

Editors' Introduction: What is Film Phenomenology?

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1. *On Difficulties in Defining Film Phenomenology*¹

What is film phenomenology? Trying to answer this question forces us to overlook a wide field, the contours of which seem to be as vague as the foggy landscapes in an Antonioni or Angelopoulos film. The task at hand is, no doubt, a tricky one. On the one hand, employing a very broad notion of film phenomenology waters down the term: Against the background of the pervasive influence phenomenology had on 20th century theory and philosophy, one would not have to dig deep to unbury at least some kind of connection to phenomenology in all kinds of film scholarship. Even structuralism, in many ways an antithesis to phenomenology, has been claimed as an offspring of phenomenology.² On the other hand, a very strict Husserlian definition of film phenomenology as a rigorous science of film experience and its essential structures would leave very little of what today goes under the name of “*film phenomenology*” as “*film phenomenology*.”

¹ The authors would like to thank Martin Rossouw and Jakob Boer for helpful suggestions on an earlier version of this introduction.

² As film phenomenologist Frank P. Tomasulo maintains, “Structuralism has been said to have been born out of the Sartre–Lévi-Strauss debate. Most conventional accounts of modern criticism therefore tend to reduce the relationship between phenomenology and structuralism to a matter of successive ‘schools’ of thought. Structuralism, it is assumed, *grew* out of phenomenology and then, in the other sense of the term, *grew out* of it—that is, rejected its assumptions and developed an alternative theoretical base. This oedipalization of theory—in which the offspring, Structuralism, kills off and supplants its parent, Phenomenology—is rich in metaphor but plausible only up to a point.” For Tomasulo, Heidegger’s philosophy of language laid the groundwork for structuralism. Tomasulo 1988: 22. More recently, Hunter Vaughan has emphasized the “kindred natures of phenomenology and structuralism.” Vaughan 2013: 15. But see Andrew 1985: 45 for an opposite statement.

The trouble starts with the term “phenomenology” itself. As early as 1923 Heidegger complained about its washiness.³ Slightly later, in the early 1930s, Edith Stein decried the difficulty of finding a common ground between Husserl, Heidegger and Scheler’s usage of the term.⁴ Today the expression “phenomenology” comprises a veritable hodgepodge of theoretical positions—from transcendental and hermeneutical phenomenology to the phenomenology of life, structural phenomenology, responsive phenomenology, analytic phenomenology, post-phenomenology, neurophenomenology, unhuman phenomenology, new phenomenology (both as French *nouvelle phénoménologie* and German *Neue Phänomenologie*) etc. Phenomenology simply means different things to different people.⁵ Due to the difficulty of locating an exact meaning of the term “phenomenology” even on its home turf of *philosophical* phenomenology, we will be even more hard-pressed to discover a clearly demarcated field of *film* phenomenology.

In some cases the categorization of a certain philosopher as phenomenologist can raise additional problems. If some scholars consider Henri Bergson, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Jacques Derrida, Giorgio Agamben or Jean-Luc Nancy as phenomenologists, would an “application” of their work to film count as film phenomenology?⁶ Moreover, not all writings of early, classical or contemporary phenomenologists are phenomenological in spirit. In their later writings Heidegger, Sartre, Merleau-Ponty or Ricoeur moved away from phenomenology, at least in a narrower sense of the term. If a scholar connects terms like “*Gestell*,” “nothingness,” or “flesh” with film—are we justified in qualifying this as film phenomenology? What further complicates delineating the term is a pervasive tendency in film studies to attach the qualifier “phenomenological” to texts that deal with the viewer’s sensual, bodily experience, even if this is carried out in the most impressionistic and subjectivist way. “[M]uch of what passes for ‘phenomenology’ in film theory should be taken only in a broad sense,” Frank P. Tomasulo wrote in 1988, at a time when film phenomenology was hardly the varied field it is today.⁷

Tomasulo belongs to those few film scholars who have suggested a return to a rigorous scientific film phenomenology: “Attention needs to be directed away from the strain of affective, intuitive, and psychological phenomenology

³ Heidegger 1988: 73.

⁴ Stein 2014: 146.

⁵ Guillemet 2010, for instance, has summarized the French controversy regarding protagonists of the *nouvelle phénoménologie* like Jean-Luc Marion and Michel Henry and whether their form of philosophy can still count as phenomenology.

⁶ Bergson and Derrida have entries in Embree et al. 1997. Derrida, Agamben and Nancy are discussed as phenomenologists in van Manen 2014. Wittgenstein is mentioned as a phenomenologist in Sorfa 2014: 353.

⁷ Tomasulo 1988: 20. Dudley Andrew, ten years earlier, commented similarly: “As always in the phenomenological criticism of any art, one finds casual impressionism standing beside decisive, law-discovering observation, the former masquerading as the latter.” Andrew 1985: 48.

that has become the *sine qua non* in film circles (Bazin, Metz, Cavell, Linden, Andrew) and redirected toward the pure phenomenology of consciousness originally posited by Husserl." According to Tomasulo, the enthusiastic and all too impressionistic writings of film scholars like André Bazin or Dudley Andrew do not meet the requirements of scientific rigor of pure phenomenology and therefore serve as nothing more than "psychological indices of the experiential."⁸ But for every Tomasulo-like scholar who advocates a strict phenomenological methodology, we find numerous authors who appropriate the term "phenomenology" without grounding it in any theoretical reflection, simply applying it in a loose sense.

As an example one could refer to an article entitled "Phenomenology of Film. On Siegfried Kracauer's Writing of the 1920s," in which Heide Schlüpmann, despite the promise of her title, locates Kracauer's "phenomenological procedure" merely in passing in the way he takes up "individual manifestations of daily life and dwell[s] upon them reflectively."⁹ According to Schlüpmann, phenomenology had a strong influence on Kracauer, but due to the historical and social experiences of his generation, he turned his method in a critical, materialist direction "which distinguishes it from that of his teacher Max Scheler."¹⁰ But if we claim that Kracauer's reflections on the Berlin picture palaces or the UFA studio world are phenomenological, are we not forced to count as phenomenology the qualitative interview studies on memories of movie-going that Annette Kuhn and others have conducted or even Roland Barthes' reflections on the face of Greta Garbo or the Romans in film (in his *Mythologies*)? At the risk of sounding too normative, we would like to posit that not every methodology reflectively dealing with film-related everyday phenomena should be identified with film phenomenology.

How to define film phenomenology then? We suggest both a broad and a narrow definition. The broad definition identifies film phenomenology with all approaches in which film scholarship and phenomenology intersect in one way or another. Here the initiative can come from film studies, which to various degrees employs phenomenological methods or borrows phenomenological concepts; or it can come from phenomenological philosophy, which turns to film as an object of inquiry. This broad—but rather vague—definition has an advantage: it mirrors more adequately what in current language use goes in the name of film phenomenology. However, the narrow definition might ultimately be more preferable, because it designates film phenomenology more unmistakably as an attempt that describes *invariant structures* of the film viewer's *lived experience* when watching moving images in a cinema or elsewhere. Here the emphasis can either lie on the *film-as-intentional-object*

⁸ Tomasulo 1988: 21.

⁹ Schlüpmann 1987: 98.

¹⁰ Schlüpmann 1987: 98.

or the *viewer-as-experiencing-subject*. Moreover, one can distinguish various degrees of generality and specificity: from a general description of the experience of film as such (Harald Stadler, Vivian Sobchack) to an investigation of very specific aspects that we experience when watching films. Think of the *lived body experience* of senses like touch (Laura Marks, Jennifer Barker) or smell (Vivian Sobchack), the *spatial experience* of video images (Steve Lipkin) or depth in film (Trevor Elkington), the *temporal experience* of documentary films (Malin Wahlberg) or slow cinema (Jakob Boer), the *collective experience* of the cinema auditorium (Julian Hanich) or the *aesthetic experience* of film worlds (Daniel Yacavone).¹¹ In the following we will therefore pragmatically use the broad definition, but normatively prefer the narrow one.

Despite the difficulties to “lock in place” the meandering meanings of film phenomenology—or maybe precisely because of them—we see good reasons to survey the field of film phenomenology and delineate some of its boundaries. Born almost at the same time, film and phenomenology share a mutual history. While never a dominating method, phenomenological thought has strongly influenced the study of film, sometimes in direct, mostly in oblique ways.¹² What seems an indisputable fact is that in contrast to classical art forms like painting and literature “professional” phenomenologists have hardly ever dealt with film. In the past we find rare essays on film by Merleau-Ponty, Roman Ingarden or Edward Casey.¹³ In the present, interest in film is equally restricted among philosophical phenomenologists: a few scattered articles by scholars like John Brough, Hans Rainer Sepp, Pierre Rodrigo and especially Mauro Carbone come to mind as exceptions to the rule (Sepp, Rodrigo and Carbone are also among the contributors to this volume). But in general the influence is more indirect, with film scholars either explicitly appropriating phenomenology as a method or implicitly being influenced by its ideas (a point we will come back to).

Of course, in principle there has never been an obstacle: In its celebrated openness to each and every phenomenon that humans consciously experience, phenomenology can direct its attention to imagination just as much as time, to perception just as much as space, to intersubjectivity just as much as the body, but also to atmospheres, to the act of reading, to emotions, and, of course, to film. On top of that general possibility to bring the method of phenomenology to bear on various facets of the cinema some scholars have claimed that film has a striking resemblance to phenomenology and can make visible insights of the latter. In an oft-quoted passage from “The Film and the

¹¹ H. Stadler 1990a and 1990b; Sobchack 1992; Marks 2000; Barker 2009; Lipkin 1990; Boer 2016; Wahlberg 2008; Elkington 2001; Hanich 2010 and 2014; Yacavone 2015.

¹² With a focus on French film theory, Guillemet notes: “the legacy of phenomenology in French film theory appears to be more like a background note that tints a vast body of works—or only parts of them—rather than being the strict application of precisely defined phenomenological concepts.” Guillemet 2010: 94.

¹³ Merleau-Ponty 1964; Ingarden 1962; Casey 1981.

New Psychology” Merleau-Ponty maintained that phenomenology is “an attempt to make us *see* the bond between subject and world, between subject and others, rather than to *explain* it as the classical philosophies did by resorting to absolute spirit. Well, the movies are peculiarly suited to make manifest the union of mind and body, mind and world, and the expression of one in the other. That is why it is not surprising that a critic should evoke philosophy in connection with a film.”¹⁴ Following Merleau-Ponty, Vivian Sobchack maintains that film is “a philosophical exemplar of ‘intentionality,’ making manifest the directed and irreducible correlation of subjective consciousness (evidenced by the camera’s projected and thus visible choice-making movements of attention) and its objects (whether ‘real’ or ‘imaginary’).” For Sobchack, the cinema can even demonstrate acts of reflection, for instance when the film, through editing, organizes and expresses “the tacit meaning of its own and the world’s explicit conjunction and movement.”¹⁵ Drawing on a strong analogy between human experience and the way film “engages” with the world does not so much amount to a *phenomenology of film*—comparable to similar claims about film as philosophy one could argue that we deal with *film as phenomenology* here.¹⁶ But if film does indeed “make manifest” certain characteristics of human experience, as Merleau-Ponty and Sobchack maintain, then one may even claim that film itself “does” phenomenology (and there has been no shortage of phenomenology-inclined scholars who have made manifest in writing what film makes manifest audiovisually).

For us, however, the urgency to stake out the field of film phenomenology is first and foremost driven by a comparatively mundane observation: Over the last two and a half decades one could witness a growing acknowledgment of—and even trend toward—phenomenology as a valid method in the study of film. A brief look at handbooks of film studies or introductions to film theory may shed light on this trend. Around the turn of the millennium film phenomenology is hardly ever mentioned at all. Notable exceptions are (a) Francesco Cassetti, who in his *Theories of Cinema* (1999) discusses Sobchack on one page and briefly mentions Edoardo Bruno as an Italian scholar with loose ties to phenomenology; (b) Robert Stam who in *Film Theory. An Introduction* (2000) includes a page on film phenomenology predominantly devoted to Merleau-Ponty’s essay

¹⁴ Merleau-Ponty 1964: 58–59 (original emphasis).

¹⁵ Sobchack 2009: 436–437. Tomasulo has gone even further: For him film is “a particularly apt subject for phenomenological investigation because it is so dependent on the explicitly *visual* experiences of time, space, perception, signification, and human subjectivity.” Tomasulo 1990: 2 (original emphasis). However, it is not immediately evident why film should be a preferred subject for phenomenology because it seems to mimic perceptual experience; just because there are structural similarities does not *per se* explain why film should have a special status within phenomenology.

¹⁶ For a similar distinction, see Sobchack 2009. The idea of film as phenomenology has been developed most thoroughly from a Husserlian perspective in Brough 2011.

"The Film and the New Psychology" and its influence on 1960s French phenomenology-inflected theories (Sobchack is mentioned merely in passing); and (c) Roberta Pearson and Philip Simpson, whose co-edited *Critical Dictionary of Film and Television Theory* (2001) features a short entry by Frank Tomasulo.¹⁷ Yet when paging through other major film theory guides of the time one encounters a big void: John Hill and Pamela Church Gibson's *Oxford Guide to Film Studies* (1998), Toby Miller and Robert Stam's *Companion to Film Theory* (1999), Susan Hayward's *Cinema Studies. Key Concepts* (2000) and the sixth edition of Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen's *Film Theory and Criticism* (2004) do not contain a single word on film phenomenology.¹⁸

Roughly ten years later the situation has changed considerably. In their *Sage Handbook of Film Studies* (2008) James Donald and Michael Renov include a four-page entry on "Embodied Cinema: Merleau-Ponty's Phenomenological Sense" by Hamish Ford.¹⁹ In *What Is Film Theory?* (2010) Richard Rushton and Gary Bettinson characterize film phenomenology as one of the "three areas of theoretical investigation that have flourished since the late 1980s" (next to audience research and the debate about the cinema of attractions). And they call Sobchack's *The Address of the Eye* an "invaluable contribution to film theory."²⁰ In Thomas Elsaesser and Malte Hagener's widely read *Film Theory* (2010) Sobchack's film phenomenology and the emphasis on embodied experience—including the viewer's tactile experience—even play a structuring role in the organization of the book, which purports to be an "introduction through the senses."²¹ Finally, Edward Branigan and Warren Buckland's *Routledge Encyclopedia of Film Theory* (2014) not only contains David Sorfa's six-page entry on "phenomenology and film," but also a section in which Jane Stadler emphasizes the importance of phenomenology for the study of filmic affects and emotions.²²

These are the *raison d'être* for our attempt at outlining the scope of film phenomenology in the following (and, in fact, for editing this entire special issue of *Studia Phenomenologica*). We will proceed in three steps. First, we provide a survey of different *research practices* within current film phenomenological writing. Then we will give an overview of the major shifts in the *history* of film phenomenology, sometimes zooming in on specific protagonists. At the end we will try to cluster some contemporary *fields of interest* that stand out as particularly noticeable.

