences of being and becoming' (Sobchack 1994: 41). And through our embodied 'address of the eye,' we, in turn, inhabit, mirror, and "become" in response to its expression, via a simultaneously haptic, tactile, and visual language. As such, the filmic experience is a pre-reflective interaction between the performing bodies of both film and viewer, and so what we come to "know" isn't simply conceptual but about what 'meaning, and value emerge carnally through our senses' (*op. cit.* 2004: 8).

The mimetic body and haptic visuality

Also drawing upon Merleau-Ponty's (1962: 253-4) suggestion that our body is our anchor in the world, allowing us to move into situations and take them up rather than objectify and dominate, Laura U Marks explores mimetic ability and the materiality of haptic vision in both *The Skin of the Film* (2000), *Touch* (2002), and her later journal article, 'Haptic Visuality: Touching with the Eye' (2004). In these, she traces the ways in which 'cinema can appeal to the senses that it cannot technically represent: the senses of touch, smell, and taste' (2000: 129). As such, Marks suggests that seeing is located in the *whole* of the body; that 'the eye [is] like an organ of touch;' and that looking signals the desire for a form of reciprocal contact between the thing perceived and the perceiver (Marks 2004: 79). By then drawing upon our own 'resources of memory and

imagination to complete' the images we see/feel expressed on the surface skin of the

film, we, the perceiver/'experiencer' can sensuously absorb, connect to, and mimic what

we see rather than be drawn into the depths of narrative (*op. cit.* 2000: 163).[12]

In this way, film can be experienced as a tactile medium and epistemology *as well* as a

visual one, bridging the distance between subject and object, viewer and viewed that is

so necessary for a voyeuristic gaze, and thereby realigning vision 'with respect rather

than mastery' (160). This is particularly important when watching bodies that deviate

from the hegemonic ideal, as I will argue in my chapter on dance and disability.

However, this is not to negate the undeniable fact that we need and engage with both

optical and haptic forms of vision for different and equally important reasons, and that

there is never a clear-cut division between them. So instead of simple condemnation,

Marks attempts 'to open up visuality along the *continua* of the distant and the

embodied, and the optical and the haptic' (132, my emphasis). This provides an

understanding of how haptic visuality, in Marks's own words,

> is not about power but about yielding; or even that the object takes on
> more power than the subject. Haptic images push us out of cinema's
> illusionary depth and invite our eyes to linger on the surface of the
> image. Rather than pull us into an idealized space, they help us feel the
> connectivity between ourselves, the image and its material support, and
> the world to which the image connects us.   (2004: 81)

Since I agree with Marks's assertion that 'in order to have the kind of radical potential I

saw in them, [haptic images and haptic visuality] need to be *motivated* by something

radical' (2004: 82, original emphasis), I would argue that it is the film's intention to

deconstruct exclusionary and binaristic mind-sets, that encourages a haptic yielding (to

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[12] Craig Sinclair 'coined the term "experiencer," an awkward yet suitable multisensory and yet sense-neutral expression to describe someone who "partakes of film". …[He] hope[s] by using this term to overcome the prevalent and persistent logic that has already hegemonically inscribed the idea that film experiencing is primarily a visual endeavour' (2003: 17-18).

a transformative respect of difference). After all, haptic images are being used more and more in advertising, computer games, music TV, as well as in popular film, so what was once radically experimental has now been incorporated into and put to the service of dominant ideologies, namely capitalism. As such, it is of paramount importance that haptic visuality is balanced with critical distance so that we remain vigilant to what we are being "sold" through our bodies, and to what exactly we are yielding? Furthermore, this yielding is *also* dependent upon how we "meet" the film, and whether our viewing bodies share the same political, ethical, and moral investments, so that we are not 'other' to what the film assumes. So whilst film *can* be a medium of ethical experience, as Jennifer Barker asserts, it is only '[w]hen viewers and films share certain attitudes, tasks, or situations, [that] they will move in similar ways' (2009: 77).

A critique of phenomenology

This balance between the film object and what we bring to it as embodied viewers is important, because whilst an image can be haptic or optical, 'haptic *visuality* is a term of reception [and so] [t]he viewer can choose, to some degree, whether to see optically or haptically' (Marks 2004: 81). Indeed, a valid critique of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology is that he only ever refers to the body in the most general of terms, as *the* body rather than *this* body. Yet human beings inhabit or experience their physical bodies in vastly different ways, obviously dependent upon culture and identity formations such as gender, physical (dis)ability, race, class, and sexual orientation etc., their subjection to the vicissitudes of power and dominance, and upon childhood/life experience and history. In other words, not *all* of (felt bodily) experience is available to everybody, and haptic visuality can create a feeling of vulnerability since there is less control in an interaction than there is in distanced objectification. Not every*body*, then,

will move with and be moved in the same way, and just as some may be ambivalent, others may actively resist the pull of the film. Therefore, as Marks so rightly advises:

> When we speak of embodied perception, we must include the embodied *blocks* to perception and to full participation in the world…Thus, if we consider that perception is subtractive, we can respect the fact that perception is not an infinite return to the buffet table of lived experiences but a walk through the minefield of embodied memory. Ultimately phenomenology can account for how the body encodes power relations somatically. It can acknowledge that embodiment is a matter of individual life-maps as well as cultural difference.   (2000: 152, original emphasis)

<u>Simone de Beauvoir</u>

Whilst Merleau-Ponty has been justly criticised for excluding the specificity of women's corporeal experience, and for citing male subjectivity as a universal, Simone de Beauvoir's groundbreaking form of political existential phenomenology cites patriarchy as one such block to women's 'full participation in the world' (*ibid*), and thereby redresses this critique. In *The Second Sex*, de Beauvoir actively explores the complexity of sexual difference as materialised in her own experience and in the lived realities of women. Rejecting the idea that there any universal "truths" about women, she writes that women 'have no past, no history, no religion of their own' (1953: 19), because 'the whole of feminine history has been man-made' (*ibid*: 159). Through this alienation from our own embodied capacities, she draws parallels between women and other oppressed groups, writing that '[j]ust as in America there is no Negro problem, but rather a white problem; just as anti-Semitism is not a Jewish problem; it is our problem; so the woman problem has always been a man's problem' (*ibid*). Beauvoir therefore asserts that women experience their phenomenological bodies in ways that have already been written by the dominant group, which leads to her most famous statement, 'One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman' (295). In exploring and demystifying these myths of female difference, she thus leaves space to imagine what

women might *become*. So whilst her work continues to be contested, and fellow feminists have even accused her of being male-identified, de Beauvoir originated the vocabulary we needed for analysing social constructions of sex and gender, and for giving us an insight into the real effects that they have on our lived experience.[13] It seems obvious, then, that her existential phenomenology will infuse this thesis even when not directly cited, and particularly in my chapter on avant-garde feminist screendance, inspiring me as I attempt to shake off the shackles of phallocentrism and confer meaning through my own embodied consciousness.

The tactile eye

Jennifer Barker's more recent attempt at describing the tactile dimensions of cinema is an extension of Vivian Sobchack, Laura Marks, and Linda Williams's work, since she argues that *all* genres are "body genres," with viewers identifying and haptically interacting with the film's body and not merely with the characters on screen. Through close, phenomenological, and what she refers to as 'textural' analyses of selected films from a variety of genres, national cinemas, and time periods, she illustrates the different forms of tactility (tactile, kinaesthetic, and proprioceptive) that are experienced and expressed within three different regions of the viewers' and films' bodies; the skin, musculature, and viscera. Describing exactly how the mind and body, vision and touch are thus married in the viewing experience, via a sensuous language that is itself tactile, she explores the ways in which 'viewer and film are two differently constructed but equally muscular bodies, acting perhaps in tandem or perhaps at odds with each other, but always in relation to each other' (2009: 72). Her imaginative and creative form of

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[13] Ruth Evans writes that 'Beauvoir's body politics has had a bad feminist press. *The Second Sex*'s description of female sexuality as holes and slime have all been subject to worst case readings, confirming Beauvoir as a hopeless misogynist, mortgaged to what Atack describes as the Sartrean "hiérarchie ontologico-charnelle" [ontologico-corporeal hierarchy], where the negative metaphors of the in-itself align viscosity with femininity' (1998: 15).

textural analysis works to challenge the critique that phenomenological approaches to film *only* provide theoretical underpinnings and generalisations about embodied cinematic experience, rather than specific and detailed analysis of particular films. It has therefore provided a more applicable analytical approach to film, outlining a conceptual and methodological framework for my own textural analysis, which thus helps to explain my sensuous immersion into film. However, elements of the critique of phenomenology made above are also applicable to Barker, since despite providing an account of her own female embodied relationship to film, she is inattentive to other questions of (cultural, racial, sexual, physical etc.,) difference and the resulting structural issues of power relations. Barker only ever refers to viewers' bodies in the most general terms, and I am more interested in accounting for the particular specificities of both the viewer and film's embodiment, and the political ramifications and effects of this embodied interaction.

<u>Other scholars deserving of mention</u>

Due to the multi-disciplinary nature of this thesis, many more scholars have nourished my work than I have room here to review, but a couple are particularly important to mention. Elizabeth Grosz's form of corporeal feminism tackles questions about how we occupy sex-differentiated bodies, which, along with de Beauvoir, has simultaneously helped me to build a stronger conception of the (female) embodied spectator whilst addressing the criticism of phenomenology that I have just made. In *Volatile Bodies*, she attempts to transcend dualistic thinking by arguing against the social constructionist's 'somatophobia.' Using psychoanalysis, Deleuzian philosophy, and phenomenology to explore how bodies are 'affected by other bodies' (1994: 12), she develops a physical model that explores our felt, lived relations. As Grosz writes,

considering 'the body as a discontinuous, non-totalisable series of processes, flows, energies, speeds and durations, may be of great value to feminisms attempt to re-conceive bodies outside the binary oppositions imposed on the body' (164). And although she does not specifically analyse film, the queer fluidity of this language works to kinaesthetically convey how bodies seep and merge with other, non-human (motion picture) bodies that move in a similar way.

Like Laura Marks, Elena del Río writes about the tactile relationship between film and viewer, but in a more literal way. In her essay on 'The Body as Foundation of the Screen,' she explains how we are able to "touch" the film without *literally* touching it, writing that '[a]s the image becomes translated into a bodily response, body and image no longer function as discrete units, but as surfaces in contact' (1996: 101). This is not to suggest that the body either "disappears" or is flat and superficial, but that in imaginatively and creatively engaging with film, it 'is always outside its visible form, [and] that it constantly extends itself beyond its objective spatial and temporal boundaries' (102). In this way, the body is forever in process and never "complete", but is instead, as Merleau-Ponty writes, 'the fabric into which all objects are woven, and it is, at least in relation to the perceived world, the general instrument of my 'comprehension'' (1962: 235). Del Río then goes on to use Merleau-Ponty's concept of *flesh* to describe this reciprocal and reversible relationship, 'in which subject and object inhabit each other by participating in a common condition of embodied sense' (*op. cit.* 1996: 103). And thus, this concept of *flesh* disrupts the rigid binaries of subject/object relations, and externality and interiority.

Whilst this blurring of boundaries can elicit a curious and sensuous surrender to 'a constant activity of reciprocal re-alignment and inflection', it can also, as acknowledged above by Marks, be unsettling and potentially threatening, which is why haptic images are so often used in horror cinema (*ibid*). This also helps explain the often-polarised response to both sensuous filmmaking and analysis. Yet it is precisely this queer ambiguity of corporeal cinema, with its (deliciously dangerous) disregard for secure borders and "fixed" positions, that appeals to me most, since it allows for a more fluid conception of subjectivity. As such, I often use the concept of queerness as a synonym for a more generalised sense of liminality, particularly in chapter two, rather than engage with the theorisation of 'queerness' itself.

The technology of film can extend the boundaries of what we are, becoming a part of our skin, our *flesh*. And it is precisely this merger and expansion that can endow "our" (filmic and human) bodies with an ethical experience, reducing the distance between our selves and 'others.' As Sobchack so elegantly puts it, this notion of *flesh* 'expresses our desire to enfold other subjects and objects (and often the world itself), to know their materiality and objectivity intimately and, indeed, to embrace their alterity *as our own*' (2004: 289, original emphasis). This highlights how in stressing the embodied nature and experience of film, we can simultaneously stress its importance as a political tool, as a way to look at, interact with, "touch" and be touched by what and whom we may not otherwise have the opportunity to know. And whilst acknowledging that tactility and mimesis can never replicate *actual* embodied experience, moving with 'others' can potentially offer a deeper and more embodied understanding of difference, helping to bridge these differences (even if only partially and momentarily) as well as compliment a hermeneutic approach to knowledge.

Why screendance and existing research in the field

Since dance as an art form/practice *and* a textual and representational form has been historically devalued, largely due to its feminized association with bodily excess, it seems to me to be a perfect subject for a sensuous analysis, which has itself been criticised for its "excessively subjective touchy-feely" aesthetic, and for its descriptive bias. So whilst I agree with Angela McRobbie's aforementioned claim that dance 'is always an emotional space' (1997: 227), I also acknowledge the inherent danger in this statement. This is because it can contribute to a binary formation in which the feminized masses' appreciation of "low" culture is governed (and analysed) by the heart, as opposed to the "masculine" intellectuals who are governed by their heads and can be found watching and writing about experimental and avant-garde films with "proper" theoretical abstraction. This is why, apart from my own eclectic enjoyment, I consider a spectrum of films rather than focusing solely upon the popular narrative dance films that I first watched when growing up. In considering what Spanish flamenco, disabled dance, avant-garde feminist screendance, and popular Hollywood dance film all have in common, I will work to break down these simplistic oppositions between high and low art.

This historical devaluation of dance (and dance in film) has also led to a relative dearth of scholarly work that specifically researches screendance, (or dance film, cine dance, and dance in film as it is also variously known). As Lesley Vize discovers in her exploration of music and the body in dance film, '[a]lthough there is a considerable literature about film music, Hollywood musicals, music video and MTV, *little work has been produced on 'dance film'* (Vize 2003: 24, my emphasis). Whilst this does appear to be gradually changing, particularly with the (2010) launch of *The International*

Journal of Screendance, there are still only a handful of academic texts that focus exclusively on screendance.[14] These include Stephanie Jordan and Dave Allen's (1993), *Parallel Lines. Media Representations of Dance*, the first (and only) anthology of essays to explore how dance has been represented on British television. Yet however interesting in its scope, considering as it does the role of dance in a variety of practices that range from pop-videos, popular dance programmes, and experimental dance, it is aimed principally at a dance audience, and largely focuses its debate around the translation of "live" dance to the televised screen. As a result, dance that has been made specifically for the camera is only touched upon.

Sherril Dodd's (2001), *Dance on Screen: Genres and Media From Hollywood to Experimental Art*, addresses the absence of contemporary scholarship examining the links between dance and film, providing a comprehensive introduction to the rich diversity of screen dance genres, and an interdisciplinary exploration into moving bodies, the camera and spectator. She considers a wide range of mediums, including the Hollywood blockbuster, adverts, music videos, dances commissioned for television, broadcasts of live performances, and digital dance, but is less concerned with a multisensory approach to dance film, and more interested in framing her book in response to critical perspectives that prioritise theatre stage aesthetics. She thus works to challenge the assumption that live dance is superior to dance on screen, and importantly explores dance in film as an art *in its own right*, with camera and editing creating the

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[14] Intended for practitioners, researchers, curators and activists engaged with screendance, *The International Journal of Screendance* is 'a new peer-reviewed publication, [and] the first-ever scholarly journal dedicated to the growing area of the inter-disciplinary practice of screendance.' Quote found on the journal's website, at: http://journals.library.wisc.edu/public/journals/6/pages/about/ Accessed: 08/08/13.

dance as much as the dancer. Whilst this has undoubtedly paved the way for my own research, I am more interested in examining the intimate relationship between film and viewer.

Judy Mitoma *et al*'s (2002), *Envisioning Dance on Film and Video*, is the first comprehensive and illustrated reference guide to the history of dance on camera. It contains fifty original essays by dance film professionals, including choreographers, filmmakers, film editors and producers, archivists, historians, critics, and scholars, and is accompanied by a DVD featuring excerpts of forty films and videos. It is thus an invaluable pedagogical tool with fascinating and difficult to find audio-visual documentation. However, its primary objective is in creating a historical record of the significance of dance on film, and in building a dance on film/video community, so essays are around general themes that aim to help elucidate the process of making dance film and video. In this sense, it is directed more towards dance film practitioners than it is to film scholars interested in a more theoretical approach to screendance.

Although it is not specifically about screendance, Karen Pearlman's (2009) book, *Cutting Rhythms*, is more in tune with my own research interests in that it covers a number of theoretical approaches to rhythm in film editing, both describing them and illustrating their practical application. And by drawing upon her experience as a dancer, Pearlman deepens these understandings and definitions. Of most interest and significance to me is her chapter on editing as choreography, since it investigates how film *moves*, and specifically how its rhythms, both physical and emotional, can affect viewers' embodiment. Or in other words, the shape and form of a film's rhythms works to shape and form its viewer. So whilst her book is undoubtedly intended as a practical

guide for filmmakers, developing viable creative strategies for the enhancement of their (rhythmical) process, it is also relevant for scholars 'interested in an integrated somatic, kinaesthetic, and cognitive approach to the study and creation of rhythms in film' (252).

Erin Brannigan's (2011), *Dancefilm: Choreography and the Moving Image*, is more helpful to my research, in that not only does it provide an elegant historical context of dancefilm, tracing its history from the silent film era through to the avant-garde, musicals and music videos, and to contemporary experimental dancefilms, but it also attempts to reconcile theoretical approaches drawn from both dance and film studies. This interdisciplinary approach neither privileges one nor the other as it investigates the impact that choreography has had on the filmic form, and the influence that film has had on dance. Brannigan thus argues for the specificity of dancefilm, as distinct from either art form, and thereby fills a gap in academic research. Of particular import to me is the relation she makes between kinaesthetic contagion in live dance to 'similar discussions in film theory on affectivity in the cinema' (13). However, whilst she does address the somatic response of viewers, it is more in terms of its historical context as a tool for discussing dancefilm, and less about in-depth embodied analyses of films. Furthermore, in focusing on form much more than content, she can tend to overlook how it generates meaning and operates ideologically, which are pivotal questions in my own sensuous approach to screendance.

Finally, Dee Reynolds and Matthew Reason's (2012) edited collection on *Kinesthetic* (sic) *Empathy in Creative and Cultural Practices*, is invaluable in that it includes three chapters specifically addressing the multisensory experience of and engagement with film. Adriano D'Aloia's chapter on 'Cinematic Empathy', focuses on the experience of

narrative fiction film; Guillemette Bolens looks at Charlie Chaplin's kinaesthetic

communication in his silent films; and through a close analysis, Lucy Fife Donaldson

considers the way in which *Rosemary's Baby* (Polanski, 1968) constructs a sensuous

form of engagement via the materiality of Mia farrow's performance, and its filmic

presentation. Whilst this collection is most in line with my own research interests,

drawing upon very similar embodied discourses, it does not consider the specific

combination of dance *and* film where they are both integral to a work.[15] And

considering the fact that they share many characteristics, the chapters of this thesis will

investigate the combination of these two mediums, exploring how they can enhance one

another as well as heighten the emotional/physical and political effect on the audience,

increasing somatic interconnectedness between dance, film and viewer.

Breakdown of chapters

In chapter one I will explore how the presence of dance functions politically in two of

the films from Carlos Saura's "flamenco trilogy, " both expressing and disrupting

norms and ideologies concerning Spanish national, cultural, and gendered identity. In

order to grasp how these films work as a form of embodied politics, it is necessary to

ground my analysis in the socio-political and historical context in which they are

situated. Therefore, I begin the chapter by considering the legacy of both colonialism

and Franco's long dictatorship on Spanish identity.

Chapter two will examine the potential for screendance performance to challenge (and

perhaps change) exclusionary perceptions of physical disability, through a haptic

visuality that encourages a sensuous engagement. I will also be drawing upon disability

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[15] Whilst there are chapters covering kinaesthetic empathy in relation to dance, they only consider "live" dance performance.

politics and theory, and particularly Rosemarie Garland-Thomson's (2009) contention that the 'baroque' stare can unravel familiar ways of looking at disability, offering a means of creating new understandings of embodied presence. In order to establish exactly how these films work to counter normative and dominant representations of disabled bodies, a brief history of Hollywood's depiction of disabled bodies and movement will be provided.

In chapter three I will consider key interpretations, distinctions and similarities between the work of four female avant-garde dance filmmakers, Maya Deren, Yvonne Rainer, Amy Greenfield and Sally Potter. Despite the differences between them, particularly in terms of their desire to/not evoke a cathartic response and elicit kinaesthetic identification, I argue that they are all inspired by a similar feminist sensibility, using cinematic movement (as well as stasis) to extend the language, spatiality, and motility of the female body and thus move away from (historical) objectification. With an emphasis on feminist phenomenology, my embodied analysis will be layered with more abstractive film studies practices, in an attempt to find a middle ground between a purely bodily and a purely conceptual reading and response to these films.

Finally, I aim to bring together a discussion of all of the key themes and issues already examined in my fourth chapter, which looks at a contemporary and globally popular (albeit independent) Hollywood dance film, *Black Swan* (2010). Sensitive to the often-contradictory politics of representation, and how cultural texts are open to multiple interpretations, I shall use a multi-disciplinary approach in order to explore the nuances of this multi generic, hybrid film. This will include a phenomenological exploration and

analysis of how cinematography and sound combine to literally "touch" the viewer with the central character's psychosis, and a consideration of the ethical implications of this embodied assault/experience. I will then utilise feminist psychoanalytic tools of analysis in order to investigate the film's construction of femininity, and its complex negotiation between misogyny and feminism. And to conclude, I will explore how the unstable ontological level of the protagonist's world can be seen to relate to and be placed within a wider socio-cultural context of American national identity.

Chapter One

***Deconstruction In Motion*: Interrogating National, Cultural, and Gendered Identity through Flamenco Dance and Film**

Introduction

This chapter explores the ways in which ideologies of national identity, and their complicity with gendered and colonial stereotypes, can be questioned and challenged within/by screendance. Carlos Saura began his collaborative "flamenco trilogy" with *Bodas de sangre* (*Blood Wedding*, 1981), a depiction of a dress rehearsal for legendary choreographer Antonio Gades's flamenco adaptation of poet/playwright Federico García Lorca's play.[16] Also the first in his trilogy of rural Andalusian tragedies, Lorca's play tells a passionately tragic tale (based on a true story) of ill-fated love, duty, deceit, betrayal, and vengeance. The intensity of his language is, however, replaced in the film with dance. The second film, *Carmen* (1983), was Saura's biggest international box-office success and a self-reflexive exploration of the legend of Carmen based upon Prosper Mérimée's (1845) novella and Georges Bizet's (1875) popular opera. Much like the first film, it shows a modern ensemble of dancers and singers as they rehearse for their flamenco interpretation of the Carmen story, led, once again, by Antonio Gades playing the director/choreographer/principal dancer, Antonio. We see him search for, discover, and get intimately involved/obsessed with his neophyte lead dancer, also called Carmen (Laura del Sol), as their social "reality" begins to mirror the myth. This multi-layered depiction of life imitating art thereby reveals the power of myth, and how its internalisation can eventually penetrate into everyday life. The final film in the

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[16] Henceforth, *Bodas de sangre* will be referred to as *Bodas*.

trilogy, *El amor brujo* (*Love, the Magician*, 1986), is Gades's modern take on

Andalusian composer, Manuel de Falla's melodramatic gypsy ballet. This is unlike the

first two films in that it is not a staged rehearsal of the ballet, but its filmic enactment,

depicting many traditions and rituals of Gypsy life. This creates more of a sense of

(heightened) realism as opposed to the documentary/backstage "feel" of the first two

films, despite a deconstructive opening credit sequence that highlights the artificiality of

the set in which it is filmed.

The first in this flamenco trilogy of films was made six years after the death of

Francisco Franco, a time of great change as Spain (and Spanish cinema) began to

emerge from the political censorship and coercion imposed by his dictatorial regime.

During his long reign, Franco had used film as a tool for perpetuating his unreflective,

authoritarian, and oppressive ideas about Spanish national identity, culture, and people,

imposing a formal hegemony upon all films regardless of whether their content

supported him ideologically or not (Higginbotham: 1988). Saura's trilogy thereby

works to address, unveil, challenge and provide alternatives not just to the political

mythologies created and perpetuated by Franco, but also to the mythologizing power of

film. In their formal complexity, both *Bodas* and *Carmen* interrogate how power

operates in the production of meaning, thus exposing the fabricated nature of Francoist

myths more through filmic form than content.

I will explore the exceptionally inventive opening sequences to Carlos Saura's *Bodas de*

sangre (*Blood Wedding*, 1981), and *Carmen* (1983), because in immediately addressing

the means by which colonial and patriarchal stereotypes have been imposed upon

Spanish national, cultural, and gendered identity, they effectively set out the principal

aims and objectives of the films and are thus vital for contextualising how the following dance scenes function politically. Furthermore, a politics of movement (both of the film and the dancers) is used as a tool for viscerally connecting with the viewer. Therefore, despite the opening credit sequence and arrival/dressing-room scene being fourteen minutes (of a total of eighteen minutes) of *Bodas* that does not feature dance, filmic conventions and rituals of performance combine in order to demystify both the dancers and the dance. This serves to construct complex characters, orientating the viewer towards the performative and transformative nature of identity and of cultural performance, and thereby disrupting prescriptive ideological norms. I would argue, then, that the filming of these "everyday" rituals in a Spanish context and setting are as much a part of the dance film as the dance itself, and moreover, are a crucial element of the film's originality and specificity as a dance *film*. However, because this opening sequence foregrounds and interrogates the construction of "truth" via a combination of image, cinematography, and language (as it is the only section of the film with dialogue), it is littered with signs that make for a more semiotic-inflected interpretation and analysis, as compared to the rather more sensuous approach to *Carmen*.

I am only considering the first two films of Saura's "flamenco *trilogy*" mainly for the sake of space, but also because whilst *Bodas* and *Carmen* attempt to interrogate and liberate the notion of Spanish national identity from the legacy of colonialism, from the Manichean politics of Franco's long dictatorship, and from the internalisation of these imposed identities through filmic form and the rhetoric of dance, *El amor brujo* (*Love, the Magician*, 1986), is more of a straightforward, positive, and traditional narrative adaption of a flamenco ballet. Therefore it does not contain the same kind of innovative cinematic disruptions that characterise the earlier films, and as a result is much easier to

"suture" into. So whilst it does have a deconstructive credit sequence, it is not as essential for understanding how the rest of the dance film functions politically, as is the case with the first two films.[17]

I am thus primarily interested in the political message embodied in the aesthetics of these opening sequences, and how successful they are at intervening in an understanding of history and of Spanishness through their visceral impact on the viewer. But in order to understand how they work as a form of embodied politics, I must first consider the socio-political and historical contexts against which they are reacting.

The legacy of colonialism: Orientalism, history, "truth", and power

> The conqueror will write the body of the other and inscribe upon it his
> own history.   (de Certeau 1984:112)

Both films address the myth of the Spanish *Gitano/a* (Gypsy) and their association with flamenco culture, most explicit in the second film's questioning of its (French) "fathering" artists, Prosper Mérimée and Georges Bizet. Both Romantic novella and glorified opera betray a colonial vision of Spain and Spanish *flamencas* (female flamenco dancers) as alluringly exotic yet dangerous "dark continents": part of Europe and yet Other due to the 'symbolic centrality of Gypsies in Spain's collective imaginary (as opposed to their actual marginality in society)...the crucial but repressed non-white, non-European, and non-Christian elements that are the legacy of its Jewish and Moorish past' (Colmeiro 2002:130). It is precisely this (Islamic and centuries-old) history that

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[17] However, this is not to assert that *El amor brujo* is without (political) merit in its own right, and indeed, Rob Stone (quoting Saura) makes an interesting suggestion when he writes that its formal superficiality was a way of 'reflecting the lack of imagination of his contemporary Spanish audience, who, says Saura, "don't know how to use their freedom" and were increasingly unwilling to engage in a process of national self-analysis' (2002: 79).

complicates any generalizations of (Spanish) Orientalism, and Edward Saïd's (1978) distinction between the "Orient" and the West (the "Occident.") This is because whilst the trajectory, conquest and settlement of Gitano's Moorish culture up into Spain from North Africa is, according to Saïd, a key part of the "Orient," the cultural and ethnic hybridity that resulted from this 'eight-hundred-year Muslim presence' and coexistence has meant that 'Islam is *not outside Spain but inside it*, thus different from the conditions in France or England' (Aidi 2006: 68; Taboada 2006: 121, my emphasis).[18] This proximity and intimacy thereby problematizes a Spanish Orientalist (and distanced) fascination/objectification of its Moorish 'Other,' since Spanish views of the Orient tend to be 'far more heterogeneous' (Taboada 2006: 121). However, 'like views of other European nations – [they are] not devoid of imperialistic tones', and at different periods in Spanish history the "Oriental question" has been approached from varying ideological standpoints, which have both romanticised and denigrated its Moorish past (*ibid*).

Despite this internal complexity, Spain's Oriental and African genealogy undoubtedly led to its Orientalization and marginalisation as "les European," more sensual and therefore inferior by its European rivals. And the French imperialist, class-based fascination with Spain, perceived as a primitively passionate culture based upon myth, instinct, nature, magic and superstition exemplifies the Romantic Movement's cultural, social and political approach that was born from the embers of the French Revolution (Williams: 1983). After this epic period of radical social and political transformation not just of France, but across Europe, art and literature would no longer be solely concerned

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[18] Saïd has responded to the criticism that he didn't say enough about Spanish orientalism in *Orientalism*, by noting Spain's exception within the European general context of Orientalism in his forward to the 2002 Spanish translation. See:
Saïd, Edward. (2002). "*Prólogo a la nueva edicion española.*" *Orientalismo*. Barcelona: Random House/Mondadori, 11-12.

with the nobility, upper classes, and clergy. Instead, interest turned towards

marginalised "common" people (although of course there were no commoners enjoying

the privilege of making such work themselves.) Combining this with an emotional

reaction against the reason and rationality of Enlightenment, along with a sense of

French nationalism and a colonial vision perhaps buoyed by the legacy of Napoleon's

1808 invasion of Spain (Laurence: 1994), Othered Gypsy/Andalusian traditions were

appropriated in order to satiate a European hunger for Orientalism, paradoxically

silencing and negating a culture through 'giving it voice', since this "voice" was

actually the imposition of both a colonising gaze and a colonising language. Thus, as

Edward Saïd writes, this period of history was marked by the 'appropriation of one

culture by another' (1978: 42), and in this way the French Romantic Movement falsified

its Spanish object of desire into an exoticised and enduring fiction, perfectly illustrating

the dichotomy of mythopoeia by which a culture is simultaneously celebrated and

subjugated. Furthermore, these ideologically loaded expressions of the *españolada*[19]

came to stand as a synecdoche for Spanishness, revealing how the "history" and identity

of a nation is constructed through its telling: entangled in a web of power and desire,

always ideologically loaded, and never to be taken as "truth". Or, as more eloquently

articulated in the words of Walter Benjamin, '[h]istory is the subject of a structure

whose site is not homogeneous, empty time, but time filled by the presence of the now'

(1969: 261).

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[19] The *españoladas* are the exaggerated and clichéd representations of 'the Andalusian folk and gypsy tradition glorified in the works of nineteenth-century romantic writers and painters, and exported abroad in theatrical, pictorial, and cinematic renditions' (D'Lugo 1991: 192). An example still popular today (with tourists at least) are the kitsch postcards that represent archetypal *flamencas* dressed in their *traje de gitana* – traditional flamenco dress, which is often embroidered over and completed with all the clichéd accoutrements including the mantilla, a fan, and a rose worn in the hair.

Whilst the rhetoric of colonialism has been the most powerful of ideologies informing the flamenco/Spanish stereotype, Spaniards themselves have contributed to and internalised this exoticism. Created in the second half of the nineteenth-century, *Costumbrismo* (from the Spanish *costumbre,* "custom"), related (and arguably catered) to Romanticism, in its literary and pictorial interpretations of folklore, festivals, customs, and everyday life in the Spanish South. But it was the four decades of Franco's dictatorship that served to cement a people in time and space through the shrewd manipulation and propagation of an internal exotic Other: deeply embedding a foreign and Orientalist image of Spain as the 'other to European modern identity, the same position of internal alterity that, ironically, the Gypsy has come to hold within modern Spanish culture' (Colmeiro 2002: 129-30).

Following the devastation of the Spanish Civil War and over ten years into the dictatorship (during which time flamenco had been silenced), 'the Franco regime ransacked the past in search of symbols upon which to build a new and unified Spanish identity, an identity that might be attractive enough to lure tourists and centralized enough to be tweaked as needed for promoting the national interest' (Washabaugh 1995: 94). And of course the Romantic vision of the ill fated, passionate, dark and deadly *flamenca* and macho *flamenco* born to suffer and then to punish the female source of his suffering had already been proven to whet a foreign appetite for exoticism. Thus, between 1939 and 1975 Franco's government set out to appropriate these motifs of Spanish culture by ruthlessly closing down traditional *café cantantes*, the bars and taverns of "ill repute" in which flamenco had been performed and professionalized, and moving it into the more "respectable" *tablaos, peñas,* and *festivales*, where it was

sanitised, commercialised, and depoliticised.[20] The less charmingly manufactured and more "genuine" *cante jondo* (the deep song considered to be "authentic" flamenco song) and *baile* (dance) were pushed underground, where they thrived on the oppression and hardship that they were (and had always been) subject to as the creative expression of a marginalised Gypsy and impoverished Andalusian culture.

This appropriation and propagandist distortion of flamenco certainly served the Spanish hegemony whilst adding insult to the injury already suffered by its ethnic Other, who had not only undergone a 'history of violent assimilation' (Smith 2000: 164) but would now suffer grotesque levels of exploitation and marginalisation under Franco.[21] Films and theatrical shows displaying bastardised folkloric musical melodrama emerged in the *españoladas*, functioning not only to disenfranchise Gypsy performers from their own culture, but to indoctrinate audiences into the belief that there was a "natural" order of society, and that despite being the reputed originators of flamenco, Gypsies and lower class Andalusians belonged strictly at the bottom of this hierarchy. These representations, and particularly the archetype of Carmen, also served as a warning for Spanish women who might be independently minded, and perhaps for the men who might be "tolerant" of this, since the Francoist ideal woman was always glad to suffer for her (inherent) "sins." Indeed, 'the age-old Spanish male's view of his own superiority and of women's inferior station…were both heightened during the dictatorship' (Edwards 1995: 17). The intervention of Hollywood between 1910-1929,

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[20] A *Tablao* is a commercialised flamenco bar catering for and popular amongst tourists and American servicemen stationed in Spain, *peñas* are private clubs where flamenco is performed, and *festivales* are flamenco festivals.

[21] As Hishaam D. Aidi writes, this mobilization and manipulation of history and geography 'richly illustrates Edward Saïd's argument about the political power of "imaginative geographies" and how the hardy, seemingly ageless, entities we know as "Europe," "the West," and "the Orient" are, at bottom, "ideological confections" whose contents and borders are shaped by conflicting state interests and nationalisms' (2006: 69).

and then again in the 1950s did nothing to help in terms of challenging these stereotypical perceptions, and in fact fed them to a much larger audience.[22] However, despite the popularity and ideological weight of these combined representations, there was a counter-cultural resistance within Spain and *nacionalflamenquismo* 'was the sneering name […given] to the *franquista* promotion of meretricious spectacles that celebrated the richness of Spanish art while hiding both the poverty and the regional allegiances of the artists' (Washabaugh 1996: 103).

After Franco's death in 1975 and the transformation of Spain into a democracy, it publicly sought to politically distance itself from his fascistic legacy, and flamenco was both trivialised and dismissed as a quaint culture that had no real relation to modern Spain. Conversely, it also signified the shameful and embarrassing rape of a marginalised and disenfranchised culture, but whichever way one's politics swung, flamenco was (once again) largely derided and silenced. The country was also on the brink of entering into a new age, as the mid-1980s would witness its emergence from a post-Franco recession and entrance into a culture of capitalism and consumerism as it joined the European community. Therefore, the bleak and intense expression of suffering and pain so associated with flamenco was for a time no longer suitable for representing the mainstream nation's mood. However, since nothing is without complexity and contradiction, "authentic" flamenco remained (for some) a cultural and ritualistic expression of identity rooted in the past but relevant for the present as well as

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[22] Between 1910-1929 Hollywood catered to a persistent American desire for exoticised Latina women, by making a total of seven filmic versions of *Carmen*, whose qualities would inform the Hollywood Latina stereotype of the dangerously duplicitous/desirable harlot/dark lady (Berg: 2004). Three of these starred Charlie Chaplin, Theda Bara, and Geraldine Ferrar, indicating the level of their popularity. A resurgence of interest in the 1950s saw Hollywood producers recording Spanish flamenco legends such as Carmen Amaya, José Greco, Rosario and Antonio, and Pilar López.

for the future, since it provided a philosophy and identity for a nation that was gradually being subsumed into a homogeneous Europe.

This then, is the socio-political and historical context in which Saura's flamenco trilogy is situated, with the first film, *Bodas*, marking the beginnings of the reappropriation/celebration of flamenco as an ever-evolving art form that could be 'retrospectively defined in the light of a variety of community-oriented agendas' (Washabaugh 1995: 99) not limited to romanticism, *Franquismo, Gitanismo,* or *Andalucismo*, but also adopted by non-Gypsy/Andalusian artists for the exploration of individual/community identities, as well as for nationalistic, academic, and commercial interests.[23]

Politics in/as aesthetics

Bodas opens on a sepia-hued wedding photograph with the washed-out quality so associated with photographs of the 19th/early 20th centuries, which, along with the old-fashioned "look" of the clothing and hairstyles, immediately presents the viewer with a sense of history, community, and ritual. With the slow zoom-in as the credits roll, it is as if we are gradually getting nearer to and almost "inside" this community for a closer look, which serves to simultaneously distance us from its celebratory veneer. The camera gradually begins to bring *El Novio* (the groom) into central focus: the only person sitting, legs spread wide open with each arm bent at the elbow and resting on each thigh, his commanding pose conveying an attitude of conventional machismo, with

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[23] *Franquismo*: a term used to refer to the years of Franco's dictatorship/style of government; *Gitanismo*: Gypsy civil rights; *Andalucismo*: regional Andalusian rights/identity/fight for autonomy.

his exposed crotch facing the camera and signifying the source of his power.[24] Framed

either side by *La Madre* (his mother) and *La Novia* (his bride), each with a dutiful hand

on each of his shoulders, and surrounded by their guests, we are left in no doubt as to

the phallocentric nature of this society. With stern and serious expressions on all three

of their faces contradicting any sense of joyful celebration, it would appear that this

phallocentrism does not provide happiness for either gender.

Immediately after this still we cut to a mobile camera following the stage manager,

José, as he walks around the space, switching on numerous light bulbs that are framing

multiple dressing-room table mirrors, opening up a chest filled with individual

toolboxes, removing the door of a travelling wardrobe, opening up and extracting a

bridal veil from a box, and recovering a bouquet of flowers from a basket – the

exaggerated sound of which, as he arranges them, signifies their rigid plasticity and thus

their artificiality. As he places the veil and bouquet on one of the dressing-room tables

the off-screen sound of footsteps approaching and people's voices are heard, and as José

looks up, smiles, and walks toward the door the camera cuts to the dance company

entering the room, led by Antonio Gades/Leonardo and Cristina Hoyos/*La Novia*.

Straight away, then, the choreography of the camerawork reveals the ideological

undercurrents of the film, as we follow the vision of a camera that has no interest in

keeping a superficial distance but rather draws us into the room by panning after José's

movements, and by zooming-in for a closer look beneath the surface of an idealised

image. Things once closeted and repressed are now being opened up, light is shed on

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[24] Whilst this word, machismo, effectively describes *El Novio*'s pose, it is important to acknowledge the problematic and 'Latinist' nature of this term (Berg: 2004), since it denies heterogeneity and thus supports essentialist notions. As Savigliano writes, '"*Macho*" is the Spanish word for "male," but it has been adopted by other languages/cultures to refer to a "wrong" kind of maleness – an unmanly maleness…Machismo is a synonym for the barbaric, uncivilized "virility' attributed to Latinos' (1995: 46). It is thus a word providing evidence of a pervasive foreign and colonising gaze, which has been dangerously naturalised, universalised, and eternalised.

the regulatory and distorted nature of ideal mirror images, and the factitious nature of

apparently beautiful objects/images and what they symbolise is (aurally and sensuously)

indicated. Translating what can be seen into what can be felt, then, the viewer is left

with an overall sense of openness and proximity, which correlates to the liberal and

revisionist post-Franco context and politics of the film.

A hierarchy of outcasts

Whilst a hierarchy is indeed still present within this world, as evidenced by the control

and gaze of the camera, the order of the dancers' arrival, and José's assignation of

dressing-room tables for select dancers, it is no longer a right-wing dictator who is in

control but a community of "outcasts." They are led by a dancer/choreographer who

was renowned for his integrity, for being a communist and open defender of the

revolution in Cuba, and for his minimalist and humble style of dance 'inspired by the

poor people of his childhood background and in contrast with the

españolada...promoted by the Francoist regime' (Simonari 2008: 189). Closely

following Gades into the room (and in the hierarchy) is Hoyos, the company's *primera*

Bailarina who grew up and learnt how to dance in the kind of poor Andalucian

neighbourhood so plundered by Franco, and who was/is similarly regarded (by some) as

an "authentic" representative of traditional *baile flamenco*.[25] And to top it all, this film

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[25] Using the word "authentic" with reference to flamenco is deeply problematic, and it is important to acknowledge that the history and origins of flamenco continue to be fiercely disputed both within and beyond Spain, involving arguments as to its cultural "ownership." Emerging from a fusion of cultural influences including (but not limited to) that of the Romany Gypsies, Spain's Moorish past, its Jewish roots, the regional traditions that originated in the Spanish south, and influences from Caribbean and African styles due to the Spanish colonisation of the Americas, it becomes clear why a definitive history is impossible, and how '[t]he differences between the stories betray the agendas behind each narrative and the anxieties those narratives encompass' (Heffner Hayes 2009: 4). Indeed, Richard Handler speaks of authenticity as a Western construct premised upon individualism and ownership, effectively saying 'more about us than about others' (1986: 2). And as Said (1978) suggests, post-colonised (or marginalised in this case) peoples can internalise Orientalism so much so that they come to believe in and attempt to reclaim their (imaginary) cultural heritage, which has been (in part) constructed by their oppressors rather than based upon any historical "truth." Furthermore, how can there be an "authentic" Gypsy culture when they were once a nomadic people, travelling through and most probably adopting multiple cultural

is an adaptation of an adaptation of a play by a seminal Spanish queer anti-doctrinaire:

marking the gently camp affectation of José, the man behind the scenes and "running"

the show, as a deliberate homage to Federico García Lorca in this multi-layered text,

despite the fact that this may perhaps only be visible to a "knowing" spectator.[26] It also

serves to add a certain resonance to his "opening up of the closets," the epistemic

object/space that has historically represented the concealment of queer visibility, since

the public face of Spain's gay and lesbian liberation movement, like that of so many

groups who were ostracised and discriminated against, gradually became more visible

after the death of Franco.

