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Negative Feelings as Emotional Enhancement in Cinema: The Case of Ulrich Seidl's *Paradise* Trilogy

Tarja Laine

A debate has emerged in posthumanist discourse about pharmaceutical mood enhancers such as Prozac to modify human nature. One side in the debate views such modification as the permanent enhancement of our human emotional makeup, aiming at the elimination of undesirable feelings by the unrestrained use of biotechnology that would take us further from our animal nature. This side of the debate is based on a technological concept of posthumanism, or 'transhumanism'. It is a discourse which is dedicated to the enhancement of our human capacities, physical, cognitive and emotional, by means of advanced biotechnology and cybernetics. According to this school of thought, the transhuman is achieved by searching for escape from the physical entrapment of our material body by means of technological modifications of human biological constraints. In his 'Cyborg 1.0'. Kevin Warwick writes, for instance, that his plan is 'to become one with his computer' and to evolve via chip implants into a superintelligent machine (Warwick 2000). In this mindset transhumanism is associated 'with a kind of triumphant disembodiment' as Cary Wolfe puts it (Wolfe 2010, xv).

Similarly, in his 'Why I Want to Be Posthuman When I Grow Up', Nick Bostrom writes that biomedical interventions may increase our capacity to enjoy life by reducing unconstructed negative feelings, such as hate and contempt; by eliminating irrational fears; and also by creating new psychological states that our 'unimproved' neurological machinery is unable to experience. Speaking of 'posthumanly happy beings', Bostrom argues that:

One dimension of emotional capacity that we can imagine enhanced is subjective well-being and its various flavours: joy, comfort, sensual pleasures, fun, positive interest and excitement. [...] There are more mental states and emotions that could be experienced with posthuman emotional faculties than with human ones.

(Bostrom 2010, 120)

One obvious objection to this line of reasoning is that surely one cannot survive without experiencing negative feelings. For instance, fear is a primary emotion that directs our attention to relevant details of the dangerous situation that are imperative to our assessment to its possible involvement. To this objection,

Bostrom might reply that we can still experience negative emotions when these emotions are truly justified by the occasion and therefore constructive. Another objection that can be raised is that negative emotions are important because they give meaning to moral values, often helping us in our ethical or spiritual growth. In answer to this objection, Bostrom claims the following, albeit without any critical analysis of how this could be achieved:

A posthuman could also be able to grow as a person in moral and spiritual dimensions without those extrinsic spurs that are sometimes necessary to affect such growth in humans. The ability to spontaneously develop in these dimensions could be seen as an aspect of emotional capacity.

(Bostrom 2010, 132)

Yet there are also opponents in this debate, who view the emotional enhancement described by Bostrom as a loss of humanness that would take us closer to a 'robotic state' (Wilson & Haslam 2009, 248). It is among them that the demise of emotional vitality in human life, resulting from pharmaceutical mood enhancers, is envisaged, leading to an emotionally safe landscape without the extremes of joy and distress. This chapter too argues that the reduction of negative feelings would not result in enhanced emotional capacity, because such feelings have important ethical dimensions. This is the reason why we regularly seek out negative experiences, for instance by watching emotionally unpleasant films, such as *Salò, or the 120 Days of Sodom* (Pasolini, 1975). Our negative responses to films of this kind challenge us intellectually, emotionally and morally, giving rise to what can be called the ethics of 'response-ability'. This depends on embodied experience and interconnected human reality, not on transhumanist ideals of physical perfectibility, rationality and self-regulative agency.

True, negative feelings, such as shame, guilt and disgust, are emotions one often wants to discard rather than to cherish. But it would be a poor emotional life without these emotions, a state of affective poverty with regard to our understanding of ourselves and our relationships with others. Cinema, too, can provide us with enhancement of such understanding, because films often produce affective-aesthetic experiences from a self-reflective viewing position. This emotional enhancement is intentionally present for us in the way the film directs itself towards our own sentient bodies as 'vibrant matter' (Bennett 2010). I propose to consider cinema vibrant matter insofar as films have agency, efficacy and vitality. Films can do things, produce effects and affects, as well as alter experience. They can result in an enrichment of our emotional-ethical capacity, thereby functioning as emotional enhancers in their own right.

