The dancing qualities of the cinematic space

A methodological experiment in order to perceive the motion picture as a dancing body

A Master's Thesis for the Degree of Master of Arts (120 credits) in Visual Culture

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Acknowledgments

Abstract

The thesis is proposing a method to perceive the cinematic space as a body in motion. The foundation for such an experimental method is traced within the investigation of the movement in the study of the motion picture, as well as in a phenomenological approach to dance, and in selected theories from the continental philosophy of the 20th century. In doing so, the paper aims to widen, examine and rethink the fundamental assumptions that are culturally and historically allocated to the cinematic expression. Therefore, a large amount of the thesis focuses on the juxtaposition of diverse theoretical approaches to construct a solid theoretical framework within which I will form the method. Furthermore, within a visual culture perspective, the thesis draws upon the debate between vision and blindness – what an audience sees and what it does not see in the experience of the motion picture – and it invites the reader to expand, challenge and deviate from a content-based approach in cinema.

The genesis of such a method will enable me and the audience to experiment with an alternative way of visualising and perceiving the motion picture at large. Nevertheless, within this paper, my aim is to solely introduce and clearly explicate each of the given qualities of dance that can be applied to the cinematic space. To do so, my analysis will be limited to the realm of avant-garde cinema.

Keywords

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Introduction

There are certain thinkers whose approach to philosophy is close to the work of an artist, and artists whose creations reach toward a philosophical discourse. In an attempt to group them together, one could say that in the contemporary cultural environment, there exists certain kinds of authors whose curiosity leads them to places that are hard to define. They are driven by the necessity of walking the forest of knowledge intuitively, without a map, but rather in a possible direction. Getting lost is part of the process.[1] The necessity of a comparison between dance and cinematic motion withholds several layers of personal interest, but ultimately its genesis can be traced back to a specific epiphany.

It was an evening back in February 2018, when I went to a dance performance called Splendour, by Stina Nyberg, at the Oslo Dansens Hus. At that time, I had scant knowledge of dance and I do not recall the reason as to why I arrived on that scene. I believe I was simply moved by curiosity for something I had not ever experienced before. I remember sitting in darkness amongst the other spectators, looking around, waiting for something. I had no idea how it would have begun or developed. Eventually, the theatre lights faded, and something alive and vibrant began taking place before my very eyes. Captured by the flux of bodies in rhythm, suddenly, in a current of total engagement in my experience of what was happening, all that mattered was there and then. For the duration of the event, one gesture after another suspended my disbelief, judgment, and interpretation. In the flux of bodies in motion there was no time to make sense of it. What I was left with were only my feelings and sensations. To quote William Fetterman on Merce Cunningham, 'we are culturally not trained to observe dance'[2], and I would like to add: luckily we are culturally not trained to observe dance. In fact, as I was experiencing the performance, I couldn't fix any reference outside motion itself. The delimitation of identities of bodies in motion, their clothing, their gender, their appearance, liquified into a flux of emotions, which to me, up until today, are still difficult to rationalise or analyse. That event was my closest experience to something like a pure presence, a presence almost sublime.

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[1] Barnett, D., *Movement as meaning: In experimental film.* (NY, 2008) 1.

[2] Fetterman, W., 'Merce Cunningham and John Cage: Choreographic Cross-current.' Choreography and Dance 4, n.3. (1997), 60.

Aim/Outcome

The following question naturally emerges from the brief introduction to the thesis theme: what does my experience of dance have to do with cinematic practice? After all, the history of cinema has a rich and vibrant tradition of film theory for which cinema is a mode of representing the real and/or manner of telling stories. My purpose in undertaking an investigation of the moving image in comparison with the moving body is to propose a potential method to perceive the event of film projection within the sensation generated by a dance performance. My goal is to construct a theoretical foundation upon which this experimental method can be grounded, and later apply it to selected empirical evidence chosen from the history of cinema. The idea is that this method might be applied to any motion picture work, and possibly developed further in the future; nevertheless, for the purpose of this thesis its application is necessarily limited to films commonly referred to as avant-garde. This delimitation is necessary to deliver a clear and functional overview of my method. It does not, however, exclude the possibility of applying the method to markedly differing empirical evidence, although that is not the purpose of this paper. In fact, the question my thesis aims to answer is:

Perceiving the screen as a surface of motion, a space defined by light in flux, where the form does not exist apart from the movement and the movement does not exist apart from the form, would it be possible to establish a methodological framework to sense cinematic motion as a dancing body?

The necessity motivating this specific research path bloomed from the encounter of my professional background as film director/cinematographer, vis á vis my recent studies in visual culture. At the core of my interest is the theme of vision, visuality, and how that generates in the audience. For instance, could the perception of the moving image be severely limited to its signification? However, given my career in film, I am also concerned with how as authors, *we*[3] come to the action of generating motion pictures. Are *we* also constraining the

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[3] By "we" I am referring to myself and other filmmakers.

potentiality of the cinematic medium to the possible *blindness*[4] of the audience? These premises in time lead to the emergence of the pulsating main question that is the ultimate outcome that I would like to answer in my following paper.

Background and relevance

Movement is the major element of the following investigation. To an extent, movement is an element essential to all the art forms and is for some theories the foundation of any activity or cognition.[5] In this section, my aim is to delimit the background and underline the relevance of motion for this paper.

The etymology of the word cinema shows a term formed by the Greek *kinemat-*, the combining form of *kinema* (movement) from *kinein* (to move), and *graphein* (to write). This definition relates closely to cinema's function, fruition, and generation. In fact, its creation happened within a study of motion; here I am pointing to the pioneering experiments by Eadweard Muybridge (1830–1904), specifically his works on animal locomotion in 1877 and 1878, for which he used multiple cameras to capture motion in stop-motion photographs.[6]

In philosophy, movement is strictly connected to the idea of *becoming*, a concept dear to ancient Greek philosophers, as in, for instance, the ontology of the pre-Socratic Ionian philosopher Heraclitus of Ephesus (*c.*535–*c.*475 BC), for whom nothing in this world is constant except change, that is, *becoming*. This idea of *becoming* is something that haunted and worried ancient Greek philosophers and led them to ground one of the first attempts to tame and make bearable the intensity of the dynamic of *becoming*.[7] Here I am referring to the introduction in Western thought of the concept of the *absolute*[8] or the

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[4] The concept of audience blindness is taken from J. Derrida's *Memoirs of the Blind*. I will discuss it further in chapter 2.

[5] See, for example, Barbara Tversky's theory in her book *Mind in Motion: How Action Shapes Thought* (2019).

[6] Muybridge, E., *Animals in motion*. (Dover Publ. 1957).

[7] E. Severino, 'La Filosofia Dai Greci al nostro tempo', in *La filosofia contemporanea* (BUR, 2004).

[8] By *absolute* I mean a privileged idea or static pose and by *becoming* the experience of a continuous flux.

existence of a space like the Platonic *hyperuranion*,[9] in which exists only an ideal realm of forms and matter that, instead of transforming and changing, is rather static. Much of western philosophy as well as religions such as Christianity followed the trend of a static heaven in contrast to a life of movement and becoming. A drastic change in the understanding of *becoming* happened due to thinkers of the nineteenth century, particularly the German philosopher Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche (1844–1900), who understood the *cure* (the absolute) to be more harmful than the *pain* (becoming). Within the field of visual culture, the dichotomy between the *absolute* and *becoming* can be grasped in the realm of *visuality* through the difference between the *recognition* (absolute) of and the sensation or the *encounter* (becoming) with an image, or in my case, a moving image.[10] While encountering the phenomenon of a moving image, the observer is confronted with the experience of its kinetic power on one side, and the surface where the image unfolds on the other. At this point, further clarification must be made on what I mean by moving image, which is to me an inquiry rooted in the studies of vision, visuality, and ways of seeing, and a ramification growing more out the field of visual culture studies than film studies. Within this thesis, I will attempt to prioritise the idea that the moving image holds both an inherent motion and a reflected motion withheld by the observers in the act of experiencing it. The moving image is intended as a vessel of motion. This motion or movement is the primary subject of investigation, opening up the possibility of comparing the cinematic space to the space generated by a dancing body. For this reason, this thesis develops from the tradition of phenomenology[11]—the philosophy of experience—and therefore understands the motion picture as an inseparable whole where no single element of the motion picture is detachable, resulting in an image where no form or signification might exist apart from its movement and, as a consequence, no movement within an image might exist apart from the form it generates. This is a discussion that I will explore in depth in Chapter 2; at this point it is only necessary

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[9] The *hyperuranion* is a place in heaven where all the ideas of real things are grouped. In Plato's view, the idea of a phenomenon is beyond the realm of real phenomena, and everything one experiences in life is merely a copy of the perfect model that exists in the *hyperuranion*.

[10] This dichotomy between recognising and encountering is an idea that I have extracted from Gilles Deleuze's *Difference and Repetition*. In particular, I am referring to the passage on page 139: 'Something in the world forces us to think. This something is an object not of **recognition** but of a fundamental **encounter** … In whichever tone, its [encounter] primary characteristic is that it can only be sensed. In this sense it is opposed to recognition. In recognition, the sensible is not at all that which can only be sensed, but that which bears directly upon the senses in an object which can be recalled, imagined or conceived.'

[11] For phenomenology, the ultimate source of all meaning and value is the lived experience of human beings.

to specify that by the body of the moving image I refer to something that might not be external to the perception of the audience but is generated from a given participation between the physical side of the image and the abstraction created by its observers instead. Therefore, in my research in the comparison between the motion picture and the motion of the dancer's gestures, I am attempting to do something that diverges from the realm of motion as cognition, something that Erin Brannigan describes as *somatic intelligence,* a concept that Jane Goodall (b.1934) referred to as 'how bodies think and how movement might be a form of thinking'.[12] Instead, my focus is primarily on the meeting point between the motion image and observer, where the movement is the vessel where the encounter of forms, abstraction, and meaning takes place.

Theory

The objective of this thesis is to conduct an inquiry into cinema using dance by investigating an element that they share: movement. For this reason, the theories I have selected for the analysis do not have strict historical or methodological coherence; the usage and adaptation of the selected thoughts is perhaps like the use one makes of a tool in the creation of something new—hopefully, a pathway leading to unexpected conclusions, rather than a means to confirm a pre-established vision.

Given that establishing a method is the goal of this thesis, and that my attitude towards the construction of this method relies on a *qualitative* and *observational* approach, the theoretical spectrum at my disposal within visual culture studies is fairly broad. Saying that, since this research disregards the production of meaning and signification within the formal analysis of the light flux in motion pictures, I am taking a strict distance from theoretical currents focusing on content or cultural analysis such as semiology and psychoanalysis. Instead, my attention will focus on the *here and now* of the filmic experience: the *event*.[13] Therefore, at the beginning of Chapter 1, my writing will diverge slightly from phenomenology as I am employing the books *Cinema I* and *Cinema II* by the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze

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[12] Goodall, cited in E. Brannigan, 'A Cinema of Movement: Dance and the Moving Image' (2004).

[13] By the term *event*, I am referring solely to Maxime Sheets-Johnstone's *lived experience* of a dance, the moment in which observers are wholly concentrated on the continuous emergence of forms appearing in front of them.

(1925–1995) to discuss primary the concept of *ancient* and *modern* movement. *Cinema I* and *Cinema II* are works that might appear to contradict the phenomenological approach. In fact, in the construction of a taxonomy of the cinematic image, Deleuze deliberately decided to keep the philosophy of *becoming* by Henri Bergson (1859–1941) separate from the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl (1859–1938), thereby avoiding the introduction of the problem of the *subject vision* or the *point of view,* and instead focusing solely on the image structure.[14] However, as the pivoting point of my investigation is *movement,* it would be short-sighted to disregard the theoretical efforts of Deleuze and Bergson concerning the subject matter. Although they are not traditional phenomenologists, these two philosophers represent the prehistory of the discussion on *movement* in cinema. For this reason, I will employ Deleuze's theory as a starting point, but I will state and explain clearly its limitations when it comes to understanding perception and motion as an *event.* Differently*,* Jean-François Lyotard's (1924–1998) *Acinema* does not discard phenomenology. Instead, it he accepts it, yet he directs his thought primarily towards psychoanalysis. Therefore, if Deleuze's three theses on movement are the first step of my theory, the *economy of movement* in Lyotard's cinematic model of *Acinema* is a continuation towards a more coherent and narrower path of movement in cinema. This is because—in my understanding—cinema in Lyotard's essay is interpreted as performative elements depicted within motion, a realm where *a crowd of elements in motion* is constrained into *real oppression orders*, an oppression that consists of *the enforcement of a nihilism of movements*. However, Lyotard's limitation in relation to the approach that I value in this paper is inherent in his focus on content and cultural analysis, which might lead to the spectrum of psychoanalysis. For this reason, the ultimate theory that completes and does not exclude the other two is *lived experience* and *presence* in the phenomenology of Maxime Sheets-Johnstone[15]. I am aware that phenomenology tends to be understood and applied more as a method than a theory, given that it is not concerned with the phenomenon itself, but rather with the description of its existence. Nevertheless, this is exactly the reason that it is the foundation of the experimental method that I propose in this thesis. However, it is within *Memoirs of the Blind: The Self-Portraits and Other Ruins* by the French philosopher Jacque Derrida (1930–2004) that I find a hybrid theoretical effort—related to phenomenology—

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[14] R. Kirchmayr, 'Estetica Pulsionale, Merleau-Ponty con Lyotard', in *Aut Aut* vol. 338 'L'acinema di Lyotard' (Il Saggiatore, 2008).

[15] M. Sheets-Johnstone, *The Phenomenology of Dance* (Temple University Press, 2015).

which will help me explain to my reader the effort required to perceive moving images as dancing entities, which would be Derrida's idea of *blindness.* For which, viewers might simply experience a visual work as if it has already been articulated for them and that this is just the way things are. In this way, blinding themselves from potential realms standing outside, as an example, mere signification.

To conclude, in order to establish a method for perceiving the kinetic nature of cinema as dance motion, I wish to use several, and sometimes contradictory, theories. My intention is not to perform a superficial reconciliation between these theories or to select them in order to confirm my thoughts or ideas. Instead, it is to privilege an intertextual approach which requires me to look at movement from different theoretical perspectives in order to have a wider ground for the foundations of my method.

Method

The goal of this paper is to form a method in order to perceive and investigate motion pictures within the framework of dancing bodies. In order to generate the method, I will rely on the theoretical foundation laid out in Chapters 1 and 2 of the thesis. As previously stated, this method will be formed within the investigation of movement, and its theoretical grounding will be developed in this order: Deleuze's *Movement-Image,* Lyotard's *Acinema,* Sheets-Johnstone's *Phenomenology of Dance,* and part of Derrida's concept of *blindness.* The order of the theories matters as my aim in the construction of the method is to begin with the *movement-image* (Deleuze), continue with the *economy of movement* within the film industry (Lyotard), and reach the idea of the perception of movement within the spectator's experience (Sheets-Johnstone). Therefore, if Deleuze and Lyotard set the stage for a discussion of movement in film, Sheets-Johnstone allows me to investigate the perception of this movement, and, most importantly, her theory permits me to do so from the perspective of dance. For this reason, my method, in contrast to Deleuze and Lyotard's, has its roots in phenomenology. Specifically, I am referring to the efforts of later phenomenologists such as the American cinema and media theorist Vivian Sobchack (b.1940), professor of communications Jennifer M. Barker, and, partly, philosopher and scholar of new media and film Laura U. Marks (b.1963). An additional note to make is to present the similarities that

my method share with formalist theories, in particular I am referring to the formalist film theory by theorist Rudolf Arnheim (1904-2007).[16] In a way, my method shares fundamental grounds with Arnheim's assumption that cinema is not simply a space for the representation of reality, but it can be perceived as a whole of dynamic forms. Yet, differently, my method does not aim to confirm the independence of film as an art form, and neither it implies the study of the effects of certain dynamics on the audience. Instead, my method —as for the formalist— intend the moving-image at large as an abstract dynamic space, but from there it then takes a distance, heading towards an inquiry on the possibly to perceive the cinematic space as a body in motion during the event of a dance. Therefore, the subject of my inquiry is not just the movement, but how this movement of cinematic space presents qualities of the dancing body.

In the generation of the method, I will praise as an approach *observation* within a *qualitative research* mode in order to tend towards the creation of a method based on flexibility and openness to the generation of new ideas following its execution. On this note, it is important to stress the importance for my reader to visualise the work, as the *point of view* is major in my proposed method.