¹⁷ Casetti 1999: 281–282; Stam 2000: 80–81; Pearson/Simpson 2001: 327–328. Among German publications one should also name Robnick 2002: 246–280.

¹⁸ Hill/Church Gibson 1998; Miller/Stam 1999; Hayward 2000; Braudy/Cohen 2004.

¹⁹ Donald/Renov 2008: 170–173.

²⁰ Rushton/Bettinson 2010: 177 and 180.

²¹ Elsaesser/Hagener 2010.

²² Sorfa 2014: 353–358 and J. Stadler 2014: 4–5. An astonishing outlier in this list is Buckland 2012. Buckland does not mention phenomenology (let alone Sobchack) at all.

2. Research Practices in Film Phenomenology

In this section we propose five main practices within the wide field of film phenomenology: excavation, explanation, exemplification, extrapolation and expansion. We gradually move from practices that are *peripherally phenomenological* in spirit to those that are *deeply phenomenological*, from doing things with phenomenology in relation to film to actually doing film phenomenology understood as a description of various film-related experiences. Note, however, that the five categories are not mutually exclusive. It is not at all uncommon that a single article or book engages in more than one practice at the same time, and scholars routinely take up different practices in separate studies.

EXCAVATION: Overlapping with intellectual history, the first film phenomenological practice digs up the philosophical roots of famous film scholars, schools of film theory or even specific filmmakers in phenomenology. Here we can think, for instance, of Siegfried Kracauer's connection to Scheler or Husserl. Ian Aitken, for one, has variously shown the ties between Kracauer's realist theory of film and Husserl's phenomenology and especially the concept of *Lebenswelt*.²³ Boaz Hagin has pointed out the closeness of some passages in Deleuze's purportedly anti-phenomenological cinema books to phenomenology.²⁴ And Greg M. Smith has excavated the indebtedness of André Bazin's understanding of emotions to Sartre's phenomenology of emotion, imagination and consciousness. Smith arrives at interesting conclusions about Bazin's normative understanding of emotions: "Bazin prefers the neorealists to Alfred Hitchcock not only because of their aesthetic choices concerning mise-en-scene, editing, etc. but also because of the emotional choices these filmmakers made."²⁵ Laying bare the deep influence of phenomenology on French film theory after the war would be a case in point of how a whole school of thought might be grounded in phenomenology.²⁶ Last but not least, the attempts to uncover Terrence Malick's roots in Heideggerian philosophy may count as an example of how a filmmaker can become the object of an excavating film phenomenology practice. As a replacement leave for Hubert Dreyfus, Malick taught phenomenology at MIT and in 1969 published his own translation of Heidegger's *Vom Wesen des Grundes* as *The Essence of Reasons* with Northwestern University Press.²⁷ The excavation practice is certainly not *doing* phenomenology in the strict sense. Nevertheless, it influences our understanding of film phenomenology proper: it can further dilute the concept

²³ See, for instance, Aitken 1998 and 2006.

²⁴ Hagin 2013.

²⁵ G. M. Smith 2006: 118.

²⁶ See, for instance, Jay 1994: 459ff.

²⁷ Davies 2009: 569.

of film phenomenology by carelessly addressing as “phenomenological” the work of authors who had only the slightest connections with the movement; or it can help to obtain a more precise notion of film phenomenology by evaluating the extent to which authors like Bazin or Kracauer, who are often considered as central figures or at least as precursors of early film phenomenology, were really indebted to phenomenology at all.

EXPLANATION: The second research practice consists of explanations, commentaries and interpretations of what important phenomenologists like Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Roman Ingarden or Mikel Dufrenne have written about film. Here we might think of Hans Rainer Sepp’s essay on Ingarden’s film ontology.²⁸ Or consider Mauro Carbone’s ongoing explanatory work on Merleau-Ponty, that has notably moved from a sheer account of Merleau-Ponty’s observations on cinema to a more adventurous reflection on the epistemological and ontological status of contemporary “screens,” while still regarding this as an interpretation of Merleau-Ponty.²⁹ In our own issue we find this approach not only in Carbone’s and Pierre Rodrigo’s analyses of Merleau-Ponty but also, at least in part, in Olivier Malherbe’s interpretation of Ingarden’s writings on film. It is an investigation in the service of—sometimes devotion to—the phenomenological predecessor, whose work is judged to be in need of interpretation, either because it is opaque or because it is deemed as not popular enough or even forgotten. Since there is in fact little material on film to draw upon in the writings of most key phenomenologists, the output of this practice has been understandably scarce, while in recent years it nevertheless gained a certain momentum, especially with the growing film-scholarly interest in Merleau-Ponty. In contrast to the excavation practice the emphasis does not lie on where the scholar under scrutiny intellectually *comes from* but on an illumination of what he or she has *contributed to*. Also, excavation usually focuses on the phenomenological roots of someone outside the canon of phenomenology, whereas the explanation practice concentrates precisely on canonical phenomenologists. Of course, in reality both practices can easily intermingle, because an excavation practice often has an explanatory upshot and an explanation might profit from excavating the roots of the canonical phenomenologist.

EXEMPLIFICATION: It is not at all uncommon that scholars try to illustrate or clarify a film (or a scene in it) with a passage from a phenomenological study or vice versa. As a case in point one might think of Kate Ince’s contention that scenes in Agnès Varda’s *Les glaneurs et la glaneuse* (2000) “echo” and “illustrate” Merleau-Ponty’s famous description of his two hands touching

²⁸ Sepp 1995.

²⁹ See, for instance, Carbone 2010 and Fielding 2009.

each other in “The Philosopher and His Shadow” and some of the phenomenological claims from Iris Marion Young’s well-known essay in feminist phenomenology, “Throwing Like a Girl.”³⁰ The phenomenological description works as a handmaiden for a new and different understanding of the filmic scene that would otherwise have gone unnoticed. Sometimes the emphasis rests more on the formal and technological features of film, as in many texts on avant-garde cinema, for instance by Annette Michelson or P. Adams Sitney. Here camera movement is *identical* to—or metaphorically *likened* to—a shift in attention and hence to a function of consciousness.³¹ A more sophisticated version of this analogy can be found in Sobchack’s claim that the camera’s directedness toward the world—the “viewing-view” of the film’s body—makes manifest the irreducible correlation of subjective consciousness and its objects. The camera thus exemplifies one of the central tenets of phenomenology: that consciousness is always consciousness-*of*—in other words: intentionality. Finally, we can also find analogies between film and the *method* of phenomenology. Amédée Ayfre, for instance, suggested replacing the term “neo-realism” with the more appropriate term “phenomenological realism,” because for him the *what* and *how* of films like *Germania anno zero* or *Ladri di biciclette* come “oddly close to” a phenomenological description and, like the phenomenological *epoché*, “but in a rather different sense,” bracket certain aspects of the everyday.³² Note that this analogy can also work in the other direction, as when Gérard Granel compares the method of phenomenology with a filmic technique like slow motion: “Phenomenology is an attempt to film, *in slow motion*, that which has been, owing to the manner in which it is seen in natural speed, not absolutely unseen, but missed, subject to oversight. It attempts, slowly and calmly, to draw closer to that original intensity which is not given in appearance, but from which things and processes do, nevertheless, in turn proceed.”³³

However, film can also serve as an audiovisual, and often narrative, means to shed light on what already exists in phenomenological writing but which film, according to the exemplifying author, is able to demonstrate in its own and potentially more accessible way. Although phenomenological philosophers are generally less inclined to resort to film as an illustration, preferring examples from literature or art, the recent works of Dylan Trigg lend evidence to the high explanatory potential of filmic exemplifications. Trigg aptly uses the films of David Cronenberg for phenomenologically understanding

³⁰ Ince 2013: 604–605 and 605–607.

³¹ Michelson describes the camera movement in Michael Snow’s *Wavelength* “as the movement of consciousness,” whereas Sitney considers Snow’s *Back and Forth* (1969) and *The Central Region* (1971) as an elaboration “on the metaphor of the moving camera as an imitation of consciousness.” Quoted from: Penley/Bergstrom 1985: 290.

³² Ayfre 1986: 185 and 186.

³³ Quoted from Michelson 1971: 30 (emphasis added).

mutations in the relationship between the body and the mind, or the works of Werner Herzog for clarifying Merleau-Ponty's notion of "wild being."³⁴ In principle, the goal of the exemplifying strategy can be to mutually illuminate film and phenomenology, to demonstrate their closeness, or both. In the best of all cases the exemplifying strategy functions as a helpful erosion of boundaries between film and phenomenological philosophy, where both shed light on each other.

EXTRAPOLATION: A fourth film phenomenological practice attempts to develop what influential phenomenologists *might* have said about film had they written about it at all or in more depth. Here one could think of Jens Bonnemann's attempt to piece together the film phenomenology Sartre has never written, based on the French phenomenologist's writings about imagination and art.³⁵ Like explanation, extrapolation is strongly bound to the work of a master phenomenologist and stays close to his or her thinking. However, in contrast to explanation the extrapolation practice does not concentrate on the master phenomenologist's *existing* work on film, but on the *lacunae* he or she has left with regard to film. Both practices are exegetical in nature, but the latter is film-phenomenologically more original in as much as the extrapolating scholar draws connections to film that didn't exist before. Extrapolation can go in two directions. The first—extrapolation as *subsumption*—connects film with theories originally conceived of in *adjacent* fields like aesthetics or image theory in relation to which film appears as a mere specification. In the present issue Claudio Rozzoni follows this path by extrapolating a *moving* image phenomenology from Husserl's image phenomenology, to which Rozzoni subsumes it. The second form—extrapolation as *transposition*—is even more original, because it extrapolates film phenomenological work from more *remote* contexts that seem to be only indirectly related to film. In our issue we can see this transposing extrapolation practice at work in Matthew Rukgaber's construction of a film phenomenology from Max Scheler's theory of value and emotion, particularly love.

The motivation for extrapolating can stray in various directions. It can reveal the author's secret or openly admitted wish that the phenomenologist *should* have said something about film, but didn't do so because he was either too condescending to engage with the popular medium or too distant from aesthetic concerns in general. An extrapolating recuperation can therefore also be seen as an act of liberation: the master phenomenologist is untangled from his own prejudicial constraints. But the motivation may also be located in an author's conviction that the work of precisely this or that phenomenologist has something to tell us about film today, something we may grasp only with

³⁴ Trigg 2011 and 2012.

³⁵ Bonnemann 2012.

his or her help. Brian Price, for instance, considers the fact that Heidegger wrote hardly anything about film the least convincing reason for his absence in film scholarship. He even speculates that Heidegger could only ever speak of cinema by *not* speaking of it: "Although Heidegger may not have spoken at great length about cinema, one might say that what remains unsaid in Heidegger is also, at times, the most important."³⁶ Price therefore encourages us to extrapolate on Heidegger's writings.

EXPANSION: The final film phenomenological practice we delineate here uses the work of phenomenological precursors as a mere springboard for rigorous descriptions of the cinematic experience. Previous ideas are developed into different and new directions. In contrast to the extrapolation practice, which implies a strictly exegetical filling of a precursor's gap or an inference of a missing theoretical consequence, expansion amounts to proper phenomenological research. While the *extrapolating* scholar serves the master phenomenologist, for the *expanding* scholar the master phenomenologist serves as a means to arrive at a new phenomenological description. Vivian Sobchack's *The Address of the Eye* is the most impressive case in point here: While strongly influenced by Merleau-Ponty's earlier work—especially his *Phenomenology of Perception* and "The Film and the New Psychology"—Sobchack develops the French phenomenologist's ideas about perception and the lived-body into a highly original phenomenology of the film experience.³⁷ But the expansion strategy does not need to rest exclusively on phenomenological precursors. Laura Marks influential study *The Skin of the Film* is an innovative amalgam of ideas by art historian Alois Riegl, Merleau-Ponty and Deleuze. (As we shall see below, the influence of Deleuze in contemporary academia has tempted many scholars to connect Deleuze and phenomenology, despite Deleuze's hostile remarks about phenomenology.)

A closer look at Sobchack's *The Address of the Eye* reveals that the five research practices—excavation, explanation, exemplification, extrapolation and expansion—are indeed not mutually exclusive. Apart from *expanding* Merleau-Ponty and Don Ihde's phenomenologies of perception, the body and technology to the cinema and *exemplifying* the concept of intentionality via the camera's directedness toward the world, it also contains *explanations* of Merleau-Ponty's essay on film. What the five categories tell us, then, is that film phenomenology as a field does not merely consist in doing phenomenology in the narrower sense of a "thick" description of invariant structures of experience, but must *volens volens* be understood in a broader sense.

³⁶ Price 2009: 111 and 117.

³⁷ To be sure, Sobchack draws also on other phenomenological sources. Ihde 1986 would be an example.

