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The image of walking

The aesthetics and politics of cinematic pedestrianism

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Conclusion: Cinematic Pedestrianism Afoot

The central aim of this dissertation has been to explore how walking, as an everyday act of engagement with the dominant politics of space, has informed, changed, and inspired cinematic aesthetics. From this initial aim, I have raised related questions to investigate the reciprocal relationships between the experience of the city on foot, its transposition into cinematic aesthetics, and the function of these images of walking within a larger cultural, social and political context. Through a cultural analysis of six film historical moments, I demonstrated that it is possible to approach the history of cinema from the perspective of the urban walking experience. My approach was primarily informed by three theories. Firstly, Henri Lefebvre's contention that all spaces, including the public space of cities, are constructions shaped by certain ideologies that determine and control how these constructed spaces function; secondly, Michel de Certeau's focus on the pedestrian as an everyday practitioner of the city, and on the everyday pedestrian acts that elude, subvert or disrupt the city's dominant spatial order; and finally Jacques Rancière's notion of the *distribution of the sensible*, which sheds light on the political structures implicated in all constructed spaces (the city, the film industry, etc.) and shapes all sensible experience (what is allowed or not allowed to be said, seen, shown, etc.). A standpoint that is informed by these perspectives also allowed me to see pedestrianism as a constructed aesthetic experience in the city and *pedestrian acts* as dissenting practices that transgress the established aesthetic order of the public space by walking unwalkable trajectories, saying the unsayable or showing

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the unshowable. Researching how the cinematic medium evolved in conversation with such experiences sheds light on the new images, styles and techniques that emerged to articulate such dissent. In this final conclusion, I would like to reflect on what I learned from investigating pedestrian acts in film history and propose some further perspectives, after having indicated the limitations of this study.

Movement, Locomotion, and the Emergence of Cinematographic Medium

The first question that emerged from my initial research question concerned the relationship between the scientific study of pedestrianism and the nascent aesthetics of the filmic medium. In order to answer this question, my first chapter offered a critical comparative analysis of Eadweard Muybridge's instantaneous photography plates of human locomotion and the chronophotographic method of Étienne-Jules Marey. In canonical film history, the scientific experiments of Muybridge and Marey are both considered as pre-cursors of cinema, but they are rarely differentiated in terms of their understanding of movement, motivations to record human locomotion and the aesthetics of movement they sought. Investigating the conception of movement that informs their studies aiming to capture human locomotion, I was able to establish specific links between these experiments and Bergson's philosophy of movement. These links pointed to a dimension of movement as surplus; that is, elusive, uncatchable, and unattainable by photographic and chronophotographic media. Within the historical context of these scientific experiments, the aspiration to capture that surplus movement imbued in many ways the emergence of cinema as a medium that can record and reproduce movement projected on a screen, creating the illusion of continuity. In this chapter, I demonstrated how recording the act of walking in its completeness, without any loss of information, was a major motivation in the

development of the photographic medium and the emergence of the cinematic movement.

Modernity's Paradigms of Bodily Movement from Taylorism to Flânerie

Shifting the focus from scientific experiments with the photographic medium to the cultural context of the late nineteenth century, I analysed in Chapter Two how two major discourses on bodily movement created a certain cinematic aesthetics. The use of photography and motion pictures by Frederick Winslow Taylor, and Frank and Lillian Gilbreth was primarily concerned with analysing and prescribing the ideal movement of workers' bodies to maximise the efficiency of production. The collection of short motion pictures produced by Taylor and the Gilbreths, known as the "Time and Motion Studies," were concerned with eliminating unproductive movement from the system: the system of human locomotion (the body) but also the industrial system, such as factory space and cities. Untamed movement was vilified as idleness and a primary means of resisting work. Flânerie was thus constructed as antithetical to industrial capitalism's objective of maximising productivity and revealed as an early form of pedestrian acts that dissent with the dominant structures of time, movement, and space. My investigation of the cinematic articulations of flânerie, a popular theme of the time in literature and painting, revealed significant connections between the practice of flânerie (wandering around the city) and filming everyday life. At the intersection of this rich correspondence, the filmography of the Lumière brothers stood out because it provided a chance to revisit canonical film history from the perspective of the aesthetic interaction between wandering in the city and filming everyday urban life on the streets. My analysis of the aesthetic forms common to urban scenes in Lumière views pointed to a rich conceptual understanding of flânerie within its cultural context, which has been impoverished in the scholarship on flânerie due to the repetitive focus on just certain

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aspects. For this reason, I revisited and re-emphasised the conceptions of flânerie by such writers as Charles Baudelaire, Franz Hessel, and Walter Benjamin. An important conclusion to draw with regard to practices of flânerie and filming is that both include an analysis (reading into) or observation of the city space for Lumière operators. Therefore, the transposition of a city scene into cinematic aesthetics should reflect that analysis as effectively as possible.