The generation of the method will be executed in Chapter 2 where, by means of extraction, I will select specific dancing qualities of the cinematic image, namely the *dynamic*, *form*, and *movement*. I am aware that by using a series of models to analyse a phenomenon, I might be contradicting the core attitude of the phenomenologist who, in her/his investigations, is usually guided by the idea of *making the familiar strange*. Therefore, to have a set of models in order to recognise patterns is not an option for her/him. However, although phenomenologically the intensity of the *dynamic*, *form*, and *movement* are diverse, the foundational structure and elements of these qualities remain in a spectrum that the audience shares, what in phenomenology is called the *lifeworld*.[17] Therefore, I will establish a vocabulary extracted from dance in order to give my readers the possibility of understanding

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[16] I am referring primarily to Arnheim's book *Film as art*.

[17] Lifeworld (German: *Lebenswelt*) - as explained in Husserl, E., & Carr, D. *The crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology: An introduction to phenomenology philosophy* (Nothwestern University Press. 1970) - is intended as a universe of what is self-evident or given, a world that subjects may experience together.

and experimenting with my proposed method. This vocabulary is based on dance qualities and is divided as follows:

1. Dynamic qualities: *attenuation, diffusion, quickness, slowness, verticality, amplitude*
2. Qualities of the form: *sustained, percussive, swinging, suspended, collapsed, vibratory*
3. Qualities of movement: *tensional, linear, areal, projectional.*

Empirical evidence

I deliberately decided to introduce the section 'Empirical evidence' after the theory and method in response to the aim and structure of the thesis. In fact, the empirical material will be introduced in the last chapter and will be used to test and explicate the previously generated experimental method, specifically the qualities of the dynamic, form, and movement. The chosen films included in the investigation of my method are works that expand, challenge, deviate, and transgress the fundamental assumptions allocated culturally and historically to cinematic expression. When saying cultural and historical fundamental assumptions, I refer to the set of codifications, shared by the viewers and the filmmakers, set by the structure of both narrative and non-narrative filmmaking. To be more specific, I borrow two terms, *experimental* and *avant-garde*, in order to describe my chosen empirical material while purposely avoiding the expression *abstract*. I take a distance from the term abstraction because it is one of the founding elements of my method, and I discuss it further in Chapter 2. At this point, the sole specification to make is that the chosen films have been extracted carefully from the avant-garde spectrum for two reasons. First, following closely the theoretical developments of Chapter 1, which ends by comparing Lyotard's *excessive movement* and the *anarchic phrasing* of postmodern dance, the chosen films feature modalities and tones emerging from that comparison. Second, although my aim is to construct a method to read cinema as dance at large, it is reasonable to restrict my investigation to clear examples of cinematic expressions that, in my view, adopt a dance framework. As my method suggests that both the moving image and the viewer are active in sensing the cinematic space as a dance, the avant-garde films that I will employ have been chosen to help direct the viewer's attention to the dancing qualities of the cinematic space.

My decision to limit my empirical evidence to the avant-garde does not exclude the idea or possibility that any moving images might at any time manifest dance qualities. This paper does not deal with motion pictures at large, although I will not ignore the existence of other genres, forms, and utilisations of moving images. For this reason, the last section of Chapter 3 involves applying my method to selected sequences from the realm of commercial cinema.

Delimitations

Attempting to propose a new method for the perception of motion pictures as dancing bodies within a Master thesis is a task that includes several delimitations. First, it is important to introduce my position in relation to the subject matter. I am a film professional who has been working in the film industry for the past ten years and came to observe and investigate the moving image within the academic realm of visual culture while holding a solid practical background. As my main role within my profession is cinematography,[18] my knowledge of the motion picture is deeply technical and therefore my principal standpoint in analysing the moving image is the one of maker rather than observer. In contrast, when it comes to the dancing body, choreography, or dance performance, I admit my distance from the practice and theory of those forms, as I have never studied or practiced them. Therefore, this thesis lies in between my naive fascination for dance and my deep knowledge of the cinematic image, making intuition and indeterminacy the ground for the following exploration of the cinematic space as a dance performance.

Additionally, I am not entirely sure that I have properly grasped the full picture or the totality of the theories that I have selected for this paper, particularly regarding a correct understanding of their relation within historical and social contexts. This does not worry me, however, because '*the properly grasped*' is not in the order of thinking of Gilles Deleuze, Jean-François Lyotard, nor Maxime Sheets-Johnstone (b.1930). Nothing is more distant to me than the famous maxim: w*hat is conceived well is clearly stated*, and, to an extent, nothing is more alien to their theories than a good conception and a clear statement.

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[18] What is considered the craft and technology of motion-picture photography.

Another important delimitation has to do with the selected empirical materials. Although my wish is to set a method for any motion picture work, I decided to limit the selected films to avant-garde works in order to test my experimental methodology within the limits of this thesis. This decision should not result in a chase for specific films that might confirm that my method works; the selection is based on the best examples in order to help my reader understand what I mean by a specific quality of dance in a motion picture work.

In addition, when it comes to dance performances, as I will explain further during the thesis, I am limiting my investigation to the current of *postmodern* dance. Also, for the purpose of this paper, which is to establish a general experimental method in order to possibly perceive the cinematic image as a dancing body, I will not take into account the rhythmic structure of movements and will focus solely on dance as a sheer dynamic flow of force instead. Although, I do not disregard the importance and value of the rhythmic structure of movement, I believe that it is a subject worthy of a longer and more in-depth investigation, something that might be executed as a continuation of this paper.

Previous research

Between the early and the mid-1990s, following the theoretical path shaped by Vivian Sobchack in her *The Address of the Eye,* several film scholars investigated the idea of a film as a performative body and also the physical responses of the audience's bodies during the film screening more deeply. Amongst those scholars, two film and media theorists are particularly relevant: Jennifer Baker, whose theories, similarly to Sobchack, followed primarily the existential phenomenology of philosopher Merleau-Ponty, and film scholar Laura Marks, who has the peculiarity of merging both the subjective implication of phenomenology and the impersonal aspects of Deleuzian theories. However, when it comes to a comparison between cinema and dance, very little has been written in visual culture studies, film studies, or dance studies. Nevertheless, a tradition of investigating dance films and musicals exists, even though to imply that the cinematic space shares qualities with the body in motion is a fairly unknown ground. However, in 2004, Erin Brannigan, Senior Lecturer in dance in the School of the Arts and Media, UNSW Arts, Design and Architecture, wrote a mesmerising PhD thesis named 'A Cinema of Movement: Dance and the Moving

Image' (2004) that became a book in 2011, *Dancefilm Choreography and the Moving Image* (2011). Her works are of fundamental importance for my research, specifically concerning the theoretical framework that Brannigan established in her book *Dancefilm Choreography and the Moving Image.* In particular, I am referring to the use she makes of Lyotard's *Acinema* and *Gesture and Commentary,* from which she extracted and developed further concepts including *gestural exchange, affect, seduction,* and *somatic intelligence.*[19] Additionally, Brannigan's research has profoundly inspired my selection of empirical evidence within the avant-garde, as has her acknowledgement of theories crossing between dance and cinema such as *anarchic phrasing* and *gestural anacrusis* in postmodern dance that are related to dancers who have also been active as filmmakers such as Yvonne Rainer. Although there is a close relation between my work and Brannigan's *Dancefilm Choreography and the Moving Image,* there are important differences in our approaches and outcomes. Starting from a major difference, Brannigan's work specifically analyses dance film and the representation of the dancing body within the medium of film, where the dancing body is depicted in what she calls a *filmic performance,* a comprehensive term including all aspects of cinematic production. In contrast, what I am investigating in my paper comes a step before that: I would like to focus specifically on the element of *filmic performance* and investigate its potential as a dancing body on its own, regardless of what it is representing. In other words, I am not interested in the depiction of a dancing body within the medium of film, but in the possibility that *filmic performance* might be a dancing body in itself. For this reason, what I rely on the most in Brannigan's research is her Chapter 6 'Registering the Gestural Anacrusis', in which she investigates filmmakers that adopt dancing approaches in their films such as Shirley Clarke, Doris Chase, and Hilary Harris.

Disposition of the thesis

In Chapter 1, I analyse movement as an essential constitutive element of cinema by starting from its constitution in order to arrive at the modulation of intensities that a filmmaker wishes to control within it. I start by introducing Deleuze's second thesis of movement and explain the dichotomy between *ancient* and *modern* movement. Then, I introduce Lyotard's economy of movement which withholds the separation between *immobility* and *excessive movement.*

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[19] S*omatic intelligence* is not a Lyotardian concept but an idea that Brannigan develops from Lyotard's *affect* in Chapter 9 'Dancefilm and Spectatorship', in 'A Cinema of Movement: Dance and the Moving Image'.

The chapter concludes with the first parallel between dance and cinematic motion, specifically through the comparison of film's *excessive movement* and postmodern dance's *anarchic phrasing* and *gestural anacrusis*.

In Chapter 2, I investigate further the composition of a moving image and exemplify my experimental method of perceiving cinema as dance. I start with the analysis of the corporality of the moving image and the space that it creates on the screen. This analysis continues with the presentation of the dance qualities inherent to the motion picture that represents the central argument of this thesis. The chapter ends with an explanation of how to understand and apply my method to the empirical material in the following chapter, with this section introducing Derrida's idea of *blindness.*

Chapter 3 elucidates each of the dancing qualities derived from my method in relation to the selected empirical material. The chapter is divided into short sections, each of which is named after one of the six dynamic qualities that I will introduce in Chapter 2, namely *attenuation*, *diffusion*, *quickness*, *slowness*, *verticality*, and *amplitude.* In the Conclusion, I will summarise the thesis's findings and elaborate on them.

Preface to chapter 1

Figure 1 **Screenshot from the film *Comingled Containers,* Stan Brakhage (dir.), duration 0:02:47, US, 1997, distribution Light Cone.**

The vibrant *Comingled Containers* (1997) by film director Stan Brakhage (1933–2003) is a percussive unfolding of colours and sudden swings of forms that overtakes one in a whirlpool of sensations and emotions. Light contracts and expands in several unpredictable directions; here, linear perspective is severely challenged, the horizon line erased, the realism of photographic reproduction curved, tilted, and troubled. Sharp cuts separate the generation of diverse informal evolving swings of bright entities.

Movement is the vessel through which these forms are created: they exist only through and within motion, and one could not make sense of them if one analysed it separately from the whole. Just like a body in a dance, the forms do not exist apart from the movement and the movement does not exist apart from the forms. Just like a body in a dance, the forms do not exist apart from the movement and the movement does not exist apart from the forms. In

order to endure and perceive the intention or *import*[20] reflected by this work, one must extend her/his perception of film from the realm of signification to the universe of the affection and sensitivity. It is this sensible understanding of cinematic motion that moves me to investigate further the forest of possibilities withheld by the motion picture, its capacity to touch us in places beyond knowledge. I believe that the consistent number of unexplored potentialities are harboured in the realm of cinematic motion, just as in *Comingled Containers* (1997); these typologies of the moving image withhold the capacity to affect, and to be affected, through their kinetic and gestural power. Just as a dancing body, in the filmic unfolding of motion something alive and vibrant is happening, as Sheets-Johnstone writes:

> … as we are totally engaged in our experience of that happening, we too are also alive and vibrant: we have a lived experience. Judgment, beliefs, interpretations are suspended: our experience of the dance is free of any manner of reflection.[21]

Claiming a suspension of interpretation, belief, and judgment during the experience of a dance performance is something poetic and feasible within the realm of the moving body. As I will investigate in the following pages, dance is a *form-in-the-making*, not an assemblage of selected static poses, but a whole.

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[20] A term used to describe a sort of meaning which suffuses a whole and is inseparable from it. I will explain this term in Section a of Chapter 2.

[21] M. Sheets-Johnstone, *The Phenomenology of Dance* (Temple University Press, 2015), xxxix.

Chapter 1 Arriving at the scene: the movement-image
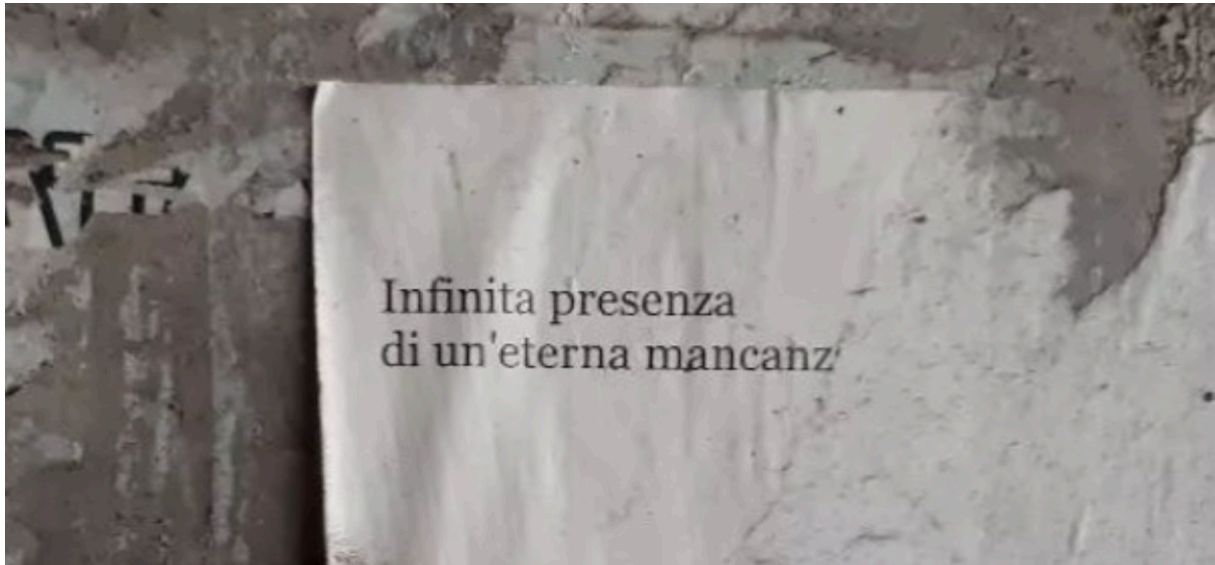
 Figure 2 **Printed paper glued to a wall in Italy, *unknown author*, n.d.**

Somewhere in Italy, there is a wrecked piece of paper glued anonymously to a wall. No signature or any kind of authorship is traceable, which makes me believe that this specific action was motivated by the necessity of sharing a thought rather than marking a presence (Figure 2). What is left to read on the paper says: *the infinite presence of an eternal absence.* Just like most quality poetry, this phrase evokes several interpretations and applications. At this point some might ask: why is this relevant to this paper?

The infinite presence of an eternal absence is wonderful phrasing for understanding an inherent quality of cinema, its unique ability to present something that is absent and therefore break through the linear understanding of time. In other words, to re-phrase this beautiful poetic line and adapt it to my paper, cinema has the inherent power to *infinitely* present something that is *eternally* absent as that particular depicted moment won't ever repeat again if it is not within the dimension of the medium that captured it. This reflection is recurrent in film philosophy and theory. André Bazin dealt in depth with this matter in his book *Qu'est-ce que le cinéma?* (*What is Cinema?*). Francesco Casetti named his chapter on Bazin's film theories *Il Cinema come Partecipazione al Mondo* (C*inema as Participation in the World*), underlining in a single phrase the realist and phenomenological nature of André Bazin. Bazin, in fact, made the interesting claim that art must fix something fluid into something static, and

he believed that photography, above painting and sculpture, took this action of abstraction or extraction to a higher position, given its apparent objectivity. This is to say that photography as cinema is also *the infinite presence of an eternal absence,* the difference being that to the abstraction of photography cinema adds the reproduction of time. By doing so, cinema in Bazin's ontology does not simply represent life but rather takes part in it: it sustains life flows. Although it sounds apparent, as Lesley Stern and George Kouvaros state: 'Film moves, it is ephemeral'.[22] Movement*,* an essential constitutive element of cinema, has been analysed in depth by Vivian Sobchack, starting from what she calls the *first movement* which is the *zero degree* of cinematic perception and expression. In her words, the *zero degree* of movement is 'the movement that commutes static photographic images into onscreen moving images through the camera and projector'.[23] Sobchack's first movement partly coincides with Deleuze's first thesis on movement in his book *Cinema I.* In Deleuze's words, 'cinema does not give us an image to which movement is added, it immediately gives us a movement-image'.[24] This means that for both Deleuze and Sobchack, cinema has inherent motion, and the movement of the frames within the camera and the projector are its barest and most essential element without which there is no cinema.[25] Let me now investigate cinematic movement in further depth, starting with the Deleuzian reading of Henry Bergson's *Matter and Memory* and *Creative Evolution.* What I find relevant about the resonance of Bergsonism in Deleuze's cinema theories is how, in order to explicate the kinetic phenomenon of film, he adopts two fundamental structures at the foundation of any kinetic phenomena: time and space. These two structures are also the starting point of Sheets-Johnstone's phenomenological investigation of kinetic phenomena through *lived experience.*[26] For Deleuze, the moving image has two faces, the *movement image* and the *time image.* The first stands for the idea that cinema is composed of matter images of and in matter. The movement

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[22] L. Stern and G. Kouvaros, cited in E. Brannigan, 'A Cinema of Movement: Dance and the Moving Image', PhD dissertation (University of New South Wales, 2004).

