

Embodied Spectatorship: Phenomenological Turn in Contemporary
Film Theory

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Abstract

Since the early 1990s, film theorists have been particularly interested in the studies of film experience and relations between viewers and films. In contrast to the classical and post-1960s film studies of spectatorship, recent film theory has made a substantial contribution to the development of phenomenological perspectives on the film viewing, engaging concepts, and methods rooted in the philosophies of Edmund Husserl and Maurice Merleau-Ponty. The phenomenological endeavor has served as an alternative epistemological paradigm competing with established theoretical approaches to questions about how to study the film experience and what constitutes the nature of film spectatorship. This paradigm marks a shift from thinking of the viewer as an ideal, abstract subject to thinking of him/her as an embodied, material agent whose existence represents the integral whole with the film and the world as such. While acknowledging the diversity and hybridity of film phenomenology, this thesis focuses on the sociocultural, heuristic and philosophical foundations underlying the entire phenomenological project in contemporary film studies. It examines film phenomenology not as a complete “Grand” theory of film experience but as a specific methodology and model of philosophizing, which challenge ocularcentrism, rationalism, the body-mind and the subject-object dichotomies of the previous film theories and Western epistemologies in general. By investigating the intellectual heritage of philosophical phenomenology and such basic phenomenological notions as experience, intentionality, reduction, and description, this study aims to delineate and clarify the fundamental strategies employed by film phenomenology in the exploration of cinematic experience. The emphasis on these strategies and central assumptions of film phenomenology is motivated by the desire to uncover the cultural and research potential of the phenomenological project which often seems to be obscure and ambiguous, and for this reason irrelevant.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

The advent of digital technologies, changes in viewing practices, and formation of alternative models of film distribution have encouraged film scholars to turn to the critical reexamination of the major ontological and aesthetic theories of cinema. Based on concerns about medium specificity, mostly elitist concepts of art, and predetermined models of spectatorship, these theories have seemed insufficient to explain ongoing cultural processes. In dialogue with them, such crucial questions of the current debates on film as “What distinguishes digital cinema from traditional cinema?” or “Does cinema still exist in the digital era?” have been formulated.

In answering these questions, there is plenty of disagreement revealing the contradictions and anxieties of contemporary film theory. While acknowledging some similarities between photographic cinema and digital cinema, the scholars defending the medium-specificity thesis tend to consider digital cinema as a radically new medium (Gaut, 2010; Mitchell, 1992; Mulvey, 2006). For them, the indexical connection between original and its image is what characterizes traditional mechanically generated cinema. At the same time, a digital image generated by a bitmap or “mathematical representation” (Gaut 14) represents the fundamental dissociation from physical reality. Thus, Laura Mulvey, for whom “the end of cinema” is apparent, writes, “the digital, as an abstract information system, made a break with analogue imagery, finally sweeping away the relation with reality, which had, by and large, dominated the photographic tradition” (Death 24x a Second 18). Berys Gaut also refers to the crisis of the indexical and identifies the unique properties of digital cinema, among them the possibility of easy, direct manipulation without degradation, limited amount of information within the digital image, absence of film grain, colour differences and other specific aesthetic features produced by the material basis of

photochemical film, and most importantly, interactivity (17-18). Arguing that “we have entered the age of electrobricollage,” William J. Mitchell points out that mutability and manipulation are crucial for digital cinema (6). For him, even though the reworking of photographic images is possible, it is always difficult and recognizable. Digital cinema, in turn, due to its ontological slipperiness, absolutizes the transformation and appropriates it as an inherent quality.

These attempts to define what makes digital cinema a new medium different from the film medium, however, do not seem to be unproblematic for the scholars who regard the advent of digital cinema as a challenge to the established assumptions about the nature of film, film production and consumption. The digital technologies, especially when they converge with traditional film, shed light on the complexity of the identity and history of cinema. Watching an “old” movie on DVD or online, we deal with the previously overshadowed paradoxes of indexicality and technological basis of cinema.

First, it becomes evident that, as Tom Gunning suggests, the indexical and the digital do not exclude each other, whereas the indexical and the photographic are not equivalent (24). To support this claim, he refers to the example of digital passport photograph to show that numerical data can be linked to reality. Another example is various instruments of measurement (medical devices, barometer, etc.) which demonstrate that indexicality can be expressed not through the photographic but numbers. Gunning concludes that “the apparatus, in itself, can neither lie nor tell the truth” (28). To identify an image as “true” or transformed, we rely on our knowledge and experience. In this regard, Gerald Mast notes that “Our sense of conviction is perhaps the most individual and personal response we make to a mimetic work and it differs considerably even among those of equal experience, knowledge, and refinement” (52).

Second, the rise of digital cinema has drawn attention to the issues of technological stability and transparency of the film medium, on the one hand, and its photographic nature, on the other. The introduction and ceaseless development of sound, color technologies, screen and other innovations characterize cinema as a medium which always exists in a state of transition and resists an essentialist approach. Due to its technological uncertainty, cinema has features that are supposed to be characteristic of other media forms. In the context of debates on digitalization, it is noted that the capacity to directly transform and remediate attributed to digital cinema can be found in analogue cinema which manipulates through exposure rate, lenses, etc. Also, as Anne Friedberg points out, interactivity and modes of digital spectatorship can be traced back to such pre-digital analogue technologies as the video cassette recorder, the remote control, and the cable television (440). In the digital epoch, the very idea that cinema descends from photography is put into question. The photographic film is considered as one of the possibilities of cinema also rooted in animation. Likewise, digital cinema can be treated as a kind of cinema, a realization of its hidden potential but not as a radical divergence from film. In this regard, Lev Manovich underscores that digital cinema is a restoration of the cinematic practice marginalized by institutions in the twentieth century and new media as such represent a return of “the repressed of the cinema” (192). Domietta Torlasco refers to digital cinema as an archival medium that reconceptualizes the history of traditional cinema and clears the path for “the discovery (never to be exhaustive) of its [film’s] multiple, conflicting, hardly lived pasts” (ix).

Undoubtedly, new technologies offer us something that was suppressed or unrealized by other cinematic forms and institutions. However, antiessentialist scholars suggest, the emphasis on technology and comparative analysis of photographic and digital apparatuses may lead to the construction of universalized totalities and imposing of misconceptions on the history of cinema

and audiences. The role of both traditional film and digital cinema cannot be reduced to their technological basis but needs to be explored through the prism of analysis of how we interact with them. In this light, the former and contemporary cinemas represent the viewing practices shaped and guided not only by technology but also by bodily involvement, knowledges, cultural and social conventions. Francesco Casetti underscores that today it is of particular importance to understand that “what identifies a medium is first and foremost a mode of seeing, feeling, reflecting, and reacting, no longer necessarily tied to a single ‘machine’” (5). Thus, the focus of film studies and film theory must be significantly expanded on the viewer’s experience and relation to film.

This shift from thinking of cinema as a medium that possesses certain generic properties to thinking of it as a specific kind of experience marks an important transition from ontology to phenomenology of cinema. Even though the issue of analogue/digital spectatorship is beyond the scope of this work, I should underscore that the increase of attention to the experience of media and decline of ontological projects was stimulated by the sensuous reorganization generated by the digital revolution. While characterizing the digital experience, Casetti identify such its crucial features as relocation of the viewer to the previously unknown territories due to new devices and platforms (the Internet, television, smartphone, etc.), the desire to recuperate the connection with film through its relics or fragments (DVDs, TV programs, video games, etc.) resulting in a return of cinephilia, reconstruction of an imagined audience and other “lost” or weak components of traditional film experience, engagement with diverse discourses due to expansion and transmedial logic of cinema, regime of display rather than of screen, and switch from “attending” traditional spectatorship to performance, which means that the viewer becomes an active, visible participant of the process of film exhibition, production and distribution. Casetti concludes that

contemporary media environment allows film to conserve its “authenticity,” but what has changed is an experiential environment and “system of sensations” accompanying cinema.

Gunning agrees with this argument and expresses one of the key premises of contemporary film theory by stating that “It is only by a phenomenological investigation of our investment in the photographic image (digital or otherwise obtained) that I think we can truly grasp the drive behind digitalization . . .” (32). The rise of phenomenological project, thus, has been motivated by the technological transformations which have challenged our knowledge about cinema, its past, and our interaction with it in particular. The phenomenological studies of film have been considered as a contribution to a more sophisticated philosophical understanding of cinema through the concept of experience and as a proper paradigm to reconsider conventional film ontologies in the epoch of digital technologies.

Meanwhile, the attention toward the category of experience as such was symptomatic for the fundamental epistemological revolution in humanities in the 1980s. This revolution marked the definitive collapse of the Western “politics of reason” and the transition from the dominance of a rational mode of exploration of the world to an acceptance of the non-linguistic, experiential and personal connection with it. In this regard, the fact that since the 1990s phenomenology has been one of the leading frameworks for understanding film and spectatorship does not seem to be conditioned exclusively by the technological changes. Film phenomenology grew out of the impulse to explain the lived experience of our interaction with the world by focusing on the complexity and diversity of the modes of this interaction.

While talking about the phenomenological paradigm in film theory, I should note that this concept can be used in two senses. In a broad sense, it refers to receptionist media studies in general and can be applied to a vast range of approaches focusing on the issues of spectatorship.

For instance, the sociological and historical approach of audience research or the cognitive film theory based on neuroscience and perceptive psychology and focusing on the viewer's mental and physiological processes are all in fact a part of film phenomenology.

In a narrow and more accurate sense, however, film phenomenology encompasses the philosophical study of cinematic experience, engaging theories rooted in Edmund Husserl's phenomenology of the lived-body and Maurice Merleau-Ponty's existential phenomenology. Here, by phenomenology I mean a specific theoretical and methodological program which focuses on "*what we directly experience*" and on "the objects of our experience before we start thinking about them, interpreting them or attributing any meaning to them" (Crotty 79). The phenomenological requirement to study the film experience in its immediacy and directedness implies focus on the existential situatedness of the viewer within the material, embodied world where film is not a set of pre-given meanings and physiological stimuli but an essential component of physical reality. By following a phenomenological philosophy, film phenomenologists, such as Vivian Sobchack, Laura U. Marks, Jennifer Barker, Jane Stadler and others have restated the very notion of cinematic experience. Criticizing classical film theory and the post-1960s theories inspired by psychoanalytic, semiotic, and cognitive approaches for ocularcentrism, determinism, and ahistoricism, the scholars consider film viewing as "a dialogic exchange between viewing subjects [spectator and film itself] who share the finite and situated conditions of objective embodiment and also share their uniquely and finite existence in a common, if contested, cultural world" (Sobchack 307).

The assertion of spectatorship as embodied and, at the same time, culturally situated experience has overcome the orthodox Western division between body and mind, on the one hand, and body and culture, on the other. It has provided a platform for constructing theories of

embodied vision with focus on the haptic, kinesthetic, visceral involvement of spectator. Moreover, the influential characterization of the film experience as a “dialogic exchange,” contact between human and cinematic bodies has brought into being theories of *embodied visuality*, that is based on the ability of film to signify “through its materiality” (Marks xi) and through materiality of the spectator’s body as well.

The elaboration of these theories in the 1990s and their complete legitimization in the 2000s is what I call “phenomenological turn” in film theory within the scope of this work. If we want to understand the institutional processes and epistemological trends which characterize the development of contemporary film studies, it is important to pay attention to this influential paradigm shift toward the embodied film viewing as the existential experience of material integrity with the world and film.

As of today, there are no separate studies which would thoroughly analyze the factors and the academic and cultural contribution of the phenomenological turn in film theory. Its origins and place within film studies remains generally unexplored. In addition, the philosophical foundations of phenomenological film theory are still obscure. On the one hand, it deals with the fact that phenomenology itself represents a complex, multidimensional philosophical tradition. Such different philosophical systems as transcendental phenomenology of Edmund Husserl, theory of *Dasein* of Martin Heidegger, existential phenomenology by Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Jean-Paul Sartre, Emmanuel Levinas, Hanna Arendt, etc., and poststructuralist critique constitute the diversity of the phenomenological current and demonstrate the variety of phenomenological approaches to the understanding of subjectivity, objectivity, body, matter, and culture. The fact that philosophy is often ignored in film studies prevents film scholars and students from understanding how these phenomenologies can inform film theory and be applied in practice. On

the other hand, phenomenological film theory is not a single movement either. As Jenny Chamarette suggests, it would be more pertinent to talk about film phenomenologies which are “hybrid, flexible, lucid, pliable approaches” (“Embodied Worlds” 293). The diversity of film phenomenology makes its conceptual apparatus and methodological models obscure, which leads, in turn, to the marginalization of film phenomenology, misrepresentation of its intentions, and nonreflexive scholarship. Despite the hybridity, there are fundamental assumptions which can be attributed to the entire project of film phenomenology and used as guiding intuitions in the phenomenological study of film.

Thus, we find ourselves in a paradoxical situation. Today phenomenology is one of the leading perspectives in the studies of film spectatorship and a promising alternative to the disembodied approaches formed within the Western, Cartesian line of thinking. Nevertheless, the philosophical basics and strategies of film phenomenology as a research project seem to be unclear and used randomly. Likewise, we are not familiar with the cultural and institutional mechanisms underlying the phenomenological turn and authority of film phenomenology today.

This thesis centers on these two problems and aims to examine both cultural and theoretical framework of the phenomenological turn in film studies. Thus, the **goal** of this work is to provide a deeper account of how the general cultural conditions and philosophical schemas inform film phenomenology and determine its place within the contemporary film theory.

The above goal will be accomplished by fulfilling the following **research objectives**.

First, I will examine the fundamental epistemological and sociocultural origins of the phenomenological turn in film studies. I will consider how this paradigm relates to previous film theory and general philosophical thought. While acknowledging that models of academic cognition and cultural context are interconnected, I will attempt to explain how the rise of film

phenomenology has been shaped and determined by some specific historical processes. My task here is not to offer a comprehensive historical analysis but to delineate the fundamental trends underlying the turn to the body and experience in film and media scholarship.

Second, I will try to analyze the major philosophical traditions of phenomenology and such basic concepts as experience, intentionality, phenomenological reduction, and phenomenological description. I will clarify how philosophical phenomenology has influenced on both classical and contemporary film theory.

Finally, I will focus on how philosophical phenomenology reveals itself within film theory itself. By analyzing film phenomenology as a dialectic of the embodied seeing and the seen, I hope to summarize the most fundamental philosophical foundations of this research paradigm.

My endeavor to examine film phenomenology as an institutional phenomenon corresponding with the contemporary cultural tendencies and as a specific program based on common philosophical and heuristic assumptions has **epistemological, pedagogical, and ethical value.**

First, by analyzing the cultural agenda and theoretical approaches of film phenomenology, we can better understand and therefore overcome the limitations of a hierarchical concept of senses and ocularcentric paradigm prevailed in classical and post-classical film theory and Western philosophical thought in general. In addition, this research may help us develop greater insights into spectatorship in the digital age and elaborate phenomenological perspective on such bodily technologies as interactive movie screens, 4D cinema, film networking, digital sound systems, etc. While knowing how phenomenological model of research works and reflects the reinventing of the spectator's body, we also can trace

the transformation of spectatorship through time and clarify how contemporary film viewing existentially and culturally relates to experience of cinema in the past.