This chapter analyses Ulrich Seidl's *Paradise* trilogy, consisting of three separate but inextricably intertwined films, *Love*, *Faith* and *Hope* (2012–2013), as aiming at emotional enhancement. Seidl's trilogy lends itself particularly well for posthumanist interpretation; not only because of its vibrant quality, but even more in the way in which it presents embodied facts of existence as themes on which all emotions and the ethics of response-ability are grounded. My approach

opposes the transhumanist fantasies of disembodiment and autonomous agency in favour of embodied embeddedness in the world shared by humans and non-humans. This version of posthumanism ‘enables us to describe the human and its characteristic modes of communication, interaction, meaning, social significations, and affective investments [...] in terms of the entire sensorium of other [non-human] beings and their own autopoietic ways of “bringing forth a world”’ (Wolfe 2010, xxv). In this chapter I first discuss the films independently, critically assessing what I interpret as posthumanist concerns embodied in these affectively charged works, and attempting to gain insight into their ethical significance. These posthumanist concerns are: speciesism in *Paradise: Love*, Cartesianism in *Paradise: Faith* and biopower in *Paradise: Hope*. Negative feelings, such as shame, disgust, humiliation and discomfort are at the heart of each of these films, not only testifying to the material agency of Seidl’s trilogy, but also to what one might call the ethical project of the films. This ethical project is aimed at altering our practice of looking, which will be addressed in the final part of this chapter.

Paradise: Love: ‘I am not an animal’

Paradise: Love focuses on Teresa, an overweight single mother in her 50s, who is on holiday in Kenya while leaving her 13-year-old daughter Melanie in the care of her sister Anna Maria, the protagonists of the *Hope* and *Faith* parts respectively. In this film, physical intimacy functions as a substitute for love, which Teresa clearly longs for. Soon after arrival she finds herself chasing one Kenyan beach boy after another in the context of the mutually exploitative, unofficial sex tourist industry of this Kenyan beach ‘paradise’. The beach resort Teresa stays at is advertised as a location of ‘comfort safari’, but animals are noticeably missing in the scenery. There are only some half-tamed monkeys that are shooed away by security guards, occasional tour camels on the beach and ravenous crocodiles at a reptile park. These are meant as an obvious metaphor for Teresa and her three Austrian friends, who are also after ‘pieces of meat’. Wildlife such as rhinoceros and elephants are only to be found as charms on the bracelets sold by the peddlers on the beach. This smacks of bitter irony, if one takes into consideration that both species are severely endangered due to illegal hunting in Kenya. Instead, it is the Kenyan men who are coded as animals, not only by the troubling discourse of the four women, but also by their dress and by their physical performance. Crucially, Seidl’s film does not allow the spectator to observe this state of affairs from an ethically neutral position. Instead, we are confronted by the film, intimidated even, so that we have to adopt an ethical stand. In this way, *Paradise: Love* deconstructs the operational logic that defines the attitude of Teresa and her friends towards the Kenyans, an attitude that makes a clear distinction between ‘civilized’ Europe and ‘wild’ Africa.

Wolfe writes that, within some humanistic discourses, the question of agency is too easily associated with rationalism and language ability (Wolfe 2010, 129). Teresa and her friends consider the Kenyans severely limited in their agency, as they do not speak German. Regularly, the women ridicule the locals verbally, such

as in the scene in which a giggling Teresa and her friend make bartender Jospath imitate the German words for bacon rind and baked blood sausage, foodstuffs which reminds them of his skin because of its glossiness. At one point Teresa complains that she cannot tell the locals from each other, thus putting them beyond her Western ability of recognition. The agency of the locals is confined to their bodily characteristics and their physical abilities only, located in the corporeal senses that traditionally have been considered lower than vision and hearing: touch, smell and taste.

When Teresa allows herself to be seduced by a young beach stud Munga, she instructs him to caress her more gently because she is 'not an animal' – again suggesting that, according to her, there is a fundamental divide between herself and Munga in this respect. In scenes like these, Teresa props up her own agency in an exploitative system, in which the locals have no agency apart from commodification of their sexual abilities. After having had intercourse, Teresa picks up her camera and starts taking snapshots of the naked, sleeping Munga, as if taking pictures of a sleeping animal. Teresa's progressively developing agential control culminates in a painful orgy scene, in which her friends bring her a young local as a birthday gift, who is promptly ordered to perform a sexually tinted 'wild African dance'. This is a scene of total objectification, in which the young man is constantly referred to as a 'beast' with a penis like a 'snake' and a body like a 'predator, ape, or tiger'. And when he is unable to get an erection despite Teresa and her friends attempting to arouse him, he is humiliated and finally thrown out of the room.