As the company enters the dressing room, one of the musicians calls José "*guapo*" as he

affectionately grasps his chin. There are multiple meanings of *guapo*, but here I am

interested in its translation as 'the handsome and brave one', or 'ladies man' as this can

either be interpreted as a friendly flirtation acknowledging the courage it takes to stand

outside of the heteronormative majority, or as a playfully ironic comment as to José's

sexual preference.[27] Rather than interpreting this as homoerotic, I prefer to see it as an

affectionate embrace of a queer identity lovingly accepted as part of a community,

which is marked in its opposition to the fervent and violent homophobia of Franco's

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practices from diverse areas? What *is* clear, however, is the fact that flamenco's capacity for evolution has ensured its survival, and so rather than having to give it a creation story, it may be more appropriate to consider it a hybrid and transnational art form/expression that has both been interpreted and infused with different discourses.

[26] Although this is not to assert that heterosexuality and camp are mutually exclusive, or that queer men are, by definition, camp, since there is no "truth" to homosexuality. Yet a camp style of performance has undeniably been a historically queer aesthetic, making visible identities largely rendered invisible due to their 'dangerous' illegality.

[27] Interestingly enough, neither *guapo* nor the exchange between José and the second affectionate musician are translated into subtitles.

regime.[28] This sense of acceptance is reinforced as another musician puts his arm around José and warmly draws him in to kiss his cheek, symbolising the contemporaneous Spanish cultural awakening to and acceptance of gay and lesbian rights. Furthermore, to add weight to this contextual reading, Lorca's homosexuality was only beginning to be openly discussed in 1983/4 (two years after *Bodas* was made), with the publication for the first time of his heavily homoerotic work, *Sonnets of Dark Love*, which had hitherto been suppressed by his family.[29] This perhaps accounts for the subtlety of the film's queer representation and for the fact that its embrace takes place in the private space of the dressing room, since even in the years after Franco's death his legacy endured, and homosexuality remained at variance with the (still) dominant Catholic morality.

However, the space (or lack of it) between the camera and performers affects the viewer's engagement with the characters on screen, and in turn, this affects the relationship between the bodies on (as well as the body of) the screen and our own. Filming with a hand-held camera as if through the (highly subjective) eyes of a member of the troupe, technology rather than didacticism elicits an empathetic response in the viewer. Not only does this serve to inform us that this is not a documentary, despite its documentary "feel," but more importantly it draws us into this anteroom. Both the movement of the camera and its close spatial relationship with the performers enables

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[28] Lorca is believed to have been executed during the Spanish Civil War (August 1936) by Nationalist anti-communist death squads seeking to silence his outspoken liberal views, including his public and artistic support of Andalusian and Gypsy traditions, his rebellion against the bourgeois Spanish society, and for his homosexuality. Franco was publicly proclaimed *Generalisimo* of the National army and head of state in October 1936 (Beevor: 1982), imposing a general ban on Lorca's work until 1953 and effectively silencing information concerning his death for close to forty years.

[29] The first (published) study to explore Lorca's homosexuality and its relevance to his works was Paul Binding's (1985) book, *Lorca. The Gay Imagination*, swiftly followed by the more scholarly (1986) doctoral dissertation by Angel Sahuquillo, *Federico García Lorca y la Cultura de la homosexualidad masculine*, or *Federico García Lorca and the Culture of Male Homosexuality*, eventually published as a book in 1991.

access to interiority, and it is this proximity that can lead to the emotional affect or duplication in the viewer, as we immediately feel part of this company and therefore begin to embody the values of its community by feeling the warmth between its members. Although better known for his work on intellectual montage, Sergei Eisenstein was also interested in the 'emotional shocks' (1942: 231) that a film can have on the body of its (politicised) spectator, prompting the political action that may contribute to the transformation of society. Therefore, as Jane Gaines writes, 'politics is not exclusively a matter of the head but can also be a matter of the heart' (1999: 88).

As well as the deconstruction of ideologically loaded expressions of Spanishness, then, one might argue that the affective choreography of the camera, even in the scenes not featuring dance, works towards encouraging a more liberal and celebratory coming together of a nation, thereby restating the relevance of flamenco for an early-eighties post-Franco Spanish society. And for a contemporary and international audience, it welcomes us into an expression of a culture, reflecting how, once a (flamenco) culture is transported outside of its national borders, it 'becomes part of a global dialogue intertwined with new histories, stories and contexts' (Washabaugh 1998: 4). The multiple ways in which a film is received both nationally and internationally mirrors the ways in which cultures/societies/people are spaces in a constant state of flux, serving to problematise any notions of "authenticity." The sense of openness in *Bodas*, therefore, serves to make flamenco accessible to all, whilst maintaining a great respect for its histories and orthodoxies.

"History" as a form of representation

If the slow zoom-into the still of the wedding photograph serves to draw the viewer in for a closer look at this community, then an illusion is immediately shattered as the company enters the dressing room. The characters framed in the photograph, under control, static and powerless, come to life in a 1980s context and thus reveal the fabricated nature of idealised images. It has not been a historical and rustic Gypsy community captured and frozen in time (as is suggested by the title of the film and its connection to Lorca's play), but a still of the company in full costume and make-up, manipulated in order to appear old. This silent and still image gives visual expression to an exoticised and idealised vision of Spanish "Gypsies", giving viewers limitless space to recreate what they think they see in their own terms. As beauty is fixed in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (Oscar Wilde, 1891), so too can a culture be fixed by the portraits that are made of it, powerless images upon which a myriad of (colonial, post-colonial, and patriarchal etc.,) fantasies may be projected. However, by contrasting the still with the living dancers/actors, the film refuses to conform to (and thus deconstructs) the fantasies inspired by it, suggesting that Spanishness is not coterminous with these kinds of romanticised images, but that there are many different ways of being Spanish. Furthermore, through revealing the performative nature of this "aged" image, it eloquently articulates Walter Benjamin's words quoted previously, visually alerting its viewers to the fact that "historical" representations cannot be fully trusted since "history" is (literally in this case) 'time filled by the presence of the now' (1969: 261).

It is interesting that the film ends on an identical slow zoom-into the same wedding photograph, conveying a sense that despite the work done in the main body of the film to deconstruct the ideologies that are represented in histories, thus revealing history as a

form of representation, these kinds of exoticised and ahistorical images have been eternalised: the effects of power and desire that are deeply embedded within both national and international consciousnesses. The use of this still to open and close the film, then, can be read as a reference to how repetition tends to normalise stereotypical constructions, which leads to them not only being believed but endlessly reinforced and reiterated. However, on a more optimistic note, because the film has (potentially) provided its viewer with *knowledge* about the Other and the stereotyping process, which is the only antidote to stereotyping, it is easier to see beneath the surface of this still when confronted with it for a second time, since we have gained an understanding of how and why it works.

The performative and constructed nature of identity

With the company's arrival the rituals of preparation begin: costumes are retrieved from the opened wardrobe, cosmetic toolboxes are unlocked and make-up, wigs, and good luck charms are laid out on the dressing-room tables. Pictures (of Jesus, a saint with the baby Jesus, a photograph of a child, and Gades's military photograph) are affixed to mirrors, infusing the room with a sense of the sacred.[30] The dedication of dancers to their performance is bordering on the religious, enlightening the viewer as to the hard work that goes into the merging of performer with role. As if to accentuate this point we hear a dancer asking for aspirin, indicating the physical labour and pain involved in this level of devotion, and later on in the film we also hear about dancers' blistered feet, twisted ankles, and damaged knees. If you believe (as I do) that freedom can only come through discipline, then the (Gypsy) dancers who reputedly have flamenco "flowing through their veins" have actually learnt it through being part of a community and

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[30] *Bodas de sangre* was filmed in the *Amor de Dios* studio, which not only translates as 'Love of God' but is also 'one of the most respected flamenco schools in Madrid' (Schupp 2003: 91), where many of the great "masters" of flamenco have rehearsed and performed.

through the observation of their elders, just as this company has learnt Gades's choreography. Therefore, even the most apparently spontaneous or inherent expressions of cultural identity have been learnt, rehearsed, and perfected, a fact which serves to avoid the negation of artistic expression that may otherwise be dangerously dehistoricised.

This scene also serves to offer a fleeting insight into the social reality of the dancers before they quickly shed their identities, identities that are multiple and fluid even before the donning of costumes and accoutrements necessary for the performance of culture, as revealed in the familial, religious, and political images reflected back at them as they gaze into their mirrors. Rather than seeing identity as a single unitary self, we are encouraged to view personal and cultural/national identity as multi-faceted, acknowledging that there are always a number of selves or identities dependent upon context and setting. This sense of multiplicity is heightened by the myriad framed mirror reflections of the dancers seated at their tables: there are no Lacanian ideal and whole mirror images, which is in sharp contrast to the singularly fixed (and false) representation of national identity, as perpetuated in the *españoladas.*

Another revealing moment during this densely packed prologue involves the making-up of the musicians as they rehearse a song. Dark brown powder is applied to their faces as they "black up" in order to resemble the darker skinned archetype of the Gypsy. They are, however, (audibly) marked as Andalusians, reputedly the equal originators of flamenco.[31] Even those praised for their "authenticity" are not regarded as "authentic" enough, having to adopt and perform the familiar and colourful portrayals of Spanish

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[31] Although I cannot distinguish regional Spanish accents myself, Hopewell writes that 'Saura eavesdrops on the Andalusian twang of the musicians as they chat in the make-up room' (1986: 259, n.51).

flamenco culture. After the warm-up and rehearsal that follow this prologue there is another brief (and final) scene that does not depict dance, but the costuming of the dancers before the full dress rehearsal. With no scopophilic intent evident, the female dancers are filmed getting undressed at a respectful distance. The camera then zooms in closer to hear them laughing, discussing both their own and Gades's anxieties about the performance, asking each other how they look, commenting on each other's sweat, and complaining about their shoes. Just as Gypsy/Andalusian/flamenco culture is demystified, so too are the dancers, as we briefly get a sense of who they are as well as the blood, sweat, and tears that are poured into their performance. Then, in a Brechtian style *gestus*, they put on their costumes and immediately "become" their characters.[32]

From this moment on the use of mirrors is suspended until the final scene of the film, connoting the sense that once their make-up has been applied and costumes donned the dancers shed their own individual identities and are transformed physically, consciously, and completely into performers of culture: bound by a fixed and defined role.[33] These representations are not multi-faceted like the performers portraying them or the culture(s) they are depicting, and through highlighting these performative aspects of cultural/national identity, this kind of "staged authenticity" is shown to be a socially constructed concept: used as a central tool in the marketing of Spain, but actually a difficult and complex concept that is open to many interpretations that are both negotiable and relative.

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[32] In relation to acting, a *gestus* is best understood as a physical action or a spatial configuration which expresses an attitude revealing the ideological, social and economic construction of a character (Brecht: 1974).

[33] Gades and Juan Antonio Jiménez/*El Novio* are also filmed as they dress, choose their knives, compliment each other, and discuss injuries. We also see Gades circling into his *fajín* (sash) as it wraps around his waist, literally binding him into the role of Leonardo.

A mobile camera tracks after a close-up shot of what looks like a military duffle bag being dragged along the floor, the pronounced sound of which conveys its burdensome weight. As it comes to a halt the camera pans up to reveal Cristina Hoyos unlocking it, and it is this imagery that immediately connotes a sense of the cultural/emotional baggage that Spaniards were carrying due to the dictatorship, baggage that was hindering their freedom of movement and expression as well as any intercultural dialogue. The locked bag, wardrobe, and cosmetic toolboxes can thus be seen as metaphors for the *españoladas*, within which lie the artifice of flamenco culture that will be taken out and put on by these performers. The fact that this duffle bag also resembles a laundry bag heightens the sense that *Bodas* is airing Spain's dirty laundry in public, as it was, at the time of this film, a nation coming to terms with its new-found freedom as well as the horrors of its past.

The fragmentation of identity

> Identification is not about denying the difference between the self and the other, the mirror moment that produces normalcy. It may be more about using differences, about accumulating possible selves – a process, in fact, that is more accretive than anything else and thus offers a direct challenge to the rule of one identity per body. (Gaines 2001: 112)

The above statement by Jane Gaines offers a valuably concise reading of the final part of the film's prologue, which has Gades seated at his dressing-room table applying make-up whilst his voice-over narrates the story of his life but his image does not speak, with the camera cutting to various other fragmented shots of dancers applying make-up, false eye-lashes, etc, and then finally returning to Gades as he lights a cigarette and observes himself in the mirror as Leonardo. This separation of voice and body contributes to the deconstruction of Gades himself, who, as choreographer is in a powerful position, and as Leonardo, the only named character in Lorca's play and thus a

figure of (patriarchal) authority, represents a Lacanian ideal image if ever there was one, particularly since the company learn their moves through observing his mirror image! Furthermore, he is a flamenco ballet dancer/choreographer in a post-Franco context *before* its (more mainstream) cultural reappropriation, and so potentially symbolises, on the surface level, a Francoist ideal image. However, as he lists the various jobs he had to take from the age of eleven despite wanting to stay at school, leading up to his discovery as a dancer, not only do we hear about his different incarnations but we see him simultaneously transform into yet another role through the application of make-up, and all this interspersed with numerous multilayered mirror reflections of other dancers transforming themselves. The combination of filmic conventions and Gades's monologue thus constructs his complex character, shattering any sense of a complete, singular, and idealised image by revealing the fragmentary nature of identity.

This is augmented through a play of mirrors as mirror is replaced with camera. Gades applies his make-up whilst peering into a small hand-held mirror and then turns to the dressing-room table mirror affixed to the wall to check his reflection, which is replaced by the lens of the camera. The disorientated viewer is thus presented with an illusory reflection, provoking a questioning of the "reality" of what we see which thereby enhances Gades's self-deconstructing monologue.[34] Are we to believe in this illusory reflection, or is this supposed to be read as a documentary-style reality that has Gades looking directly into the camera? The symbolism of Saura's recurrent use of mirrors is thus revealed: the Francoist mirror/camera reflected propagandist and regulatory images back to a Spanish (and international) audience, and when '[p]rojection and reflection take place in a closed space…those who remain there, whether they know it or not (but

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[34] This juxtaposition of what is real and what is imaginary is essentially cinematic.

they do not), find themselves chained, captured, or captivated' (Baudry 1970: 352). So just as we see/hear multiple representations of Gades but never actually see *his* reflection, so too did the *españoladas* project a tradition of distorted, limited, and pejorative '*images* but not "reality"' (*ibid*).[35] Gypsies/Andalusians and by association, flamenco culture, had been the object of the (Francoist) gaze, denied agency by being constructed and positioned for the visual and narrative pleasure of the "norm," depriving them of any "real" reflections of themselves whilst producing and defining the cultural ideals that would provide the necessary ideological justification for race, gender, and class oppression. Therefore, whilst a narcissistic identification with these images may have momentarily provided an audience/nation with a powerful sense of complete superiority/inferiority, or transmit an impression that "complete" understanding of another nation had been achieved, this feeling was/is inevitably an illusion, *exactly* the point that this revisionist and interrogative use of the mirror/camera makes, since camerawork and editing elucidate how racial ideology has worked so effectively. In this way, the paradoxical and ideological nature of the cinematic apparatus is exposed, and *Bodas*'s formal duplicity works to reveal how 'art is *not* necessarily a mirror to reality. [Is it ever?] Events or figures differ substantially in their artistic and social significance' (Hopewell 1986: 153). So whilst Gades may well be the object of our gaze he returns it in a direct address to the camera/spectator, refusing to be a passive racial or ethnic object by asserting his own subjectivity and visual power in an oppositional gaze whilst speaking his multiple "truths," and thereby breaking away from existing stereotypes and myths.

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[35] These multiple representations of Gades include his younger self, as described in the jobs of his youth; the future of this younger self, signified by the retrospective monologue; his present self as we see him seated at his dressing-room table; his illusory reflection/self peering into the mirror/camera; and his transformation into the character of Leonardo by the end of the sequence.

As if to substantiate this deconstruction of Gades and of the other dancers in the company, they are then reconstructed in the following warm-up and rehearsal. As the dancers watch and copy Gades's instruction whilst looking at their own mirror reflections, they don't master the choreography immediately and have to ask questions whilst making mistakes, particularly Cristina Hoyos who is the *primera Bailarina* and thus on a par with Gades in terms of being a supposed "ideal image." We hear Gades make numerous comments such as "so so", "what a mess, no offence", and "what a disaster", and we are thus presented with a company of Spanish dancers who do not aspire to a false ideal, but are happy to reveal the hard work that goes into a performance, the mistakes that are made, and the good humour with which this is taken. Furthermore, a hand-held camera constantly moves with the dancers, aligning the viewer's point-of-view with theirs so that instead of a framed, distanced, and idealised image of the company, we become part of it and part of the dance. Any elitist, idealised, or "authentic" notions pertaining to flamenco are thus shattered, as the camerawork transmits the message that it is an art form/expression that is open to all.

Carmen's "ballet rats"

Carmen, the second film I shall discuss here, opens on a high-angled shot looking down upon a static group of female dancers dressed in an array of colourful flamenco skirts, tops, shawls, and legwarmers, headed by Antonio Gades who is marked in his position of power, by being the only man in frame, and by the drabness of his grey trousers, jumper, and shoes.[36] With the camera positioned just to the side rather than directly behind the dancers, we get a diagonal view across the space that captures either the backs of the dancers or their side profile as they face the mirrored wall in front of them,

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[36] Whilst writing about *Carmen* I shall refer to Antonio Gades by his first name, since this is also his character's name in the film.

the corner of which is just visible in the top right-hand corner of the frame. Along with the heavy black curtain that spans the width of the background, the mise-en-scene informs us that we are observing a rehearsal in a dance studio, and the composition of this shot is reminiscent of Degas' sketches and paintings of ballerinas shown backstage and in rehearsal, immediately hinting at the French precedents of the Carmen myth.

Degas' preference for colours such as ultramarine blue and various shades of brilliant pink are reflected in the costuming of the dancers, and the way that the key source of (soft) light comes from above, both illuminating the bare shoulders of some of the women and endowing the scene with a hazy/wispy quality, can be read as a reference to the pastel-like ethereal and intoxicating quality of Degas' dancers, who were similarly lit from above by the staged lighting of the theatre. Degas never painted the *prima ballerinas* of his time, preferring instead the everyday dancers known derogatively as "ballet rats," which adds a certain resonance to the fact that we later hear Antonio referring to these dancers as not "bad, but I don't see any of them as Carmen." And furthermore, the dancers hold their opening position for five seconds before Antonio counts them in and they begin to move, thereby adding to the painterly quality of this opening shot. However, it is not so much the aesthetics of this comparison, or the fact that it provides further evidence for the French origins of the "flamenco myth" that interests me most about this reference to Degas, but the fact that he was widely reputed to have been a profoundly conservative and misogynistic bachelor whose most intense examination of women took place from within a box in the theatre, a privileged position from which he would look down upon the ballet in a most productive voyeurism, imposing a male discourse onto a (silenced and objectified) female world. And it is exactly the Francoist appropriation and distortion of the archetype of Carmen in the

service of the phallocentric system, a system whose powerful imposition of chauvinistic patriarchal discourse had conditioned Spaniards' vision of themselves and of each other, thereby making them complicit in their own victimisation, that this film both interrogates and reacts against in its version of the *Carmen* myth.

Patriarchal drill

Having counted them in, Antonio leads and the dancers follow by stamping their left foot down and then moving in-synch to the left of the screen, back to the right, left and right again in a formation resembling a military-style drill in which hips sway and feet stamp in strong and dynamic rhythms, with the camera gently sweeping after them from its high-angled perspective. As the only source of either diegetic or nondiegetic sound, the dancers' snapping fingers and marching feet add to a sense of growing intensity and tension, reflecting the way in which military exercises can serve to escalate hostilities. After the fourth "march" back to the right-hand of the screen, Antonio turns around to look directly at the dancers as they advance towards him for six counts and he retreats backwards; they then stamp their feet on the spot for a count of four and then proceed towards him again for another six counts, backing him up against the mirror behind. During this sequence the camera very slowly pans down so that it is positioned amongst the massed rank of dancers before gradually zooming into a close-up of Antonio, thereby bringing their reflections into view and creating the impression that Antonio is surrounded on both sides. Paul Julian-Smith has commented on the fact that 'the story boards for *Carmen* resemble military maps, with sweeping arrows plotting the deployment of dancers' (2000: 169), which not only indicates the intense discipline, strength, and control of flamenco dance, but more importantly articulates a political dimension of the film.

In command of a battery of fifteen female dancers, Antonio begins by effectively

performing Carmen for them to copy as they all face the huge mirror, thus revealing

both the narcissistic and masochistic construction of this idealised fantasy-woman, and

the male omnipotence in this female-dominated space. Antonio sees his ideal Other in

his own reflection, conveying the fact that female archetypes are the

products/projections of male fears and fantasies and not anything to do with *real*

women: illustrated by a series of crosscuts between subjective medium shots that pan

across from one dancer to the next, and then back to a close-up of an increasingly

disappointed and anxious-looking Antonio, revealing his POV as he tries to imagine

each of them as Carmen.[37] Towards the end of this prologue a discouraged Antonio

gives up and swiftly walks over to the side of the stage, asking Cristina (Hoyos) to "take

care of them." As she asks "the same step?" the level of his disheartenment is palpable

as he shrugs his shoulders and replies, "whatever you feel like," and then proceeds to

ask Paco de Lucía, both the musical director within the film and a hugely respected

flamenco guitarist, to "check the dance academies" in Seville for a suitable Carmen,

marked for being the birthplace of Mérimée's *Carmen* and thus revealing the

inculcation not only of Spanish patriarchal discourse, but also of the ubiquitous foreign

and Orientalist construction of Spanishness.[38]

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[37] Antonio performing as Carmen for Carmen to copy is repeated later on in the film, as she is instructed in how to be more feminine, and this idea that the perfect "woman" is merely 'the split of the single subject … into himself' is nothing new, as explored in an interesting book by Anne Callahan, *Writing the Voice of Pleasure. Heterosexuality Without Women* (2001: 53). In this, she charts the Western literary tradition of 'the troubadour effect' that dates back to the twelfth century, in which the heterosexual couple is presented as the romantic norm. However, when you look a little closer, '[t]he woman in narratives of desire is an illusion, a representation of a male artist's desire to transcend conventional masculinity and express his difference from other men. The perfect woman of western romance is a man, and the sexual arrangements in narratives of desire in Western culture are most aptly described as heterosexuality without women' (195). Thus the misogyny and heterophobia apparent in Antonio's attitude are 'landmarks of modern and postmodern culture' (*ibid*).

[38] Furthermore, the fact that Cristina Hoyos was born and learnt how to dance in the Alfalfa district of Seville, 'has the racial look of a Gypsy' (Colmeiro 2005: 101), is, to quote Antonio in the film, "the best dancer," and to quote Saura, has dancing 'in her bones' (in Schupp 2003: 93), not only makes her the most obvious choice for the title role, but arguably the best since her personal identity is closest to the

Conditioned, then, by his phallocentric and colonial education to believe that this

dangerously exotic and passionate myth made-flesh actually exists, the quest for his

femme fatale is ultimately masochistic not only because she is fictitious but because he

already knows, since it is written, that she will punish/castrate him: an offence against

patriarchy for which she will "justifiably" be destroyed. Yet he searches for her

regardless, and Antonio's role as choreographer/controller of movement and behaviour

can thus be read as a metaphor for the ideological militancy with which the Francoist

regime worked to indoctrinate Spanish women (and men) into the roles prescribed by

patriarchy. Antonio attempts to construct his fantasy and it attacks/surrounds him,

illustrating the crisis in masculinity that occurs when men become victims of their own

phallocentric myth making. Just like the slow zoom-into the (unhappy) wedding still in

Bodas, the choreography disrupts a simplistic, ahistorical, and transnational

generalisation of patriarchy that constructs *all* men as oppressors and *all* women as

victims, by acknowledging the effect that discourses of masculinities have upon men's

lives as well.[39] In this film's post-Franco context, when 'women's liberation, like

regional nationalism, became an issue at the same time as Spain was moving from

dictatorship to democracy' (Hooper 1995: 165), dance works to elucidate the stake that

Spanish men had in the transformation of gender, encouraging an examination of

masculinities that could potentially both complement and inform feminist strategies for

change. After all, Antonio's search for, discovery of, relationship with, and

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cultural construction of Carmen. Indeed, in the stage version of Gades's *Carmen* Cristina played the title role. Therefore it is no coincidence that in the film Antonio cannot see what is right in front of him, passing over the experienced Cristina for "someone different and younger," and thereby revealing how the internalisation of idealised images can distort the judgement of women, and how the silver screen has been used to service patriarchy in its perpetuation of these stereotypes at the expense of "real," or more specifically, older women.

[39] However, this is not to say that men and women are equally victimised under patriarchy, or that men revolt against patriarchy for the same reasons as women; and thus their victories may not be counted as victories for women. Yet there is a danger in labelling *all* men phallocentric because whilst this word is important and does have its use, it should be used carefully because not *all* men are phallocratic otherwise nothing would ever change in the world, and likewise, neither are *all* women anti-phallocratic.

jealousy/"murder" of Carmen do not bring him much in the way of happiness. Indeed, his intensely pained expressions throughout the film signify quite the reverse, revealing him to be a 'prisoner of traditional male attitudes which see women as sex objects, as possessions which are theirs and no one else's' (Edwards 1995: 110).

A fissure in power relations: bodies that do politics

As well as being a choreographic reference to the way in which patriarchal ideologies drill discipline into women, increasing both the psychological and physical control over their bodies as they are trained to submit to male hegemony, this initial dance sequence *can also* be read as a reference to the burgeoning movement *against* patriarchy's silencing and disempowerment of women. As Hooper writes, 'the social revolution of the eighties was about gender. It was the decade in which Spanish women flooded into higher education and on to the labour market' (*ibid*: 168). So whilst their shaping into a mass-moving pattern arguably averts the threat that a single woman might pose in her demand to be acknowledged as a person, it also gives language to an embodied politics, affecting a sense of their intersubjective and corporeal experiences of togetherness and strength as they move in-synch against and into the space of oppressive constraints/Antonio, who aims to set them apart in competition.[40] This sense of their emotional bonding through rhythmic coordinated movement is an example of how dancing bodies (and cameras) can do politics, a politics that has 'little to do with thoughts…that is unintentional, inadvertent, but no less effective than conceptual politics' (Washabaugh 1995: 87), and can have, in turn, a psychological, emotional, and visceral affect on both participants and audience.

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[40] Because coordination and synchronization are ubiquitous within flamenco culture, it is an art form that has been appropriated by various politically oriented groups/agendas, and *Carmen*'s (danced) representation of Spanish womens' fight for freedom 'is allied to the vindication of flamenco. [Since] [h]er independence challenges and exposes Antonio's own crumbling ideology in accordance with the changes in contemporary Spain' (Stone 2002: 78).

Stemming from his own 'sense of pervasive well-being…[and] more specifically, a strange sense of personal enlargement' (1995: 2) thanks to his participation in close-order drill as a draftee of the United States army in 1941, William H. McNeill investigates the historical affects of ritualised movement on group identity in *Keeping Together in Time*:

> Obviously, something visceral was at work; something, I later concluded, far older than language and critically important in human history, because the emotion it arouses constitutes an indefinitely expansible basis for social cohesion among any and every group that keeps together in time…"Muscular bonding" is the most economical label I could find for this phenomenon, and I hope the phrase will be understood to mean the euphoric fellow feeling that prolonged and rhythmic muscular movement arouses among nearly all participants in such exercises.[41] (*ibid*: 2-3)

As Antonio ceases to lead and turns around to watch "his" dancers they do not descend into undisciplined chaos, but advance towards him with a physical unity that reflects women's growing power and his increasing isolation in the face of it, offering an example of how this kind of 'muscular bonding' can be appropriated for political purposes. Indeed, it is interesting that both novella and opera present Carmen's dancing as seductive solo performances, whereas Gades largely represents her as part of a female group, neither the centre of attention nor sole object of the gaze, but part of a coordinated "mass" working in parallel. So whilst agreeing with Rosella Simonari's contention that this 'use of the group is paradigmatic of Gades's political interpretation of the myth. Carmen is aware of her class, she is a worker and as such she lives and fights with the people from this same background' (2008: 199), I would add that their somatic interconnectedness also works to ally her individual fight for freedom to the wider socio-historical and political context of women's liberation. And thus, 'her

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[41] McNeill does, however, acknowledge that 'isolated individuals can indeed consciously repress the euphoric affect of keeping together in time when compelled to take part in something they dislike or fear or hate' (1995: n. 2, 159).

dancing should be recognised as the politicised expression of female identity', revealing how feminist ideologies may be conveyed through motion and physicality (Stone 2002: 77-78).

A shared somatic experience

As the sweeping, gliding camerawork and slow zooms of this initial sequence reflect and imitate both the fluidity and mobility of the dancers' bodies, it is as if the phenomenological sense of the film's body draws me into the dance, intimately submerging me into the flow of movement through my alignment with the camera's point-of-view. A physical relationship is thus established between three bodies, those of the dancers' on screen, the film's body, and my own, and in watching I 'can see the seeing as well as the seen, hear the hearing as well as the heard, and *feel the movement as well as see the moved*' (Sobchack 1992: 10, my emphasis). The euphoric feeling of moving in-synch that McNeill writes about, then, is not restricted to actual participants of the filmed dance, but can kinaesthetically extend to viewers who respond physically and with 'heart' to movement both on and of the film (*op. cit*. Gaines: 1999).

Therefore, the strength of this experience is, *for me*, heavily reliant upon the activation of my body, signalling the inseparability between our bodies and our minds and thus revealing how our thinking is dependent upon our corporeality. "Meaning" is, after all, layered, with some levels not always literally and cognitively intelligible but sensually and muscularly felt and understood. However, this is not to say that either process of understanding negates the other because they are inseparable, always working together in the creation and enhancement of meaning whether paradoxical or not. In Julia Kristeva's *Revolution in Poetic Language* (1984), she criticises the fixed and static

model of traditional semiology in which the linear and logical realm of the symbolic

provides the rules and codes that constitute the building blocks of meaning. Instead, she

posits that all signifying practices, like human beings, are complex, contradictory, and

forever changing over time and space, and are thus *processes* that contain both the

symbolic and the semiotic realms: or what Kristeva terms the *chora*. This realm,

deriving from the Greek word for womb, relates to our internal rhythms, to our

somatically felt, emotional, and oftentimes abstract experience of meaning that is more

fluid and less precise than the symbolic, and a space of meaning that has been Othered

by the supremacy of binary logic. Thus, through giving credence to a form of

(nonrational) perception, Kristeva's chora is potentially subversive since it encourages a

transformation in the way that we privilege meaning making processes, and can

therefore lead to the 'production of a different kind of subject, one capable of bringing

about new social relations' that are not dependent upon the mind/body, nature/culture,

subject/object, and interior/exterior oppositions (Kristeva 1984: 105).

Despite differences in terms of their respective grounding in Lacanian psychoanalysis

and philosophy, Kristeva and Sobchack are thus similarly concerned with the materiality

of meaning, and since Sobchack calls for more attention to be given to our direct bodily

experience specifically of cinema, I shall now articulate *my own* bodily response to this

initial synchronised dance sequence.

The first five seconds of quiescence inspire in me a feeling of subordination, as I "stand"

to attention, waiting expectantly for something to happen, just as the dancers wait for

Antonio's direction. As we are counted in, the camera immediately begins to mirror the

dancers' graceful and confident movements in an inclusive gesture that serves to gather

me into their community: a feeling that is accentuated by the tight framing of the scene, as well as the camera briefly positioning itself amongst them on its trajectory towards a close-up of Antonio. The poise and strength of the simple and clean choreography is spelt out by the sound of the dancers' feet and fingers stamping and snapping in the same rhythm and with the same intensity, so that even when the camera cuts to Antonio's POV, I remain interconnected with the synchronised dancers because I am feeling the *compás,* or rhythm, inside my body, as my own internal rhythms, my 'heart, lungs, pulsing fluids, and firing synapses receive, respond to, and reenact the rhythms of cinema' (Barker 2009: 3). The visceral nature of this relationship is both mesmerising and somehow deeply moving, and I am transformed into an emotional participant who is not only observing but also now feeling the dance resonate throughout my body-mind.[42]

Without thinking I pull in my abdominal muscles and hold my pelvic floor, internal adjustments that improve my sense of core strength as I mirror the attitude of the dancers/dance/film, feeling more upright, grounded, elegant and proud, despite the fact that I am not discernibly moving. It is this kind of 'muscular engagement' with the film that enables me to 'straddle that threshold between "here and there," body and image. In the cinematic experience, we inhabit both places at once, with varying degrees of success' (*ibid*: 72). This affirmation of my body as part of the group moving in-synch and in kinetic exhilaration endows me with a sense of self-confidence and of belonging, something that Sobchack refers to as the 'carnal subversion of fixed subject positions' (2004: 67). This, in turn, creates a form of empathy that shapes my understanding of the

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[42] *Aficionados* and *flamencólogos* believe that flamenco can *only* be understood instinctively, by the irrational, emotional body-mind. Whilst this kind of passion has undoubtedly played a major role in the production of exoticism, passion and emotion are undeniably highly valued in flamenco, since it is not a half-hearted dance but one that encourages an intense release of self. The *compás*, or rhythms, are to be felt and lived, not counted, and as the audience participate by playing *palmas* (clapping their hands), or through *jaleo* (spoken or shouted comments), the dividing line between performers and audience is blurred. This impulsive, emotional, and embodied way of experiencing the film is therefore arguably more in tune with traditional flamenco, supporting the need for a sensual analysis of this film.

film. Through listening to the dancers' rhythms with my body in this way, it is as if we share the present moment, and therein, a simple (yet illusory) sense of freedom: no longer feeling the exertion of the film's or Antonio's power over us, we are able to collectively transcend the gendered hierarchies that have produced and now direct and survey "our" movement. This is because I have become part of a "mass" body that moves in space and in relation to other bodies, simultaneously in my body and feeling the sensations of this movement, whilst my spacious body is "everywhere," becoming space, and thus, feeling "free." And although of course *I know* that I am not dancing with them in the same place and time, 'I still do have a partially fulfilled sensory experience of these things that make them both intelligible to me and meaningful for me' (*ibid*: 76), enhancing my critical understanding of the film through the meanings that are conveyed through motion and physicality *as well* as through cognition and emotion. Merleau-Ponty proposes that there is a stage in an infant's development in which the divide between real and imaginary space does not exist, correlating with Lacan's account of the mirror stage. He writes that,

> The child knows well that he is where his introspective body is, and yet in the depth of the mirror he sees the same being present, in a bizarre way, in a visible appearance. There is a mode of spatiality in the specular image that is altogether distinct from adult spatiality. (1964: 129)

Perhaps, then, this imaginative and creative feeling of spaciousness and freedom is just that *because* it ruptures pre-existing forms of (learnt) subjectivity, granting us moments of escape/challenge to and from rational/adult understanding and constructs in order to experience a more phenomenological conception of time and space, in which any one dimension is not privileged over another. Through internalising the rhythm and synchronising with the bodies on screen and with the camera, a feeling of empowered

and celebratory revolt is expressed and embodied, and as such, this dance symbolises the fight for liberty and the independence from patriarchal authority.

Encouraging solidarity?

Whilst moving "with" these women is, as Deidre Sklar's ethnographic work on dance communities suggests, 'a way to also "feel with" them, providing an opening into the kind of cultural knowledge that is not available through words or observation alone' (1994: 11), I cannot ignore the fact that I am interpreting this dance, and indeed the entire film, through the prism of my own socio-historical, cultural and somatic experience. Therefore, I can never claim to know what the dancers were feeling or to speak on their behalf, or for Saura or Gades for that matter, since I can only speak for myself. Not all, or indeed any viewers will respond to the gestures of the dancers/film in kind, and may consciously resist what I feel to be the physical (and feminist) pull of the film. This is partly why film is so exciting, because meaning is never fixed or static; it does not reside solely in my body, in the cinematic representation, or in its context, but in their conjunction. And this conjunction, for me, makes the prologue to *Carmen* a powerful and political form of tactile communication, helping to produce Kristeva's notion of 'a different kind of subject…capable of bringing about new social relations' (1984: 105).

In exploiting the audiences' emotional and physical response to mass synchronised movement (coterminous to the time of its release), the film encourages solidarity between Spanish women (and men) striving for equality on a subrational level, thus making the collective task of feminism more effective in 1980s Spain. The repeated representation of keeping together in time may have also encouraged and/or supported a

sense of national solidarity, as Spain was beginning to challenge the legacy of

Francoism as well as attempt to exorcise foreign conceptions of Spanishness.[43] And so

for a contemporary audience, this bodily synchronicity can aid an embodied

understanding, without the need for words or didacticism, of feminism as a complex

generational movement, shedding light on the struggles and battles waged in the past in

order to understand how we have reached where we are today, and thereby connecting

to a history of women's strength and power. In not taking for granted how much has

changed for women due to these struggles, whilst also remaining aware of persistent

inequalities, we may learn to address the powerful backlash against feminism, and the

resulting misperceptions that many young women, in particular, have about feminism.

And although this film deals specifically with Spanish feminism, these lessons transcend

national and cultural borders.

The credit sequence: foreign perspective/male discourse

This simple yet incredibly rich introduction to *Carmen* ends with an abrupt cut to the

credit sequence after Antonio has expressed his disappointment, as noted earlier, in the

dancers featured in this prologue. Accompanied by Bizet's choral music and projected

against a series of engravings that depict the French artist, Gustave Doré's, 1862

journey through Spain, we move directly from Antonio's failed attempts at inflicting a

false ideal upon "real" women, to a series of false images/sounds of Spanishness,

'bound up as [they are] in the colonizing aesthetics of foreign perceptions of Spain'

(D'Lugo 1991: 205). As the first title acknowledges the inspiration of both Mérimée

and Bizet, the camera focuses on a group of men looking up as they are seated around a

table, upon which we can see the feet of a woman. Straight away then, Mérimée and

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[43] This is also evident in the rehearsal that comes straight after the prologue in *Bodas*: as the dancers gradually synchronise their steps they are transformed into an ensemble working together, as opposed to the (deconstructed) individuals that we have just witnessed getting ready.

Bizet are associated not only with a foreign perspective of Spain, but with a tradition of male discourse, since this image of woman is one seen through the eyes of the men who are looking up at her. This focus on the feet of a woman is repeated in four shots of different engravings, connoting a sense that despite being her creators, men are subordinate to their own fears and fantasies as they blindly worship at the feet of an archetype. This articulates the truly subversive element of the film, because in representing Antonio in crisis, he is shown to be a victim of his own (narcissistic, phallocentric, and colonial) quest for the "authentic" Carmen when there is no truth but only representation – even Carmen doesn't measure up as *Carmen*! Surely then, this story can *never actually be about Carmen* because she has never existed and so she cannot die? The real story, or stories, are those of her creators and the internalisation of these creation stories, which have served to galvanise the attributes of this dangerously sexualised dancing archetype/Latina Other.

Therefore, as the camera pans up to reveal a woman standing atop the table triumphantly, it is as if this movement articulates the film's political embodiment. Because it is only through the movement *away* from these (male-created) foundational myths of "woman" that an autonomous female identity may be asserted. And just as the film attempts to disentangle Carmen from a web of false and exoticized representations in order for this to be possible, so too does it deconstruct a notion of Spanish national identity that has been bound up in the same web of lies, damaged and distorted at the hands of foreign bias as well as the dictatorship.

This is why the images of this "French" title sequence are immediately juxtaposed in the following scene with the everyday setting of the dance studio, just as they were

preceded by the prologue's emphasis on "real" Spanish women who do not comfortably

fit into the role prescribed by patriarchy/Orientalism. In this studio scene, the camera

dollies through the dancers, both men and women, as they work hard at their craft in

order to reinterpret exoticised interpretations of themselves and of their culture, a task

that becomes most apparent when Paco de Lucía uses his 'authentic Spanish musical

instrument' to transform Bizet's Seguidilla into a traditional *bulería* – 'a genuine

Spanish musical tradition' (Edwards 1995: 104).[44] These historical

titles/representations, then, are framed on either side by Spanish artists: director,

choreographer, dancers, and actors, who all work together in the process of creating

their own, specifically Spanish, version of a Spanish myth: and in so doing, deconstruct

both colonial and patriarchal constructions of what it means to be a Spaniard.

<u>Conclusion</u>

The innovative combination of politics in/as aesthetics that merges signs with affective

camerawork in both of these opening/credit sequences, can thus successfully intervene

in the understanding and "authority" of history, of what it means to be Spanish, and of

female identity, by drawing the viewer into an intimate relationship with the company

of dancers. Inclusive gestures, the proximity of the camera to performers, rhythmic

coordinated movement, and a sense of the multi-faceted nature of individual, cultural,

and national identity, all contribute towards a feeling of openness, fluidity, questioning,

and emotional bonding that makes "their" battles and victories (against patriarchal,

homophobic and historical authority/fixity), "my" battles, through an intersubjective

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[44] A *bulería* is a typically high paced *palos*, or style, of flamenco. This simultaneous quoting and displacing of Bizet's music is also apparent in the title sequence's use of his choral music written for the tobacco factory fight scene, whilst during this actual scene in the film, a flamenco song is used. Thus, Bizet is connected to false images, whilst flamenco is associated with a process of national and cultural reinterpretation and reclamation.

and corporeal sense of togetherness and strength. I am thus welcomed into the liminal space of the dressing room/dance studio, an 'Other' space in which to build up a sense of community whilst reinventing sets of relations with the more dominant "outside." A collective ideal thereby informs both films, simultaneously consolidating (through the juxtaposition of both credit sequences), as well as anticipating a more liberated time. And whilst Jane Gaines acknowledges in her brilliant article on 'Political Mimesis,' that it is impossible to quantify whether politically inflected cinema can effect social change, the 'element[s]…that make a visceral impact' can produce 'a powerful mirroring effect' in sympathetic audience communities who, as a result, 'want to kick and yell. … want to *do* something' (1999: 98-9, 90, my emphasis).[45] This sense of persuasion through embodied mimesis is thus far more effective than didacticism alone, because it goes 'beyond the abstracting intellectual to produce a bodily swelling' (*ibid*: 91), that, in the case of these films, endows me with a sense of what it is like to go beyond myself and become a part of a mass body/movement. Whether acted upon or not, this sensually conveys a political idea: that however innovative, committed, or powerful they may be, no single individual can effect change alone. For large-scale social change to take place, broad cooperation and coordination is required.