Furthermore, there are other angles from which we may look at the wide field of film phenomenology in order to further sharpen its fuzzy contours. Thus, we can make a difference between the *attention focuses* of the phenomenological description—between the noema and the noesis in Husserlian terms. If we define the noema as the “*what* is experienced as experienced” and noesis as the “*mode* of its being experienced,” we can notice how film phenomenologists give different weights in their descriptions to the *film-as-intentional-object* and the *viewer-as-experiencing-subject*.³⁸ In Sobchack’s work, for instance, we find a strong emphasis on the noematic end in *The Address of the Eye*, with the weight clearly shifting to the noetic end in *Carnal Thoughts*. Below we will encounter different attention focuses also in the writings of André Bazin.

Similar variations affect the *motivation or goal* of a text that one can—however broadly—categorize as film phenomenological in spirit. Is the goal of the text a straightforwardly phenomenological one, i.e. does the author *do* film phenomenology by describing film-related experiences? Or is the objective an ulterior one, i.e. does the phenomenological concept or method help to achieve a different goal in film theory? Feminist theorists—Laura Marks among them—have found Merleau-Ponty’s concept of the lived-body as an integrated sensorium helpful to counter the “masculine” ocularcentric paradigm connected to distance, enlightenment and mastery. A revaluation of near senses like touch implies an acknowledgment of what at least some of these theorists consider a more “feminine” experience.

Having said this, two essential observations need to be stressed. First of all, film-phenomenological texts are rarely based exclusively on phenomenological concepts and methods. On the contrary, most authors fuse phenomenological impulses with various other influences, be they rival philosophical traditions (critical theory, semiotics, Deleuzian philosophy etc.) or empirical research. Obviously, we are not arguing for phenomenology-for-phenomenology’s sake here, since what in the end counts most is how productive a theoretical approach is. But it is precisely from this perspective that *exclusively* phenomenological approaches like Allan Casebier’s work from the early 1990s have proven to be much less insightful than *inclusive* approaches to phenomenology like Sobchack’s *Address of the Eye*, which blends phenomenological intentions with post-structuralist and semiotic perspectives. Or think of the work of Laura Marks, whom we have already mentioned as a fruitful example of phenomenological amalgamation. This inclusiveness has the advantage of making contemporary film phenomenology more flexible and open than traditional phenomenological research, but its tendency to avoid drawing firm boundaries to other theoretical approaches certainly contributes to its current fuzziness.

³⁸ Andrew 1985; Sobchack 1997 and 2009; del Río 2010.

Second, the entire variety of film-phenomenological practices described above relates foremost to the field of film studies, where the methodological tools of phenomenological philosophy are used in manifold ways to clarify aspects of the film experience in competition with—or completion of—other theoretical traditions or research techniques. If we move from the field of film-scholarship to that of philosophy itself, however, this landscape becomes much more barren. In philosophy we certainly find some examples of exemplification or exegesis, but hardly any attempt to *expand* the systematic field of phenomenological philosophy itself with original reflections on film. Such an attempt would no doubt mean to elevate the philosophical dignity of film as such (and not just of this or that film which might be philosophically appealing). The fact that such approaches are patently missing today is telling both with regard to film and phenomenological philosophy.

3. *Sketch of a History of Film Phenomenology*

Despite helpful overviews by Dudley Andrew, Vivian Sobchack and others, a comprehensive history of film phenomenology has not been written yet.³⁹ The ups and downs in the development of this field have yet to be investigated in a manner comparable to Edward Lowry's monograph on the filmology movement or, for that matter, Herbert Spiegelberg's monumental history of *The Phenomenological Movement* in general.⁴⁰ This is obviously not something we can deliver here. But even a cursory look can identify two decisive moments in film phenomenology's history: the years of 1946ff (with 1947 as the key moment) and 1990ff (with 1992 as the crucial date). The former coincides with the founding of the filmology movement in 1946, the publication of film phenomenological essays by Merleau-Ponty and Roman Ingarden in 1947 and an early experimental phenomenological study by Albert Michotte van den Berck in 1948. The latter concentrates at the beginning of the 1990s with a special issue of *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* on "Phenomenology in Film and Television" in 1990, the publication of Allan Casebier's *Film and Phenomenology* in 1991 and, most crucially, the arrival of Vivian Sobchack's *The Address of the Eye* in 1992. Both *Sternstunden*, if you will, have sparked productive decades of phenomenological investigations into the cinema. And the influence of the second decisive moment is still ongoing.⁴¹

The growing success of film phenomenology since the early 1990s was from the onset accompanied by references to a preceding history of the relations between phenomenology and film theory. Thus, one could often read of a "return"

³⁹ Andrew 1985; Sobchack 1997 and 2009.

⁴⁰ Lowry 1985; Spiegelberg 1965.

⁴¹ Yacavone 2016 similarly distinguishes between "first-generation phenomenological film theory" and "contemporary phenomenology of film."

or “renaissance” of film phenomenology. Dudley Andrew’s classical essay “The Neglected Tradition of Phenomenology in Film Theory,” which made the first attempt to narrate this history in the late 1970s, played a significant role.⁴² To be sure, a contemporary philosopher specialized in phenomenology might be baffled by the laxness with which the term “phenomenology” is used here to designate the most divergent theoretical programs, including French filmology, auteur-theory, genre-studies and sociological anthropology. Their common denominator is, according to Andrew, the mere fact that they all illustrate an alternative to the dominant structuralist-semiotic film theory of his time. The alternative he broadly describes as phenomenological. He generally characterises the phenomenological approach as being descriptive rather than explicative, diachronic rather than synchronic, immersive rather than distanced and objective, focused on expression and not on communication, synthetic and not analytic etc. A similar opposition is also widespread in contemporary image theory, where any interpretation of the image along the lines of a theory of perception is denoted as phenomenology in contrast to a semiotic-linguistic interpretation of the image as a “sign.”⁴³ Thus, on the basis of their potential opposition to structuralist and post-structuralist film theory, Andrew and, following in his footsteps, several more recent encyclopaedia entries on film phenomenology list highly diverse authors as precursors of a phenomenologically inspired film theory: Arnheim, Bazin, Cohen-Séat, Ayfre, Agel, Munier, Morin, Cavell, Merleau-Ponty, Metz, Laffay, Kracauer etc. However, a closer look at the actual pre-history of the relations between phenomenology and film studies shows that this vagueness cannot be imputed to Andrew alone, as it does indeed have a certain ground in the evolution of the relations between phenomenology and film theory.

3.1 *Early Phenomenology, Ingarden and Sartre*: When evaluating the actual historical impact of phenomenology on film theory we must start from the assumption that the *direct* influence of phenomenological theories on film scholarship was not at all determinant, while the *indirect* influence was on the contrary considerable.⁴⁴ We can first see that, at the height of classical phenomenology in the interwar period, phenomenologists generally showed a distinctive tendency to avoid all contact with phenomena of contemporary urban life like film, advertisement, radio etc. The three most significant authors of the early phenomenological period—Husserl, Heidegger and Scheler—principally steered clear of any aesthetical considerations, a field in which they could have eventually also approached film. Other representatives of the phenomenological school who have dealt with questions of aesthetics—like

⁴² Andrew 1985.

⁴³ Hombach 2001; Wiesing 2005.

⁴⁴ See also Spiegelberg’s reflections on various forms of indirect influence like: (mutual) stimulation, reinforcement, corroboration, resonance, convergence, etc.; Spiegelberg 1972: XXXVII-XLII.

Moritz Geiger, Felix Kaufmann, Oskar Becker etc.—stubbornly omitted references not only to film but to the entire spectrum of artistic endeavours associated with the medium of photography. The few references to film that can be found in this period are predominantly characterized by a certain conservative reserve. On the one hand, this attitude is based on a principal contempt of photographic reproduction, most often opposed as a mere copy or likeness (*Abbild*) to the aesthetically valid art-work (*Gebilde*)—a distinction one often encounters in authors like Fritz Kaufmann or Moritz Geiger, but also in some of Husserl's and Heidegger's works. On the other hand, this aloofness regarding film comes from a common disdain towards the non-aesthetic reception behaviour of the cinema spectator, which finds its expression in the classical opposition between impure distraction (*Zerstreuung*) and pure aesthetic contemplation. This latter opposition can be found in Moritz Geiger's reflections on the superficial and the profound effect of art, but also in similar considerations from Oskar Becker, Eugen Fink or Martin Heidegger.⁴⁵ There are only two significant exceptions to this general disinclination of early phenomenology to tackle film: Roman Ingarden and Jean-Paul Sartre.

Ingarden first refers to cinema in a short paragraph of *The Literary Work of Art* (1931).⁴⁶ Cinema is discussed together with theatre, pantomime, scientific treatise and journalistic reportage as one of the “marginal cases,” which have to be considered in their relation to the literary work of art in the classical sense. Ingarden undertakes several elementary reflections concerning the pictorial representation of movement and the relationship between sound and image, but finally contents himself with demonstrating the rather obvious fact that film should not be addressed as a “literary work of art.” Ingarden then returns to film in 1947 in an essay first published in the *Revue internationale de filmologie*, which assumes the task of sketching out an ontology of film based on a “noematic” analysis of the filmic work of art as aesthetic object.⁴⁷ Following Husserl's theory of image consciousness, Ingarden distinguishes with regard to fiction films between the real objects on the film set, their photographic reconstruction on film and the unreal part which they play in the picture (and which is primarily intended by the viewer). By comparing the various means of expression available to film to those of other art forms, Ingarden underscores as distinctive features of film—in contrast to the plastic arts and literary works of art—both its “phenomenological habitus” of reality and its specific musicality as a rhythmic configuration of time intervals and movements. Although these observations were hardly novel at the time and although they did not exercise any considerable influence, they nevertheless represent the first attempt to translate findings of early film theory into the more precise terminology of phenomenological philosophy.

⁴⁵ Ferencz-Flatz 2016.

⁴⁶ Ingarden 1972: 343–349.

⁴⁷ Republished in Ingarden 1962: 319–341.

Jean-Paul Sartre often dealt with film in his early writings.⁴⁸ Following the chief inspiration of Bergson, his early essays develop various theses concerning film in a predominantly enthusiastic and rhapsodic fashion: Film is considered as an art of totality, a form of consciousness, an art of movement and duration, a means for exploring mental disorders, an anthropocentric art which tends to obtain an idealized representation of the surrounding world by rhythmic configuration of its material etc. However, all of Sartre's early essays on film were developed prior to his conversion to phenomenology, while his writings of the 1940s conspicuously circumvent film, despite their interest in phenomena like imagination and image consciousness. If Sartre's own contribution to the early analysis of film remains rather negligible, his enormous literary and philosophical success after 1945 soon made him the most significant intellectual landmark for an entire generation of French film critics of the post-war period. This is precisely why one can easily trace a certain indirect influence of phenomenology in the works of Bazin, Ayfre, Astruc, Leenhardt, Laffay and others, with regard to their general theoretical approach, their current intellectual motifs and their vocabulary.⁴⁹ The often evoked analogy between film and phenomenology can also be traced back to this particular context. The analogy was first used by Maurice Merleau-Ponty in "The Film and the New Psychology" was picked up during the 1950s by Amédée Ayfre and André Bazin in reference to Italian neorealism, which they explicitly termed a "phenomenological realism", and was then also used by Jean Mitry, Albert Laffay and Christian Metz.

3.2 *Gestalt Psychology and Merleau-Ponty*: Concerning the *indirect* influence of phenomenology on film studies, it is safe to say that among the various equivocations which to this day impede a more precise methodological delineation of phenomenology, none was more decisive for the evolution of film phenomenology than the one concerning its relation to *psychology*. According to Dudley Andrew, most of the authors mentioned in his essay share as common denominator their focus on the analysis of film reception and the experience of the film spectator, which is indeed almost unanimously considered to be the key issue of film phenomenology. Consequently, psychological and properly phenomenological inquiries are often intermingled. To be sure, this ambiguity does not affect solely the more recent developments of film phenomenology—they find their correspondence also in the difficulties encountered by phenomenology itself when it comes to univocally delimiting its endeavour from that of psychology. To begin with, according to Husserl phenomenology fundamentally differs from psychology in two respects. On the one hand, psychology regards consciousness solely as a *worldly* object situated

⁴⁸ Minnisale 2010.

⁴⁹ Chateau 2005.

in the causal nexus of reality, while phenomenology regards the objective world merely as an *intentional* correlate of subjective lived experiences. On the other hand, psychology as a *factual science* is devoted to the empirical regularities of mental life, while phenomenology as an *eidetic science* is interested in the *a priori* structures of subjective experience. Husserl himself relativised this sharp separation by admitting the possibility of both an intentional and an eidetic psychology, which would run perfectly parallel to the explorations of phenomenology, thus blurring the boundaries between the two. Nevertheless he upheld a critical stance towards the actual psychology of his time throughout his entire oeuvre. This also applies to Gestalt psychology, which Husserl himself never showed any special sympathy for, despite their common background—the most significant representatives of Gestalt psychology were themselves students of Brentano (von Ehrenfels) and Stumpf (Wertheimer, Köhler), while Koffka and Katz actually studied with Husserl—and despite the fact that Husserl's phenomenology and Gestalt psychology bare the traces of obvious mutual influences.

Instead, already in the early 1930s another phenomenologist and student of Husserl, Aron Gurwitsch, questioned Husserl's often expressed criticism of Gestalt psychology as a form of "psychological naturalism."⁵⁰ Contrary to Husserl, Gurwitsch tried to show that, especially due to Köhler's rejection of the so-called "constancy hypothesis," Gestalt psychology was actually led to a similar theoretical perspective as the one held by phenomenology on ground of the transcendental reduction.⁵¹ In their treatment of perception, both phenomenology and Gestalt psychology no longer regard the perceived object in view of its causal relation to an objective stimulus, but exclusively as an intentional given of perception itself, that is: as a "perceptual noema" or as a *perceptum*. Moreover, according to Gurwitsch, Gestalt psychology comes to develop detailed theories of the thematic field, of the relationship between theme and horizon, and of attention and its modifications, which have precise correspondences with the discoveries of phenomenology. Similar observations are also put forth by Maurice Merleau-Ponty, most explicitly in his lectures from 1951/52, *Les sciences de l'homme et la phénoménologie*, where he adds to Gurwitsch's relativisation of the difference between the intentionality-based approach of phenomenology and the naturalistic-objective approach of Gestalt psychology a further relativisation concerning the relation between fact and essence. Thus, Merleau-Ponty shows that while phenomenology was in

⁵⁰ Gurwitsch 1956.