[23] V. Sobchack, 'The active eye' (revisited), *Studia Phaenomenologica*, 16 (2016), 63–90. Available from: https:// doi.org/10.5840/studphaen2016162 (accessed 15 December 2021).

[24] G. Deleuze, *Cinema I: The Movement-Image* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2019).

[25] In 2022, the cinema industry has moved almost entirely to digital capture, yet this very first movement of cinema is still in place, although no longer physically due to technology.

[26] M. Sheets-Johnstone, *The Phenomenology of Dance*, (Temple University Press, 2015), xxxix.

image presents the tendency of the cinema to show us ways in which the world and its bodies capture, organise, and structure what in Bergson is *pure memory*[27] or *spontaneous thought* through the sensory-motor system.[28] On this note, it is interesting to go back to Bazin's phenomenological account. For him, cinema is participating in the world: while the movement-images for Deleuze:

> describe on-screen the sensory-motor system: a cinema which extracts from the world a coherent centre, a centre such as a human character; a centre which can express emotions and then react to or act upon the world from which it was extracted …[29]

As underlined by this quote, the materiality of the movement-images occurs through their unfolding acting upon the one observing them. It is within the act of reception that, according to Deleuze, another image exists in film: the *time-images.* This quality of the moving images is strictly related to its capacity to capture thought, following the tendency of the cinema to discover the means to escape, unhinge, disrupt, and disturb the sensory motor system through *pure memory* and *spontaneous thought.* Therefore, to summarise what I have just explained here, the *movement-images* resemble the structure of space and are intended as a means to spatialise temporality as movement, while the *time-images* resemble the structure of time, rendering spatiality temporal as duration. At this point, what is crucial to pinpoint is that one structure depends on the other: there can be no sensory-motor system without pure spontaneous thought, and no pure spontaneous memory without the sensory-motor system; no image without duration, no duration without image.[30] This reflection might be misleading if one thinks that Deleuze, similarly to phenomenology, is taking into account both subject perception and the image. Instead, what Deleuze does is to establish a taxonomy of moving images which investigates both sides of its components *time* and *space.* The given subjective result is not a matter of his investigation. For this reason, I will choose to focus only on his precise investigation of the movement image.

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[27] For Bergson, pure memory is neither a weakened perception nor an assembly of nascent sensations. Memory becomes little more than the form of an image contained in already embodied nascent sensations.

[28] D. Deamer, *Deleuze's Cinema Books* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), 6.

[29] Deamer, *Deleuze's Cinema Books*, 12.

[30] Deamer, *Deleuze's Cinema Books*, 6.

(a) The movement-image and modern dance

Having established that movement meets thought within the kinetic experience of cinema, in this section I introduce a comparison between dance and motion picture developed from Brannigan's chapter 'Henri Bergson's movement theory and the new dance aesthetic'. I focus on how Deleuze developed from Bergson the idea of *modern movement,* for which the *pose*[31] dissolves into the endless flow of life experience.

> … art, ballet, and mime became actions capable of responding to accidents of the environment; that is, to the distribution of the points in space, or of the moments of an event. All this served the same end as the cinema.[32]

This quote is only one of the several allusions to dance that Deleuze made in his book *Cinema I,* a work in which he introduced the three theses on movement. In the first two, Deleuze focuses on the description of the condition of movement itself, while the third investigates the relation of movement to the concepts of whole and duration. My primary focus in this paper is on thesis two, in which, differently from theses one and three, Deleuze introduces two concepts that allow for further investigation into cinematic motion. Having established, following Bergson's idea in his *Creative Evolution*, that movement in cinema is an illusion (not real movement)*,* in thesis number two Deleuze named two different kinds of motion illusion: *ancient* and *modern*. This Bergsonian dichotomy between *ancient* and *modern* movement used by Deleuze could appear at first as similar to the distinction between the *encounter* and the *recognition* or, as introduced in the background to this thesis, the difference between the *becoming* and the *absolute*. As previously mentioned, by *encountering* I refer to the possibility of approaching the world without a strict dependence on a method or a pre-established expectation of what manifests from the world. In a passage of the English translation of *Difference and Repetition* (1968) Deleuze writes:

> Something in the world forces us to think. This something is an object not of *recognition* but of a fundamental *encounter* … In whichever tone, its [the encounter's] primary characteristic is that it can only be sensed. In this sense it is opposed to recognition. In recognition, the sensible is not at

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[31] A selected privileged moment.

[32] G. Deleuze, *Cinema I: The Movement-Image* (The Athlone Press, 1986), 7.

all that which can only be sensed, but that which bears directly upon the senses in an object which can be recalled, imagined or conceived.[33]

For me, this is one of the most influential and inspiring passages of the book: it is foundational as an approach for this thesis, namely when it comes to the possibility of *encountering* a film as a dance. Nevertheless, when it comes to *ancient* and *modern* movement, Deleuze's discussion diverges slightly from the dichotomy between the *encounter* and the *recognition.* Let me now give a clear explanation of what I privilege and what I disregard from these two concepts. By *ancient movement*, Deleuze means the *eternal* and *immobile*. In this description, what he refers to is the movement of privilege poses, something close to a regulated transition from one form to another, while by *modern movement* he means a motion related not to privilege instances but to *any-instant-whatever,* taking into account the endless flow of life. By *any-instant-whatever* Deleuze refers to a function of equidistant instances, selected in order to create an impression of continuity. He adds:

> Any other system which reproduces movement through an order of exposures [poses] projected in such a way that they pass into one another, or are 'transformed', is foreign to the cinema.[34]

Therefore, for Deleuze, every cinematic piece is inclusive of the *any-instant-whatever*. Consequently, all cinema is *modern movement.* As a practical and visual example, Deleuze refers to Muybridge's *equidistant snapshots* as *modern movement* in the desire to explain that no matter which single frame one might choose to extract from a moving image sequence, none of them might be a privileged moment.

In doing so, he also refers to dance as a 'regulated transition from one form to another, that is, in order of poses or privileged instants, as in dance'.[35] It is precisely at this point that the theoretical framework for my method diverges from Deleuze's. This not to say in any way that I am criticising the Deleuzian dichotomy between *ancient* and *modern* movement, but to state that the way that these concepts are used and explained in *Cinema I* are severely limited

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[33] G. Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition* (The Athlone Press Limited, 1994), 139.

[34] Deleuze, *Cinema I*, 5.

[35] Deleuze, *Cinema I*, 4.
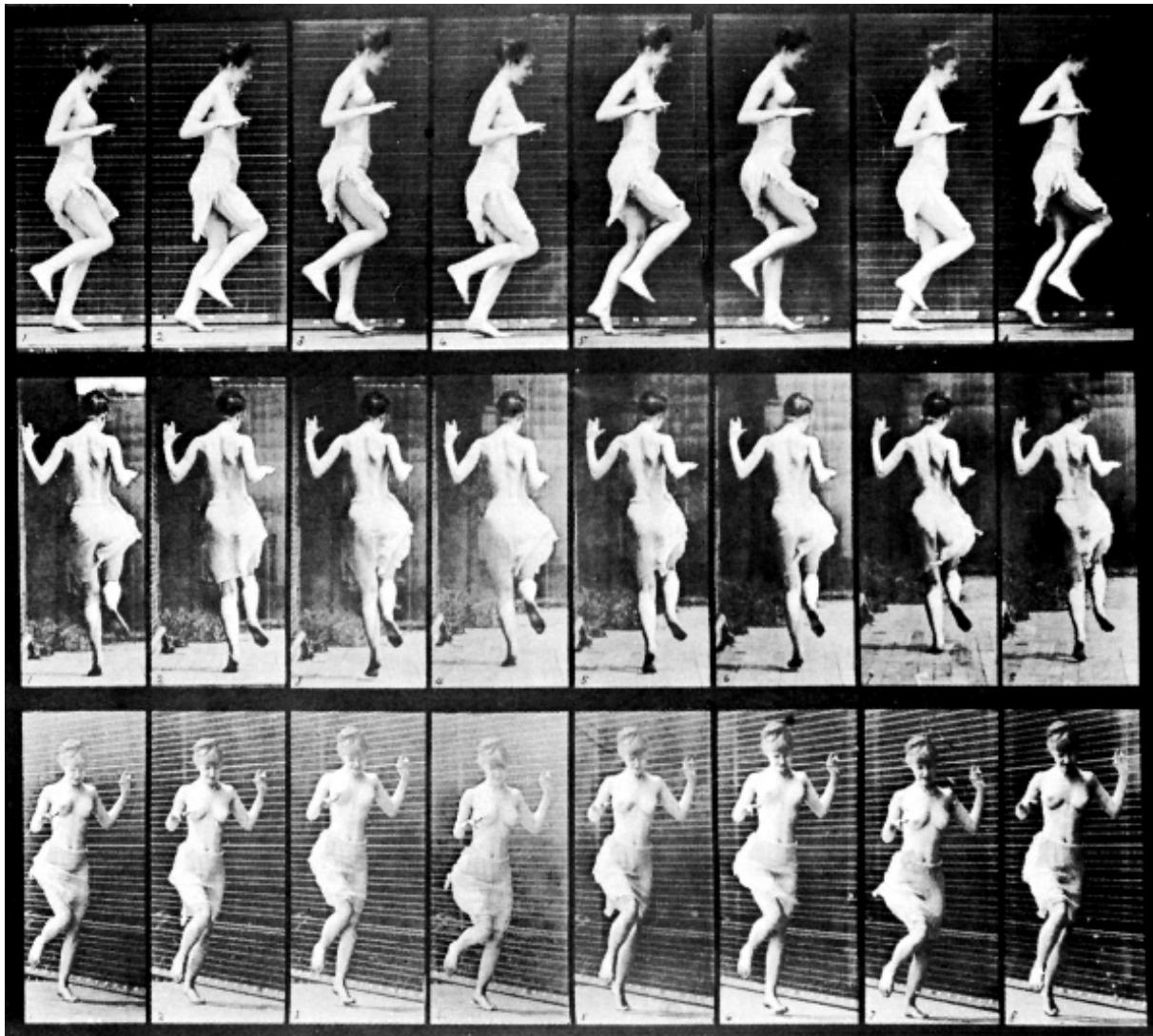
Figure 3 **Plate from Muybridge's Motion Studies, *Figure Hopping*, E. Muybridge, 1887.**

when it comes to the theoretical framework for the method that I propose in this paper. What I intend to do with the concept of *ancient* and *modern* movement is to develop and explore them outside their original understanding instead, something similar to what Erin Brannigan does in her thesis 'A Cinema of Movement: Dance and the Moving Image'. Brannigan returns to this reference thanks to Deleuze's claim that the cinema of ancient movement or privileged poses leans towards dance, and she opened up the discussion to several typologies of dance. In fact, dance withholds several diverse functions and approaches, which are culturally and historically related. For instance, classical ballet is a dance regulated by several strict rules and a specific vocabulary, while modern dance privileges a flow of less structured gestures. This to say that, by reinterpreting the concept of ancient and modern movement within the framework of Deleuze's second thesis of movement, classical ballet leans towards the realm

of privileged poses (*ancient* movement), while modern dance belongs to the space of *any-instant-whatever* (*modern* movement). This elaboration and, to an extent, reinterpretation of his second thesis of movement leads my theoretical inquiry further away from Deleuze and closer to Lyotard's *Acinema* where a new dichotomy comes into play: immobility and excessive movement. These two concepts will be the subject of the next section. For now, I would like to conclude this paragraph by stating that what will come next will not exclude or disregard *ancient* and *modern* movement, but rather move away from the problematic claim that Muybridge belongs to modern movement. Instead, I propose that modern movement might be the manifestation of a specific level of motion intensity in cinema. For this reason, what I am proposing in the next section is an evolution of the concept of ancient and modern movement, where the ancient refers to *stasis* and the modern to *excessive* movement.

(b) Jean-François Lyotard's immobility and the cinema of stasis

As established in the previous section, Deleuze's *modern* movement is limited to a broad analysis of motion in any moving picture works. For this reason, I have adopted as a further theoretical framework Lyotard's essay *Acinema,* in which he introduces a dichotomy within movement itself: *immobility* and *excessive movement*. In my understanding of *Acinema,* Lyotard looks at the performative elements depicted within the medium of the motion picture as *a crowd of elements in motion* constrained in *real oppression orders*, that is, oppression that consists of *the enforcement of a nihilism of movements*. As Lyotard writes, 'no movement, arising from any field, is given to the eye-ear of the spectator for what it is: a simple sterile difference in an audio-visual field.'[36] This underlines the fact that Lyotard's approach to the moving image uses the magnifying glass of an economy, that is, an order operating under the law of value.[37] What follows is that the understanding of the motion picture—and therefore its action of cinematography—concerns an inscription of movement. In this economy of movement, Lyotard sees the performers' gestures as catalysed within the ruling power that controls motion in cinema such as its technical aspects (slow motion, montage, colours, camera movements). In this theoretical model stands two poles: on one side one finds *stasis* or *immobility*, and on the other *excessive movement*.

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[36] J-F. Lyotard, 'Acinema', *Wide Angle 2*, no. 3 (1978), 53.

[37] Brannigan, 'A Cinema of Movement'.

La strada dell'immobilità trova la sua esemplificazione estrema nel tableau vivant: la fissità dell'immagine, la sospensione del divenire, la costrizione dei personaggi in una posa, esaltando il rapporto tra chi guarda e chi è visto, ed insieme fanno del secondo una "vittima" del primo. La strada dell'eccesso di movimento trova invece la sua esemplificazione migliore nell'esaltazione lirica: il film, anziché interrompere il suo flusso, lo amplifica all'estremo; accelerazioni, viraggi, spostamenti di campo, alternanze di inquadrature, ecc., ne scandiscono la superficie.[38]

The path of immobility finds its extreme exemplification in the tableau vivant: the fixity of the image, the suspension of becoming, the constriction of the characters in a pose, enhancing the relationship between the beholder and the one seen, and together they make the second a "Victim" of the first. The road of excess of movement, on the other hand, finds its best exemplification in lyrical exaltation: the film, instead of interrupting its flow, amplifies it to the extreme; accelerations, colour changes, field shifts, alternation of shots, etc., mark the surface.

As exemplified in this quote from Francesco Casetti, Lyotard makes a clear distinction between the use of motion in cinema: on one side there is the *tableau vivant*[39] or *immobility* and on the other the *lyrical*[40] film or *excessive movement*. Therefore, if the Deleuzian *modern movement* establishes the idea of cinema as an endless flow participating in life, where the *any-instant-whatever* is put into a sequence, Lyotard looks deeper into how the construction and choices behind the genesis of this *any-instant-whatever* can present diverse qualities and intensities of motion. This is a crucial point for the generation of my method, as my inquiry does not simply utilise any dance and cinematic genre but specifically borrows the structure (or lack of structure) of postmodern dance and avant-garde filmmaking. This is to say that different typologies of film and dance manifest different *intensities*[41] of motion, and that this intensity is ruled by the economy of movement. I will not look at the specific historical or cultural reasons for which filmmakers or choreographers tame or exaggerate motion in their work; what I am interested in here is to establish whether cinema is, for Lyotard, an economy of movement where that movement is the bare essential material of cinema:

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[38] F. Casetti, *Teorie del cinema 1945–1990* (Milano: Bompiani, 1993), 33.

[39] A *tableau vivant* is French for 'living picture', a static scene containing one or more actors or models.

[40] A work expressing the artist's emotions in an imaginative and intimate way.

[41] A concept that I am borrowing from Deleuze that can be narrowed down to dynamism.

Cinematography is the inscription of movement, a writing with movement, all kinds of movements: for example, in the film shot, those of the actors and other moving objects, those of lights, colours, frame and lens; in the film sequence, all of these again plus the cuts and splices of editing; for the film as a whole, those of scene organisation [découpage]. And over or through all these movements are those of the sound and words coming together with them.[42]

Therefore, if to create a film is to organise movement within an economy, the role of the filmmaker is 'knowing how to eliminate a large number of these possible movements. It seems that image, sequence and film must be constituted at the price of these exclusions'.[43] Therefore, in order to delimit motion in a film, filmmakers are working with *intensity,* a flow of variable strength and of differential processes primarily connected to sensation as well as to forms and concepts tied, to an extent, to *becoming*. Consequently, shaping a film involves taming the intensities of movement inherent to the potentialities of the camera.