However, whilst these films scrutinise the stereotypes of flamenco through flamenco in order to assert a felt sense of collective liberty, they can still be read as the expression of familiar stereotyped forms. Indeed, it is interesting that, as Pietsie Feenstra writes, '*Carmen* was not seen by a large audience in Spain while it was still selected to represent Spain abroad for the Oscars. *Carmen* is an image that sells itself very well outside the borders' (2011: 93). So whilst one could argue that it is precisely these

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[45] Although Gaines is specifically writing about political documentary, cinema, and in this case, screendance, can work in a similar way.

audiences that need "educating" the most about Spanish stereotypes, however much they attempt to question and deconstruct them, both stories embody (and perhaps encourage) a colonial gaze. And whilst this is more obvious in the case of the French precedents of the Carmen myth, Lorca can also be accused of romanticising flamenco, particularly in his (1928) collection of poetry, *Romancero gitano* (*Gypsy Ballads*). Thus his treatment of gypsy culture in *Bodas* is not exempt from ideological critique. So however much these filmic adaptions may be imbued with radical politics and potential, if the viewer does not meet the film with the same ethics, values, and political dispositions, then their power of sensual subversion is rendered null. And particularly so if they are watching without any knowledge of how the films' socio-historical and political contexts have shaped them.

Furthermore, they would not have subrationally and corporeally collectivised Spanish audiences in the fight for women's equality if they weren't widely watched. And despite the merit in the above argument that audiences outside of Spain need to be educated about Spanish stereotypes more than the people who "live" it, the myth of Carmen's "otherness" has undoubtedly been entrenched in Spanish culture *as well*. Thus, whilst *Carmen* makes an excellent attempt at demystifying the myth of "Carmen," it does not ultimately reinvent the language and subjectivity of woman. Rather, in showing her to be the construction of colonial/phallocentric fantasy, she is *without* a position because she doesn't exist, and so there is no move away from being the object of male desire to a subject position. In a balanced critique of the film, Andrés Lema-Hincapié acknowledges that whilst 'Saura laments the inescapable cliché', he 'never imagine[s] that it is within his power to destroy it. He remains a prisoner in it, and therefore, his criticism is still timid' (2005: 162). In contrast, the films explored in my chapter on

avant-garde feminist screendance, and particularly Amy Greenfield's *Tides*, provide example of a more complete and embodied expression of female liberation and subjectivity.

However, despite all of these caveats, I would argue that the films' combination of innovative cinematic reflexivity with sensuous screendance pleasure at the very least renders these colonial stories "strange," and thereby, to re-quote Laura Mulvey, 'get[s] us nearer to the roots of our oppression', helping audiences 'begin to make a break by examining patriarchy [and Orientalism] with the tools it provides' (1975: 59).

Chapter Two

**Dancing with Difference: Challenging (Disabling) Perceptions of Disability in
Screendance Performance**

Introduction

In this chapter I shall explore the potential for screendance to challenge exclusionary

Western societal perceptions of physical disability, working towards transforming a

historical (and cinematic) tendency towards objectification into embodied interaction. It

is not merely the presence of a disabled dancer performing their own identity on screen,

nor narrative content alone that shape the meaning(s) of disability and dance, but the

specificity of their filmic mediation. I shall therefore use Laura Marks's (2000) concept

of haptic images and visuality to examine how camera placement (in relation to

dancers), mise-en-scène, lighting, framing, sound, and editing technique, all contribute

towards physically arousing the viewer to meaning. I thus aim to show how the

sensuality of filmic form can potentially bring the film object closer to the viewer's

body, connecting (and incorporating) them with/into the body of the dancers and with

the body of the film, in a tactile and mimetic relationship that can elicit empathy rather

than pity and/or fear. But I shall also consider how, despite best intentions, screendance

can fail, since not all of the films considered are as successful as others in challenging

and disrupting prevailing notions about disability, and in foregrounding the agency of

disabled subjects. Through the intersubjectivity inherent in the act of Rosemarie

Garland-Thomson's (2009) notion of baroque staring, which is distinct from the

oppressive and disciplinary gaze that seeks to subordinate its object from a "safe"

distance, I shall also investigate how screendance can encourage a circuit of

communication and meaning making that broadens expectations of who can and should

be seen, and who "looks back." In this way dominant viewing strategies are disrupted by refusing exotic spectacularization.

My main object of study is a short film made by DV8 physical theatre company, *The Cost of Living* (2004), adapted for the camera from an earlier stage production and the recipient of numerous dance-film awards.[46] It is set in various locations in a deserted Norfolk seaside resort, where main characters and friends Dave (David Toole) and Eddie (Eddie Kay) are street performers trying to make a living as the summer season comes to an end. Accompanied by a small cast of what can only be described as misfits and social outsiders, character and "story" are told more through dance than dialogue (although there is spoken dialogue as well), in a series of interlinked scenes exploring the dynamics of how we look at and judge others, and how we, in turn, value ourselves. Whilst many of these characters and *all* of the scenes are deserving of an in-depth analysis, my focus will be on Dave since he is the only character/dancer/actor/person who is visibly disabled, being without any legs.[47]

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[46] Henceforth and for the sake of space, I will refer to this film as *TCOL*.

A full list of the film's awards can be found on DV8's website at:
http://www.dv8.co.uk/projects/costoflivingfilm

[47] These "misfits" are deserving of analysis because they represent different kinds of physical/emotional/mental health/learning disabilities, which are not as easily (or as visibly) identifiable as Dave's. Briefly, I read Eddie's insightful intelligence, anger and aggression, struggle with society, and nervous tics as a representation of a man living with a mental illness. Rowan sports a perpetually blank face whilst locked into performing mechanic and repetitive movements (until his fabulous and liberatory dance to a Cher song), and does not utter a word throughout the film. He thus seems to represent a man on the autistic spectrum who only feels "free" when he dances. Tom is a *repressed* homosexual, furtively seeking out anonymous sex away from the prying and aggressively homophobic eyes of Eddie. And Viv, although eventually empowered, allows Eddie to construct her into the object of his desire. It seems to me, then, that all of these "disabilities" profoundly affect these characters' physical position in the world, although unlike Dave, they don't necessarily affect their access to the world in quite the same way. And just to clarify, it is Tom's *repression* and certainly not his homosexuality that I regard as a disability.

Various scenes explore his encounters with ignorance and prejudice; his dependence, at times, upon his friends; and also his independence and fierce refusal to let his disability, or other people's prejudices, disable him. An extensive and detailed analysis of a *pas de deux* with an able-bodied ballerina in a ballet studio context will form the main body of my analysis. This is because in terms of the internal hierarchies within dance genres, along with the hierarchical "ideal" of the balletic dancing body, ballet undoubtedly occupies *the* most privileged position in the world of dance. It is the foundation for virtually every genre of Western dance, and therefore its strict enforcement of body type has transcended the ballet world and created a corporeal standard/orthodoxy for (many) professional dance practices (Novack: 1993, Bull: 1997). This is why I also consider how a momentary doubling of another (able-bodied) female dancer/character, Viv (Vivien Wood), just before Dave enters the studio, both establishes and destabilises these patriarchal orthodoxies. In order, then, for disabled dancers (and women) to challenge these exclusionary norms and standards, and to be accepted as genuine and professional performers, it makes sense that the stereotypes created by ballet are the ones most in need of deconstruction. This is why a great deal of attention is focussed on this densely packed scene, because in placing a disabled man in a ballet studio context, *TCOL* takes on the hierarchical world of dance and offers its viewers the *possibility* of a different and accommodative world, transforming professional dance into an art that is accessible to *all*.

I shall also be bringing two other films into the discussion, *Outside In* (1995), and *Water Burns Sun* (2009), two short, non-narrative and experimental dance films that feature professional disabled dancers taking (various levels of) control over their own representation on film. But first, in order to establish exactly how these films work (or

not) to counter more normative and dominant cinematic representations of disabled bodies, I shall give a brief history of the changing relationship between mainstream (Hollywood) film and disability.

Dominant cinematic expressions of disability

Paul K. Longmore's (1985) foundational and influential article on 'Screening Disability: Images of Disabled People,' as well as Martin F. Norden's now canonical text, *The Cinema of Isolation* (1994), have both documented these negative stereotypes of disability. Norden divides the history of Hollywood's fascination with disability roughly into three periods: between the late 1890s and the late 1930s early cinematic representations tended to be highly exploitative, sharing as they did a visual aesthetic, historic place, and cultural position with the Freak show. Disabled women and girls (but boys and men as well) were largely represented as thoroughly "good" and angelically "pure," desexualized tragic victims in desperate need of pity, protection, charity, and a miracle cure.[48] One such paradigmatic example is the beholden and nameless young blind girl in Charlie Chaplin's *City Lights* (1931), defined solely by her disability. In a sentimentalised romantic comedy, Chaplin's iconic character, the Tramp, falls in love with this '"Sweet Innocent"' (Norden: 33), who never adapts to her disability by developing her non-visual perception in order to "see" without sight, or by using a cane to help her navigate her environment. Instead she is powerless and vulnerable, forever groping around or relying upon the Tramp to lead her home. Treated reverentially and ultimately rescued, the Tramp raises the money for the "miraculous surgery" that restores her sight. The subtext, then, is hardly subtle, as her blindness/disability is an affliction to be cured, and "womanhood" is only achieved once she is "whole."

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[48] Rather than the self-advocacy, autonomy and civil rights that could (and would) be won through challenging educational, medical, and social institutions that deny/stifle disabled people.

Disabled men, on the other hand, were generally presented as either 'Comic Misadventurers' using 'slapstick humor (*sic*) to trivialize issues of physical disability', or '"Obsessive Avengers": an egomaniacal sort … who does not rest until he has had his revenge on those he holds responsible for his disablement and/or violating his moral code in some other way' (*ibid*: 20, 52). This sinisterly embittered and pathologically vengeful monster/freak is arguably one of the *most* popular, and certainly one of the most enduring stereotypes in our cultural imaginings, as evidenced by the cult status of Tod Browning's (albeit, interestingly ambiguous) *Freaks* (1932).[49] A more recent incarnation can be found in the character of Two-Face from *The Dark Knight Rises* (2008). His dualistic "good" battle with the criminal "dark" side of Gotham City leaves him facially disfigured and his fiancée dead, thus transforming him into a crazed and horrific coin-flipping murderer bent on revenge. As Longmore asserts, since 'the final and only possible solution [for both monstrous and criminal disabled characters] is often death', Two-Face gets his "just" punishment when Batman kills him at the end of the film (1985: 5).

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[49] Norden refers to *Freaks* as 'one of the most disturbing films ever made … alternat[ing] between cloying sentimentality and outrageous exploitation' (115), but I would argue that this appraisal does not tell the whole story. Although the (real-life) cast of physically and mentally disabled people do indeed enact revenge upon the non-disabled aerialist and her strongman lover, it is the latter two that are presented as the murderous, money grabbing "monsters." This, then, subversively hints at the fact that historically, it has been 'non-disabled people who have at times endeavoured to destroy people with disabilities. [And] [a]s with popular portrayals of other minorities, the unacknowledged hostile fantasies of the stigmatizers are transferred to the stigmatized' (Longmore 1985: 4). Scenes are shot from the perspective of the disabled performers, and they are shown to be a sympathetic community of outsiders who look after each other and lead relatively "normal" lives (for freak show circus performers), until an attempt is made on one of their lives. However, the (exploitative) sight of their disabled bodies was undoubtedly intended to evoke a particular response (of curiosity/disgust) in the audience, and the film resorts to a familiar visual rhetoric of horror as the "freaks" gang up and kill the strongman and mutilate the acrobat so that she becomes "one of them." But the film's lack of disabling binaries that usually and unproblematically construct the "normal" characters as inherently "good," against the disabled and abject personifications of "evil," makes identification with either disabled or non-disabled characters neither straightforward or easy, and thus helps explain the cultural unease that led to a long history of censorship and outright bans.

Largely due to a cultural anxiety concerning the return home of disabled veterans, the second period of Hollywood's discourse on disability tended towards more sensitive and progressive portrayals. Between the years of World War II and the 1970s, disabled characters were often portrayed as remarkable heroes, triumphing over the terrible burden of their particular disability with awe-inspiring tenacity. No longer inextricably associated with "evil," innocence, or comic buffoonery, Hollywood would now propagate the supercrip stereotype, whose success is always (mis)understood as being *despite* rather than *because* of their disability.[50] An example of this can be found in '[o]ne of Hollywood's best-loved and most commercially successful movies,' *The Best Years of Our Lives* (1946) (Gerber: 1994: 545). This cathartic drama/melodrama tells the story of three veterans struggling to adjust to civilian life. Although all "disabled" in different ways, only Homer Parish (Harold Russell) is *actually* physically disabled (both in the film and in real life), being a bilateral hand amputee who uses two metal hook prostheses. Despite, then, breaking new ground in casting a disabled and non-professional actor to play the role of a disabled character, the film fails to challenge long-standing stereotypes of disability that provoke pity and fear. This is because whilst the dexterous use of his prostheses is empowering, they are also undeniably 'freakish and menacing' (*ibid*: 552). His parents pity him and struggle to accept his disability, just as he struggles to accept himself, or to believe that his childhood sweetheart is not mistaking pity and duty for love and devotion. Whilst his angry outbursts are both understandable and sympathetic, they are simultaneously frightening (especially to the children in the film). And although the camera does focus on his body, it serves to symbolise what Sharon Snyder and David Mitchell refer to as 'the threat toward the integrity of the able body' (2010: 186). Therefore, rather than promoting a respectful

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[50] The word 'crip' is a counterword used within some sections of disability culture, and works to reclaim and rename with pride the violence and damage done to disabled people through the 'master's' language.

understanding of difference, it elicits/processes audiences' anxieties concerning their own vulnerability. Furthermore, Homer's struggle is "magically resolved" in a formulaic happy ending, marriage. And whilst this may well have sent 'a powerful message of hope and reconciliation' (*op. cit.* 1994: 546), it ultimately (and over-optimistically) deflects attention away from a social model of disability.[51] The underlying (and pernicious) ideology behind this "well intentioned" stereotype is, then, that the problems faced by disabled characters are the result of their individual "problem" bodies, which have individual solutions that have nothing to do with society's disabling perceptions and/or environments.

The final period that Norden covers is from the 1970s to today, when depictions gradually begin to present more three-dimensional characters who have a disability but are not defined solely by it. Or as Norden puts it, filmmakers began 'showing characters trying to live ordinary, post-rehabilitation lives often within the mainstream of American society. The characters may still face problems connected to their impairments (attitudes, mostly), but nevertheless they frequently pursue goals that go beyond basic rehabilitation issues if indeed they deal with the latter at all' (1994: 264). It was largely the aftermath of the Vietnam War that gave rise to these multidimensional representations, which can be seen in films like *Coming Home*[52] (1978), *The Deer Hunter* (1978), *Apocalypse Now* (1979), and *Born on the Fourth of July* (1989). However, this period also features the saintly sage, wise prophet, or blind seer

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[51] This message of hope was much needed at the time, evident in the fact that the film won seven Academy Awards in 1946, two of which went to Harold Russell, the only ever actor to receive two Oscars for one role. One was for best supporting actor, and the other was a 'Special Oscar' 'for bringing hope and courage to his fellow veterans' (Berg 1989: 427).

[52] Importantly, *Coming Home* was one of the first, 'if not *the* first' Hollywood film to explicitly depict a disabled person as a sexual being, in a mutually satisfying sexual relationship. Thus, it 'set the stage for movies of the 1980s and beyond to explore the concept further' (Norden 1994: 268).

stereotype in films like *The Elephant Man* (1980), and *Mask* (1985). Whilst these films are based on the real lives of disabled people who were isolated, or worse, abused, exploited, and exhibited, these saintly figures never seem to express anger with the treatment they receive at the hands of a deeply prejudiced society. Instead, they are always able to rise above their oppression in order to forgive their oppressors and teach the world humanity and compassion. Furthermore, they always die at the end, which conveniently and cathartically absolves the audience of any guilt or sense of social responsibility, whilst simultaneously propagating the message that social integration for severely disabled people is impossible.

Whilst this brief and generalised history serves to acknowledge that Hollywood is not a straw figure doing *everything* wrong when it comes to representing disability on screen, and that its depictions have been diverse, nuanced, and variable over time, both reflecting and contributing towards changes in societal attitudes and beliefs that have *generally* moved in a positive direction, it is important to note that negative stereotypes continue to resurface with alarming regulatory. For example, the pernicious 'Obsessive Avenger' stereotype reappears in *Hook* (1991), *Speed* (1994), and *Wild Wild West* (1999). And regardless of the huge success and international acclaim of *Million Dollar Baby* (2004), the protagonist's desire for and actual assisted suicide after a spinal cord injury reaffirms the durable and pervasive message that disabled lives are not worth living. These films, then, continue to reflect more about the prejudices and fears of mainstream society than the realities of disabled peoples' lives. Using disability as a 'politically charged commodity' to sell to (predominantly) able-bodied audiences (*ibid*: x).

The filmic mediation of disability

At the same time as acknowledging the seminal contribution that Longmore and

Norden's work has made in detailing, contextualising and understanding the history of

Hollywood's relationship with physical disability, and how its depictions/stereotypes

have shaped our perceptions/prejudices, there is in their work little engagement with

how the *medium of film itself* creates meaning.[53] Disabled characters have been further

isolated through various cinematic devices that accentuate their disability, including

(but not limited to) stationary cameras that shoot intrusive close-ups, thereby

encouraging a gratuitous gaze not dissimilar to a freak show set up. Long, static shots

have been used to put physical distance between disabled characters and others, as well

as between disabled performers on screen and viewers, which does nothing to bridge the

gap between them, or to draw the viewer into the disabled character's experience. This

has the effect of "fixing" them in a position from which there is no hope of escaping.

Long takes can (negatively) emphasise the time-consuming nature of disabled

characters' needs, and of navigating an ableist world. Shots are rarely taken from

realistic wheelchair height eye-lines, invariably positioning the spectator as able-bodied

whilst keeping the disabled characters "in their place," as they are literally looked down

upon. And by casting half of a character's face in near darkness, lighting can be used to

connote the "sinister" nature of disability. Therefore, in the following analyses, I shall

consider the kinds of stereotypes and disabling attitudes that my chosen films are

working against, as well as the ways in which they achieve their effects cinematically

and choreographically.

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[53] Neither does their work consider the possibility that however negative and damaging these stereotypes
may be, *some* disabled viewers may "reclaim" and even revel in these monstrous stereotypes, reading
against the grain as a recuperative and defiant strategy for survival. However, despite these limitations,
Norden and Longmore's foundational contribution to the study of disability and film is particularly
valuable when considering that despite frequent discussion, 'especially on academic listservs and at
scholarly meetings, omnibus publication about the relationship between film and disability is scant'
(Chivers & Markotić 2010: 13).

A moment for self-reflexivity

But first I would like to take a brief moment for self-reflexivity. Whilst I agree with querying and disrupting the binary divisions between fixed categories of embodiment such as disabled and nondisabled, and fully subscribe to the idea (or rather, the fact) that *all* bodies are in a constant state of flux and are thus vulnerable to (temporary or permanent) disablement at any time, particularly if we live long enough, I have to acknowledge that I am writing about the meanings of dancing disabled bodies from a privileged position as a nondisabled person. Therefore, I have had to ask myself some uncomfortable questions, such as whether I am perpetuating the 'disability ghetto' by writing a chapter on *disabled* screendance. However, after extensive research in the field of disability studies, I am confident that disability *does* make a huge difference, and in assuming otherwise, for whatever reason, is to dangerously 'limit[] the (real) difference that disability can make in radically refiguring how we look at, conceive of, and organise bodies in the twenty-first century' (Albright 2001: 60). It is not the task of this chapter to argue the effect of these films on disabled identities, nor to establish a disabled gaze. This is not intended to ignore or negate the viewpoint of viewers with disabilities, but to focus instead on the dominant, able-bodied audience, and the ways in which screendance can provide a self-reflexive commentary on our cultural beliefs and assumptions about physically disabled bodies.

The foregrounding of (sexual) subjectivity

The assumption that sexuality is somehow inappropriate or impossible for disabled people, as established by the 'Sweet Innocent' stereotype, is both confronted and subverted in a scene from *TCOL*. Sitting on top of a bar in a nightclub, Dave transfers his gaze from the woman who has just walked past, to look directly into the highly

mobile camera as he says, "Hello, name's Dave." Having spun around on his hands and

arms and seductively reclined on the bar, he returns our gaze once again to ask if we're

"impressed?" He then moves across the bar and closer to the camera, raising himself up

onto his hands and arms so that his eye-line is matched with the viewers, and utters the

classic pick-up line, "What winks and shags like a tiger?" He pauses, and then winks

directly at "us." Dave then goes on to both pre-empt as well as answer the kinds of

questions/thoughts that we might not *actually* ask or voice, but may well secretly

harbour, reversing the power dynamics inherent within the viewer's (ableist) gaze:

"Would you like to dance … Don't be embarrassed … can you imagine these wrapped

around you? [Opening out his arms] … It can't be the legs … I bet you're wondering

what's it like … Well, I'll tell you, its small, but its peachy … I saw you looking … I'll

be looking for you".

The fluidity of the camera mirrors the graceful fluidity of his bar dance, and it is this

simultaneous movement of the frame and the action happening within it that

momentarily obfuscates my sense of orientation. This endows the scene with a haptic

quality, as I am sensuously drawn into an embodied interaction rather than a distanced

and static objectification. Dave is not fixed or disabled by his disability, just as I am not

"fixed" in my position or intentionality towards him/the film. Instead, he is confident

and at ease in this nightclub, a liminal social space imbued with the possibility of

transgressive sexuality/encounters. And since this is a space that has not been

traditionally associated with inclusivity or easy accessibility for people with disabilities

(as indicated by the steep stairs Dave has to climb down in order to enter the club), his

confident presence is doubly subversive. The combination, then, of cinematography and

his *ability* to gracefully manoeuvre himself so that he can come closer and look directly

into my eyes, creates a sense that we are meeting each other on a level playing field. This is because camerawork neither diminishes nor "disappears" his disability, and I am not positioned "above" him looking down. As he winks at the camera/me, this tightly framed medium shot provides an insight into his multifaceted character and sexually suggestive sense of humour, and thus encourages empathy and identification with a *whole* character with a range of thoughts and desires, not merely a disability. Therefore, Dave's confident display of himself as a sexual object not only works to foreground his (sexual) subjectivity, but also to subvert his social invisibility as a disabled person. And through his direct address, he reverses his own objectification by reflecting it back onto the viewer, thereby encouraging a self-reflexive awareness of our own gaze and attitudes.

This interaction, then, 'affords a spontaneous moment of interpersonal connection, however brief, during which two people have the opportunity to regard and to be known to one another' (Garland-Thomson 2009: 33). Because Dave (as well as the medium of film) gives us "permission" to stare at him, and because he "stares" back, the viewer/film may engage with what Garland-Thomson refers to as 'baroque staring' (*ibid*: 50). This is distinct from the oppressive and disciplinary gaze, in that it is a form of open wonderment that is not concerned with or contained by rationality and a desire for superiority and control. Instead, a 'baroque stare is unrepentant abandonment to the unruly, to that which refuses to conform to the dominant order of knowledge', and as such, 'baroqueness resides not in a visual object, but rather in the encounter between starer and staree. Baroque staring entangles viewer and viewed in an urgent exchange that redefines both' (50). In this way, then, baroque staring has much in common with haptic visuality, which 'draws upon the mimetic knowledge that does not posit a gulf

between subject and object, or the spectator and the world of film', and 'allow[s] us to reconsider how the relationship between self and other may be yielding-knowing' (Marks 2000: 151). In teaching the starer *how* to look in a way that acknowledges, rather than closes down, the staree's full humanity, *TCOL*'s combination of baroque staring with haptic visuality can thus help shift our focus away from curiosity and towards ethical knowledge and embodied interaction.

Visual activism

This sensuous form of visual activism is also foregrounded in *Water Burns Sun*. The film begins with a high-angled shot zooming into a close-up of Neil Marcus's head and bare chested torso as he is seated on the floor, immediately connoting a sense that this will be both an intimate and dynamic encounter rather than a distanced and superior observation. The proximity of the (highly mobile) camera to his body creates a presence of texture, as I can see the folds of his flesh as he moves. Writing about the body of the film, Vivian Sobchack asserts that its (cinematic) vision 'knows what it is to touch things in the world … [and] thus perceives and expresses the "sense" of fabrics like velvet or the roughness of tree bark or the *yielding softness of human flesh*' (1992: 133, my emphasis). Therefore the film both expresses and evokes in me a sense of touch through my own body's 'intersensory links,' as my (embodied) vision allows me to caress Neil's skin and the contours of his twisted body (Marks 2000: 213). In this way, the film immediately invites my bodily interaction, as a haptic reciprocity is established between us.

As the camera pulls back the scene cuts to quoted text of Butoh, a Japanese/transnational movement form that typically explores playful and "grotesque"

body imagery/patterns with slow, hypnotic, and controlled motion, thereby subverting the classical aesthetics of (professional) dance practices.[54] Then the rest of the film proceeds with a montage of enigmatic images as Neil, a playwright, poet, actor, and dancer with generalised dystonia, is both positioned and shot with a camera on ground level. With his wheelchair looming large in the background, he proceeds to disrupt viewers' preconceptions of severely disabled bodies and dance, firstly by getting out of the chair, and then by exploring his own unique spastic movement vocabulary. Displaying his body in close-up without shame or embarrassment, the film not only explores the interesting shapes that his body can make, but also investigates interdependence, permeability, and tenderness in his exchanges with three female dance partners. These moving (but not patronising) scenes do not pathologise his movement patterns by signifying dysfunction, but instead explore *his* way of being in the world through *his* lived experience of disability, using artistic expression as the vehicle of his communication.

One of these images shows Neil tenderly stroking the hair away from his dance partner's face, as she places her head on his lap and closes her eyes in contentment. The film then cuts to a close-up of his head and chest in side profile as he lies horizontally across the floor, gazing directly into the camera as his dance partner sensuously places her head on his, then slowly rolls it along the side of his neck and arm. The closeness of the camera as well as the warm tone of bluish/purple light increases the temperature and proximity of their mutual and sensuous exchange. Jennifer Barker explains that physicists describe light 'either as a particle or a wave,

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[54] The text is accredited to the founder of Butoh, Tatsumi Hijikata, and reads: "When I begin to wish I were crippled – even though I am perfectly healthy – or rather that I would have been better off born a cripple, that is the first step towards butoh".

terms that aptly describe light's touch upon the skin', and thus I am also warmed by the film/their exchange, as '[t]he substance of cinema touches [me] in the same way … leav[ing] a trace on [my] skin[]' (2009: 30). The abstract, tonal and experimental soundtrack has an otherworldly quality about it, and this interesting and exploratory use of sound accentuates the dancers exploration of each other, as well as the film's broader exploration of Neil's dance movement. In the same way, then, that space was once the final frontier, perhaps by "boldly going where no man has gone before," and engaging with this "strange new world" of disabled screendance, disability will not be so alien, frightening, or unknowable as it has been historically constructed.[55]

A dissolve momentarily blends this image with a medium shot of Neil now intertwined with both his original partner and another female dancer, against whom he is leaning whilst touching her mouth with his fingers. The other dancer continues to recline on the floor with her head on his lap. The sensual connection between them is thus exemplified by the choice of "soft", permeable editing, which works to dissolve the stability of categories by subverting the cultural rules that attempt to fix Neil in the role of dependent sufferer. He is not passive in these relationships; the dance is an equal exchange in which he caresses, comforts, and cares for his partners as much as they care for him. This works to reveal how physical disability is *not* automatically accompanied by emotional, intellectual, sensual, sexual, or spiritual regression. Disabled people can have balanced and fulfilling relationships as well.

What is more, he forthrightly denies his asexual objectification as he is caressed in close-up, by looking directly into the camera with a powerfully expressive intent, which

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[55] These lines in double quotation marks are taken from the voiceover spoken at the beginning of many *Star Trek* television episodes and films.

seems to me to speak of his desire, his sensuality, and his appetites/enjoyment as a sensual/sexual being. Just before the "threesome" fades to black, he glances directly into the camera once again, and this is followed with another image of him alone, staring intently at "us" for almost all of the forty-nine seconds of this scene, which *feels* like a long time. At one point, he leans his head forward towards the camera and appears to smile with a glint in his eye, expressing a sense of his selfhood through the mobilisation of his direct gaze/address/contact with the viewer. In this way, Neil/the film invites me to activate the baroque stare as he/it meets me half way in the interaction. Through the generative potential in this staring exchange, along with the hapticity of the images, I am touched by the emotional and physical intimacy of the dancefilm. This creates the opportunity of recognising Neil's humanity, which can, in itself, be transformative, as we discover how his unique physical diversity need not be disabling.

A closed and regulated world

After a scene in *TCOL* that shows Dave and Eddie literally and humorously barging through the environmental and attitudinal barriers that can exclude disabled people from the social world, the film cuts to a low angled close-up shot of the legs (from the knees down) and feet of dancers' lined up as they perform ballet step exercises at the barre. Shot with a camera at ground level, this close-up not only highlights Dave's difference, but also draws attention to one of the foundational principles of ballet technique: the proper placement of the legs/feet. Every single step in classical ballet is performed with hips, knees and feet as turned out as possible, and it is this turnout that distinguishes

ballet from all other forms of dance.[56] With an emphasis, then, on aesthetic and

ephemeral qualities such as purity of line, weightlessness, smoothness, and fluidity,

(professional) ballet is the only dance technique that demands a certain physique and so

symbolises yet another exclusionary space and ideology, and not only for disabled

people. Writing about the 'primacy of seeing' in ballet, Cynthia Jean Cohen Bull

explains that:

> Students who do not possess "a good line," that is, a slender, long-limbed body which can form geometrically proportioned shapes, know that they will never be successful performers and are told so by teachers and administrators of professional schools. They may enjoy studying ballet, but they know that they do not "have the body" – the physical appearance – to be a "real" (professional) ballet dancer. While having the body by no means provides sufficient basis for success, it is the necessary prerequisite. (1997: 272)

As if to emphasise the refusal of ballet as a dance practice to acknowledge any

difference, light streams through a large window separated into smaller panes,

spotlighting the dancing legs and feet that are executing the same prescribed movements

in synchrony, and containing them within a grid/prison of light. In this way, camera

placement, choice of shot, lighting, and synchronicity of movement, all work together to

express the closed and fiercely regulated nature of the ballet dance studio, in which the

policing gaze of the ballet world demands absolute control and conformity of both steps

and bodies. And as intimated by the prison film's shafts-of-light-through-barred-

window shot, freedom lies beyond the confines of the window/studio.

However, as we cut to a shot of the outside of the studio, whilst we may hear the

evidence of the ballet teacher's strict surveillance as he counts out the dancers' routine,

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[56] A perfect turnout is the "effortless" outward rotation of the leg, starting from the hips and knees down to the feet, which should be turned out to the sides of the body at a 180° angle – an unfamiliar position for most people.

the door is surprisingly wide open. Perhaps then, this world is not as closed after all, since an open door undoubtedly connotes a sense of invitation. Instead of going straight through it, though, Dave wheels himself directly to the shut window and uses his hands and arms to prop himself up onto the ledge in order to have a look inside. Thus begins a brief (sixteen-second) but visually eloquent scene that further explores the division of spaces and their stability.

The division and transgression of space

A cut to Dave's head and shoulders looking in, centre frame, from outside the barred and slightly opaque window, makes him appear pale and ghost-like whilst also reinforcing a sense of the dancers' imprisonment within (as well as his exclusion from) the confines of this "high art" culture. This 'ghost effect' brings to mind Terry Castle's notion of *The Apparitional Lesbian* and her historical haunting of Western literature and culture.[57] Like lesbians (and many queer identities), disabled people have never been 'with us, it seems, but always somewhere else: in the shadows, in the margins, hidden from history, out of sight, out of mind, a wanderer in the dusk, a lost soul, a tragic mistake, a pale denizen of the night' (1993: 2). Through this effective process of 'derealization' then, the lesbian/disabled person is safely made to disappear, drained of 'any sensual or moral authority' (6, 32). In the *pas de deux* that follows, this ghostly metaphor is simultaneously affirmed and undermined, as Dave crosses over from the space "outside" in which he has been historically enclosed, to dance with a woman in a

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[57] Robert McRuer's compelling *Crip Theory* explores these intersections between queer and disabled identities, politics, cultural logic, and pathologised pasts, by theorising 'the construction of able-bodiedness and heterosexuality' and how '"compulsory able-bodiedness"…in a sense produces disability …[just as] the system of compulsory heterosexuality…produces queerness' (2006: 2).

space where his presence has previously been displaced or ignored.[58] Instead of signalling his continued marginality and invisibility, then, this ghosting serves to highlight an act of transgression.

This is because space is one of the things that helps to 'tell us who we are in society' (Cresswell 1996: 8), in that certain spaces expect certain behaviours and so when these spaces are unexpectedly transgressed, behaviour thought to be "natural" to it is unmasked as a spatial/cultural construct. In this way, 'normative geographies' are used to 'delineate the construction of otherness' (*ibid*: 9) and can therefore be transgressed in order to challenge dominant ideologies. This is why we get the close-up of the legs and the shot from outside the studio, or the "introduction" to the actual floor-dance, because as well as revealing how dance and film can enhance one another, it establishes the orthodoxies of the ballet studio space as well as signalling its susceptibility to transgression.

Whilst the profusion of windows and mirrors signals the need for constant monitoring and improvement, and along with the use of lighting, serves to parallel the space of the ballet studio with that of a prison, these are also, along with the open door, frames within a frame, liminal spaces that appear to divide inside and out but simultaneously threaten this very division. This ballet studio is not a secure world, but permeable and open to new things, experimentation, and difference. These tropes, then, suggest that protagonists can escape the way in which they have been "framed;" and by going

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[58] Furthermore, this duet is not drained of any sensuality. To quote two YouTube comments posted in response to this (2.25 minute) clip of the *pas de deux*, this scene is 'sensual and it touches my heart' (Hala33400), as well as 'the most sensual dance I have ever seen' (Isabellerose). Accessed 10/02/12 and found at: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mLe9ZSwU4aQ

through the literal and metaphorical threshold of the open door, Dave shows his

willingness to leave behind a fixed sense of (disabled) identity through his ability to

enter into another/the Other's space.

The spatial element of this scene, then, or the crossing from one space to another, is also

part of the "meaning" of this *pas de deux*, because it encourages the viewer to challenge

and reconsider accepted notions of grace and perfection. It is more subversive, after all,

to transform rather than attempt to escape the discipline and conventions of the ballet

world, because this insists that another world is possible *within* rather than always

outside and on the margins.

Woman as a multiple subject

Another interesting aspect of this cut to the inside of the studio as Dave momentarily

looks in, is that its visual emphasis on windows and mirrors is a common trope of the

dance film genre which leads to the construction of complex looking relations. Whilst

the window takes up three-quarters of the frame, foregrounded in the extreme left-hand

corner is a medium shot of the back of a male dancer's head and torso exercising at the

barre, and in the right is a female dancer's side-profile as well as her double/mirror

image, reflected in the mirror affixed to the studio wall.

In striving towards "perfection" (and pretence), the ballerina's intensive training

paradoxically leads to the denial of her real corporeality, and so '[t]raining thus creates

two bodies: one, perceived and tangible; the other, aesthetically ideal' (Foster 1997:

237, my emphasis). In traditional ballet gender ideology, this tension between what one

has to *do* and what one is required to *look* like is not imposed upon the male dancer to

the same extent, because although of course there are aesthetic and artistic requirements

of his movement vocabulary, qualities such as vigour, power, endurance, and

athleticism are valued, as opposed to sylph-like delicacy and grace. This is undoubtedly

because a powerfully athletic body and performance style can serve to distract from, or

to compensate for, the feminising implications of a dancing-man-as-spectacle.[59] So

whilst the ballerina is lifted, propelled, and turned, or in other words created,

'[m]asculinity is the strong jumper, the narrative's driving force, the creator rather than

the created' (Daly 1997: 112). This is why we only see the doubling of the female

dancer, Viv, in the space of the ballet studio, since she 'has long been inscribed as a

representation of difference: as spectacle, she is bearer and object of male desire' (*ibid*:

111). The centrality of the mirror and the gaze can thus signal the disjuncture between

seeing and being ourselves; between subject and object; between the kind of self

scrutiny that can be both affirming and alienating, whilst also implicating us, the

spectator, more directly in these looking constellations as we gaze at her as well. This

association between ballet, mirrors and ontological crisis, and the traumatic

juxtaposition of self/other, is repeatedly highlighted in the Hollywood dance/horror

film, *Black Swan*, which I consider in my final chapter.

It is no coincidence that a brief cut to the outside of the studio shows Eddie leering in at

Viv, as he joins Dave to look in from outside the window. Since this operates as a kind

of screen within the film, Eddie's looking can be read as a metaphor for what is

probably one of the most argued premises of feminist film theory: that the ideological

apparatus of (mainstream) cinematic address manufactures a masculinised viewer by

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[59] However, it also, rather contradictorily, highlights the self-conscious performativity of gender. Steven Cohan (1993) explores these tensions in his chapter, ''Feminizing' the Song and Dance Man. Fred Astaire and the Spectacle of Masculinity in the Hollywood Musical', in Steven Cohan and Ina Rae Hark (eds), *Screening the Male. Exploring Masculinities in the Hollywood Cinema*, London and New York: Routledge, pp. 46-69.

positioning the woman as object of the (phallocentric and hetero-normative) gaze. The sense of Viv having two bodies, one subject/material and one object/ideal, is elegantly established in an earlier scene in which Eddie introduces her, as his new girlfriend, to his friend Rowan. He describes the features that initially attracted him, including her "mass of long blonde hair" and "extraordinarily large breasts", which jar considerably with the brunette woman with average sized breasts standing, increasingly uncomfortably, right next to him. He also directs her to perform a dance step and to tell a joke, interrupting and silencing her whilst taking over and thereby revealing how the *actual* woman by his side does not marry with the "perfect" construction he has of her in his own head: a narcissistic and Oedipal investment in his illusory "ideal."

This doubling of the woman, then, serves to highlight the parallels between the social meanings attributed to female bodies and disabled bodies, in that both of them are cast as deviant and inferior by being defined in opposition to a norm that is largely considered superior: 'man' or 'able-bodied.'[60] Just as the ballerina/woman is split into two bodies, so too is the disabled performer, whose 'image is already loaded with the desire to be other, projected onto her by the audience' (Kuppers 2003: 55). However, an important difference is that whilst a woman's social capital is increased by her feminisation or to-be-looked-at-ness, disability undoubtedly reduces it (for all genders), eliciting, more often than not, a different kind of gaze altogether.

Despite (or *because* of all of this), there is something subversive at work in this momentary doubling of the female dancer, just as the setting up of an exclusionary space is established in order to articulate Dave's transgression into and transformation

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[60] Although not the "same", disability as a social category is structurally similar to gender, race, and sexual orientation, since they all rely on constructed (biological) binaries.

of it, as well as (potentially) challenging the way a dancing disabled body is stared at. This is because the barred window that is also reflected in the mirror, framing her double, connotes a sense that the Lacanian/balletic ideal and "whole" mirror image is in fact a trap and a form of imprisonment. Indeed, as Lacan says himself, '[t]his illusion of unity, in which a human being is always looking forward to self-mastery, entails a constant danger of sliding back again into the chaos from which he started; it hangs over the abyss of a dizzy assent in which one can perhaps see the very essence of anxiety' (2003: 302-302). It is, after all, the narcissistic identification with this illusory ideal body that leads to the well documented and disturbing prevalence of eating disorders within the ballet world.[61] This is not to negate the fact that ballet dancers can and do achieve professional "perfection," but what is the material cost of this ideal? Once again, *Black Swan* makes this its subject, viscerally charting the prima ballerina's descent into a psychosis of paranoia as her broken identities ultimately destroy each other. More commonly (and also either highlighted or alluded to in *Black Swan*), this material cost includes the frequency of injuries, often serious, a fiercely competitive environment, the abuse of one's own body through drugs and addiction, and the aforementioned pervasiveness of anorexia, bulimia, and body dysmorphia.

Ballet is, then, a hierarchical organisation that has always been dominated by men, its 'patriarchal underpinnings' (Daly 1997: 112) encouraging/enforcing the internalisation in women of the 'panoptical male connoisseur' (Bartky 1988: 72). Therefore by framing Viv as *not looking at her mirror reflection* in a space where self-scrutiny is the law (of the father), it is as if she refuses to see herself as something that she isn't (yet), and so

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[61] See Evan Alderson's (1997) chapter, 'Ballet as Ideology: Giselle, Act 2', in Jane C. Desmond (ed) *Meaning in Motion. New Cultural Studies of Dance*, Durham & London: Duke University Press, pp. 121-132, for a theorisation of the links between anorexia and ballet, particularly p. 129-30.

does not deny her own materiality for an image: an image from which she will always be distanced.[62] Through engaging with a subjective sensory and non-visual experience of her body, she does not merely look at but arguably *feels* the exercises, resulting in a more grounded and holistic experience/performance that is counter to the idealisation of 'a strangely disembodied female' (Wolff 1997: 95), and can thus be read as a feminist political gesture.

Furthermore, the fact that her refreshingly healthy and well-trained dancer's body does not conform to the excessively slender and weightless balletic ideal, signals her/the film's political rejection of 'centuries of patriarchal codification about gender difference' (Daly 1997: 118, n8). In offering an alternative to the "fragility" of the ballerina (against the "power" of the male dancer), 'the asymmetrical *equilibrium* of patriarchy – which does not offer equality at all', is directly challenged (*ibid*: 114). So just as Dave does not let the ideal image of a male ballet dancer stop him from entering the space, dancing, and transforming it by questioning the very hegemony of that ideal; so too does Viv question and challenge the ideal of the classical ballerina. Although of course, in both cases, this depends upon the viewer and how prepared they are to challenge and let go of a deeply ingrained ableist/phallocentric gaze in order to open up new ways of seeing and of interpreting dancing bodies that do not conform to the classical aesthetic.