⁵¹ The constancy hypothesis assumes a univocal correspondence between the phenomenal object of perception and the objective stimuli causing them, such that the same stimulus would necessarily produce the same perception. On the contrary, Köhler showed that the appearance of objects in perception is determined foremost by the relative organisation of the perceptive field. This assumption is commonly regarded as one of the founding theoretical insights of Gestalt psychology.

the course of its evolution led to assume a much more fluid separation between essence and fact than the one put forth by Husserl, Gestalt psychology itself developed a specific form of induction which highly resembles the eidetic intuition of phenomenology.⁵²

In light of these correspondences between phenomenology and Gestalt psychology, one could trace a certain phenomenological perspective on film back to the works of Rudolf Arnheim, who was, as is well known, a student of the Berlin school of Gestalt psychology (Köhler and Wertheimer). This association can be sustained not only by Arnheim's later works—like his book from 1969, *Visual Thinking*, which shows obvious similarities to Husserl's conception of the relations between concepts and pre-predicative experience in *Experience and Judgement*—but already by his classical film-theoretical book from 1932, *Film as Art*. Arnheim himself regards this work as an application of fundamental insights in the Gestalt-psychological theory of perception by rejecting from the onset the interpretation of perception as a mere mechanical imprint of exterior stimuli. In contrast, he specifically stresses the processes by which the sensuous material is organized within the field of perception, aiming to sketch the differences between the manner in which these processes occur in the case of natural perception and the way they occur in the case of photographic reproduction. By doing so, his considerations, though based on empirical research, nevertheless employ an implicitly phenomenological perspective set on analysing the immanent differences between the photographic noema and the noema of natural perception.⁵³

This very same parallel between phenomenology and Gestalt psychology also shapes Merleau-Ponty's own take on cinema in his famous lecture "The Film and the New Psychology." While the lecture starts by discussing some of the most significant principles of the Gestalt-psychological theory of perception, Merleau-Ponty intends to show that the application of those principles to film—regarded as an object of perception and more precisely as a "temporal Gestalt"—can not only confirm the intuitions of some of the most pertinent present day aestheticians of film, but also helps to expose the "meaning" of film experience as such. For, in Merleau-Ponty's view, this meaning is by no means established through an intellectual interpretation, but is grasped within the act of perception itself. In his conclusion, Merleau-Ponty ventures a step further, by no longer contending to view film as a perceptual object allowing for a Gestalt-psychological analysis, but instead he regards it as a means of expression which puts forth the same intimate relation between the subject and the world, his own body and his fellow subjects, which was addressed around the same time both in the investigations of Gestalt psychology and in the phenomenologically inspired descriptions of "being in the world" in the

⁵² Merleau-Ponty 1973: 135 f.

⁵³ Arnheim 2002: 24 f.

works of existential philosophers like Heidegger and Sartre. Oddly enough, however, Merleau-Ponty tends to ground this analogy solely in the “common worldview” of his own generation.⁵⁴

Merleau-Ponty's later writings and lectures continue to show a constant interest in the topic of film, but his considerations never exceed the status of preliminary notes and brief sketches.⁵⁵ Despite the scarce material available, Merleau-Ponty's reflections have gained a tremendous impact in film theory. This was not due to the actual exegesis of his comments on film, but to the extensive and creative extrapolation of both his earlier theory of perception and his later philosophy of the body in the works of more recent film phenomenologists like Vivian Sobchack. Following these developments, the growing interest in Merleau-Ponty in film theory has consequently led to a more thorough philosophical exegesis of his later notations on film as well as to the publication of several of his previously unknown lectures containing references to film. These publications have in turn stimulated the film-theoretical engagement with Merleau-Ponty. Among these publications, the most interesting statements can be found in his two lectures: “Le monde sensible et le monde de l'expression” (1952–1953) and “L'ontologie cartésienne et l'ontologie d'aujourd'hui” (1961), which try to draw the more fundamental philosophical consequences of his Gestalt-psychological understanding of film. In the latter lecture Merleau-Ponty discusses film in the context of an “ontology of the present day” on the basis of a renewed concept of movement. In the former lecture, he discusses film in the context of a more radical philosophy of language, which is grounded in a new interpretation of the relation between movement and expression. These reflections have been intensively taken up both from a film-theoretical perspective (as in Anna Caterina Dalmasso's paper in the present issue) and from a philosophical perspective (see the contributions of Mauro Carbone and Pierre Rodrigue in this issue).

3.3 *The Filmology Movement*: Today a certain influence of phenomenology on the explorations of the French filmology movement during the late 1940s and 1950s is widely assumed as self-evident. However, if one considers the eclectic and multidisciplinary (rather than interdisciplinary) character of the filmology institute, which has been pointed out by several recent studies, this claim would need to be relativised.⁵⁶ Similarly, Dudley Andrew in his essay only speaks of a “quasi-phenomenological” orientation of the *Revue internationale du filmologie*.⁵⁷ Moreover, if one can indeed substantiate a certain impact of phenomenology on the research conducted within the filmology movement, this cannot be qualified as a form of direct influence. For

⁵⁴ Merleau-Ponty 2000.

⁵⁵ Carbone 2015.

⁵⁶ Jullier 2009.

⁵⁷ Andrew 1985: 45.

sure, the institute did have visible ties to some of the most significant figures of contemporaneous phenomenology like Jean-Paul Sartre (who delivered a presentation at the first conference of the institute), Maurice Merleau-Ponty (who also held a lecture at the institute and was personally close to several protagonists of the filmology movement), Roman Ingarden (who published his essay “Le temps, l’espace et le sentiment de réalité” in the first issue of the *Revue internationale de filmologie*) or Alphonse de Waehlens (whose essay “Mouvement, mystère et horizon au cinéma” came out in the same issue). However, all of these contributions were to a large extent neglected in the most significant debates of the movement. Moreover, they did not even seem to have any explicit intention to plea for a rigorous and methodologically self-aware phenomenological approach amidst the different scientific perspectives involved in the filmology project.

Even though in a somewhat unsystematic way, such a plea can be found in Erich Feldmann’s essay for the *Revue internationale de filmologie*, “Considérations sur la situation du spectateur au cinéma” (1956).⁵⁸ In this essay Feldmann explicitly opposes the program of a “phenomenology of film” to the dominant research paradigms of contemporary filmology. Feldmann has two chief objections to the work of the filmology institute. On the one hand, he accuses preceding filmologists of equating film-perception either with natural perception or with dream-consciousness, whereas it should be understood more properly as a transitional phenomenon between the two.⁵⁹ On the other hand, Feldmann reproaches filmology for conducting its experimental research on film spectatorship solely with regard to the reactions of the individual viewer, thereby neglecting the wider situational context, which encompasses the surrounding ambience of the cinema hall as well as the fellow spectators who constantly co-determine the reactions of the individual as well. By developing a theory of situations inspired by Heidegger and Jaspers, he analyses the various manners in which the collective audience-situation in the cinema hall and the individualized situation of spectatorship, determined by the viewer’s personal relation to the film, pass one into another, in order to show that the interferences between these two types of situations constitute an indispensable part of the complete experience of film. Feldmann’s inquiries, which find a certain correspondence in the contemporary film-phenomenological reflections of one the authors of this introduction (Julian Hanich), provoked no relevant echo within the filmology movement.

Although the phenomenological element of filmology was neither due to an actual phenomenologically inspired research program nor to a direct influence of the major phenomenological theories of the time, one can account for

⁵⁸ Reprinted in Feldmann 1962: 113–133.

⁵⁹ This objection is not entirely pertinent if one considers several passages in Morin or Michotte, where they specifically discuss this double consciousness of the film spectator.

it by considering the following two aspects. On the one hand, the works of the filmology institute up to the end of the 1950s show a certain implicit closeness to the phenomenological method mostly because of their tendency to interpret the phenomenon of the spectator's film experience by contrasting and correlating it with other types of experience (like natural perception, memory, fantasy or dream). These inquiries are often condensed in general categories and distinctions, which actually perform an "eidetic" or structural clarification of the film-experience in a quasi-phenomenological style. Among these categories and distinctions one should mention especially the concept of the "cinematographic situation," which Michotte developed even before Feldmann; Gilbert Cohen-Séat's contrast between filmic and cinematographic facts; and Étienne Souriau's distinction between the diegetical, the spectatorial and the creatorial aspect of film. To be sure, within these investigations, explicit references to phenomenology are rare and rather vague, and the dominant research method was without a doubt experimental psychology.⁶⁰

On the other hand, it is certain that among the various currents of psychology which were represented in the filmology project, ranging from behaviourism to classical humanist psychology, we can trace several authors who explicitly defended a phenomenologically inspired methodology. Especially noteworthy are two contributors of the *Revue internationale de filmologie*, who illustrate the two alternative possibilities of integrating phenomenological analysis and empirical experiment in psychological research: David Katz and Albert Michotte van den Berck.

As a former student of Husserl in Göttingen, David Katz debuted in the early 1920s with a series of Gestalt-psychological works on tactility and the perception of colours, which employed phenomenological first-person descriptions combined with experimental procedures. While his early writings contain numerous references to film and photography regarded as modified perceptual phenomena, his sole contribution to the *Revue internationale de filmologie* addresses the aesthetic implications of composite photography, leaving open some challenging conclusions both with regard to the beauty ideal of film stars and to character identification.⁶¹

Albert Michotte van den Berck, who explicitly designated his method as an "experimental phenomenology" in the tradition of Carl Stumpf, developed a variety of experimental procedures for analysing the functional relations between the I and the phenomenal world. Unlike Katz whose experiments were performed in the first person as well, Michotte resorts predominantly to the verbal descriptions of his experimental participants. Michotte's phenomenology is thus in fact a phenomenology with an outside view or a third-person

⁶⁰ Jullier 2009: 143; Hediger 2003.

⁶¹ Katz 1949. On Katz' relation to phenomenology, see also Spiegelberg 1972: 42–52.

phenomenology.⁶² Nevertheless, his method shows significant resemblances to Husserl's eidetic variation, and his process-based conception of subjectivity recalls Husserl's understanding of the I as a functional pole of act performances. The two articles Michotte wrote for the *Revue internationale de filmologie* are among the most influential contributions of the journal, and they rest precisely on this methodological basis. The first of the two texts, "Le caractère de 'réalité' des projections cinématographiques" (1948), takes as its point of departure the fundamental distinction between an ontological or epistemological (i.e. objective) and a phenomenological (i.e. subjective-noematic) concept of reality, and analyses the complex interferences between our *belief* in reality and the mere intuitive *impression* of reality in film. He arrives at the following well-known definition of the "cinematographic situation": "we believe that one can describe the cinematographic situation by keeping in mind, that it gives us the impression of perceiving real beings and events taking place in our presence, but this reality is to a certain extent distorted, pertaining to a world which is—psychologically speaking—not entirely ours, and from which we feel ourselves, despite everything, somewhat distanced."⁶³ The second essay, "La participation émotionnelle du spectateur à l'action représentée à l'écran" (1953), draws from results of his own research on *phenomenal* movement (which he differentiates from *physical* movement) in order to clarify phenomena of empathy in the film experience on the most basic level of mimetic comprehension of movement.⁶⁴ Significantly, Michotte regards his reflections in both essays, which are not supported by any proper empirical investigation of film spectatorship, as mere hypotheses that would still require experimental verification and confirmation.

3.4 *André Bazin and Jean Mitry*: Parallel to the ascendancy of the filmology institute the star of what would become one of the most influential film theorists of all time began to rise: André Bazin. Bazin's writings cannot be described as phenomenological proper and it would be wrong to reduce his theory to a watered-down version of phenomenology, as some commentators have done.⁶⁵ But the connections to phenomenology are various and they certainly left their traces in Bazin's theory. Apart from the influence of Christian thinkers like Marcel Legaut, Emmanuel Mounier and Teilhard de Chardin, the two most important philosophical streams for him were the heritage of Bergson and phenomenology: "In effect, Bazin was present at the handing of the Bergsonian torch to phenomenology. His entire life was thus led amid the

⁶² On the "experimental phenomenology" of Michotte, cf. Thinés, Costall & Butterworth 1991 as well as Waldenfels 1987: 397–404.

⁶³ Michotte van den Berck 1948: 261.

⁶⁴ Michotte van den Berck 1953: 87–95.