In one final scene Teresa takes Jospath to her hotel room. Once there, she first commands the mild-mannered, reluctant Jospath to take a shower and next to kiss her left thigh, then the right thigh and then 'in the middle'. Teresa's lack of human empathy, affinity and respect in this scene is tangible to the extent that the spectator starts volunteering these affects in order to fill in the emotional blank spot (Fisher 2002, 144). Above all, the spectator experiences shame, not so much because of what Teresa does, but rather from the fact that she is not ashamed of what she does. This confrontation with Teresa's raw desire is where we experience the function of shame at its purest, revealing the shared, response-able foundation of all individual existence. But, positioned on his hands and knees, Jospath meekly states that he 'cannot get used to it', out of a sense of maintaining his dignity perhaps. This triggers a bout of severe self-loathing in Teresa. She herself now fills in the emotional blank spot, which was first left to the spectator. This is not a question of Aristotelian catharsis or a purging of negative emotion, as the scene is still painful to witness, perhaps because we are all at risk of compromising our emotional integrity. This is what I understand Gilles Deleuze to mean when he talks about 'ethological attitude', which includes the fact that 'you do not know beforehand what good or bad you are capable of; you do not know beforehand what a body or a mind can do, in a given encounter, a given arrangement, a given combination' (Deleuze 1992, 627). Similarly, Karen Barad writes that it is precisely 'our actions lacking compassion' that makes the ethics of response-ability possible, 'a recognition that it may well be the inhuman, the insensible, the irrational, the unfathomable, and the incalculable that will help us face the depths of what

responsibility entails' (Barad 2012, 216–218). It is a recognition that, in my view, would not be possible without negative emotions, and is the reason why we seek them out in cinema in the first place.

There are numerous telling (tableau) shots in *Paradise: Love*, which depict the divide between Europe and Africa, 'wild' and 'civilized'. In one shot the tourists lie on beach chairs positioned in a straight row in the foreground of the image. In the background is the beach, where the peddlers stand immobilized, staring at the tanning tourists with their wares in their hands. A rope in the middle of the image divides the foreground from the background, not only physically but also symbolically. The image composition of this shot evokes an association with exotic animals being stared at in the zoo, but in contrast to the operational logic of the film in general, here the situation is reversed. At the same time, it is significant that the tourists are noticeably indifferent to being stared at by the locals, as if the locals were lacking agency to act as subjects, instead of objects, of look. The divide in the image thus becomes a symbol for that unthinkable space where the two 'species' only meet as agents in the context of sexual supply and demand. In the final shot of the film Teresa walks alone on the beach in the early light of dawn, while from the opposite direction a group of beach acrobats doing somersaults pass her. This communicates a mutually exploitative system, which can only exist insofar as it is based on racism, economic disparity and lack of authentic human connection.

Paradise: Faith: 'Free them from their carnal desires'

It is unusual to distinguish between content and form in the context of film aesthetics. But in the case of *Paradise: Love* there is such a distinction, insofar as the film's content encompasses the difference between human and animal, while its form deconstructs it. Deconstruction is found in the way in which the film positions the spectators in an ethical space, in which they are invited to fill in the affects that its protagonists lack. This same strategy is found in *Paradise: Faith* as well, but in this film the focus is on the Cartesian attitude, which privileges mind over matter to such an extent that the essence of human being no longer depends on the embodiment. The name of the game is already clear in the opening scene of the film. Here Teresa's sister, Anna Maria, kneels in front of a crucifix, praying to it to free people from their carnal desires, and proceeding to whip herself with a cat-o'-nine-tails, a practice of mortification of the flesh, while the camera moves into a close-up of her open wounds. In Christianity, self-induced pain has been seen as a source of enlightenment, an act of denying the body by way of imitating the suffering of Christ, so that it offers an avenue to a mystical union with Him (van Dijkhuizen 2009, 208). There is a strong suggestion in the film that Anna Maria's self-flagellation is an attempt to cancel out her sexual desire, which she is unable to deal with after her husband's accident left him confined to a wheelchair. Furthermore, as Neil Badmington points out, to feel sexual desire is to 'trouble the sacred distinction between the human and the inhuman' (Badmington 2001, 9). Thus,

Anna Maria's religious practice can be read as an attempt to cancel out the animal materiality of her body (earthly desire) in order to reach the unworldly state of divine immateriality, exceeding bodily processes (heavenly desire). This is the source of her superimposed facial expression of happiness, which one might typically expect to observe with a Prozac patient. It is also manifested in Anna Maria's tidily made bed, which is strictly divided in two. Spotless white bedding covers her right side of the bed, with a picture of Jesus on the bedside table, while a coarse brown counterpane is spread on the side intended for her husband, before he was exiled to the couch.