In this way, then, a momentary shot of a dancer's body and her mirror image can work to destabilise the patriarchal orthodoxies of ballet culture. This sense of subversion is reinforced towards the end of the film, as Eddie asks Viv, "Why do you drink so

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[62] Not looking at her mirror reflection could also signal fear of the desiring self, or a reflection of the self denied, but I prefer to read this doubling and rejection of the idealised body as a means to understand and interrogate social and political relationships in the ballet world.

much?" to which she replies, "You try listening to you all day." Finally, in a demonstration of her ever-increasing empowerment, Viv responds to Eddie's question of "What's wrong?" with "You are", and proceeds to walk away from him. In doing so, she symbolically rejects the male constructs that have attempted to "create" her in their image. In this wonderfully subversive world, then, women can be ballet dancers and not look like delicate and fragile sylphs, just as men can dance without any legs.

Confronting and subverting disability

Having swung out of his wheelchair and entered the studio, a shot from Dave's vantage point foregrounds the row of legs exercising at the barre, with two female dancers sitting and stretching in the background. Through placing the camera at his eye (or ground) level, the cinematography immediately 'refuses the implicit ideology of standing upright' and thereby 'break[s] up (by literally breaking down) an ablist gaze – the one that is forever overlooking people who aren't standing (up) in front of its nose' (Albright 1997: 80). Not only does this cinematic angle serve to complement the *pas de deux* that is to follow, but it also conveys a sense of his everyday lived experience, as he has to negotiate his way through a forest of disembodied legs that (literally and figuratively) stand in the way of his dancing with an able-bodied dancer in a ballet studio context. Just as he approaches her, the female dancer he has set his sights upon moves away without seeing him, and indeed, at this point nobody in the studio has cast a glance in his direction. This articulates the dichotomy of the disabled performer, who is at once both marginalised, invisible, and excluded from culture and our critical discourses, as well as being hypervisible (to the viewer) due to his difference.

However, despite this paralysing lack of acknowledgement, Dave does not give up and follows her as we cut back to a shot of Eddie leering in from outside the window. As he turns to walk away he is immediately drawn back, seemingly surprised, to look (at Dave and his new partner) in a different way, with a concentrated and respectful interest that belies a grotesque spectacle. Since this window acts as a screen, this moment highlights the different modes of looking that viewers may engage in, and in demonstrating an alternative to the oppressive and disciplinary voyeuristic gaze, perhaps encourages its viewer *how* to look at the duet that is to follow, whilst importantly neither denying the spectacle making tendencies of the filmic medium nor the fact that '[t]he appearance of disability in the public sphere makes…for a stareable sight' (Garland-Thomson 2009: 20). Furthermore, when the *pas de deux* actually begins with a low-angled shot of Dave and his ballerina in full camera frame, Eddie can be seen in the background looking through the window, centre frame. Once again, then, questions are raised about scopic regimes, as we are made aware of our own looking, since his viewing position directly reflects our own and thus encourages us to think about the way we look at others and judge them.

Far from pretending that Dave's disability does not exist, this combination of his body, cinematic angle, choreography, and emphasis on the gaze, all work to highlight it, and more importantly, show that it need not be an insurmountable barrier to his dancing. Dave has no fear, and instead of accepting the obstacles that block his path he moves through them to get to where he wants to be. In not giving up, he is represented as a determined motivator who actively seeks collaboration on equal terms despite his social isolation, which undermines the culturally pervasive biomedical model of disability that has defined, named, and fixed him as a tragic, passive victim without any choice. In

representing a multi-faceted human being whose disability is not intrinsic to who he is but just one of his attributes, the (liberated) viewer is thus encouraged to consider disability as being 'depend[ent] upon perception and subjective judgement rather than on objective bodily states' (Garland-Thomson 1997: 6).

Incorporating disability into dance

As Sarah Whatley writes in her excellent analysis of *TCOL*, the *pas de deux* 'upholds traditional dance values in its structure: combining strength, control, athleticism, and smooth, effortless performance' (2010: 47). But importantly, it does not attempt to emulate or replicate the movement vocabulary of classical ballet. In other words, Dave is not forced into conforming to an able-bodied aesthetic. Instead, and like Neil in *Water Burns Sun*, his movement throughout the film appears to come from the workshopping and (collaborative) development of his own body and experience, rather than it being choreographed (or "written") for him. In this way, his disability is incorporated into the dance so that instead of focusing on his shortcomings, the viewer is encouraged to recognise his unique movement abilities.

Supported by his hands and arms, Dave uses his upper body strength to shift weight and release, balance, pull, counterpull, leap, slide, swing, turn, lift and extend with a graceful fluidity, freedom, and power; and it is his articulate movement vocabulary that leads and shapes as much of the movement as his nondisabled partner. So instead of the able-bodied dancer facilitating the disabled dancer, or the male dancer manipulating the female, they are both autonomous agents immersed in creative collaboration, permitting the full and equal expression of both individuals. Therefore, whilst the structural values and emotional weight of a traditional *pas de deux* are upheld, 'one of our culture's most

powerful modes of patriarchal ceremony' (Daly 1987: 16) is simultaneously subverted on two counts! Neither the woman nor the disabled man are denied their own agency; neither is "displayed" by the other; and both represent themselves as strong and assertive dancers who sensuously explore the identification between them by grafting their substance onto each other. The liberating potential of this unique *pas de deux* can thus be found in, to paraphrase Laura Mulvey, 'the thrill that comes from leaving the past behind without simply rejecting it, transcending outworn or oppressive forms … in order to conceive a new language of [dance]' (1975: 60).

As the *pas de deux* begins, this new language of dance is filmically mediated with a lateral tracking shot executed from a dolly at ground level, which gently and fluidly glides after their action, adding motion to the motion of the dancers. This parallel relationship between dancers and camera suggests a sort of mirroring or partnering between dancers and film, and in effect, between the dancers/film and me, since the spatial configuration and mimetic faculty of an involved camera connects me to the choreography. Therefore, the calmly relaxed but dynamic pacing of the dance and camera, or the film's body, expresses itself in a tactile way, "touching" me so that I interact with a concentrated interest. This interaction promotes the sense/idea that there is time and space for this kind of duet to happen, for dance between abilities, and for disabled people to enter the world of ballet. This is further reinforced by the light, spaciousness, and openness of the studio: qualities that can facilitate change.

The camera's gliding movement also places me aesthetically in constant motion and in accordance with the rhythm of the elegant ¾ waltz time music, synchronising my body

with the rhythm of the dance. I am thus caught up in the gracefully swirling and flowing

auditory movement, which infuses a felt sense of calm, ease, and lightness. There is,

then, nothing "out of the ordinary" about this *pas de deux*, and it certainly does not feel

like an 'exotic spectacle,' something that the dichotomy posed by integrated dance can

(sometimes) create, where in disabled people are 'categoris[ed] as sub-human, giving

definition to their non disabled counterparts' (Campbell 2009: 27). Indeed, a classic

fairground waltz, often used in horror films due to its slightly sinister edge, would most

certainly create a sense of the carnival freak show, propagating a "freak display"

reading.[63] Perhaps, then, the conscious choice of a *different kind* of waltz, but a waltz

nonetheless, comments upon as well as subverts this traditional association. Another

interesting note about this ¾ waltz time, also known as triple time, is that it has three

beats in each bar, something that I like to think represents the three "bodies" involved in

the dance: that of the dancers, the film, and my own.

The fact that the *pas de deux* is shot in one long take has great impact on my experience

of the movement, because contrary to the seduction of fast cuts with lots of rhythms, the

emotional energy of the shot is allowed to flow in the same way as the choreography

and music.[64] This induces a feeling of flow within (rather than an assault upon) my

body, as I am carried along by the film and therefore able to fully submerge myself into

the experience without interruption. Furthermore, the fact that this is immensely

enjoyable contributes to the film's ability to arouse an emotional response in me. And

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[63] Dave's dancing can undoubtedly invite a 'freak-show' style of voyeuristic and exploitative gaze, as ever-curious viewers are potentially thrilled by the spectacle of the 'Other,' and "roll up, roll up to watch half a man dancing". Indeed, evidence of the kind of career David Toole might have had if he had been born at the beginning of the twentieth century, can be found in his remarkable similarity both in body and style (or means) of movement, with American freak show performer Johnny Eck (1911-1999), who co-starred in Tod Browning's 1932 cult classic, *Freaks*.

[64] This fast paced editing with lots of different cuts and rhythms is commonly found in Hollywood dance films, as well as in advertising.

what better way to challenge preconceived ideas about disability than through evoking an embodied emotional response (that has nothing to do with pity or awe) to the freedom and flow of a performance? This perfectly illustrates how cinematography is intrinsic to the affect of the dance, and how film itself is a form of choreography.

The intimacy and ethics of tactile images

There are three moments in the *pas de deux* when the dancers' axis of movement changes, as they turn and move vertically towards the camera. As a result, extreme close-ups of parts of their bodies appear to touch the camera, and by extension, pull me close and evoke a sense of touch in my body as space literally expands and invites me in. When Dave's body is so close it is no longer objectifiable, separate, and complete, but almost becomes part of me, 'mudd[ying] intersubjective boundaries' (Marks 2002: 17). Although I cannot understand what it is like not to have any legs, as I 'los[e] myself in the intensified relation with an other that cannot be known', I edge closer to a somatic understanding of disability *as an experience*, as a lived thing and not a stereotype or a clinical diagnosis (ibid: 19). This is exactly how haptic visuality can complement and enhance the more obvious ideological work and intellectual pleasures going on in the film. Because through encouraging my sensuous interaction and immersion into the dance, into the "now," the film crosses time and space. And through its ability to create this embodied space, I am able to cross the boundaries between it and myself, encouraging this feeling of *connectivity rather than difference*. The fact that for me, this sense is powerfully evoked, means that the film is more persuasive in its blurring of the boundaries between (so called) disabled and able-bodied, film object and viewer subject, establishing instead 'a continuum between the two, with the possibility of one becoming the other' (Marks 2004: 80).

In giving up our 'own mastery', and responding to, accepting, welcoming and respecting the Other as different but equal in this way, haptic visuality can thus engage the viewer in what is both an ethical and erotic experience (*op. cit.*, 2002: 20). And as Audre Lorde writes, the erotic can be a liberating as well as a transgressive force:

> The erotic functions for me in several ways, and the first is in providing the power which comes from sharing deeply any pursuit with another person. The sharing of joy, whether physical, emotional, psychic, or intellectual, forms a bridge between the sharers which can be the basis for understanding much of what is not shared between them, and lessens the threat of their difference. (1984: 109)

Subverting the loneliness of the 'heroic' disabled dancer

Throughout the *pas de deux*, the other dancers in the studio are seemingly oblivious to the couple's dancing, and the ballerina ends their dance by getting up and walking away to join another (able-bodied) male dancer, not so much as casting a look in Dave's direction as he exits the studio. The viewer is thus left questioning whether this dance has actually happened? Was it a fantasy or a reality? And whether it is the former or the latter, sympathy is likely to be evoked for Dave, as he is, once again, left alone and unseen. However, like Sarah Whatley, I read this as a *deliberate* strategy that 'forc[es] the viewer to confront the reality of the disabled hero', rather than propagate a patronising view of a tragic disabled person as heroic outsider/overcomer (2010: 48). This is because it can potentially alert viewers to the fact that heroisation can isolate a person, preventing them from actually being "seen." This, in turn, prompts the kind of critical reflection that accepts that heroisation says more about the onlooker than the person being heroised. So instead of feeling sorry for Dave, viewers are once again encouraged to interrogate their own assumptions, and handkerchiefs are no longer necessary.

As if to substantiate this further, Dave's initial response to her ending their dance is to continue dancing, until he spots Eddie at the window beckoning him to leave. In no way then, is he represented as being wounded or vulnerable; this is the fiction. He is neither more than or less than human, simply an (extra)ordinary dancer getting on with what a dancer does, and so the viewer's pity is therefore 'an emotional cul-de-sac that ultimately distances starer and alienates stared. A block to mutuality, pity is repugnance refined into genteel condescension' (Garland-Thomson 2009: 93).

Furthermore, this blurring of the boundaries between fiction and reality is a recurring motif throughout the film: all of the actors/dancers play a role whilst using their own first names; Eddie's belief in a fictional/fantastical version of Viv is juxtaposed with her actuality; the fiction of disability as entrapment contrasts with the reality of Dave's freedom of movement; the fiction of an identity that is collectively imposed upon you contrasts with the reality of the complex and contradictory person that you happen to be. Ultimately, then, the ambiguity of this dialectic points to the fact that what is "fiction" and what is "reality" depends more upon the perspective of the onlooker, as dominant fictions can become reality, and realities may be regarded as fiction. This highlights exactly why screendance can function politically, because whether this *pas de deux* has *actually* taken place in the diegetic world of the film or not is not as important as the fact that it has represented the *possibilities of what is perhaps not there, but what could be* – and it is this that can be seen again and again. As Judith Butler writes, '[f]antasy is what allows us to imagine ourselves and others otherwise; it establishes the possible in excess of the real; it points elsewhere, and when it is embodied, it brings the elsewhere home' (2004: 29).

Instead, then, of completely immersing the viewer into a utopian fallacy, this ambiguity reminds the viewer not to lose sight of the exclusionary reality of the hierarchical dance world, or indeed, of the *world*, whilst simultaneously enjoying the possibilities of travelling to another reality. This, in turn, gives us a taste of what we are missing out on, and thereby acts as a conduit for changing existing Western societal perceptions of physical disability and dance.

Different but *passive* bodies in motion

However, despite best intentions, not *all* of integrated screendance performance achieves the full and equal expression of both able-bodied and disabled dancers. Whilst acknowledging that *Outside In* was ground-breaking at the time it was made and in its destabilisation of both the invisibility and hypervisibility of the disabled dancer, there are some scenes that undoubtedly work more successfully than others, but it is one of its *least* successful scenes that I wish to briefly interrogate here. This is because it can be seen to propagate a sense of tokenism, dangerously damaging the credibility of integrated dance as it potentially elicits sympathy for and boredom with the disabled dancer.

In a moodily lit scene, two integrated and same-sex couples, one a wheelchair user and the other able-bodied, perform the same tango-esque choreography in synchrony, to tango music. Whilst the sensual and erotic connotations of a tango between these couples is transgressive in itself, since there are (still) so few representations of disabled people as sensual/sexual beings, and because their queer pairing works against the norm of heternormativity, it is, unfortunately, exceptionally dull to watch. This is because instead of incorporating the two wheelchairs into their users/dancers' bodies and into

the dance, the two "facilitative" able-bodied dancers, Helen Buggett and Kuldip Singh-Barmi, merely turn, roll, pull, tilt and sit on the their passive partner's laps, whilst all Celeste Dandeker and Jonathan French seem to do is execute a series of arm movements, some of which look extremely awkward.

Perhaps in an attempt to incorporate the wheelchair into the dance, there is a close-up of the wheels being turned around, which again, only works to highlight the dancers' passivity since the chair not only signifies their disability, but also a sense of their dependence, when in fact both dancers have use of their arms and can indeed move themselves through the choreography. Therefore, 'the presence of the wheelchair alone seems to represent integrated performance, with little investigation into its meaning or contribution to the performance as a whole' (Campbell 2009: 27).

In stark contrast, the now famous BBC hip-hop wheelchair advert provides an example of just how thrilling wheelchair dancing *can be*. Ade Adepitan (ex-Paralympic athlete/medallist/presenter and dancer) leads two other wheelchair dancers in an incredible choreographed sequence, in which wheelchairs move with the same fluidity and staccato, freedom, and expression as the dancers' upper bodies, spinning, swaying, leaning, shifting weight, rapidly changing direction, and jerking backwards and forwards as they mirror the rhythm of the music. Far from being an obstacle to their dancing, an instrument of containment, and a symbol of dependence, then, the wheelchair becomes an object of liberation, a part of or an extension of their bodies and the movement style, and thereby works to revise 'the cultural significance of the chair, expanding its legibility as a signal of the handicapped into a sign of embodiment'

(Albright 1997: 83). Importantly, the dancers' disability is not covered over, but becomes a secondary presence to the exciting skill and characteristics of the dance.

However, in fairness to *Outside In*, which was made twenty years before this advert, one could argue that developments in wheelchair technology, along with the continual development of disability politics/activism and a concomitant increase in the visibility, understanding, and acceptance of disabled identities in mainstream culture, have enabled this kind of exciting (and perhaps more risky) way of moving through space on wheels. Furthermore, *Outside In* foregrounds integrated dance partnerships as opposed to the all-disabled cast of the advert, which, in some respects, is also a riskier form of choreography due to the immediate and problematic dichotomy of (so called) "normal" and "abnormal" bodies, which can invoke tired old stereotypes of disabled bodies as grotesque against the classical "ideal."[65] Nonetheless, the individual embodiment and unique talent of the two disabled dancers is neither explored nor exploited in this scene, as they are controlled, manipulated, and displayed by their able-bodied counterparts.

Furthermore, despite my own rather obvious enthusiasm, embodied enjoyment, and respect for what I consider to be a sensuously transformative/"moving" film, *TCOL*, like any text, is also open to critique. When watching the ballet class through the window before his *pas de deux* begins, Dave is framed as an outsider, a liminal being inhabiting a liminal space. This could indeed evoke pity for the lone 'supercrip' who longs to join the (able-bodied) world, constructing the kind of oppressive psychological stereotyping that says 'disabled people want to be 'normal'…den[ying] disability culture as a positive experience' (Kuppers 2003: 51). Therefore, instead of reading all of

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[65] Indeed, although I believe that they subvert this formally and choreographically through the foregrounding of their unique movement, both *Water Burns Sun* and *TCOL* are open to this critique.

the obstacles that stand in his way as evidence of his social oppression, this kind of

ableist gaze will focus on his "desperation" (rather than his compelling interest in the

potential of dance between abilities); his loneliness (rather than his desire to connect

with another dancer); and his perceived personal tragedy (rather than the ideological

prescription of attitudes *as the real tragedy*). So rather than looking at what *is* there and

what a body *can* do, this kind of critical gaze will focus on what is missing and what

doesn't work, thereby maintaining the position of privilege from which the critic

speaks, whilst shutting down all agency of the disabled subject under a totalising label

of "disability." As Rosemarie Garland-Thomson writes, '[s]een this way, disability is a

loss to be compensated for, rather than difference to be accommodated. Disability then

becomes a personal flaw, and disabled people are the "able-bodied" gone wrong.

Difference thus translates into deviance' (1997: 49).

Sexually desiring beings/"monster" predators

Both *TCOL* and *Water Burns Sun* couple a disabled man with (apparently) non-disabled

female dancers (and viewers), working to construct them as "whole" people who

experience desire despite their culturally presumed undesirability. However, this pairing

can *also* revive pernicious stereotypes dating back to early cinematic representations.

As Longmore writes, '[i]n a sexually supercharged culture that places almost obsessive

emphasis on attractiveness, people with various disabilities are often perceived as

sexually deviant and even dangerous … [with] disabled characters convey[ing] a kinky,

leering lust for sex with gorgeous "normal" women' (1985: 11).[66] Instead, then, of a

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[66] Longmore goes on to list numerous television and filmic examples, such as 'Dr. Loveless, the hunch-backed "dwarf" super-criminal in *The Wild Wild West* (1965-1970), [who] surrounds himself with luscious women. The Nazi "dwarf" in the film comedy *The Black Bird* (1974) displays a voracious appetite for sex with statuesque beauties. Dr. Strangelove salivates over the prospect of having his share of nubile young women to perpetuate the human race … "Monster" disabled characters menace beautiful

sensuous and ethical interaction with difference, *TCOL* and *Water Burns Sun* could evoke in the viewer this kind of contemptuous revulsion towards "predatory" disabled men/monsters.

Moreover, the heterosexualization of their disabled bodies/desire does nothing to challenge the power relations inherent within "normative sexuality," or to represent the *diverse* sexual and gender identities of disabled people. Something that *Outside In*, despite its limitations, is more successful at doing. And finally, since the (patriarchal) hierarchy of bodies and norms at the heart of disability oppression places disabled women firmly at the bottom, by only featuring disabled men, both films can be critiqued for colluding with and perpetuating the social invisibility and double disablement of disabled female bodies and their sensuality/sexuality (see Nancy Mairs: 2002). Therefore, despite their political potential, it is important not to become overly celebratory and to remain alert to ambiguity and contradiction.

<u>Conclusion</u>

As Sarah Whately asserts, there 'are relatively few dance films, readily available, that feature disabled dance artists … [and] very few disabled dance and screendance makers' (2010: 43). Indeed, I know how difficult (and expensive) it was to source films for this chapter. And so despite welcome shifts in societal attitudes towards people with disabilities, particularly after the extraordinary success of London's 2012 Paralympics, disability and screendance (like Dave peering in at the window) unfortunately remain at the margins. This undoubtedly levels a great deal of responsibility onto performers and choreographers'/filmmakers' shoulders, as well as diminishing the potential for

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women who would ordinarily reject them … [And] there is always an undertone of sexual tension, of sexual danger. We are never quite sure what he might do to her' (1985: 11).

screendance to further challenge exclusionary Western societal perceptions of physical disability.

Furthermore, it is not merely the radical motivation behind these films that creates their radical potential. If a phenomenological approach stresses the interactive nature of film, in which the viewer 'participates in the production of the cinematic experience,' then just as some viewers may be touched, moved, and potentially "changed" by their yielding to the films haptic and political propensities, others may well feel discomfort, embarrassment, pity, and/or outright hostility towards this (violating) contact (Marks 2002: 13). If viewers do not have respect for difference to begin with, then it is unlikely they will experience a 'concomitant loss of self in the presence of the other,' and screendance may thus be experienced as a disabling interaction with/and representation of disability (*ibid*: 20). What is more, some viewers may simply harbour no interest in an outsider's perspective because their position of privilege does not require them to do so. And these are precisely the kinds of audiences in most need of "educating," which raises the question of whether these films are merely "preaching" to the already converted. Therefore, the question of whether disability and screendance can help develop personal and social identities within a disabling society is both complex and contradictory, and certainly a matter of more than just the film alone.

However, my own yielding to the radical motivation of this dance film resides in the fact that our bodies are invested in the same project, and therefore, I am not 'other' to what the film's body assumes, as well as my predisposition for embodied viewing, and the powerfully visceral and corporeal responses to film, and particularly dance films, that this entails. Therefore, on the basis that I know I am not unique, and despite the

potential discussed above for both ambiguity and contradiction, through the combination of its radical motivation, the level of viewers' embodied/political receptivity, and the context in which it is seen, screendance *can* connect the viewer to an experience, and thus to an understanding of what it means to be excluded *as well as connected* on the grounds of one's disability. This, in turn, can potentially help nurture a "community" that works to both respect and celebrate difference through a shared commitment to political equality. Both *TCOL* and *Water Burns Sun* consciously employ different ways of filming (by presenting us with both optic and haptic images), in order to encourage a dialectical movement between the different ways of seeing/feeling that will enable us to emphasise with Dave and Neil both objectively and sensuously. In doing so, they can act as a powerful political tool/intervention, encouraging (nondisabled) viewers to look at difference *differently*. And what is more, dance and film can enhance one another, potentially reaching a crossover audience from within both forms.

Chapter Three

Privileging Embodied Experience in Feminist Screendance

Introduction

[I]n film I can make the world dance.
(Maya Deren, from the documentary *In the Mirror of Maya Deren*)

Film just seemed much more pliable and less static.   (Yvonne Rainer 1999: 69)

For me, dance, choreography and video are one thing – they all proceed from the dance of electrons.   (Amy Greenfield in Elder 1997: 297)

All directorial decisions are also choreographic ones…And film exists only in time – like dance.   (Sally Potter 1997: 90)

This chapter takes an approach grounded in feminist phenomenology to consider the work of four female filmmakers. Each of them, Maya Deren, Yvonne Rainer, Amy Greenfield and Sally Potter, came to film from a background in dance, which informed their rhythmic creativity in, understanding of, and approach to screendance.[67] This has also located their work within an unusual filmic genealogy, in that its female artists have enjoyed equal (if, arguably, not more) prominence than their male counterparts. All have utilised choreographic form and content, with rhythm being a defining element of their work. They have also maintained an interest in the physiological functioning of perception, and have privileged the moving body/film, placing it at the centre of their aesthetic and technological experimentation.

I shall consider some of the key interpretations of my chosen films, with which I share a feminist common ground, in order to highlight how my methodology is both

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[67] Maya Deren is the exception (of the four) in that she was not a trained dancer. However, 'she was a born dancer' (Wodening 2001: 179) who gained insight into the professional world of dance through her role as personal secretary to choreographer, dancer, and anthropologist Katherine Dunham.

interconnected to these, and distinct. I shall then begin to draw distinctions between the work of these filmmakers, arguing that Deren and Greenfield's creative practice, and specifically *Meshes of the Afternoon* (1943-59) and *Tides* (1982), is grounded in a cinema of the body, in material rather than conceptual thinking. Conceptual thinking, I suggest, takes place *after* the film has been made. They attempt to create a unique ritualistic and creative-art form/experience, showing emotion and transcendence *through* the body. In contrast, Rainer conceptualises emotion in order to explore it, and in *Lives of Performers* (1972) is preoccupied with words and with language as signifying practice. Influenced by a poststructuralist distrust of language, she encourages her audience to reflect more thoughtfully than bodily, using film as an alienation technique in order to dissect rather than indulge in emotions and affect. Thus Rainer's work can be seen as a cinema of ideas with a great sense of reflexive humour. I shall argue that Potter's later work, and specifically *The Tango Lesson* (1997), attempts to bridge the gap between these two approaches.[68]

However, despite the differences between these filmmakers, particularly in terms of their desire to evoke or not evoke a cathartic response and elicit kinaesthetic identification, I argue that all four are inspired by a similar feminist sensibility. Extending Vivian Sobchack's argument that there is a difference between the fetishized body and the *lived* body, I shall argue that their use of cinematic movement (as well as stasis) can extend the language of the body, and can thus be read, or rather, *felt*, as moments when the body performs 'in excess of the historical and analytical systems available to codify, contain, and even negate it' (Sobchack 1992: 147). This provides a means through which the female body can move away from objectification through

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[68] Henceforth, *Meshes of the Afternoon* will be referred to as *Meshes*, *Lives of Performers* as *Lives*, and *The Tango Lesson* as *TTL*.

physical movement and expression, since it is, as Merleau-Ponty writes, 'clearly in action that the spatiality of our body is brought into being' (1989: 102).

Complicating categorisation: feminist interpretation/neglect

> Deren defies categories. She was neither feminine in the demure sense
> nor feminist in the modern sense.   (Nichols 2001: 8)

The discourse surrounding Maya Deren's films is contradictory, occupying, as Catherine Soussloff asserts, 'two places: one of them apolitical and aestheticizing, the other political and feminist' (2001: 105). Although her work has more recently enjoyed a great deal of scholarly attention, Bill Nichols attributes its neglect 'over the last several decades' (2001: 12) to at least five contextual factors that were products of their specific time and place. Most importantly for this discussion, her work was perceived to have made no significant contribution to the conceptual frameworks that dominated the rise of film theory in the 1970s. This is because it stresses a utopian sensibility that privileges introspection and embodied experience over ideological analysis, and cultural difference over gendered identity. It also contains (on the surface level) a problematic celebration of "primitive" cultures, inner (spiritual) experiences, trance, and ritual, without an acknowledgement of their essentialist association with women and the culturally exoticised, and thus of the dominant oppositions that form Western identity and power. As a result, the serious critical feminist implications of her work were largely ignored.[69] As if it couldn't possibly be both, Deren's work was placed within the

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[69] Although in some aspects undoubtedly problematic, Deren's interest in the "primitive" was far more complex than an outright essentialist dismissal would allow, and her "utopian sensibility" was the driving force behind her desire to and attempts at completely surpassing dualistic thinking in regards to cultural difference. Not only, then, did she conduct extensive research into different cultures and social/historical contexts – most notably her research into Haitian dance, magic, trance and ritual, which culminated in her (1953) book *Divine Horsemen: The Living Gods of Haiti* (1953), as well as her own initiation as a Voudoun priestess – she was also fiercely critical of artists who described their work as "primitive" without any understanding of the cultural contexts from which they were stealing. As Bill Nichols writes, her 'efforts to understand hysteria, trance, and ritual as socially situated acts of collective association

"avant-garde tradition" rather than the feminist, resulting in ambivalence about her place within feminist film history.[70] Indeed, '[h]ighly influential feminist writers like Claire Johnston and Laura Mulvey ignored Deren entirely in their search for pioneering feminist filmmakers' (*ibid*: 13).

Furthermore, because Deren's antipathy towards Freudian psychoanalytic (as well as surrealist and abstract) interpretations of her work are so well documented, Judith Mayne suggests that 'at least one of the reasons why Maya Deren's film work has not received the sustained critical attention one might expect within feminist film studies', is because Freud has 'done fairly well within feminist film theory' (2002: 82).[71] However, what is immediately and seemingly contradictory about this is that her first film, *Meshes*, explores a woman's interior experiences/dream states in a way that is absolutely laden with symbolic imagery: multiple selves, mirrors, doors and windows (against which Deren presses as she looks outside in the most iconic "Botticelli" shot of the film), staircases, a circular and repetitive structure, a flower, knife, key, mysterious mirror-faced figure, and the ocean etc., etc. Instead of understanding woman's

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rather than as personal dysfunction … went against the grain of dominant practices; each incurred resistance and misunderstanding. Each remains an emblem of Deren's extraordinary willingness to transgress boundaries and reformulate their contours' (2001: 13-14).

[70] Although many female avant-gardists were very successful within the feminist film movement, there was also a great deal of (feminist) suspicion about the 'avant-garde' during the 1970s/1980s. This was largely because some avant-garde filmmakers considered "feminist art" to be explicitly political, where as they, 'like many artists, resist[ed] sociological, collectivist explanations of and responses to their lives and their work in favour of more personal, individualistic analyses'. Therefore, as Jan Rosenberg explores in her study of the feminist film movement, 'Women's avant-garde films pose[d] the greatest problems for feminist theory' (1983: 39, 75).

[71] Deren believed that attaching labels such as "surrealist" or "abstract" to her work would limit understanding of it, since they dissect, fix, and thereby confine meaning by focusing on individual images/scenes rather than on the film as a whole. As John David Rhodes observes, 'nothing annoyed Deren more than what she called a 'Freudian' interpretation of the film' (2011: 95), and in section 3B of her *Anagram of Ideas on Art, Form and Film* (1946), Deren writes that: 'Psychoanalysis, while valid as a therapy for maladjusted personality, defeats its own purpose as a method of art criticism, for it implies that the artist does not create out of the nature of his instrument, but that it is used merely to convey some reality independent of all art. It implies that there is no such thing as art at all, but merely more or less accurate self-expression' (Deren 2005: 72).

subjectivity on the basis of or through adaptation of a Freudian/Lacanian model, however, symbols that seem ripe for psychoanalytic analysis can instead be seen to be "inverted," or subversively repeated, in order to speak from the impossible space of women's 'otherness.'

Since the woman is played by Deren herself, and the film is shot in the actual house that she shared with her husband, the filmmaker Alexander Hammid, who not only features in but was also a collaborator on the film, it is not difficult to interpret *Meshes* as a feminist autobiography/commentary on gender identity and sexual politics in a WW II era when women's roles were dramatically changing – thereby both predating and anticipating the political concerns of feminist filmmaking and film theory.[72] Indeed, Deren's "fantasies" are interrupted twice by Hammid, whose mirror image, unlike hers, is reflected as "whole" and "complete" (in the third repetition). At first suggesting a return to order, the illusion of his stable and unified subjectivity is (literally) shattered as she stabs his mirror face, which action, along with the repeated image of the knife and the final image of the dead Deren/mermaid, represents the power and violence of her subconscious fantasies and desires, as she breaks down the (fragility) of his (menacing) male dominance. Therefore these tropes, along with the circularity of the "narrative," can and have been read as the expression of women's specific anger, and as metaphors for their collective yearning for liberation and escape from the monotonous everyday existence of imprisonment within the domestic sphere, with all the "dark" and erotic frustrations and fantasies that can arise from this gendered confinement.[73]

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[72] This is despite the fact that Deren's 'antipathy to the claim of the personal and the biographical' (Rhodes 2011: 13) is also well known!

[73] For examples of this kind of feminist interpretation, see:

Moreover, because it is not clear whether the woman ever wakes up from her dream states, and because she is doubled, trebled and quadrupled, *Meshes* problematizes the unified subject of patriarchal discourse, as does *At Land* (1944) with its own filmic images of Deren's multiplicity. This works to disrupt 'the law of non-contradiction' (Butler 1990: 122), by suggesting that subjectivity is neither singular nor on a journey from infantile fragmentation to a (Lacanian) fantasy of "unity" and "wholeness", but instead, is multiple and in relationship, in a state of becoming. Therefore, a more flexible 'network of multiple possibilities, multiple perspectives, multiple identities, where there is no clear split between 'I' and 'not I'' (Kristeva 1980: 167), replaces the rigid masculinization of subjectivity and the idea that there is an essential core to the self, a "real me." In this way the film resides in a liminal space somewhere between the Imaginary and the Symbolic, creating an alternative order to that specified by Lacan by revealing the instability of, and alterity within, identity (and meaning), and thereby responding to the silence that has been projected onto women via a phallocentric discourse that characterizes femininity and subjectivity as divergent paths – as either/or. This sense of being in an "in-between" place is beautifully articulated in *At Land*, as Deren sensuously slides herself over rocks and driftwood onto a long banquet table, around which "high-cultured" men and women completely ignore her presence as they continue eating, drinking, and conversing. Caught between the ocean from which she has "emerged," and the sophistication of the dinner party, she is suspended somewhere across the nature/culture divide.

Maureen Turim, (1986) 'Childhood memories and Household Events in the Feminist Avant-Garde', *Journal of Film and Video*, 38: 3/4, pp.86-92.

Marilyn Fabe, (1996), 'Maya Deren's Fatal Attraction: A Psychoanalytic Reading of *Meshes of the Afternoon* with a Psycho-Biographical Afterword', *Women's Studies: An Inter-disciplinary Journal*, 25: 2, pp. 137-152.

Despite all of this feminist potential, however, her films remain contradictory and problematic because whilst undoubtedly complicated, mechanisms of patriarchal filmmaking – voyeurism, narcissism, and exhibitionism, are all still present. As Lauren Rabinovitz acknowledges, 'female pioneers in their "masculine" fields of endeavour … remained prisoners of an ideology that even constructed their positions of resistance' (2002: 73). In *Meshes,* Deren's fragmented, exotic body is situated entirely within the patriarchal fantasy of the sexualised woman – nearly always on display and thus the object of the gaze throughout the film – with the gaze behind the camera largely being that of her husband. Therefore it is not simply a film about a woman by a woman. However, at the same time the "fantasy" and desire in and of the film are all hers – and thus she is not simply *either* an object of desire *or* a fetishized other.[74] It is undoubtedly this complication that left Deren's work 'as a nonentity within [Mulveyan feminist] critique' (Soussloff 2001: 115). But it is *also* this complication that opens up deeper levels of complexity, subverting the law from *within* the law, because whilst she is an object, her multiplicity enables her to watch herself through the window, just as viewers watch her. In this way, a female object is transformed into a subject/object, (ironically) aware of her own objectification and either complicit in or subversively commenting upon it – or both.

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[74] Considering both Deren and Hammid's comments on their collaboration, it seems clear that the concepts and images for *Meshes* were born from Deren's imagination, as evidenced by the repetition throughout her body of work of key themes as well as cinematic effects. (See Deren's 'Magic is New' in *Essential Deren*, 2005, pp.197-206, and particularly p.203). Whilst undoubtedly an accomplished technical filmmaker, Hammid acknowledged that his strength lay in helping others to realise their work, saying in an interview that, 'I accepted the fact that I am not an originator of ideas, and that I need someone else to help me' (in Clark *et al.* 1988: 115).

Whilst the body will always be an object (for others), it is also always a lived reality (for the subject). This relates to the contradiction of the body itself: both our most intimate experience of the world and the way in which we are immediately and publicly perceived – at once both powerful and powerfully superficial. Through establishing a multiplicity of identities and perspectives (rather than a taxonomy) for the female artist and viewer, *Meshes* breaks down categories of opposition – just as the use of multiple mirror reflections in *Bodas de sangre* illuminates the multi-faceted and performative nature of Spanish cultural and national identity, and as Viv's refusal to look at her doubled mirror image in *The Cost of Living* both acknowledges and subversively rejects the patriarchal splitting of woman into two bodies – one subject/material and the other object/ideal.[75] Thus this visual emphasis on mirrors and windows, a trope familiar to *all* screendance genres (and beyond), reflects back to the viewer the reflexivity of film and its use as a political tool.

However, whilst this reflexive, fluid sense of (feminist and queer) multiplicity can be read into *Meshes*, it is both interesting, disappointing, and perhaps (yet again) contradictory to discover that Deren frequently attempted to control audience reception (see Sitney 2002: 11 and Rhodes 2011: 98), often adopting an autocratic style in her lectures and writing that spelt out what her viewers were "supposed" to see/feel in her films. Despite this defensive (and arguably patriarchal) didactism, Deren *was* undoubtedly a pioneering filmmaker and film theorist, who fiercely refused the trivialising label "woman artist" in her fight to be taken seriously in a masculinist avant-garde world, and within an ideological milieu that 'celebrated the male artist as a

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[75] These discussions concerning the multiple mirror reflections in *Bodas de sangre* and the refusal to look at a doubled mirror image in *The Cost of Living* can be found in chapters one and two respectively.

Romantic hero while configuring women's roles only in relation to the male artist's greatness – as either wives or lovers' (Rabinovitz 2002: 74).[76] Furthermore, in championing more "amateur" independent avant-garde film practice, she promoted resistance to mainstream Hollywood film – an industry notoriously 'cut to the measure of [male] desire' (Mulvey 1975: 68), and thereby created a (female) discourse as an alternative to the dominant order.

A diachronic approach: percept *and* concept/ subject *and* object

> Perception is, as it were, mid-way between mind and body and
> requires the functioning of both.   (Grosz 1994: 94)

Of course, the "meaning" of a film/filmmaker and their cultural significance/critical appreciation/neglect, is not only polysemic at any given time, it is also diachronic. Therefore the metamorphosis from critical neglect of her work to appreciation reflects the changing perceptions, models and approaches of its audience, and the society within which we live. As detailed in the introduction to this thesis, Feminist film theory (of the late 1970s/1980s) drew heavily upon semiotics and psychoanalysis in its aim to restore subjectivity to women, strategically distancing us from our representation in films as objects of the gaze, associated *only* with mindless bodiliness and emotions, by focusing on the body as a written and spoken sign rather than a material entity. This progressive political conviction was, and I believe, *still is*, necessary, since 'it works to revalorize woman's speech and to promote her integration within symbolic social and cultural systems' (Del Rio 2003: 11). Yet some of the more confrontational and absolutist

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[76] Rabinovitz notes the following comment Deren made to an interviewer in 1947; '[It] always comes as a little bit of a shock to men when a woman is doing something in a field that has to do with machinery and with creating in terms of inventing with a machine' (2002: 80, n.12).

pronouncements and questions, like the contention that women can *only* ever be trapped

in and defined by our bodies, and that the enjoyment of our bodies can *only* ever be

narcissistic and exhibitionist (whilst in many ways understandable because we will

always be watched), 'did not foresee the new imbalance it would foster, as it would

relegate the sensual and bodily aspects of female subjectivity to a practically irrelevant

status' (*ibid*).

However, this work *had* to be done, and has enabled a future generation of feminist film

scholars, like me, to return to the idea of the *lived* body as opposed to the fetishized

body. And to the ways in which the "problematic" body may be "undone" by the

performing body/body of the film itself, in a more liberating countercinema that does

more than simply deconstruct the patriarchal bias of mainstream film. Thus, what has

evolved over time is arguably a more measured approach that integrates the ability to

focus outwards towards a politics of gender, sexual orientation, race, and class etc., and

also inwards, to characters/the film's emotional states and transcendence through the

body.

With this in mind, I aim to layer my own subjective lived-body experience of watching

Meshes with more abstractive film studies practices, in an attempt to find a middle

ground between the critiques of Deren. Since this film is neither a purely bodily nor

purely a conceptual experience, I am interested in where these spheres interconnect.

Whilst acknowledging that there are no foundational experiences that are unconditioned

by power and ideology, I would also argue that, as Elizabeth Grosz so elegantly

articulates, 'without some acknowledgement of the formative role of experience in the

establishment of knowledges, feminism has no grounds from which to dispute

patriarchal norms' (1994: 94).

Structure and audience engagement

The cyclical structure of *Meshes* is built upon three repetitions (that foreground

different elements) of the initial series of scenes, with a double ending. After the

fragmented images of a woman's hand, feet and shadow have picked up, walked away

with, and smelt an artificial flower that has been left on the road by a "magically"

moving/disappearing mannequin's hand, the shadow of the woman (played by Deren)

pauses at the bottom of the steps to her home and looks, and the film then cuts to a long

shot of a dark figure of a man disappearing around the bend in the road ahead.[77]

"Naturally" reading this as her subjective POV shot, it is thus confusing when the

camera pans back to reveal the woman's fragmented body *in* the frame, no longer

subject but object, with her shadow cast behind her. In this way the film works to cue a

generic perceptual response for it only to be denied, and the viewer quickly learns (or

perhaps simply senses) that there is nothing "natural" about this world/film, and

therefore, its "psychological guidance" cannot be trusted.[78]

This play between subjectivity and objectivity, between real and unreal will be repeated

throughout the film, and John David Rhodes argues that this is 'the key to

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[77] In the cycle of repetitions that follow, this figure of a man is transformed into the mysterious mirror faced figure.

[78] The use of POV camera and editing has long been used to structure narrative discourse by creating a spatial relationship between different shots. This gives the viewer some insight into what the character sees and how they might be feeling, thereby providing the psychological motivation for what happens next. In this way, POV editing is one of the most powerful mechanisms for audience manipulation, and as influential theorist of montage, V. I. Pudovkin writes, 'editing is not merely a method of the junction of separate scenes or pieces, but is a method that controls the "psychological guidance" of the spectator' (1970: 75). In *Meshes*, these familiar rules are shattered.

understanding its critical (political) potential … it is the unprepared-for, the casual abruptness of these switches in point of view that make them so powerfully unsettling and engrossing as we are drawn in and then expelled from a subjectivity that we think we share' (2011: 59). I would add that it is this use of editing, of suggesting continuity where there isn't any, that tacitly encourages the viewer to temporarily abandon their more cognitive processes of understanding, and to go more with the flow or *experience* of the film, however jolting or disturbing. Of course, however, it can just as easily lead to the viewer's ambivalence and/or disengagement, because just as some viewers may well be captivated, some may feel *held* captive, whilst some will simply want to escape.