⁶⁵ See, for instance, the aforementioned quote from Tomasulo 1988: 21.

light and the shadows cast by that torch," Dudley Andrew notes.⁶⁶ Above we have already mentioned Sartre's influence (especially via his *Psychology of the Imagination*), but Bazin also had ties to Merleau-Ponty and Gabriel Marcel. According to Andrew, it was Bazin who invited Merleau-Ponty to give his talk on "The Film and the New Psychology" at the Institute des Hautes Études Cinématographiques (IDHEC) on 13 March 1945; in 1956 the two engaged in a public discussion at the École Normale Supérieure on rue d'Ulm over Jean Renoir's 1946 adaptation of *Diary of a Chambermaid* (Aron Gurwitsch was also present); and with Marcel, who was close to Bazin's friend Amédée Ayfre, Bazin had a dialogue on radio broadcast in 1948.⁶⁷

Where do we encounter the phenomenological influence most clearly in Bazin's theory? There are three main areas to look at. The first one—with a focus on the noematic side—would be the revelatory power attributed to the photographic image as the basis of film. Bazin believed that our deeply habituated ways of engaging with the world have made it difficult for us, "in the complex fabric of the objective world," to discern reality in a pure and defamiliarized form: "Only the impassive lens, stripping its objects of all those ways of seeing it, those piled-up preconceptions, that spiritual dust and grime with which my eyes have covered it, is able to present it in all its virginal purity to my attention and consequently to my love."⁶⁸ Film, as a medium, serves as a means to take us out of the "natural attitude," to use Husserl's term. This was, of course, a widespread position in theories of photography and film from the 1920s onward. Just think of Proust, Balázs, Benjamin and the Neues Sehen movement in photography.⁶⁹ Sobchack nevertheless discovers a strong phenomenological quality in Bazin's writings: "Bazin sees the cinema as a privileged apparatus capable of phenomenological *epoché* and reduction, description, and interpretation of worldly phenomena. Mechanical in nature, the camera brackets or puts out of play the habituated vision of human being, lets the world speak and impress itself upon the film and our perception, and leads us to a fresh awareness of the contingent and ambiguous nature of existence."⁷⁰ What Bazin's celebration of the medium *as such* seems to neglect is the fact that the defamiliarizing effect of film might easily wear off and become habitualized. Yet in many other essays he has clarified that it is not merely the *medium*, but a certain *aesthetics* that allows for a phenomenological

⁶⁶ Andrew 2013: 14–15.

⁶⁷ Andrew 2013: 75, 214–215, xxx and 121. See also Tröhler 2014.

⁶⁸ Bazin 1967: 15.

⁶⁹ See, for instance, Benjamin 2008: 37.

⁷⁰ Sobchack 1997: 228. With reference to Bazin's continuous engagement with Rossellini's *Paisà* and Welles' *Citizen Kane* Dudley Andrew writes: "Both films operate under the phenomenological attitude he ingested at [the journal] *Esprit* since both attempt, in very different ways, to record and preserve the complexity of our encounters with the world or, what he was to call after Merleau-Ponty, the ambiguities of experience." Andrew 2013: 110.

epoché. Think of the films of Jean Renoir or Orson Welles or Italian neorealism (about the latter he emphatically writes: “It is a phenomenology”).⁷¹ However, the important lessons of Russian formalism remind us that aesthetics also becomes habitualized or automatized over time and thus is in need of further *ostrannenie* (defamiliarization), something Bazin’s celebration of his favoured auteurs and styles does not foreground enough.⁷²

Moving toward the side of the viewer’s experience—the noetic end of the intentionality correlation—Bazin famously connects specific film styles to how the viewer engages the filmic image and how this affects one’s viewing activity. Faced with a long take in deep focus the viewer has to participate differently in the film than when confronted with a scene edited analytically. Bazin puts emphasis on three mental acts: attention, volition and interpretation. In case of the long take, the viewer is more actively called upon to decide what layer of the image to pay attention to; in case of the edited scene, the spectator feels effortlessly guided by the choice of the filmmakers. And while the deep focus scene offers the viewer room to choose, the edited scene limits his or her possibilities. Hence apart from differences in mental effort (how much attention do I have to pay?) there are also degrees of personal choice (how much can I decide for myself where to look?). Finally, Bazin also connects these differences in style with the activity and passivity of meaning-making: In a deep focus scene “[i]t is no longer the editing that selects what we see, thus giving it an *a priori* significance, it is the mind of the spectator which is forced to discern [...]”.⁷³ Bazin considers editing as a habitualized form of abstraction that reduces—or even rules out—the ambiguity of reality, which the deep focus scene potentially reintroduces. The audience would be more strongly called upon to make meaning itself.

Finally, we can find phenomenological traces in his discussions of the collective cinema experience.⁷⁴ Bazin’s remarks, which are few and far between, do not always convince as phenomenological descriptions. But pieced together they reveal noteworthy observations on how viewers in the cinema remain oblivious to or become conscious of each other. One of his crucial claims is that, in comparison to the theatre, the cinema phenomenologically isolates its viewers. Due to a strong psychological identification with the characters, the spectators lose themselves in the filmic world. They are “physically alone” like the reader of a novel, “hidden in a dark room,” following the film as if in a “waking dream.”⁷⁵ While the theatre enables its audience a “community feeling,” the cinema viewers become a crowd with identical emotions: They all feel the same, but individually for themselves and without being aware of

⁷¹ Bazin 1971: 65.

⁷² On *ostrannenie*, see van den Oever 2010.

⁷³ Bazin 1971: 28.

⁷⁴ For a more detailed account of the following, see Hanich 2017a.

⁷⁵ Bazin 1967: 100, 102 and 107.

the emotions of others. This is not a contradiction for Bazin: "Crowd and solitude are not antinomies: the audience in a movie house is made up of solitary individuals."⁷⁶ To be sure, the distinction between theatre and film is not carved in stone. While the strong passive identification with the hero goes for "the cinema of myth and dream," films by Bresson, Welles or Malraux can heighten the viewer's "intellectual alertness" and thus an awareness of one's distance from the character.⁷⁷ But even here the viewers don't experience a community feeling; despite their distance from the filmic world they remain in their "private zone of consciousness."⁷⁸ In a number of texts, however, Bazin mentions that spectators *can* have an awareness of other co-viewers: for instance, spectators attending a screening in the presence of famous directors, viewers collectively weeping at the premiere of Chaplin's *Limelight* (1952) or collective laughter about Chaplin's *The Adventurer* (1917).⁷⁹ Hence Bazin is not fully consistent in this respect.

In connection to Bazin, several concepts and motives of Sartre's existential phenomenology were employed during the late 1950s and 1960s by authors like Henri Agel or Amédée Ayfre as a base for a religiously inflected film-philosophy.⁸⁰ At the same time, many of the central issues which arose in the research of the filmology movement under a more or less diffuse influence of phenomenology found their extension within the so-called classical French film theory of the 1960s. Their most significant elaboration can be found in Jean Mitry's monumental work *Esthétique et psychologie du cinéma* (1963/65). Mitry explicitly resorts to phenomenological motives and theories: He quotes not only from Merleau-Ponty with whom he was personally acquainted, but

⁷⁶ Bazin 1967: 99.

⁷⁷ Bazin 1967: 112 and 113.

⁷⁸ Bazin 1967: 113.

⁷⁹ Bazin 1981: 69; Bazin 1971: 124; Bazin 1967: 146–147.

⁸⁰ See also Quicke 2005 and Sobchack 2009, 440: "A second strain of French phenomenology focused on the aesthetic qualities and experience of cinema, often articulated as a theologically inflected ontology. The medium was celebrated for its essential capacity to provide viewers an 'immediate' apprehension of human being, as well as providing an 'intuition' of spiritual and moral truths. Thus, Henri Agel suggested the cinema had a 'soul.' Greatly influenced by Gaston Bachelard's phenomenological writing on the 'primordial' and 'immediate' nature of the poetic image and highly critical of semiotics and structuralism, Agel's posthumously published work, *Poétique du cinéma: Manifeste essentialiste* (1973), described and privileged a cinema of 'contemplation' that functioned aesthetically through analogy, rather than reason, to allow spectators access to the transcendental qualities of nature and human existence. Theologian Amédée Ayfre, a former student of Merleau-Ponty's, also focused on the medium's capacity to reveal transcendence in immanence: the openness of human consciousness and the world which—through its materiality—insists on the existence of more than merely meets the eye. Ayfre's *Le cinéma et sa vérité* (1969) thus privileged 'authentic' films that resonated in the viewer first intuitively and then reflectively, ultimately reorganizing the viewer's perception and behaviour so that the life-world outside the theatre was reengaged in a new and ethically enhanced relation of moral responsibility."

also from Dufrenne and Husserl (the latter is quoted rather distortedly to support an argument in favour of “mental images” which Husserl rejected). Nevertheless, Mitry’s work is an amalgamation of various philosophical and scientific perspectives, ranging from Ancient philosophy to quantum mechanics. His core philosophical ambition seems to have been overcoming the traditional dichotomy between subjectivity and objectivity. He touches upon this topic at various points and also puts it in an explicit relation to phenomenology. However, it remains marginal in comparison to his more intimate theoretical ambition: that of delivering a more updated and detailed psychology of the film experience, which was meant to follow in the footsteps of Arnheim’s early Gestalt-psychological work and to systematically draw all the consequences that arise out of it for film aesthetics. On the one hand, Mitry’s work is a vast summation of motives and concepts developed within the filmology movement, ranging from the impression of reality to identification or perceptive transfer. On the other hand, it is already a work of transition from the psycho-phenomenological perspective of filmology towards a semiotic perspective on film. This aspect of Mitry’s work is especially vivid in his treatment of the question of film as language, which takes a balanced stance between a phenomenological understanding of film as an image and a semiotic understanding of film as a system of signs.

3.5 *The Eclipse of Phenomenology*: In the early 1960s authors like Canguilhem, Foucault, Lacan, Althusser, Lévi-Strauss, Derrida, or Barthes initiated a systematic subversion of that specific form of psychology that had received essential impulses from phenomenology.⁸¹ In the context of the broader connection between phenomenology and psychology highlighted above, the rise of these critical voices led to a situation in which phenomenology became a constant *negative reference* in film theory. Given the rather diffuse presence of phenomenology in film theory, one might be surprised by the persistence with which this tendency manifested itself throughout the 1960s and 70s. Here we might consider particularly the works of Jean-Louis Baudry, Christian Metz and Gilles Deleuze.

Baudry took as his starting point the correspondence between the perspective painting of the Renaissance (which tended to organize the perceptual space around a sole privileged point of view) and the metaphysics of idealism (which tended to view the objective world similarly in relation to an individual subject of representation). Baudry thus attempts to come up with a corresponding analogy between cinema and phenomenology. Cinema was regarded as an extension of perspective painting, because it reduces all movement and discontinuity to the *formal* continuity given by the static position of the spectator in front of the screen and to the *material* continuity of the

⁸¹ Jullier 2009: 154 f.

diegesis. Phenomenology was regarded as an extension of metaphysical idealism, because it reduces the constitution of objects to the continuous synthesis of their diverging views. According to Baudry, the film spectator is thus placed in virtue of his identification with the camera in precisely the same position which Husserl attributes in his philosophy to the transcendental subject. Baudry explicitly reproaches all phenomenological film theories, especially Gilbert Cohen-Séat and André Bazin, for having tacitly and self-evidently assumed this position, which is in his view ideologically charged, as their point of reference.⁸²

Even though his early works explicitly assume a phenomenological perspective, Christian Metz similarly accuses phenomenological film theories by Bazin, Cohen-Séat and Merleau-Ponty of interpreting film reception exclusively in view of a subject assumed capable of mastering the givens of his or her perception.⁸³ Metz explicitly claims, by referring to the analyses of Bazin and the reflections of Merleau-Ponty, that phenomenology is “the most important version of idealism in film theory.”⁸⁴ He considers the plain phenomenological description to be a useful and perhaps even necessary point of departure for film theory. However, it needs to be followed by a critical analysis of the institutional, technical and social characteristics of the cinema as well as their hidden psychological mechanisms, which ground the illusion of the sovereign subject of perception.

Finally, Gilles Deleuze contrasts his own Bergsonian theory of film with a phenomenological conception of cinema on several occasions in the first volume of his work on cinema, *The Movement-Image*. Deleuze blames phenomenology for understanding film experience exclusively in light of natural perception, by taking the natural anchoring of the subject in the world as its point of departure and by subsequently interpreting movement as a pure “Gestalt” organized in the subject’s perceptual field. To this Gestalt-psychological as well as phenomenological conception of cinema, which Deleuze explicitly finds in Merleau-Ponty and Albert Laffay, he opposes Bergson’s attempt to derive the “centring” of natural perception from a decentred matter, to which the various changes of perspective in film show an obvious affinity.⁸⁵ Baudry had used an analogy between film and phenomenology to reject both as bearers of ideological effects; Metz then departed from the same observations, but acknowledged the ability of film to also clarify the conditions which determine the illusions of phenomenological idealism. In contrast, Deleuze regards the cinema from

⁸² Baudry 1970.

⁸³ For instance, in an essay from 1965 Metz follows Michotte by addressing the question of the cinematic impression of reality. Regarding Metz’ relation to phenomenology, see also Chateau and Lefebvre 2014. Tom Gunning claims that most film theorists have ignored Metz’ early, phenomenological writings, treating them “as juvenilia.” Gunning 2012: 42–60.

⁸⁴ Metz 1975: 37.

⁸⁵ Deleuze 1983: 83 f.

the onset as a radical alternative to the phenomenological theory of perception, which all three authors seem to interpret as too deceptively simple.

In the 1970s and 80s film phenomenology therefore became unfashionable and went mostly underground. Only occasionally it resurfaced in the influential phenomenology-inflected film criticism of Annette Michelson, in scattered essays by Alexander Sesonske, Edward Casey, Brian Lewis or Bruce Jenkins and in (more or less) phenomenological monographs such as George W. Linden's *Reflections on the Screen*, Jean-Pierre Meunier's *Essai sur l'image et la communication* or Mathias Winkler's *Filmerfahrung: Ansätze einer phänomenologischen Konstitutionsanalyse*.⁸⁶ When in 1978 Dudley Andrew prophesied that the collapse of a rigid structuralism might herald the return to phenomenology, he was premature by over a decade.⁸⁷

3.6 *The Return of Phenomenology in Film Studies*: The situation changed dramatically, when in the early 1990s three publications gave testimony to a strongly renewed interest in film phenomenology. In 1990, Frank P. Tomasulo edited a special issue of *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* on "Phenomenology in Film and Television." Apart from an introduction and select bibliography by Tomasulo himself, the issue contained articles by Linda Singer, Harald A. Stadler, Gaylyn Studlar, Jenny N. Nelson, Steve Lipkin as well as the authors of the two other books that showcased the new significance of phenomenology for film studies: Allan Casebier and Vivian Sobchack.⁸⁸

Where did this return of interest in phenomenology come from? On the one hand, Sobchack's Merleau-Ponty-inspired interventions resonated well with a renewed and widespread focus on the body. This "somatic turn," which started to fascinate many humanities disciplines in the 1990s, affected film theory simultaneously through the psychoanalytically-based studies of Linda Williams and Steven Shaviro's Deleuzian approach. The reigning semiotic, psychoanalytic and Marxist theories could not account for the richness of experiences one could make in the cinema, including the manifold pleasures of film viewing. On top of that, Sobchack identified another reason: the growing awareness of the challenges that television and other media implied for the specificity of cinema as a medium and a specific type of experience.⁸⁹

⁸⁶ Linden 1973; Meunier 1980; Winkler 1985. See also Peritore 1977 and Streb 1982.