Second, the analysis of the fundamental concepts and methodological models of film phenomenology may encourage students and scholars to develop strategies for the articulation of their own cinematic experience. By looking at how phenomenologically inclined theorists reflect on their own film experience and personal bodily engagement with film, we have an opportunity to work out the tactics for an alternative type of empirical researches based on reflective, non-abstract awareness of our own presence. Generation of the phenomenological narrative is one of the ways to produce sources for an elaboration of new perspectives in both theoretical and historical studies, and film criticism. Phenomenological descriptions of sensuous, bodily involvement with film may be useful for understanding how films work, communicate meaning and can be appropriated by viewers. They also can serve as a source for comparative analysis of experiential connection with different types of media, which may shed light on the role and functions of these media, transmedial connections, and their historical transformations. In historical studies, despite the fact that the contemporary viewer's experiences of such cinematic forms as, for example, a photochemical silent film or film on videotape are significantly different from those of the past audiences, emphasis on articulation of immediate, corporeal experience through the simple language can reduce the historical gap. For the pedagogical purposes, however, it is more important that such kind of phenomenological activities allows rediscovering the very idea of the historical gap and the ways we construct the past of media in our classroom and research practices. Equally, the introduction of phenomenology helps to switch attention from the focus on production of theoretical knowledge about media to the ways how we produce this knowledge, what components of real experience we suppress or, on the contrary, foreground,

and why we do it. In this regard, phenomenology as a pedagogical tool is important in terms of formation of the high level of self-reflexivity. In addition, based on special linguistic operations, experimental phenomenology provides us with an opportunity to develop new approaches to talking about film and expressing a personal position. The phenomenological language seems to be productive not only for deepening the skills necessary in film criticism but also for the promotion of a non-conventional form of film criticism. This type of film criticism would be grounded in comprehension of a film as a physical phenomenon rather than merely a text or aesthetic object.

Third, and finally, the investigation of the institutional and theoretical basics of film phenomenology is directed at the understanding of how critical deconstruction of Western logocentrism rest on the hierarchical concepts of race, gender, and class is possible. Film phenomenology is one of the alternatives to the bodily politics of the Western culture which tends to suppress the body by associating it with the ideas about savagism, femininity and lower-class origin, on the one hand, and to exclude the perspective of some social groups by connecting it with irrational, bodily mode of existence, on the other. Phenomenology rediscovers the corporeality as a general and necessary property of human being but not as a marker of “good” or “bad” social subject. Meanwhile, it also rejects the essentialist definition of the body and acknowledges the variability and flexibility of experiences. Phenomenology does not aim to conceptualize the different types of corporeal regimes but as a specific practical directive emphasizes that a subject articulating his/her experience needs to reflect on its specificity, connection with the concrete cultural environment and personal fate. In this regard, the phenomenological project is also a rediscovery of the subject and its intimate being within the physical and cultural world. In this regard, it would be important to say that this perspective does

not lead to solipsism. On the contrary, another ethical meaning of the phenomenological project consists in the restoration of links between the subject and the external world due to focus on tangible, experiential materiality of their relations. Equally, film phenomenology intends to reconstruct the relationship between the viewer and cinema in their physical interdependence and integrity. At the same time, phenomenology, as well as the study of the phenomenological program, are not free from ethical pitfalls. As I show it in my work, the phenomenological turn in film theory coincided with the formation of new bodily ideologies shaped by demands of the advanced capitalism. It poses a question about the influence of economics on the moral responsibility of a phenomenologist. Also, even though I do not address this issue specifically, I should note that the tendency to associate phenomenology as a philosophical movement and approach in film theory exclusively with the Western authors seems problematic. Of course, it would be a mistake to consider the Western scholars as necessarily providing the Eurocentric perspective. However, their attachment to the Western philosophical traditions and canons should be taken into account in the future researches. I must acknowledge that, since my work is an introductory study, it relies on the dominant, canonical phenomenological philosophies and brackets the suppressed Islamic, Eastern European, Latin American and other alternative currents of phenomenological thought. Nevertheless, this limitation of my thesis reveals the possible principles film and media scholars can work out to employ in their own sensuous research.

The **primary sources** of this thesis can be divided into three groups: (1) the major classical and post-classical theoretical works which deal with the issues of (dis)embodied film experience and/or embodied nature of the film medium; (2) the texts written by film phenomenologists during the 1990s and 2000s; and (3) philosophical works on phenomenology.

I refer to the fundamental theoretical texts of the pre-1960s and contemporary film theory to identify the differences of phenomenological approach to the film experience as opposed to other well-entrenched perspectives to the investigation of this topic. I examine the persistence of ocularcentric paradigm and idea of disembodied vision in such works as Hugo Münsterberg's *The Photoplay: A Psychological Study*, Rudolf Arnheim's *Film as Art*, Béla Balázs' *Theory of The Film*, Dziga Vertov's manifesto "Kinoks: A Revolution," Walter Benjamin's "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility," Jean-Louis Baudry's "Ideological Effects of The Basic Cinematographic Apparatus," Christian Metz's *The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and the Cinema*, Laura Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," etc. At the same time, I consider Stanley Cavell's ontology of film and Gilles Deleuze's theory as conceptions which demonstrate closeness to phenomenology but refuse to promote the radical materialism characterizing the theories of the phenomenological turn of the last decades.

The second group of primary sources plays the crucial role for this thesis. I analyze them in the context of conventional division of phenomenology into transcendental and existential movements. Thus, Allan Casebier's *Film and Phenomenology. Toward a Realist Theory of Cinematic Representation* is analyzed as a work representing the transcendental approach to film experience. This approach has not received significant attention within the phenomenological turn in film theory and Casebier's research still remains the only text offering detailed conception of this paradigm in film phenomenology. For this reason, I focus on the works influenced by Merleau-Ponty's existential phenomenology of embodiment. Vivian Sobchack's pioneering *The Address of the Eye: A Phenomenology of Film Experience* and collection of essays *Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture* are the most essential texts in this regard. It is difficult to overestimate the importance of these works to contemporary film

phenomenology. Sobchack's concepts of the dialogic film experience, subject-object structure of film viewing, and cinematic body constitute the basics of this theoretical movement and seem to govern all phenomenological theories of embodied spectatorship. I also focus on the works *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses* and *Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media* by Laura U. Marks and *The Tactile Eye: Touch and the Cinematic Experience* by Jennifer M. Barker. They offer an insightful phenomenological perspective on the embodied spectatorship and materiality of film and formulate the influential ideas about tactility of vision and haptic visuality. In addition, I analyze how the fundamental theoretical assumptions of film phenomenology are discussed in Jenny Chamarette's *Phenomenology and the Future of Film: Rethinking Subjectivity Beyond French Cinema*, Jane Stadler's *Pulling Focus: Intersubjective Experience, Narrative Film, and Ethics*, and Malin Wahlberg's *Documentary Time: Film and Phenomenology*. Finally, I use such articles as Nicholas Chare and Liz Watkins' "The Matter of Film: *Decasia* and *Lyrical Nitrate*," Alex Cobb's "Cinema of Pre-predication: On Stan Brakhage and the Phenomenology of Maurice Merleau-Ponty," Elena Del Rio's "Alchemies of Thought in Godard's Cinema: Deleuze and Merleau-Ponty" and "The Body of Voyeurism: Mapping a Discourse of the Senses in Michael Powell's *Peeping Tom*" to demonstrate how film phenomenology can appeal to specific model of semiotic research where signification and embodiment, sign and body function as a unity.

The third group of primary sources is presented by the philosophical texts which elaborate concepts and methods of general phenomenology. By paying attention to the works, I hope to summarize and clarify such important notions as intentionality, phenomenological reduction, phenomenological description, and embodiment. Although these complex notions are actively applied by contemporary film phenomenologists, their meaning are often problematic

and obscure. Wilhelm Dilthey's "Fragments for a Poetics," Edmund Husserl's *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology* and *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*, and Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception* and *The Visible and the Invisible* are those that most fully illuminate the phenomenological terminological apparatus and essence of phenomenology as such.

While talking about the **secondary sources** of this research, it is important to point out that many of texts written by film phenomenologists not only elaborate the basics of film phenomenology and exemplify phenomenological studies but also offer a cultural and theoretical critique of the phenomenological turn as such. For instance, in her works, Sobchack analyzes the state of film academia to justify the necessity of phenomenological approach. Marks, in turn, explains how the new media technologies and proliferation of intercultural modes of artistic expression are associated with the rise of experiential studies. And Wahlberg delineates the epistemological foundations of the phenomenological turn. In this context, the works of those authors who are considered to be film phenomenologists can also be applied as secondary sources which help us realize the role and determinants of contemporary phenomenological film studies.

The valuable sources which discuss the problems of film phenomenology within film studies are Thomas Elsaesser and Malte Hagener's *Film Theory: An Introduction Through the Senses*, Daniel Frampton's *Filmosophy*, Steven Shaviro's *Cinematic Body*, Paul Stoller's *Sensuous Scholarship*, Dudley Andrew's article "The Neglected Tradition of Phenomenology in Film Theory," and Chamarette's "Embodied Worlds and Situated Bodies: Feminism, Phenomenology, Film Theory." These works not only summarize the main theoretical assumptions underlying the phenomenological concepts of sensuous spectatorship and bodily

representation but also offer a deep insight into the influence of culture, institutions, and philosophy on the phenomenological ideas.

I pay special attention to the sources dealing with the sociocultural aspects of transformation of experience and practices of film viewing. They are Emily Martin's "The End of the Body?", Tom Gunning's "Tracing the Individual Body: Photography, Detectives, and Early Cinema," Ben Singer's "Modernity, Hyperstimulus, and the Rise of Popular Sensationalism," Linda Williams' "Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess," Mary Ann Doane's *The Emergence of Cinematic Time: Modernity, Contingency, the Archive*, and Francesco Casetti's *The Lumière Galaxy: Seven Key Words For the Cinema To Come*. The authors of these texts are concerned with the questions of how the new economic, political and media environment of the twentieth and twenty first centuries influences the existential being of a human and his/her experience of social and artistic life. By following the conclusions made in these works, I will try to contextualize the phenomenological turn and to explain what tendencies of contemporary life have determined the establishment of film phenomenology.

Finally, I turn to David R. Cerbone's book *Understanding Phenomenology* and Don Ihde's *Experimental Phenomenology* addressing the history, philosophical transformations, and methodology of phenomenology. These sources deal with the role of phenomenology in humanities, its advantages as a research program, and pitfalls of phenomenological research.

In my research, I follow such **methods** as conceptual analysis, comparative method, and discursive analysis. This thesis is a study based on general philosophical examination of the conceptual and methodological specificity of film phenomenology. I analyze the key theoretical assumptions employed by the phenomenological paradigm and consider how they shed light on the complex dynamics of film experience and ontology of film. By applying comparative

method, I consider the relationship between film phenomenology and the major film theories, on the one hand, and between film phenomenology and phenomenological philosophy, on the other. Meanwhile, the basic discursive analysis allows me to identify the cultural phenomena and practices through which film phenomenology has been constructed.

The **organization** of this thesis corresponds to the research objectives formulated above. The thesis will be divided into three main chapters.

Following this introductory chapter is Chapter 2, “Phenomenological Turn in Film Theory: Epistemological and Sociocultural Origins”, which presents background examination of film phenomenology as a specific epistemological program and institutional phenomenon produced by cultural and political changes. In this chapter, I will consider how film phenomenology challenges some of the central trajectories of the previous film theory based on ocularcentrism, logocentrism, linguistic analogy, and subject-object dichotomy. That is, I will describe film phenomenology as a counter-epistemology to epistemological assumptions of film studies. I will also explain how the project of film phenomenology has been influenced by transformations of media environment and new economic and political programs rooted in clashes of cultures of modernity and postmodernity.

Chapter 3, “Phenomenology as a Research Project of Film Theory: Basic Philosophical Concepts and Methodology,” describes the conceptual and methodological connections between film phenomenology and phenomenology as philosophy. In this chapter, I will analyze the fundamental concepts of general phenomenological research by focusing on how they are appropriated by film phenomenologists. I will also deal with the differences between the essential movements of Husserl’s transcendental and Merleau-Ponty’s existential

phenomenologies and explain how these two paradigms inform film theory on general philosophical level.

In Chapter 4, “Film Phenomenology as the Dialectic of the Seeing and the Seen,” I am concerned with the guiding and constitutive formula of phenomenological theory of film – the thesis about the reversibility of cinematic perception and expression due to embodied existence of the spectator and material situatedness of the film medium. I will summarize and clarify the central arguments which support this thesis. I will also discuss how the concept of dialectic of perception and expression creates the possibility for semiotic phenomenology as a unique approach to film analysis.

With the basic cultural and epistemological origins of the phenomenological turn identified, and the theoretical foundations of film phenomenology clarified, I will move on to the concluding chapter where I will summarize the main findings of this thesis and explore possibilities for future research.

Chapter 2. Phenomenological Turn in Film Theory: Epistemological and Sociocultural

Origins

Academic interest in phenomenology and formation of embodied film theory on its base paved the way in the United States in the 1990s. The publication of a seminal issue “Phenomenology in Film and Television” by the *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* in 1990, Casebier’s *Phenomenology and Film* in 1991, and Sobchack’s *The Address of the Eye* in 1992 led to a great deal of discussion of the film experience and its corporeal dimensions among film and media scholars. Film phenomenology as an alternative theoretical and interpretative program attracted even more attention in the 2000s and eventually proved to be not only epistemological but also political and ethical project which reformulated agenda of apparatus theory, psychoanalytic theory and other important theoretical systems in film studies.

Referring to the critical gap between actual cinematic experience and existent film theories which aim to explain it, film phenomenology marks a decisive departure from the accepted paradigm of film scholarship. In the view of film phenomenologists, this paradigm is mostly based on the application of ready-made explanatory models to the nature of film experience and tends to suppress the lived event of film viewing as such. In addition, determined by the logocentric tradition of Western philosophy and its sensory hierarchy, it disregards the active role of our bodies. That is, it disregards, as Sobchack notes, the “essential *premises* of our being in the world” (“Is Any Body Home?” 182). This heuristic insufficiency of film theory, meanwhile, coincides with general tendency in contemporary culture in which “our bodies have become increasingly distanced and alienated, increasingly viewed as “resources,” and increasingly lived as “things” to be seen, managed, and mastered” (Sobchack, “Is Any Body Home?” 182). Cultural violence toward the living bodies is another concern of film

phenomenology that considers the carnal alienation as a strategy of discrimination and oppression.

Given that phenomenology has been established as a counter-epistemology in relation to dominant heuristic models in film studies, on the one hand, and as a political practice, on the other, it is important to analyze the origins of this theoretical movement within both academic discourse of film studies and sociocultural context. In this chapter, I will compare the phenomenological approach and basic lines of the classical and post-1960s film theory. I will focus on a general phenomenological critique of such widely accepted theoretical assumptions as ocularcentrism, logocentrism, linguistic analogy, subject-object dichotomy, and ahistoricism. I will also examine the general cultural conditions that influenced the phenomenological turn in film theory. In this regard, I am concerned with transformations of media environment and economic and political dynamics of modernity and postmodernity.