The woman then climbs the stairs, knocks on the door, tests to see whether it is open and since it isn't, takes her key from her purse. This then drops from her hand and falls down the stairs in slow motion, which contrasts with the rapid editing as she chases after it. In combination with the percussive music that gradually reaches a crescendo, but does not "match" the motion of the key falling and hitting the stone steps, an uncanny sense of time and rhythm is created.[79] Like Deren's slow motion and dancerly ascent of the stairs in the first repetition, this cinematic manipulation of time (and space) connotes a Bergsonian sense of the *duration* of this moment in time through its 'freedom from "real [linear and unified] time"' (Franko 2001: 132).[80] Or in other words, the combination of rhythm, speed, sound and image work to immerse me, however

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[79] *Meshes* was originally shot as a silent film, but under Deren's supervision in 1959, Teiji Ito, Deren's third and final husband, added the musical score that is influenced by classical Japanese music.

[80] The intellect, and particularly scientific and mathematical laws, have divided and measured time in order to make it quantifiable and thus "graspable" or knowable – advantageous because what is known can also be controlled. However, these "laws" are more probable and useful than they are universal, moral, or enforceable, and according to Bergson's theory of duration, time is not immobile in its linearity, fixed or divisible. It is instead incomplete, with neither beginning nor end and thus forever in a process of becoming. In this way, then, time and consciousness are qualitative multiplicities that cannot be understood through symbols, only through Bergson's (fluid) concept of intuition (Bergson: 1968).

briefly, into my embodied *experience* of the film and further away from habitual attempts at "mastering" its meanings – since 'the rhythm of varying and repeated speeds in [Deren's] films affect perception much more than the symbolic value of the pictures' (Holl 2001: 160).

What this does, in effect, is stretch out the viewers' sense of time by conveying the feeling of complete immersion in an experience – an experience that I am familiar with, can remember, and so can "mirror" – that time can feel endless as it slows down – or conversely, that it can speed up and pass by in an instant. In this way, the filmic apparatus evokes a more ample understanding of time unlike that of the "everyday," one where it is not fixed but forever in process, a process that I am encouraged to "go with" – to "surrender" to. Thus, my embodied mind gives meaning to the film through my embodied memories – and through this *durational* aspect of my experience, the film impresses the feelings with which I interrelate and which I share, thereby breaking down the time and space that divides me from "it". On this, it is worth quoting Bergson at length:

> [A]rt aims at impressing feelings on us rather than expressing them […] [I]t seems that we should have to re-live the life of the subject who experiences it if we wished to grasp it in its original complexity. Yet the artist aims at giving us a share in this emotion, so rich, so personal, so novel, and at enabling us to experience what he cannot make us understand. This he will bring about by choosing, among the outward signs of his emotions, those which our body is likely to imitate mechanically, though slightly, as soon as it perceives them, so as to transport us all at once into the indefinable psychological state which called them forth. Thus will be broken down the barrier interposed by time and space between his consciousness and ours: and the richer in ideas and the more pregnant with sensations and emotions is the feeling within whose limits the artist has brought us, the deeper and higher shall we find the beauty thus expressed. (1910: 16, 18)

This "surrender", then, is not passive. I am not lost in or "defeated" by the film, but rather, through an interested sense of surrender I am able to "move in" deeper. I am

proactive, fully attentive and receptive as I begin to move in rhythm with the choreography of the screen. It is through this process of engagement that the process of "letting go" is facilitated, and through this letting go a sense of liberation and discovery – of who and what I/the film is, beyond, between and perhaps in contradiction with the social and cultural expectations and projections that can confine us. As John Berger questioned: '[w]hy should an artist's way of looking at the world have any meaning for us? Why does it give us pleasure? Because, I believe, it increases our awareness of our own potentiality' (1960: 16). Thus, I am brought into a more direct relationship with the present, moving further away from dualistic thought, from the battle between self and other – and to a place of holistic "knowing" that is more relaxed and spacious.

This is because instead of "protecting" myself by keeping myself removed, rushing 'to quote others, and describe [my] objects of study through a range of "floating signifiers" that tend to overdetermine and foreclose [my] objects and [my] descriptions before the latter have even really begun' (Sobchack 2012: 22), I am instead "daring" to realise first the freedom (from the literal) that lies at my own centre – not disregarding my own embodied process of watching, and thereby moving away from the (masculinist) socio-symbolic order that traditionally "speaks" or externalizes in order to be "right" – or to prove others' wrong. Therefore, in effect, I am addressing and questioning the perpetual asymmetries in gendered forms of power and knowledge – precisely one of feminism's aims. And whilst I acknowledge that (perhaps ironically) I am unable to do this without quoting the words of other, much more refined thinkers, I am moving somewhere nearer to a feminist phenomenological inquiry.

Creative possibilities of time: an alternative temporality

It is significant that the world of *Meshes* is not governed by

temporal/geographical/material laws of "here and there", or of past, present and future,

but instead different time frames overlap as we see Deren sleeping in a chair whilst

simultaneously watching herself from above (in the first repetition), or appearing in one

place then immediately in another without travelling in between, as she strides/jump

cuts (in the third repetition) across different terrains in order to return home. Through

this sense of "dreamtime," I am smuggled out of the familiar, known world and enter

into a time that is 'other' than historical – an imaginative and freer space in which I may

reconsider long held assumptions/certainties in a new light, and make new decisions.

This is because an alternative notion of temporality works to resist the construction of

linear time and its equation with historical progress, serving the dominant power

structures through the concealment of multiple and contradictory histories of any given

time or space, and thereby 'recognizing in the mastery of time the true structure of the

slave' (Kristeva 1981: 17). Like *Meshes*, our world is in fact riddled with contradictions

and confusing signals, yet despite this, our histories are assessed, judged and introduced

as fact by our dominant ideologies and institutions, which we then learn to accept as our

cultural foundations and our "imagined" guidelines – resulting in our "entrapment"

within the meanings we have made. In her eloquent investigation into British

imperialism, Anne McClintock writes that:

> The axis of time was projected onto the axis of space and history became
> global. With social Darwinism, the taxonomic project, first applied to nature,
> was now applied to cultural history. Time became a geography of social
> power, a map from which to read a global allegory of "natural" social
> difference. Most importantly, history took on the character of a spectacle.
> (1995: 37)

Meshes therefore disrupts these 'masculine, civilizational and obsessional' (*op cit.* 1981: 18) concepts of time, illustrating how politics and "meaning" may be more evident in the form rather than the content of a film.

Enmeshment of reality/unreality

Having re-climbed the stairs and entered the house, gone upstairs into the bedroom, then back downstairs to the armchair by the window, an extreme close-up of Deren's eye cuts to the view of the street from the window, then cuts back to her eye closing in sleep as both images cloud over. Thus ends the initial series of scenes with which the three repetitions interconnect – retelling, varying and ritualising the "narrative" in different ways. What they have in common, however, is that they are all initiated by the woman's gaze through the window, they each show the pursuit of an elusive black-robed and mirror-faced figure perpetually out of range, and they repeatedly cross different thresholds – between dream and reality, subject and object, and between inside and outside.

This cyclical and repetitive structure makes the dimensions of 'reality' and 'unreality' so thoroughly enmeshed that a clear-cut demarcation cannot be made. Indeed, as Deren said herself, 'it would seem that the imagined achieved, for the protagonist, such force that it became reality' (2005: 204). In this way, then, the film rises above any fixed sense of categorisation, since it is no longer the case that "reality" is assigned *only* to a waking state, or desire *only* to dreaming. Just as with fairy tales, myth, and art, the borders between the imaginary and real are blurred, and anything that can be imagined can also become real, just as the "reality" of film is created through artifice. And thus, the "magical" power of the imagination/film creates another kind of freedom, a playful

and/or serious take on and layering of reality, where things can change at any moment. This freedom is not aspired to in a political (or even, in this case, a joyful) sense; it does not attempt to teach its viewers a lesson. Instead of didacticism, the freedom comes from the film's dancerly movement, from its repetition with difference.[81] It shows us several realities, several paths through which we can "feel" our way and try out different and multiple meaning(s) as familiar objects are transformed into something else, and slight nuances are added every time the woman looks out of the window or enters the house.

This non-normative and complex layered temporality/enmeshment of different realities offers no certainties, presenting us with a feminist conception of time and reality that not only actively resists theories of progressive temporality and a straightforward meaning of 'reality,' but also renders the mastery of history and of knowledge impossible. The past or the present cannot be possessed as an object of knowledge, and so the viewer is thus encouraged to challenge evolutionary historicist claims, and to question the ways in which the consideration of time (and of history) have entered into the constitution of gender, constructing and perpetuating the power relations between men, women and gender queers – the powerful and oppressed. And the film's enmeshment of different realities, with its refusal to define which one is real or not, promotes in the viewer a creative consciousness and the possibility of new logics and new methods of reasoning that can, potentially, transfigure the coherency of our existent reality.

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[81] The "dance" is not limited to a particular body or choreographic routine, and instead, the film itself engages with dance, creating choreography through structure, camera movements, and editing techniques, and thereby freeing the concept of choreography from its limiting definition as an interrelated series of (bodily) movements. Therefore, whilst some sections may not necessarily "look like" dance, they have the same kinaesthetic impact and "feel" of a dance, and create a time and space that can *only* exist on screen.

Entering into the film's rhythm through sound

Whilst the film's pace and rhythm undoubtedly affect my own embodied viewing experience in the slow-motion key-falling-down-the-stairs sequence, it is Teiji Ito's dissonant score that draws me in *deeper*, adding dimension to the duration of what I see. On this point and in reference to Derek Jarman's *Blue* (1993), Vivian Sobchack elegantly destabilises the dominant audiovisual hierarchy by paying attention to the phenomenology of sound:

> Film sound (to historically varying degree) surrounds and envelops us and is not, like the image, "in front" of us. Merleau-Ponty tells us: "To see is *to have at a distance*." To hear not only bridges that distance but also brings it near so that things resonate on and in our bodies. (2012: 30, original emphasis)

Therefore, when image and sound work together to draw me into the film in this way, when they combine to evoke a sense of movement and journey within my body and I am able to go with the experience, to become attuned to the rhythm of the film, I can, in a sense, establish direct contact with it – and enter into its dance. Like deep concentration and deep breathing (which are *experiences*, not concepts), attuning with the film's rhythm, both audio and visual, can (potentially but not necessarily) bring about a change in both the viewer's physical and mental/emotional state – thus explaining the hypnotic quality that is often associated with this film. Of course one has to be receptive in order to be hypnotised, but through the filmic form's capacity to engender new experiences through its creation of new (and multiple) realities, a receptive viewer can experience a sense of "letting go", which can be both an interesting, moving and liberating experience.

Ethics, form, experience and intuition

In her essay on Deren's ethics of form, Maureen Turim examines 'structure as defining

a process of audience engagement' (2001: 77), concluding that:

> [I]t is perhaps time to pay more attention to the nuances of a
> morality of form that is less absolute, more playful, born between
> ritual and play, borrowing from the classic, from earlier avant-
> garde traditions, but forging its own rhythms, its own protagonists,
> *its own dance*.   (100, my emphasis)

I agree with Turim that engaging with these nuances is just as important as pure

description and naming, since it seems to me that *Meshes* is more "about" engendering

an *experience*, or rather, a multiplicity of experiences, than it is about "fixing" meaning

through theoretical interpretation and analysis. The film is playing with different ideas,

and whilst the *images* of these ideas are visible, the ideas *themselves* are not.[82]

Therefore, in effect, we are all (film and viewers alike) dancing around meaning(s),

testing and learning through an inquisitive and enquiring sense of reality, which, like

the film, is a dynamic structure. So attempting to define and determine something that

lives and moves will never quite capture its complexity or its "magic". In a similar way,

John David Rhodes argues:

> It seems to me that the film becomes less interesting the more we push at
> any of its images or set of images as 'meaning' this or that. The flower
> might connote female sexuality, the mirrors might connote narcissism,
> the man might stand in for patriarchal authority, but *Meshes* will become
> a very uninteresting film if we imagine we can 'read' it via some master
> symbolic code. The film's grounding in and foregrounding of a woman's
> experience make femininity and feminism necessary and generative
> horizons of interpretation. But we would not want to limit the film's
> meaning – its connotative reverberation and resonance – to these
> registers alone.   (2011: 92)

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[82] Deren writes that 'I came to understand the difference between contriving an image to illustrate a
verbal idea and starting with an image which contains within itself such a complex of ideas that hundreds
of words would be required to describe it' (2005: 204).

Furthermore, fixing the meaning of the film will never reflect the creativity and complexity of individual interpretation and experience at any one time or over a period of time. In her excellent article examining the ontology of photography, Sarah Kember proposes that Bergson's concept of intuition, in contrast to the intellect, be used as an alternative method for understanding, acknowledging how, '[t]he intellect blocks our understanding of life and all things that move and change' (2008: 176). Although I have neither the space nor time here to explore Bergson's difficult concepts of duration and intuition, and so am undoubtedly circling around their edges, I am interested in the *aim* of intuition as the attempt to experience directly 'the flow of the inner life', signifying 'first consciousness, but immediate consciousness, a vision which is scarcely distinguishable from the object seen' (Bergson 1968: 34, 36). What I garner from my understanding of this is that since intuition 'starts from movement' (38) it privileges the flow of immediate (bodily) experience, and therefore, in relation to film, intuition as a method does not subordinate the filmic *experience* but offers us a different (and complementary) way of "knowing" or interconnecting with the filmic experience/object – from the inside. Where as intelligence/concepts, like a gateway, can only ever *point* to this experience, intuition *is* experience.

> It follows that an absolute can only be given in an *intuition*, while all the rest has to do with *analysis*. We call intuition here the *sympathy* by which one is transported into the interior of an object in order to coincide with what there is unique and consequently inexpressible in it. Analysis, on the contrary, is the operation which reduces the object to elements already known, that is, common to that object and to others. […] All analysis is thus a translation, a development into symbols, a representation […] the always imperfect translation. It is analysis ad infinitum. But intuition, if it is possible, is a simple act.   (Bergson 1968: 190-191, original emphasis)

Whilst difficult to sustain and undeniably 'luxurious and excessive', intuition can, then, compensate 'for what intellect must leave out, the myriad connections, entwinements,

and transformations that make up even the most stable objects of intellectual analysis'

(Grosz 2004: 240).[83] This seems to me entirely appropriate for a film that is all "about"

enmeshment, and a scene in *Meshes* perfectly expresses these ideas in moving images.

The physicality of film: chasing after meaning

Directly after the iconic "Botticelli" shot of Deren (number two) at the window,

watching the third version of herself chasing the mirror-faced figure, who (once again)

disappears around the curve in the road, the film cuts to a close-up of Deren taking a

key from her mouth, cut to another close-up of it held in her upturned palm.[84] We then

cut to the (third) Deren who is entering the house downstairs, and just as in the opening

sequence and the first repetition, a handheld camera pans around the living room, but

this time as it accelerates it captures the mysterious mirror-faced figure heading towards

and climbing the stairs. There is an incredible physical quality about this shot, due to

the combination of the camera's gradually accelerating surveying action and the hurried

movement of the mirror-faced figure, as s/he seems to want to evade capture by the

camera's gaze – and this combined speed is registered phenomenologically.

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[83] As Elizabeth Grosz says, intuition is 'luxurious and excessive' precisely because it involves such effort – it takes real concentration to *really* listen to the internal and turn away from the external. Therefore, it cannot be maintained for very long and in some respects, intuition 'is literally useless. It has no utility. Its domain is that of philosophy, not science, and it promotes an entirely different kind of understanding that Bergson calls "aesthetic"' (Kember 2008: 182). But in combination with and as a challenge to theory, it can be a productive (and holistic) form of practice – 'a form of understanding which is inseparable from doing' (*ibid*) – and a (phenomenological) experience of the film that is actually *lived*.

[84] This well known shot of Deren was first referred to as the "Botticelli" shot by Anaïs Nin, who appears in several of Deren's films, including *At Land*. Referring to its painterly quality, she writes that: 'When Sasha [Deren's second husband, Alexander Hammid] filmed her, as he loved her and found her beautiful, he caught a moment when Maya appeared behind a glass window, and, softened by the glass, she created a truly Botticelli effect' (in Pramaggiore 1997: 20).

Having mounted the stairs with ease, we cut to a slower sequence that shows Deren desperately attempting to follow mirror-face up the stairs, her journey impeded by the tilting movement of the camera. The physicality and violence of the combined movement of camera and body going in opposite directions conveys the sense that she is being thrown from one side to the other by a rocking staircase, thereby frustrating her efforts to get to where she wants to be. This simple cinematic effect is kinaesthetically suggestive, and indeed, 'Deren noted that this sequence caused nausea akin to motion sickness in some viewers' (Satin 1993: 47). It is thus a sequence where rhythmic creativity and energy is produced through kinetic camera positioning and movement, rather than through any sense of theatrical dance.

As if exhausted by this effort, a medium close-up of Deren has her resting her head and hand against the wall, still looking desirously ahead of her as she pauses to regain her strength. More effort is then exerted until the film cuts to mirror face in the bedroom, placing the flower on the bed, cut to a close-up of Deren's side profile positively straining with effort to see her/him, and then to a series of cross-cuts between mirror face turning to look in Deren's direction, and Deren looking – until the former, like the mannequin's hand in the opening scene, instantly disappears through stop-motion photography. The sequence then ends with a rapid series of jump cuts that position Deren at different points up and down the staircase. However, because we do not see her actually travel between these points, there is no real feeling of movement, and thus the editing connotes her passive entrapment.

What this sequence suggests is a sense of "our" (ultimately dualistic) need to "understand," to "make sense" of and to find literal meaning in, with mirror-face acting as the embodiment of these concepts – always just ahead of us, out of reach, obscure and evading our grasp because it/they are constantly moving and changing at such a rapid pace. And just as we are about to get a good look, to "get" it, it disappears from sight. Yet, if we caught up with and looked directly at mirror-face, what would we see? We would see ourselves reflected back at us, connoting a sense of how what we read into objects/experiences/others/reality is inextricably part of who we are ourselves, and everything that has constructed who we are/have become. Whether it is conscious or not, or whether we want to admit it or not, theoretical approaches are embodied, they can tell us a great deal about the theorist (even if that is to say that s/he is completely *disembodied*), just as the theoretical discourses that we are drawn to at any given point in time also say a great deal about us and where we are, even as this is forever in flux. Thus, considering the symbolism attached to the key, and the fact that this sequence begins with Deren calmly taking it from her mouth and placing it in her upturned palm, *Meshes* is encouraging us to "unlock" this intuitive experience before we move on to conceptualising, privileging a subjective knowledge and understanding that can only come from within – through our direct embodied experience.

This is not to say that we have to make a choice of being *either* embodied *or* academic. The two can work in complete harmony, and I firmly believe that for holistic understanding, there has to be a balance of the two. However, under our patriarchal system the pursuit and development of more abstract ideas and understanding has been more highly valued, thus has more cultural capital, and whilst no longer a privilege reserved solely for men, is still the accepted measure of our intelligence and ability.

Therefore, we have become more accustomed to not trusting in and/or disregarding our inner (intuitive) embodied knowledge, and to instead externalise, to search for meaning "outside" of ourselves, as it provides some form of security. However, as the series of jump cuts up and down the stairs show, this quest for knowledge, for meaning, can itself entrap us within *apparent* movement, that can, in fact, be stasis. And the violence with which Deren is thrown about mirrors a sense of the violence with which different epistemological movements and trends can clash and contradict each other, in an academic ritual where one approach is so often (ahistorically) debunked for the next "big" thing.

Whilst the understanding that the more we learn the less we know can, at times, feel overwhelming, it more importantly opens up to us the exciting and inexhaustible world of possibilities that exists beyond ourselves. And this relates precisely to the kind of feminism that is present in *Meshes*: whilst there is undoubtedly a wealth of symbolic imagery that can eloquently articulate the restrictions placed upon women under patriarchy, and the tension between women's objectivity and subjectivity, it is the filmic form's creation of different times/worlds/places of the imagination that can begin to stimulate consciousness of individual *and* social transformation, where such limitations do not exist.

Therefore, rather than relying solely on a didactic form of feminism that enunciates our entrapment and *dictates* change, we are *also* being "worked on" by and with the film through our *experience* of its timing, rhythm, and structure – which all create a sense of creative freedom. This freedom can be felt, mirrored and potentially embodied, as we are encouraged to re-evaluate interpretative strategies and "realities" that have both

been created. As Elizabeth Grosz writes, '[t]his indeed is what I understand feminist politics – at its best – to be about: the production of futures for women that are uncontained by any models provided in the present' (Grosz 2004: 255). Through this kind of "doing," this specific way of understanding the world through material thinking, meaning is not "fixed" and a sense of becoming, not of being, is made manifest through the film. Just as images and objects are constantly metamorphosing into something else in each repetition, and just as Deren is also fragmenting and multiplying, the film is exposing the indeterminacy of meaning and of identity. Everything, then, is in a state of becoming – identity, meaning, film, life, reality, and cinema thus become '*sensible* as a materially-embodied and actively-directed structure through which meaning is constituted in an on-going sensual, reflexive, and reflective process that, entailed with the world and others, is always creating its own provisional history or narrative of becoming. In effect, *the cinema enacts what is also being enacted by its viewer*' (Sobchack 2012: 20-21, original emphasis). This lack of determinacy does not rob the film (or the world) of value, but instead, and as I have written above, can potentially liberate us from confinement in the meanings that have already been made.

Rejecting conceptualising = conceptual neglect?

This discussion leads nicely into Amy Greenfield's work, a graduate of the prestigious Harvard University who has written that her '"intellectual college training worked against a deeper, more fundamental self as an artist"' (Greenfield in Haller 2007: 157). Whilst sharing an aesthetic kinship with Deren in terms of their mutual interest in the potential of screendance to transform '"physical laws of human motion in time and space, while … creating a three-dimensional imaginative world which relates to some deep area of the human psyche"' (*ibid*: 156), her work is *even more* concerned with showing how emotion "moves" the body, working to elicit kinaesthetic identification in

the viewer by speaking to widely felt bodily and emotional experience.[85] Out of the four

filmmakers considered, then, I would argue that her work is *most* about the body, about

interior experience and catharsis, about attempting to draw the viewer into the film's

depths through affective forms and structures that penetrate inwards, and about the

rewarding and potentially transformative experience that this contact and immersion can

entail – as we see and feel ourselves through the reflection of her films' protagonists

and the tactile dimension of her work. As such, she is less concerned with the

intellectual engagement of the viewer through the conveyance of ideas and arguments,

perhaps even striving to bypass the intellect altogether in her alternative to a language-

based cinema. The pedagogical mission of her work: to pass on a particular way of

seeing/experiencing film that leads to a deeper understanding of our selves.

Perhaps, then, this focus on embodiment and preverbal knowledge, her privileging of

the art *process* over any sense of the film object's ontological meaning, and her own

reluctance to specifically interpret many of her own films – which rarely contain spoken

language or traditional choreography – can help explain the relative dearth of *scholarly*

material on her work, despite her being an award-winning experimental filmmaker,

video artist, performer and writer for over forty years. Whilst it cannot be said that

Deren, Rainer, or Potter have achieved *mainstream* acceptance and recognition, there is

a *great deal more* scholarship on their work, and thus, as Douglas Rosenberg writes, she

'must be considered on the margins of the margin. It is in this most marginal of spaces

that women including Amy Greenfield … and others presupposed Feminism and carved

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[85] Making films, as Greenfield was, in the first post-Deren generation, Robert Haller writes that her
'pivotal ideas emerged after she saw films by Maya Deren', amongst others. Furthermore, although she
had never met her, 'Deren's mother gave Greenfield a bracelet that had belonged to Maya in recognition
of the aesthetic kinship between the two' (2007: 153).

out a territory in cine dance as independent, experimental filmmakers, as outsiders

enabling themselves to create works that are seminal in the history of Dance for the

Camera'.[86]

However, the main scholarly publications that do exist, including Robert Haller's *Flesh

into Light* (2012), the only book to concentrate entirely on her films, tend to focus *more*

on the visceral and embodied/kinaesthetic process and experience of watching than on

their specifically feminist aesthetics. This is because 'Greenfield is aligned with that

part of the avant-garde that is more concerned with the politics of vision than the

politics of social commitment' (Haller 2012: 23), striving, as she does, to challenge the

anaesthetizing conventions of popular narrative. Indeed, Greenfield herself cites her

aesthetic interests as inspiration for her filmmaking, saying in a 1975 interview that,

'"I've never thought of myself as a feminist filmmaker. I thought of myself as a

filmmaker…If I felt within myself that that was the only value of my films, then I

wouldn't feel good about it *at all*' (*ibid*: 114, original emphasis).

Feminism is not, however, completely bypassed, with the discourses surrounding her

work tending to agree that whilst her 'films are not overtly feminist' (Haller 2007: 162),

they do work to reverse the usual view/ideal of women's passivity through the repeated

use of active and assertive female nudes. Greenfield has used the nude body –

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[86] This quote is taken from an online source, last accessed 22.02.13: Douglas Rosenberg's *Essay on Screen Dance*. First presented in February 2000 for Dance For the Camera Symposium, Madison, Wisconsin, USA, pp.1-9, p.1. Available:

http://www.dvpg.net/docs/screendance.pdf

principally her own in her early work (1970-1981) – as her primary form of expression, exploring the emotionally complex tension between power and powerlessness. Through presenting the nude woman as *both* powerful and vulnerable, as accepting of herself, courageous, and strong, she is arguably able to transcend her immanence and objectification through the combination of the body and the medium's expressive and metaphoric qualities, that can cut across time and space/cultures. In taking control over the way she is represented in this way, she challenges the restricted roles for and the visual treatment of women, 'propos[ing] a positive view of the body that relies on the body's capacities as an epistemological agent, for the body grants us knowledge of a unique sort' (Elder 1997: 298).

A feminist politics of the body

In *Tides*, as with many of her other films, Greenfield both directs, edits, and performs in a twelve minute film that shows her naked body rolling into, rising above, resisting, and being swept out by the ocean's churning waves, ending in her ecstatic emergence.[87] There is undoubtedly something primal in this surrender to, battle with, integration with, and emergence from the natural elements – just as in her earlier (black and white, silent) film, *Element* (1973), although in this film her naked body lies down in, rolls, crawls, and plunges into a field of thick viscous mud, connoting more of a sense of violent struggle than the sensual incorporation/emergence of *Tides*. Never simply submitting to nature in either film, or to the cultural expectations placed upon her as a woman, there is an interesting tension between the primal language of her naked body in motion, and the enduring identification of women with nature and the physical body, an association which has, of course, contributed to the Cartesian spilt between mind and

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[87] *Tides* was photographed by Hilary Harris under Greendfield's direction. An avant-garde filmmaker himself, he was her first mentor, friend, and principal cinematographer on many of her films.

body and hence the association of women with the non-rational, and men with the rational.

Therefore, it is my aim to give specific focus to the feminist aesthetics of *Tides*, and to determine *if*, and indeed *how*, Greenfield manages to shatter the oppressive dualism of the nature/culture divide through her 'specifically female sensibility' (*ibid*: 306). To what extent does her naked movement on, as well as the movement *of* the screen, complicate her reduction to fetishistic object, thereby facilitating a feminist re-visioning of the female body? Indeed, Haller has written that 'Greenfield celebrates the female body without eschewing its visual pleasure … [And] she has been regarded with some suspicion for that pleasure' (*op cit.* 2012: 32). Therefore, how does her (at times) obvious enjoyment of the body depart from exhibitionism and narcissism, allowing her to speak from the "inside" and thereby avoid/lessen the exploitation of her "outside"?

Intertextuality and verticality

> [A]ny text is the absorption and transformation of another.
> (Kristeva 1986: 37)

But first, I want to take a moment to acknowledge the intertextuality between *Tides* and Deren's *Meshes* and *At Land*, further substantiating my claim that their work is deeply connected in terms of being primarily a cinema of the body. Towards the end of *Meshes*, as Deren shatters Hammid's face/mirror with a knife, the shards of glass fall onto a sandy shore before being washed away by the ocean waves. Then right at the end of the film Deren is found (apparently) dead, covered in seaweed as if she is a creature of the sea who, after her desperate and repetitive attempts at survival, has perished like a fish out of water. *At Land* begins with waves, and then a series of sensuous images

shows Deren on her back being washed up onto shore – a play between death and deliverance. As the waves roll away from her in reverse motion, it is as if the ocean is her place of origin, delivering her onto land before retreating. So if the vast expanse of the ocean can be read as metaphor for uncharted territory, boundless adventure, unexplored depths, and the possibility of discovering the limitless self, metaphors and signs that have traditionally been assigned more often to men (but to women as well), then the final image of *Meshes* is a warning of what can happen to a woman if she is cut off from this ocean of possibility, from the source of her creative and imaginative freedom, and from discovering an identity apart from that imposed by a phallocratic society.

Deren's subsequent emergence from the ocean in *At Land* signifies her rebirth, her "second" coming, just as it was Deren's second film. And in this film, Deren explores different territories and boundaries, exploring female identity through female adventure that is now freed from the bindings of domesticity and social convention. Deren doesn't get tied down but observes; she meets a succession of different men (and women) on her journey, enters and (more importantly) *leaves* a house that Hammid leads her into, breaks the rules of a game, and ends the film by running along the shoreline with her hands thrown up in the air – free to continue exploring new and multiple versions of the self in a liminal space where old boundaries and restrictions do not apply.

Similarly, Greenfield's *Tides* shows us a woman in full possession of her own body and her own voice of the body. Shot at various slow motion speeds, she returns to, revels in, is tossed about by, and then finally emerges from this "ocean of possibilities." The

images of waves flowing in reverse away from the beach, with Greenfield also moving in reverse, are striking in their similarity to *At Land*, and indeed, 'Greenfield acknowledges these reverse sequences are derived from Maya Deren' (Haller 2012: 50).[88] This use of rhythmic editing, of creating uncanny motion through taking apart both the movement of sea and body and then reassembling it so that what we see is different to the sum of its parts, whilst simultaneously reversing time, is uncannily entrancing – adding to the already hypnotic quality that has long been associated with the ebb and flow of oceanic space.

Just as the rhythmic waves "take" and "deliver" Greenfield and Deren's bodies, then, so too does the film's rhythmic body "take" and "deliver" mine, as I am immersed into the experience through the film's manipulation of time and space, as well as through my own embodied memory and love of being in the sea. The combination of slow motion and close-up allow me to see the *quality* of the movement, both of the waves and Greenfield's body, which would not be visible otherwise, whilst also provoking a sense of touch through the proximity of the camera. Through this sense of tactility, I not only feel the weight of, but am also carried along with the rhythmic waves both on and of the screen, in what is a particularly corporeal experience/transference between moving image and audience. In this way, the act of simply watching this film can be likened to swimming itself, as I dive beyond its surface into something that is rich in associations.

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[88] Although in *At Land* Deren's body is washed up onto the shore, whilst Greenfield reverses her body's direction so that it goes towards the sea.

As with aspects of Deren's films, I am able to effortlessly relax into *Tides* as a whole experience, instead of floating around outside it attempting to attach ideas and concepts. This is because my sense of intuition as *a physical and spatial feeling* allows me, to re-quote Bergson, to be 'transported into the interior of an object in order to coincide with what there is unique and consequently inexpressible in it'. And what *is* unique and "inexpressible" is my sense of childlike excitement at my/Greenfield's submergence into the film/waves, as well as a common and timeless feeling experienced when by the ocean – a sense of peace and well being. The aural dimension of the film undoubtedly enhances this, as the immersive and soothing sound of the ocean waves combined with the rhythmically fluid editing, lull me into a deeply relaxed, yet concentrated and focused state – a state of deep contentment.

It is this material connection, this ability to experience the rich depths and fluidity of the film that points to the influence of Deren's conception of verticality in film. Characterised by elements of mood, tone and rhythm that work together to build emotional layers and depths, this "poetic" film structure 'probes the ramifications of the moment, and is concerned with its qualities and its depth, so that you have poetry concerned, in a sense, not with what is occurring but with *what it feels like* or with what it means' (Deren in Vogel 1963: 174, my emphasis).[89] Thus, both Deren and Greenfield utilise the body/body of their films to promote a sensuous engagement with the physicality of film, encouraging their audience to watch with an awareness of their own bodies and interiority, thereby connecting bodies and collapsing spaces.

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[89] Film also works on another axis: the horizontal, which privileges/builds linear narrative, character and action.

The flow of (female) identity

> What's the meaning of these waves, these floods, these outbursts?
> (Cixous 1981: 246)

> Ah, Waves, you tell me what I am and what I may yet be.
> (Naslund 1999: 623)

As is clear from above, the choice of setting for *Tides* is significant since the ocean cannot be reduced to simple dualisms, enjoying, as it does, a complicated relatedness. All complex life on earth, including human life, began in and emerged from the ocean, thus marking our relatedness to other species, other shores, and to each other. Furthermore, tides, like '[s]easons … days, months, years, and the movement of the stars are all examples of universal rhythms, and our survival depends on us oscillating with these rhythms and functioning as part of a rhythmic environment' (Pearlman 2009: 7). Indeed, our own bodies are also subject to internal rhythms and tides, particularly apparent in our circulatory system and many women's experience of the menstrual cycle. However, as well as being dependent upon the ocean as a source of abundance, connection, well being, and access to other spaces, it is also a place of tragedy, fear, loss and limitation – a space in which we are vulnerable and never far from death.

Similarly, in Western cultural tradition the ocean has been imagined as *both* a masculine and a feminine force/space. Representing man's escape from the confines of married life, family, domesticity, and heterosexuality, the ocean has traditionally been associated with rugged sea*men*/sailors who yearn for the freedom and adventure of this open expanse. Women, on the other hand, have traditionally been confined to the shore, limited and constrained within the essentialist role of earth mother, praised for her culturally imposed female virtues of watching and waiting. At the same time, however, the sea has also been imagined as both a maternal provider and a dangerous seductress.

In his essay on water and dreams, Gaston Bachelard writes that, '[t]he sea is maternal; water is a prodigious milk. The earth prepares in its womb a warm and rich food; on its banks swell the breasts that will give all creatures particles of fat' (1983: 116). Of course this feminisation of the ocean as idyllic and bountiful mother has led to her dangerous exploitation.[90] And the inherent danger of the ocean itself, with its mysterious, unknowable, and unpredictable depths, has also given rise to the classical myths of corrupting mermaids and sirens, who lure men to their deaths with their beauty and song.

Yet despite all efforts to mythologise, understand, control, and fix the ocean, it resists classification – it is both female and male and neither, because something that flows cannot be dualistic. In this way, the fluidity of its tides can be read as a metaphor for the continuous flow of identity, of gender, and as a metaphor for change. Therefore, Greenfield's naked immersion in *Tides* shows us a woman who is bravely exploring her identity, agency, creativity, and adventure via the boundlessness of the open sea. If, like the ocean, the female body is unchartered territory, then it is being claimed according to *her own* unfettered female expression and female desire, creating a space that is not beholden to, and therefore surpasses and subverts, the phallocentric fantasy and desire of woman as passive spectacle/receptacle without voice. In this way, and although Greenfield uses a different medium, I see *Tides* as a response to Hélène Cixous' seminal and enduringly inspirational call for women to write:

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[90] Overfished, with human and toxic waste habitually dumped into "her" with little accountability or responsibility, the ocean is no longer a bearer of infinite resources. The patriarchal desire and need to dominate nature is thus reflected in its domination of women, connecting them in the way they are thought about.

> Woman must write herself: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies – for the same reasons, by the same law, with the same fatal goal. Woman must put herself into the text – as into the world and into history – *by her own movement*.
> <div align="right">(1981: 245, my emphasis)</div>

Undoing dualisms: vulnerability as a measure of strength

The patriarchal system's insistence that males are inherently dominating, superior to nature and to women and thus within their rights to rule over them, fails to acknowledge the history of effects and the damage we are inflicting upon ourselves, since men are not the sole teachers and/or perpetuators of patriarchal values and beliefs, and can be victims of patriarchy themselves. What happens at sea/land, then, affects the land/sea, affects us, just as patriarchy's institutionalized gender roles also damage men – since we are all ultimately connected. As Bruce Elder observes, the relation of Greenfield to the sea in *Tides* shows us a different, more respectful and non-dualistic kind of interaction with nature, since she 'does not insist upon the upright position with its connotations of aggression, control, and self-assertion, but can accept entering into and being controlled by earthly forces or marine rhythms and can tolerate submitting the self to forces that lie beyond it' (1997: 306). In this way, her *active* vulnerability shows us that our human bodies, like the ocean itself, are fluid sites of *both* vulnerability *and* empowerment, with qualities that are deemed both "masculine" and "feminine" within us all. Furthermore, she shows us that this fluidity and vulnerability can itself be a measure of our strength.

Without the courage to be vulnerable, we don't take risks, and by not taking risks, we can get entrenched in limited and limiting beliefs about the world, others and ourselves. Indeed, one of patriarchy's most damaging effects has been its insistence that boys and

men have to always be in control, repressing any signs of weakness or vulnerability if they do not want to be readily dismissed, and thereby denying them access to *full* emotional expressiveness and well-being. After all, experiencing a sense of one's own vulnerability can be a connective force, since it shows us that instead of being entirely autonomous, self-contained or self-sufficient, we are in fact dependent upon each other, just as we are dependent upon the forces/rhythms of nature. To be truly "in our power" involves relinquishing some of that control and power – being able to go more respectfully with the "flow." In allowing herself to be tossed around by such powerful waves, then, Greenfield demonstrates the courage it takes to ultimately experience the joy of this merger/vulnerability, since joy is a daring emotion.[91] And through her fearless incorporation into and movement with the endless flow of the ocean tides, her non-essentialist relationship to nature works to show us that: 'Woman is not a completed reality, but a becoming, and it is in her becoming that she should be compared with man; that is to say, her *possibilities* should be defined' (de Beauvoir 1997: 66, original emphasis).

This continued identification of women with nature and the body, then, does not exclude culture and the mind precisely because Greenfield unites her body, emotion, and mind in order to *create* culture – an avant-garde film that resists either emotional or intellectual simplification. If culture, just as the *lived body* of woman and man, is both mind and body, then a dualistic relationship between them simply cannot exist, and equal respect is given to both.

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[91] Making this film was *actually* a dangerous experience, as Greenfield writes that 'over and over I go under the water and come up stronger, until at the end, I'm running with a gigantic wave, in joy. Those last shots were real risks – in order to have waves high enough, we shot the day after a hurricane' (in Haller 2012: 118).

A feminist re-visioning of the naked female body

According to Iris Marion Young's seminal essay on 'Throwing Like A Girl', gender tells us more about our social norms/power structures than it does about "natural" differences, subjectivity and identity. However, these power relations undoubtedly have a material effect on our bodily comportment, as gender rules and regulations are, to varying degrees, internalised and embodied. Therefore, because women have been socialized to be objects of the gaze, to think of themselves as bodies that are acted *upon*, they tend to be 'rooted in immanence … retain[ing] a distance from [their] body as a transcending movement and from engagement in the world's possibilities' (2005: 39). As if in knowing contradistinction, Greenfield throws her *whole body* into this interaction with the waves with 'uninhibited intentionality' (37). She is not rooted in place, passively waiting for the waves to move her, but begins the film by actively rolling out towards and into them. Shortly after there is a (slow motion) sequence in which a low-angled shot shows her attempting to stand-up, facing the camera, as a breaker wave in the background simultaneously reaches its own maximum (and significant) height. Just as she bends forward with her arm raised to help propel her forward, the wave breaks behind her at exactly the same time, mirroring her movement. Not merely uniting her with her surroundings, this creates the sense that the waves are an extension of her own being, or that she is an extension of the waves – thus increasing both the action and spatiality of her body. Not only does this challenge the more traditional ideas about female motility and spatiality, since she is not 'mere object and immanence' (31) but a 'pure presence to the world' (38), it also problematizes, and perhaps even overturns (depending on the viewer) the objectification of her naked female body.

This is because her connection to and continuity with the space around her 'institutes the link between a here and a yonder, a now and a future which the remainder of the instants will merely develop' (Merleau-Ponty 1989: 140). When enhanced by the close-ups of her body as she runs towards the camera, and the "ordinariness" of her movement, which cuts across time, space, and cultures, it represents a transcendental lived (*female*) bodily experience that has the power to then link to the outlying space and time of the audience, eliciting a self-reflexive consciousness of the viewers' own bodies through kinetic familiarity and proximity. This is subversive because as Young so brilliantly articulates, this space of "yonder" has not traditionally been corporeally available to women:

> In feminine existence … the projection of an enclosed space severs the continuity between a "here" and a "yonder".… [T]here is a *double spatiality*, as the space of "here" is distinct from the space of the "yonder." … Thus the space of the "yonder" exists for feminine existence, but only as that which she is looking into, rather than moving in.   (40-41)

Therefore, through combining with space and time to step into this space of "yonder", Greenfield opposes the cultural determinants that fix women as objects. And through my own embodied connection with the film, I become part of this expanse, experiencing a wonderful feeling of freedom and exhilaration. In this way, she teaches her audience transcendence *through* the body, which, in a world where women and girls are *still* constantly reminded that they don't belong to themselves, endows viewers with the power to already know that their body, spirit, and mind are their domain, that women have the right to own ourselves, and should not be slaves to others (or our own) deepest insecurities, hopes and desires. This is perhaps where the ritual association of entering water comes into its own, since the film's "healing powers" can potentially help nurture a strong, positive, and healthy relationship to one's body image. Furthermore, this

challenges the (patriarchal and Platonic) view that transcendence can *only* be achieved through "rising above" the body, as if our sensual materiality is merely an impediment to our souls/intellects attaining clarity and "truth."

Inviting self-reflexivity/objectification?

Through the combination of her naked body in (joyful) motion, along with the cinematic devices that work to draw us into as well as expand the action and spatiality of her/my body, *Tides* bridges the gap between film and viewer, presenting us with a freedom of expression that is neither narcissistic nor sexually exploitative. Just as Greenfield's nakedness 'directs attention to no single part of the body, leading the viewer to see the dynamics of the whole organism' (Haller 2007: 155), so too does the continual motion of her body/camera/editing work to overcome the fragmentation of her body – presenting us instead with a transcendent sense of a "whole" person. Furthermore, the illusions created by editing and a physically active camera do not jar with the film's rhythm but enhance it, so that although I may "know" certain movements are purely cinematic and not *actually* possible, I neither question nor disbelieve in them.[92] In this way, Greenfield's play with form heightens the transcendent quality of her film.