⁸⁷ Andrew 1985: 45.

⁸⁸ For a review essay on these two monographs, see Sweeney 1994. Tammy Bennington and Geri Gay have extended Casebier and Sobchack's film phenomenology to the study of interactive new media: "Phenomenologically inspired film theory and phenomenological hermeneutics contribute to a more complex and nuanced understanding of digital ergodic 'texts' and can provide insights into visual perception and motility not available from the literary approaches that have dominated so much of the discussion of hypertextuality," they write. Bennington/Gay 2000: n.p.

⁸⁹ Sobchack 2009: 442.

Allan Casebier's *Phenomenology and Film*, which came out in 1991, was conceived as an attempt to sketch out a phenomenological model of film experience based on the writings of Husserl. It burdened itself with the ambitious task of showing that the dominant film theories of the period, generally placed under the sign of post-structuralism, were based on indefensible epistemological and ontological grounds. For sure, his endeavour to prove this by appealing to the phenomenology of Husserl's philosophy, which Metz had attacked as "the most significant version of idealism" to ever influence film theory, was a rather daring one. For Casebier himself wants nothing less than to turn this accusation of idealism against authors like Baudry or Metz, who reproached Husserl's idealism, by calling them to be the actual idealists, whereas Husserl's phenomenology is on the contrary sold as a solid resource for constructing a viable realist conception of cinema in contrast to the dominant idealist-nominalist paradigm. Given such immoderate ambitions, it is no surprise that Casebier's book failed not only to fundamentally revolutionize film theory, but also to have a noteworthy impact on it. There are at least three reasons that account for this. Firstly, the scholastic dichotomy between realism and idealism was hardly the right tool for offering a sufficiently nuanced understanding of the complex situation of film theory at the beginning of the 1990s. Secondly, Casebier grounded his entire argumentation on a surprisingly sparse understanding of Husserl—an author whose forename he misspells in the introduction of the book as "Edward." Casebier not only interprets him as a "realist" despite Husserl's own self-understanding of his philosophy as "transcendental idealism," but also addresses Husserl's image theory without taking into account his most important and detailed work on this topic: the manuscripts in *Husserliana XXIII*, which had already been published for several years at that time. Thirdly, the manner in which Casebier orchestrated the confrontation of phenomenology with its critics proved problematic both for phenomenology, which here appeared in its most faulty and vulnerable guise, and for its critics, whose arguments are misinterpreted and whose legitimate core is not acknowledged.

By building on Husserl rather than Merleau-Ponty, the book also seemed to have bet on the "wrong" phenomenologist at the time. Richard Rushton and Gary Bettinson speculate that the book's realist claim to the revelatory power of the cinema came at a wrong moment: "It is perhaps understandable that, when the world of cinema was just about to embark on the journey towards its digital future—the break-through films of *Terminator 2* (1992) and *Jurassic Park* (1993)—Casebier's reiteration of a realist theory of film fell on deaf ears. With digital cinema, many argue, there simply are no longer any "things themselves". Rather, there are merely combinations of digital data, so any claim for a return to "things themselves" might already have appeared

outdated shortly after it appeared.”⁹⁰ Considering that the 1990s saw various attempts to renew realist cinema—the Dogme 95 movement came to life, the first films of the Berliner Schule appeared, the Dardenne Brothers fully entered the scene—one may also propose a less charitable explanation: Maybe Casebier’s book simply wasn’t convincing, leaving the numerous ways to extrapolate or expand Husserl unexplored.

The starting point for Vivian Sobchack’s intervention was also a critique of the reigning film theories at the time. However, Sobchack’s critique went into a different direction: For her film theory neglected important facets of the film experience by downplaying viewing pleasures and, more generally, ignoring the *lived-body experience* when watching a film. In order to give the body back its full share, Sobchack embraces phenomenology. Critical of Husserl’s transcendental phenomenology, she prefers Merleau-Ponty’s existential phenomenology.⁹¹ Sobchack’s attempt to “flesh out” film theory by reintroducing embodied experience starts with the presupposition that embodied experience has *two* manifestations in the cinema. The first is the film viewer who is not a body-less subject-eye, but sits in the cinema with his or her entire body. The film viewer’s body occupies not a point-of-view but a situation in the cinema, and is informed not just by the sense of seeing but by all lived-body accesses to the world, “including the tactile contact of my posterior with the theatre seat.”⁹²

The embodied vision of the *spectator* in the cinema “meets”—and this is the surprising *coup de théâtre* of Sobchack’s book—the embodied vision of the *film*. For Sobchack the film literally, and not just metaphorically, has a perceiving and expressing body of its own: it is an “empirical and functional subject-object.”⁹³ This is not to say that the film is human—the viewing subject-object of the film merely has perceptual and expressive capacities that are *equivalent* to that of the viewer. The film *perceives* via the recording technology of the camera: It sees, hears and moves in a world, be it a fictional or real one (it is thus a *viewing-view*). And the film also *expresses* its own perception via the projecting technology of the projector (it thus exhibits a *viewed-view*). However, unlike other seeing bodies one encounters in the world, the film makes its seeing visible, as it were, from within: “Whereas the other seeing person’s ‘visual body’ is visible to me in our encounter with the world and

⁹⁰ Rushton/Bettinson 2010: 177–178.

⁹¹ As Sobchack in a later text writes against Husserl’s phenomenology: “Ahistorical, acultural, and inherently static, the transcendental ego seemed a return to metaphysical idealism. That is, the goal of achieving a completely presuppositionless and all-encompassing description and interpretation of phenomena in the life-world ran counter not only to actual but also to possible experience with its countless ambiguities and variations of meaning and value.” Sobchack 2009: 438.

⁹² Sobchack 1992: 179.

⁹³ Sobchack 1992: 133.

each other, the film's 'visual body' is usually invisible to me."⁹⁴ We don't see the film's body itself, we only see its act of seeing and what it sees. The film is thus a "perception-cum-expression" that the viewer can perceive in the cinema: "Watching a film, we can see the seeing as well as the seen, hear the hearing as well as the heard, and feel the movement as well as see the moved."⁹⁵ According to Sobchack, classical and contemporary film theories, with their three master metaphors of the window, the frame and the mirror, have concentrated wholly on the film as a static viewed object, but have overlooked the dynamic act of viewing of the film itself.

In the cinema there are always two bodies in communication with each other then: The *viewer's* body and the *film's* body stand in an *intersubjective* relation to each other; the relation between the two is a *dialogical* one. Here we immediately encounter an advantage over earlier attempts to theorize film viewing: Talking about a dialogue between viewer and film implies the riddance of monological models of spectatorship, according to which the film dictates what the viewer passively receives. The perception of the viewer and the film can converge, but they also often and necessarily diverge. Hence there is no Metzian "primary identification" of the viewer with the film, but the film always stands opposed as an "other," sometimes to a lesser, sometimes to a stronger degree.

Sobchack's book is primarily a work in film phenomenology that draws on phenomenological philosophy and discusses key concepts such as intentionality, the phenomenological method, perception or technology. Even though it contains numerous interesting discussions and suggestions for further explorations, it is much less an "application" to specific films or viewing experiences. One major exception is a masterly discussion of Robert Montgomery's *The Lady in the Lake* (1947), the famous example of a film body assuming the role and perception of a human body practically throughout the entire screen time. In its lack of concrete applications (and perhaps applicability) we may find one reason for the astonishing fact that *The Address of the Eye*, while a tremendously influential book referenced in virtually all film phenomenological texts of the recent past, it is much less quoted verbatim. Another reason might be the complexity of its prose. Abounding with neologisms, hyphenations, puns, inversions, chiasms and parallelisms, the text is difficult to read for a purpose: "in order to force a certain form of attentiveness to what we say but hardly hear."⁹⁶ Although Sobchack does not explicitly reference it, we can compare it to Heidegger's strategy of defamiliarizing the reading process by destabilizing language. On top of that, at a time when the language of Saussurian, Lacanian and Althusserian high theory still dominated much of the

⁹⁴ Sobchack 1992: 138.

⁹⁵ Sobchack 1992: 10.

⁹⁶ Sobchack 1992: xviii.

debate in film studies, a certain difficulty of the text may have been a necessary strategy in order to avoid charges of naïve humanism, impressionism, subjectivism and other allegations sometimes levelled at phenomenology. It might be relevant to point out, however, that Sobchack did not reject all theoretical strands popular at the time in equal measure: A former colleague of Hayden White at University of California, Santa Cruz Sobchack was much less critical of post-structuralism, which can also be seen in her positive references to Derrida and Judith Butler. The importance that signs and language had for *The Address of the Eye* finds further evidence in its attempt to not only propose an *existential* but also a *semiotic* film phenomenology, a suggestion that seemed less appealing for subsequent scholars.

Despite its indebtedness to Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of perception and the lived-body, *The Address of the Eye* is a book with a strong emphasis on vision (as can be gleaned from its title).⁹⁷ Later, Sobchack countered this vision-bias with other essays, for instance the cleverly titled "The Dream Olfactory. On Making Scents of Cinema."⁹⁸ An even more influential essay from her book *Carnal Thoughts* bore the programmatic title "What My Fingers Knew. The Cinesthetic Subject, or Vision in the Flesh." Here Sobchack takes up the concept of synaesthesia, which was already present in *The Address of the Eye*, and develops it further into a theory of synaesthetic (or cinesthetic) spectatorship.⁹⁹ As we will see below, the argument that we do not only see and hear films but perceive them with our entire embodied sensorium—including our senses of touching, smelling and tasting—has left a strong mark on film studies and beyond. But it would be a mistake to reduce Sobchack's phenomenological studies to *The Address of the Eye* and *Carnal Thoughts*—she has written highly illuminating phenomenological essays on the actor's body, the genre of the epic, the nonfiction film experience and many others.¹⁰⁰ Given the widespread influence they had, it is hardly surprising that Sobchack's claims have been thoroughly scrutinized. Especially the strong thesis that the film

⁹⁷ Malin Wahlberg has criticized Sobchack's reliance, via Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception*, on Gestalt psychology from which it inherits "a bias toward vision" and which leads to "an exaggerated emphasis on the act of seeing and being seen." Wahlberg 2008: 19.

⁹⁸ Sobchack 2013.

⁹⁹ In *The Address of the Eye* Sobchack writes about the essentially synaesthetic nature of perception: "perception is not constituted as a sum of discrete senses (sight, touch, etc.), nor is it experienced as fragmented and decentred. All our senses are modalities of perception and, as such, are co-operative and commutable." Sobchack 1992: 76. In *Carnal Thoughts* she notes: "vision is not isolated from our other senses. [...] [V]ision is only one modality of my lived body's access to the world and only one means of making the world of objects and others sensible—that is, meaningful—to me. Vision may be the sense most privileged in the culture and the cinema, with hearing a close second; nonetheless, I do not leave my capacity to touch or to smell or to taste at the door, nor, once in the theatre, do I devote these senses only to my popcorn." Sobchack 2004: 64–65.

¹⁰⁰ Sobchack 2012, 1990 and 1999.

has a body made some film theorists wonder. Kevin Sweeney, for instance, maintained that “[f]ilms can only simulate human perceptual life; they do not embody perception except as an effect of the technical process of filmmaking and projection.”¹⁰¹ From a phenomenological point-of-view Sweeney’s objective third-person claim need not be harmful, since phenomenology’s interest lies in the viewers’ subjective first-person experience. But even from a purely phenomenological perspective one might have reservations about Sobchack’s argument. By positing that the film literally has a body her account seems to conflict with one of the basic premises of the phenomenological reduction: the description of experience freed from theoretical presuppositions. The notion of a “film body” seems to be precisely a theoretical concept rather than an experienced phenomenon, as it can hardly be validated via phenomenological description—at least if a yardstick for a successful phenomenology is “whether or not the description is resonant and the experience’s structure sufficiently comprehensible to a reader who might ‘possibly’ inhabit it,” as Sobchack later put it.¹⁰² To be sure, phenomenological aesthetics in the wake of Dufrenne and Ingarden has often reverted to terms like “quasi-subject” or “subject-object” to capture the effect of the concretizing act when a recipient turns a *physical* object like a work of art into an *aesthetic* object. But talking about a “quasi-subject” does not go as far as the claim that our film experience can be described as an encounter between two *bodies*. (As we well see, Jennifer Barker has later taken the concept even more literally by ascribing a skin, a musculature and viscera to the film’s body and parallelizing it with the skin, musculature and viscera of the viewer.)

What certainly complicates recognizing Sobchack’s phenomenological description of the film’s body as deeply resonating is the fact that it is a “body” like no other: We do not only see it seeing, but also see what it sees; we do not perceive it from the outside in, but from the inside out, so to speak.¹⁰³ There may be good strategic reasons why Sobchack has raised this claim, the revalidation of the concept of the body for film theory being the most obvious one. But speaking of a “body” rather than a “quasi-subject” and using it literally rather than as a striking analogy has come at the price of disagreement. Daniel Yacavone has recently criticized “this radical seemingly counterintuitive proposition” also on another ground. He claims that it marginalizes the fact that film is an aesthetic product: “Sobchack’s study is primarily a phenomenology of the celluloid film medium and its technology.”¹⁰⁴ What it leaves out is aesthetics.