Having established cinema as a dichotomy between *excessive movement* and *immobility*, and the filmmakers as the people deciding on the amount of movement to explore within their works, Lyotard sees in the *cinema of productivity*[44] the necessity for the industry to tame the potentiality of cinematic motion to almost null, in other words, to control, structure, or, to borrow again a term dear to visual culture, *recognise*. In this thesis, *immobility* opposes my chosen empirical materials because it refers primarily to commercial cinema, television and web series, informative documentaries, and works with highly connotative and informative contents; they are works which use the medium of film to address a problem, to tell a story, or to make a claim. Regarding the filmmakers leaning towards *immobility*, I can spot a further interesting element in tune with Lyotard's economy of movement, namely the dependence of their films on other art forms. For example, a film which is informative or tells a story usually depends highly on a literal form, a script, a concept, or an idea, while a film that wishes to emphasise the aesthetic within light and shadow usually depends on pictorial forms such as painting. On this note, it is worth mentioning the theoretical efforts of several cinematographers active in the late 1970s to introduce a theory comparing the craft of cinematography to painting. The most renowned author of this group of thinkers is the Italian

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[42] G. Jones, *Acinemas: Lyotard's Philosophy of Film* (Edinburgh University Press, 2017), 33.

[43] Jones, *Acinemas*, 33.

[44] Informative or commercial video productions.

Vittorio Storaro who published several books on this subject, including the three volumes *Writing with Light.* Understanding cinematography as writing is a process that, in my view, contributed to the *immobilisation* of cinema. If the person with the camera and the director start the process of understanding the frame as a canvas to paint, then the process of filmmaking turns into a practice of detailed planning and decision-making. From Lyotard's perspective, this would represent ultimate *immobility*: the filmmakers are so concerned with avoiding any little unnecessary element in their films that the film practice becomes a form of writing rather than a dance. This not to say that dance cannot take static forms: as I established in the previous section, dance can also lean towards *immobility*. I used as an example classical ballet that, in Deleuzian thinking, adopts the quality of *ancient movement* and therefore selected immobilised sections. In the next section we will investigate the *excessive movement* of dance, namely postmodern dance.

(c) Jean-François Lyotard's excessive movement and postmodern dance

Having introduced Lyotard's *Acinema* and explained how I consider it relevant to the proposal of a method to perceive cinematic space as dance, I will now introduce the theoretical framework emerging from dance theories. However, before entering the realm of dance, I will clarify further what I intend for a cinematic work within the concept of *excessive movement.* To begin with, it is important to note that when the cinematic medium leans towards *excessive movement,* it usually leaves almost no traces of the object represented. In other words, the *excessive* in cinema establishes a visual realm that usually goes beyond bare representation. This tendency of opposing the conventions and the analogical imprint of an index is a recurrent feature of experimental cinema; Dominique Noguez , refers to experimental cinema as a practice of *irreverence* and *irreference*.

> It is a cinema of apparition more than of appearances; appearing, in effect, to comply with all the characteristics of the figural: a cinema which refuses mimesis, representation, narration.[45]

The figural or figurative is another term that Lyotard uses in his *Acinema,* specifically in order to group those works which are not primarily discursive, that is, those films that privilege the

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[45] D. Noguez, cited in *Acinemas: Lyotard's Philosophy of Film* (Edinburgh University Press, 2017).

visual qualities of the cinematic medium itself rather than functioning as a means to transmit a message.[46] This tendency towards the figural, or to the refusal of mimesis, denial of representation, and disregard for narration can be found in several experimental films, though not only those that might express *excessive movements*. Nevertheless, it is also possible to find *immobility* and the *discursive* in experimental or avant-garde cinema. I am referring here in particular to the shift that occurred following the introduction of sound in motion picture technology. Before sound, both meaning and non-meaning-oriented films were mostly concerned with investigating the potentiality of movement as a means of expression in cinema. After the introduction of sound, the focus in the generation of cinematic connotation changed.

Figure 4 **Selected frame from *Un Chien Andalou*, Luis Buñuel (dir.), France, 1929.**

For what concerns experimental cinema, let me take the works by filmmaker Luis Buñuel (1934–1983) as an example. His films, although experimental in their connotations, do not explore the formal possibilities inherent to cinematic movement. Instead, Buñuel provokes

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[46] J-F. Lyotard, 'Acinema', *Wide Angle 2*, no. 3 (1978), 53.

and surprises his observers through the cinematic approaches generated by the dependence of cinema on literature or concepts: the *discursive*. Following the release of his collaboration with Salvador Dalí, *Un Chien Andalou* (1929), the avant-garde was taken by storm with the emergence of an approach based on the deconstruction and relativism of meaning, overshadowing the previous experiments investigating motion in cinema.[47] Buñuel's work is therefore a case of experimental cinema largely based on *immobility*. As consequence, *excessive movement* is not necessarily found only within a specific genre but might manifest in any motion picture work. This is because the subject in which *excessive movement* appears is the moving image itself and is not directly contingent to the cultural, artistic, and historical background of a work. However, when it comes to intensity, there are certain approaches that help the actualisation and fostering of the concept of *excessive movement*. Within cinema, that would be the experimental field, while when it comes to dance practice, it is more likely to be found within the current of postmodern dance.

When ascribing the term postmodern to dance practice, I am aware that the definition of this term has been highly debated throughout dance and theatre theories.[48] However, the two choreographers whom I introduce in this section have been assigned to this specific dance current. For this reason, without further investigation of the terminology or the causes which led to the call for this specific approach to postmodern dance, I am simply adopting this term in order to delimit the performance activities which sprung up in the *New York Judson Church* group.[49]

> The postmodern is not a newly defined dance language but a strategy and method of inquiry which challenges [*sic*] and interrogates [*sic*] the process of representation itself … Analysis, questioning and manipulating of the codes and conventions of dance are distinguishing features of the postmodern mode.[50]

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[47] M. A. Kaplan, 'Towards an Integral cinema', *Journal of Integral Theory and Practice*, Vol. 5, No. 4 (2010), 114. Available from: ResearchGate (accessed 20 February 2022).

[48] Brannigan, *A Cinema of Movement.*

[49] The Judson Dance Theater was a collective of dancers, composers, and visual artists performing at the Judson Memorial Church, Manhattan, New York City between 1962 and 1964.

[50] E. Dempster, 'Women Writing the Body: Let's watch a little how she dances', in *The Routledge Dance Studies Reader*, ed. Alexandra Carter (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), 226.

This understanding of the postmodern is relevant to my study of cinematic motion because here movement is released from outside references as spatial and temporal coordinates. Therefore, the moving body is no longer dependent on other sources as for instance music or stage design—it is movement for movement itself. American dancer and choreographer Merce Cunningham (1919–2009) is the pivotal figure around whom this radical shift in dance performance came to be. Possibly inspired by his partner John Cage's (1912–1992) methodology of *chances operation*,[51] Cunningham started to challenge coordinated, utilitarian, signifying, or habitual movements, advocating an investigation, manipulation, and subversion of motion in dance instead in order to constitute it as an independent art form. Within a similar pool of investigation, many experimental filmmakers rediscovered the similarities between dance and the cinematic space. Yvonne Rainer (b.1934) and Maya Deren

Figure 5 **Still from *A Study on Choreography for Camera,* Deren Maya (dir.), USA, 1945.**

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[51] This principle concerns the removal of the author's own intention from the work. Intention is always to some extent circumscribed by one's own tastes and personality, whereas non-intention moves beyond like and dislike and becomes something that resembles more an act of nature.

(1917–1961), both choreographers and filmmakers, are examples of authors crossing between the two mediums, as both have directed experimental films as well as more narrative-driven works. Another important figure is dancer and choreographer Trisha Brown (1936–2017).[52]

Yvonne Ranier was active as a choreographer, performer, filmmaker, and writer. What connects her vast and diverse body of works is an intense criticism towards disciplinary conventions and a constant interrogation of the form and the role of a performance. As established earlier, Merce Cunningham worked on breaking the concept of dance as representation. However, following my previous discussion on *Acinema,* the non-representational alone is not necessarily a quality of *excessive movement.* For this reason, the additional investigations on performance pursued by Rainer are particularly relevant for my framework, namely his concept of a*narchic phrasing.* The starting point for understanding *anarchic phrasing* is Rainer's addition of the idea of a *tone* within performative practices. The tone for Rainer is somehow related to Deleuze's intensity: it is a modulation or an inflection within dance performance. By changing the tone, a dancer can affect another aspect, namely the *phrasing.*

Rainer's main point on the subject matter is that traditional dance phrases lean towards theatrical or fictional structures. Following Brannigan's understanding of Rainer's criticism of a traditional dance phrase, these phrases are composed within a sequence of a beginning, a climax, a registration, and an end. Particular attention should be paid here to the term *registration*: it carries a photographic connotation and is the idea of a delimitation and prediction of movement within its creation. In this parallel, we find similarities to Lyotard's *immobility* in cinema.

> In eliminating, before and/or after the shooting, any extreme glare, for example, the director and cameraman condemn the image of film to the sacred task of making itself recognisable to the eye.[53]

Similarly, the dancers make themselves recognisable to their audience by selecting and presenting classical phrases that create repetition and identification. In this way, Rainer is

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[52] Brannigan, *A Cinema of Movement.*

[53] Jones, *Acinemas: Lyotard's Philosophy of Film*, 37.

working against *immobility* and *recognition*, chasing an unmodulated dance phrasing where the choreographer wishes to create the impression of a constant flow in continuous transition. I propose that the introduction of this criticism of classical dance phrasing is similar to the experimental current in filmmaking and *excessive movement*. As Stan Brakhage wrote, 'imagine an eye unruled by man-made law of perspective'.[54] Such an eye would not be ruled by the economy of movement and might release at any time unpredictable and intense *excessive motion.* Another fundamental concept I adopt in my comparison between *excessive movement* in cinema and postmodern dance is Trisha Brown's *gestural anacrusis.* The latter is an idea that I extract from Brannigan's thesis, who also adapted the concept from American dancer Isadora Duncan (1878-1927):

> One inevitably goes back to the mystery of what happens before the movement: what body image? what geography? what history? And above all, what intentionality? The pre-movement is an empty zone … and yet everything is already played out there, the entire poetic charge and tonal colouring of the action. A brief passage, a low pressure trough corresponding to this wholly founding moment: the gestural anacrusis.[55]

The *gestural anacrusis* lies in between the stimulus and the movement; it is the change from one movement to the next, perhaps the most mysterious element of all the motion-based crafts. By adding this concept to Rainer's *anarchic phrasing,* what emerges is a framework of high indeterminacy, a total and unpredictable constant mobility. This is the moment in which, I suggest, the body in motion loses its grounding in relation to a reference or an identity and becomes what Sheets-Johnstone has named a *form-in-the-making.*

> Since movement is never complete at any one instant or point, never fully there, the body of consciousness [sic] exists in movement as a form continuously projecting itself toward a spatial-temporal future: hence, as a form-in-the-making.[56]

Therefore, a *form-in-the-making* is the foundation of the appearance of a dance or, as I suggest, a film. Whether the subject of investigation might be a dancer or light on a screen,

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[54] S. Ganguly, *Stan Brakhage: Interviews* (University Press of Mississippi, 2017), 132.

[55] I. Duncan, cited in Brannigan, *A Cinema of Movement*, 214.

[56] Sheets-Johnstone, *The Phenomenology of Dance*, 28.

they do not exist apart from the form they are creating and presenting: their illusion of force is a singular phenomenon. Therefore, as Sheets-Johnstone points out:

> … since a form-in-the-making is spatially unified and temporally continuous: the illusion of force which it creates is an indivisible, cohesive whole.[57]

Consequently, in a dance there is not a dancer and a performance: the event of the dance as a *form-in-the-making* is a cohesive whole. However, the *form-in-the-making* might present the previous issue that I underlined in Deleuze. Just as the *any-instant-whatever* in cinema does not state a difference within intensity of motion, so the *form-in-the-making* seems to refer to any typology of dance. For this reason, I apply to the concept of *form-in-the-making* the notions of *anarchic phrasing* and *gestural anacrusis*. On this note, it is important to add that Sheets-Johnstone, although not referring to these notions, is making a point about the possibility that the dancers might set themselves apart from the motion of their dance:

> The dancer sustains the primary illusion so long as she never separates herself from the spatial unity and temporal continuity of the form. It is only as the dancer reflects upon herself apart from the dance that she is no longer one with it …[58]

By adapting this idea of the dancers separating themselves from motion to Lyotard's economy of movement, an analogy between the moving image's *immobility* and the self-aware dancer emerges. Just like in the *Acinema* when the creator's wish is to convey a signification within the modulation of movement, the dancers are making themselves static objects within motion, resulting in the destruction of the internal spatial temporal structure of the *form-in-the-making*.

(d) Conclusion to chapter 1

In this chapter, I have investigated cinematic movement starting from its constitution to arrive at the modulation of intensities that a filmmaker wishes to control within it. This first reflection served as a foundation to introduce the importance of motion within the cinematic

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[57] Sheets-Johnstone, *The Phenomenology of Dance*, 28.

[58] Sheets-Johnstone, *The Phenomenology of Dance*, 28.

medium. Starting from Deleuze's second thesis of movement, I established the dichotomy between *ancient* and *modern* movement and continued the discussion by introducing Lyotard's *economy of movement* which withholds the separation between *immobility* and *excessive movement*. Taking *excessive movement* as the standpoint of a cinema liberated from the oppression of signification and fictionality, I made an initial comparison between cinema and dance where *excessive movement* corresponds to the *gestural anacrusis* and *anarchic phrasing* in postmodern dance.

Chapter 2. The dance qualities within the cinematic space

The movie theatre goes bright. As the light goes on in the room, space is rediscovered; a screen appears. A moving image occurs on a screen, but this screen is not the created space of the motion picture. In fact, according to film theorist Antoine Gaudin:

> […] before being anything else, a film is a light projection on a screen, opening a space for us and making our body sense a certain volume of void.[59]

In these sense, a film creates its own space within and beyond the boundaries of the material surface onto which it is projected. This is why today, as screen technologies grant several different options, one might witness audiences watching films on mobile phones, tablets, computers, televisions, and projectors. In a dance, the created space is qualitatively defined by the aerial pattern,[60] and the comparison between the cinema and the dance space could be made through the action of *framing*,[61] for instance, in terms of how the director uses the given space of the frame to choreograph movement.

In a way, both the body in dance and the body of light in motion overtake their corporeality in order to become ephemeral sensations. However, in order to witness movement, it is necessary to have a physical entity in which this movement manifests. In the case of the dance, the dancer is the vessel carrying motion, while for cinema, ephemeral in nature, the movement can be transposed to several diverse typologies of mediums, commonly referred to as the screen. This physical presence of movement presents us with a dichotomy between a material image and a perceived image. This might lead to a more ontological discussion that goes beyond the range of my research since, following a phenomenological approach, I am focusing on the effect of the encounter between image and observer. However, the corporality of images in motion, their tangible presence, is an active part of the perception and understanding of motion. The next section looks deeper into this matter.

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[59] A, Gaudin, '6.1 The Viewer's Embodiment into Cinematic Space: Notes on a "Space-Image" Cinema', in *New Approaches to Cinematic Space*, essay (Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group 2020), 196.

[60] Sheets-Johnstone, *The Phenomenology of Dance*, 43.

[61] The formal decision in the composition of a shot.

(a) Light as a body: the corporality of motion

To use a Heideggerian analogy, for the materiality and presence of an object to become noticeable in its activity, that tool must be somehow damaged. Heidegger gives the famous example of a broken hammer: only when something unexpected happens during its use does the user become aware of its presence and function. Similarly, in both dance and cinema, it is only when something breaks the perception of motion that one notices their corporality. In dance, as I mentioned in Section c of Chapter 1, 'a dancer sustains the primary illusion so long as she never separates herself from the spatial unity and temporal continuity of the form'.[62] In a dance, the dancers' identities are overcome: if one were to recognise dancers as individuals performing a selection of tasks, the *form-in-the-making* would be compromised and the dance performance would vanish. The same is possibly true for cinema: only when something goes wrong with the projection or the screen technology does the audience face the material identity of motion, as is the case, for instance, when a *glitch*[63] suddenly appears on the screen. The term *suddenly* is crucial: in fact, a film might utilise a glitch purposely, in which case the projection technology would not be noticed, given the fact that the audience accepts the glitch as part of the screening. Yet when it suddenly and unexpectedly appears, a shock and an awareness come into play. This is an important principle for the structuralist/ materialist film current of the early seventies, for whom the main objective in their films was to reveal the illusion of cinematic images. A great example is the films by film writer, theoretician, and filmmaker Peter Gidal (b.1944) who also wrote a theory for materialist cinema in his book *Materialist Film* (2013). Expanded cinema is another current that investigates the materiality and bodily presence of the motion picture: by installing their projections in an uncommon matter and/or unexpected locations, they make the body of the image an integral part of their works. An example of this is *Light Music* (1975) by artist Lis Rhodes (b.1942), where two analogue projectors are placed in front of one another, and the audience is invited to walk in the projection space. However, besides these and other specific cases in film history, movement in cinema is meant to overtake and shadow the corporality of its medium. Thus, during my investigation and comparison to dance, I do not take into account these exceptions.