However, as Murray Smith writes, 'spectators evaluate characters [and films] on the basis of the values they embody, and henceforth form more-or-less sympathetic or more-or-less antipathetic *allegiances* with them' (1995: 75, original emphasis). Therefore, I must acknowledge that whilst the invitation via the camera to look at her

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[92] An example being an underwater shot in which the camera is upside down when shooting, but then the image is inverted so that the shot is the right side up, but backwards.

body is certainly empathetic for me, it may also be predatory, reflecting the complexity of social/cultural relationships with the female body. As Iris Marion Young writes, '[t]o open her body in free, active, open extension and bold outward-directedness is for a woman to invite objectification' (45). Indeed, the 2012 YouTube censorship of both *Element* and *Tides* attests to this way of looking.[93] Perhaps, then, this film, like the ocean itself, has the power to "draw" us in but is not without its inherent dangers – corresponding to the sort of powerful/powerless dynamic that a woman experiences when in her body.

Confounding seduction and catharsis

Whilst sharing an (non-elitist) aesthetic with Greenfield in her privileging of "everyday," pedestrian movements and gestures over virtuosity, Rainer actively resists transcendence through movement in her first independent feature film, *Lives*. Instead of drawing the viewer into the film's depths, concerned with showing how emotion "moves" the body and how, in turn, that body/body of the film "moves" the viewer in a direct *experience* of film, Rainer uses movement and stasis to stress the *concepts*, or the central questions that drive her desire/need to make work. This largely keeps the viewer at a critical distance, "looking on" from the outside where they can become a producer (rather than an embodied part) of meaning. In depersonalising her actors/dancers

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[93] However, this censorship has since been lifted, with Greenfield credited for 'breaking new ground for freedom of speech on the Internet. In 2010, the National Coalition Against Censorship and Electronic Frontier Foundation protested the censoring of her films *Element* and *Tides* on YouTube. The international stature of her work enabled them to bring attention to and change YouTube's guidelines on nudity and art. Now, many filmmakers and performance artists have put their work on YouTube for the first time'.

Found: http://www.amygreenfieldfilms.com/biography/

through a range of distancing devices that totally oppose, and thereby deconstruct the classical Hollywood model of melodrama and the generic nature of the film's clichéd love triangle, Rainer invites the intellectual and self-reflexive engagement of the viewer. This is unquestionably more "difficult" and demanding than the "altering" effects of kinetic rhythm, force, and highs, but certainly not without its own pleasures and rewards.

Therefore, it would seem to follow that if Greenfield's lack of interest in intellectual engagement goes towards explaining the dearth of scholarly discourse surrounding her work, then Rainer's formally complex and intellectually demanding film work that is not afraid to be didactic, can help explain the abundance surrounding hers. Unlike Greenfield (but similar to Deren and Potter), Rainer has also spoken and written extensively on her own work, with numerous published interviews, essays, scripts, and books that delineate her progression from dance to film, as well as question the/and link it to film theory – particularly feminist film theory. Indeed, her films are mainly analysed from within a feminist or avant-garde framework, with a particular flurry of writing between the mid-1970s to the late 1980s that includes contributions from celebrated feminist and avant-garde theorists such as Laura Mulvey, the *Camera Obscura* Collective, Teresa de Lauretis, Kaja Silverman, Annette Michelson, Annette Kuhn, and Jonas Mekas. It was Rainer's long-time concern with narrative and the narcissistic/voyeuristic spectacle of the live dancing body that led to her complete transition from dance to film in 1972, and Peggy Phelan acknowledges the ways in which this earlier choreography, as well as Rainer's 1965 "No Manifesto" both predates and '*anticipates* feminist film theory's attention to the structure of the gaze in terms that are resonant with Laura Mulvey's celebrated 1975 essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative

Cinema"' (1999: 8, my emphasis). E. Ann Kaplan further substantiates this, arguing that *Lives* 'preceded any coherent feminist film commentary in New York and any assertion of their voices by the female artists working in the male-dominated avant-gardes. At this time, artists' anti-Establishment politics centred around Vietnam rather than around feminism' (1983: 113).

Characterised by the same concerns as her dance work, *Lives* explores the representation of women's bodies with hostility towards voyeurism, an aversion to artificiality and the manipulation of an audience, a critique of disciplinary conventions, an interrogation of the role of performance, and an attraction to human relationships and emotions. Therefore, it is really no surprise that her films have received so much feminist scholarly attention, or that she herself is hailed as an uncompromising feminist avant-garde filmmaker, since she anticipated a number of theoretical interventions that revitalised the relationship between theory and practice as an act of feminist politics.[94] As a result of her diverse interests and influences that span disciplinary borders, such as postmodern dance, avant-garde film, visual arts, psychology, feminist film theory, and (Cagean) music, her innovative practice both "describes" and challenges the socio-political-historical (and specifically academic feminist) contexts from which it sprung. Therefore it is, in many respects, a "perfect fit" for avant-garde feminist (dance) film analysis, despite (or because of) the fact that her work did not "fit perfectly" into any contemporaneous disciplinary trend.[95]

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[94] Furthermore, Rainer's later films would develop alongside and in direct relationship with feminist and psychoanalytic theory, exploring increasingly explicit (and political) feminist themes such as the menopause, breast cancer, lesbianism, white (female) privilege, and political violence against women.

[95] Although I stress here the connection between her work and feminist film theory, as Peggy Phelan asserts, 'Post-structuralist, feminist, Marxist, and now also queer theory illuminate the intellectual and psychic terrain traversed by Rainer's films' (1999: 15).

Essayistic filmmaking

In shifting her attention from the object, or what the viewer sees, to the subject, or what the viewer *reads*, Rainer espouses an essayistic mode of filmmaking. Always littered with intertexts that display her debt to other authors and thus point to the film's status as a collaborative process, her work can be read as the application of her ideas/theories to her practice. Once again this contrasts with Greenfield's materializing type of pedagogy, where theorising comes after/out of practice. Thinking, writing and reading her films *are* Rainer's/the viewer's creative practice, and it is no coincidence that her most famous piece of choreography, *Trio A* (first performed in 1966), was initially part of a larger work entitled *The Mind is a Muscle*. Whilst the mind is housed within the body, and thus they are one in the same thing, Rainer undoubtedly exercises and privileges this *particular* muscle of the body in both her choreography and filmmaking. This is because for her, it leads to a kind of disciplined liberation that the (female) body in motion (as the main element of the work) cannot achieve, since it will always be "weighed down," restricted, and defined by its cultural and social inscription – or in other words, *how it is read* and the ideological repercussions of this for the audience. For Greenfield and to a lesser extent, Deren, it would seem that the exact opposite is true: it is the physical body beyond thought that leads and grounds their filmmaking and understanding of the world, creating a "freer" space of feminist creative imagination, in which women can change and define exactly how they are read.

I am thus interested in exploring how *Lives* uses the medium of film to both challenge and develop ideas about dance and film, about the gaze and the representation of women, but also how these ideas can "reach out" to the viewer, moving their intellectual corporeality and thereby inspiring self-reflection and reflexivity – which are

the seeds of change and growth. I am also particularly interested in a dance scene where

Rainer reinstates existential expression, offering viewers a moment of empathetic

emotional identification through a sequence of movements that are beautifully executed,

staged and shot. In marked contrast to the majority of the performers' affectless

choreographies throughout the film, this sequence activates (my) emotions rather than

scrutinizes them, reflecting the complexity of Rainer's film, as well as (my) relation to

it. The *bodily* expression of emotion, then, is not (entirely) forgotten, but due to a

certain (Rainerian) combination of cinematic devices, is also never (entirely)

overwhelming.

A 'Progress towards conscious experience'[96]

Lives begins with an intertitle quoting Leo Bersani, an American literary theorist,

declaring that 'Cliché is, in a sense, the purest art of intelligibility; it tempts us with the

possibility of enclosing life within beautifully inalterable formulas, of obscuring the

arbitrary nature of imagination with an appearance of necessity.' This ultimately sets up

the "meaning" of the film for its audience, as well as hinting at Rainer's playful

humour, since there will not be any seduction or confinement within the conventions or

"meanings" of *this* arbitrary melodrama – only in the (literal) box that is the central prop

in the film, and which appears in the opening shot. Throughout the film characters will

move in and out of it, but the spectre of this box remains, representing the deeply

entrenched limiting beliefs, ideologies, and behaviours, that can restrict people from

thinking more expansively about life and film. Daring to challenge and change these

attitudes, as Rainer is doing, can therefore be a liberating experience, because when you

limit your thinking, you limit your life. So the image of this box represents the ever-

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[96] Quote by Bertolt Brecht, from (1978) *Brecht on Theatre*, London: Eyre Metheun, trans. J. Willet, p.276.

present *choice* of entrapment, of retreating back to the safety and confines of the familiar, the clichéd, the unquestioned, and thus, in a sense, the "easier" place to be – thereby symbolizing everything that the film is not. Through its reworking of narrative, cinematic genre, techniques, and images, *Lives* reveals that "inalterable formulas" are not inalterable at all.

The first three minutes of this black and white film are silent footage of dancers' perfunctory warm-up exercises and rehearsal in a bare room, which immediately contrasts with Babette Mangolte's rhythmic and self-conscious camerawork that gracefully moves all around the space of the room and the dancers within it. Cinematography is thus more "dancerly" than the bodies it films, revealing itself to be an independent unit/body in relation to their movement, and thereby drawing attention *away from it* in order to highlight the process of filmmaking. Straight away, then, viewers are made aware that they are watching a film, and that the 'real star of the show [is] cinema as personified by the play of pure cinematic devices' (Carroll 2007: 90). The audience is further distanced from the dancers' material presence through the camera's fragmentation of their (decorporealized) bodies: alternately showing medium shots, low angled shots of legs, feet, and "decapitated" bodies. The dispassionate nature of this dissection works to resist 'the implicit spectacularization of the dancing body' (Albright 1997: 19), just as the pared down, task-like choreography resists the narcissistic/voyeuristic duality of performer and audience. This is because without any choreographic emphasis, highs, lows, or dynamic rhythm, male *and* female bodies are more likely seen as simple "things", generic (and not erotic) objects that move. This is enhanced by the uniformity of the performers' "everyday" outfits, namely trousers/jeans and tops, as well as the moments in which they move together in time and in-synch.

Therefore, in its departure from classical virtuosic dance, the choreography works to broaden ideas about what dance is – just as the departure from continuity editing broadens ideas about what film is.

Disjuncture: an act of becoming

As the disembodied instructions of Rainer interrupt the silence, we get the first example of a non-synch voice-over, and of the disjuncture between the words heard and the images seen that will feature throughout the vast majority of the film. (This theme of disjuncture is also reflected in the film's use of intertitles, as well as in the play between narrative and "real" life.) Another glimpse into Rainer's sense of humour is also evident, as she tells the dancers that their "gaze is to the audience" in the same instant that the camera pans down to their lower bodies and feet. This short-circuits the exchange of gazes that her words set up, thereby displacing voyeurism by ironically reinforcing the point that emotional identification is certainly not the focus of this narrative, and that words are not always to be trusted. This lack of synchronization also breaks another rule of dominant narrative cinema, allowing female characters to both inhabit and speak from a space *outside* the diegesis. As Kaja Silverman so eloquently articulates, this is dangerously challenging to androcentricity because it 'put[s] her beyond the control of the male gaze, and release[s] her voice from the signifying obligations which that gaze sustains' (1984: 135). When no longer entrapped within the alignment of form and voice, within the 'beautifully inalterable formulas' of phallocentrism, the spatiality and motility of the female body is infinitely expanded, and the contradictory, multiple, and fluid nature of female identity is revealed. Thus, the ontology of woman is shown (or rather heard) to be one of *becoming*, not of being. It is

clear, then, that despite their differing methods, both Greenfield and Rainer are using the medium of film to step into a space of (feminist) 'yonder' (Young 2005: 40).

An intellectual corporeality

In marked contrast to the first scene of the film, a fixed and dispassionate camera shows a series of still photographs from one of Rainer's earlier dance pieces, as well as scrapbooks of past performances. The voice-over narration by various members of the cast thus provides the only "movement" in this section, yet it is *far from moving*, despite relating the details and complexities of the love triangle between Valda, Shirley, and Fernando. This is because they improvise and read these narratives out in flat, monotone, and emotionless voices, denying any affect that the words may have by reminding the viewer that *every* aspect of this film is a performance. Because they don't "own" the emotions of which they speak, there is a sense that they could be anybody's, and in this way deeply personal narratives are depersonalized. The deliberate mixing-up of characters names so that viewers cannot follow the plot or get emotionally involved reinforces this, particularly when Valda and Shirely are called "number one" and "number two." Different actors playing the same character further emphasise this theme of interchangeability, as well as scenes that are rehearsed and played in different ways. Through all of this, then, the generic, archetypal nature of emotions and narratives is revealed, as well as a sense of the multiplicity of alternative *choices* that exist within any narrative structure – revealing just how alterable a formula it actually is.

It is in this juxtaposition of the stillness of the frame and the movement of the words that a space and time of unlearning is created, allowing the viewer to "slow down" in order to notice more. Stillness is thus a resource for discovery, and its reach of intentionality moves out to "touch" my (intellectual) corporeality, encouraging and

challenging me to find my own meanings in these distanced and fragmented narratives.

Through the insights garnered from my experience of the film, I "turn" self-reflexively

to my own attachments to archetypal narratives of emotion, which, through this process

alone, releases me somewhat from their grip. I am, therefore, in complete agreement

with Peggy Phelan's (1999: 16) astute observations about Rainer's work, when she

writes that:

> In 1965, Rainer yelled "no to moving or being moved" but the rest of her
> effort has been geared toward finding the generative intelligence produced
> by, and necessary for, kinaesthetic, political, and psychic empathy. A well-
> toned empathy increases our capacity to respond to the compelling
> possibilities of moving and being moved and remains our best hope for
> remaking ourselves and our worlds.

However, Rainer has been criticized and dismissed 'on grounds of intellectualism,

opacity, and, probably, elitism' (Rich 1998: 126). So this sequence (and indeed, the

entire film) can *also* be read as incongruous, banal, and downright boring. As if in

humorous acknowledgement of this, the sequence ends with a voice-over saying "lets

go on, I'm tired of all this." Once again, then, Rainer's self-reflexive humour reminds

viewers that whilst *Lives* is undoubtedly a serious investigation into the politics of

narrative construction, it is never meant to be taken *too* seriously!

<u>Reinstatement of existential expression</u>

Apart from this ever-present humour, *Lives* reveals itself to be neither entirely detached,

didactic, nor existentially expression*less* in what is, for me, its most poignant scene:

Valda's solo. Through a six-minute, highly expressive silent sequence that is shot in one

uninterrupted long take, the force of affect through a sensuous bodily performance of

choreography is reinstated. Both the silence and initial stillness of the camera act as a

counterpoint to the intense voice-overs/kinetic camera movement of other sections of

the film, creating an immersive time and space that accentuates her movement. Cinematography thus establishes intimacy, despite there being no close-ups to draw the viewer towards her. Instead, the film's body is made palpable through its concentrated look, taking the time and space to stay and move with Valda (as well as the spotlight that frames her), and this focussed "concentration" is infectious.

At times her movements are graceful, fluid, balanced, and extended; and at others, frozen, falling, awkward, and hunched, conveying a sense of her beauty, strength, and pride, *as well* as her vulnerability and limitations. She also repeatedly picks up, holds onto, and lets go again of a ball, which visually articulates her ability (as well as her choice) to both hold onto the "ball and chain" of archetypal emotions that have entrapped her within a confining (and unhappy) narrative, as well as let it/them go. Therefore, Valda is not one thing and cannot be contained in nor defined *solely* by her words or by her body, because her body is neither fixed nor final, but multiple, fluid, and always in a state of "becoming." This is *literally* highlighted by the hand-held spotlight that casts her silhouette on the wall behind, as choreography and lighting combine to express her character's complexity/multiplicity. However, it *also* acknowledges her position as spectacle, since Fernando is both watching and evaluating, and despite the affective sensuality of her performance, is not moved. He has "seen it a hundred times," and despite her claim that she "does it differently now, that she understands it better," "it looks the same to him." Perhaps this is a pun on the fact that it is another of Rainer's recycled choreographies, but his insensitivity and inability to really "see" Valda's multiple subjectivity also reflects the fact that whilst embodied subjects *act*, they are also always *acted upon*; and that bodies are *lived* as well as thoroughly *written*. But as Valda turns away from Fernando and looks directly

into the camera, a medium close-up of her sly, irritated expression suggests that he doesn't convince her anymore. Deviating from the majority of the film's expressionless close-ups, this aside imbues hope that she will escape her confinement from within the clichéd love triangle: that she isn't merely an object filmed to seduce but a subject who speaks, questions, and moves beyond that which attempts to fix her. However, whilst Rainer allows for this empathetic connection between film, character, and viewer, there is no danger of being sucked in too deeply, because reflexivity is ever-present and cathartic resolutions are of course denied.

What is complex about my relation to this scene is that whilst the film is undeniably conceptual, and I can "measure" its meaning(s) through symbolic thought and analysis, it also works to disarm me of my (intellectual) defences, encouraging more of an intuitive, direct experience. (All the more poignant in a film that privileges symbolic thought over immediate experience.) It is my feeling for "Valda" through her movement, unconnected to what narrative information has come before or what is to follow, that moves my understanding not just from the "outside", but also into a relationship of feeling/coinciding with her/the film. Therefore, I am brought into a present *experience*, and for the first (and only time) I am "in" the film rather than looking on from outside.

Like every other "episode" of the film, this scene is a unit that is part of an un-unified whole, in that each episode *could* be abstracted from the film and still hold as much "meaning" as it does within it, despite the narrative thread. This is because Rainer does not get caught up in (the time and space) of conventional narrative, which traditionally segments time into a beginning, middle, and a transcendent/catastrophic ending.

Instead, each dissociative unit has no time and space, and it is this lack of unity that encourages an intuitive sense of duration – or of 'the heterogeneity which is the very ground of our experience' (Bergson 1910: 97). As Rainer states herself in the now famous 1976 *Camera Obscura* interview, 'I want everything I make to reflect my whole life…[to] have no time or space…[to be] pure events or states that the audience can hang on themselves very immediately, if they choose' (1976: 96). So just as there is succession between these episodes, but not distinctions, there are multiplicities of choice within any narrative structure, despite the fact it implies a framework of homogeneity. In the same way that narrative and film are shown not to be (only) homogenous, neither is reality.

> What we must say is that we have to do with two different kinds of reality, the one heterogeneous, that of sensible qualities, the other homogeneous, namely space. This latter, clearly conceived by the human intellect, enables us to use clean-cut distinctions, to count, to abstract, and perhaps also to speak. (Bergson 1910: 97)

A shift towards embodied pleasure

If Rainer anticipated feminist film theory, then Sally Potter (fifteen years her junior) has been directly influenced by many of the same critical, scholarly, and artistic discourses, just at a different stage of their development. Drawing upon the avant-garde, independent, feminist, and experimental cinemas, Potter was making highly theoretical and pedagogical films during the late 1970s and early 1980s when this kind of filmmaking was at the height of intellectual fashion. With her (1979) film *Thriller* widely considered to be a classic of feminist independent cinema, she was (and continues to be) widely celebrated as a feminist auteur. The attachment of this label has therefore led to her films being read and written about as "doing" feminist theory, and like Rainer, there is an extensive feminist academic bibliography surrounding her work.

Potter has also published her own writings on her films, as well as touring extensively with them whilst offering Q&As and masterclasses along the way. As (vocally expressive) feature filmmakers, then, Rainer and Potter have much in common in that their intellectual quest is part of their films' aesthetic pleasure – arguably the reason why their films have polarised audiences. Furthermore, Potter has also used similar distanciation devices to Rainer: asking questions rather than giving answers, dividing the film into parts, inter-titles, a lack of closure, and voice-over, in order to disrupt and deny any sense of illusionism.

However, although by no means a "popular" film, *The Tango Lesson (TTL)* marks a definite shift in her work (a shift that began with her (1992) film, *Orlando*): undoubtedly offering its viewers a more conventional form of visual pleasure, in what is, in many respects, a more "conventional" dance film (at least compared to the rest of the films examined here.) It therefore marks the beginning of Potter's attempt at bridging the gap between independent/experimental/conceptual cinema and popular film, which by its very nature has to be somewhat less confounding.[97] Despite this relaxed and arguably more measured approach to filmic style, Potter neither wholly departs from, nor completely undermines, the progressive political convictions and thematic/formal preoccupations that infuse her earlier, more confrontational work. As such, her visual language, in part, remains markedly different from classical cinema, with its interrogation of a gender system that both defines and limits experience, its exploration of female subjectivity, corporeality, and desire; its self-reflexive play between reality and fiction, the personal and the professional, looking and being looked

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[97] For whatever reasons, this is a compromise that Rainer has never made. However, Rainer's last feature film, *Murder and Murder*, was made in 1996, whereas Potter is continuing to make films, with her most recent being *Ginger & Rosa* (2012). Considering austerity and funding cuts, and the fact that it is becoming increasingly more difficult for filmmakers to make independent work, Potter's British yet international independent filmmaking success, within an industry still dominated by men, is notable.

at. As well as the more "popular," highly accomplished and kinetically exhilarating dance scenes. Therefore, *TTL* is neither a purely conceptual, nor a Hollywood-style dance film, but an amalgamation of both. As I shall explore in the following chapter, the ideological elements in the Hollywood dance film, *Black Swan*, are so intensely contradictory (due to the pressure of appealing to as broad an audience as possible), it is impossible to yield to its more progressive potential. In its attempt to bridge the gap between different forms of cinema, *TTL* also makes a compromise that results in an ideological contradiction, and is thus not exempt from critique. This is because, as explored below, its inclusion of a "popular" romantic storyline and a desiring female gaze treads a fine and contradictory line between feminist empowerment and cinematic stereotyping.

The film begins with a high-angled shot looking down on Sally (the character played by Potter) in a bare room, seated at a white table in front of a blank page, all suggestive of what we will later learn is her imprisonment within the barren void of writers block. A cut to a close-up of her pencil writing "Rage" is intercut with scenes of her ideas for this film within the film, striking in their Technicolor contrast to the black and white photography of *TTL*. As a gunshot is fired and a woman falls, a cut back to Sally shows her scrunching up the page and throwing it onto the floor. This immediately signals not the death of, but certainly the temporary abandonment of these more cerebral ideas driven by her "rage" (with the fashion industry's reduction of women to mere objects), for a more personal, embodied exploration of the sensuality of dance and the politics of partnership that will bring intellect and senses *together*.[98] Lucy Fischer puts it succinctly when she writes that whilst *Rage* (the film within the film) 'might have been

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[98] Potter would later turn this exploration of the fashion industry's reduction of women to mere objects into the film *Rage* (2009), which would be very different to this version within *TTL*.

novel in the late seventies…by now the idea seems clichéd and hackneyed – which is precisely the point. On some level, Potter has not only abandoned the screenplay for *Rage* but the very emotion it signifies. Thus, in trekking around the world in pursuit of the tango, she chooses pleasure over pain' (2004: 44). Therefore, just as *Thriller* (and *any* text) was a product of its specific socio-political-historical context, so too is *TTL*. And in terms of reflecting the changes within feminism and within the individual living through them, we now see a high-achieving, articulate, and empowered woman play with incorporating her "own" identity into her work, thereby complicating and defining feminism for herself.

Ethical vision?

If Potter has abandoned a now 'clichéd and hackneyed' critique of female objectification, then it may seem contradictory that the next scene has a close-up of Sally gazing desirously at Pablo Veron (and his partner) performing a tango in Paris. However, because she is *also* interested in his subjectivity, this gaze is not a simple act of reversed objectification, but it is nonetheless problematic. This is because, as Emanuela Guano so convincingly argues, despite revealing the particularities of her *female* desire and thereby reclaiming women's visual power, it 'ends up reproducing yet another exploitative visual structure: that of the desiring, and controlling, imperial gaze firmly cast on its Latin American object as a fetishistic image that, under its spectacularity, conceals the politics of its making' (2004: 461). Regardless of Potter's authorial intentions, then, this gaze/the film's body reproduces the power relations and colonizing aesthetics that have been traditionally associated with dominant cinema, and the enduring exoticization of its 'sensual Latin American Other' (ibid: 472). Indeed, to begin with and before Sally has "taught" him how to be seen and how to behave, Pablo

embodies all of the tropes associated with 'slick Latin lovers' (Berg 2004: 159): he is a dancer, connected to his body (as opposed to Sally's more intellectual identity as a writer/director), he is also 'dashing and magnetic,' macho, narcissistic, immature, and self-absorbed (*ibid*: 76). Therefore, I have to agree with Guano that Sally/Potter's unreflexive reproduction of these Latinist tropes negates the feminist empowerment of her desiring female gaze.[99] This is because "real" empowerment should never be at the expense (knowingly or not) of somebody else's disempowerment.

This contradiction in *TTL* is particularly salient because it relates back to the tension within *Bodas de sangre* and *Carmen*, explored in the first chapter. Despite being Spanish-made films that both attempt to disentangle Spanish stereotypes and archetypes from exoticized representations and projections, they do so by (reflexively) repeating these very same stereotypes. There is the danger, then, that in embodying a colonial gaze in order to deconstruct it, they encourage a colonial gaze. In the same way, by reflexively repeating the desiring gaze of a traditionally phallic camera in order to deconstruct woman as object, rather than bearer of the look, these looking relations undoubtedly objectify somebody else, 'distanc[ing them] from the Anglo majority' (*ibid*: 166). Therefore, these power relations are deeply embedded within the *medium and history of film itself*, and so any compromise concerning the use of more "popular" forms of filmmaking will always jeopardise the film's progressive politics.

However, this film is not merely one-dimensional, and in asking Pablo if he teaches, and more significantly, learning how to *follow his lead*, Sally/Potter relinquishes some

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[99] Although the fact that Sally is past the age where women in film are usually allowed to desire, *let alone be desired back*, unpunished, by a younger, attractive man, is a double transgression certainly not lost on its audience.

of her (filmmaker's) control and power of vision in the twelve lessons that structure this narrative film. Similarly, Pablo will later learn to be led by Sally the director. Thus this film attempts to shows how (ethical) vision is not merely a tool of domination, but can create a respectful and open space in which subject/object, object/subject can negotiate between power and vulnerability, just as Sally and Pablo negotiate language in order to communicate. In this way, the risk of vulnerability is (once again) shown to be a connective rather than a disabling force, breaking down dualistic thought by revealing the fluidity of gender.

Freedom through the body

It is, however, not just (visual) *ideas and words* that challenge and transcend cultural and social inscription, since the *dancing body* itself works to bridge the gaps between men and women, language and cultures. In "giving herself completely up" to the tango, Sally is guided (both by Pablo and her own sense of touch and intuition) towards a more embodied sense of freedom, which Potter's sensuous, kinetic camerawork makes infectious. Towards the end of the film an exhilarating *pas de quatre* between Sally, Pablo, Gustavo, and Fabian, expresses this sense of personal enlargement through somatic interconnectedness.

After Sally directs Pablo to set up a tap routine for Gustavo and Fabian to follow, Pablo communicates the improvised choreography through, and Gustavo and Fabian listen with their whole bodies. In this way, listening and responding are shown to be the same thing. This synchronized movement, along with the sound of rhythmic tapping, immediately affects a sense of their intersubjectivity and togetherness. The pace of the editing between shots increases with the pace and intensity of the choreography, and the

insertion of extra diegetic music works to accentuate the build up to, as well as the ending of, Pablo's climatic solo, as he leaps explosively through closed doors and into a beautiful old loft room/dance studio, with white light streaming in through the windows. His repeated pirouetting into this vast expanse evokes a journey towards openness, reflecting the journey that Sally herself has embarked upon since the opening shot. (Although her journey has been facilitated by her privileged position of power). No longer entrapped by her ideas (or lack of them), she now expresses them through her body as she also enters the room dancing with Gustavo. Sweeping, gliding camerawork then follows the dancers as they soar along the length of the room, responding to and reflecting the fluidity and mobility of their bodies as if a fifth partner in the dance. Sally is handed between and dances with each of the men; she is encircled by all three; they move together as a unit whilst performing intricate kicks and flicks between each others legs; and the sequence ends with the camera panning in to a dizzying close-up of her being lifted onto Pablo's shoulders as he repeatedly spins around and around. The kinetic effect of this combined movement transmits a sense of what their dancing might *feel* like, and as my alignment with the camera works to submerge my body into the dance as well, I begin to 'feel the movement as well as see the moved' (Sobchack 1992: 10).

Challenging the stereotype that tango is predicated *solely* upon strictly defined gender roles, Sally's interaction with her partners is not kinetically containing, despite being "shared around." Instead, through alternating medium shots of upper bodies and (smiling) faces, long shots of whole bodies, and low-angled medium shots of legs and feet, the delicate and respectful communication between their bodies is made visible. Neither party seems to be completely in control nor completely submissive, and in

listening and responding to each other's bodies in this way, it is as if they expand into and inhabit the space beyond their skin, filling the room and dancing as one. Through this sense of integration and transcendence through movement, gendered boundaries are critiqued and dissolved, and the female dancing body is suffused with an equal subjectivity. In this way, the film expresses a sense of freedom *from* the (gendered inscription of the) body *through* the body, constructing Sally/Potter as empowered in front of as well as behind the camera. It does not seem a coincidence, then, that the soundtrack to this sequence is Astor Piazzolla's *Libertango*, Spanish for *liberty* tango.

<u>Conclusion</u>

However, *TTL* is careful to acknowledge that Sally's embodied freedom *only* comes through the discipline and hard work that she applies to her dance lessons, just as Potter's (thoughtful) return to her *lived* body is also the result of hard work: the work of (1970s/80s) filmmakers and feminist film theorists (as discussed above), including Potter and Rainer, who have deconstructed the *fetishized* body of patriarchal cinema in order to restore a sense of female subjectivity. Only *after* this revalorization has Potter deemed it "safe" to return to the sensual and bodily aspects of female subjectivity, and to the idea of transcendence through the body. And this has been reflected in the resulting shift towards more sensuous modes of film scholarship, as spearheaded by Vivian Sobchack and Laura Marks.

This all helps explain why Deren (until the more recent scholarly explosion of interest in her work), and *particularly* Greenfield's sensuous form of screendance has been 'regarded with some suspicion for that pleasure' (Haller 2012: 32). Although similar to both Rainer and Potter in that these films were made prior to and contemporaneous with

(so-called) "second-wave feminism" and the related development of feminist film theory, their specific privileging of introspection and embodied experience did not *appear* to make any significant contribution to the conceptual frameworks that were dominant at the time. However, what I hope to have revealed through a more "holistic" approach are the feminist sensibilities and aesthetics that infuse *all* of these films, despite the discourses surrounding them, the contradictions within them, *or* whether the filmmakers identify/identified themselves as feminist artists or not. Greenfield, Rainer, and Potter are undoubtedly indebted to Deren, as well as to each other, since there are precious few artist/filmmakers who have dared to form their own visions based on their own experience of being a woman. So despite coming to film from different angles and using/encouraging the use of different "muscles" when reading/watching/feeling their films, they all share a similar "goal" – connecting out to the audience in order to think/feel film as a liberatory practice.

This reflects the fact that "feminism" has never been a unified, monolithic ideology or dogma, but a field of inquiry that is made up of a pluralism of feminist epistemologies, methods, and aesthetics, *despite* the (superficial) hegemony of certain trends at certain points in time. Furthermore, the balance that comes from considering a cinema of the body alongside a cinema of ideas, affirms how '[p]erception is, as it were, mid-way between mind and body and requires the functioning of both' (Grosz 1994: 94). Screendance analysis cannot be anti-ocular, just as it cannot be anti-sensuous – it has to be both. So whether it is through the body/the body of the film, or through words and visual ideas, or the combination of the two, Deren, Greenfield, Rainer, and Potter have *all* imagined and visualized their own ways of moving beyond boundaries in order to extend and expand the language, spatiality, and motility of the female body. Therefore,

through showing that neither image nor narrative can ever convey or contain the complexity and multiplicity of female identity, and in providing the space for viewers to find *their own* meanings, they collectively and creatively imagine different ways of moving beyond the same boundaries. This provides, to quote bell hooks, 'education as the practice of freedom' (1994: 207).

However, keeping a check on any sense of over-idealisation, none of these films have or likely will be seen by a wide audience. Indeed, as Rainer acknowledges herself, and I would argue that the same is true for all four filmmakers, 'my thinking and making process will always result in a product that appeals to a very select audience, an audience already disposed to share my point of view and appreciate the manner in which it is conveyed' (1976: 76). Therefore, their power of subversion and "liberation" is undeniably reduced, yet by no means does this imply that their work is without political value. Even if they only affect, influence, and inspire a small number of people, this is valuable in and of itself. And furthermore, whether audiences see their films directly or not, the indirect influence of their work on others will always be evident.

Chapter Four

Hollywood Cinematic Excess: *Black Swan*'s Direct and Contradictory Address to the Body/Mind

Introduction

In this final chapter I aim to bring together a discussion of all of the key themes and issues examined in previous chapters, namely the representation of disability, feminism, and national identity, through analysis of a contemporary and globally popular (albeit independent) Hollywood film, *Black Swan* (2010).[100] Sensitive to the often-contradictory politics of representation, and how cultural texts are open to multiple interpretations, I shall use a multi-disciplinary approach in order to explore the nuances of this multi generic, hybrid film. This will include a phenomenological exploration and analysis of how cinematography and sound combine to literally "touch" the viewer with the central character's psychosis. As the film attempts to break down the mirror-boundary between viewer and screen, as Nina (Natalie Portman) smashes the mirror and stabs herself with a shard of it, I will also consider the ethical implications of this embodied assault/experience. I will then utilise feminist psychoanalytic tools of analysis in order to explore the film's construction of femininity, and its complex negotiation between misogyny and feminism. Finally, I will explore how the unstable ontological level of Nina's world can be seen to relate to and be placed within a wider socio-cultural context of American national identity. Whilst none of these approaches or insights can offer any "truths" or definitive meanings, they do work together in productively investigating the complexities of representation and (embodied) identification within a popular independent Hollywood dance film.

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[100] This chapter explores, as does *Black Swan*, a psychiatric rather than a physical disability.

Black Swan tells the transformational story of a disturbed young dancer's journey in becoming the Swan Queen in a new production of Swan Lake, as artistic breakthrough merges with psychotic breakdown. Perfect as she is for the innocence and graceful fragility of the White Swan, she lacks the sensuality and darkness necessary for the Black Swan, recognising these qualities in her own "dark double"/understudy, Lily (Mila Kunis). Therefore, under increasing pressure to find and release these qualities within herself, and combined with the conflicted relationships she has with her mother, fellow dancers, understudy, and artistic director, Nina's paranoid delusions and hallucinations intensify, building to the film's horror climax and her hallucinatory transformation.

A phenomenological cinematic psychosis

Nina's frightening and climactic descent into a psychosis of paranoia is first implied in the film's use of mirrors and phantasmal doubles, and then in the escalating violence of her hallucinations which include bleeding wounds, sexual encounters, "demonic" portraits that come to life, horrific deformities/metamorphosis, and murder/suicide. With the highly kinetic (and almost exclusively) hand held camerawork that fluidly moves with Nina as she dances and traverses her everyday life – sometimes following behind her, sometimes in front; sometimes catching up with, encircling, and swirling all about her, and occasionally embodying her point-of-view – the viewer is encouraged to feel more connected to her world as they are touched, increasingly uncomfortably, by the disorienting and claustrophobic experience of her unstable and paranoid subjectivity. In variation from "objective" formal norms, then, Nina's subjectivity is thus expressed even when she is seen in the frame (and not just in point-of-view shots) because the *film itself* mirrors and brings close Nina's physical, emotional, and

psychological experience/crisis. Stylistic decisions are thereby based on the immersion in her increasingly disturbed mind, decisions which, whilst undoubtedly playing with traditional identification, serve to draw the viewer in as they are implicated in the subjective "feel" of the shots and the psychosis of the film itself. Nina's audition for the role of Black Swan near the beginning of the film is an exemplary illustration of this, and although only forty-three seconds long, is a crucial sequence for the way it both introduces and prefigures the action of the film.

Having auditioned the White Swan to perfection, Nina is directed by Thomas (Vincent Cassel) to dance Odile's (the Black Swan's) coda. As she turns and walks towards her starting position, the camera also turns and follows her from behind, capturing a close-up of the back of her head, hair pulled back into a perfect ballet bun. As it catches up with her, revealing a close-up of her side profile, she "senses" that she is being watched, looks out from the corner of her eye, takes an audibly sharp intake of breath and turns her head. Just at this moment the film cuts to a close-up of Veronica (Ksenia Solo), her fellow dancer and rival for the part, who inclines her head slightly to one side as she glares back at the camera/Nina with a cold, malicious, and defiantly superior expression in her unblinking eyes. The camera then cuts back to a close-up of Nina looking back, then turning away and casting her eyes down to the ground in side profile, anxiously taking another sharp intake of breath as she clenches her jaw. The sound of her footsteps and anxious breathing amplify the sense of her "aloneness" in this harsh and hostile environment. Neither fellow dancers nor director are rooting for her, doubting that she can and hoping that she won't embody the sensuality and freedom of the Black Swan.

As she gets to her position and turns toward the maestro, another close-up of the back of her head bowed towards the floor reinforces her anxiety and isolation, as well as heightening the (perhaps paranoid) sense that she is always being watched and spoken about from *behind* her back and by those who are close to her. Indeed, there are numerous shots like this throughout the film that follow her in close-up and from behind as she walks through forbidding hallways, corridors, and subways. Therefore, in what is an interesting duality of expression, camerawork is able to both objectify Nina as it breathes down her neck, and simultaneously express the *feeling* of her paranoid subjectivity.[101] This is because whilst the camera is always *close to* and *motivated by* her movements, it is neither (strictly) subjective, nor exactly objective, but somewhere between these. And because of this, it can potentially both draw the viewer in and distance them from Nina's experience, making her a subject/object. This cinematographic split not only reflects the film's theme of doubling, but also highlights what Ann Cooper Albright refers to as the 'fascinating double moment' in the performance of dance, 'in which performing bodies are both objects of the representation and subjects of their own experience. […] [And] [t]he ambiguity of this situation creates the possibility of an interesting slippage of viewing priorities' (1997: 13). Moreover, it visualises the way in which Nina's interiority threatens to separate her self from the exterior world, just as a severe mental illness might.

As Steven Shaviro hints in his blog on *Black Swan*, this expressive ambiguity offers a version of cinematic free indirect discourse.[102] Adapted from the literary term by Pier

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[101] The sound is also crucial in establishing this sense of Nina's subjective experience, and is explored in depth below.

[102] Steven Shaviro's weblog is called 'The Pinocchio Theory', and his review of Black Swan can be found at:
http://www.shaviro.com/Blog/?p=975

Pasolini in his essay on 'The "Cinema of Poetry,"' this device identifies a style of cinematography that 'is, simply, the immersion of the filmmaker in the mind of the character and then the adoption on the part of the filmmaker not only of the psychology of his character but also of his language' (2005: 175).[103] In the case of cinema, this is the language of images. Although the sequences that follow Nina from behind are not *strictly* point-of-view shots, they do, as I have argued above, express a subjective sense of her separation and paranoia, whilst simultaneously forcing an awareness of the formal qualities of the film itself. As Pasolini argues, then, this poetic device 'has the common characteristic of producing films with a *double nature,'* which in turn creates an irresolvable ambiguity that can be divisive (*ibid*: 182, my emphasis). For example, Katherine Fusco argues that *Black Swan*'s cinematography 'emphasises the voyeuristic act of looking at Nina … encourag[ing] examination, not empathy' (2013: 21), whereas Mark Fisher believes that '[m]uch of the film's power derives from its lack of proper perspective: we are always inside Nina's paranoid schizophrenia, just as we are inside the madness of Carole (Catherine Deneuve) in Polanski's *Repulsion*' (2011: 58). However, what is infinitely more interesting than either perspective being "right" or "wrong" is the unnerving *effect* of this cinematographic "queerness." Whether objectifying Nina or expressing her psychology, or both, the unrelenting intensity of the camerawork builds up a tone of unease and anxiety which can, in turn, push the viewer into feeling consistently "on the edge" throughout their filmic experience, just as Nina is in the diegesis of the film.

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[103] Free indirect discourse/speech is a literary device favoured by modernist writers such as James Joyce and Virginia Woolf, in which a third-person narration contains the essence of first-person direct speech.

Overwhelming proximity

With the back of her head in close-up as she faces the maestro, Nina clears her throat and the film cuts to a medium-long-shot of the studio: placing her in the right-hand corner of the frame stretching her feet whilst fellow ballet dancers/auditionees are seated against a vertical, mirrored wall behind her – except for Veronica who is standing, and is, significantly, dressed all in black. Not only does this contrast with the soft pink, grey, and white shades of Nina's attire, but along with her attitude, also further enhances the sense that Veronica is more suited to the role of the Black Swan. Thomas is also standing in front of the horizontal mirrored wall in front of Nina, and due to his mirror reflections both behind and to the (screen) left of him, he is tripled in this shot, accentuating Nina's object-ness as she is literally surrounded by his critical panoptic gaze.

Nina nods at the maestro, the music begins, and the film cuts to a close-up of her (visibly sweaty) side profile anxiously looking in the direction that she will move into. The camera then travels with her in medium close-up as she pirouettes in a diagonal phrase across the studio, cutting to a close-up of her foot rising onto pointe – the amplified sound of which expresses the tremendous (and painful) effort it takes to appear weightless. A cut to a medium-close-up of Thomas shows him watching, negatively shaking his head from side to side with his finger on his lip. Reflected in the mirror behind him is a double mirror image of Veronica "standing" out, once again hinting at her suitability for the role as Thomas expresses his dissatisfaction with Nina's Black Swan. As he shouts out "not so controlled, seduce us" there is a cut to a medium shot of Nina pirouetting past him, and for a split second the doubled mirror reflections of Thomas, Veronica, and a seated woman are visible. Not only does this reflect the

film's theme of doubling, of exploring (multi faceted) identity and of not knowing who you are, but it also suggests that Nina, at this point, is not in touch with her dark side/double, because her reflection is not visible as she dances past the mirror – as indeed it should be and as it was when auditioning Odette, the White Swan. This could perhaps be attributed to an oversight in post-production, where the digital removal of the camera operator's reflection has also caused the erasure of Nina's, since they were moving in synch, at pace, and in such close proximity. However, due to the film's attention to detail as well as its play with doubling throughout, it seems more likely to be a deliberate device used to highlight Nina's inadequacy at this split second in the film.