1. Film Phenomenology as Epistemological Project

The special status of the phenomenological theory as a new agenda of film studies, first of all, has to do with its refusal to follow the ocularcentric paradigm of the classical and post-1960s theory. Gillian Rose defines ocularcentrism, or “scopic regime,” as a worldview that “equates seeing with knowledge” and emphasizes the seeing as the most important of all senses (3). The centrality of vision in the interpretation of both the film medium and the film experience used to be taken for granted by critics and scholars and to shape film theory since its very beginning. In the 1910s and 1920s, cinema was characterized exclusively as a technology that revealed itself as the “appearance” of life (Canudo 62) or a “series of visual impressions” (Munsterberg 61).

The essentialist-oriented theorists saw the specificity of cinema in its capacity to transform our natural perception. Rudolf Arnheim, for instance, considers the reduction of depth, lighting, the delimitation of the screen, and the absence of color as factors that allow us to digress from the everyday perceptive experience and in doing so to serve as a guarantee of the artistic potential of film (*Film as Art*). Similarly, Béla Balázs recognizes revolutionary importance of cinema while referring to the fact that film “showed not other things but the same things shown in a different way” and made it possible to identify with cinematic subjects due to the situation when “we see what they see and see it as they see it” (48). Walter Benjamin, in turn, celebrates the “optical unconscious” which was discovered through cinematic “accentuation of hidden details in familiar objects” (37). The Russian formalists proclaim cinema to be a visual language based on operation with “visual notions” (Eichenbaum 61) while such Soviet theorist and filmmaker as Dziga Vertov insists on “the use of the camera as a kino-eye, more perfect than the human eye, for the exploration of the chaos of visual phenomena that fills space” (14-15).

Thomas Elsaesser and Malte Hagener point out that the ocularcentrism of film theory became even more pervasive in the 1960s and 1970s when “apparatus theory transported the seeing humans into Plato’s cave, whereas feminist film theory was governed for a long time by key words and phrases such as voyeurism, fetishism, exhibitionism and the male gaze” (109). In his theory of cinematographic apparatus, Jean-Louis Baudry states that cinema activates vision of a transcendental subject, that is, a regime of disembodied, idealized, abstract vision. By describing the spectatorial position, he writes: “And if the eye is no longer fettered by a body, by the laws of matter and time, if there are no longer any assignable limits to its displacement – conditions fulfilled by the possibilities of shooting and of film – the world will not only be constituted by this eye but for it” (537). Thus, Baudry emphasizes not only the central role of the

eye in the film experience but also constructs his theory of ideological affect through the prism of the belief that vision is what constitutes the subject and determines our relations with the world. Although Christian Metz is more conscious about various dimensions of cinematic perception and treats, for example, hearing as a crucial component of the cinematic experience, he still insists that “passion for seeing” establishes the nature of film viewing that is a mirror-like communication with the immaterial (51-52). Meanwhile, Mulvey, despite her attempt to specify the film experience in terms of male and female bodies, launched the entire tradition of feminist criticism focusing on the gendered split of “pleasure in looking” (“Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” 19).

Contemporary film phenomenology acknowledges that it would be naïve to deny the importance of vision in our experience of cinema. In this light, it criticizes the previous film theories not precisely for the privileging of the eye but for the epistemological assumptions and procedures this ocularcentric position implies. What Sobchack emphasizes in this regard is that the dominant film theories “relate directly to the screen rectangle and to the film as a static *viewed object*, and only indirectly to the dynamic activity of viewing that is engaged in by both the film and the spectator, each as *viewing subjects*” (The Address of the Eye 15). That is, the ocularcentric paradigm suggests the dissociation of the viewer and the viewed and suppresses the issue of mutual, dialectic exchange between them. One should add that in film theory this dissociation, in fact, means disengagement from the material world. As such, vision here holds no interest and functions as a means of cognitive, conscious/unconscious activity that occurs exclusively inside the viewer.

The separation of the audience and the film complies with the classical rationalist separation of subject and object and with the belief that the distance represents a necessary

condition for cognition. Thus, the heritage of Western epistemology and Western aesthetics, where the first proclaims the distance senses to be “vehicles of knowledge” and the latter looks at vision and hearing as “vehicles of beauty,” becomes the primary object of phenomenological critique (Marks, “Thinking Multisensory Culture” 144). For phenomenologists, the dominance of the eye in film theory becomes merely an expression of the authority of this heritage and impulse of the intellectual habit that should be critically reevaluated today.

Why does the alienation of subject from object seem to be an inadequate epistemological predisposition according to film phenomenology? The emphasis on the necessity to distinguish between the subject and the object and at the same time from the world results in the delegitimization of the very category of experience and makes the problem of experience irrelevant for understanding both film viewing and film medium. This stance leads us to believe that we comprehend and respond to film only metaphysically or cognitively. Also, the film itself is deprived of its physical qualities and becomes immaterial essence, a set of codes, signs or stimuli. And the act of film viewing is transferred to the sphere of the intelligible.

The subject-object alienation in the analysis of spectatorship and cinematic medium exposes the ubiquitous dichotomy of reason and experience. The constant confrontation of idealist and materialist epistemologies marks this dichotomy and at the same time demonstrates its contradictions. The dominant approaches to the interpretation of experience were formed in ancient Greek philosophy by Plato and Aristotle. Whereas Plato treats the experience as a false knowledge based on the trust and acceptance of visibilities, Aristotle makes experience a central principle and condition of knowledge. Both philosophers consider experience as a sensory, corporeal access to the world via perception, tactility, smell, hearing, etc.

Later, this tradition was continued and consolidated by René Descartes and Francis Bacon. Descartes, who doesn't make a distinction between experience and dream, insists that only the fact of thinking and our awareness of thinking results in knowledge. By following Aristotle, Bacon, in turn, questions the very possibility of knowledge without experience and observations. For him, it is only experience which allows us to get information about the world and can be a foundation of truth and science.

What is startling in these debates is that even if philosophers such as Aristotle or empiricist Bacon admit experience, they see it as an instrument for generation of knowledge by reason. The experience itself, for them, cannot produce knowledge and plays a supplementary role in human life. Unlike reason, experience fails to systematize, organize, or generalize, that is to complete the procedures that constitute knowledge. Thus, the main contradiction here is that there is no principal difference between idealist and materialist epistemologies – both philosophical movements tend to suppress experience.

Most of the leading film theories are inspired by these epistemologies and regard the film viewing as an activity of consciousness/unconsciousness whereas the corporeal, enworlded experience remains concealed. The rationalization of the film experience in the dominant film theory, according to Steven Shaviro, is a demonstration of the persistent anxiety of the Western culture in response to affect as such and affect engendered by visual forms. He concludes that “Film theory endeavors to subdue and regulate the visual, to destroy the power of images, or at least to restrain them within the bounds of linguistic discursivity and patriarchal Law” (Shaviro 29). In this regard, the ocularcentric division “the viewer/the film” and concept of vision as a disembodied sense connected to consciousness seem to be culturally informed strategies allowing to restrain the disturbing in its irrationality presence of experience.

The accepted epistemologies of film theory alleviate this anxiety through the dematerialization, disembodiment of both film and film viewing. The language here becomes an ideal model for the procedure of rationalization. It plays an essential role as a tool of explanation and serves as a prototype of interaction between the audience and cinema. Film viewing is considered as an encounter with a semiotic system where abstract, arbitrary entities of signs dictate our relationship with the image. Meanwhile, language is what can be seen as opposition to experience at the ontological level. “We have language in order not to have experience” (11), Franklin K. Ankersmit writes. For him, language is the symbolic matrix, the “shield” against the world as given us in experience. Experience “exceeds concepts and even language itself” and serves as “a marker for what is so ineffable and individual (or specific to a particular group) that it cannot be rendered in conventionally communicative terms” (Ankersmit 5).

Language understood in the Saussurean sense is a socially constructed set of rigorous norms and rules of using symbols for communication. It is always a pre-established knowledge, unlike speech that is situational and can defy normative structures. Thus, the analogy between language and film, which has remained extremely influential in the entire development of film theory, presupposes that we receive knowledge from film and construct meaning on its base. This analogy disregards experiential, non-symbolic knowledge born through the material interaction between the human body and film. The persistence of linguistic models of film theories is one of the primary objects of phenomenological critique. As Sobchack notes, “part of the appeal of phenomenology lies in its potential for opening up and destabilizing language in the very process of its description of the phenomena of experience” (*The Address of the Eye* xviii).

The isolation of the subject and rationalization of film experience are insufficient epistemological strategies for film phenomenology not only because these assumptions obscure the real situation of film viewing through the split of mind and body. Their inadequacy also deals with the fact that they, on the one hand, disregard reflexive awareness of the theorist's position and, on the other, lead to ahistorical and acultural perspective in an analysis.

Applied to the interpretation of the film experience and ontology of film, the rationalist predispositions are equally influential in a definition of the scholar stance. In the dominant film theory, the scholars remain distanced from his or her body. It reveals itself in the elimination of intimate impressions and constructing idealistic, abstract linguistic narrative in theory. "Stiffened from long sleep in the background of scholarly life, the scholar's body yearns to exercise its muscles. Sleepy from long inactivity, it aches to restore its sensibilities" (xi-xii), Paul Stoller writes, while referring to the persistent invisibility of the scholar's corporeality and sensitivity. The acceptance of sensuousness is what film phenomenology insists on, as opposed to classical rationalism striving to exclude or delegitimize presence of researcher as a living, enworlded subject.

In this regard, Sobchack underlines the role of phenomenology as the inherently different research approach that interrupts the tradition of dependence on "received knowledge" and emphasizes that film scholar needs to acknowledge that "we dwell on the ground of experience before moving on to more abstract or theoretical concerns, that we experience and reflect upon our own sight before we (...) cite others" ("Fleshing Out the Image" 193). Thus, phenomenological epistemology, in fact, makes an effort to restore experience along with the subjectivity of scholar. It foregrounds the importance of the inner life and the personal. As

Ankersmit puts it, “the rediscovery of experience is also the rediscovery of the subject, and vice versa” (2).

Besides, the redemption of the scholar’s bodily, lived experience becomes an essential condition for understanding the cultural and social forces which inform our research. The connection with the matter, rejection of isolation from the world allow a researcher to be more responsible and conscious about the environment that surrounds him or her and certain established conventions that determine our experience and studies. Unlike the top-down analytic models which reduce the scholar to a bearer of prior knowledge and unreflexively impose the pre-established “Grand” theoretical schemata upon the object of study, the phenomenological perspective in film theory aims to make this pre-given knowledge visible by analyzing its coexistence with experience and their respective interconnection.

Phenomenological attitude does not presuppose the reversal bottom-up movement to the formulation of all-encompassing theory either. It insists on the irrelevance of the hierarchical paradigm of thinking as such. The rediscovery of the subject is directed exactly at the destabilization of existent epistemological hierarchies based on the deductive/inductive reasoning. The subject here is not an epistemological benchmark. He/she acquires the voice not to construct some complete, finished generalization of phenomena on the basis of personal experience. The subject’s task is to reflect on his or her own corporeal existence within the world and physical connection with knowledge and culture. This reflection becomes the first step toward an understanding of “local epistemologies” (Stoller 4) which are multiple, diverse, competing paradigms of knowledge generated by class, gender, race, and cultural heritage in a broader sense. Film phenomenology focuses on the mutability of subjective embodied

experience and these epistemologies and emphasizes the ways by which this mutability manifests itself.

In this relation, it is not accidental that two principal sources of the epistemology of sensuous scholarship and embodied film theories are feminism and post-structuralism (Stoller xiii). Feminist and post-structuralist philosophies have made a significant contribution to phenomenological film theory by providing a deepened insight into how lenses of culture shape experience, knowledge, and subject. Like phenomenology, these movements challenge the rationalist logic of difference and reevaluate the distinction between mind and body, self and the world. This category of division which seems to be ontologically and epistemologically unreliable for the phenomenological tradition is deprived of its neutrality in a social, political and axiological sense in feminism and post-structuralism. The body, meanwhile, often serves as a primary tool and starting point in this critique of division and difference.

Film phenomenologists are actively engaged in a dialogue with feminist and post-structuralist philosophers. This engagement, in turn, effectively reinforces the fundamental orientation of phenomenological program to both epistemological, experiential, and cultural self-reflexivity. Thus, following Judith Butler, Sobchack, who draws on Merleau-Ponty's theory in her interpretation of embodied spectatorship, is forced to acknowledge the "sexual Cartesianism" and patriarchal origins of this theory (*The Address of the Eye* 150). By criticizing Jean Baudrillard's concept of techno-body, she also analyzes the "dimensions of prosthetic pleasure," her own experience of being an "incomplete" body and how this experience influences her as a spectator ("Beating the Meat"). At the same time, Chamarette emphasizes that, despite the significant presence of women in the field, film phenomenology rests on the "masculine" version of phenomenological philosophy of Husserl, Heidegger, and Merleau-Ponty while ignoring the

heritage of Simone de Beauvoir, Hannah Arendt, Martha Nussbaum and other feminist phenomenologists (“Embodied Worlds” 291). The male phenomenologies, in turn, are not devoid of inclination for universalization and retention of conventional philosophical language developed within the classic tradition. Another example is Marks who finds the concept of rhizomatic thinking offered by Gilles Deleuze and Pierre-Félix Guattari an efficient model to challenge persistence of Euro-American rationalism and Eurocentrism in the discussion about the film experience (*The Skin of the Film* xvii).

These important references to feminism and post-structuralist philosophy prove not only the willingness of film phenomenology to reflect on its heuristic operations and cultural embeddedness. They also demonstrate that, unlike logocentric epistemologies oriented exclusively at the production of “true” knowledge, film phenomenology tends to emphasize its social and ethical responsibility in the analysis of film spectatorship.

Dudley Andrew in his famous 1978 article *The Neglected Tradition of Phenomenology in Film Theory* noted that

from the most primitive descriptions of the peculiarities of perception in cinema, to our emotional involvement in the image, to the momentum of a narrative, to the constitution of a cinematic world, to the description of types of worlds (genres) and to the life of our interpretation of them, phenomenology claims to be closer, not necessarily to truth, but to cinema and our experience of it (632).

Thus, the phenomenology of film brackets the questions about the true nature of film and true nature of viewer’s position (which was the main reason of suppression of phenomenological approach in film studies). Instead, it assumes that there are numerous forms of knowledge and experience. The description, articulation of embodied process of film viewing, in turn, helps us

understand how this diversity is possible, what mechanisms underlie delegitimization and neutralization of multiplicity, and why subjectivity still matters.

In this regard, it would be a mistake to consider the establishment of film phenomenology as an alternative epistemological project in film studies independently from cultural and social processes shaping the understanding of the human being today.

2. Film Phenomenology as Cultural and Political Paradigm

In their analysis of contemporary film theory, Elsaesser and Hagener point out that the development of phenomenological studies has been driven by the media environment. For them, the phenomenological assumptions (the dialogic correlation between subject and object and active bodily investment of human beings in communication with the world) correspond with the logic of new media spectacles that “require participating onlookers, voluntarily enforced exhibitionism and performative masquerade” (109). Indeed, the development of digital forms of visual culture, social media, video games and media exploiting the sensorium of augmented reality, on the one hand, and changing conventions of exhibition and distribution, on the other, have redefined connection between the spectator and the media resulting in reinforcement of participatory mode of engagement and reversibility.