Anna Maria's clinical attitude towards the body becomes also clear in the sequence that immediately follows the opening scene. In this sequence she is portrayed at the place she works as a radiology nurse, where bodies are subjected to medical examination in a high-tech laboratory, as mere machines to be fixed. Her own house is no less hygienic than the hospital in which she works. This orderliness is emphasized by the film's setting, the image composition and the centrally positioned immobile camera. In one scene Anna Maria is shown playing her electric piano situated in front of a window covered with shutters and bordered by curtains. The vertical lines distributed evenly across the width of the fabric, combined with the horizontal lines of the window shutters, truly create a claustrophobic effect. It calls forth the image of a body-prison enclosed in its own materiality. Regularly, Anna Maria is shown in surroundings that are dominated by firm vertical and horizontal lines, such as the hallways of industrial blocks of flat, which she visits to convert the (often immigrant) residents to Christianity. Camerawork often emphasizes this rigidity with its immobility and the use of wide-angle lens, the depth of field demonstrating the bodily confinement of this character.

The camera becomes increasingly more mobile, adopting less 'carefully' selected angles as soon as Anna Maria's husband Nabil, who is an Egyptian Muslim, returns from his land of origin, to which he was apparently exiled by Anna Maria after his accident. But next she exiles Nabil in his own house as well, resentfully making him feel unwelcome. Nevertheless, Nabil's physical presence becomes more and more obtrusive, ranging from his nightly visits to the bathroom that disturb Anna Maria's sleep, to his attempt to rape her. Nabil's presence thus triggers a series of events of mutual humiliation that become increasingly violent, a true holy war on a domestic scale. I argue that Anna Maria's inhospitality is borne out by denial of her embodied existence, on which all compassion and the ethics of response-ability is grounded, according to Vivian Sobchack. Sobchack writes that an ethical stance is based on the human body 'as a material subject that experiences and feels its own objectivity, that has the capacity to bleed and suffer and hurt for others because it can sense its own possibilities for suffering and pain' (Sobchack 2004a, 178). Anna Maria's inability for authentic encounter with others and her lack of compassion for her potential converts is indeed palpable. Instead, contempt is what she feels, using a figurine of 'Mutter Gottes' as an intermediary between herself and others. The only exception to this is her encounter with a drunken Russian woman that takes place towards the end of the film. The woman responds

to her missionary quest with the same inexcusable viciousness and contempt with which Anna Maria treats her own husband. In this scene, the setting is particularly messy and the camera shaky, constantly adopting new angles and ignoring the 180-degree rule. Half the time the woman violently insults Anna Maria, while trying to undress her in the other half. This renders Anna Maria almost completely helpless in a humiliating situation. It is this negative emotion of humiliation that triggers a bout of self-loathing in Anna Maria, and she ends up on her knees before her husband, begging for forgiveness. The film ends with a disturbing gesture of Anna Maria whipping a crucifix with her cat-o'-nine-tails, blaming Christ for her humiliation. The negative emotion conveyed in these scenes becomes contagious, insofar as the spectators are invited to feel and experience their own possibilities of inflicting humiliation and being humiliated, which complicates their moral judgement of the main character.

Paradise: Hope: 'Discipline is necessary for success'

Like *Paradise: Faith*, the third part of Seidl's trilogy, *Paradise: Hope*, is aesthetically dominated by vertical and horizontal lines in an immaculately orderly, white setting, combined with central, one-point perspective and an immobile camera with a wide-angle lens. This white setting is the interior of a school building, the location of a summer camp for overweight children, where Teresa's 13-year-old daughter Melanie has been sent. The building as a backdrop to the therapeutic scene evokes a strong association with prison or some other correctional institution, as if designed to discipline and punish unruly, obese bodies so that they might become 'normal'. The film presents a striking juxtaposition between orderly bodies being controlled and reformed in the spirit of Foucauldian biopower, and disorderly, unruly bodies that become layabouts as soon as they are out of sight of the institutionalized gaze. The all-seeing repression is represented here by the insensitive female dietitian and the sadistic male fitness trainer, whose personal motto is: 'Discipline is necessary for success.' A large part of the film consists of shots in which the children, dressed in uniform, are kept standing side by side in a straight row against the wall, or are made to march towards their daily activities in single file behind an instructor. Connotations with tortured bodies are hard to avoid when witnessing scenes in which the children are suspended by their arms from wall bars situated in front of a grated window. The play of vertical and horizontal lines in these scenes evokes an association with the diabolical barbarity of medieval torture by means of the rack.