The constant motion of the dynamic camera cuts back to Thomas shouting "Not just the Prince, but the court," then back to a medium-close-up of Nina repeatedly pirouetting as Thomas can be heard shouting "The audience, the entire world, come on." At this point there is a momentary reprieve as the camera cuts to a static long shot of the studio as Nina presents her *fouettés en tournant*, with Thomas shouting, "Your *fouettées* are like a spider spinning a web."[104] Then the last few moments of this already intense sequence intensify, as images blur in and out and frenetic editing cuts between close-ups of Nina's anxious, wide-eyed expression as she spins, dizzying 360-degree camera rotations that are a whirl of exposed brick wall and harsh light, and medium close-ups of Thomas shouting, before blurring out again and into the same whirl of wall and light, and then cutting back to close-ups of Nina spinning. Throughout, Thomas is shouting,

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[104] The *fouettés en tournant* is a movement in classical ballet where the dancer is momentarily on flat foot with the supporting knee bent, with the whipping motion of the other "working" leg enabling her to spin around. This working leg pulls back in to touch the supporting knee as she rises up onto pointe on the supporting foot. Being able to consecutively perform thirty-two of these is considered a bravura step by the ballerina.

"Attack it. Attack it. Come on," as well as visually expressing his displeasure and audibly sighing in disappointment. This dizzying and pressured sequence is repeated until the sound of the door being opened distracts Nina, and in one of the whirling rotations the camera briefly focuses in on a figure at the door, which, *only* when viewed in slow-motion is clearly Natalie Portman playing the "dark double" of herself/Nina, with her hair loose and dressed all in black. Indeed, the film delights in playing with these uncanny tricks of the eye, and this face-changing motif, along with the doppelganger and the split personality motifs, run throughout the film. This all works to play (visual) mind games with the viewer, so that when combined with the delirious effect of the dancing camera, we, like Nina, become increasingly confused as to what in the images we have seen is "real" and what isn't, or whether we even saw it at all.[105] We can thus potentially begin to feel as confused and (emotionally) unstable as she does.

The camera then proceeds to blur out again, continuing to rotate until cutting back to a shaky handheld close up of Nina as she stumbles out of the frame, gasping. We then cut to a close-up of her legs and hands as she struggles to regain control, cut back to her face turning to look and then to a short blurry whip around to a medium long shot that reveals that it is in fact Lily who has entered the studio, late. Although also dressed all in black with a black bag, her hair is in a bun, differentiating her from the "dark" figure that momentarily flashed onto the screen. Therefore, through the subjectivity of the camerawork, it is clear that Nina sees in and projects onto Lily a version/the opposite of herself that she wishes she could be, but hasn't allowed herself to be, yet. The arrival of

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[105] The film also plays aural tricks on the viewer. For example, an eerie, mocking reverb/dissonance helps the viewer to adopt Nina's fear and paranoia, and is particularly associated with Lily. However, there are moments that imply Lily is in fact perfectly nice and innocent in her dealings with Nina, and that her coveting the role of the Swan Queen is all in Nina's mind.

Lily has, then, literally "opened the door" to Nina's repressed Black Swan, and this doubling further mirrors the rivalry between Odette and Odile: the Black and White Swan of the ballet.

The relentless "closeness" of the camera to Nina in this sequence is a technique that is used throughout the film, effecting a claustrophobic and oppressive quality due to the sense of there being no separate, outside world, but only the world as it exists in connection to her, in her mind. And the small, insular, and tightly framed space of the ballet studio, just like the apartment she shares with her Mother, her bedroom within it, Beth/Nina's dressing room, Thomas's office, and the numerous bathrooms she locks herself into, all work to exacerbate this sense of her confinement. Nina *is* the ballerina in the music box by her bed, trapped within the restrictive space of her arrested development and her obsessive-compulsive drive for perfection.[106] In order to become the Black Swan she has to break out of this imprisoning desire to please others (her mother, Thomas, her audience), because only then will she find *her own* pleasure and release. However, the abundance of mirrors in *all* of these spaces implies that there is no way out, that she is trapped in and surrounded by her own (narcissistic) reflections and doubles, by her desire to be other, and by the constant surveillance from all angles. So just as Nina cannot escape the intensity of her own internal (as well as physical) struggle, neither can the viewer, since the repeated close-ups put her emotions and presence, as well as the pressure of Veronica's competitiveness and Thomas's displeasure, literally "in our face." Through denying its viewers any comforting objective distance in this way, the spatial relationship established between film and

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[106] This makes the close-up of this broken figure, torso-less and missing a leg but still turning to the twinkling of the *Swan Theme*, all the more disturbing, since it comes directly after Nina's violent hallucination/transformation and collapse the night before her opening performance. Despite Nina's psychological and emotional fragmentation, the show must go on.

viewer is one of stifling proximity. Not only does this viscerally express the "closing in" of Nina's world/psychosis, but it also effectively mirrors the relationship that she has with her mother – with its absence of appropriate individual, emotional, and physical boundaries. And since, as Merleau-Ponty writes, '[d]istance is what distinguishes [a] loose and approximate grip from the *complete grip which is proximity*' (1989: 261, my emphasis), *Black Swan* has the ability (and is clearly attempting) to completely overwhelm the viewer. This is because cinematography, sound, mise-en-scène, and performance all work together to elicit in the viewer the same kinds of feelings Nina experiences as her psychosis begins to take hold, potentially deepening their bodily and emotional connection to, and empathy with, her experience. Through this sensorial assault, it is as if the viewer is being constructed as Nina's (extradiegetic) double. And not unlike psychosis *and* ballet, there is nothing subtle or comfortable about this incredibly over-the-top and melodramatic visual language that pummels its unreal realism into the audience.[107]

Vertiginous intertextuality and the prefiguration of doom

The whirling camera rotations that express Nina's dizzying perspective as she spins draw the viewer into the sensation of the movement by inducing a similarly vertiginous experience; and the blurring in and out of Thomas shouting renders palpable the pressure she is under. This affective camerawork is directly taken from a sequence in Powell and Pressburger's ballet film, *The Red Shoes* (1948), highlighting the

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[107] Further contributing to this fevered pitch of the film's visual language is the dark, moody lighting and imagery that underscore Nina's inner psychological disintegration. The muted, monotone palette of blacks, whites, pinks, and greens, and the overt symbolism of these colours are demonstrated in the gradual darkening of her ballet clothes from the whites and pinks of her innocence, to shades of grey, and finally to the black that personifies the release of her dark side/swan. The extreme pinkness of her bedroom filled with pink teddies and childish trinkets represents her arrested development, and the green walls of the apartment's narrow hallway underscore the competitive, envious, and claustrophobic nature of the relationship between mother and daughter, also reflected in her relationship with other dancers.

intertextuality between the films and thus allowing Aronofsky and Matthew Libatique (the director of photography) to pay homage to this classic of British cinema and of dance film. The subjective whirls in *The Red Shoes* do not occur in the famous fifteen-minute ballet sequence of the film's name, but in an earlier matinee performance of none other than *Lac des Cygnes*, or *Swan Lake*, just as this sequence from *Black Swan* occurs at the beginning of the film and not in Nina's opening night performance. Both are composed of a multiplicity of shots and are exceptionally short, with *The Red Shoes* sequence lasting only twenty-eight seconds. However, as is also the case for Nina's audition, this sequence is crucial for the way it both introduces and prefigures the action of the film.

As a medium close-up moving shot of Vicky Page (Moira Shearer) pirouetting cuts to her perspective, the theatre turns round in a blur through a series of whip pans over the audience that alternate with shots of her ecstatic face. That is until a subjective whirl flashes past the impresario of the Ballet Company in the audience, Lermontov (Anton Walbrook), cutting to a long shot of Vicky holding her pose in order to cut back to a medium close-up of him watching. Like Thomas, he observes "his" dancer critically: with one eyebrow raised, a cold expression in his eyes, and his hands clenched and touching/covering part of his closed mouth as everybody else in the audience applauds. The camera then cuts back to an extreme close-up of Vicky, and there is something about her heavily made-up face and wide-eyed, wild expression that offers a frightening glimpse of madness/horror – a generic element that Aronofsky will push to an extreme in *Black Swan*. The whiteness of her powdered face connotes (and foreshadows her) death, whilst the scarlet red around her painted eyes and lips prefigure her starring role in *The Red Shoes* as well as accentuating the passion/madness of her desire to dance as

well as please Lermontov on the one hand, and Julian (her husband) on the other. The ecstasy conveyed on her face whilst dancing thus contrasts with the fear and panic of being (emotionally) divided, and it is this conflict that will ultimately lead to her suicide. The ecstatic sensation of and obsessive compulsion to dance and to attain perfection is therefore shown to be deadly.

Consequently, *Black Swan*'s reference to this film thirteen minutes in is foreboding. And whilst Nina bears a close resemblance to Vicky in that they share a compulsive desire to attain perfection in their dancing, are dominated by a manipulative director, and are both, albeit in different ways, split in two, Vicky at least expresses her rapturous joy when dancing. In contrast, Nina's inner anguish is permanently etched onto her face (until her transformation at the end). This detail accentuates the already overwhelming sense of anxiety created through cinematography and sound, and *Black Swan* is undeniably a much "darker" film, as reflected in the monochrome palette compared to the glorious Technicolor of *The Red Shoes*. In terms of prefiguring the action and thereby acting as a (phenomenologically felt) microcosm of the whole film, this audition sequence shows that Nina is already under intense (psychological) pressure even before she is given the role(s). The shaky handheld camera that captures her stumbling out of the frame as she is distracted by the entrance of Lily/her dark side, elicits in the viewer her growing sense of instability and nervousness, just as the grainy texture of the film stock reflects her ever-diminishing grip on reality. The feverish pace of the editing combined with the speed of filming and intricate detail of the sequence enacts a compulsive drive that doesn't allow the viewer to catch their breath, almost as if they have just performed the audition themselves. More importantly, this drive mirrors the film's/Nina's unrelenting acceleration into full-blown horror/psychosis, as

she begins to hallucinate, "becomes" her dark double, and then ultimately stumbles out of the frame/the ballet/ her life/her mind as her compulsion to attain perfection destroys her. It is, then, as Maya Deren argues, the emotional integrity of the body of the film that 'recreate[s] through filmic means – editing rhythms, camera attitudes and movements etc. – the sense and spirit of,' in this case, Nina's physical as well as emotional/psychological experience, thereby prefiguring the action of the film (2005: 230).

Sonic tactility and the "touch" of madness

As I have hinted above, the disconcerting nature of all of this visual complexity is mirrored in the macabre multi-layered texture of the horror-film sound design, as well as Clint Mansell's menacing adaptation of the original *Swan Lake*. Making liberal use of Tchaikovsky's most memorable leitmotif of all, the *Swan Theme* sounds throughout: in Nina's rehearsals, her final performance, the tinkling of her ballerina musical jewellery box, her mobile ring tone, and even mixed in with the Chemical Brother's track featured in the visually and aurally complex club/drug scene. Beginning with subtle adaptations, its "beauty" and "purity" is gradually and radically distorted by darkly processed sounds to a point almost beyond recognition, acoustically reflecting (as well as absorbing the viewer into) the horror of Nina's own transformation/psychosis. At times, the harshness of these sounds taps into instinctive fears, just like the classic screeching violins of *Psycho* (1960) or the crashing chords of *Jaws* (1975), and the abrupt shifts up and down in pitch work to enhance its emotional impact. And as this theme builds to its explosive ending, neither Nina *nor the viewer* can escape the increasing intensity of her suffocating obsession. For, just like her, we hear Swan Lake *everywhere*. In this way, the score reinforces the sense that what we

experience on screen represents Nina's inner psychological condition, rather than some independent reality.[108] Furthermore, when I first saw *Black Swan* on its release, the sound in the cinema was *so* loud that it was, at times, quite literally painful. Indeed, I was not the only one who thought so, since Peter Bradshaw's review for *The Guardian* states that, 'Motörhead could not have played the Swan Lake theme any louder than this. I left the cinema with blood trickling from my ears.'[109] This embodied experience of being "hurt" by the film heightened my sense of sensory involvement, further coercing me into the space of Nina's subjectivity, since she is herself continuously and progressively in pain (both physical and psychological) throughout.

Bubbling over this loud score are the amplified (and intimate) sounds of Nina's agitated, raspy breathing, cracking bones, scratching, retching and vomiting, as well as sinister gasping and laughter, barely audible whispering, approaching footsteps, and fluttering wings etc. All of this creates a foreboding paranoia and sense of what is to come, never releasing the listener/viewer from its grip and viscerally demonstrating the physical power of sound and our susceptibility to it. (Indeed, even the texture of Nina's childlike voice puts me on edge!) It is this highly subjective as well as acousmatic (Chion: 1994) sound that fleshes out the already disturbing cinematography, elevating its representation of bodily abuse, paranoia, and uncanny hallucinations by

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[108] A further point of interest concerning the score is that it does what Nina is attempting to do throughout the film. Instead of obsessing over getting a highly revered ballet "right", Mansell "lets go", expands and distorts it, surprises the audience and thereby transcends the original (I do not mean in terms of musical quality, just in terms of its difference). In the same way, Nina is pursuing "perfection" distinct from technical accuracy, which requires her to "let go" of her overwhelming need for control and to discover who *she* is. This does indeed lead to her transcendence, but at a cost – her complete detachment from reality. Therefore, in a sense, the brilliance of the score is that Nina's ultimate madness in the pursuit of artistic perfection is hermetically sealed by it, since the transformative process ultimately destroys/distorts them both beyond recognition.

[109] Peter Bradshaw, 'Black Swan – Review', in *The Guardian*, Thursday 20 January 2011. Available: http://www.guardian.co.uk/film/2011/jan/20/black-swan-review

'connect[ing] us in a way that vision does not' (Bull & Back 2003: 6).[110] This is because sound is quite literally physical: objects (including the vocal chords) have to be touched in order to make a sound, which then travels in waves and tactile vibrations that sonically touch and affect the entire body of the viewer, thereby 'reintroducing an acute feeling of the materiality of things and beings' (Chion 1994: 155). This tactile and experiential aspect of listening can therefore incorporate the viewer/listener into the absolute horror of Nina's interiority. Or rather, it is the jarring, unnerving, and penetrative shock of the sound effects that prod and probe at us, "touching" *our inner self* with *her* psychosis. As Thomas Elsaesser and Malte Hagener write:

> When a film performance is no longer limited to the screen alone, by virtue of the spatial extension brought about by the envelope of sound, omnipresent in the room, then it becomes indeed difficult to decide whether the cinematic experience takes place "inside" or "outside" the body.
> (2010: 140)

This brings to mind Wayne Koestenbaum's eloquent account of his own embodied experience of listening to, or being *entered by* opera: 'The singer, through osmosis, passes through the self's porous membrane, and discredits the fiction that bodies are separate, boundaried packages. The singer destroys the division between her body and our own, for her sound enters our system' (1993: 43). However, since touch is both physical *and* social/cultural/political, due to the fact that our experience of touch/touching is dependent upon our corporeality and everything that constitutes it, I shall explore my own experience of touch in *Black Swan*'s deployment of sound in order to avoid universalising what are specific, located, and locatable experiences. This is because whilst I am (voluntarily) engaged with this film, both physically and corporeally, its tactility can also be denied for a multiplicity of reasons – every bit as valid as my own engagement.

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[110] Michel Chion (1994) defines acousmatic sound as that which one hears without seeing its source.

<u>An intense auditory/bodily experience</u>

The first indication that this ballet film has a "dark side" occurs right at the beginning in the title sequence. After twenty seconds of the opening of Tchaikovsky's *Swan Theme*, a reversed whoosh of wind/breath comes in. This fades into a sinister, distorted laughter which then dissipates into a low-end throbbing sound before returning to the score. All of this coincides with the appearance of the title, *Black Swan*, and comes just before the film opens onto Nina's dream of dancing the White Swan. With both the reverse reverb and sinister laughter signalling an eerie sense of demonic/otherworldly possession, a daunting and unsettling undertone to her dream/the film is established before it even begins, with the low-end throbbing adding a sense of unnerving anxiety. Variations of this darkly dissonant insertion will be repeated and adapted throughout in order to indicate Nina's paranoid hallucinations, as well as marking the moments in which we catch a glimpse of her inner black swan. This provides a POV audio that supports the subjective feel of the cinematography and thereby allows me to enter Nina's unstable headspace acoustically. However, despite the unsettling effect of these kinds of acoustic conventions of horror, it is the gruesome sounds of her bodily injuries (or her slow and terrifying metamorphosis) that for me provide the real "horror". This is because whether diegetically "real" or imagined, these visceral sounds/images directly address my body, inviting me to experience the same sensations through their textural qualities. And because of this visceral immediacy and direct address, *Black Swan* perfectly fits within the categories of what Linda Williams calls "body genres", since 'the success of these genres is often measured by the degree to which the audience sensation mimics what is seen on the screen' (1991: 4).

Straight after the opening dream sequence, a visual and auditory close-up of Nina's neck and feet cracking is nauseatingly intense. Like the dissonant insertion in the title sequence, this immediately establishes the "politics" of the film, which is less concerned with the ethereal, dream-like, and distanced portrayal of ballet dancing, and more interested in overpowering the viewer with the affective intensity of its underlying brutality. Like Nina, I do not feel in control of the images I see/hear but am rather subjected to them, and this physical/emotional vulnerability counters any (illusory) sense of power and mastery over the image that classical film spectatorship might provide.

Having returned home from her disastrous audition, Nina begins to obsess over her pirouettes by practicing in front of a mirror, and as the camera cuts to a close-up of her foot rising onto *pointe*, the film briefly slows down in order to exaggerate the disturbing crunching sounds as she spins and grinds into the floorboards. The force and tension of what sounds like wood being twisted to the point of snapping is actually painful to hear/see, because it effects a sense of the agony of this unnatural load-bearing, as well as sounding as a metaphor for Nina herself, who also begins to crack and give way under the pressure. This is, however, nothing compared to the even more exaggerated and squirm inducing sound of her toenail splitting, which is more gruesome than the actual image itself. Similarly, whilst being debuted as the new Swan Queen at a black tie fundraiser for the ballet company, Nina fixates on a tear in her cuticle and, after a cut to the toilet, tears away a long strip of skin from her finger. It is not only the texture but also the length of this fleshy ripping sound that makes it particularly horrific in its attack, and despite it being signalled as one of Nina's hallucinations, is rooted in a kind of everyday pain that many of us have actually experienced, thus evoking body

memories that contribute to an overwhelming feeling of physical revulsion and pain.

Furthermore, Nina's pulling at this wound reflects the incessant pressure that she is

under as the pain of her psychiatric instability gradually becomes uncontainable,

threatening to sabotage the image of "exquisite" perfection that Thomas demands she

project.

However, the most disgusting/captivating sound/image for me comes towards the end of

the film during Nina's horrific transformation/hallucination, as bristles violently tear

through the bubbling skin of her animated rash. As she pulls out what proves to be a

black feather from her back, the drawn out squelching sound/image is *so* affecting I feel

as if I am pulling it from my own body, perfectly illustrating how the texture of a film's

sound design can communicate "feeling" through its close association with the sense of

touch. And whilst the touch of this sequence is quite literally repulsive, her viscerally

marked and suffering body certainly captures my attention, thereby destabilising the

pain/pleasure dichotomy. Moreover, because the "realistic" texture of these sounds

endows them with a greater sense of metamorphosis than do the images alone, it also

breaks down ontological distinctions between human and animal. This perhaps helps to

explain why I find this scene so disgusting, since the morph, as Vivian Sobchack writes,

taps into 'specifically historical – concretions of contemporary confusions, fears, and

desires' (2000: xiii), particularly concerning notions of self-identity and contagion. And

when considering how hair, in particular, is so overdetermined with (gendered)

meanings and associations, and how our dominant Western culture has become

'especially obsessive about denying the hairiness of women, who remove it from legs,

upper lip, chest, and armpits, and … from the pubic region also' (Miller 1997: 57), it is

no surprise that despite my proud feminism and rejection of these constructed,

ideological norms, I have nonetheless learnt and internalised this specifically gendered "horror."

Therefore, this sound/image also collapses other boundaries founded on gender and disfigurement/beauty, which reflect the kind of bodily transformations many women go through every month, when hormones connected to the menstrual cycle can produce extra/excessive hair growth. Despite being a common occurrence, the undeniable cultural taboo and disgust with hairy women can deeply affect a woman's self-confidence, and in extreme cases, her mental health. This, then, brings the horror *as well* as the fascination and freedom that Nina's final metamorphosis provides even closer, because it is only during this final process that we see her "let go" of her need for control, of concealing and plucking, in order to embrace and enjoy the sensuality and "freedom" of her (hairy) embodiment. To quote Sobchack again, Nina's uncanny morphing thus 'generates our physical and cultural "double" – some radically other "familiar" whose visible image […] not only "reflects" us but also "renders" and "clarifies" us' (*Op cit*. 2000: xii).

Although not directly connected to her body, the final examples of visual and auditory close-ups that I want to consider are of Nina breaking in a new pair of *pointe* shoes towards the beginning of the film. This is because the amplified and ritualistic sounds of taking them out of the plastic, pulling and thwacking them apart, sewing on the ribbon, plastering up sore and swollen feet, and scoring the soles with scissors, all presage the mutilation and fragmentation of Nina's body/mind. Just as the shoes are smashed and flattened in order to conform to the shape of her feet, Nina is similarly "broken" in order to fit the role of the Black Swan. In contrast to this auditory violence is the sensuous

sound/image of putting on the shoes and tying the satin ribbon around the fine and delicate material of her tights. Indeed, the texture of this sound gives me a *feel* of the fabric as if against my own skin, offering a momentary and luxurious flash of pleasure. However, because this is followed by the squirm inducing twisting/manipulating sound of her feet rising onto *pointe,* as well as the fact that I have just seen the battered and deformed reality of what is hidden beneath, I am not seduced by its elegance. Rather, I am again reminded of the central metaphor of the film: that however enticing and "beautiful" ballet/Nina appears to be on the outside; beneath this veneer is a great deal of (physical, emotional, and psychological) pain and horror. In this way, sound unveils the problems inherent within "ideal" images, and the extent to which they can be destructive to a woman's body/mind, working to subvert the image of the female ballet dancer as an ideal of embodied femininity.

Contradictory ethical implications

This contradiction between outside appearance and hidden, inner agony also says something about the embodiment and lived experience of people disabled by severe mental illness, because whilst it is not always "visible" on the outside in the same way that a physical disability is, it is nonetheless a *material as well as a mental experience*. Like the exposed grey brick walls in the ballet studio, this film is stripping down and laying bare an unstable woman's experience of the harsh world of professional ballet. However, this reading is undoubtedly complicated due to the "unstable woman" being such a familiar trope in cinema, historically representing *woman in general* rather than disability. Indeed, the most significant development in the treatment of women in film during the 1980s, was, as Molly Haskell asserts, 'the crazy women … an endlessly expanding category of neurotics, murderers, *femmes fatales*, vamps, punks, misfits, and

free-floating loonies whose very existence was an affront, not only to the old, sexist

definitions of pliant women (or even categorizable psychotics), but also to the upbeat

rhetoric of the women's movement' (1987: 373). With this in mind, it is difficult to see

Nina as representing mental disability in any serious way – particularly when *most* of

the female characters in the film (except for Lily, who might not be "real"), are also

mentally unstable. In the next section I shall explore this complex and contradictory

swing between misogyny and feminist potential in greater depth.

Yet despite this complication/contradiction, during the actual experience of viewing, the

visible, audible, and kinetic aspects of Nina's emotional and physical breakdown are *so*

close that I momentarily give up my 'own sense of separateness from the image' (Marks

2002: 13), and my body responds to the pain of what I perceive to be Nina's psychosis.

It is only after the immediacy of this filmic experience, when there is more distance

between my body and the body of the film that I begin to conceptualise and critique it.

This undoubtedly arouses a different response in me and therefore garners different

meanings. I would argue, then, that the affective elements of the film are compromised

by the ideological elements, which are themselves contradictory. This is effective in a

way, because I remain, like Nina, confused as to exactly what I think or feel, and the

complexity of this makes it more interesting to me.

But focusing for now on my phenomenological viewing experience/reading, *Black*

Swan's increasingly uncomfortable and "ugly" sounds/images invite me to feel/think

about Nina's (painful) psychosis, as well as paying due attention to the social causes

and construction of her "madness".[111] Therefore, because Western culture places

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[111] These social causes include the highly stressful and competitive environment of a professional ballet
company, and all the psychosocial stresses that are specific to this profession. Ravaldi *et al*'s research into

"madness" "outside" and regards it as "other", this film allows us the opportunity of

(temporarily) taking up this different position and of making, as Sara Ahmed writes of

orientalism, '"the strange" familiar, or the "distant" proximate' (2006: 126). In this way

film "works" on us, as it 'displaces our world, and shows us another world' (Frampton

2006: 202). And in the best-case scenario, this projects the possibility of transcending

more traditional and established ways of thinking, expanding our conceptions by

eliciting sympathy (rather than fear) for the experience of people who live with a mental

illness.

Furthermore, it does this without romanticising Nina's psychiatric disability, a

dangerous celebratory trope often used in popular Hollywood cinema. For example,

although the recent Oscar winning film, *Silver Linings Playbook* (2012) does portray its

central characters with bipolar disorder and depression as *people* rather than simply

psychological conditions (since people have a disease, they are not the disease), it also

arguably sanitises and trivialises mental illness through the narrative trope of

redemption.[112] Part romantic comedy, part serious drama, and part dance film, its

undeniably feel good, slightly glamorous, happy ever after ending can contribute *as*

'Gender role, eating disorder symptoms, and body image concern in ballet dancers', comes to the conclusion that the 'cultural pressure towards an ideal of leanness, which gives a dancer an eternally adolescent and prepubertal appearance, could interfere with the complex process of gender identity acquisition' (2006: 534). It also encourages a higher risk for eating disordered behaviour, body dysmorphia, and perfectionism due to a constant feeling of not being good enough. Although we can't wholly rely on Nina's narration, there is evidence to suggest that her mother, Erica, is overbearing and controlling, simultaneously wanting her daughter to succeed and resenting it at the same time. Indeed, the evidence would suggest that Erica struggles with her own mental health issues, indicating a possible genetic vulnerability/propensity for learnt behaviour/depression/psychosis. Certainly overly protective of her "sweet girl", Nina is torn between the comfort and familiarity of her naïve and sheltered upbringing, and the desire/pressure to "grow up" and embody the impulsive and sexually confident Black Swan. On top of this, she is further pressured through the sexual advances/harassment of her patriarchal ballet director, and takes Ecstasy or MDMA (a powerful hallucinogen that can trigger a psychotic event if predisposed), when she is at her most vulnerable.

[112] This type of "politically correct" romantic discourse can also be seen in Hollywood films such as *Benny and Joon* (1993), *As Good as it Gets* (1997), and *A Beautiful Mind* (2001).

much to the stigma attached to mental illness as its automatic association with pathological violence. This is because not everybody with a mental illness is able to function well in society, has a family that supports them, or is able to fall in love. Therefore, heroising and celebrating (what may be) a disabling illness as a lovable quirk, is not as politically correct as it perhaps aspires to be. And if, as Stephen Harper's book on madness and the power of the media attests, 'people are likely to form their understanding of mental distress through its cinematic figurations' (2009: 59), then they will come to expect sufferers/survivors bad times to be neither too severe nor long-lasting.

Clearly, then, *Black Swan* does not fit into this romanticised category, and despite Nina's murderous hallucination, neither does it perpetuate the stigmatising association between mental illness and aggressive violence. Whilst Nina may well embody the stereotype of the alienated psychotic, she does not *actually* harm Lily, she only hurts herself. Therefore, although the visual spectacle of her "madness" oversimplifies and exaggerates her symptoms for horror effect, it does not descend into the horror genre's longstanding and enduring dehumanisation of "the mentally ill" as people who are deranged, psychopathic killers.[113] There is, then, something potentially transgressive about a popular Hollywood film that foregrounds the "horror" of her painful psychosis, without *actually* turning her into a crazed "monster" or a loveable outsider.

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[113] There are numerous examples of this Hollywood/generic treatment of people with a mental health condition, including one of the most iconic homicidal killers, Norman Bates, in *Psycho*, and Mike Meyers in *Halloween* (1978). In the late 1980s/early 1990s, Hollywood enacted a backlash against feminism with a spate of female psychopath films, including *Fatal Attraction* (1987), *Misery* (1990), *The Hand that Rocks the Cradle* (1992), and *Basic Instinct* (1992). More recently in *The Dark Knight* (2008), the terrifying yet charming Joker attempts to commit mass murder for no other reason than his psychopathic lunacy. And a mother with bipolar disorder murders her own children only to be murdered by her husband, who also goes "mad', in *Shutter Island* (2010).

Whilst Nina has a shy and sweet side, she is also deeply and narcissistically self-absorbed, alienated, pained, humourless, and withholding. It isn't altogether easy to "like" her, and it certainly isn't much fun being so "up close" to her. Yet the film still encourages my embodied interaction through its affective (visual and aural) intensity, connecting me to her experience and thus promoting compassion rather than objectification, because my relationship to her is not merely specular. Having myself grown up around family members diagnosed with severe and chronic mental illness, I understand this complex duality of not much liking what the worst of the illness can do to the person, and to those close to them, but still never losing sight of the fact that it *is* an illness deserving of support, understanding, and compassion. I therefore acknowledge that my sympathy for Nina/the film is in part dependent upon my own context, and my own rallying against the systematic stigmatisation of madness in our Western culture.

Although they focus solely on *Black Swan*'s illustration of obsessive-compulsive spectrum disorder, where as I see it as a descent into paranoid psychosis, psychologists Danielle Vanier and H. Russell Searight support this reading of the film. They argue that despite it being far from "accurate," its exaggerated and visceral representation of Nina's mental distress can 'make learning about these conditions both enjoyable as well as memorable' (2012: 7).[114] And due to the power and reach of Hollywood cinema, including its highly successful "independent" films like *Black Swan* that do record

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[114] Although it is not my intention to judge the "accuracy" of *Black Swan*'s representation of mental illness, my own experience of observing psychosis suggests that people usually have auditory, rather than visual hallucinations. However, as I have established, this film is not interested in a straightforward portrayal of "reality", and the visual manifestation of her hallucinations makes it a more dramatic and frightening filmic experience. Also excessive are the whole host of anxiety disorders that Nina experiences, which are, in reality, highly unlikely to *all* appear together in one person and at the same time. In addition to her psychosis, Nina appears to be both anorexic *and* bulimic. The scratching and ripping of her skin implies that she self-harms, and her meticulous perfectionism certainly suggests obsessive-compulsive disorder.

significant box-office business, and are circulated in global popular culture, it can help ensure that a debate will at least occur amongst a much broader audience, and thus the profile of psychosis (and all psychiatric disabilities) might be raised. In contrast, the films that I consider in my chapter on dance and disability will never reach beyond niche audiences, despite (or rather, because of) their social engagement and aesthetic experimentation that privileges "art", difference, resistance, and opposition over commerce. Constructed as the perpetual other to Hollywood, their power of subversion will unfortunately always be reduced.

However, *Black Swan* is made primarily to entertain, not to teach. Although I do not have the space here to explore in any depth the contested category (and plurality) of independent cinema (versus the Hollywood studio system), *Black Swan* arguably fits within Michael Z. Newman's definition of an 'indie blockbuster,' in that it 'aims to bargain away some outsider credibility in exchange for commercial reward … nudging … toward the mainstream to occupy negotiated terrain, part outside and part inside' (2011: 5).[115] Horror devices are therefore used (or exploited) in order to maximise emotional impact, because emotionally engaged audiences equate to box-office success. Moreover, whilst its treatment of "madness" is not overtly stigmatising in the ways that I have listed above, it still focuses *only* on the spectacular *horror* of Nina's experience, thereby supporting dominant (and debasing) perspectives about people with disabilities, which can lead to opposition to and fear of their freedom. In contradistinction, in the film *The Cost of Living*, (analysed in my chapter on dance and disability) viewers get to know the character/actor Dave through a series of everyday experiences that reveal his strength and ability to cope, his sense of humour, as well as the occasions in which he

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[115] However, despite this compromise 'it is often possible to retain the credibility and integrity associated with independence while also appealing to a wider audience' (Newman 2011: 5).

needs help and is discriminated against. In many ways, then, he is represented as a recognisably "ordinary" person who happens to be an extraordinary dancer, which makes his physical disability both imaginable and palatable. This can, in turn, encourage viewers not familiar with disability politics, to make the leap of identifying with a character who is neither "conventionally beautiful" or "able-bodied." So although dealing with different forms of disability, and although *Black Swan* does encourage empathetic identification with Nina, it clearly goes for the more conventional generic association between disability, vulnerability, and horror, which is more likely to elicit sympathy and/or fear than respect and intervention.

Furthermore, *Black Swan* is undoubtedly influenced by stereotypes of gender and lesbianism. With its constant references to mirrors and reflections, female archetypes, individuation, and transfiguration, it has an undeniably heavy allegorical hand, and indeed, Amber Jacobs goes so far as to argue that it is anti-feminist, 'proceed[ing] as if feminist film theory never happened' (Fischer & Jacobs 2011: 60). Therefore, it is impossible *not* to look at this film through a feminist lens, since the body is not simply an issue in phenomenology and epistemology, but also a theoretical location for debates about power and ideology. In the next section I will explore its aestheticisation of female madness, and the fetishisation of melodramatic, hysterical, and tragic femininity through the trope of the ballet dancer. It is, unfortunately, still too often the case that '[w]hile the mad men of contemporary cinema are often represented as active heroes struggling against psychiatric adversity, mad women are more typically represented as the passive victims of their disordered psyches' (Harper 2009: 77).

An 'infernal vision of patriarchy': gratifying (or subverting) the male gaze?[116]

Mirrors and reflecting surfaces are omnipresent throughout the film, reflecting back at Nina the desired yet repressed adult/dancer she wishes she could be, and is pressured into as well as held back from being. Many of her hallucinations occur when she is locked in a bathroom looking into a mirror, since it is one of the rare places in which Nina escapes the gaze of others, and thus offers her a private space in which her internal battles may be fought with her "darkly" seductive, dangerous, and even vicious self. This recurring and 'worn-out visual cliché' (Fischer & *Jacobs* op. cit.: 60) thereby highlights her increasingly fractured state of mind, her unstable and split subjectivity, and the centrality of the gaze. This is not only in terms of Nina's '*to-be-looked-at-ness*' (Mulvey 1975: 63, original emphasis), but also in her own construction and projection of a specific image, an illusory ideal that marks the internalisation of her 'panoptical male connoisseur' (Bartky 1988: 72). Unlike the female dancer, Viv, in *The Cost of Living*, who does not look at her mirror image in the space of the ballet studio and thereby symbolically rejects the patriarchal Imaginary and its dichotomous construction of femininity, Nina reproduces the terms and pleasures of this male fantasy. This is because her obsession with the disjuncture between her "one true original" (White Swan) "self", and the aesthetic ideal of dark perfection to which she aspires, perpetually alienates her from her own subjective and material experience. Therefore, instead of showing identity as something that we *do* rather than something that *we are*, there is an overwhelming sense that she has to choose either/or, black or white, virgin or whore identity, as reflected in the film's black and white chiaroscuro. Like the camera that often follows her closely from behind, Nina is thus always on the "outside", obsessively scrutinising herself and thereby fuelling her own psychosis. For this reason,

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[116] Taken from Fischer, Mark (and Amber Jacobs), 2011: 59.

and although the causes of mental illness are complex and varying, it may be easy for some viewers to blame her for her own narcissistic self-absorption rather than acknowledge the overarching social and cultural factors that undoubtedly play a part. This highlights how the definition, judgement, and punishment of "madness" can be seen as powerful tools that help maintain patriarchal (and heterosexual) hegemony.

In this way, mirrors/the film can be seen as instruments of control, because in fighting and literally shattering her own multi-faceted image in order to become the Black Swan, Nina/the film can be seen to undermine the (queer) understanding and celebration of identity as multiple, flexible, dynamic, and volatile in favour of a discourse of normalised dichotomous identities. The film can thus be read as the story of her sacrifice to the age-old archetype of the duplicated woman, to the patriarchal definitions of female "beauty" and "perfection," how underneath this painted perfection is the horror of monstrous femininity, and to the enduring idea that women do not really exist at all, only for the sake of others.[117] Indeed, Nina's guilt inducing and self-sacrificial mother, Erica, embodies yet another female archetype: the monstrously terrifying (and terrified) despotic mother, who only "lives" vicariously through her daughter.[118] Having

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[117] The trope of the duplicated woman is largely a male fantasy that has inspired too many cinematic doubles to mention.

[118] Through wielding her power over her daughter by picking on her Achilles heel: her rash/skin, as well as dressing/undressing, manicuring, constantly calling, feeding her cake from her fingers, and even watching her sleep, the relationship between Erica and Nina is shown to be disturbingly intimate, suffocating, and strained. This then implies that Nina's trauma has been born and created from her mother's own mental instability, from which she needs to be "rescued" by the invariably absent father figure/phallic director. As Barbara Creed explores in her (1986) essay on 'Horror and the Monstrous-Feminine: An Imaginary Abjection', this pathological construction of the monstrous mother 'reveals a great deal about male desires and fears but tells us nothing about feminine desire in relation to the horrific' (265). Erica thus contributes to the horror of the film precisely because she is a typical Freudian nightmare, threatening to devour her daughter with her needs as well as mould her into a version of herself. Whilst there may well be ballet/stage mothers like her, this cinematic trope reveals the enduring ways in which mothers continue to be categorised, idealised, and demonised, and how this individualising of her "monstrosity" works to absolve both the audience and society of any responsibility. This is because it fails to set her actions within a larger cultural and social framework, which might, for example, consider how abandoning her attachment to her daughter is made more difficult by patriarchy's placing of

been ousted from her role as the company's prima ballerina and replaced by a much

younger Nina, a suicidal Beth (Winona Ryder) speaks volumes about interchangeable

female identity and aging when she (sarcastically) advises Nina to "enjoy the moment,"

and then later repeats the words "I am nothing." In a ballet world full of interchangeable

doppelgangers all competing for Thomas's attention and approval, as well as for the

same principal parts, it is undoubtedly a struggle to define who you are when you are

merely one of many performing moves that are by and for somebody else. And

Thomas's advice before her opening night performance is for Nina to "lose" herself.

Therefore, Amber Jacobs' exasperated dismissal of the film's 'fixed take on femininity'

is certainly understandable, since '[t]he mirrors crudely hammer this point home; the

infinite image of the reflected, homogeneous bodies and faces of the ballerinas

represents a construction of femininity that has no life outside the terms of the

mirror/gaze of the male symbolic' (Fischer & Jacobs op. cit.: 60).

Indeed, the idea that women are irrational, abject commodities who are quite literally

"nothing" until they are selected/objectified by the dominant and controlling gaze of the

male 'bearer of the look' (Mulvey op. cit.: 61), is perfectly expressed early on. Coming

just after a scene set in the dressing room, in which myriad mirror reflections highlight

the striking similarities between the female dancers as some of them gossip unkindly

and competitively about Beth's age, the film cuts to the daily company ballet barre

class. Moving in amongst the closely situated dancers, the camera establishes an

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the responsibility for child-rearing on the mother. Neither does it offer an explanation for her controlling
behaviour. Indeed, one only need think of the sheer number of cinematic monstrous mothers, as compared
to their counterparts, demonic fathers, in order to understand how this cinematic trope works to 'shore up
the symbolic order by constructing the feminine as an imaginary 'other' which must be repressed and
controlled in order to secure and protect the social order' (*ibid*). To cite just a few examples of these
cinematic monstrosities: there is the classic dead mum in *Psycho*, the religiously-fanatical and abusive
mum in *Carrie* (1976), the vain and self-absorbed (biographical) mum in *Mommy Dearest* (1981), the
frighteningly abusive mum in *Precious* (2009), and the terrifying matriarch of a crime family in *Animal
Kingdom* (2010).

intimate sense of people hard at work as it moves between close-ups of legs and feet, as well as panning up dancers' bodies to medium close-ups of their faces and arms. This is heightened by the warmth and encouragement of the ballet mistress who also walks amongst the dancers, smiling and counting them in, saying "good," telling Nina that she is "beautiful as always," and directing her to "relax." Therefore, when the film cuts to a high-angled long shot looking down onto the studio, and the back of Thomas's head comes into view, a very different spatial relationship purposefully establishes his dominance before we even know who he is. With a cut to a low angled shot looking up at him as he crosses his arms, observes, objectifies, and judges, there is no mistaking his authority, which is compounded by the ballet mistress as she acknowledges his presence, claps her hands, and directs the pianist to stop. There is then a decided shift in tone as dancers anxiously remove layers of clothing in order to improve the display of their 'to-be-looked-at-ness.' It is only Lily, the new addition to the company, who finds this behaviour strange, as expressed by her puzzled, critical expression and her failure to remove any clothes. Thomas then makes a motion with his hand, the lesson resumes, and he walks down in amongst the dancers, recounting the tragic story of Swan Lake as he scrutinises the female dancers at close range whilst tapping many of them on the shoulder. As if playing ruthless mind games with his "subordinates," he finishes his monologue by advising "all the soloists I tapped, go to your scheduled rehearsals this afternoon, and for the *girls* I didn't tap, meet me in the principal studio at 5:00pm." A series of cuts between the latter reveal their pleasure, and in the case of Veronica, her sense of triumph in being selected to audition for the Swan Queen by this "brilliant" man.