The old dream about the merging of the spectator and cinematic apparatus appears to go outside the domain of aesthetic metaphors and theoretical conceptualization. Now this utopian/dystopian myth is coming true. The omnipresence of visual media in human life along with the enhanced technological and symbolic interaction between media technology and a man have challenged the positioning of the viewer as a passive and fixed consumer. It is no less important that these new circumstances have destabilized ocularcentrism of modernist film

thought. The “looking” spectator has made way for the corporeal spectator whose entire body and senses are active, dynamic and intense.

With regard to the new circumstances of media production, it should also be said that today we are witnessing a “boom” in the field of the sensuous imagery as such. The proliferation of such genres as melodrama, horror, and pornography and elaboration of more corporeally appealing cinematic sensorium in these films have made the body’s involvement more visible and accessible. In her famous 1991 essay, Williams calls these types of cinema “bodily genres” and characterizes them as “low” films based on “bodily excess,” “ecstasy,” and suppression of language (7). It is notable, however, that these genres have been legitimized as ones possessing artistic potential and social significance in the culture of 2000s. Moreover, the features Williams attributes to bodily films are actively exploited in a variety of contemporary cinematic contexts, including experimental and art film.

Another significant aspect of this cultural visibility of body is that today we deal with visibility of multiple bodies and corporeal regimes. The easier access to technology and changes in approaches to distribution in the conditions of global capital and cyberculture have undermined a closed nature of cinematic production. The corporeality of gender minorities, numerous ethnic, racial and religious groups and classes have become an essential part of the imagery generated by contemporary media. Although the approach to representation and participation of these social groups in the dominant media is still radically problematic, collaborative nature of the transnational media industry allows producing media texts that are not culturally hermetic and reflect the coexistence of various cultural identities. Meanwhile, social media and video-sharing platforms make it possible to distribute the content produced by independent users who belong to different cultural environments and expose their material

presence through images. Finally, today the consumers are actively involved in the process of reorganization and remaking of the products promoted by official, normative media. Fans, artists, and political activists employ such practices as remixing, re-editing and rewriting. These practices bring to light the hidden materiality of media that are not symbolic, bodiless texts but products existing in physical form and bearing a material trace of their creators. Here, the materiality of both the producer and medium reveals itself as a site of struggle between various political and social forces and marks the specificity of the current cultural processes.

In this light, it is not surprising that phenomenology which is deeply concerned with the existential role of bodily experience has become a proper theoretical model that could explain these new conditions of interaction with media where seeing does not represent the dominant form of bodily involvement, the spectator and media function as a whole, and visibility of body is exaggerated.

As argued above, the transformations of media culture might be considered factors which have accelerated and stimulated the establishment of the phenomenological approach in film and media studies. These phenomena have exposed the impossibility to ignore phenomenology in the context of apparent changes of media experiences and corporeality. Meanwhile, it might be said that the phenomenological turn in film theory of the 1990s has been prepared by the entire history of mechanical visual forms connected with real economic and political processes in the epochs of modernity and postmodernity. Phenomenology as a study of experience was crucial for understanding the experiential reorganization achieved through film and photography and initiated by the development of capitalism.

Tom Gunning treats the advent of these visual forms as an essential part of “new configuration of experience” shaped by both economic transformations of the Industrial

Revolution of the late nineteenth century and transformations of everydayness marked by urbanization, mass production, and new patterns of communication (15). The emergent form of experience, or the “drama of modernity,” as he puts it, revealed itself in

a collapsing of previous experiences of space and time through speed; an extension of the power and productivity of the human body; and a consequent transformation of the body through new thresholds of demand and danger, creating new regimes of bodily discipline and regulation based upon a new observation of (and knowledge about) the body (16).

Thus, for Gunning, the experiential metamorphoses of modernity are first and foremost to be conceived regarding alternative bodily positioning and social discourse about the body. Mary Ann Doane also refers to the importance of the issue of bodily experience by stating that “While in classical thought meaning precedes and determines embodiment, in modernity meaning is associated with immanence and embodiment” (10). For her, modernity rediscovered body and made it an instrument for meaning-production.

Photography and film have influenced the reorganization of experience and corporeality through various mechanisms in a significant way. These media were able to present what Gunning called “an experience of global tourism”: an experience of deconstructing spatial barriers through visualizing both the connection between remote places and velocity of spatial travel (16). This elimination of spatial stability was experienced together with disrupted temporality which now promised “immortality, the denial of the radical finitude of the human body, access to other temporalities” (Doane 2).

According to Doane, the photographic and cinematic technologies have become instruments of resistance to the rationalization of advanced capitalism grounded in the ideals of purpose, control, and stability. They promote contingency and ephemerality and exclude the general by foregrounding the particular. However, for her, this resistance is not deprived of

ambiguity and ideologically can serve to reinforce capitalism or at least “to make tolerable an incessant rationalization” (11). Similar idea has been discussed by Gunning who proposes that the mechanical media engage in the controversies of modern capitalism that “contains a tension between forces which undo older forms of stability in order to increase the ease and rapidity of circulation and of those forces which seek to control and make such circulation predictable and, therefore, profitable” (19).

It seems plausible to claim that the ambiguity of ideological role of the technologies of representation lies in their experiential and bodily politics rooted in dialectics of pleasure and anxiety. On the one hand, cinema and photography constitute fascination with limitless possibilities of experience. The spectatorial pleasure derives from both indexicality of these media and its deconstruction through the restructuring of the world’s materiality. On the other hand, the same factors cause the bodily anxiety. As Doane underscores, the cinematic exploitation of the familiar and the indexical represents the “disturbing potential of meaninglessness, of providing the spectator with nothing to read” (63). This means, in turn, that all communication might be reduced to the bodily experience. Cinema potentially allows the body to acquire the total control over the non-symbolized cinematic message. However, the deconstructive role of film and photography emancipating materiality from human everyday perception results in the dissociation of the inner life from the body. The spectator distrusts his or her own senses and becomes alienated from the corporeal.

As already noted, this abrupt instability of experience and the matter may support and at the same time subvert existent social structures of power, but it always seems to be incorporated in the system of contemporary power relations. The spectator’s alienation from the body and growing suspicion about sensory experience permit capitalist rationalization and efficiency. In

this case, the viewer is constructed as the “Fordist body,” to borrow Emily Martin’s term, which exists within the model of “hierarchical pyramids with the brain firmly located at the top and the other organs ranged below” (122). For Martin, this type of body is easily subject to control and standardization. It functions within the logic of abstractness which is a mark of capitalist thinking, according to Siegfried Kracauer (“The Mass Ornament”). Meanwhile, the reverse model of the corporeality, where it is not suppressed but emphasized and where its flexibility and situatedness are dramatized, refers to more contemporary forms of capitalism. Martin argues that emphasis of the late capitalism on “technological innovation, specificity, and rapid, flexible change” requires formation of shaky, uncertain identities ready to function in the world of global capital (123). The body, in turn, becomes a tool and discursive referent which destabilizes the identities.

Although Martin classifies corporeality according to major historical trajectories of development of capitalism, she also underscores that their coexistence is possible. Ben Singer, in his turn, suggests avoiding a sharp division between modernity and postmodernity regarding discussion of the transformation of experience. He notes that whereas a phenomenal world of modernity is often described as “markedly quicker, more chaotic, fragmented, and disorienting than in previous phases of human culture,” we also can find the same descriptions of postmodern experience (73). That is, both modernity and postmodernity are experienced in culture as experiential traumas.

The phenomenological turn in film theory of the 1990s is one of the responses to this sensuous shock of modernity and postmodernity. Phenomenology tries to articulate the role of cinema in the economic and political reformulation of the body. While analyzing the simultaneous existence of practices of bodily suppression and liberation, it situates the

corporeality in the context of media production and consumption. It is important to note, however, that phenomenology itself becomes a political project which also reproduces the ambiguity of advanced capitalism. It celebrates bodily multiplicity and emancipation of “non-normative” bodies in terms of gender, sexuality, race, and class. But by legitimizing the variety and flexibility of experiences, it also promotes the ideal of the human body constructed by the postmodern capitalist system for its own purposes. At the same time, the phenomenological impulse may be interpreted as a form of modernist capitalist rationalization necessary in the contemporary situation when we deal with “bodily excess” and directed at gaining control over the bodily freedom.

Chapter 3. Phenomenology as a Research Project of Film Theory: Basic Concepts and Methodology

The phenomenological turn marks a decisive revision of the most fundamental assumptions accepted by the previous film theory, including the essentialist approach to the ontology of cinema, logocentric perspective to the understanding of the viewer's activity, and ahistorical depiction of both spectatorship and film as a medium. Meanwhile, film phenomenology does not constitute a single movement that unites scholars who share the same theoretical models and methodological apparatus. Instead of talking about film phenomenology, as Chamarette suggests, it would be more pertinent to talk about film phenomenologies which are "hybrid, flexible, lucid, pliable approaches toward a form of image-making and material medium that is in itself also hybrid, unstable, and constantly evolving" ("Embodied Worlds" 293).

Indeed, whereas we identify such scholars as, for instance, Casebier (1991), Stadler (2008), or Barker (2009) as film phenomenologists, it is impossible to ignore the significant differences in the way they interpret the film experience and formulate research questions. Casebier elaborates what he calls a "realist theory" of cinematic representation and considers the spectatorial activity as the discovery process directed by cinematic devices. Stadler examines the viewer's experience as an evaluative process shaped by the ethics corporeally manifested in the cinematic narrative. And, for Barker, the specificity of this experience lies not in the narrative or cinematic techniques but in the space between the screen and us, that is in the feeling of simultaneous distance and proximity. These scholars follow different models of the phenomenological investigation, have a different level of self-reflexivity, and use different

language which can be terminologically sophisticated (Casebier) or metaphorical, sensuous and even mystical (Barker).

However, film phenomenologies exemplifying the growing interest of film theory to philosophy (as opposed to adherence to art criticism, literary theory, sociology, and cognitive sciences) are derived from the specific intellectual tradition set by German and French phenomenological movements. And although film phenomenologies “retain a looseness and lightness of foot” (Chamarette, “Embodied Worlds” 290) in following this tradition, there is a set of concepts, premises, and methods shared by various phenomenological studies of the film experience and philosophical phenomenology. The grounding of these studies in this philosophical paradigm is what makes film phenomenology a recognizable current in the contemporary film theory.

In this chapter, I will focus on such fundamental concepts of phenomenology as experience, intentionality, and phenomenological reduction. I will examine phenomenological description as the basic method for investigation of experiences and consider its implication. In addition, I will delineate between the essential movements of Husserl’s transcendental and Merleau-Ponty’s existential phenomenologies and explain how these two paradigms inform film theory at the general philosophical level.

In his *Filmosophy*, Daniel Frampton describes phenomenology as “the philosophy of experience – the study of consciousness and the phenomena (objects/appearance) of direct experience. That is, it attempts to describe our *experience* of things (the appearance of things to us), marking out phenomenal states – also known as sensations, sense data or qualia” (39). This definition refers to one of the most fundamental and interdependent premises of

phenomenological framework, namely, intentionality, a method of phenomenological description, and embodiment.

Before exploring the role of these concepts in phenomenological research of experience and the film experience, in particular, it is necessary to examine how phenomenologists understand experience as such. Wilhelm Dilthey, one of the pioneers of phenomenology, characterizes experience as a mode of existence in which “reality is there-for-me” (223). He explains that the reality of experience is there-for-me “because I have a reflexive awareness of it, because I possess it immediately as belonging to me in some sense” (223). That is, the experience is not something perceived or given to us but a particular existential position in which the recognition of the independence of the world and the feeling of connection with it coincide. Experience manifests itself as an inseparability of our consciousness, sensations, and impressions from the reality to which they are directed. Husserl develops this view by stating that experience is “whatever is to be found in the stream of experience” (Ideas 120). This paradoxical definition implies that experience as a subjective activity is identical with the experienced reality.

Although the reality of experience needs to be recognized by the subject and seems to belong to us, it is always something that exists separately from our subjectivity. This reality represents a content of experience and, thus, constitutes a connection between the subjective and the objective. As Husserl writes, “perceiving is the perceiving of something, maybe a thing; judging, the judging of a certain matter; valuation, the valuing of a value; wish, the wish for the content wished, and so on” (Ideas 243). This unique property of experience to be the “consciousness *of* something” (Husserl, Ideas 242) is what he calls *intentionality*.

For phenomenologists, intentionality as the directedness of experience to an object is a basic structure and fundamental grounding of any experience. Every act of experience possesses

some quality of intentionality even if it is not intentional in itself. Thus, as Husserl points out, the experience of “whiteness” is not a consciousness of something. It is a hidden part of the experience, which cannot be identified immediately and directly. However, sensory feelings, such as the experience of color, taste, sound, touch, and so on, are bearers of intentionality, “components in concrete experiences of a more comprehensive kind which as wholes are intentional” (Husserl, *Ideas* 247). Moreover, the sensuous experience becomes a condition for the formation of intentionality, for establishing the mutability between subject and object.

Thus, intentionality refers to the following three critical phenomenological assumptions: (1) experience reveals itself as an impossibility to separate the subject from the object; (2) the division between mind and sensory body is impossible; and (3) although not every sensuous experience is intentional, every intentional experience is sensuous.

In film phenomenology, intentionality is an essential concept that determines theoretical and methodological investigation of the film experience. The spectator’s consciousness which is always consciousness of a film constitutes interaction and unity of the viewer and cinematic reality. As Barker writes, film phenomenology treats the viewer and film as “intimately related but not identical, caught up in a relationship of intersubjectivity and co-constitution, rather than as subject and object positioned on opposite sides of the screen” (13). In the same vein, Sobchack argues that the film viewing is “a dialogic exchange between the viewing subjects who share the finite and situated conditions of objective embodiment and also share their uniquely and finite existence in a common, if contested, cultural world” (“The Address of the Eye” 307). Meanwhile, for Shaw, the film experience is a “Janus-face alternation,” a “subject-object correlation that switches back and forth like a fusing mirror” (23).

One of the most important preconditions of the phenomenological study of experience through the prism of intentionality is an employment of descriptive method. A phenomenological description of experiences implies exclusion of all evaluations, judgments, and opinions about the analyzed object. The phenomenological restoration of the integrity of subject and object through descriptive approach also presupposes the elimination of any explanatory and theoretical perspective. As Husserl points out, in phenomenological studies “we stand bodily aloof from all theories, and by “theories” we here mean anticipatory ideas of every kind. Only as facts of our environment, not as agencies for uniting facts validly together, do theories concern us at all” (Ideas 105-106). Thus, theories as the pre-knowledge are of interest to the phenomenologist only in terms of their belonging to the experience of the world. That is, they become an object of phenomenology as phenomena of our experience and product of consciousness but not as an epistemological tool or epistemological goal.

Description serves here as an attempt to bring our immediate experience of the world back, to “return to that world prior to knowledge of which knowledge speaks, and with regard to which every scientific determination is abstractive, dependent and a sign” (Merleau-Ponty “What is Phenomenology?” 60). For phenomenology, the experiencing subject possesses the limitless authority in the study of experience and the world given in it. The very fact of the existence provides the subject with this authority. In this regard, Merleau-Ponty writes,

I am the absolute source. My existence does not come from my antecedents or my physical and social entourage, but rather goes toward them and sustains them. For it is I that make exist for myself (...) that tradition which I chose to adopt or that horizon whose distance from me tends to disappear, since it would have no such property as distance were I not there to view it. (“What is Phenomenology?” 60)

From this perspective, it may appear that phenomenology is committed to anti-constructionist stance and disregards historical and socio-cultural factors as determinants of subjectivity. However, it is important to note that what Merleau-Ponty underscores is the fact that these factors would be meaningless without the presence of the subject. In phenomenology, the emphasis on the subject's immediate experience as it is, as opposed to the emphasis on the analysis of cultural and epistemological meanings of the experience, is based on the belief that these meanings acquire their power only due to our existential capacity to be, to have experience and therefore to accept and develop them.