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[62] Sheets-Johnstone, *The Phenomenology of Dance*, 30.

[63] A sudden malfunction of equipment.

(b) The concept of abstraction in cinema and dance

My analysis in this paper is strictly limited to the screen space, where the motion flows uninterruptedly. So far, I have purposely avoided the term abstraction, as was the case, for instance, when describing *Comingled Containers* (1997) by Stan Brakhage. Nevertheless, at this stage of the thesis, it is important to introduce and investigate this term further.

> The question should not only be 'what specific space does the film show us?', but also 'what abstract space does the film make us live? [64]

In this quote, film theorist Antoine Gaudin introduces the term abstraction as a self-standing field of experience inherent to the cinematic image. Similarly, in the use of the term abstraction, I take a distance from the formalist perspective, whose adherents include Rudolf Arnheim and Lev Koulechov.[65] Therefore, my use of the word abstraction does not simply imply the non-figurative or the non-representative but rather refers to the autonomous forms generated within a cinematic apparatus, what some film scholars refer to as the *filmic performance*:

> In film the lighting, editing, and camera distance and movement are equally potent 'performers', so that one could talk of filmic performance as including all these technical elements …[66]

This idea of *filmic performance* implies that any film, or whichever style or approach, produces a body anew through its technicality. To borrow a term from Gaudin, film has an inherent *life of forms* that runs simultaneously with the representation.

A dancer's body in motion also delivers a *life of forms* within its *form-in-the-making*: inside both the cinematic and the dancer, bodies are inscribed abstract spatial potentialities which emerge through motion. This leads me back to a fundamental concept for this thesis, the fact that there exist no forms with no movement and no movement without forms, just as for Deleuze, there is no duration without a spatial component and no spatiality without a time in

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[64] A. Gaudin. '6.1 The Viewer's Embodiment into Cinematic Space'.

[65] A. Gaudin. '6.1 The Viewer's Embodiment into Cinematic Space'.

[66] L. Jayamanne as quoted in L. Stern, *As Long As This Life Lasts*, Photofile (Winter 1987), 18.

which it happens. Within this necessary coexistence of both form and movement, according to Sheets-Johnstone, a *symbolic* form is generated in dance. Sheets-Johnstone does not investigate or develop deeply the signification of the word *symbolic* in this context. Similarly, I will stay outside the realm of meaning creation and semiotics. What is important from a phenomenological standpoint in regard to the genesis of a *symbolic* form is how the observer might experience it. In other words, although there is a possibility of analysing such a symbolic form by separating the form from its movement, the experience of it can only happen within the simultaneous expression of the two. Sheets-Johnstone in this matter refers to two abstractions happening in the dance: on one side, the necessity of the dancers to express something (content) that is abstracted from everyday feelings, and on the other side, the movement (medium) which is motion abstracted from everyday life into a performance. The two cannot exist separately. A film works in a similar manner, yet its means of expression are not organic but artificial,[67] although it generates live experiences for its audience through movement. From this perspective, abstraction seems to be at the foundation of any film and dance work, yet abstraction in film is culturally connotative of a divergence in the process of the lens to render the world within the law of linear perspective. The cinema camera, besides its physical properties which are its material components (lens, body, magazine), withholds an infinite number of *virtual* capacities. By the term *virtual*, I mean an aspect of reality that is ideal, but nonetheless real; it exists but, in the case of the camera, it is up to the filmmaker to actualise it. Since the major actualisation of the cinema camera usually follows the principle of linear perspective, there is a tendency to understand cinematic abstraction as a faithful representation of the world. This is the reason for which the cinematic space of narrative storytelling is often addressed as a window into the world, a metaphor generated during Modernity,[68] when the technical objective in painting was primarily to create an illusion of depth on a flat surface.[69] A necessity inducing painters to the employment of the camera obscura, a darkened room with a tiny hole through which an image is projected onto the opposite surface. This technique allowed painters to sketch a seemingly faithful representation

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[67] I am using the words organic and artificial only to make a distinction between the living body of a dancer with the mechanical body of the film apparatus. In Deleuzian terminology, we could also say that cinema is an organic performative form.

[68] I am referring here to the historical period of the modern era.

[69] P. Florensky, *Reverse Perspective* (Reaktion Books, 2002).

of their chosen subjects. However, the *faithful* aspects of representation from the fifteen century until today always implies an abstraction which is ultimately defined by the rule of *linear perspective*.[70]

(c) The motion beyond representation: the import

Having established the cinematic space as a realm of abstraction where *life of forms* generates a unique and self-standing area within the power of motion, I can now introduce a fundamental concept for my method that I have extracted from Sheets-Johnstone's *Phenomenology of Dance*: the *import*. The *import* is a term used to describe a sort of meaning which suffuses a whole and is inseparable from it. Therefore, the *import* is reflected by the *form-in-the-making* as it happens, and it relates to the quality of this form. As Sheets-Johnstone writes:

> Import is dynamic: the form does not hold import but reflects it as the form itself presented. Because the form is *form-in-the-making*, a form which moves and changes, its import, too, is vital and moving.[71]

This idea of *import* as the reflection of a new meaning, perceivable only through the whole of dance, gives us an idea of how abstraction in a dance opposes the content and the index on which the cinema of diegesis depends. On this note, it is interesting to look at the cinematic space generated by the cinema of *excessive movement* as a place where, just like in dance, *import* is reflected through a cinematic *form-in-the-making* not as an image holding a specific content, but as being significant in and of itself, that is, a feeling of something rather than its actual expression.

Through movement, a specific filmic body delivers to their observers a kinaesthetic sensation of *contraction/expansion*,[72] as in *Comingled Containers* (1997). Here, the fluxes of colours provide a good example of how an image phenomenon generates its own sensation of a space,

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[70] A system established during the Renaissance for creating an illusion of depth on a flat surface.

[71] Sheets-Johnstone, *The Phenomenology of Dance*, 49.

[72] Gaudin, '6.1 The Viewer's Embodiment into Cinematic Space'.

since those images do not represent any liveable space behind the screen, and, within this space, no sequence alone carries the *import*. The gesture of a dancer extending an arm alone has no perceivable *import*: it is only in relation to the whole of the dance phrase that the *import* might appear. To go back to the matter of the screen, it would be wrong to assume that the concept of *import* shifts the understanding of a screen from a window to a surface. The reason is an intuitive one: when one experiences *Comingled Containers* (1997), one does not simply look at organised and choreographed surfaces or mere motion as motion but sense this surface as a reflection of an *import.* If the screen is intended solely as a surface of light, one would miss not only the *import* but would also deny the emotional or sensorial response to motion pictures. Therefore, at the foundation of my method, the surface in motion creates a *form-in-the-making* that further leads to a different spatiality in the cinematic event.

> [In film] There never is 'no space at all', for space is a primary matter 'inscribed in the film's body'. If we can feel and understand the primary spatial sensation that these structural films make us experience via their pure depth-and-burst variations, that will allow us to address classical narrative cinema, in which we will once again encounter this primary spatial sensation, lying behind the realistic representation of the well-known static three-dimensional space we are used to perceiving.[73]

Gaudin specifically refers to a cinematic space created by films from directors including Peter Kubelka (b.1934), who is known for his kinaesthetic jump effect, technically a *flicker,* as found, for example, in the film *Arnulf Rainer* (1960). Following Gaudin's quote, both *figurative* and *non-figurative* filmmaking contain and deliver a space of unique *life of forms*. Yet, it is worth noting that historically only a few narrative filmmakers have explored the seemly endless potentialities of visual expression contained in a single frame or sequence.

To conclude this section of the thesis, what I have explored in the first three sections of Chapter 2 is the possibility that any *contraction/expansion* of light projected onto a screen generates its own cinematic space, whether it is figurative or not. I have also explained how any projection is an abstraction and introduced the concept of *import,* which is a meaning reflected through the surface of motion within its whole and not perceivable in selected parts.

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[73] Gaudin, '6.1 The Viewer's Embodiment into Cinematic Space'.

(d) Introduction to the dance qualities of the cinematic space

This section is where my method finally takes shape. Here, I present the existence of specific dancing qualities which, within diverse usages, influence the generation of different cinematic spaces. These qualities will be employed and tested against the empirical material of Chapter 3. Let me start with Sheets-Johnstone's 'The Plastic Components of Virtual Force'.[74] In this chapter, she describes dance as a force made up of several components that are interrelated qualities of a virtual force. Several points have to be elaborated in order to describe these components. First, given that the plasticity of these components has to do with their potential appearance in a *symbolic* form, she describes them as *qualities*.[75] These qualities exist only within a *virtual force* or, in other words, the flux of a dance. What I find extremely important in the understanding of these qualities is how none of them are either additional or discrete:

> One quality is not appended to another quality and then another quality to make up the illusion of force, not does any quality engender a significance in and of itself. It is not a question of putting specifically chosen qualities together and arranging them in a certain way, nor is it a question of each quality, or all of the quality combined, having a denotative or connotative significance in and of itself.[76]

What emerges from this concept is how dance qualities within Sheets-Johnstone's phenomenology do not exist in separation from the whole of their *becoming*, and that both movement and its qualities have no significance outside a performance. To be described, these qualities have to be put into relation with the global phenomenon of force within the *form-in-the-making*.

In accordance with my intention to employ elements of dance in order to perceive film motion before explaining and introducing the dance qualities of film, it is valuable to introduce another scholar that has named specific qualities of movement within film studies from a phenomenological perspective: Vivian Sobchack. In *The Active Eye: Towards a*

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[74] This is Chapter 4 of Sheets-Johnstone's book *The Phenomenology of Dance*.

[75] Sheets-Johnstone, *The Phenomenology of Dance*, 40.

[76] Sheets-Johnstone, *The Phenomenology of Dance*, 40.

Phenomenology of Cinematic Movement, Sobchack lists four qualities of cinematic movement that she refers to as *modes* of movement, all of which, as for Sheets-Johnstone, are inseparable from the whole of the cinematic experience. They are not additional or discrete, but one can influence the other instead. Sobchack does not give these modes of movement specific names. For this reason, I provide my own terms here. The first is *body-movement,* the motion of the projector and camera which turns still images into moving images. The second is *optical-movement*, the ability of the camera to manipulate motion such as between slow motion and fast motion. The third is *subject-movement*, the motion of the depicted elements. The last is *camera-movement,* the ability of the camera to introduce movement within its motion during filming. It is important to stress that these four qualities stand as the foundation of my method because the dance qualities of film that I am about to introduce can manifest themselves only within Sobchack's four movements.

Given Sobchack's four movements as the primary cinematic modes within which dance qualities can emerge, similar to Sobchack's theory, what matters in my method is the effect of the whole of those qualities. Therefore, even if it is possible to analyse them separately, in a film projection as in a dance, these elements are co-present, co-operative, and interrelated. This is because a film, according to my method, is interpreted as a *form-in-the-making,* a continuous flow of forms that change within movement. Thus, the generators of the given qualities are in a constant flow of interchangeability, transforming from one to the next instead of being added or excluded from this flow. Given that, in my methodological approach, the form is inseparable from the movement, a form cannot stand as a selected pose. Therefore, it won't be accurate for me to use a notion such as geometry to bring up the possible modalities of the form in cinema. For this reason, although in my method I separate the qualities of the form from the qualities of the movement, the two might be interrelated after all.

The given qualities of movement are *tensional*, *linear*, *areal*, and *projectional*, while the qualities of the form are *sustained*, *percussive*, *swinging*, *suspended*, *collapsed*, and *vibratory*. These modalities of movement and form are common knowledge amongst dancers; they form a vocabulary which makes it is possible for a choreographer to communicate a certain move to dancers. I am aware that each of these six modes can be developed and investigated in

more depth, but I have purposely chosen to limit my analysis to this group in order to set up my method.

What stands out at first glance is how each term is dynamic and non-representational. This is a fundamental aspect: Sheets-Johnstone speaks of dynamic as the element making each dance uniquely significant. Consequently, beyond movement and form, the dynamism in itself includes other aspects that I will now introduce into my analysis, namely *attenuation*, *diffusion*, *quickness*, *slowness*, *verticality*, and *amplitude.* In order to provide a clear understanding of this simple but dense methodological framework that I am establishing, it is worth looking at it in the order below:

<div align="center">

Form-in-the-making

↓

Dynamic qualities

↓

Form & Motion qualities

</div>
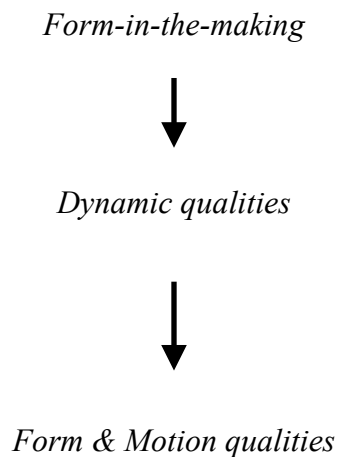
Everything starts from the *form-in-the-making*, that is, the inseparable shear force constituting the film image and the moving body. From this it is possible to name a dynamic which ultimately includes specific qualities of movement and peculiar qualities of the form. It is important to stress once more that movement does not exist without form and vice versa, hence their respective qualities.

(e) Further explanation of the dance qualities of the motion picture

This section serves as an important clarification and explanation of the dance qualities of cinematic space. The following explanation of each quality will help my reader to understand what I intend for each of them, and simplify their application in my method in Chapter 3.

Dynamic Qualities

Attenuation: the reduction of the force or diminishment in the value of a dynamic power.

Diffusion: the change of dynamic force from a region of higher concentration to a region of lower concentration.

Quickness: the quality of a fast change of phase within a dynamic shear force.

Slowness: the quality of a slow change of phase within a dynamic shear force.

Verticality: the unfolding of a dynamic shear force within vertical lines.

Amplitude: the maximum extent of a vibration or oscillation, measured from the position of equilibrium.

Form Qualities

Sustained: an effect whereby a form can be held after its dynamic is released.

Percussive: a quality that begins with a strong impetus which might stop suddenly at any point and then start again.

Swinging: a form moving back and forth or from side to side while suspended on an axis.

Suspended: a form that is temporarily prevented from continuing or being in force or effect.

Collapsed: an effect whereby a form is temporarily deprived of its usual structure.

Vibratory: a form quality that manifests when tension is applied to an element that might respond with a series of quivering movements.

Movement Qualities

Tensional: a movement resulting from dynamic forces acting in opposition to each other.

Linear: a sequential movement that progresses from one point to another in a single and predictable series of steps.

Areal: relating to an area as the pivoting point around which the dynamic shear force in dance and cinema takes place.

Projectional: a movement whereby a centre of force comes towards or away from a given observer.

(f) The cinematic event and the phenomenological method

Having established the cinematic space as an abstract generator of the *form-in-the-making*, and the latter as a dynamic shear force that contains several qualities, it is now time to

complete the theoretical framework of this thesis by introducing the last component of my method: *the point of view.* In the act of observing moving images, viewers might at some point take their perception simply to be a neutral filter of facts, taking the world of experiences as if it has already been articulated for them and that this is just the way things are. This perspective precludes the possibility of challenging the idea that the very way a film image is presented rests on some decisions to which an audience might have been blind. In other words, for as long as the realm of the visible is the sole guide of perception, the way a viewer might engage with the moving image will tend towards representational reporting, which is a form of a blindness. On this note, my method shares similarities with Rudolf Arnheim formalist perspective, especially the following passage in *Film as Art* (1932):

> Everyone has seen a railway engine rushing on the scene in a film. It seems to be coming straight at the audience. The effect is most vivid because the dynamic power of the forward-rushing movement is enhanced by another source of dynamics that has no inherent connection with the object itself, that is, with the locomotive, but depends on the position of the spectator, in other words, the camera. The nearer the engine comes, the larger it appears, the dark mass on screen spreads in every direction at a tremendous pace (a dynamic dilation toward the margins of the screen), and the actual objective movement of the engine is strengthened by this dilation.[77]

Arnheim is shifting the subject of perception in film from the represented object to the motion and dynamics taking place in the frame. Therefore, in certain aspects, my method continues from this assumption that film before representation is an abstract space where several dynamics take place. Although, differently from Arnheim, my aim is not to counter the idea of a cinema as *realism,*[78] and by *blindness,* I will refer to any action of not seeing beyond a given perspective.