A complex negotiation between misogyny and feminism

In so many respects, then, this scene is a textbook demonstration of the male gaze, as women who appear to lack a core identity are infantilised and dismembered under a misogynistic lens – and what is worse, are grateful for it! Importantly, however, this is complicated both by Lily's reaction to Thomas, and the way in which he is introduced as repellently egotistical and cruel. At the exact moment he explains how the Swan Queen desires her freedom, "but only true love can break the spell," he brazenly gazes into the mirror at his own reflection, strokes his hair, and thus identifies himself with the role of heroic "rescuer." This doubling serves to reveal how he uses his position as artistic director to live out his own exploitative, male fantasies, and a cut to Lily rolling her eyes reflects back a resistant viewers' sense of disapproval and exasperation with his dominating and manipulative will to power and mastery. It is moments like these that insert a subtle form of feminist politics into a film intended for mainstream exhibition, and I therefore have to *also* agree with Mark Fischer when he writes that Thomas is 'an almost parodically phallic artistic director' (Fischer & Jacobs op. cit.: 59), who selects Nina because she is so obviously vulnerable and in need of "liberating" (from the confinement of her arrested development). However, whilst she is undoubtedly in need of psychological help, it is certainly not the kind of sexual harassment and humiliation that Thomas has to offer under the guise/excuse of tutelage, which only adds to her stress by exacerbating her anxiety.[119] In one scene, disappointed and frustrated with Nina's rehearsal, he even asks David/The Prince (Benjamin Millepied) in front of her, "Honestly, would you fuck that girl?", thus reflecting back

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[119] In an chapter on 'Women's Mental Health Research', Gayle Y. Iwamasa and Audrey K. Bangi write that: 'Although some may not feel that sexual harassment is at the same level as domestic violence or rape, it still has profound psychological effects on its victims. Certainly, domestic violence and rape are severe physical assaults on women, and may even cause death. However, sexual harassment may lead women to feel trapped and psychologically immobile' (2003: 279). Therefore, Thomas' fantasy of liberating Nina may only serve to further her imprisonment.

the kind of scopophilic pleasure and power that viewers may get from watching and judging the sexual worth of a female object based on the way that she moves. He then answers his own question with, "No, no one would", before going on to *kindly* demonstrate the necessary passion and sensuality he is looking for by forcing her to kiss him and groping her body in her most intimate places. As if humiliating an obviously vulnerable person's inexperience was not enough, what is particularly sadistic about this scene is that at the moment Nina appears to respond and actually enjoy this sexual contact, he walks away, asserting that it was him seducing her and that it needs to be the other way around.

Furthermore, it is abundantly clear that he is encouraging her to access her darker impulses and push herself to her limits not for altruistic reasons, but for his own selfish ends and with no regard for the devastating consequences that will entail. Thus, he does not see Nina as a real person, twisting her to fit his own image and loving only the reflection of himself that he sees in her. Nina is merely a commodity, groomed to replace the "worn out" Beth and continue to sell his ballet company until she, too, wears out and/or is used up.[120] Business is business. This is shown in his acknowledgement to Nina that Beth's accident was an attempted suicide, driven by the "dark impulse" that made "her so thrilling to watch, so dangerous, even perfect at times," knowing full well how Nina obsesses over perfection, and thus encouraging her to sacrifice herself to the medium and satisfy his impossible demands no matter what the cost. Having discovered that Lily has been made her alternate later on in the film, Nina tearfully approaches Thomas for reassurance but he only exacerbates her insecurity and paranoia by

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[120] A telling exchange between Nina and a male admirer (in the club scene) reveals the extent to which she has learnt and internalised this self-negation, as she answers the question of who she is with "I'm a dancer", rather than giving her name.

confirming that "there is always an alternate" and that "everyone in the world wants your place." And finally, the theme of substituting one woman for another is cemented right at the end of the film when he calls Nina "my little princess" – exactly the same name that he used to call Beth and will no doubt call the next in a long line of "sweet girls."

In Lily's succinct words, then, Thomas is a "prick." So if cinema is a mirror, then as well as reflecting and gratifying the male gaze, *Black Swan* can *also* be seen as 'a black mirror held up to patriarchy' (Fischer & Jacobs op. cit.: 59). Despite its 'boy-friendly thriller structure' (Mullen 2011: 49), it is a female-centric film with four major female roles, confronting many of the significant issues facing young girls and women in a way that few mainstream films dare. It touches upon the impossible nature of (arrogantly egotistical) male expectation; the ways in which (patriarchal/ballet) culture is constitutive in numerous ways of girls' and women's pathologised bodies, subjectivities, experiences, and practices; society's disdain for and unfair treatment of aging women; the damage that the internalisation of patriarchy has done to female friendship and competition; the mother/daughter relationship; sexual harassment in the workplace; and the pursuit of "perfection." In exploring the complex and contradictory mix of Nina's repression, desire, guilt, and achievement, *Black Swan* also addresses the ways in which women have been taught to fear our own power and abilities, believing that if we fully exercise both we risk destroying ourselves, and those close to us. It raises the question of whether we can maintain our integrity *and* be successful, or do we have to morph into something that is demonised and desired (by patriarchy) in order to fiercely go after what it is that we want? Alternatively, can we reconcile these

contradictions by transcending this enduringly and deeply entrenched archetypal good/bad girl tug of war?

Indeed, although it is, as *Sight & Sound* critic Lisa Mullen puts it, 'a difficult, conflicted film which denies its audience any simple payoff' (*ibid*), its play between delusion and reality *does* leave the ending ambiguous enough for it to simultaneously acknowledge the cinematic tradition of punishing transgressive women, and leave it open to interpretation/rewriting. Nina (symbolically) kills her dark double by smashing the dressing-room mirror and stabbing Lily/herself with a shard of it, and her White Swan-self "dies" on stage along with the character of Odette, so perhaps, and as Virginia Woolf advises (in her essay, 'Professions for Women'), Nina acts out the (metaphorical) killing of both her own self-sacrificial 'Angel in the House' as well as her archetypal opposite, because it is only through killing these aesthetic ideals that Nina can 'rid herself of falsehood' and be free to put the fragments back together, aware that they will never form a "whole" but will instead always be a multifaceted fiction. (Woolf 2008: 142). Sure enough, having realised that she has stabbed herself rather than Lily, we see close-ups of Nina's pain, the familiar terror, her emotional exhaustion, and then, in a brief moment as she wipes away her tears and dabs her face with white powder, a sense of peace and even the hint of a smile. This therefore marks the first and only time we see both the timid White Swan and confident Black Swan in the *same* expression.

Therefore, *Black Swan*'s politics are not as black and white as its symbolic use of colour, or as divisive as the feminist/anti-feminist debate between Fischer and Jacobs in their joint article on the film. Instead, it is a complex negotiation between these extremes that both reinvigorates and subverts clichés, just as it is a hybrid genre that

straddles the traditions of dance film, psychological thriller, horror, and melodrama in order that it be as easily consumed and as broadly appreciated as possible. For this reason, whilst Amber Jacobs' well-argued and articulate feminist critique of the film as a lewd male fantasy is absolutely fair, I also find myself somewhat troubled by it, because s*howing* the sexism and misogyny that is so prevalent in the ballet world (as well as in the film industry), is not the same as *being* sexist and misogynistic. Furthermore, what is interesting about *Black Swan*'s problematic blend of what appear to be mutually exclusive ideas and suggestions, is that it reflects the way in which Nina is caught between repression and liberation, passivity and aggression, naiveté and knowledge, girlhood and womanhood. And whilst doubling and mirrors are undoubtedly a cliché, not only of the ballet world, but also of the dance film and horror genre, their multiple levels of symbolism do reveal the absolute horror of Nina's psychological experience due to the patriarchal conditioning within which she is trapped.[121] So rather than being regressive, these familiar tropes and archetypes can still, as Laura Mulvey wrote in 1975, 'get[] us nearer to the roots of our oppression' (op. cit.: 59), because despite the very clear evidence of progressive social change since then, there remains a decidedly anti-feminist backlash (even twenty years after the publication of Susan Faludi's seminal book, *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against Women*). Largely driven by capitalist consumer industries that profit from our insecurity, this backlash has undoubtedly been deeply internalised. So if Nina perfectly embodies the desired and conventional aesthetic of our dominant culture: skinny, white, young, middle-class, "beautiful," and a talented dancer, then in deconstructing this superficial cultural ideal of "perfection" by showing the physical, emotional, and psychological cost at which it is obtained and lived, the ideal *itself* is shown to be

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[121] These themes and motifs may well have been chosen in order to draw attention to their arcane quality, as a political comment/acknowledgement that equality between the sexes has not been achieved, and thus to reinvigorate a feminist debate.

disabling. Whilst this is not meant to imply that *all* ballet dancers will existentially and psychologically self-destruct, it does work to challenge the narcissism that is sold to young girls/women through our mediatized consumer culture, with its relentless bombardment of (largely unobtainable) images of models, Hollywood stars, and "beautiful" ballerinas.

Reinvigorating and exploiting lesbian clichés?

As with so many popular narrative films, it is impossible not to return to the fact that *Black Swan* is simultaneously interesting and found wanting in quite complex ways, and this continuous oscillation between potential progressiveness and regressive presentation is mirrored in the emotional tonality and rhythm of the sound design. Sometimes really quiet and at other times so loud it hurts, these abrupt shifts in pitch go to extremes then pull you back, which perfectly reflects the (patriarchal/feminist) dynamics of the film. Therefore, I cannot write about the contradictions within the text that offer up these feminist spaces of politics and desire, without considering the arguably cynical and gratuitous inclusion of the two-minute soft-core lesbian sex scene. Indeed, in an interview in the American magazine, *Entertainment Weekly*, Natalie Portman says: 'Everyone was so worried about who was going to want to see this movie…I remember them being like, "How do you get guys to a ballet movie? How do you get girls to a thriller?" And the answer is a lesbian scene… Everyone wants to see that'.[122]

Of most interest is the point at which a close-up of Nina's open-mouthed expression of pleasure cuts to a close up from her perspective, as she looks down at Lily's head

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[122] *Entertainment Weekly*'s feature cover story, 'Natalie's Dark Victory', Dec 31st 2010, p.32.

between her legs. As "Lily" looks back up at her, her face morphs into Nina's, and an abrupt burst of kinetic syncopation expresses Nina's panic as she springs up in horror. As the camera cuts back to a close-up of Lily, now with her rightful face, the music changes to soft, romantic strings as she comforts Nina and eases her back down. Then both the music and Nina build to their climax, as Lily continues to perform oral sex on her. Throughout this scene, there is a conspicuous (and unpleasantly disturbing) juicy, slushing sound of fluid, layered with an uncanny twisting, manipulating sound as Lily's tattooed wings move about her shoulder blades. There is also an insect-like sound that merges with wings flapping as parts of Nina's skin become animated and goose-fleshed, and all of this is interspersed with Nina's gasps and moans of pleasure, until it goes quiet for a few seconds of peace after her orgasm. Then the sound of mournful strings come back in as a medium close-up of Lily, with a mirror directly behind her in the background, shows her sit up, wipe her mouth and say "sweet girl," the *exact* words that Nina's mother uses to refer to her daughter. A cut looking down onto Nina's panic coincides with the crashing chords that then build to the second (horror) climax of the scene, as Lily once again turns into Nina, grabs the pillow and smothers Nina as the screen goes black and the soundtrack goes silent.

Combining the body genres of pornography and horror with the viscerally disturbing sound effects and emotionally impactful music, this scene undoubtedly aims to incite a physical response in the viewer. And with its acceptably feminine, conventionally attractive Hollywood stars and standard lesbian porn clichés, it is no doubt particularly titillating for the kind of heterosexual male gaze that fantasises about (a stereotypical kind of) lesbian sex. Therefore, as Portman indicates above, lesbianism offers the "spice" that will transform the film into a more sellable commodity, and both reveals

and represses/exploits lesbian desire and representation at the same time. The switching of Lily's face to Nina's can be seen to support Freud's contention that lesbians are 'plainly seeking themselves as a love object' (quoted in Hart 1994: 18). Which is further corroborated through the suggestion that this entire scene is hallucinogenic and masturbatory. Therefore, in accordance with Lacan's (1981) reformulation of Freud's work in *Feminine Sexuality*, Nina's sexual attraction to Lily is grounded in her desire to *be* her, connoting a narcissistic and pre-Oedipal desire that relegates lesbianism to immaturity. Indeed, there is plenty of evidence in the text to support this theory of her arrested development, as she constantly projects a sexualised image of herself onto other women, has an overbearing and protective mother, and has thus failed to successfully complete her psychosexual development by fully transferring her desire/identification from the mother/self to the (absent) 'Other' father/man. Furthermore, her mother/lover/self/other literally smothers her in this scene, in front of a mirror. This psychoanalytic theory of lesbian psychosis thereby promotes the patriarchal, heterosexist, and homophobic assumption that lesbianism is a "phase" that should be outgrown, and a desire based only on gender dysfunction rather than autonomous desire. Therefore, because the sex scene is represented as a natural consequence of Nina's neurosis/psychosis, and no "real" lesbians are involved, any subversion that it may have posed to hetero-patriarchy is dissolved, and what is left is a "safe" male fantasy.

It is, then, clearly understandable why this scene has evoked mistrust and cynicism, since it is, as ever, a patriarchal institution (Hollywood) that benefits from institutionalised lesbian verisimilitudes. However, what is once again interesting is the contradictory way in which it is designed to both repel and gratify, as highlighted by the

David Cronenberg-esque body-horror sound effects, as well as Nina's own horrified and appalled reaction to her own apparent narcissism. Moreover, as much as the indeterminacy of their encounter being "real" or not may well strengthen male fantasy, it can also be seen 'as a knowing joke on the desires of the [heterosexual] male audience, giving them what they want but at the same time making it disturbing, uncanny and only an embarrassing wet dream!' (Christiansen 2011: 311). Indeed, although in no way do I believe him to be representative of *all* heterosexual male viewers, Mark Fischer argues that: 'A heterosexual male viewer coming to *Black Swan* looking for titillation would surely be deeply disappointed. The film shows a female body too destabilised by anxiety and delirium to be the object of a masturbatory male gaze' (Fischer & Jacob*s* op. cit.: 61).

Yet apart from these considerations of the male gaze, and regardless of whether it is yet another case of assimilationist visibility (at the expense of a marginalised invisibility), this scene *does* represent a woman's fantasy about another woman – who happens to be flattered by the idea if not the reality. A mainstream indie-Hollywood film undoubtedly increases the visibility of and discussion about queer/lesbian desire in a space in which lesbianism still remains relatively invisible, propagating a more fluid conception of human sexuality. It will therefore have resonance in different ways for different audiences, and as my previous MA (audience) research into lesbian viewing (dis)pleasure in (un)friendly popular cinema suggests, lesbians are not a homogeneous mass who respond to the politics of representation in the same way, so no doubt there will be some who will derive just as much visual pleasure from this scene as the next "guy." And these will not necessarily be just lesbian/bi/queer-identified women either, as highlighted by Portman's comment above. For this reason, Amber Jacobs' assertion

that '[i]t functions entirely for the pleasure of the heterosexual male spectator [and] absolutely precludes any other kind of desire' (Fischer & *Jacobs* op. cit.: 60), seems somewhat reactionary in its dismissal of the contradictions within the text that reflect the same contradictions within the dominant ideologies of the day. However, to further the sense of contradiction, as a lesbian/queer/feminist viewer myself, I tend to agree with her whilst simultaneously acknowledging the fact that "our" response cannot speak for all women.

A feminist phenomenological assault

Whilst *Black Swan*'s cinematic excess can thus be potentially "maddening," it can also be completely and viscerally overwhelming, and it is this way-over-the-top, hysterical, conflicted, and intense tone that differentiates the politics of this popular dance film from the kind of films I consider in my chapter on avant-garde feminist screendance. For example, whilst *Tides* and *Meshes of the Afternoon* also privilege embodied experience, immersion, and connection, they do so by giving viewers the time and space in which to enter into their "depths," creatively imagining alternatives to patriarchal thinking and reality (despite being considerably shorter films). This is achieved through their use of rhythm, time (particularly slow motion), space, and repetition, which drastically contrasts to the violent immediacy of *Black Swan*'s exploration of the power structures that have given rise to Nina's psychosis, without necessarily confirming them. This perhaps addresses the wider context of our cultural fascination with and Hollywood's need to sell experiences of immediacy, in order to compete with an increasingly digital media landscape which aims to provide unmediated visual and aural experiences. However, this is not meant as a value judgement because they are different forms of filmmaking, and the avant-garde has always worked against the predominant

cultural forms of its day. Instead, the point of this comparison is to show how this independent Hollywood film is undoubtedly a hybrid form that incorporates and assimilates different filmmaking practices, whilst retaining its allegiance to representational practices.

As briefly mentioned above, independent cinema is a slippery category, and whilst it can be seen to embody cultural critique and be 'a viable system that parallels that of Hollywood … [it has also] in some cases been incorporated by it' (Newman 2011: 2). This is because even within the independent sector there is a spectrum of "independence," with what Sherry B. Ortner refers to as 'a more Hollywood-y end of the spectrum and a more radically avant-garde and experimental end' (2012: 2). Therefore, whilst more avant-garde techniques and aesthetics are used in *Black Swan*, they are used differently because the purpose of popular 'Hollywood-y end' film is different from its non-commercial counterparts. Where as the avant-garde is primarily concerned with conveying messages and critiquing the mainstream, *Black Swan* predominantly uses its more experimental techniques for stylistic purposes and dramatic effect, in order to support the "product's" entertainment value.[123] However, what I hope to have revealed is that whilst this inevitably leads to a more conservative text because it is trying to please a much broader audience, which explains its oscillation between progressive/regressive presentations, it does not preclude feminist politics. Indeed, this "hybrid" text *can* be read as explicitly political and critical, literally moving viewers and encouraging a deeper psychosocial understanding of the role of representational

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[123] Although this is not meant to imply that mainstream, big-budget Hollywood studios *never* produce challenging and progressively politically films, but just to acknowledge that these kinds of films will always be in the minority within the context of Hollywood's output. Conversely, independent films are largely made up of these kinds of complex and challenging films.

forms in producing and challenging marginality. However, it can *also* be consumed simply (and "safely") as a narrative spectacle.

This breakdown of boundaries between the traditional worlds of avant-garde, independent, and popular Hollywood filmmaking is not new. Indeed, there is a substantial body of independent/mainstream work 'that began roughly in the mid-1980s and thrived through the 1990s and into the mid-2000s' that actively questions and disregards some of the conventions of traditional Hollywood film production (*ibid*: 1).[124] However, despite some anomalies, what is strikingly apparent is its predominant association with a certain kind of cultish male-orientated cinema, celebrating the work of filmmakers such as Quentin Tarrantino, Michael Mann, David Fincher, and Darren Aronofsky.[125] What is clear, then, is that even in the *supposed* progressive space of independent/Hollywood cinema it is the boy-wonder myth that prevails, whilst 'the girl-wonder myth doesn't exist…you just end up in the girl ghetto' (Lane 2005: 199). Therefore, despite there being evidence of a productive interaction between feminism and the more mainstream end of independent cinema, it is largely on male terms, pointing 'strongly to the cultural gender biases that govern independent filmmaking' (*ibid*: 204). In contrast, the avant-garde has been more able to subvert the usual male

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[124] Many independent film companies and studio divisions closed down by the end of the 2000s, as a result of the global economic recession. However, as Ortner argues, '[d]espite being hit hard by the Great Recession since about 2007, and despite widespread (but questionable) pronouncement that independent film has collectively sold out to Hollywood, the movement still retains a good deal of artistic and political independence and force' (2012: 2).

[125] However, as Michele Schreiber argues in her essay on women directors in contemporary independent cinema, the space 'between Hollywood homogeny and 'unpopular' experimental filmmaking has become increasingly populated with women directors […whose] innovative contribution is regularly overlooked in scholarship on independent cinema' (2013: 6-7). Whilst being something to celebrate *and* write about, these films do tend to be more on the experimental, and thus the less viewed and accessible, side of the spectrum of independent filmmaking. Therefore, I would argue that despite the success of filmmakers such as Lisa Cholodenko, Rebecca Miller, Nicole Holofcener, Mary Harron, Kelly Reichardt etc., there remains an undeniable gender imbalance when it comes to the more commercially successful independent filmmakers, and the kinds of films that garner large audiences.

gaze of commercial films and allow for an *uncompromising* feminist perspective, because it has always been more open to nonpatriarchal, resistant women filmmakers making films about women's stories. This is largely due, no doubt, to its own marginal status.

Black Swan and the crisis of American national identity

Considering the long film studies tradition of reading horror and science fiction genres as expressive of fears of national identity, I want to briefly explore the way in which *Black Swan*'s anxiety around Nina's fractured identity, and the unstable ontological level of her world, can be seen to relate to and be placed within the context of a wider socio-cultural crisis of American national identity, an already complex and contested concept. As Annette Kuhn writes in her edited collection, *Alien Zone*, 'the overt contents of science fiction films are *reflections* of social trends and attitudes of the time, mirroring the preoccupations of the historical moment in which the films were made. … [As well as] voic[ing] cultural *repressions* in 'unconscious' textual processes, which … require interpretation in order to reveal the meanings hidden in them' (1990: 10, original emphasis). Nina tries to access (as well as deny) her multiplicity, but she is also afraid of it as it surfaces repeatedly and insistently, providing moments of horror as multiple mirror reflections fail to coincide with the reality of her movements. For example, as she is standing still in front of a mirror whilst being measured for her Swan Queen costume, the first in a long line of doubled mirror reflections scratches the rash on her shoulder and turns to look directly at Nina, and later as she is practising alone in the studio the night before her opening performance, with her back facing the mirror, her "dark doubled" reflection turns around and confronts her just before the lights go down. Not only highlighting her own psychic instability, these moments of horror can

be seen to reflect a nation's fear of its own fragmented and increasingly multifaceted identity.

In his book, *Who Are We? The Challenges to America's National Identity*, Samuel P Huntington explores how in the years preceding September 11 2001, American 'national identity seemed at times to have faded from sight. Globalisation, multiculturalism, cosmopolitanism, immigration, subnationalism, and anti-nationalism had battered American consciousness' (2005: 4). During the 'culture wars' of the 1990s, the "grand narratives" of old (as laid out in the American Creed and the Declaration of Independence) were challenged and abandoned (by some) as unduly privileged, and a celebratory notion of intersectionality, multiplicity, and flexibility had gradually replaced the idea of a patriarchal, racist, and hegemonic identity. Since the discrepancy between these lofty ideals and the reality as experienced by certain groups, particularly African-Americans, could no longer be ignored, increasing insistence was placed on the differences of race, gender, class, ethnicity, and sexual preference. However, 'September 11 drastically reduced the salience of these other identities and sent Old Glory back to the top of the national flag pole' (*ibid*: 8). This is because when under attack, a vulnerable people are more likely to come together and identify more clearly with their national identity, history, values, and pride, putting aside their differences in order to construct themselves against, in this case, their "dangerous Muslim/terrorist Other." After all, the September 11 attackers were indiscriminate in their killing, paying no mind to America's internal diversity.

For a time in post-September 11 America, then, the revival of patriotism and Islamophobia was unprecedented (Huntington: 2005). Similarly, governments across

Europe (including our own here in Britain) had the incentive they needed to attack years

of hard work by declaring the death of multiculturalism and the crackdown on (illegal)

immigration, by playing on fears that it fosters extremist ideology and terrorism. The

legacy of this has been an increased desire to fix national identities across the globe,

with 'commercial, governmental and cultural forces actively work[ing] against multiple

and performative experiences and practices of identity' (Van Zoonen 2013: 46).

Therefore, the 'unconscious' of *Black Swan* can be read as a warning of the "horrors"

that await when we move away from the hegemony of a single, "safe" (national)

identity (Kuhn: 1990). Like America, Nina is experiencing a crisis of identity and is

therefore vulnerable, particularly to the perceived threat of Lily, the new dancer from

another company – code for immigrant 'Other' – who threatens her position as prima

ballerina/sense of national identity. Because Nina's unstable identity requires

differentiation, she immediately compares herself with (the exoticised) Lily, which then

leads to both evaluation and competition. As Huntington writes, a nation sources its

sense of identity through, '[c]ompetition [that then] leads to antagonism and the

broadening of what may have started as the perception of narrow differences into more

intense and fundamental ones. Stereotypes are created, the opponent is demonized, the

other is transmogrified into the enemy' (26). Nina's constant paranoia about her "dark

Other" trying to usurp her place and position can thus be read as a metaphor for

America's fear of its own internal threat of immigration. As Fraga and Segura assert,

American national identity 'is threatened by growth among native-born and immigrant

populations of Latin American origin, particularly – but not exclusively – Mexicans'

(2006: 279). And if the threat of immigration is dealt with by assimilation, then Lily has

shown that she is not prepared to adapt herself to her new surroundings, by criticising

Thomas and refusing to display herself like the other dancers. Therefore, the "unity" of the company is threatened, just as America's linguistic and cultural unity is being questioned as it 'prepares for a future where Caucasians are a far smaller proportion of the national population than may ever have been the case in our history' (*ibid*).

Black Swan's pervasive sense of paranoia, fear, and doom thereby reflects back the kind of socio-cultural anxieties that have risen to the forefront since the start (in 2008) of our global economic decline and recession. With increasing financial insecurity, unemployment, and pervasive cuts to social services and health care, not to mention the War on Terror (2001-present) and the related threat of terrorism, the on-going conflict in the Middle East, and the number of devastating natural disasters that have occurred around the world since 2000, including Hurricane Katrina that hit America in 2005, it is not difficult to imagine the enormously negative impact this current "age of anxiety" can have on peoples' mental health, as well as fostering racist and xenophobic attitudes toward immigrants. The unfriendly and isolating competitiveness of this dance troupe, and Nina's paranoia and fear concerning interlopers and usurpation, can thus be seen in some way to stand in for America. Unlike the affective choreography of Carlos Saura's post-Franco *Bodas de sangre* (*Blood Wedding*), and *Carmen*[126] that opens out to cultural, national, and gendered multiplicity after a long period of "closed" dictatorship, *Black Swan*'s stealthily close tracking shots rather evoke a sense of (cultural) unease and suffocating anxiety. This highlights how film, as well as theory and the meanings ascribed to identity categories, do not exist in a vacuum, but always relate to wider political and economic contexts. However, because these contexts are always complex

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[126] As explored in my chapter 'Interrogating National, Cultural, and Gendered Identity through Flamenco Dance and Film'.

and contradictory, as well as constantly in the throes of change, "meaning" is never

fixed or stable.

Indeed, since *Black Swan* is set an inescapable world of mirrors in which there is no

way of telling the "real" from the reflections, a more progressive

"meaning"/interpretation would highlight how this reflects the fact that America is a

nation of immigrants. Any fantasy of "wholeness" will thereby always be illusory, since

national (as well as individual) identity is overwhelmingly constructed, and, like the

film itself, both insistent and unfathomable. Indeed, it is never clear that Lily poses any

actual threat outside of Nina's paranoid delusions, so rather than the threat of

Lily/immigration, we could read Nina's/America's own paranoia and fear of/desire for

diversity and multiplicity as the cause of her/its own destruction. If she just embraced

Lily's difference as part of who she is, there would have been no battle. Therefore, to

return to Vivian Sobchack's work, as well as to the film's contradictory politics, it is no

surprise that Nina morphs into a swan in the grand finale, since:

> Morphing's dramatic emphasis on process thus foregrounds not only
> metaphysical but also political contradictions. That is, it threatens to
> dissolve dominant fixations of "American" identity whilst also appealing
> to their very mythos and grounding in the American ideal of social
> mobility and the "be all that you can be" mutability of the "self-made-
> man." (2000: xi)

Conclusion

As explored previously, the abrupt and violent shifts in the politics of this popular

independent Hollywood dance film mirror and reflect the same shifts in its sound and

rhythm, and when combined with the incredible sense of proximity due to its (almost

exclusive) use of handheld close-up shots, as well as Natalie Portman's emotionally

wrought and Oscar-winning performance, it makes for an intensely contradictory and

exhausting audio-visual experience. As the dancing camera lurches, leaps, and pirouettes, with accompanying shock cuts, zap hallucinations, off-kilter framing, and moody chiaroscuro, it feels as if I am being tossed around the stage and "shaken up" along with Nina, and that we are connected through our surrender to the violence of this dark, tough, and nerve-wracking experience. Therefore, despite the low cultural worth often ascribed to dance film and melodrama, body genres that have long been dismissed and trivialized for being too corny and "obvious," *Black Swan*'s lack of subtlety *is the point*. And this overload does not equate to a lack of effect, however open it is to contradictory and multiple interpretations.

I would therefore liken the experience of this film to a frenzied phenomenological attack, employing conventions of horror, melodrama, and pornography in order to grab hold of the viewer's body, whilst also effectively blending independent and European/experimental-influenced styles of filmmaking with the Hollywood studio style, in order to also engage the mind. This is seen in the film's violation of the classical realist paradigm through reflexive, dancing camerawork, a stylised reality, the use of computer graphics, and an "irrational" narrative that frustrates viewers' desire to draw coherent interpretations, along with "big" Hollywood moments such as the ballet scenes and "spectacular" images of horrific transformation. However, unlike the popular utopianism found in its more mainstream Hollywood dance film counterparts, there is no conventional "feel good" happy ending, and despite Nina's eventual success in the role of/transformation into the Swan Queen, it is certainly no 'fantasy of achievement' (McRobbie 1997: 230) due to the terrible cost at which this fantasy is achieved. Further perpetuating the film's theme of doubling, then, even the form straddles two modes of filmmaking, as it attempts to effect in the viewer a full-bodied

experience of cinema, simultaneously drawing us into and divorcing us from the diegesis.

Because of this multi-generic and multi modal form of filmmaking, it has made sense to use different critical frameworks in order to explore the contradictory dynamics of a film that may not make me feel "good," but certainly invites me to both feel and think. This makes for yet another interesting contradiction, since it deals with fragmentation holistically. This is why I have sectioned out a phenomenological analysis of the representation of disability, from a more "traditional" feminist psychoanalytic approach to identity and representation, as well as a consideration of how *Black Swan* can be seen as a response to and a reflection of particular socio-political and historical anxieties. The film is neither *merely* affective, nor *merely* ideological, but an ambiguous blend of both with conflicting ideologies that do not allow for a passive model of film spectatorship. Yet, at the same time, with its horrific images of metamorphosis and the use of some of the oldest horror gags in cinema (such as the mirror shock cut) to entertain and appease, it can be superficially enjoyed for its spectacle. Perhaps, then, the film itself is like Nina: a mess of technical perfection that lacks a core identity due to its desire to please.

This points to an important distinction between this popular indie-Hollywood film and most of the other filmmaking practices I consider throughout the chapters of this thesis. Whilst in many respects it *faces* the crisis (of psychiatric disability, feminism, and national identity), it never fully engages with the alternative filmmaking practices it uses in order to create any alternatives to the trauma of what it represents. Although far less contradictory and problematic in its representation of feminist politics, this is also

the case with Saura's *Carmen*, in that it uses filmic form only to demystify, rather than reinvent, the language and subjectivity of archetypal woman. So whilst *Black Swan* may work to elicit a powerful sensory involvement that can connect the viewer to an embodied experience of psychosis, highlight the damage that patriarchy has done to women, and work through pertinent socio-cultural historical anxieties, we are left with an overwhelming sense of powerlessness, just as Nina is left "bleeding" and accepting of her fate in the final shot. Therefore, despite it being a film about transformation, there is no sense of this (horrific) world becoming-otherwise. Whilst one could argue that this reflects back a realistically harsh, cynical, and unpalatable truth about life in contemporary society, it is difficult not to think that in some respects, commerce has been privileged over a more radical cultural critique and potential – especially when considering Natalie Portman's comments concerning the anxiety around projected audiences for this film. Therefore, because the contradictions are so deeply embedded within *Black Swan*, it is impossible to fully yield to the progressive potential that can be read into it.

Conclusion

Existing approaches to screendance tend to argue for the specificity of dancefilm, and whilst the somatic response of viewers has been addressed, it has been more in terms of its historical context as a tool for discussing dancefilm, and less about in-depth embodied and/or ideological analyses of selected films. What I have tried to do in this thesis is to approach screendance more holistically and from a specifically film studies perspective, striking a balance between phenomenological lived-body experience and critical distance/discussion that aims to demonstrate how textuality and embodiment do not have to oppose each other. I have thus incorporated sensuous and deep textural analysis of my chosen films, with theoretical text-based and socio-political historical contextual analyses. Investigating what meanings come from the affective elements of the film and the ideological elements, and whether they work together in order to heighten the impact of screendance, or whether one is compromised by the other. I have thus been most interested in the movement and potential for mimesis between the film and viewers' body, and whether it can constitute an ethical experience, encouraging progressive and self-reflexive political and ideological engagement.

Through paying attention to the immediacy of my own lived body experience of screendance, I have connected to an experience, and thus to an understanding of what it means to be an embodied part of a (marginalised Spanish) collective, enjoying a corporeal and political sense of togetherness and strength as we move in-synch and against historical, phallocentric, and orientalist norms that attempt to fix "us." A haptic reciprocity between my body and the bodies of disabled dancers/film has connected me to a somatic understanding of their movement, and to what it means to be excluded as well as connected on the grounds of one's embodiment. Immersed in the mutuality of

this relationship, I have seen/felt disability as an *experience*, as a lived thing and not a stereotype or a clinical diagnosis. In moving with the rhythmic current, dance, structure, sound, pace and force of avant-garde feminist films, I have moved beyond imposed boundaries as "we" extend and expand the language, spatiality, and motility of the female body. And finally, a popular Hollywood dance film has waged a powerful multi-sensory attack on my body, incorporating me into a horrific yet sympathetic (if ideologically contradictory) experience of psychosis. Therefore, the corporeal ties between dance, film and audience constitute, for me, a sensuous and ethical experience that is far more effective than austere didacticism, because, as Merleau-Ponty writes, 'there is no thought which embraces all our thought' (1962: xiv). As these films "touch" and become a part of me, I am brought closer to the 'Other'/film through empathetic embrace and surrender. And as Jennifer Barker writes on this experience:

> The empathy between the film's and viewer's bodies goes so deeply that we can feel the film's body, live vicariously through it, and experience its movements to such an extent that we ourselves become momentarily as graceful or powerful as the film's body, and we leave the theatre feeling invigorated or exhausted, though we ourselves have hardly moved a muscle.   (Barker 2009: 83)

This material foundation of my knowledge of the 'Other'/film (and of myself) gives, as Vivian Sobchack argues, 'ethical gravity to semiotic and textual production and circulation, serving and far too often suffering as their very ground' (Sobchack 2004: 187). This is because during the process of empathic immersion and surrender I call into question my received notions of things, learning *how* to understand as opposed to how I have been taught I must understand. Surrender is, then, in no way passive, but an intuitive state in which established somatic, affective, and cognitive boundaries are made permeable. Films that are able to induce this surrender in me are of particular interest, because although I never give up my sense of identity in the process of

viewing, I am sensuously reminded of just how flexible that identity is. This is why, to refer back to Stanley Cavell's words quoted in the introduction, certain films have always taken on such 'unspeakable importance for me,' because in relaxing self-boundaries and self-representations, I not only learn about the world and others, but also about myself and the possibilities of who I want to be (1979: 154). Just as each of the films I consider involve narratives (whether explicit or not) of surrender, control and agency, screendance is a medium through which the viewer can embody these same ways of being through mimesis.

Through the films capacity to "manipulate" me materially and politically, and through my own embodied/political receptivity, I am thus "produced" by the 'powerful mirroring effect' of this particular body genre (Gaines 1999: 90). And not only does this lead to a self-reflexive, political and ideological engagement with minority/marginalised groups and cultures who are given the space in which to '"image back," but it can also offer viewers a temporary taste of what it feels like to be a part of something, to be connected in an intersubjective relationship. This points to the potential of screendance to help galvanise viewing communities, just as we recently witnessed the kinaesthetic power of televised sport/movement to shift perceptions about disability during the 2012 Paralympic Games. So whilst acknowledging that empathy will always be contextual and dynamic, and that one's experience of empathy will not necessarily lead to any kind of action, this *does* support the political implications of a sensuous approach to spectatorship. As Jane Gaines writes on political mimesis, such an approach:

> [A]llows us to deal with the wish that images could change the world, that bodies on the screen could have their concrete connection with bodies in social space, whether these screen bodies are seen as performing the ideal or enacting the taboo. Finally, the notion of the world and the wide screen as having a "sympathetic" relationship, the one with the other, takes us out of the realm of any mechanical,

behavioural connection and into the realm of unpredictability, opening up
the possibility of miraculous transformation.   (1999: 94)

Having thus explored the immediacy of my own lived body experience of and

interaction with screendance, and its importance as a political tool in the chapters of this

thesis, I have come to a better understanding of why I have been drawn to existential

phenomenology as a method. This sense of surrender has a close connection with what

Merleau-Ponty refers to as 'phenomenological reduction' (1962: xiv). Rejecting

Husserl's original transcendental and idealist interpretation, Merleau-Ponty posits that at

the heart of our intentionality, or our bodily grip and "direction toward" the

world/things, is the *epoché*, a methodological principle that brackets our judgements

concerning the world (of which we can often be unaware) so that we can experience, in

his own words, the ''wonder' in the face of the world', which then allows us 'to respond

to their call' (*ibid*: xiii, 139). On this he writes that:

> [I]n order to see the world and grasp it as paradoxical, we must break
> with our familiar acceptance of it and, also, from the fact that from this
> break we can learn nothing but the unmotivated upsurge of the world.
> The most important lesson which the reduction teaches us is the
> impossibility of a complete reduction. … The philosopher … is a
> perpetual beginner, which means that he takes for granted nothing that
> men, learned or otherwise, believe they know. … Far from being, as has
> been thought, a procedure of idealistic philosophy, phenomenological
> reduction belongs to existential philosophy.   (xiv)

In this way, existential phenomenology neither accepts nor rejects but brackets what we

"know" in order to experience, in this case, film, in the here and now, as it immediately

appears and "feels" to us. This "surrender" thereby moves away from typification to a

more complex and richer kind of (contextualised) understanding, creating a space in

which we can look at the plurality of the world/people/things, as well as from the

'Other's' point of view. This then relates to our epistemological interest in the world,

and the moral, political, and aesthetic implications and meanings of this embodied

response, which can, in turn, lead to some kind of action and/or change/transformation. This potential for corporeal reflexivity thus confirms that the body is never merely passive, but has generative potential. Therefore, despite my anxieties concerning the interdisciplinarity of my thesis, of circling around the exterior of well-established modes of philosophical thought in which I am not grounded, and of philosophy's reported bias towards men, I have found that a phenomenological approach to film shares a feminist 'scepticism of all universalising claims,' and thereby helps to do justice to the complexities of the holistic viewing experience (Stanley & Wise 1990: 27).

I have found that for the most part, the meanings that have come from my embodied experience have confirmed what I perceive to be the ideological project of the films, stressing the importance and effectiveness of, as Vivian Sobchack calls it, 'the sensual thickness of lived experience' of film (2004: 187). That is except for a contradictory gaze in Sally Potter's *The Tango Lesson*, which sensually embodies a desiring female (and feminist) look, but ultimately reproduces another exploitative structure by exoticising its 'Latin Lover' object, thereby negating its political and sensual power of subversion. And throughout the Hollywood film *Black Swan*, the affective elements are compromised by the ideological elements, which are themselves contradictory. Therefore, despite my bodily yielding to its sympathetic and multisensory experience of psychosis, its potential to increase embodied and ethical understanding of mental illness is undermined by a long (cinematic) history in which female madness has become paradigmatic of Woman, and has been both aestheticized and fetishized. At the same time, however, the embodied meanings that I take from it resist this ideological framework, as my body reads against the grain of my intellect and the film is *both* a progressive and regressive (ethical and political) experience and representation.

The relationship between film's and viewer's bodies can thus be one of inspiration, imitation, and resistance, and the way that our body reads the film's body is dependent upon its specific gestures (which can be "unconscious" or ambiguous as well as intended), and the response that these gestures provoke, which are themselves dependent upon their context and the viewer's personal history and identity. Therefore, the extent to which our embodied experience of film plays into, confirms, or resists the ideological project of the film is complex and multi-layered, and as Jennifer Barker asserts, it is only '[w]hen viewers and films share certain attitudes, tasks, or situations, they will move in similar ways' (2009: 85). Since one can only "surrender" when there is a two-way relationship of trust, it would be interesting for future research to open out to 'Other' audiences in order to explore how an embodied response intersects with race, class, gender and sexual orientation, potentially deepening an understanding of the relationship between affective and ideological elements. An audience study could provide access to the nuanced (but not unproblematic) insights that can arise from the dialogue between different approaches to film. And whilst no single approach can ever offer any "truths" of meaning, interpretation, or embodiment, because audiences are not a homogenous mass and meaning, interpretation and embodiment will always be situated, multiple and shifting, it would be both an interesting and useful tool in further exploring the depth of embodied participation and response to screendance, its relation to ideology, and its potential to elicit a transformational experience both internally and in relation to our perceptions of the world.

To conclude, whilst I agree with Siegfried Kracauer that film engages the viewer 'physiologically before he is in a position to respond intellectually,' eliciting 'a "resonance effect" provoking in the spectator such kinaesthetic responses as muscular

reflexes, motor impulses, or the like,' I could never focus *solely* upon the meanings that are generated through the body (1997: 158). This is because the body is not simply an issue in phenomenology and epistemology, but also a theoretical location for debates about power and ideology. And as much as I trust in my intuitive bodily response, holistic and ethical meaning has to involve stepping outside of this experience in order to look at it from different perspectives that you don't or can't embody. This is why I keep in play "suspicious" readings of screendance as ideology, and have an abiding interest and respect for traditions in film studies that have, for the past forty years, emphasised the importance of narrative and image as bearers of meaning. A balance between different approaches thus produces a more balanced approach to film and to "knowing."

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Bodas de sangre (Blood Wedding), Carlos Saura. Choreographed by Antonio Gades. Spain. 1981, 71 minutes.

Carmen, Carols Saura. Choreographed by Antonio Gades and Carlos Saura. Spain. 1983, 101 minutes.

Cost of Living, The, Produced by DV8 FILMS and Channel 4. Conceived and dir. Lloyd Newson. UK. 2004, 35 mins.

El Amor Brujo (Love, the Magician), Carols Saura. Choreographed by Antonio Gades and Carlos Saura. Spain. 1986, 103 minutes.

Element, Amy Greenfield. 16mm film, silent. USA. 1973, 11½ minutes.

In the Mirror of Maya Deren, Martina Kudláček. Austria, Czech Republic, Switzerland, and Germany. 2002, 103 minutes.

Lives of Performers, Yvonne Rainer. 16mm, black and white. US. 1972, 90 minutes.

Meshes of the Afternoon, Collaboration by Maya Deren and Alexander Hammid. Score by Teiji Ito added in 1959. US. 1943, 14 minutes.

Outside In, Made by British dance company Can*do*co. Dir., Margaret Williams. Choreographer: Victoria Marks. UK. 1995, 14 mins.

Tango Lesson, The, Sally Potter. UK. 1997, 97 minutes.

Tides, Amy Greenfield. 16 mm film, sound. USA. 1982, 12 minutes.

Water Burns Sun, An Olimpias Disability Culture Production, www.olimpias.org. Choreographer and Dir., Petra Kuppers. US 2009, 7mins 17 seconds.