Film phenomenologies also prioritize the subject. They aim to express the film experience through the description of the lived impressions, senses, and conscious attitudes of the viewer, while avoiding explanation of their origins and features which are not recognized by the spectator and have no direct relation to the very experiential event. They are guided by the necessity to suspend theoretical, scientific and cultural knowledges about the film medium and spectatorial activity. Nevertheless, film phenomenologists do not ignore their relationship with the social environment. The significant difference of film phenomenology in comparison with other strategies of studying the film experience lies in the attempt to identify the ways this environment influences not our experience of film but our research. While referring to the research self-reflexivity, Stadler notes that it is impossible to eliminate all preconceptions but, as phenomenologists, "we can at least try to become aware of how they inform our understanding by admitting, examining, and critically accounting for them" (40). It makes sense to say that film phenomenology tries to recover the film experience as it is by focusing on the very act of talking about it and by identifying our pre-given knowledges in the articulation of our experience.

This raises concerns about the language film phenomenologists use in their descriptions of the film experience. Don Ihde, whose classical work *Experimental Phenomenology* first published in 1979 has become an essential guide for Sobchack's seminars on film phenomenology, notes that the main difficulty of the descriptive approach as well as any linguistic reflection on experience is an inevitability of "confusion of immediacy with nonexperienced elements presumed or posited in explanations" (20). His example of such kind of confusion is a phrase "I see red and black stimuli on my retina" in describing the ladybug, where reference to physiological stimulation and scientific terminology function as an obstacle for true phenomenological description. In this regard, Ihde emphasizes that by describing appearances we should express the experience of them in simple, ordinary language. This is not a guarantee of successful phenomenological description. Nevertheless, the using of ordinary language can reduce the risk of reliance on prior knowledge in description.

The requirement to apply descriptive approach relates to the next important concept, namely, reduction, which is one of the most problematic notions in phenomenology. As noted above, the descriptive approach is considered in phenomenology as a practical method that allows to distinguish genuinely experiential phenomena from knowledges and preconceptions received from science and formed by sociocultural environment. This epistemological "bracketing" of presuppositions is what Husserl called phenomenological reduction.

In phenomenology, there is no general consensus on the concept of phenomenological reduction. At issue in the debates on this notion is the possibility and limits of its application as a practical guideline in phenomenological study of experiences. The difference of approaches to the operation of reduction constitutes the main criterion for division phenomenology into two

fundamental philosophical movements: *transcendental phenomenology* and *existential phenomenology*. Phenomenology of film can also be seen in terms of this division.

Transcendental phenomenology of film follows the Husserlian tradition of “pure” phenomenology which studies transcendental experience defined as self-directed consciousness, “purely internal experience, experience of one’s own conscious life” (Husserl, Cartesian Meditations 32). For Husserl, this study requires absolute phenomenological reduction. He describes it as an operation “split up into different steps of ‘disconnection’” from our natural standpoint (Husserl, Ideas 114). These steps include not only “bracketing” of epistemological preconceptions and social knowledges but also “bracketing” of the subject as such. David R. Cerbone explains that the Husserlian reduction implies removing the assumption that “I am a worldly, materially real human being just as much as I do the assumption that my experience is taking place within a materially real world” (33). From this perspective, the subject becomes a transcendental essence, pure consciousness freed from the surrounding reality. The transcendental phenomenology focuses on how one can be aware of this consciousness. It tries to describe how experience can be about something and how the experience of something is possible. Similarly, the transcendental phenomenology of film describes in what way our experience can be about film and how the cinematic experience as a form of conscious activity can exist.

The idealistic stance of transcendental phenomenology and its total disregard of embodied and sociocultural dimensions of experience have made it an unpopular research initiative in film studies. Nevertheless, the first attempts to apply phenomenological approach to study of film were inspired exactly by the transcendental paradigm.

Thus, under the influence of transcendental phenomenology, Münsterberg formulates the object and approach of his film theory as follows:

we turn to the photoplay, at first with a purely psychological interest, and ask for the elementary excitements of the mind which enter into our experience of the moving pictures. (...) We approach the art of the film theater as if it stood entirely on its own ground, and extinguish all memory of the world of actors. We analyze the mental processes which this specific form of artistic endeavor produces in us (45).

Whereas in his study Münsterberg is more concerned with the principles of gestalt psychology and behaviorism, the Husserlian phenomenology informs much of his film theory. The theorist makes an attempt to isolate film as a content of experience from all possible associations with the surrounding world. He brackets the presuppositions about film as art, medium and profilmic reality, and considers the spectator as a pure, independent mind. Moreover, as Noël Carroll points out, Münsterberg not only disconnects the spectator's mind from the material world but contrasts them because the mind "*overcomes* what he calls the forms of the outer world, namely space, time, and causality" (493).

We also find the influence of transcendental phenomenology in Russian formalist film theory which considers the film experience as an autonomous conscious act. Russian formalists, mostly Eichenbaum, developed the idea according to which cinematic experience is reflexive. Eichenbaum argues that the audience in cinema performs the "inverse process of reading" which presupposes the movement from an object towards the conscious experience of it as a formation of "inner speech" (61). Viktor Shklovsky and Yuri Tynianov place great emphasis on this phenomenon as well, but they are more interested in cinematic *ostranenie* (defamiliarization). The purpose of defamiliarization in image, as Shklovsky puts it, "is not to draw our understanding closer to that which this image stands for, but rather to allow us to perceive the

object in a special way, in short, to lead us to a “vision” of this object rather than mere “recognition” (10). For him, *ostranenie*, or making the experience of objects strange, is what makes cinematic experience possible. Meanwhile, this possibility manifests itself only through the work of decontextualized spectatorial consciousness.

The turning point in the development of transcendental phenomenology of film is a publication of Stanley Cavell’s *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film* (1971). Although this work inherits many assumptions of analytic philosophy, Cavell develops a genuine phenomenological interpretation of cinema. He examines the film experience in the spirit of transcendentalism which becomes apparent not only on the level of methodology but also on the level of theoretical conclusions. Cavell separates the spectator from the conditions of material and cultural reality. At the same time, he argues that this separation is a necessary condition for the very act of film viewing. As the philosopher notes, since we cannot participate in the world depicted and since this world reveals itself due to mechanical non-human recreation, the cinematic experience becomes a new form of our connection with the world by our disconnection from it. As he writes, in cinema “objects participate in the photographic presence of themselves; they participate in the re-creation of themselves on film; they are essential in the making of their appearances” (Cavell xvi). This independence of the physical world of cinema results in alienation of consciousness from the object.

Another prominent representative of the transcendental phenomenology of the film is Casebier whose *Film and Phenomenology* (1991) became one of the first works where Husserl and his philosophical conception were discussed in the context of film theory. In his work, Casebier describes the possibilities of phenomenology for film theory and delineates the issues it can help to analyze. He defines phenomenological approach as “a way of looking at the same

time at both subject and object in the cognitive act while maintaining the object of the act as existing independently” (4). The aspiration for positioning of the object independently as well as emphasis on experience as the cognitive act is what, according to Casebier, allows phenomenology to provide “the needed realist framework” for film theory. Meanwhile, this idealistic striving for restoration of reality through pure objectivity is what characterizes transcendental phenomenology.

As mentioned above, the phenomenological reduction was introduced as one of the most crucial concepts for phenomenology, but it has also become the reason for the disintegration of phenomenological movement. Today, the question regarding what should be bracketed is solved by scholars in different ways. The radical reductionism of transcendental phenomenology has been rejected not only by philosophers but also by film scholars. This is one of the reasons why this field was overshadowed by more flexible and open existential phenomenology.

While anti-naturalistic transcendental phenomenology excludes the questions about the reality of objects and empiric and psychological factors affecting consciousness, existential phenomenologists dispute this model and offer alternatives. Existential phenomenologists deny the possibility of transcendental consciousness and insist that a human cannot be separated and analyzed independently from the world. Thus, existential phenomenology makes it possible to explore experience in non-transcendental terms and opens the opportunity for a combination of phenomenology with social and cultural studies.

Nevertheless, the widespread tendency to unify existential movement also contradicts its real pluralism. Following Cerbone, one can signify the Heideggerian structuring phenomenology of being, “subjective” phenomenology of Jean-Paul Sartre, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology of embodiment (*Understanding Phenomenology*). While the first two

paradigms were not favored with significant attention among film scholars, Merleau-Ponty's ideas about the embodied perception and interconnection of mind and body are praised by numerous film theorists. Today, this approach of existential phenomenology represents the dominating research strategy in phenomenological research of cinema. In this regard, Stadler even notes that "the emphasis placed on the perceptual engagement of the physical body, rather than on the conscious or subconscious mind, or the sociopolitical body" can be considered to be "the most significant contribution of phenomenology to film theory" (44).

For Merleau-Ponty, the Husserlian phenomenological reduction represents the main contradiction of the study of experience. The intention of transcendental phenomenology to reduce experience to the act of pure consciousness implies that mind, and the therefore experiential activity, is something universal and structurally identical for every subject. This returns phenomenology back to the sphere of scientific epistemology based on the construction of unities and essences. Moreover, the assumption that we can behave as an absolute consciousness removes the problematic of the reduction as such. That is, if we accept the possibility of independence of our mind from the world, the operation of bracketing loses its sense. Another problem of this type of reduction is that experience acquires features of "meaning-giving operation," and "the world is nothing but 'world-as-meaning'" (Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* xii). Whereas this cognitivist and semiotic perspective can indeed accompany phenomenological investigation, it cannot be a point of departure for understanding the experience.

In her phenomenology of film, Sobchack also points to the irony that it is precisely transcendental approach to reduction, which has been central for phenomenologists for many years, is what undermines the aim of phenomenology to ground itself in the field of the lived

experience and the world as it is experienced. In addition, for her, the Husserlian “transformation of subjectivity into an objective modality” confronts the other phenomenological concepts and, first of all, the concept of intentionality (Sobchack, *The Address of the Eye* 38).

While criticizing the transcendental perspective, Merleau-Ponty concludes that “The most important lesson which the reduction teaches us is the impossibility of a complete reduction” (*Phenomenology of Perception* xv). It is fair to add that Husserl acknowledges these pitfalls of his conception of reduction and transcendental subjectivity. However, his desire to achieve certainty and clarity in description of experience through removal of any preconceptions and natural attitudes did not allow him to overcome the logocentric perspective of Cartesian idealistic philosophy.

Like Husserl, Merleau-Ponty considers phenomenology as the return to the world, which is impossible without reduction, that is, without elimination of the pre-given knowledge about this world. Nevertheless, if, for Husserl, the reduction comes to end when we focus on the pure consciousness and posit it as an absolute source of experience, then, for Merleau-Ponty, our body plays the role of such source, and reduction cannot be applied to this fundamental condition of our existence – the sensory and corporeal being within the world.

It would be plausible to say that Husserl does not ignore the body as important determinant of human experience. As mentioned above, he treats senses as a condition for formation intentional connection between the subject and the world. According to him, the appearance of things in our experience is dependent on body and sensibility; body is “the bearer of the zero point of orientation, the bearer of the here and the now, out of which the pure Ego intuits space and the whole world of the senses” (Husserl, “Material Things” 12). While agreeing with constitutive role of the body in the formation of experience of pure consciousness, Husserl

notes that emphasis on the embodied subject in phenomenology would refer us to reestablishment of our natural attitude to the world. This attitude suppresses the stream of inner life and forces us to pay attention to the world as an object but not as a component of our experience, that is, to “the things experienced rather than the experience of things” (Cerbone 108). For Husserl, by focusing on the body, we inevitably construct it as a thing experienced or material thing which is just a part of the reality subjected to physical objective laws.

Merleau-Ponty shares Husserl’s thesis about the fundamental role of our body in the interaction with the world and organization of our experience. As he writes, “there is a logic of the world to which my body in its entirety conforms, and through which things of intersensory significance become possible for us” (Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* 380). Meanwhile, he criticizes Husserl’s thesis about the unavoidable objectification of the body. In his view, this conclusion is an expression of those mechanic epistemologies dividing the body and mind against which phenomenology rebelled.

In Merleau-Ponty’s existential phenomenology, the body is what possesses the quality of both object and subject. To conceptualize this idea, he introduces the metaphor of touch as a representation of the unity of the touched and the touching and impossibility to separate one from another in the very act of touch. Our body is what can be touched or objective thing that exists in the material world and at the same it is what touches or subject that does not belong to this world but aspires to explore it. The body can touch the things because “being of their family, itself visible and tangible, it uses its own being as a means to participate in theirs, because each of the two beings is an archetype for the other, because the body belongs to the order of the things as the world is universal flesh” (Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible* 137). Thus,

the body becomes an independent touch and vision because it is simultaneously the thing which is tangible and visible.

It is important to note here that for Merleau-Ponty touch and vision are phenomena of the same nature. Every tactile being is doomed to visible existence. Meanwhile, vision itself is not independent from the material things but includes them. Our perception as well as touch constitutes the integrity and reversibility of the seeing and the seen, that is subjective and objective realities. This thesis has become crucial for phenomenological turn in film theory of the 1990s. This turn might also be called the “tactile turn,” since Merleau-Ponty’s analogy between the eye and touch has become a starting point for development of the theories of embodied, material spectatorship.

Whereas classical and post-classical film theorists disregarded phenomenology or followed the principles of transcendental phenomenological study unsystematically and intuitively, film theory of the 1990s and 2000s has rediscovered phenomenological approach in its existential variant and consciously applied Merleau-Ponty’s perspective to studying the film experience. Although, as I said earlier, contemporary film phenomenology represents a hybrid, methodologically and thematically diverse movement, such concepts as intentionality, reduction, phenomenological description, and body are essential notions of this theoretical program.

The distinctive contribution of Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology to film theory consists not only in the elaboration of alternative understanding of spectator as a subject whose corporeality becomes a significant factor of the film experience. Under the influence of existential phenomenology, film theory offers new philosophical anthropology as well as ontology of cinema.

The double reference of body to subjective and objective realms entails that a human being cannot be alienated from the world and the world cannot but participate in the construction of subjectivity of this being. “It teaches us,” Merleau-Ponty writes, “that each calls for the other” (The Visible and the Invisible 137). By emphasizing the role of spectatorial body and senses, phenomenological film theories reaffirm this connection between us and the world, between the subject and the other. They are interested in restoration of the contact among humans through articulation of our bodily experience as a unique structure that constitutes our existence and makes possible experience as such. Moreover, film phenomenology which believes in the mutability of subject and object establishes the new principles regarding ontology of film. Film is considered to be itself a body which is seen and can see, that is, it acquires features of subject and object. For example, in film phenomenology we deal with theories of film-body (Sobchack), film’s skin (Marks) or film as a three-dimensional tactile being (Barker).