To be blind in sight is an ancient saying. In *Memoirs of the Blind*, Jacques Derrida presents several metaphors bridging the not seeing and the observation of the work of art. Derrida refers to three major typologies of blindness: *natural blindness*, *folded blindness*, and *ideological blindness*. It is important to stress that Derrida values a phenomenological approach in *Memoirs of the Blind*. On page two, he starts by stating, 'the point of view will be

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[77] R. Arnheim, *Film as art*. (University of California Press 2007). 60-61

[78] A current of film theory according to which film photographs reality.

my theme', and ends on page 126 with 'and the point of view will have been our theme'. The whole journey within the concept of blindness is about what it is *to be* a point of view, what it is to describe a lived experience. At this point, without going further into *Memoirs of the Blind,* I would simply like to borrow from Derrida the possibility of a blindness in the act of sight, clarify that is a concept I am creating myself from my understanding of Derrida's work. The film *Moires Mémoires* works as an example of this concept. It was created by director Claudine Eizykman (1945–2018) between 1972 and 1978 and known for a cinematic approach developed from Lyotard's *Acinema*, in particular the concept of *excessive movement* previously discussed. When watching *Moires Mémoires* for the first time, I became dizzy. I realised that if I attempted to read every frame as a window into the world and therefore as a faithful representation or signifying object, I would not have been able to watch the film in its

Figure 6 **Selected frame from *Moires Mémoires,* Claudine Eizykman (dir.), duration: 00:25:00, distribution Cinédoc Paris Films Coop, 1972–1978.**

entirety.[79]Before I describe this film, I suggest my reader watches the given clip,[80] a short extract from the film uploaded by *Cinédoc Paris Films Coop.* This is because I believe that we[81] share a lifeworld of similar and communicable experiences, as artist James Turrel wrote:

> The more you have extraordinary experience in flight, the more you recognize the difficulty in passing on the experience to others. Your experience becomes such that it is almost too difficult to talk about it. It seems useless to try to transmit the experience, it would be easier to send others on the flight itself.[82]

Therefore, as for all the empirical evidence I discuss in Chapter 3, I suggest my reader experiences the work themselves and then analyses it using my proposed method.

Now that my reader has experienced the work, I will explain the assumption that a brief idea is generated from the approach that Claudine Eizykman adopts for the 25 consecutive minutes of her film. Perspective, representation, and continuity are seriously challenged within this work. However, this film experience does not totally deny us the possibility of approaching the given cinematic space as a window into the world. As I mentioned, however, to do so is a self-harming practice. Personally, the way I have managed to watch and enjoy the experience of viewing this film was by learning not to see or rather learning to see beyond it, or perhaps by getting lost in the formal *import* of the work rather than its meaning. In this precise situation, it is worth bringing up Derrida's *blindness*. If a film is a *gesture exchange*, one must in some way be blind when perceiving it as a window into a world (representation), but one must also be in some way blind to a signification in the image. Here, it is important to note that the moving image itself plays a major role. As is the case for *Moires Mémoires*, certain works encourage specific responses in the audience. This is another reason for which I have

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[79] I sincerely wish to thank film programmer and friend Aleksandra Ławska for the help she gave me in accessing a rare and exclusive restored copy of the entire film.

[80] The extract is accessible at this link: https://vimeo.com/676230929? embedded=true&source=video_title&owner=58324342

[81] By 'we' I mean myself and my potential readers, implying that we share a set of cultural and historical notions that unite us.

[82] J. Turrel, cited in D. G. Pelli, 'What Is Observation? James Turrell's Skyspace at P.S.1'. *TIME Magazine: The eyes (and brain) of the beholder.* Science Daily. The Local Papers. 2005

chosen specific examples as empirical evidence for my comparison between cinema and dance practices.

Before I continue, it is essential for me to establish that when I talk about blindness to the moving image, I am not implying that there is a certain sight that is to be privileged above another. In other words, I do not wish to take a messianic approach in which I would give sight to the blind. Rather, my aim is to reveal that there is a possibility of perceiving the motion picture as a dancing body. Let me now go back to *Moires Mémoires*. This film confronts us with the matter of motion image blindness by deconstructing continuity and implying constant changes in perspective that the viewer is forced to lose very quickly, which is the usual illusion that generally happens during a representational reading of motion pictures. One typology of blindness in the experience of motion pictures is therefore the idea of concentrating on signification and leaving behind the choreographed fluxes of motion in the images. On the contrary, in order for my reader to understand the methodological approach with which I am about to experiment in Chapter 3, I use *blindness* as a tool to let go of signification and focus primarily on the motion qualities of film as a *form-in-the-making*.

(g) The signifying and the non-signifying gesture in a dance

Having established the idea of *blindness* as a framework that my reader might decide to employ in order to test the method, I must note that to become blind to signification in my chosen empirical evidence is not mandatory for my method. Instead, to become blind to signification in the moving image is simply a suggestion in order to better understand each quality I am about to explore in Chapter 3. This idea of including the concept of *blindness* as an aid to my method comes from the greater difficulty for audiences to distance themselves from signification within a film rather than in a dance performance. To clarify, I am suggesting that the assumption might be that it is easier to distance a body in motion from its signification as compared to a moving image. However, this does not exclude the possibility that the body in motion could be employed as a vessel to convey simple and direct language, as is the case, for example, in sign language. The extreme example of sign language is at the opposite pole to postmodern dance, as the latter is not interested in conveying meanings but rather feelings or sensations. The signifying gesture in dance is one of the reasons for which

for some choreographers —for example, Merce Cunningham, Martha Graham, Isadora Duncan—the idea of the gesture is a functional, task-based, object-oriented action, meaning, therefore, that the gesture is intended as something alien to the dance spectrum.[83] Dancer and scholar Hubert Godard stated, 'When I say gesture, I am not thinking exclusively on movement, but of all the signifying, symbolic implications'.[84] I particularly appreciate Godard's distinction between *movement* and *gesture*, as if signification is not in the *form-in-the-making* but rather in a selected single pose. In this sense, following closely the intuition of Brannigan in part three of her thesis, it is essential to mention Lyotard's thoughts on the subject matter.

> Lyotard uses the terms g*esture* and *gestus* to describe the various elements of aesthetic production and reception which together constitute a model of gestural exchange, from the work of the artist, to the components of the work of art, to the response of the philosopher's discourse.[85]

Through this explanation of Lyotard's understanding of the gesture, I can briefly mention the concept of *gesture-dance* which stands for the motion of body parts represented onscreen that may have nothing to do with communication or signification.[86] For Lyotard, gesture is first a term denotative of operations beyond the realm of the language of knowledge, in opposition to the notion of gesture as a means of signification. According to his essay *Gesture and Commentary*, the gestural exchange in a work of art is divisible into three parts: the gesture of the work itself, the gesture that constitutes the work of art (its formal aspect), and the responsive gesture of the observer.[87] These three different shades of the gesture meet in a single *event,* the moment of the encounter with the work of art. Without falling deep into Lyotard's *Gesture and Commentary*, I want to stress the importance of understanding a work of art, in this case a film, as a *gesture exchange*. What I would like to underline is that cinema and dance as *gesture exchange* could be signifying or non-signifying, but both remain a *form-in-the-making*. From this perspective, within a phenomenological approach, it is up to both

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[83] Brannigan, *A Cinema of Movement.*

[84] H. Godard, cited in Brannigan, *A Cinema of Movement*, 214.

[85] Brannigan, *A Cinema of Movement*, 215

[86] Brannigan, *A Cinema of Movement.*

[87] Lyotard, J.-F. , 'Gesture and Commentary'. *Iyyun: The Jerusalem Philosophical Quarterly,* 42, 37–48, 1993. Available from: http://www.jstor.org/stable/23350751 (accessed 15 December 2021)

the observer and the given film to make up their own way of sensing a given *event*. For this reason, the metaphor of *blindness* is particularly relevant in this case. If, as I have explained so far, the moving images are a *form-in-the-making*—an inseparable combination of movement and form that generates a singular event—and, as is the case in Lyotard's *gesture exchange*, the meaning or signification in the *form-in-the-making* is contingent and not necessary, in order to better understand the methodology I am about to explore in Chapter 3, my reader's focus should be on motion and blind to signification. Nevertheless, as previously explicated the methodology, they are not necessarily required to be so: blinding oneself to signification is solely to help the reader fully understand and engage with the proposed method.

(h) Conclusion to Chapter 2

In Chapter 2, I delimited the fundamental structures and components of my method. I started by introducing the idea of cinematic space as a realm of abstraction where a *life of forms* generates a unique and self-standing area within the power of motion. Second, I explained how every cinematic work is generated by the act of abstraction, within which *linear perspective* is still the privileged approach in the rendering of the cinematic space. Following this, I introduced the idea of the *import,* which is a reflection of a new meaning given by the abstraction of a feeling or emotion by a dancer/choreographer, and which is perceivable by the observer through the whole of the abstraction of the generated dance. Having established the *import* as the element generated by abstraction and taking place in the *life of forms* of the cinematic space, I introduced three groups of cinematic qualities: *dynamic*, *form*, and *movement*. These groups form my method, and in order to easily comprehend Chapter 3, I suggested my readers become partly blind to signification while experiencing my chosen films and to engage primarily with the given properties of the dynamic, form, and movement.

Chapter 3. A method to perceive cinematic space as a body in movement

This chapter will employ my experimental method against the selected empirical evidence chosen from the history of cinema. At last, I can answer the main question of this thesis: would it be possible to establish a methodological framework to experience cinematic motion as a dancing body? Before going into the analysis of the selected works, it is important to stress once more that my method is structured according to three different elements: *dynamic*, *form*, *and movement*. These elements are further divided into the following qualities:

Dynamic*: attenuation*, *diffusion*, *quickness*, *slowness*, *verticality*, and *amplitude.*

Form*: sustained*, *percussive*, *swinging*, *suspended*, *collapsed*, and *vibratory.*

Movement*: tensional*, *linear*, *areal*, and *projectional.*

These qualities function as a whole, meaning that one quality does not ever exclude another. These qualities also manifest with different intensities, meaning that, for instance, a film with a high amount of *quickness* might not usually manifest *slowness* at the same time, though this would not be impossible if a film presents a contraposition of both *quickness* and *slowness* dynamics whereby it could end up with a *tensional* movement and a *vibratory* form. Another important note to make is that for both dance and film the *dynamic*, *movement*, and *form* change over the course of the full performance*,* resulting in the fact that the proposed method could be much more effective in the analysis of a single sequence rather than a complete work. Having said that, it is important to go back to the concept previously introduced of the *import,* even though *dynamic*, *movement*, and *form* all occur due to several shifts during the whole performance. The *import*—as I introduced it— functions as the element within which choreographers or filmmakers reflect their emotions through motion. In the selection of films for my analysis, I carefully chose works with a high intensity of a specific *import* in order to make this process as clear as possible.

An element of concern regarding the fruition and further analysis of the empirical evidence is the visual characteristic inherent to each given medium (videotape, film, digital) used by the filmmakers I will analyse. In other words, each of the selected films uses a specific capturing and projection technology which ultimately affects the film visually. For example, the videotape recording of Doris Chase's *Sculpture Series* features horizontal distortion within

colourful lines typical of a video cassette (Figure 10), while Porter and Blizer films show strong film grain due to the less sensitive film stock available in the early 20th century (Fig. 7 and 8). When it comes to my analysis, I cannot avoid taking these elements into consideration, but I will try to take into account solely the intentional or unintentional *noise* of which the author of the film was aware. To clarify, I won't take into consideration additional noise which might have occurred due to deterioration, digital artefacts, or elements that were not considered by the authors.

(a) Attenuation: sustained form in a linear and projectional movement

Figure 7 **Selected frame from the film *Coney Island at Night*, Edwin S. Porter. (dir.), USA, 1905.**

At the start of cinematic practice, there was not a strict separation of genres: it was a sensation, a moment of awe, a time of collective entertainment that was almost magical. The movement of the image itself, and its capacity to render the empirical world realistically was the majestic innovation at the end of the 19th century. Looking back at the works of Edward

Muybridge today from the perspective of a person growing up in a metastasis of moving images, it is fairly challenging to even attempt an understanding of what it would have meant to look at those sequences of pictures back in the 19th century before cinema came to be. For this reason, it would be short-sighted to address Muybridge as the possible extreme example of the previously discussed Lyotardian concept of *stasis* in motion pictures. In fact, what Muybridge did was to ultimately give motion to static poses, giving birth to the most common movement quality: *linearity*.

Without any further theoretical and historical notions, I will begin my analysis of Edwin S. Porter's *Coney Island at Night* (1905). What emerges from my several viewings of this work is principally a *sustained form* in *linear movement* within an *attenuation dynamic*. Let me now elaborate on each of these elements. An *attenuation dynamic* is, in principle, the reduction of the amplitude of movement that, in this case, *sustains a form* within *linear* camera *panning* from right to left.[88] The reduction of the amplitude of movement is noticeable as the image dynamic decreases its force linearly within the film. The central section of the film tends to enter a slow, dynamic phase that eventually picks up again towards the end. For what concerns the form, by *sustain* I mean the power of this *linear attenuation* to strengthen or support the forms generated by the contrast between black and white. On this note, the rhythm of the camera panning in the film can almost be sensed as the ticking of a metronome, the reason being that I can experience the movement as a constant linearity. Differently, the lights portrayed in the film do not generate rhythmical flickering in the image; the shining white lines against the black background end up *sustaining* rather than opposing the linearity of the camera motion, ultimately resulting in an *attenuation* of the film's dynamism.

Since this is my first attempt to apply this experimental method to a film, it is worth reminding my reader of the concept of *blindness*. In the modality of experience of this film I attempted to leave behind several connotations that this work might carry such as the electrical current, Coney Island, the silhouette, and the city at night. This results from the fact that this particular reading of this film, namely *attenuation dynamic*, *sustained form*, and *linear motion* is primarily subjective and relative.

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88 In cinematography, panning means swivelling the camera horizontally from a fixed position.

Once more, by underlining that phenomenology is the seed from which my method has emerged, I am aware of the several diverse potential readings that might emerge by using my method within other cultures, as well as the potential differences caused by relativism. In other words, this work is *linear* from my perspective, but if I were to view it in comparison with a work with an inherently higher linear intensity, *Coney Island at Night* (1905) might be perceived as less linear. As a viewer of this film, I cannot help but feel overwhelmed by Porter's *import* that reflects through the moving images a sense of *linear* and *sustained attenuation* within an *attenuation dynamic.*

Figure 8 **Selected frame from the film *Interior New York Subway, 14th Street to 42nd Street*, G.W. Bitzer (dir.), USA, 1905.**

Similarly, *Interior New York Subway, 14th Street to 42nd Street* (1905)*,* released the same year as *Coney Island at Night* (1905), takes the audience on a journey into a tunnel of the New York subway. Once more, I remind my reader to let go of the signification and to concentrate on the image. What appears from this movement, similarly to Porter's film, is a *linear*

continuous motion, yet given that Bitzer's film is not a panning shot but a *tracking* forward,[89] this movement is not simply linear but also *projectional*. The image carries the viewer forward, regardless of where and how: due to the position of the camera on a motion vehicle, the moving image expands from the centre to the edges of the frame. Therefore, no matter if an observer might interpret this motion as a moving in (subject perspective) or a moving out (image perspective), what I sense here is a projection. For what concerns the form, this projection of motion is paired in the film with a *sustained* form which ultimately leads to an *attenuation* in its dynamic.

Having established that Bitzer's film carries within it a *projectional* movement, the result is that *Interior New York Subway, 14th Street to 42nd Street* shows severe differences from Porter's film in terms of a diverse *import.* Perhaps these differences might turn the dynamic of this image from *attenuation* to *quickness*: what I sensed during this film was a strong emphasis on speed, energy, and mechanical vitality, qualities that, I would say, the motion carries within itself in separation from the anchorage of the title and the connotation of the train. To summarise, the *import* of this film seems very connected to the abstraction of the sensation of the restlessness of modern life and the vitality of the machinery, values shared and divulged by the current of futurism.[90]

(b) Amplitude: swinging form in a linear movement

This section starts with Hilary Harris's *Longhorns* (1951). For me, Harris's work breathes *amplitudes*, while the form is constantly *swinging*, pivoting around shapes (horns) that are performing throughout the whole piece. A dynamic *amplitude* is the maximum extent of a vibration or oscillation, and in relation to a *swinging* form it revolves around a motion of contraction and expansion that in this case is primarily *linear* and occasionally *tensional* and/ or *projectional*. When addressing *tensional* and *projectional* movement, I am referring primarily to the quality of motion imported through editing, specifically, what I previously named *optical-movement* within Vivian Sobchack's four movements. This induction of

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[89] A tracking shot is a shot for which the camera physically moves sideways, forward, or backward.

[90] An artistic and social current that originated in Italy in the early 20th century.

dancing qualities through editing is an important difference between Porter and Blizer's films, which mainly relied on the camera and the subject as sources of motion in their works.