However, as a metaphor or analogy the concept of the “film body” may be extremely fruitful precisely in this respect, because it allows us to connect it to the discourse on empathy in the 19th/early 20th century sense of *Einfühlung*.

¹⁰¹ Sweeney 1994: 35.

¹⁰² Sobchack 2004: 5.

¹⁰³ Sobchack 1992: 138.

¹⁰⁴ Yacavone 2016: 165.

Following the tenets of *Einfühlungsästhetiker* like Robert Vischer, Karl Groos or Theodor Lipps we might claim that over and above an empathy with the body of characters, there might also be an empathy with the “film’s body” as a whole. Throughout *The Address of the Eye* Sobchack makes various references to the “comportment,” the “behaviour,” the “intentional style” of the film’s body. If we consider that films are routinely characterized as elegant, heavy-handed, slow etc., empathizing with these “styles” of the film’s body might explain various aesthetic effects (which would, in fact, not be too far off from Yacavone’s own discussion of a holistic affect—a “cinaesthetic world-feeling”—that we experience toward an entire film).

4. 21st Century Film Phenomenology: Current Fields of Interest

We have mentioned this last point, because we believe that film scholars have not explored the full potential of Sobchack’s phenomenological intervention yet. At the same time it is out of the question that her insistence on the embodied experience of the spectator has had a huge resonance, and despite contemporaneous efforts by Casebier and Tomasulo she reintroduced phenomenology almost single-handedly into the study of film—so much so that in their introduction to film theory Thomas Elsaesser and Malte Hagener can speak of “a tremendous boost” of film phenomenology since the 1990s that resulted in various internal “differentiations.”¹⁰⁵ Although we cannot adequately represent these differentiations in their entirety here, we want to distinguish at least three major fields of interest in contemporary film phenomenology.

4.1. *Embodied Spectatorship, Synaesthesia and the Sense of Touch*: Sobchack’s polemics in *The Address of the Eye* and *Carnal Thoughts* was directed against “anorectic” theories: film theories that did not sufficiently take into consideration that in the cinema we have very strong bodily experiences. As part of the larger trend (or turn) toward the body phenomenology-inclined scholars like Laura Marks and Jennifer Barker became interested in the notion of synaesthesia and focused on the sense of touch.¹⁰⁶

Like Sobchack before her, Marks is convinced that films can evoke other senses than merely those of seeing and hearing and that in the cinema *all* of the viewer’s senses work together. In her influential book *The Skin of the Film* her explicit goal is to emphasize the *tactile* or *haptic* quality of the cinematic experience. She describes the viewer’s relationship to the moving image as a continuum: It can be predominantly visual or primarily haptic. Of course, Marks does not claim that we actually touch the objects displayed on the

¹⁰⁵ Elsaesser/Hagener 2010: 119.

¹⁰⁶ See also Lant 1995; Stephens 2012; McHugh 2015; Sorfa 2016.

screen. Instead, the sense of touch is approached *asymptotically*, with some images evoking a more haptic experience than others.

Drawing on ideas by 19th-century art historian Alois Riegl (but also modifying them), Marks distinguishes between optical and haptic visuality. *Optical* visuality is identified with a distant overview position of the spectator who is able to clearly discern, isolate and comprehend the object of vision and thus “controls” and “masters” the image. It tends toward abstraction at the expense of the concrete here-and-now. *Haptic* visuality is located at the other end of the polar continuum: it discerns texture and scans the surface of the object of vision. “It is more inclined to move than to focus, more inclined to graze than to gaze,” Marks notes.¹⁰⁷ While optical visuality keeps the image, so to speak, at bay, haptic visuality evokes an experience of closeness, as if touching the object. The viewer is therefore more likely to “get lost” in the image. Even though Marks refers to Steven Shaviro’s remarks on the violence the tactile assault of a film can imply, she mostly assumes a benign relationship with haptic images. Haptic visuality for her even has a tendency toward a compassionate involvement. Sometimes Marks makes it sound as if only—or predominantly—haptic images elicit an *embodied* response. But this would not only contradict her own claim that in the cinema *in general* all the senses are involved, it would also go against claims by Merleau-Ponty or Erwin Straus who have insisted in their phenomenologies of perception that vision is always experienced and hence embodied as well. Thus *optical* visuality is simply a differently experienced form of perception.

What is particularly remarkable about Marks’ addition to Sobchack’s more general phenomenology of the film experience is her emphasis on different types of moving images. This not only opens up the possibility to connect different viewing experiences to different film styles (e.g. close-ups of certain fabrics and textures), but also to different materials (film, video) and ageing effects of the medium (scratches on the film strip; chemical deterioration of the video tape). Whether the film experience is predominantly a haptic one does not only depend on *what* we perceive, however, but also *how* we perceive: “Whether cinema is perceived as haptic may be an effect of the work itself, or it may be a function of the viewer’s predisposition. Any of us with moderately impaired vision can have a haptic viewing experience by removing our glasses when we go to the movies. More seriously, a viewer may be disposed to see haptically because of individual or cultural learning.”¹⁰⁸ For Marks sense experiences are differently inflected, depending on one’s cultural and historical position.

Here lies the seed of her critical—or, if you want, political—intervention: The supremacy of optical visuality in “modern Euro-American societies” is not a given, but can be changed just as much as the sense experience is something

¹⁰⁷ Marks 2000: 162.

¹⁰⁸ Marks 2000: 170.

that can be learned and differently cultivated.¹⁰⁹ According to Marks, this also has an effect on how one experiences a film: “If one’s sensory organization privileges other senses as well as vision, it will be easier to experience an audiovisual object, like a film, in a multisensory way. If it does not, the object may appear inert because the viewer cannot perceive its multisensory quality.”¹¹⁰ Pitted against the ocularcentric paradigm connected to distance, enlightenment and mastery, the revaluation of near senses like touch also implies an acknowledgment of “non-Western” experiences.¹¹¹

Following Sobchack and Marks, Jennifer Barker claims that in the act of viewing the film spectator’s mind and body, vision and touch are always interconnected. And with Marks she shares the conviction that viewers and films are much more closely intertwined than previous models of spectatorship have made us believe: “Watching a film, we are certainly not *in* the film, but we are not entirely *outside* it, either. We exist and move and feel in that space of contact where our surfaces mingle and our musculatures entangle.”¹¹² As indicated above, Barker extends the notion of touch by penetrating the viewer’s body even more deeply, discovering not only a tactile experience, but also a muscular and a visceral one. Skin, musculature, viscera: “These terms are not used [...] metaphorically, but are stretched beyond their literal, biological meaning to encompass their more phenomenological significance.”¹¹³ Moreover, she draws strong symmetries between the viewer’s body and the film’s body (which especially on the level of the viscera not everyone found convincing).¹¹⁴ Developing Sobchack’s and Marks’ thoughts further, Barker’s particular merit lies in her concrete phenomenological analyses of various types of film that some critics were missing in Sobchack’s *The Address of the Eye*.

Some argue that Sobchack, Marks and Barker have not only heightened attention to films that emphasize haptic visuality, but have in fact influenced filmmaking itself: “One of the effects of phenomenological thinking about film has been to encourage a style that stresses the surface texture of objects and, particularly, human skin. This is a metaphorical transposition of phenomenology’s interest in experience in the visual realm,” David Sorfa writes.¹¹⁵

¹⁰⁹ Marks 2000: xiii.

¹¹⁰ Marks 2000: 230–231.

¹¹¹ See also Pozo 2014: 191.

¹¹² Barker 2009: 12.

¹¹³ Barker 2009: 20–21.

¹¹⁴ One critic accused Barker of “esoteric musings.” Clepper 2011: 81.

¹¹⁵ Sorfa 2014: 357. While Sorfa clearly assumes a causal effect of film phenomenology on filmmaking, Thomas Elsaesser and Malte Hagener merely observe a correlation: “A glance at Terrence Malick’s *The New World* (US, 2005) underlines the fact that not only film theory has undergone a transformation, but many contemporary films also revolve around the same theoretical preoccupations. [...] Fabrics and materials, animals and weapons, human skin and clothing, construction materials and bodily fluids, grass and trees—the tactile properties of living and non-living things structure the world just as much as communication, which relies

However, there are also critical voices. Elsaesser and Hagener complain that the focus on synaesthesia and touch has a tendency to overvalue viewing pleasure: "the haptic turn and other body-based approaches to the cinematic experience are sometimes in danger of celebrating a big-tent, inclusive feel-good-theory of sensory empowerment."¹¹⁶ Similarly, Sorfa warns of a noncritical revelling in experience-for-experience sake which may result in a narcissistic reinforcement of one's own preferences: "If we elevate personal experience above all else, we can find ourselves trapped in a hall of mirrors where all we see in what we look at is a reflection of ourselves. Phenomenology's emphasis on experience must be tempered by a critical understanding that there is indeed a mirror in the world and that our reflection in it is more than just a corroboration of what we understand ourselves to be."¹¹⁷ Other critics have bemoaned that Marks and Barker take their metaphors too literally, a criticism we have also encountered in Sobchack's case. In her later book *Touch* Laura Marks has therefore felt the need to defend herself against readers who have accused her of "impressionist criticism."¹¹⁸

These criticisms notwithstanding, film scholars continue to fruitfully explore notions of embodied viewing, synaesthesia and touch—a fact we can clearly see in our own issue in the texts by Jennifer Barker and Jane Stadler.¹¹⁹ In this context we should also mention studies by Christiane Voss, Elena del Río, Martine Beugnet or Jenny Chamarette, which may not be film phenomenological in the narrow sense of the definition, but which have taken up Merleau-Ponty, Sobchack, or Marks (or all of them) in one way or another.¹²⁰ Moreover, scholars like Tarja Laine and Julian Hanich have described specific viewer *emotions* such as shame, fear or disgust, thereby underscoring the experiential-embodied side of emotions over their cognitive component explored in film cognitivism.¹²¹

4.2. *Feminist and Queer Film Phenomenology*: In the 1970s phenomenology as a largely *descriptive* enterprise became unfashionable, because it seemed less amenable to critique and change; at the very least it was considered apolitical and uncritical. As Dudley Andrew summarized the position against phenomenology at the time: "Structuralists are typed as cultural radicals while

on touch because of the incompatibility between linguistic and cultural systems." Elsaesser/Hagener 2010: 114.

¹¹⁶ Elsaesser/Hagener 2010: 127–128.

¹¹⁷ Sorfa 2014: 358.

¹¹⁸ Marks 2002: xiii. See also Sorfa's critique: "Writers like Barker and Marks sometimes overplay the 'touchiness' of touch by imagining too easily that images of touch allow us access to the real in a way that other images might not. My sense is that they lose sight of the metaphor." Sorfa 2016: 203.

¹¹⁹ See also J. Stadler 2008.

¹²⁰ Voss 2013; del Río 2000; Beugnet 2007; Chamarette 2012.

¹²¹ Laine 2013; Hanich 2009 and 2010a.

phenomenologists are accused of neutrality, if not rightism. The former [...] can envision a utopia of signs, of knowledge, and of communication, a cinema which will be clear, just, and demystified. The latter are anxious to change nothing but instead to comprehend a process which flows along perfectly well on its own.”¹²² In an early article that tried to bridge the gap between film phenomenology and feminism Gaylyn Studlar described phenomenology’s “philosophical stance toward a genderless experience”—“a pipedream of pretended neutrality”—as largely opposed to the goals of feminist film studies.¹²³ However, as already mentioned with regard to Sobchack and Marks, phenomenology was rediscovered as a helpful tool for more straightforward social or political goals. Among feminist and queer film phenomenologists we nowadays find attempts to “politicize” phenomenology, to make it less disengaged from activist thinking, and to combine film phenomenology with questions of gender and sex and, more generally, embodied difference.¹²⁴

What feminist and queer film phenomenologists above all want to make room for are specifically *female* and *queer* film experiences (rather than film experiences as such). Emphasis is put on *embodied difference* rather than sharedness. Following feminist and queer phenomenologists like Iris Marion Young or Sara Ahmed, a major presumption is that female or queer bodies have a different bodily engagement with the world, and this should be manifest both in the way feminist or queer viewers experience films and in the comportment and style of feminist and queer “film bodies.” Katharina Lindner, for one, writes: “Queer ways of being-in-the-world are [...] characterized by differences in our relationships to space. We extend space differently based on how we are orientated in the world.”¹²⁵ The question of sexuality should therefore not be reduced to the object of sexual attraction, according to Lindner, but should be based also on how queer bodies “face” the world.

Making room for embodied differences seemed possible only via a critique of Husserl and Merleau-Ponty, who were reproached for assuming a white, male, heterosexual body as the basis of their descriptions of experience. Again, Sobchack took the lead in film phenomenology. Following Judith Butler and other gender theorists, Sobchack reproached existential phenomenology for being “historically patriarchal”: “The ‘lived-body’ of existential and semiotic phenomenology has been explicitly articulated as ‘every body’ and ‘any body’ (even as it has implicitly assumed a male, heterosexual, and white body).”¹²⁶

¹²² Andrew 1985: 49. See also Beckman 2010: 38.

¹²³ Studlar 1990: 71.

¹²⁴ See also Tomasulo 1988 and Ince 2011.

¹²⁵ Lindner 2012.