In the next chapter, I will address the fundamental epistemological assumptions of these phenomenological film theories and focus on such important questions as correlation of the embodied seeing and the embodied seen in cinematic experience.

Chapter 4. Film Phenomenology as Dialectic of the Seeing and the Seen

The fundamental task underlying the phenomenological turn in contemporary film theory consists in understanding the film experience as a complex, existential state irreducible to the logic of correlation between the consciousness and the unconscious, process of meaning-making or physiological reactions to stimuli. Film phenomenology prioritizes the embodied nature of vision and the corporeal spectator whose body contributes to the film experience. For film phenomenology, the body is not merely a physical organism and set of senses subject to objective biological law but a vehicle of existence and condition of interaction with the world, and in particular with the cinematic world. The spectator's body is regarded as a guarantee of the possibility of film experience and as an essential factor of the film viewing.

In addition, although film phenomenology is less concerned with the cinematic qualities and devices as such, it also offers an alternative approach to ontology of cinema, based on the recognition of materiality of film. While considering the film experience through the prism of intentionality, phenomenology does not distinguish film from the spectator but focuses on a continuum between them. The mutability of the viewer and the screen in the stream of the lived experience implies that film acquires features of the subject and, moreover, becomes an embodied thing in its expression whereas the viewer acquires the status of object whose materiality is visible, changeable, and controlled. Thus, film phenomenology emphasizes the corporeality of the film image, technology, and cinematic narrative along with the corporeality of the spectator.

The emphasis on the diffusion of spectatorial and cinematic beings is a central leitmotif of the major phenomenological theories of film. These theories approach the integrity of the viewer and cinema as a complex dialectic of the embodied seeing and the embodied seen. In this

chapter, I will examine the main philosophical assumptions that are at the basis of this concept of the dialectic film experience. First, I will turn to the thesis of reversibility of perception and expression, that is of subject and object, and explain how an embodied and enworlded nature of the sight determines it. Second, I will focus on the essential arguments which allow film phenomenologists to position the viewer as a mode of expression or object whose corporeality is visible and tangible. Third, I will analyze the phenomenological claim about the capacity of film to act as a perceiver and to reveal its subjectivity. Finally, I will discuss how the concept of the dialectic of the seeing and the seen creates the possibility for semiotic phenomenology, where the boundary between the sign and the matter or culture and body is erased, and the film experience as an experience of the materiality of signification is investigated.

1. Film Experience as a Subject-Object Diffusion

The issue of the film experience as understood in the logic of correlation between embodied vision and embodied visibility became clearly articulated for the first time in Sobchack's film theory and was developed by Marks, Barker, Stadler, Wahlberg and other phenomenologically inclined scholars on the basis of Sobchack's account.

By applying the principle of intentionality, Sobchack turns away from considering the film as an object or a single unity and focuses on the act of viewing in which the visible world and the viewer are interconnected in the lived experience. For her, the intentionality of the film experience does not simply represent a fixed correlational framework that allows the viewer to cognitively react to a movie. As she puts it, the film experience represents a set of "dynamically and directionally reversible acts that reflexively and reflectively constitute the *perception of expression* and the *expression of perception*" (Sobchack, *The Address of the Eye* 5).

It follows from this formulation that the reversibility of perception and expression lies at the core of our intentional relationship to film. The spectator participates not only in the act of seeing but also in the act of being seen. Film, in turn, also becomes a site of this simultaneous balancing between two modes of intentionality and functions as both perceptive and expressive thing. “Seeing,” Sobchack writes, “presents itself as the seen, it points to the seen, and it represents the seen to and for an other who sees” (The Address of the Eye 132).

Influenced by Sobchack and Merleau-Ponty, Marks uses the concept of touch to describe this perception-expression continuum of the film experience. Just as the boundary between the touching subject and the touched object seems to be erased in the tactile contact, the boundary between the viewer and film also becomes flexible and unstable in the act of watching since experiential distinguishing subjective vision from its object is unrealizable. According to Marks’ interpretation, the impossibility of separating the vision from its content ontologically embodies the integrity of subject and object in the tactile experience of the encounter of two surfaces. In this haptic revelation of film viewing, as Marks writes, “our self rushes up to the surface to interact with another surface. When this happens there is a concomitant loss of depth – we become amoebalike, lacking a center, changing as the surface to which we cling changes” (Touch xvi). Like the seeing and the seen, on the one hand, and the touching and the touched, on the other, the spectator and film absorb each other: unable to differentiate my perception from what this perception is about, I exist as part of the film, whereas the film is incorporated as part of myself. Thus, what Marks implies is that, in this mode of coexistence, the viewer’s identity as well as the film’s identity become hardly recognizable. The relationship between them is a process of continual mutual transformation.

This relationship – or, as Chamarette puts it, the “chiasmic *in-betweenness* of film encounters” – constitutes the object of film phenomenology (Phenomenology and the Future of Film, 3). Neither spectator nor film are of interest to phenomenologist. Phenomenology is concerned with their active mutability that is represented through the dynamics of the seeing/touching and the seen/touched.

Following Merleau-Ponty, film phenomenologists acknowledge that the exchange between the seeing and the seen, that is, between the spectator and film occurs because perception is not a transcendental, alienated activity but an embodied and enworlded phenomenon. The eye is never free from the rest of the body. It is a part of our carnal sensorium where all senses and feelings are interconnected. The smell of a rose may evoke its visual image or taste of rose petal jam or painful feeling of touching the flower’s sharp thorns and, on the contrary, the appearance of this rose in front of our eyes can make us recall all these senses of smell, taste, and touch. This is to say that perception is synesthetic and functions in relation to other senses. It is also connected to our material situatedness within the world and subject to the physical presence and properties of our bodily existence as well as those of others. The perception is structured by the matter which underlies it. Meanwhile, it is structured by the matter that exists as its object because our body and the outer world physically belong to the same ontological order.

While referring to the synesthetic and enworlded nature of vision, Barker suggests we approach the film experience as a three-dimensional action where we perceive the film “haptically, at the tender surface of the body; kinaesthetically and muscularly, in the middle dimension of muscles, tendons, and bones that reach toward and through cinematic space; and viscerally, in the murky recesses of the body, where heart, lungs, pulsing fluids, and firing

synapses receive, respond to, and reenact the rhythms of cinema” (3). Equally, in phenomenology, the film’s perception never functions outside of the cinematic body that manifests itself through the film technology and matter of the world filmed. For Barker, we also can distinguish haptical, kinaesthetic, and visceral regimes of the cinematic corporeality enacted through the screen surface, the boundaries of off-screen and on-screen space, and projector and lenses correspondingly (3).

2. The Viewer as a Material Object

Our sensuous connection with the world and the materiality of our seeing body involves the fact that we exist not only as a seeing subject but also as a seen object. The status of object is acquired through various mechanisms.

As a viewer, I achieve the status of the seen because, while focusing on the screen, I invest my own material being into the film. Watching *Eyes Without a Face* (Georges Franju, 1960), I shudder at the view of scalpel cutting a face of young woman. The rhythm and dynamics of *Run Lola Run* (Tom Tykwer, 1998) make me viscerally feel the speed and velocity of movement. Aleksey German’s smoky rooms in *Khrustalyov, My Car!* (1998) evoke the smell of tea, tobacco and the newly washed linens. And the flavor of flowers, raw fish and mustard fiercely eaten by characters of *Perfect Sense* (David Mackenzie, 2011) also becomes tangible to me. Due to this investment of my own body and senses which are always a factor of my vision, “I will reflexively turn toward my own carnal, sensual, and sensible being to touch myself touching, smell myself smelling, taste myself tasting, and, in sum, sense my own sensuality” (Sobchack, “What My Fingers Knew” 77). Thus, I become a visible/sensible object to myself in the act of seeing. In his *The Book of Skin*, Connor, in turn, explains that the objectifying of the

seeing subject results from dependence of vision on distance and capacity to isolate me from myself, to dissociate the visible part of me from the rest. As he notes, “this very dissociation is what allows me to dissociate myself in turn from this dissociation of myself, allows recourse to what one can call recursive reparation: as the involvement of the eye in masochistic fantasy suggests, you can always watch yourself being watched” (Connor 68).

The existential reversibility of the spectator’s vision through its embodied nature and distance is also conjoined with a real film viewing environment. I am not merely a perceiving subject but the visible body because I am part of the tangible world and others can recognize my material presence. The physical existence of the viewer is recognized by other viewers, filmmakers, creators of cinematic technologies, and institutions. In watching a film, my body is positioned in a specific way in accordance with social conventions and material circumstances of the environment, be it a movie theater, classroom or my own house.

Depending on the physical and cultural space, there are various modes of the viewer’s visibility. For instance, the architecture and interior organization, size of the screen, and presence of other people in movie theaters prescribe my bodily behavior and structure my sensitivity. The very institution of movie theater has been created with the viewer’s body in mind – the body which keeps silence, remains relatively immobile and plunged into a darkness. Meanwhile, another type of the spectatorial body has been made visible via portable devices such as tablets or cellphones. This body is unstable and can be hardly situated; it gains a control over the screen and openly declares itself. As such, this mode of embodied spectatorship becomes an illustration of phenomenological mutability of the seeing and the seen. In this regard, Casetti writes,

spectators now model films, or remodel them onto themselves, thanks to a combination of precise practices that affect the object, the modalities, and the conditions of vision. The effect is that the spectators become the active protagonists of the game, even if they

continue to be its pawns. They are no longer asked to be present at a projection with eyes wide open, just reacting to the film or to the environment; instead, they must act to make their own viewing possible. *Attendance* has ceded the field to *performance*. (186)

Thus, the viewer's body turns into performative thing emphasizing its own existence and visibility in the film experience.

3. Film as a Material Subject

While, in order to formulate the theory of cinematic experience, Sobchack's film phenomenology and its followers require the special clarification of how the viewer can be seen, it also demands an answer to the question of how film can be a viewing subject. In this regard, Frampton identifies four main theses of Sobchack's analysis: "film sees and expresses its seeing;" "it is subjective;" "it is embodied;" and "the filmgoer feels this presence, this other" (41). It seems that, again, the assumption of embodiment and materiality plays an essential role in this analysis.

For Sobchack, film is capable of expressing the act of viewing and of being subjective exactly because it has a body. By mirroring and absorbing the sensuous spectatorial gaze, the film acquires its corporeality through the connection with the viewer's corporeality. Structurally, these two orders of the carnal – the cinematic carnal and the spectatorial carnal – coincide and supplement each other. As Sobchack puts it, "Both the film's body and the spectator's body are implicated in their respective perceptive activity, enable it, and allow its expression in the world. Both the film's body and the spectator's body intend their perception *coterminously*, and both also express their perception as lived *introceptively*" (The Address of the Eye 217). Marks, in turn, continues to develop this assumption while referring to the fundamentally mimetic nature of the film/spectator relationship. For her, mimesis as a basic condition of the film experience,

creates a situation where “erstwhile subjects take on the physical, material qualities of objects, while objects take on the perceptive and knowledgeable qualities of subjects” (Marks, *The Skin of the Film* 141). In our immediate experience, we see film as mimicking us, that is, mimicking our subjectivity. While coexisting with it and imposing our senses on the film, we perceive it as a subject.

Meanwhile, the cinematic embodied vision and subjectivity are irreducible to the spectator’s investment. First, the film articulates its materiality and capacity to see as a subject by means of technology. At the most basic level, the film’s body manifests itself through camera, projector, and screen. Just like the human body becomes a fundamental modality and point of orientation for perception, these technological bodies serve as points of orientation for cinematic vision. The material technology is one of the conditions of the cinematic subjectivity because it is what actively reorganizes and restructures the world in accordance with its purposes and possibilities. Such cinematic techniques and devices as editing, framing, coloring, and so on, also point to the physical nature of cinema and at the same time to its subjective power to subdue and transform the reality. The technological body becomes a universal mediator for the spectator. While describing the multiplicity of our relations with the cinematic technology, Stadler writes that “We see the technology (the screen), we see *with* the technology (the camera and the spectator both look at the story world together), and we see *through* the technology (we are largely unaware of the presence of the projector, or of the camera . . .). We also see *in addition to* the technology (we can look away from the screen, or look at one small part of it)” (46).

The technology and cinematic techniques function as a demonstration of reflexive, subjective activity of film or ability of the film’s body “to expressively organize the perceptual experience of consciousness” (Sobchack, *The Address of the Eye* 252). That is, according to

Sobchack, film might be understood as showing the work of mind or even representing an independent, effective mind that possesses a unique view of the reality.

One should note that the concept of cinematic mind is not new in film theory. Furthermore, the film-mind analogy constitutes one of the major philosophical paradigms taken by film theorists. However, the contribution of film phenomenology to these debates consists in its implicit acknowledgement of the interdependence of matter and consciousness. For film phenomenologists, consciousness which is never empty and directed toward the world cannot be separated from materiality of this world, on the one hand, and body, on the other. Equally, they consider the film mind as materially embedded and corporeally grounded expression of the work of consciousness. Many leading film theorists, on the contrary, tend to eliminate the issue of matter in their discussion of film as mind. For instance, Münsterberg strictly distinguished consciousness and reality by stating that film “obeys the laws of the mind rather than those of the outer world” (97). Metz, whose famous comparison of cinema with dreaming and hallucination deeply informs the psychoanalytic film theory, emphasizes that film in its recreation of the unconscious is based on “temporary suspension of concern for the exterior world as well as the cathexis of objects, at least in their real form” (207). Another example is Gilles Deleuze’s approach. Although, under the influence of Bergsonian views on the correlation between mind and matter, Deleuze seems to provide the phenomenological perspective and equate the consciousness and the reality, he prioritizes the mechanisms of mind in this equation. That is, while phenomenology insists on the idea that matter is a modality of conscious life and its essential condition, Deleuze focuses on how consciousness informs the matter and, in fact, subjects the reality to its own laws. Revealing itself due to its connection with the spectator’s and

filmmaker's consciousness, the cinematic mind, for Deleuze, does not give us the body and matter because

it sets itself a different objective; it spreads an "experimental night" or a white space over us; it works with "dancing seeds" and a "luminous dust"; it affects the visible with a fundamental disturbance, and the world with a suspension, which contradicts all natural perception. What it produces in this way is the genesis of an "unknown body" which we have in the back of our heads, like the unthought in thought . . . (194)

Thus, despite the fact that the philosopher points to the production of corporeality through the cinematic work, this corporeality appears to come from the depths of mind. The "unknown body" of cinema is a potentiality of consciousness but not of the matter.

It may seem that, while theorizing about the cinematic embodied subjectivity, film phenomenology can consider the cinematic technology and devices from the formalist perspective. But, unlike formalism, phenomenological approach often accentuates the matter of film by suppressing the self-evident, aesthetic correspondence between technology, on the one hand, and symbolic and narrative form of cinematic text, on the other. In this regard, phenomenology, as Chare and Watkins put it, focuses on the "viewer's encounter with the substance that undergirds the image" (75). In their analysis of found footage films *Lyrical Nitrate* (Peter Delpout, 1990) and *Decasia* (Bill Morrison, 2002), Chare and Watkins examine the ability of the cinematic flesh to manifest itself through the substance of decaying, fading and damaged footage. They demonstrate that this footage "functions to undermine the grammar and syntax of the films, their symbolic aspect, disrupting cinema's narrative function and . . . permitting the thing that is film to materialize alternative, often disavowed, meanings" (Chare and Watkins 75-76). The key point to take from this is that the carnality of film confirms the cinematic subjectivity not only because it determines the film's active involvement in

reorganization of the world but also because it is able to conflict with proposed meanings, challenge and replace them. Thus, by focusing on the material form of cinema, phenomenology considers film as what acts and not only as what is acted upon.