In this way all pleasure in physical exercise is efficiently quelled, while all forms of bodily movement emerging from social interaction between the children (dancing, pillow fighting) is strictly discouraged. Even the enjoyment of food, which is usually based on the pleasure one feels when one's physical appetites are satisfied, is tightly regulated. On the other hand, the obese bodies can be seen as a form of rebellion against the normative discourse that describes and defines what is 'normal' weight, or a 'normal' body. Even though the dormitory is designed to resemble a penitentiary, with its bunk beds and minimal comfort, the children

quickly take possession of this space by smuggling in candy, beer and cigarettes, by scattering their belongings all over the place, and by throwing secret parties that involve stripteases, spin the bottle and stealing food. It is often at these moments of rebellion that the camera becomes mobile too, as if it were also freed from otherwise firmly established aesthetic restraints. Furthermore, the children are remarkably outspoken about their sexuality and nothing in their conversations or in their way of being-in-the-world testifies of discomfort about their body shapes or their embodied existence. This suggests that the demand to manage their bodies in order to enter into the realm of normalcy originates from societal apparatuses of biopower, and not from within the children's own agency. The fat camp is an example of the way in which human bodies are targets of disciplinary biopower, although it also offers intrinsic opportunities for resistance, such as when Melanie and Verena escape the camp to get drunk in a local 'tanzbar'. But, of course, the problem is that these acts of rebellion are merely reactive to disciplinary power, not positive actions as such.

However, the central storyline revolves around the not-so-innocent flirtation between Melanie and the fat camp's world-weary physician. It is this element in the film that triggers negative emotions, since it is painful to watch these scenes, which just stop short of actual sexual intimacy between the two, but constantly suggest that we are about to cross a line. This negative emotion is borne out by anticipation, with a heightened sense of urgency that something is to be done on behalf of Melanie regardless of whether she herself shares that urge. It is a future-oriented, oppressive concern for Melanie's well-being, which involves both the expectation that sexual abuse will take place, and an appeal that this will not be the case. And when the physician finally ends the flirtation, relief sets in as the outcome we have anticipated so nervously turns out to be virtual – potential, but not actualized. So this is how Seidl's film produces affects: it evokes a future-oriented emotion that is negatively charged, and subsequently replaces this negative affect with a positive one. It is through this strategy that hope emerges, an emotion which is not based on an institutionalized demand for normalcy though. Rather, it is based on what Janet Wolff (2008) terms the 'aesthetics of uncertainty' as the film avoids any clear coordinates of what Melanie's ensuing actions will be. This allows her to become an independent character in her own right, which is something that cannot be claimed on behalf of the protagonist in the two first films of the trilogy.

Material agency

Paradise: Love begins with what might be characterized as a mood-setter for the whole trilogy, a sort of non-musical overture that is not a part of the plot, but which establishes the emotionally resonant aesthetics of Seidl's work. This resonance is truly disturbing, and it saturates the spectators' emotional engagement with all three films. The opening sequence starts off with a static establishing shot of a tacky bumper car pavilion with no movement within the frame apart from the on and off blinking of the bumper car headlights and the light bulbs strung along