¹²⁶ Sobchack 1992: 149 and 148. Sounding quite similar, Lindner notes: “What is perhaps slightly problematic about Barker’s work as well as other writing in this area is that it is based on seemingly unproblematic, universalizing, and at times paradoxically ahistorical understandings of the body and embodiment. Despite the emphasis on the materiality of the body and its concrete

She therefore suggests that the lived-body experience might be qualified in various ways: the “female” body, the “coloured” body, the “diseased” body, the “impaired” body, the “fat” body, the “old” body or the “deprived” body.¹²⁷

It is important to note, however, that one can locate the critique on two levels. On the one hand, there is what one could call *the problem of incompleteness*: In this case existing phenomenological descriptions are effectively wrong in their limitedness, because despite their universal aspirations they cannot account for *all* experiences, marginalizing and excluding female, queer and other types of viewers. If this were the case, then feminist and queer film phenomenology's project would be highly expedient in pointing out precisely the limitations of the universal claims. An effect would be that henceforth the existing film phenomenological descriptions would be valid only for a certain proportion of humanity, say white, straight, male viewers. Feminist and queer phenomenology would amend and complement them by descriptions of specifically female and/or queer experiences.

On the other hand, we could be dealing with *the problem of generality*. One could criticize that existing film phenomenological descriptions are too general and hence too unspecific. They may be correct in their universalizing aspirations, but should be amended and complemented by more concrete descriptions. One could zoom in, so to speak, and describe the lived-body experiences not of *all* film viewers, but of specific *subgroups* of the audience. Depending on one's research interest (and/or social-political intentions) one will then choose these subgroups along the lines of gender, race, sexuality, age, attractiveness, etc.

This would presume, however, that we subscribe to an understanding that on a certain level of generality we, as viewers, do indeed *share* experiences, even if we simultaneously *differ* on more specific levels. According to Sobchack, human embodiment is “first, always an essential set of ontological functions that enable ‘being-in-the-world’ at all, and, second, always a qualified and specific set of epistemological functions that determine ‘being-in-a-particular-world’ in a particular modality.”¹²⁸ Whoever rejects this understanding will eventually run into problems locating the sharedness on a more specific level: A feminist or queer film phenomenologist who denies the sharedness on the level of *all viewers*, would be hard-pressed to account for it on the level of *all female* or *all queer viewers*. Put differently, it will be difficult to argue for sharedness only for a more *specific* level of generality and not for a more *general* level of generality. Yet another way of putting it would be to say that in order to convey what is individual to an experience, one has to presuppose general structures of experience—otherwise the individuality thereof would be

functioning, it is the white, male, heterosexual body that is implicitly at the heart of the theoretical underpinnings of much contemporary film phenomenology.” Lindner 2012: n.p.

¹²⁷ Sobchack 1992: 145.

¹²⁸ Sobchack 1992: 144.

unintelligible, and hence describing it would be pointless. The project of film phenomenology only makes sense if we do not assume that everyone makes entirely idiosyncratic experiences, but that there are structures of experience that are shared, at least on some level of generality (and this level of generality might then be contested).¹²⁹

Yet this problem of generality does not only emerge when we distinguish viewer experiences. If we hark back to our distinction between a noetic and a noematic analysis, the problem of generality can be located on both sides of the intentionality structure: the *viewer-as-experiencing-subject* and the *film-as-intentional-object*. And even on the noetic side this not only goes for the question we have just dealt with (all viewers vs. specific subgroups of viewers), but also for the description of specific viewing experiences (say, the viewer's temporal experience of film *as such* vs. the viewer's temporal experience of a *specific type of cinematic fear* like dread). Similarly, on the noematic side one can locate one's description on different levels of generality or specificity and find an overly general description as wanting. Daniel Yacavone has criticized Merleau-Ponty's and Sobchack's film phenomenologies precisely for their overly high level of generality, focusing as they do "on only the most general, wholly medium-specific and determinate dynamics of (all) cinematic experience, perception, and related features of films qua films."¹³⁰ Instead of looking at the experience of the *medium* of film, he proposes a more specific phenomenological investigation into film *form* and the various *aesthetic* experiences when watching a film.¹³¹

4.3. *Film and/as Consciousness*: Another major field of interest to re-emerge in film phenomenology is the idea that film itself *echoes* or indeed *has* and *is* a form of subjectivity, intentionality, consciousness or mind. Inasmuch as film is able to express experience, for scholars like Sobchack this even entails that film also *does* phenomenology (Daniel Frampton therefore speaks of a Sobchackian "metaphenomenology").¹³²

¹²⁹ Doing phenomenology can be driven by diverse motives, which can have theoretical and political implications. One motive for doing phenomenology is to lay bare *generalities*, invariant structures of experience, that we share, with an emphasis on sameness, solidarity, empathy. More post-structuralist inflected phenomenologies may lay the emphasis on *individuality*, where the motive is to describe how an experience is individual, particular, unique, singular, different in the interest of a politics of recognition and emancipation.

¹³⁰ Yacavone 2016: 182.

¹³¹ More specifically, Yacavone writes: "Sobchack's overriding focus on what are presented as fundamental visual, spatial, and affective features of *all* live-action films, as tied to perceptual conditions of the film *medium* and its *technology*, stands in sharp contrast to Merleau-Ponty's emphasis on variable *artistic form*, *style*, and *expression* in cinema, together with temporality and rhythm." Yacavone 2016: 160.

¹³² Frampton 2006: 91.

As we have seen, the analogy between film and consciousness has occupied earlier film phenomenologists. In fact, the parallel goes back at least to Hugo Münsterberg's seminal early film theory *The Photoplay* (1916), where the Harvard psychologist argued that film's technique and form mimic the mental mechanisms of attention, memory, and emotion. In phenomenology-inspired writing we find it in the aforementioned texts on the American avant-garde by authors such as Michelson and Sitney.¹³³ Yvette Biro in her book *Profane Mythology: The Savage Mind of the Cinema* (1982) later extended this analogy.¹³⁴ However, it was once again Sobchack—for whom the film's consciousness is closely entwined with the film's body—who sparked renewed interest. While the embodiment trend relies strongly on her use and introduction of Merleau-Ponty's concept of the lived body, particularly from *Phenomenology of Perception*, the subjectivity trend is more tightly connected to her discussion of Merleau-Ponty's "The Film and the New Psychology," also prominent in *The Address of the Eye*. However, just like the "return to the body" in film studies was related to larger shifts in interest outside of the field, so the "return to consciousness" in film studies (and film phenomenology more specifically) may be seen as a response to but also an influence on discourses about consciousness at large. As Murray Smith has pointed out, consciousness studies has become a veritable academic discipline.¹³⁵ Just think of publications like the *Journal of Consciousness Studies* and university departments like the *Center of Subjectivity Research* in Copenhagen.

This is why it is hardly astonishing that film phenomenologists are not the only ones who have picked up this interest in consciousness, as the lively debate in the adjacent (and partly overlapping) field of film philosophy testifies. The differences between the film-philosophical and the film-phenomenological contributions to the debate may be roughly divided along two major acts of consciousness. While the former are mostly interested in film as a form of

¹³³ As Constance Penley notes: "Michelson's approach to film, whether in analyses of Vertov, Eisenstein, Brakhage or Snow, has been explicitly phenomenological. She sees film as the 20th-century medium for epistemological inquiry. For her, as a phenomenological critic, the power of film is its striking capacity to serve as a grand metaphor of vision used to trace out the essence of all the activities of consciousness. [...] In the work of Michelson, as well as that of P. Adams Sitney, the phenomenological approach is not meant to be an exterior analysis 'applied' to the film; for them, it is a description of both the intentional efforts of the film-makers and an analysis of the *nature* of film; in other words, their critical discourse justifies itself by the belief that their methodology mirrors filmic processes and that film is the perfect phenomenological scene: Merleau-Ponty called film the 'phenomenological art.'" Penley/Bergstrom 1985: 290.

¹³⁴ Interestingly, both Michelson and Murray Smith have pointed to the flipside of the "cinema as consciousness" analogy, namely the "consciousness as cinema" metaphor, employed in philosophical and psychological writings on the nature of consciousness by William James, Henri Bergson, Edmund Husserl, Aron Gurwitsch and, more recently, Oliver Sacks. Michelson 1971; Murray Smith 2009: 46; Sacks 2004.

¹³⁵ M. Smith 2009: 40.

thinking and philosophizing, the latter concentrate more strongly on *perception*. However, this distinction gets easily blurred in studies that try to wed the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze and phenomenology: Daniel Frampton, Spencer Shaw and Hunter Vaughan are only three authors one could cite as cases in point.¹³⁶ Over and above the strong attractiveness of Sobchack and Deleuze's writings for many film scholars, the striking simultaneity of their seminal publications on film may have also influenced this confluence: Sobchack finished her dissertation, on which *The Address of the Eye* is based, in 1984—the year between the French publication of Deleuze's two cinema books.

These three fields of interest in film phenomenology are merely the most prominent ones. Other directions can be identified as well. Christopher S. Yates, Daniel Yacavone and Ludo de Roo, for example, have developed phenomenological approaches to the fictional and aesthetic *worlds* films open up on the screen.¹³⁷ Vivian Sobchack and Malin Wahlberg have phenomenologically explored the documentary film.¹³⁸ Last, but certainly not least we find phenomenological approaches to individual *auteurs* like Kathryn Bigelow, Jean-Luc Godard or Stan Brakhage as well as to specific films like Antonioni's *Blow Up*, Akerman's *Toute une nuit* or Michael Powell's *Peeping Tom*.¹³⁹

5. Success and Limits of Current Film Phenomenology

Against the background of the research practices, precursors and fields of interest outlined above, it seems hardly an exaggeration to say that film phenomenology is a field to be reckoned with. But it's equally fair to claim that, in its contemporary guise, film phenomenology has limitations. One of the problems has already been hinted at: the occasional lack of descriptive rigor. Today articles and books bear the term “phenomenology” in their titles, even though they use the phenomenological method only in the loosest sense. (It may be the ultimate sign for a method to have achieved full academic recognition when authors and publishers seek reader attention gratuitously.) However, this is not a problem film phenomenologists aren't aware of. Even Sobchack has come under attack. Malin Wahlberg, for instance, takes issues with the “methodical self-sufficiency” and “solipsistic position” of Sobchack's phenomenological descriptions in *Carnal Thoughts*, which she finds “excessively subjective” and heading toward introspection: “the phenomenological

¹³⁶ Frampton 2006; Shaw 2008; Vaughan 2013. Another take on the connection between consciousness and phenomenology is suggested by D'Aloia 2012. Taking up a term by Francisco Varela, he proposes a neurophenomenology of the film experience.

¹³⁷ Yates 2006; Yacavone 2015; de Roo 2012.

¹³⁸ Wahlberg 2008 and Vivian Sobchack 1999.

¹³⁹ For references, see Sobchack 2009: 443–444.

description tends to be either exclusively personal or just too descriptive: you describe the filmic event and your emotional reaction as thoroughly as possible, and that is the end of it."¹⁴⁰ Similarly, Karen Beckman has opposed the "the rigor and philosophical discipline" Sobchack has fashioned in *The Address of the Eye* with the autobiography-based and anecdote-filled celebrations of "a lack of philosophical discipline" in *Carnal Thoughts*.¹⁴¹

A second drawback is the current self-limitation of film phenomenology. Within the theoretical constellation of film studies at the time and as the specific polemic that it was meant to be, Sobchack's Merleau-Pontyan take on film phenomenology had a peculiar channelling effect: Many scholars following in her wake—and very much in contrast to her wide-ranging interests in other film phenomenological topics—remained bound to discussions of embodied spectatorship, thus overlooking the richness of the phenomenological tradition, which is only gradually rediscovered. A lack of important translations has further exacerbated this limitation. Since the resurgence of film phenomenology was originally coming out of the Anglophone world, with North America as its hub, important untranslated work in German and French phenomenology was not taken into account. Interestingly, this can also be seen in the focus on embodiment itself with its strong reliance on Merleau-Ponty: Hermann Schmitz' in many respects much more nuanced and original phenomenology of the lived body has hardly had any effect in film studies so far.

Many other classical areas of phenomenology await detailed expansions into film phenomenology as well. Think of the act of imagination: While Merleau-Ponty famously said that "A movie is not thought; it is perceived," films are also imagined. Here the work of Husserl, Sartre and Edward Casey might prove a veritable reservoir of phenomenological insight.¹⁴² Or consider the viewer's temporal experience, which can vary considerably between scenes, films and genres. Sobchack herself has emphasized the importance of *space* rather than *time* for her phenomenology of the film experience. And Matilda Mroz has pointed out that theories of embodied spectatorship tend to isolate and put out of context moments of strong emotions or affect from the temporal flow of the film.¹⁴³ A third phenomenological area of interest is the social experience of movie-watching: Since films are often seen with other people, phenomenological accounts of collectivity and community can help to illuminate differences in experience. As current authors of this issue we have both previously argued in this direction and are completing monographs

¹⁴⁰ Wahlberg 2008: 20.

¹⁴¹ Beckman 2010: 36–37.

¹⁴² For first attempts, see Minissale 2010; Sobchack 2005. Hanich 2012.

¹⁴³ Mroz 2012: 24ff.

on the topic.¹⁴⁴ In Daniel Frampton's terminology this would imply, a move from a phenomenology of the *film* experience to a phenomenology of the *cinema* experience.¹⁴⁵ Finally, Daniel Yacavone has suggested taking into consideration the important writings on phenomenological aesthetics: "this rich tradition of thought has received comparatively little attention from theorists and philosophers of film. Yet it played an important if still largely unanalysed role in the development of modern film theory (having notably influenced the ideas of such prominent theorists as Jean Mitry and Christian Metz)."¹⁴⁶

This current self-limitation is very much regrettable—but it is also a chance. It shows that film phenomenology is far from having exhausted its own potential. There are, to borrow from Robert Frost, many roads not taken yet. In fact, we have conceived of this issue both as a *mirror* reflecting the current field and a *flashlight* illuminating new grounds.

Let us, then, move on to new territory with the 15 articles that follow.

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¹⁴⁴ See Hanich 2010b, Hanich 2014a and 2014b; 2017b. Christian Ferencz-Flatz is currently working on an individual research project supported by the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation titled "Film als soziale Erfahrung. Ein phänomenologischer Ansatz."

¹⁴⁵ Frampton 2006: p. 157.

¹⁴⁶ Yacavone 2016: 159.

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