The phenomenological assumption that cinema is an embodied subjectivity is closely associated with the view that film does not merely see the world but also reveals its seeing. Phenomenology addresses film as “experience expressing experience,” that is, as intentional activity of seeing as such (Sobchack, *The Address of the Eye* 5). For phenomenology, film possesses subjectivity because it literally represents how the mutual connection between the perception and the world is realized. The intentionality as a property of subjective consciousness/experience is also a property of film, since the film’s object (the reality to which it relates) is the film itself. And this cinematic intentionality, intentionality of other consciousness, is visible and tangible for the viewer.

Meanwhile, by accepting the phenomenological stance, one can say again that the matter becomes crucial for this process. In this case, however, we emphasize not the film’s technological body but materiality of the world which serves as an object for the cinematic vision. In its capacity to refer to the real stream of experience, film indicates the union of the corporeality of the world and perception. The matter of the objective world enters the cinematic eye and communicates its physical properties to the image. This assumption has particular resonance in relation with the issue of trace in film theory as it was presented by Walter Benjamin, André Bazin, Stanley Cavell, Roland Barthes and others. In this context, Wahlberg offers her phenomenology of cinematic trace where she emphasizes that the trace of the world reveals itself in the image not only through materiality of the vestige but also through recreation of the sense of *pastness*, sensuous manifestation of presence of the absent. It is

important that, according to Wahlberg, this recreation of the world has specific sensuous, physical nature because it often “fuses with violence and death” (60). Although this idea correlates with Bazin’s concept of a mummy complex, Wahlberg directly refers to the specificity of affective impact of the cinematic image on the viewer’s experience but not to the cultural origins of the cinematic representation. For her, cinema delivers the sense of decay and deterioration of the material world. Unlike Bazin and other theorists of the trace, she also underscores that the visual representation is not constitutive for the cinematic trace. As she notes, sound plays significant role in the cinematic materialization of the reality.

To sum up, from the perspective of phenomenology, the subjectivity of cinema is based on a three-level dynamics of the matter. Film becomes the subject due to (1) the viewer’s bodily and sensuous investment; (2) activity of the cinematic flesh revealing itself through technology and devices; and (3) indexical correlation with the pro-filmic world whose materiality becomes an inseparable content of the cinematic vision. The connection with the spectator’s body allows film to mimic and “borrow” the subjectivity of the viewer. The technological body conditions the capacity of film to reflexively reestablish and reconsider the world, while constructing independent meaning. And finally, the matter of the world which saturates the cinematic perception demonstrates that film duplicates the fundamental feature of subjective consciousness, namely, the feature to be of something, or to be intentional.

Although phenomenology opens new perspectives for ontological studies of cinema, one should recall that film phenomenology itself is not concerned with cinema in the ontological sense. It focuses on the exchange between the spectator and film in the lived experience of viewing. In this regard, phenomenology attributes importance to the film subjectivity and acknowledges its possibility as such only with regard to the viewer. In its modalities of the

seeing and the seen, film exists only to us and only in the spectatorial event. At the same time, whereas it reveals itself within our experience, film is not exactly our experience. This capacity of film to be a subject and physically demonstrate the subjectivity is always considered as a condition for meeting of the spectator with the specific Other. This Other is not merely a distanced object that becomes close and visible to us. As Sobchack writes, film “presents and represents an other who is with us and for us and in itself as an ‘object-subject’” (The Address of the Eye 142). In the film experience, we meet the Other who coexists with us and who appears not only as an object of our experience but as a subject whose internal life has a material form and is tangible to us. This is the Other whose subjectivity is not taken for granted but exists as the matter.

The film experience, thus, activates a particular regime of interaction with the Other. This interaction is based not on the complete merging of our and the cinematic existence but on the feeling of our material similarity and equal co-presence in the world. In this regard Sobchack writes

Certainly, a form of absorption can and does occur in the film experience. But it is not a concrete absorption into the *body* of the other or the *consciousness* of the other. Rather, it is a mutual absorption in the *world*, a mutually directed interest that converges in the visible and its significance. This similar intentional directedness and interest is lived as a similar (but nonidentical) bodily style of being in the world. Thus, at moments, the spectator and the film may live their vision in concert, may seem to predicate it “identically,” each absorbed by and in the other’s predication. (The Address of the Eye, 273)

What is startling about this formulation is that Sobchack emphasizes the role of “bodily style of being in the world” which is shared by the viewer and the film. And again, the similarity of the viewer’s being and the film’s being comes from the intentionality of their activity. The film

demonstrates that it is inseparable from the world it is about. At the same time, the viewer's experience is not isolated from what this experience is about. Both the spectator and the film are subject-objects and exist in the material integrity with the reality.

The process of mutual implication of the Self and the Other in the film viewing where the viewer and film find ourselves adopting a position between these extremes, or rather, playing the role of both subject and object, has its roots in the persistence of the matter. Phenomenological film theory demonstrates that the film experience is embodied and carnal. But this is a specific mode of carnality which can be approached in various ways. Film phenomenology can switch between the focus on embodied vision of the viewer and film, on the one hand, and on their embodied visibility, on the other. Phenomenological approach, however, never focuses on the stable material essences and foregrounds the bodily reversibility of the spectator and film. This is a crucial demand of phenomenological study of the film experience.

4. Semiotic Phenomenology

Whereas film phenomenology considers the spectatorship as grounded in the corporeality and matter, it also admits the flexibility and changeability of the material conditions of the film experience. The materiality of film and spectator manifests itself differently and depends on the specific situation. The spectatorial body is never "clear." It is situated within personal, gender, race, social, and cultural histories which are not merely abstract contexts. Although these contexts are paradigms of signification, they have material equivalent found in the bodies, organization of space, production of objects, and physical interaction with them. The cinematic body, in turn, is subjected to codes of technology, institutions, and aesthetics. And once again, these codes are not ideal but can be embodied. Aesthetics is especially important here because it

is articulated explicitly in the cinematic physical self-revelation. Aesthetic mode directly characterizes the forms of the corporeality of film. For instance, the genre aesthetics of horror films often implies the direct address to human flesh and evokes trauma of bodily disintegration. Meanwhile, the aesthetics of wildlife films establishes connection between human and non-human materiality while challenging the conventional patterns of identification and mimetic relationship.

Taking into account the influence of the sign reality and cultural codes on the film experience, Sobchack introduces the concept of “semiotic phenomenology” of film. At first glance, there may appear a tension between the phenomenological directive to describe the film experience in its immediacy and fluidity and claiming that the analysis of cultural and symbolic contexts is important for this study. In this regard Wahlberg notes that the very expression “semiotic phenomenology” is a “provoking oxymoron” (xi). As she clarifies, philosophical phenomenology “opts for a transcendental method to reveal sensory data through a precise system of description,” and semiotics “draws upon the intersubjective realm of language and a systematic analysis of structural patterns that are primordial to specific meanings’ (Wahlberg xi-xii). Indeed, as mentioned in the previous chapter, phenomenological approach tends to suppress analytical explanation of the experience. While prioritizing the articulation of experience as it is through description, phenomenology considers analysis as a superimposition of pre-knowledge and tyranny against the lived experience.

However, under the influence of Paul Ricoeur, Sobchack reconsiders this perspective by starting with the revision of differentiation between the literal and metaphorical meanings. Phenomenology implies that description provides the most accurate view to the experience because it is based on the literal transfer of the real in language. Meanwhile, analysis and

explanation use highly metaphorical linguistic constructions determined by epistemological, historical and social conventions and, moreover, are often directed to the production of new metaphorical systems which do not shed light on the reality but continue to alienate it from us. While referring to the film experience, Sobchack, in turn, argues that “In that experience the literal and figural reciprocate and reverse themselves as “sense” – primary and secondary contexts confused, hierarchy and thus the grounds of metaphor undermined if not completely undone” (“What My Fingers Knew” 80).

In the film experience, the boundary between the literal and the metaphorical is erased. The sign of the film image is experienced as a material reality that exists in front of our eyes. It is interesting to note that quite often phenomenological descriptions of the film experience seem to be metaphorical. The attempt to convey the sensations (smell, taste, touch, etc.) or to describe the cinematic flesh as it is given through film stock, color, close-ups and so on produces an effect of almost poetic expression. Meanwhile, here we deal with the deconstruction of the metaphoric. Sobchack explains that a word acquires its literal meaning only within the normative contexts, whereas it becomes metaphoric when it is used in an unconventional way. At the same time, if we accept the phenomenological assumption that our experience represents the unity of all senses, diffusion of the material and the immaterial, and of the objective and the subjective, then we also accept the impossibility to recognize any hierarchy, including hierarchy of meanings and hierarchy of the normative and non-normative contexts of using those meanings. Therefore, we lose the ability to recognize the literal and the metaphoric. Sobchack concludes that in our perception of the sensual language of phenomenological description as metaphoric we are under the influence of reductive “afterthought” (“What My Fingers Knew” 80).

Just like the metaphoric turns out to be the literality and corporeality in the act of talking about the film viewing, the cultural signs and codes become existential and material modality of the film experience. They are not extraneous, received schemata but inseparable part of our interaction with the film. In this regard, Sobchack writes that

the film experience – on both sides of the screen – mobilizes, confuses, reflectively differentiates, yet experientially unites lived bodies and language, and foregrounds the reciprocity and reversibility of sensible matter and sensual meaning. Our fingers, our skin and nose and lips and tongue and stomach and all other parts of us understand what we see in the film experience. (“What My Fingers Knew” 84).

That is, there is no recognizable, identifiable difference between the non-cultural and the cultural in the film experience. MacDougall emphasizes this co-presence by saying that “We see conceptually, metaphorically, linguistically. But whatever our culture, we also see to some extent literally” (2).

Semiotic phenomenology is possible because it ignores hierarchies of the primary and secondary levels of meaning-making. The signification and materiality coexist in their mutability. One of the tasks of phenomenological approach, then, becomes the task of exposing of how the carnal manifests itself in the signification and how the signification articulates its materiality. For this reason, focus on the body of spectator and film body as the symbolical, culturally conditioned matters is not something extraneous and paradoxical towards film phenomenology. On the contrary, this is what helps to describe experience understood through the prism of correlation with the world, where the latter exists as the unity of the material and the sign.

This perspective implying the synchronicity of matter and sign or experience and construction of meaning is promoted by other film phenomenologists. The scholars aim to show

that the “muteness” of bodies and the matter never entails the absence of meaning or our futility to understand it experientially. While referring to the specific examples from cinema, they show that the matter of medium always exists in the context of its form that is sign. Equally, the matter of the viewer is grounded within the act of sign-making.

Cobb underscores this phenomenological assumption by stating that meaning “emerges for us as a direct result of our fundamental state of being-in-the-world” and that it is “our always embodied and irreducibly involved relationship with the world” (“Cinema of Pre-predication”). That is, our existential, material presence itself becomes a condition for meaning. For Cobb, Stan Brakhage’s filmmaking aesthetic, especially prominent in *The Act of Seeing With One’s Own Eyes* (1971), is what perfectly demonstrates that the meaning exists within a thing because it is a thing and because the corporeal cannot be outside of our consciousness, and vice versa. As he continues, “when we thematise phenomena, we cannot and should not attempt to detach ourselves completely from it; we cannot perceive objects from nowhere, but only from within the world itself” (“Cinema of Pre-predication”).

In her analysis of Jean-Luc Godard’s *Passion* (1982), following from Merleau-Ponty and Sobchack, Del Rio emphasizes that the distinction between the body and its meaning is barely perceptible. For her, the bodily gesture is what proves the impossibility of such kind of division, and Godard’s reconstruction of Rembrandt’s *Nightwatch* along with images of Isabelle Huppert illustrate this “capacity of the body to speak for its subject” through the action and pose (Del Rio, “Alchemies of Thought” 66). The gesture, according to Del Rio, reveals both meaning and intentionality of consciousness and shows that “the body functions as a primordial ground of semiosis” (“Alchemies of Thought” 66). This is true not only for the cinematic image itself but also for the body of spectator whose voyeuristic and constrained position still “exhibits its own

particular bodily conduct and signification” (Del Rio, “The Body of Voyeurism” 145). The absence or presence of the spectator’s gesture and its specificity, thus, mark a specific mode of symbolic involvement.

By formulating her research task as “to find culture *within* the body” (The Skin of the Film, 152), Marks actively supports the main assumptions of Sobchack’s semiotic phenomenology and clearly declares her disagreement with the position that the body and senses oppose the meaning and knowledge. For her, the separation of experience and logic of sign is a result of “the Eurocentric mistake of thinking” (The Skin of the Film, 144). The historically well-entrenched disregard or suppression of proximal senses in Western culture results in the belief that these senses and corporeality do not belong to culture in general, whereas many non-Western cultural regimes explicitly situate body within production of meaning and their epistemologies. According to Marks, our body and sensorium are culturally informed and symbolically saturated and, in the film experience, “We bring our own personal and cultural organization of the senses to cinema, and cinema brings a particular organization of the senses to us . . .” (The Skin of the Film, 152).

The concept of semiotic phenomenology which comes from the elaboration of the dialectic of the embodied seeing and the embodied seen demonstrates that film phenomenology has roots in radical materialism. The phenomenological understanding of sign, language and culture through the prism of their physical manifestation, on the one hand, and positioning of the matter within the context of act of signification, on the other, challenge the familiar inclination of film scholars to distinguish aesthetic and cultural film studies. The phenomenological perspective as it is presented in contemporary film theory suggests the reconsideration of conventional oppositions of the matter and culture, biology and psychology.

In this chapter, I have tried to demonstrate that, despite the diversity of phenomenological approaches to cinema, the intention to reexamine the normative epistemological division of subject and object, sight and the seen, and body and culture is what characterizes the agenda of entire phenomenological movement in film studies. While focusing on the embodied nature of our vision as well as on the embodied existence of its content, film phenomenologists offer the fresh framework for analysis of film experience and cinema as artistic, technological and cultural phenomenon. Within this framework, the spectator and film unroll as the mutually corresponding and dependent matters possessing corporeality. The bodily being of the viewer and film underlies the instability of their status as subject or object and implies that they always exist in the situation of changing places. This ontological merging of subjectivity and objectivity constitutes the essential assumption of all film phenomenological theories today. It also determines the development of contemporary media phenomenology inspired by actual transformation of technology and our communication with it.

Chapter 5. Conclusion

The studies of spectatorship remain one of the most problematic areas in film theory. The exploration of the nature of film viewing is the subject of sustained controversy having to do with an ambivalent position of scholar, and unification and idealization of the film experiences.

The criterion of objectivity of academic research demands the scholar's self-exclusion, suppression of his/her subjectivity. In film studies, this requirement often leads to the separation of scholarly perspective from the perspective of spectator. The status of scholar as a concerned, curious film viewer is often concealed or abolished. Meanwhile, it is impossible to conduct the study of film experience by keeping the personal distance from the object. Moreover, the very idea of this field contradicts the tasks of "objectivity" set by classical academia. As a result, the theorists dealing with the issue of film viewing are forced to balance between the institutional conventions and epistemological agenda conditioned by the specificity of their area of studies. The crucial problem here is that the pressure of rationalist models of investigation outweigh and the scholar's presence paradoxically turns out to be invisible in the situation where its visibility is necessary.