the edges of the pavilion. The cars are carefully arranged in front of the camera, positioned in the corner in a dynamic composition, which renders the anticipation of the drivers, already sitting in their cars, almost palpable. In the following shot, Teresa, observing this scene, is shown against the campy pavilion wall that depicts a paradise palm beach, metaphorically as artificial as her future holiday destination. There is no sound apart from a low buzz and distant fairground music, until a loud alarm and the locking of the safety bar are heard and the fun begins. In several close-up shots, in which a SnorriCam is mounted in front of the bumper cars facing the drivers, we observe a group of cognitively challenged people, apparently with Down syndrome, as they scream in excitement in the maelstrom of the ride. The camera switches from one close-up shot to another, as if dancing among the drivers in a constantly changing editing rhythm. The unflinchingly intimate mood in which this sequence is shot elicits negative affect as the opening is exceptionally confronting. For instance, the drivers regularly stare directly into the camera as if eager to display their disability, thus inviting the spectator to invade their privacy and bodily integrity. This sense of unwilling invasion is a pertinent part of the spectators' experience throughout the trilogy. Furthermore, as Lisa Cartwright and David Benin point out, moments of negative affect like these can trigger self-reflection on how we look at disabled bodies. That films can trigger this kind of self-reflection confirms that they have material agency, which they can exercise upon the spectators. In the opening of *Paradise: Love*, this material agency resonates with the spectators in ways that potentially lead to acknowledgement of their own response-ability in the diverse compositions of relations between different bodies (to be looked at).

The relationship between looking and being looked at is also central in a voyeuristic scene in *Paradise: Faith*, in which Anna Maria stumbles upon a bunch of people having group sex in a park at night. At first she only hears distant moaning, which arouses her curiosity. Then she makes her way through the bushes towards the outdoor orgy, the camera following closely from behind her shoulder. The camera alternates between explicit images of unsimulated sex and reaction shots of Anna Maria, staring at the scene strangely frozen, arrested in her simultaneous horror and fascination. It is this alternating between captivation and rejection embodied in the cinematography that draws us into the film, producing affective intentionality designed to throw the spectators out of their secure viewing positions.

Similarly, in *Paradise: Hope*, there is a scene in which the physician, dressed in swimming trunks, follows Melanie, wrapped in a beach towel, into the forest during a break in the middle of a day hike. In this scene, the camera is centrally positioned and immobile at first, as Melanie enters the forest looking over her shoulder to see if someone is following her. Then the physician enters the frame from off screen and follows her, looking back to see if anyone is noticing. Inside the forest, the camera is a mobile steadicam, following Melanie as she makes her way along a narrow path, regularly looking back over her shoulder. At some point the camera no longer follows Melanie, letting her to escape from its hold as it were. But then the physician once more enters the frame from off screen, gazing over

his shoulder as he does, enticing the camera to follow as he approaches Melanie. The sequence ends with a long shot of Melanie and the physician hugging each other in a small clearing, and the film cuts to the next scene in a meadow with the fitness trainer exercising the children to the rhythm of his whistle. The organization of the cinematography in the forest scene creates an uncomfortable tension, the camera compelling us to follow Melanie and the physician to where we do not necessarily want to be. Furthermore, the fact that they are constantly looking back makes the scene all the more effective, as it makes us aware of being in the presence of the two characters. The scene is not meant to be witnessed, but the camera compels us to stay, and we are suddenly strongly confronted with our involuntary voyeurism.

This is how the material agency of cinema can make demands on our spectatorial responsibility, when we feel compelled to watch scenes that arouse negative emotions in us. But, as I hope to have demonstrated, in the *Paradise* trilogy experiencing negative emotions is worth our while, even necessary, for the development of an ethical stance towards what the films represent and how this is realized. Yet the trilogy also contains vibrant moments that are characterized by beauty and serenity, such as the painterly shots of Teresa and Anna Maria in which the use of lighting and the image composition evoke an association with Titian or some other classical master. I think this testifies to the filmmaker's affinity with, or even (moral) compassion for, his characters. The same author who has often been accused of sadism and ethical breaches by some critics. However, Melanie is denied her own 'Venus moment' in *Paradise: Hope*. Although she is shown lying in a picturesque setting – a beautiful forest bathing in morning mist – the image is ruined by the presence of the physician breathing in her odour as she lies, unconscious after her wild night out. Perhaps this image intends to communicate how close Melanie got to being seriously traumatized. Finally, though, she retains a certain innocence, and only suffers a broken heart. The negative emotion produced by this image intensifies the significance of the scene, generating a self-reflective insight that cannot be ignored. This insight is related to the way in which all three films direct our attention – albeit in a highly negative way – to how we generally engage with films, not only as subjects but also as objects of affective action. Furthermore, even though the negative affects discussed here are decisively anti-cathartic, it does not follow that these affects would lack ethical value altogether, since their self-reflective character is essential for our understanding of human relationships when it comes to cinema as a vehicle for emotional enhancement.

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