Contesting the Histories and Conceptions of the Flâneuse

Flânerie was strongly contested in the 1990s by women scholars. My third research question that emerged from the initial question was how women's experiences of the city differed and what kind of cinematic aesthetics was created by these different experiences. In the 1990s, it was argued that flânerie at the turn of the century was exclusively a male activity, and that women experienced public space rather differently from men. One of the ground-breaking arguments was made by Janet Wolff, who contended that the flâneuse did not exist in the historiography of modernity, especially in the public world of work, politics, and city life. Even though there were several attempts to recover the "invisible flâneuse" in the literature and art of the nineteenth century, these studies tended to look for the flâneuse in commodified forms of pedestrianism. Going back to the writers of the time for a contextual understanding of flânerie, as I explained in Chapter Two, I was able to highlight certain under-researched aspects. Studies on the leisure culture of working women at the turn of the century have inspired research into early cinematographic images of women walking to work or hanging around in public spaces for a pleasant leisure time. Alongside certain non-fiction or documentary footage that shows women's experience of public space, or the conventional behavioural patterns that are expected of women with regard to their posture and walking in the city, Lois Weber's recently restored fiction film *Shoes* from

1916 provided a new perspective to discuss its working-class female protagonist's pedestrian acts and its female director's filmmaking practices. In this chapter, focusing on female pedestrian acts in a turn-of-the-century urban setting, revealed a parallelism between women's pedestrian acts and women's filmmaking in that both created a rupture in the distribution of the sensible.

Reading and Revealing the Construction of Public Spaces

In Chapter Four, extending my focus on the pedestrian acts of working-class people, I analysed Dziga Vertov's theory and practice of filmmaking to investigate the function of pedestrianism. An in-depth examination of Vertov's writings and of *Man with a Movie Camera*, a film that is in many ways a manifestation of his film theory, revealed pedestrianism to be primarily an analytical activity for observing the everyday life of the city, and to film it *as it is* in its uninterrupted flow. Here, pedestrianism had a function similar to the Lumière operators' flânerie, which again included an analysis of urban space and its transposition to film *in the best way to reflect its rhythm and movement*. In contrast to Lumière views, however, pedestrianism was a significant component of Vertov's revelationist cinema. I have analysed a particular stop-motion sequence from *Man with a Movie Camera*, where the revelationist aspirations of Vertov's cinema are manifested through the image of what I call a 'kino-pedestrian': a camera which is mounted on a tripod, and which can walk, observe, and record autonomously. The combination of the camera's machine-like qualities, which are superior to human vision and which can show what remains invisible to the human eye, and the anthropomorphic qualities of walking, which allow the camera to be constantly on the move, can be seen as a prototype of a drifting prosthetic camera, which characterises the realistic and documentary-like aesthetic of uncut long takes in more recent film history.

Pedestrian Filming as Resistance and Spatial Practice

The cinematographic image of walking in post-war Italian cinema has been the focus of academic scrutiny. However, its transformation in the filmmaking practices and in the cinematographic aesthetics from the fascist era to the postwar political conditions has not been analysed. With this aim in mind, in Chapter Five, I primarily investigated the social and political background and its effects on walking in the city and on filmmaking. Going out on the street with a camera to observe without intervention everyday life in its uninterrupted flow and to shoot these scenes was a recurrent urge widely voiced by many filmmakers of the era, primarily Cesare Zavattini. Starting from Zavattini's concept of *pedinamento*, I analysed cinematographic images of pedestrian acts in three films, which I selected to investigate the changing interrelationship between the politics of public space, pedestrian acts, and filmmaking praxis, from the fascist era to postwar Italy. As a film made under occupation, *Roma, Città Aperta*'s treatment of pedestrian acts was substantially different from that of *Germania Anno Zero*, filmed immediately after the war in a liberated, albeit completely ruined Berlin. Pedestrian acts, their transposition to cinematic aesthetics and the meaning attached to these images of walking changed dramatically in the early 1950s, following the disillusionment that came with Italy's 1948 elections, which reinstated the power of the dominant classes and rapidly diminished revolutionary aspirations that had emerged in 1943. *Ladri di Biciclette*, filmed in the wake of the 1948 election campaign, strongly embodied the political atmosphere of that era in that pedestrianism primarily functioned as a signifier for enforced displacement, which I explained within its larger socio-political context. Overall, my analysis of the transformation of the walking-shot in these three films reveals various features that have been overlooked in academic scholarship

on the image of walking in Italian Neorealism, including Gilles Deleuze's notion of the 'time-image.'