Figure 9 **Still from the film *Longhorns,* Hilary Harris (dir.)*, duration: 00:04:51, USA, 1951.**

Similarly to Hilary Harris, filmmaker Doris Chase was strongly influenced by dance in her approach to moving images. The full collection below, *Sculpture Series*, features several works including diverse qualities of the dynamic, the movement, and the form. For this reason, and to limit my analysis of Chase's work to an *amplitude* dynamic, I have chosen to describe a selected part of this series, specifically from 00:03:40 to 00:14:15. The selected section within a *swinging* form manifests itself as a sphere. Within this swinging spherical form, the film explores the screen inside the dynamic of *amplitude* through a movement that shifts between *linear* and *projectional.* It is interesting to ponder the projectional motion quality of the piece and to go back to the previously discussed film largely sharing this quality: *Interior New York Subway, 14th Street to 42nd Street.* This comparison might clarify further the differences between *amplitude* and *attenuation* dynamics. Chase's work gives the audience a centre point in which it is possible to perceive a contraction and expansion that

results in the perception of an *amplitude*, that is, the maximum distance from the centre. In contrast, in the previous session I established how, within a *projectional* movement, Blizer's film does not give the observer any possibility of understanding the amplitude of the inherent dynamic and results in an attenuation of a projectional force instead.
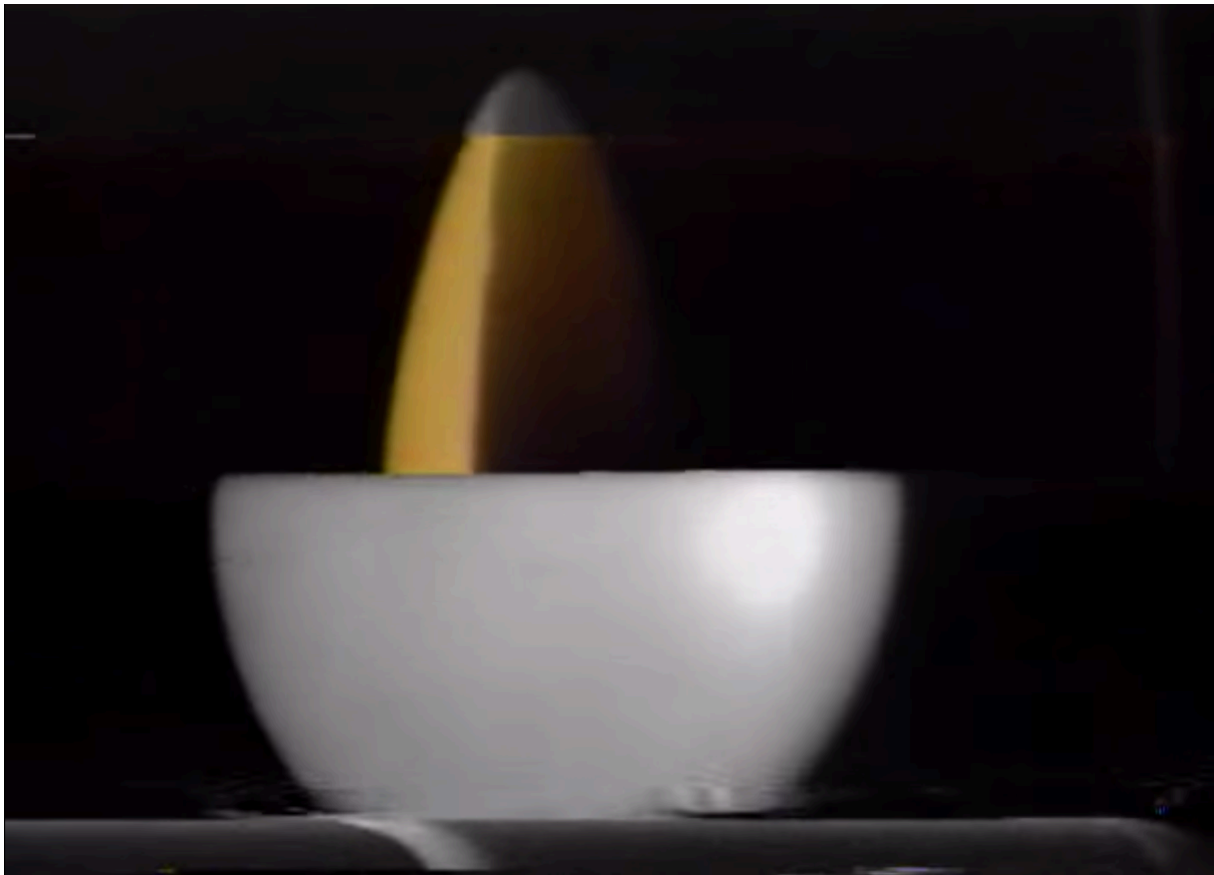
Figure 10 **Selected frame from the film *Sculpture Series,* Doris Chase (dir.), selected duration: 00:03:40 to 00:14:15, USA, 1979.**

(c) Quickness: Percussive-Vibrant form in Tension movement

Quickness is perhaps the most direct of the six dynamic qualities of the *form-in-the-making*, as exemplified by the short film *Trade Tattoo* (1937) by Len Lye, in which several perspectives are grouped into quick edits and overlays of moving images, resulting in a *percussive* form within *tensional* movement.

Figure 11 **Selected frame from the film *Trade Tattoo,* Len Lye (dir.), duration: 00:05:28, United Kingdom, 1937.**

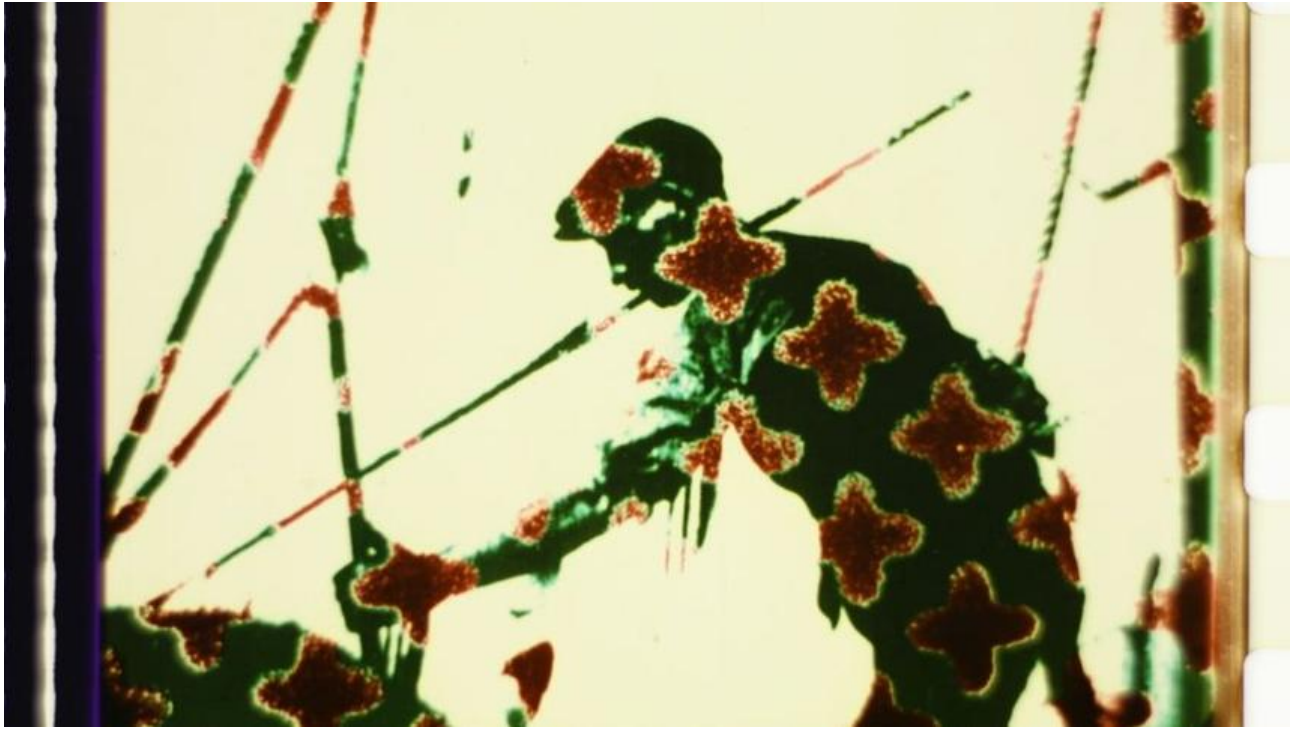*Trade Tattoo* (1937) is a playful and joyful explosion of colours, a film which highly resembles Lyotard's concept of *excessive movement* and his metaphor of the moving image as *pyrotechnics.*

> A match once struck is consumed. If you use the match to light the gas that heats the water for the coffee which keeps you alert on your way to work, the consumption is not sterile, for it is a movement belonging to the circuit of capital: merchandise-match → merchandise-labour power → money-wages → merchandise-match. But when a child strikes the match-head to see what happens – just for the fun of it – he enjoys the movement itself, the changing colours, the light flashing at the height of the blaze, the death of the tiny piece of wood, the hissing of the tiny flame. He enjoys these sterile differences leading nowhere, these uncompensated losses; what the physicist calls the dissipation of energy.[91]

Lyotard refers to the explosion of the *pyrotechnic* as the genesis of a sterile pleasure leading nowhere. When experiencing *Trade Tattoo,* although I am aware of the film's subject which is stated in the film itself as 'the rhythm of work-a-day in Britain',[92] I am simply overwhelmed

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[91] Jean-François Lyotard, 'Acinema', *Wide Angle 2*, no. 3 (1978), 2

[92] This phrase appears in the film *Trade Tattoo* (1937) at 00:00:40 min of the film.

by the quick succession of several colours within the frame. This is to say that, although different in their medium and experiential context, the fast succession of the explosions of colours of the fireworks event shares a similarity with the experience of seeing *Trade Tattoo* and other films by Len Lye.

Just as was the case for the fireworks, in film motion, *quickness* is a dynamic quality that usually has a *percussive* and *vibrant* form according to its nature of moving fast or doing something in a short time. A short period in between the juxtaposition of different colours results in a visual percussion. A *percussive* and *vibrant* form within a quick dynamic in *Trade Tattoo* adds up to a *tensional* movement because of the fast and opposing change of form and colours acting in opposition to each other.

Figure 12 **Selected frame from the film *The Flicker*, Tony Conrad (dir.), selected duration: 00:01:40, USA, 1966.**

The Flicker (1966) by Tony Conrad is an extreme example of a *quickness* dynamic in film. Just as in *Trade Tattoo* (1937), the form is *percussive* and movement *tensional*, yet, in contrast, its intensity reaches a much higher, almost disturbing, level. One might also argue that rather than *tensional*, the movement is *linear*, since a prolonged opposition between a black and white frame might eventually break the separation of the two and enter a percussive

continuity. Furthermore, this work relies heavily on the mechanic component of film and projection and functions as an example of how film might extend the qualities of dance to extremes which are not achievable for the moving body. Although this *percussive quickness* might be achieved by a robotic dancer, it would be still something outside dance as a human-to-human practice. This to say that film has the potential capacity to expand motion sensation further than a moving body.

(d) Slowness: suspended form in areal and linear movement

Figure 13 **Selected frame from the film *Visitors*, Godfrey Reggio (dir.), selected duration: 00:12:02 to 00:13:18, USA, 2013.**

At the opposite polarity of *quickness* lies *slowness,* a dynamic quality that in Godfrey Reggio's *Visitors* (2013) *suspends* the form in an *areal* motion. When it comes to *slowness,* as for *quickness,* there is not a set measurement for stating whether a dynamic is slow or quick; one might say that a film or dance performance is quicker or slower than another one. Therefore, once more, I rely on my experience of the filmic performance, although I set my level of judgement according to the history of western films. In other words, when I say that

Visitors has an inherently *slow* dynamic quality, possibly the majority of the audience within my cultural scape would sense a similar quality in the work. Therefore, although subjective, my perception of *Visitors* is undeniably linked to what phenomenology calls a *lifeworld,* a world that subjects may experience together and where an observer, instead of making truth claims, shares possibilities. Nevertheless, if one compares *Visitors* to all the works previously discussed, its *form-in-the-making* unfolds at much slower pace. As anticipated, what results from this *slowness* is a *suspended* form. *Suspension* is a quality on which I shall elaborate further. At first glance, a *suspended* form might lean towards Lyotard's *immobility* in his economy of motion. On this note, I wonder whether *slowness* and *suspension* share the same ground as the explosion of the *pyrotechnic. Visitors* in this sense might be evidence of how Lyotard's *Acinema* has some limitations regarding a reading of cinema as dance. In fact, Godfrey Reggio's long phase sequences do not harm the economy of cinema in its capacity for representation or signification. At the same time, similarly to *Moires Mémoires* by Claudine Eizykman, these moving images break the cinematic space as a window into the world. The realism or the illusion is defeated not by *excessive motion*, but by *excessive immobility*, which results necessarily from the observer reimagining the perceived motion pictures. Therefore, a *suspended form-in-the-making* in cinema, just like a dancing body, does not discard the necessity for the audience to solve the puzzle of perception, but rather amplifies it.

> To say that a dancer is moving in a circle means that we, as audience, are imaginatively apprehending the movement as a visual-kinetic form, a circle which does not in fact exist.[93]

In this quote, Sheets-Johnstone explains how an observer tends to extract from movement meanings and significations that do not actually take shape. *Visitors* is a good case of study on how both the form and its signification (that nevertheless does not concern this paper directly) change severely in the observer due to its *slow* dynamic. Borrowing Sheets-Johnstone's example of the circle, if a dancer were about to perform within a *slow* dynamic, the form would be *suspended*, meaning that the potential circle that should be forming within perception is never actualised completely. Instead, it would be somewhere in between, so one might ask whether the dancer tends towards the shaping of a circle or not.

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[93] Sheets-Johnstone, *The Phenomenology of Dance*, 94.

(e) Diffusion: collapsed form in areal movement

Manifestarsi (2021) is a short film that I produced and directed myself. The reason I have chosen to employ my own work as evidence in this paper is to briefly touch upon the parallelism of the filmmaker to a choreographer within the economy of motion.
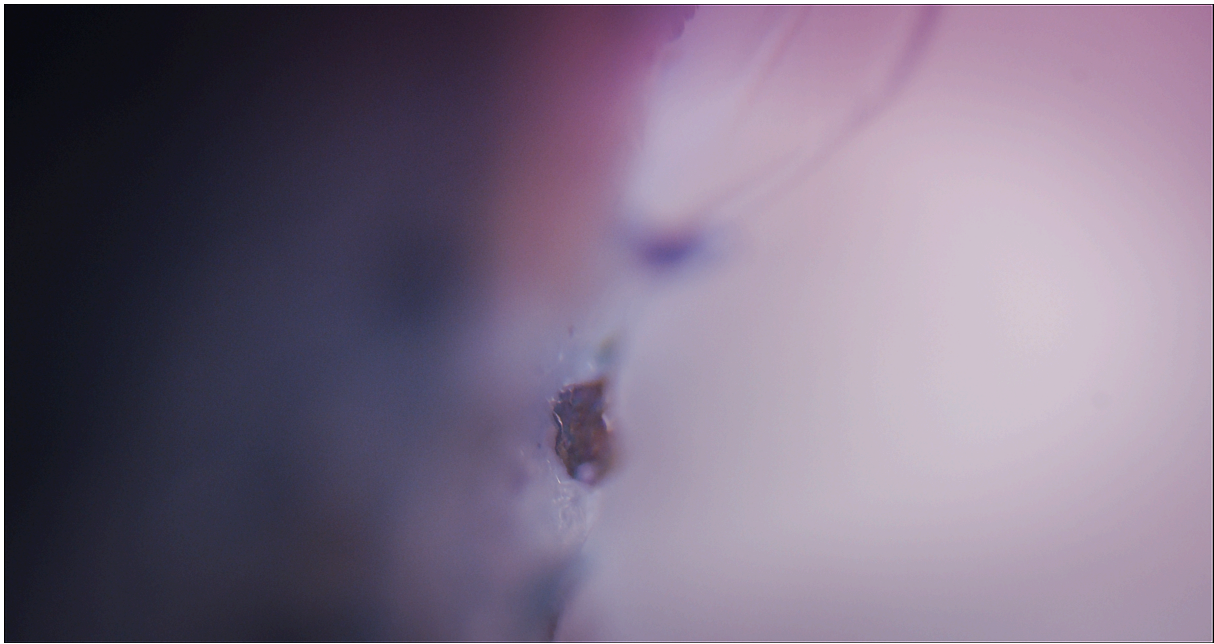

Figure 14 **Selected frame from the film *Manifestarsi*, Gianmarco Donaggio (dir.), duration: 00:12:12, distributions Visual Container (IT) and CFMDC (CA), Italy, 2021.**

To begin with, *Manifestarsi* (2021) showcases a *diffuse* dynamic resulting in a *collapsed* form in *areal* motion. The dynamic quality of this film shares a large amount of *slowness* with *Visitors* (2013)*,* but, differently from *Visitors*, the slow camera movement is paired with a constant fading from one image to the other, revealing several different shapes that appear to be in a continuous sequence. In other words, the moving image goes from an area of high concentration to an area of lower concentration in a seamless transition. Within this dynamic, my capacity as an observer to read the form is highly challenged as their constitution is slowly but continuously *collapsing.* Thus, one might refer to the generated movement as *areal,* something that is intentionally developed within a specific area which, in film, is the frame. Therefore, I can say that within the framework of dance, *Manifestarsi* (2021) is a work

utilising the area of the frame as a cinematic space in dynamic *diffusion* that results in a *collapsing* of the form. To conclude this brief section, I would like to give the reader an insight into the production process of this film. In the introduction of this thesis, I referred to certain philosophers whose approach is close to the work of an artist, and artists whose creations tend towards a philosophical discourse. *Manifestarsi* (2021) is a practical example of that statement. My approach to this work was driven by a curiosity to walk in the forest of film production intuitively: I did not know where I would have landed in the process of filming, but ultimately, I am convinced that the film already had within it the seed of a cinematic practice intended as a choreography of motion.