The recreation of film experience in its complexity and multiplicity is beset with similar difficulties. The prerequisites of rigorous, objective theoretical research seem to reduce the film viewing to a set of static characteristics shared by every spectator. The spectatorship is often explained through the ready-made formulas, whether they are psychoanalytic models or cognitive assumptions. These formulas create the ideal viewer whose position is defined by theoretical pre-conceptions of particular paradigms, whereas the real existential, cultural and historical instability and diversity of film experiences are silenced.

The phenomenological turn of the 1990s and 2000s in film studies is a reaction to these persistent problems of theory of film experience. Contemporary film phenomenology is an attempt to restore the scholar's subjectivity and to subvert the accepted views to research behavior. In this regard, I wanted to bring attention to phenomenological turn as an epistemological revolution which redefines the strategies of film scholarship and academic study in general. Thus, film phenomenology is not a complete theory of spectatorship which offers us causal explanations of how we experience film. It is a specific methodology and model of philosophical thinking which gives us an opportunity to reevaluate our approaches to theorizing and talking about film viewing.

My ultimate goal was to explain where the phenomenological epistemology comes from and which fundamental assumptions underlie this project in film theory. The reason why I consider the research of these issues to be important is that, despite the growing popularity of phenomenological studies of film which have already acquired a status of academic fashion, many film scholars tend to apply phenomenological approach randomly and incoherently. Without understanding the ethical meaning of film phenomenology and its connection with a distinct intellectual tradition, we cannot fully uncover the potential of this paradigm for our future studies (Casetti, 2015; Gunning, 2008).

I started my research by analyzing the epistemic standards of classical and post-classical film theory which film phenomenology opposes. One of such basic standards questioned by film phenomenology is ocularcentrism, that is, the assumption that we experience film exclusively through the vision and that the looking determines our spectatorial position. Film phenomenologists do not deny the obvious fact that the sight plays an important role in our experience of film. Rather, they criticize the ideas of the fundamental distance and hierarchy

which produced by ocularcentrism. Ocularcentric paradigm implies that our vision is separated from the rest of our body and from the world but connected with our mind which perceives the film through the eyes. This perspective prioritizes the distances between the vision and the body and between the consciousness and the body and isolates us from the outer world by situating us as external observers. It creates a sensuous hierarchy where vision becomes the most significant sense and hierarchy of the mind-body relationship where the body takes a subordinate position.

The ocularcentrism is directly associated with another epistemic standard rooted in Cartesian rationalism and criticized by film phenomenology. This type of rationalism is what informs the entire tradition of Western humanities, including film theory. While promoting the dichotomy of mind and body, Cartesianism is skeptical about the category of experience as such. It insists that knowledge is received and produced by the reason which is immaterial essence. The corporeality of our existence and materiality of the world are obstacles for our cognition. In this regard, the division between the subject and the object is not only ontological separation between us and the physical world but also epistemological separation between the cognizing subject and the cognized object. This subject-object antithesis, foregrounding of the mind, and oppression of the corporeal existence are dominant lines of thought which have been adopted by most of film theories.

Cartesian anxiety in response to the matter has engendered another epistemic tendency, namely, tendency to turn the material into the immaterial through signification. The conversion of the lived, embodied experience of film into the operation with signs and abstract concepts is what conditions the dominance of linguistic and semiotic models of analysis in film theory. These theories do not merely apply such models in articulating and explaining the film experience but they transfer them on the very nature of this experience. That is, these models

serve not as epistemological strategies but as ready, complete ontologies of the film experience. The film viewing here becomes an expression or illustration of the pregiven concepts.

What has happened due to the phenomenological turn in film theory is that these epistemological strategies and premises were recognized as insufficient for understanding our interaction with film. Film phenomenology calls upon us to think about our film experience through the entire body, through our real, material presence in front of the screen. It acknowledges the bodily nature of vision and the inseparability of mind and our carnality. Moreover, it acknowledges the integrity of the spectator and the surrounding environment which also includes film. Thus, the subject-object dichotomy loses its authority. The reversibility of subject and object entails that their division cannot be a criterion of the research objectivity. Film phenomenology brackets all questions about objectivity as such because it is driven by intention to express the film experience as it is while disregarding explanatory mode of study. The viewer's embodied, palpable subjectivity living in the unity with the world is the main source for phenomenological investigation.

In my research, I adopt the view that the emergence of new epistemologies is directly related to the cultural transformations. Therefore, the legitimization of phenomenological project in film theory is not accidental process but culturally and politically conditioned phenomenon. At the most basic level, the advent of film phenomenology has to do with the reorganization of our experience due to new media technologies. The sensuous shock caused by the new conditions of bodily involvement in the process of consumption, production and distribution of media has made us rediscover our body and reconsider the connection between the consciousness and corporeality of our existence. The contemporary media environment makes the body visible and active. In addition, today interactive media systems erase the boundary between us as subjects

and media products as objects of our experience. We, in fact, participate in film and film participates in our life due to digital technologies, numerous devices, and networking. It is notable that this deconstruction of the subject-object boundary is realized through the disintegration of our body. The body has become so tangible because its stability has been shaken.

Film phenomenology is an epistemological response to the reconfiguration of our bodily existence through the recent media practices. It is also a reaction to the new identity politics based on the recognition of flexible and uncertain identities. The transformation of economic systems under conditions of circulation of the global capital and erosion of national and cultural barriers suggests the model of decentralized and undetermined subject whose ability to produce and consume is not restricted. The formation of such subject is achieved through the deconstruction of the previous rationalist models of knowledge. In this regard, the phenomenological turn in film theory reproduces this paradigm by reinforcing the fundamental logic of the late capitalism. Film phenomenology mirrors the new ethics where the subject is uncontrolled and where the dominance of one specific mode of knowledge is considered to be impossible and undesirable. For this reason, film phenomenology is closely associated with feminism and social critique of gender, race and class. It is directed to the expression of the diversity of experience and complexity of the subject.

The understanding of how film phenomenology meets the requirements of the cultural context and corresponds with the new patterns of production of knowledge is necessary if we strive for responsible research and want to apply this methodology consciously. In my thesis, I do not offer a comprehensive discursive and cultural analysis of phenomenological turn. I have

tried to delineate the general specificity of phenomenological agenda in terms of its status within the institution of film studies and contemporary culture.

Meanwhile, another task of my study was to show how film phenomenology relates to the concrete intellectual tradition of philosophical thinking. Examination of the basic concepts and methods of phenomenological philosophy which inform film phenomenology helps clarify the possibilities and intentions of the latter. I analyzed the most important assumptions of phenomenology about the nature of experience, intentionality of consciousness and strategies of phenomenological epistemology based on descriptive method and reduction.

In general, phenomenology aims to restore a living, immediate experience which is understood as a reflexive awareness of our own existence and presence in the world here and now. It considers experience as a manifestation of our unity with the world which was neglected by the Western rationalism. This unity is possible due to the fundamental intentionality of our consciousness. Intentionality means the directedness of consciousness to an object. It means that our consciousness is never empty, it is always of something. That is, phenomenology rejects the idea that we can separate the consciousness or experience from their content. For instance, thinking of a tree, hearing a sound of streets, watching a film are all events of diffusion between us and these objective phenomena.

For phenomenology, articulation of experience must be implemented through specific mode of language, namely, through simple description. The descriptive method implies exclusion of all evaluations, judgements, and opinions about the object and using of regular everyday language. The task of this method is to recreate the experiential integrity of subject and object through elimination of explanatory and theoretical perspective. The pre-given theories are of interest to the phenomenologist only in terms of their belonging to the experience of the

world. That is, they become an object of phenomenology as phenomena of our experience and product of consciousness but not as heuristic tool or heuristic goal. In this regard, phenomenological epistemology always requires the high level of self-reflexivity and insists on the necessity to train our ability to talk about our talking, to understand how we are subject to the knowledge which is not a component of our immediate experience.

The bracketing of the pre-knowledge is what is called a phenomenological reduction. The attitude to reduction is a criterion for the major division of phenomenology into transcendental and existential movements. The Husserlian transcendental phenomenology aims to bracket any knowledge including the knowledge about the material existence of the subject. Its purpose is to study consciousness directed at itself. It is a study of consciousness which studies itself. The transcendental model has not received significant attention within contemporary phenomenological turn and its critical influence can be recognized in the work of only one scholar – Allan Casebier. Meanwhile, the tradition of existential phenomenology adopted through Merleau-Ponty's philosophy is what forms the basis of today's film phenomenology. This tradition denies the possibility of the radical reductionism of transcendental phenomenology and fairly considers it as a principle which contradicts the very idea of phenomenology and returns us back to the rationalism of Descartes.

Merleau-Ponty's existential phenomenology suggests that the limits of reduction lie in the sphere of our bodily, material existence. The knowledge about our body is a knowledge which never can be bracketed in our exploration of experience. The body is a point of departure for our orientation in the world. Moreover, the body is a lively representation of how subject and object can coexist through the unity of the mind and the matter.

Merleau-Ponty's approach plays the major role for film phenomenology because his philosophy of embodiment directly relates to the new paradigm of thinking about the vision and our communication with the visible. Our body is the subject-object substance because it can see as a subject and can be visible as a thing simultaneously. Moreover, our bodily vision like touch reenacts the logic of diffusion of subject and object because we cannot distinguish the act of looking from its content. That is, it possesses intentionality.

These essential assumptions of phenomenology, and in particular existential phenomenology, are constitutive for phenomenological theory of film experience. My final task was to examine how these assumptions have been adapted by film phenomenology. In my thesis, I point out that film phenomenology is not a single movement. However, I have attempted to demonstrate that the idea of dialectics of the seeing and the seen is what underlies all phenomenological studies of cinema. This idea implies that the viewer and film exist as components of each other. Film is not a static viewed object whereas the viewer is not an independent viewing subject. They absorb each other in the intentional act of viewing by mutually transforming the modes of their existence.

This is exactly because both film and spectator are material bodies which can see and be visible. The viewer becomes visible thing due to the investment of his/her material being into the film and inability to dissociate this being from the film image. Our bodily senses and affects are imposed on the film and turn out to be seen for us. In addition, the visibility of spectator is conditioned by his/her real situatedness within the world. We do not watch a film from nowhere but always exist in the material spaces and corporeally interact with technologies. We, thus, manifest our presence to others.

Meanwhile, film becomes a seeing subject because it borrows the subjectivity of the viewer through the connection with his/her corporeality. It expresses its capacity to see subjectively through technology and active reorganization of the world. Finally, cinema functions as a subjective seeing due to its directedness to the profilmic world. In this regard, what film phenomenology points out is that film itself reproduces the experience. It directly represents intentionality of consciousness through the integrity of embodied cinematic perception and its object.

Thus, film phenomenology offers us a research paradigm which eliminates the question about the object or subject of study. It focuses on their dynamic mutability and coexistence through materiality. The radical materialism of film phenomenology offers us another unexpected solution for conducting a study of film experience. Film phenomenology does not accept the idea that our experience is free from signification and cultural codes. For this reason, it denies that we can ignore the historical and sociocultural context of film viewing or aesthetic properties of film itself. However, it questions the view to sign as an abstract, immaterial construct. For film phenomenologists, sign can also be material, it is always connected to the flesh of the world. The viewer's body is subject to the personal, gender, race, social, and cultural histories which are not ideal contexts but bodily paradigms of signification. At the same time, the cinematic body is the matter which bears the codes of technology, institutions, and aesthetics.

Here, we see again that phenomenological paradigm fiercely rejects any division and hierarchy between the material and the immaterial. It erases the boundary between the literal and the metaphoric as well. The phenomenological model of semiotics does not imply that we feel and experience signs in the act of film viewing as culturally formulated, pregiven meanings. It implies that signs can be experienced corporeally. In this regard, the task of phenomenological

approach is to articulate how the carnal manifests itself in the signification and how the signification articulates its materiality in a living experience. This perspective overcomes the problems of the leading approaches to the film experience – psychoanalysis and cognitive theory. Whereas psychoanalysis suppresses the real bodily experience of the viewer and applies the ready-made concepts to it, cognitive approach suppresses the presence of concepts within our experience and considers the spectator as a mechanical body. Phenomenology, in turn, offers us the third way where the body and sign are inseparable.

At first glance, it may seem that, despite its intention to recreate the film experience as it is, film phenomenology yet offers us some ready conception which explains how we interact with the film. However, I would like to emphasize here that film phenomenology based on existentialism argues that the recreation of the experience is impossible if we bracket the fundamental knowledge – knowledge of our bodily presence. As I have attempted to show, this approach does not explain the mechanisms and structures of the film experience but points to the basic condition of our experience which is the matter. The matter of both film and the viewer cannot be ignored by scholars and should be considered as an epistemological point of departure in our study of the film viewing.

This thesis is an introductory research illuminating the basics of film phenomenology as a specific research program which reformulates the issues of subject, object, vision and sign. My hope was to reconstruct the cultural and philosophical foundations of this program which often seem to be obscure and ambiguous, and hence irrelevant. I believe that this epistemological project has a great potential for our understanding the contemporary media cultures and our interaction with them. For this reason, it deserves to be explored in order to be applied properly as an alternative to our habits of thinking.

At this point, I see three major possibilities for the future research of film phenomenology as an epistemological project. First, it is a study of ethics of film phenomenology. As mentioned above, phenomenological turn in film theory is one of the reactions of humanities to the bodily and identity politics formed by the late capitalism. On the one hand, these politics are directed to the formation of new type of flexible consumer/producer whose existence meets the requirements of the new economic systems. On the other hand, they allow a restoration of the multiplicity of the gender, race and social identities suppressed by the normative forms of knowledge. In this regard, film phenomenology finds itself in an ambivalent situation. While acknowledging that the viewer's identity is unstable and dissolved within the world and that the articulation of the film experience must be self-reflexive and based on the recognition of the real conditions of the scholar's existence (which include gender, race, etc.), film phenomenology reinforces both the capitalist agenda and humanistic, ethical intention to emancipate the identities from the epistemological and cultural dogmata. This dilemma has an ethical character and can become a topic for separate research.

The second possibility lies in the exploration of the non-Western phenomenological thought. The suppression of the bodily nature of subjectivity and the dominance of the mind-body division is a part of Western, elitist paradigm of thinking. The European phenomenological tradition which informs film phenomenology today still operates within the framework of this paradigm. Although it rejects the Cartesian rationalism, it always functions in relation to it. Meanwhile, many non-Western philosophies are sources which can help us overcome our cultural predispositions and can suggest some unconventional epistemological strategies for film phenomenology.

Finally, it is important for the epistemological studies of film phenomenology to analyze the issue of language. We need to decide how to talk about our film experience, how to express its real nature. Film phenomenology insists on the necessity to use the descriptive, non-conceptual, everyday language. However, it is difficult to outline the limits of description and distinguish it from the non-descriptive linguistic mode. Also, it is still unclear how this language can be adopted by academic institutions. Film phenomenology does not consider any alternative methods of articulation of the film experience. In this context, to provide some solutions to this problem would be a serious achievement.

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