Pedestrianism as Nomadism in Films and Filmmaking Praxis

Continuing my research into the articulations of pedestrian acts, in Chapter Six, I analysed Agnès Varda's filmography and practice of *cinécriture*, which demanded a more philosophical approach to her female characters' experiences of public space. It was possible to observe significant parallelisms between their experiences and Varda's journey as a woman filmmaker in a male-dominated industry. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's concept of nomadism emerged as a major concept since, in the case of Varda's own filmmaking, being constantly on the move meant an insistence on transgressing the limits of established conventions, experimenting to constantly open up new paradigms, and following creative strategies to persistently re-invent a cinematic language. In Varda's films, walking primarily functions as a signifier for persistently eluding and subverting the dominant politics of space.

In conclusion, my exploration of pedestrian acts in the history of cinema has revealed an aesthetic connection between the corporeal experience of the city on foot and the transposition of that experience into cinematic aesthetics. The influence of the changing aesthetic experience of pedestrianism – not only in the history of cities but also in the specific experience of certain social groups, such as working-class people, underground political resistance groups, lower class women, or immigrants – on cinematic aesthetics has been significant, as I have demonstrated in the preceding chapters. As a historical revisionist venture in which the primary aim was to re-interpret and re-explain certain moments in canonical and non-canonical film history through the transposition of pedestrian acts into cinematic aesthetics, this study has positioned itself between film history and film theory to explore and critically analyse the function

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of cinematic images of walking within larger socio-cultural and artistic contexts. In the particular socio-cultural contexts analysed in each chapter, the aesthetic connection between walking and filming differed to some extent, making this research relevant to other social, cultural, and political contexts that remain beyond its scope.

Possible Future Research Trajectories

In addition to the above conclusions, I would like to point out some further directions that this research could inspire. As I indicated in the Introduction, there is increasing scholarly and popular interest in pedestrianism and its forms, such as *flânerie*, wandering, and hitchhiking. Firstly, I still see a need for raising awareness of how pedestrianism is culturally, politically, and spatially constructed. Such an awareness would eliminate romanticised accounts of walking in the city and shed light on the constructions (such as discourses, architectures, produced desires) that shape our walking. From this point, it would be possible to discern certain dissenting pedestrian acts that elude, disrupt, or subvert these constructions in space. In this study, I used Henri Lefebvre's theory of production of space and Michel De Certeau's notion of pedestrian acts to investigate these dimensions. Jacques Rancière's theory of aesthetics has been particularly crucial for analysing the transposition of the aesthetic experience of the city on foot to cinematic aesthetics.

Secondly, this research could be expanded diachronically and synchronically. Concerning the former, there is an increasing need to study and formulate the transposition of urban walking experience to new media forms that retain or recycle certain aspects of earlier forms of media. These include a large variety of apps from touristic walking routes to Google maps; wearable video production tools such as GoCams; everyday video sharing platforms such as Instagram and Snapchat stories; GPS Art or new media-aided forms of landscape art; and emerging VR technology.

These technologies provide very interesting material regarding the research questions investigated in this study. A diachronic analysis could also be performed on earlier forms of media, such as some magic lantern shows, where *flânerie* and travel were significant underlying themes connecting multiple still images to one another, similarly to the way *flânerie* was connected to still images by Eugène Atget or the moving images recorded by Lumière operators.

While investigating pedestrian acts within the spatiotemporal paradigms of modernity, I encountered very rich material that demands further scrutiny. A synchronic study could usefully extend the samples analysed in each of the time periods that I covered in this research to provide a better understanding of the social and cultural context that produced these cinematographic images of pedestrianism. For example, I still see a significant need to investigate further female pedestrian acts and their articulation in cinematic aesthetics. Given the growing field of feminist media histories, I see an increasing and exciting potential that can illuminate new dimensions of women's history in media. On a similar note, during my research I also observed a need for film historians to expand research into visualisations of labour. In particular, studies of the pedestrian acts of the working class and their cinematic aesthetics could be a fruitful direction to take. Although there is a rich literature on travelling workers or mobilities of labour, the subject remains under-researched within the film discipline.

I hope the framework of this dissertation and the trajectories that I explored while researching the cinematic articulations of pedestrian acts can provide a starting point for the exploration of these further perspectives.