(f) Verticality: vibratory form in tensional movement

Canadian-born filmmaker Norman McLaren (1914–1987) is one of the few major examples of those authors in the history of cinema who explore a *vertical* dynamic. Even after the introduction of the smartphone, a tool which relies primarily on vertical fruition, the users and the filmmakers still tend to privilege a horizontal dynamic in their moving images. There are several reasons, but perhaps the most intuitive is that the actions which users usually depict with their cameras or phones mostly occur horizontally. Therefore, although the newest technologies and their sharing platforms (for example, Instagram stories and TikTok) primarily affect the framing,[94] their dynamic remains horizontal. In the history of cinematography, *verticality* is a rare dynamic: usually, it happens in short sequences depicting airplanes or birds because generally it is intended, like the screen, as a *window into the world*, while the human is the centre of vision, with *horizontality* being her/his privileged perspective.

Since the film *A Phantasy in Colors* (1949) is free from the need for a faithful representation within the moving image, McLaren's could explore the concept of *verticality*. The moving images in the film seems to be running down the frame; it is difficult to me to discern whether the motion is induced by the camera[95] or the subject in the frame, but what truly matters is

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[94] The composition of the visual content from a single point of view.

[95] I am referring to the camera as the camera motion of tilting downward, although I am aware that McLaren did not employ a motion picture capture device for this work.

that the sensation I grasp is vertical. The quick vertical dynamic of *A Phantasy in Colors* results in the generation of a *vibrant* form within a *tensional* movement. An important note to make here is how *verticality* is not the primary factor inducing vibration and tension in the moving images: *verticality* in this case is a vessel within other dynamic qualities that take place such as *quickness* that also influence the quality of the form and movement. In this respect, this example refers to a founding principle of this method: all the qualities of the dynamic, the form, and the movement are never exclusive but always in a relation of intensity.
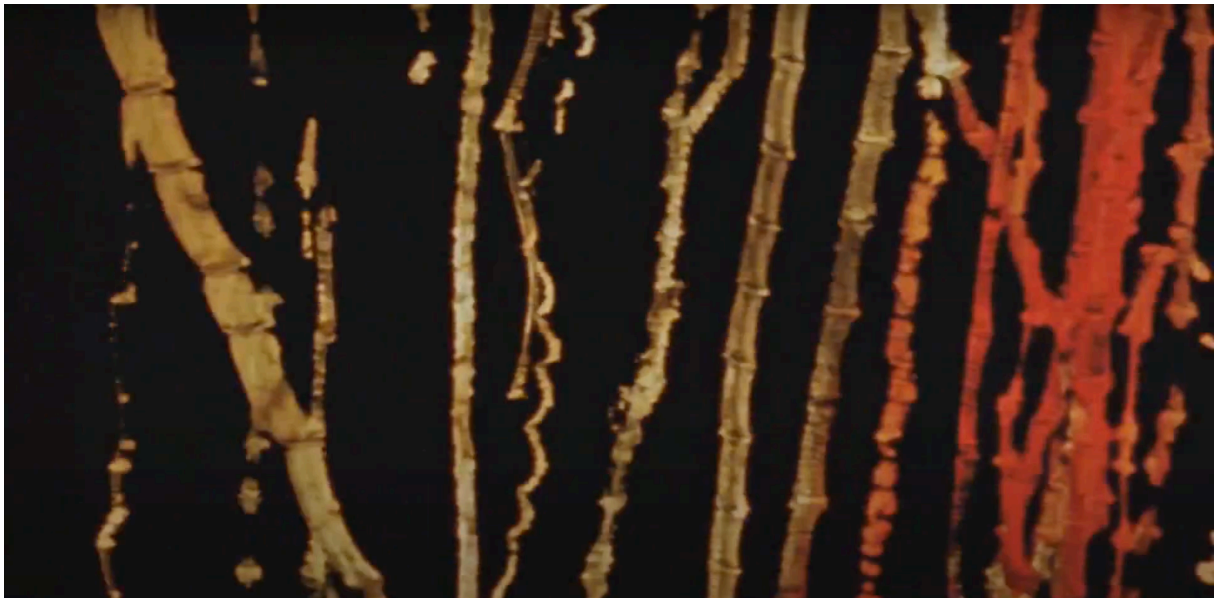

Figure 15 **Still from the film *A Phantasy in Colors,* Norman McLaren (dir.), duration: 00:07:50, CA, 1949.**

(g) The cinematic space as a dance: a method for any motion picture work

This is the final section of the paper. As I have exemplified through the theory (Chapter 1), generated method (Chapter 2), and finally analysis of the selected empirical evidence (Chapter 3), it is possible to establish a methodological framework to experience cinematic motion as a dancing body. However, in this paper I have limited my analysis to films that expand, challenge, deviate from, and transgress the fundamental assumptions allocated culturally and historically to cinematic expression. Therefore, the explication of my method is limited to selected avant-garde films.

The purpose of this last section is to briefly open my method to possible future applications within more—or any—motion picture work. To recap, the *import* is a term used to describe a sort of meaning which suffuses a whole and is inseparable from it (see Chapter 2 for an in-depth discussion). In a method for perceiving cinema as dance, the *import* is a crucial element. If a dance is the result of emotions from which a dancer or choreographer have abstracted, in film, differently, the *import* might be influenced by the genre and formal requirements of a given film. Going back to one of the pivoting theories of this thesis, *Acinema,* within the discursive and immobile cinematic approach Lyotard underlines:

> We are not only speaking of the requirement of profitability imposed upon the artist by the producer, but also of the formal requirements that the artist weight upon the material. All so-called good form implies the return of sameness, the folding back of the diversity upon an identical unity.[96]

Therefore, when not only the profitability but also the *good-form* takes over the intimacy and artistic necessity of an author, the *import* is severely affected, if not erased. For this reason, although I am about to test my method using examples of very different films from my previously chosen empirical material, I am aware that in this action—to some extent—my attempt is to try to interpret a work through the gaze or necessity of another *import.* In other words, although it would be possible to analyse a renaissance painting through a phenomenological approach, one must be aware that phenomenology is not a method of which Renaissance culture and artists were aware at that time. Therefore, the results of the application of such a method would never be in line with the cultural and historical vision of the time of that specific painting. This is to say that, in the films that I have discussed so far, the *import* of the authors was to an extent in accordance with a possible cinema with inherent dancing qualities, while in the upcoming analysis I observe sequences where dance qualities were not imported by the directors. What I am trying to carefully pinpoint here is not that an *import* might not exist in commercial cinema, for instance, but that its necessity and development stands on another ground, a place that needs further investigation and study to be revealed.

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[96] Jones, *Acinemas: Lyotard's Philosophy of Film*, 36.

A further note on the following selected empirical material, as introduced in the delimitation section of the thesis, is that this part does not look at the complete film work, but selected sequences of feature films through which I will try to prove the possibility of extending the proposed experimental method outside my research zone. In terms of *import,* an *import* of a sequence is different from an *import* of a full film, just as in dance, an *import* of a phrasing is different from the *import* of the full performance. The *import* of a given sequence and the *import* of a full work are not necessarily different or in opposition, but since my method emerges from phenomenology, the experience of the work and the sensation that it evokes as a whole is what matters. Therefore, one could not simply analyse several sequences and by means of addition and substraction reach the final *import.* Although, this does not exclude the possibility of analysing single sequences but underlines how the analysis of the sequence and the analysis of the whole are two different analyses of two totalities.

Figure 16 **Selected frame from film *The Fast and the Furious,* Rob Cohen (dir.), selected duration: 00:03:20 to 00:04:00, Production Universal Pictures, USA, 2001.**

The selected sequence, Figure 16, is part of Rob Cohen's action/drama *The Fast and the Furious* (2001), a crime film including several high-speed car sequences. Let me now analyse it within the *form-in-the-making* model that I used throughout Chapter 3. I suggest my reader try and watch it without sound, not because my method implies the erasure of sound, but simply because, as a visual method, the absence of sound helps diminish several layers of *blindness* within the perception of the clip. For what concerns the dynamic quality, this clip includes an intensive use of *quickness*, *amplitudes*, and partly *verticality.* The resulting form is

vibrant and *percussive,* while the movement is *tensional* and *linear.* What results from this reading of the moving image within a dance framework is an *import* tending to express *instability*, *power*, *shock*, and *awe*.

Figure 17 **Still from film *Knight of Cups,* Terrence Malick (dir.), Production: Dogwood Films, FilmNation Entertainment, Waypoint E., USA, 2015, selected clip [Youtube].**

This sequence is part of Terrence Malick's drama *Knight of Cups* (2015), an existential journey through the life of an actor who is a slave to the Hollywood system. The dynamic quality of this sequence is not as clear as the previously analysed section from *The Fast and the Furious* (2001). What I see as the most prominent dynamic qualities here are *attenuation*, *slowness*, and *amplitude.* The resulting form is *sustained* and *suspended*, while the movement is *areal* and *projectional*. The areal quality of the movement is something, I suggest, that is shared by much of fiction cinema for the reason that generally fiction filmmaking revolves around a centre of focus in the image, an area, which might be an actor, an object, or a subject that helps the narration of the film, while the *projectional* motion is due to driving or moving sequences where the image expands towards the corners or contracts towards the centre. Interestingly, *attenuation*, *slowness*, and *amplitude* are, to an extent, dynamics that can be used to describe the whole of *Knight of Cups* (2015). One might even say that the whole filmography of Terrence Malick includes primarily these same dynamic qualities. This reveals how Malick has a specific visual vocabulary in order to abstract from his emotions and translate them into a specific *import* within his films. A recognisable *import* given by the

employment of similar dynamic qualities is denotative of a specific style and approach, which is the reason some filmmakers who manage to achieve such a recognisable authenticity are usually keener to be addressed as artists. This is not due solely to the repetition of specific qualities, but mostly to the filmmakers' ability to master and create their own visual vocabulary.

Figure 18 **Selected frame from film *Memoria*, Apichatpong Weerasethakul (dir.), distributed by Neon (2021), selected clip [Youtube].**

The selected sequence from *Memoria* (2021) by director Apichatpong Weerasethakul (b.1970) concludes the thesis.[97] I have chosen this example in order to present a work which almost annihilates dynamic. For this specific case, it is worth reminding my reader of Sobchack's four movements in cinema. According to the first of the four movements, a film always moves, due to its physical property of recording and projecting several frames per second. Similarly, in an attempt to stand completely still, a dancer will always move at same minimal

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[97] The clip is accessible at this link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ViF2xQt3ORE

level because what might be the *zero degree*[98] of dance motion is the fact that the dancer is alive and that therefore her/his body will never be completely still.

As a consequence, the dynamic qualities of *Memoria* (2021) are the extreme exemplifications of what I have presented in Section d of Chapter 3. They are the reason for which *slowness* is the primary dynamic quality of the film, resulting in a *suspended* form in a *linear* movement and an *import* diverging from the necessity to entertain, aiming, rather, to address the audience in a feeling of suspension or disbelief typical of the oneiric works.

(h) Conclusion to chapter 3

In Chapter 3, I exemplified each of the qualities of the dynamic, form, and movement through the analysis of empirical material. I ended with an analysis that enlarges the possibility of adapting my method outside the spectrum of avant-garde films. This proves not only that my method can be successfully applied to selected material within a specific genre, but that possibly cinema at large can be perceived through the qualities of the dancing body and can be the subject of future investigations.

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[98] As previously explained, this is what Sobchack defines as the movement that commutes static photographic images into onscreen moving images through the camera and projector.

Conclusion

In the context of my broader thesis, Chapter 3 is where I consider whether, given that motion picture works as *form-in-a-making*, a methodological framework based on dance could be used to experience a film. By introducing each of the qualities of my method singularly — carefully explained in Chapter 2—and giving a specific practical example on how each of the qualities function within their application to the empirical evidence. What emerges is the method formulated throughout the thesis for perceiving the cinematic space within given selected qualities of the dancing body can function.

Essential for reaching this conclusion has been the identification and development of Deleuze and Lyotard's theories of cinema in a divergence from their original outcomes and directed towards the field of phenomenology. Within Chapter 1, Deleuze's *movement-image* and further identification of *ancient* and *modern* movement had to be questioned and interpreted differently, leading to the discussion of a juxtaposition of these two ideas with Lyotard's concepts of *immobility* and *excessive movement* from his essay *Acinema.* In other words, I have proven that *ancient* and *modern* movement are limited when it comes to analysing the intensity of motion within a moving image, but functional in the introduction of a dichotomy between a movement of selected poses versus a movement participating in the flow of life. For this reason, I have proposed an understanding of *ancient* movement as Lyotard's *immobility* or *stasis,* and *modern* movement as Lyotard's *excessive* movement. Following this, *excessive* movement has been proven to be the core concept for establishing a connection between the cinematic and the dance space, especially in relation to postmodern dance concepts including Rainer's *anarchic phrasing* and Brown's *gestural anacrusis.* This ultimately lead me to the exploration and development of my method within Sheets-Johnstone's phenomenology of dance.

In Chapter 2, I concluded that the cinematic space is a realm of abstraction where the *life of forms* generates a unique and self-standing area within motion. Additionally, by investigating further the idea of the abstraction, I concluded that every cinematic work is generated from an act of abstraction although the act of abstraction relies primarily on the rule set by the *linear perspective.* At this stage of the thesis, Sheets-Johnstone's understanding of dance as an

import—which is a reflection of a new meaning given by the abstraction of a feeling or emotion by a dancer/choreographer—gave me the possibility of introducing the idea of the cinematic and dance space as a realm generated by two diverse abstractions. First, the abstraction of the feelings and/or emotions of their authors and second, the abstractions of the generated forms within motion.

The second part of Chapter 2, specifically Section d, *The dance qualities of the cinematic space,* and Section e, *Further explanation of the dance qualities of the cinematic space,* is where my method took its concrete shape. Defined and explained the given qualities of the dynamic, form, and movement, what followed in Chapter 3 was the presentation of each of these given dance qualities within their manifestation in selected avant-garde films.

In this thesis, I hope to have contributed to shifting the understanding of cinema from a space of fixed and static significations—a realm of *recognition*—into a flux of ephemeral motion— a space of *encounter*. I proposed that movement is the foundational, yet oppressed, element of the motion picture. In this way, beyond the fields of film and dance studies, what results is an inquiry into the act of experiencing motion pictures, what an audience does and does not catch sight of, and what could be grasped instead, resulting in my proposed method as an experiment primarily rooted in visual culture studies, specifically those ramifications of the field concerning perception, cognition, and lived experience.

To conclude, this paper is only the starting point for future explorations of the possibilities of engaging with motion picture works within a dance perspective. A finding of this thesis is that, although it is possible to construct a method based on dance qualities in order to perceive the motion picture, the production process of the films matters. Even though my investigation did not take place within the realm of cinema at large, from the analysis of the given avant-garde works and the brief application of my method to three sequences from commercial cinema, what emerged is that not only important theoretical effort still has to be done for the construction of a method to experience cinema as dance, but additionally a considerable number of experiments have to be executed on the practitioner's side. In other words, by being both a filmmaker and a scholar, I conclude that in order to enrich the manifestation of dance qualities within the cinematic space, not only must the spectator be asked to look

differently in order to conceive a new experience of motion pictures, but also the film authors should be asked to experiment with the possibilities and potentialities inherent to cinema in a praise of motion. On this note, the future of experimentation in both cinematic practice and theory seems to be particularly fertile and open to unexpected and surprising possibilities. It is therefore up to scholars and filmmakers to tread the exciting and indeterminate grounds of cinema as dance.

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