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The Disquiet of the Everyday: Gesture and *Bad Timing*

Cinematic discourse produces socially inscribed representations of sexed bodies. For Mary Ann Doane cinematic bodies become the site of regulation as the technologies that modulate and animate the human form disclose prosodic and contingent gestures for analysis (Doane 2002, p.1; Väliaho 2010, p.25, p.31).¹ From Muybridge's chronophotographic studies of gesture to Stephen Heath's reading of Charcot's *Salpêtrière Iconographie* of hysteria, the body is both produced and inscribed by the effects of the symbolic.² Heath tells us that Charcot's photographic records submit gestures "to the clarity of meaning in narrative [...] the spectacle of the lessons which contemporary pictures and prints pick up: the excited audience, the master, the young woman in a series of pathetic scenes according to a script" (Heath 1978, p.58). Whilst symbolic inscriptions form "socially appropriate bodies" (Grosz 1989, xv) gestures trace the intersections of the body with language and memory in solitude and social interaction where the possibilities and limits of communication are at play. Gestures can underscore or unsettle meaning in conversation, betray a default in an exchange of information or operate as an affective trace of what remains unspoken in silence. An analysis of gesture as a facet of performance and as a specifically cinematic inflection of narrative form in *Bad Timing* (Nicolas Roeg, 1980)

¹ The tutoring of the body into a social and cultural form is made visible through the materiality and system of cinematographic representation as a series of still images that belie the illusion of movement and the increasingly complex temporalities of emergent narrative form.

² The symbolic refers to the effects of a social order and language on the formation of subjectivity according to the demands of a paternal authority, which is dependent on the suppression the feminine.

finds that the repetition or reflection of a bodily movement and the nuance that a sleight of hand betrays as reciprocity or disconnection in dialogue among characters, traces instances where subjective memories intersect with a history articulated by others. From “gestures that are frighteningly carefree” and which involve the heroine, Milena’s “whole body” to the film’s seemingly “excessive and superficial” (Maslin 1980, p.70) attention to the flicker of a hand and the mirrored orientation of a gaze, such movements interweave a gendered system of representation and the history of cinema as a discourse founded on the body and technology (Doane 1991, p.79).

The complexity of narrative form in *Bad Timing* elicits a series of unstable subject positions in an economy of scopophilia and the desire to know, which situates the disillusion of classic narrative cinema historically (de Lauretis 1984, pp.84 – 87; Wilson 1999, p.278). Although not a feminist film or simply eliciting the distancing effect of art house cinema (Miller [1994] 2004, p. 327), *Bad Timing* draws from the style and content of film noir and espionage along side the inflection of a love story in its intimacy and disavowal (Ross 1995, p.195) to call an economy of knowledge that is gendered into question through a process of rewriting that situates images and shots in new contexts. The investments and counterpoints of the network of power in *Bad Timing* align masculinity with narration and scopophilia (Wilson 1999, p.178) whilst Milena has been read as enacting “a bodily, affective register that is opposed to knowledge and understanding” (Ross 1995, p.199): the detective’s determination to re-establish the chronology and order of an ellipsis in the account that Milena’s lover offers of her suicide attempt is intercut with an assembly of her impulsive gestures, such as the shudder and flex of her hand, which

betrays inconsistencies in their verbal exchange. Associative editing and the cross-cutting of shots from different locations and the chronological disordering of events in to a film that unfolds in flashback contribute to the destabilisation of processes of “visual and narrative identification” (de Lauretis 1984, p.88). The fragmentary effect of editing opens a space in which to read gesture as a register that is both operative in and indicative of the alignment of sexuality, violence and the female body in cinema as a historicised and gendered discursive form. *Bad Timing* enacts the disillusion of a textual system in which the subject is positioned ideologically. Close proximity and control of the film’s heroine, Milena Flaherty, are insinuated as the locus of desire in relation to a masculinised subject position that is temporarily aligned with Stefan Vognic as her husband and dissuaded lover, Alex Linden as a psychoanalyst, and Inspector Netusil as detective. Each of them temporarily offers a point of orientation for the spectator in a scenario which plays on sadism through visual analysis as the desire to know and of inciting a change in another (Mulvey 1975, p.22). Speech is aligned with the narration of events throughout which gestures, as an effect suggestive of the repressed, solicit attention. Such modulations of meaning in language appear to be ephemeral, but also retrace memories which seem to haunt the body in movements that signal discontent. Between body and language, gestures trace an economy of exchange and resistance in the gendered discourse of cinema.

In *Bad Timing* this complex process of associative editing elicits connections between minute details such as the imagery of hands to be found in a brooch on

Milena's jacket or the repetition of a gesture.³ In his study of the power structures in *Bad Timing*, Ian Penman notes that the narrative is articulated "through a compulsive - and useful- catalogue of individual habits, characteristics and possessions" (Penman 1980, p.107). For example, as Alex reflects the movement of a desk clerk who lifts her curled hand to her lower jaw, his response incorporates a disruption in the repetitive tapping of his fingers (figure 1.1). The sequence cuts between them, each time closer to their hands and marking the temporality of their exchange as Alex's determined movement draws attention to the clerk's bodily tic and his own hesitation to accept the words spoken. The critical play of this gesture disturbs the reciprocity of conversation with a sleight of hand. The deictic function of a gesture is also marked in the direction of a character's look as it is taken up by that of another (Kendon 2004, p.2). The connections are swift and yet compelling in a film otherwise described as a "labyrinthine" configuration of fragmented scenes and images intercut into narrative form (Maslin 1980, p.70; Brooke 2007, pp.86-7; Lapsley 2009, p.20). The illegibility of *Bad Timing* lies in the discontinuity of Alex Linden's account of Milena Flaherty's suicide attempt.⁴ In a conversation about Milena in her absence, the mirroring of a gesture as Alex and then Inspector Netusil look off-screen is followed by a shot of her in the stupor of an overdose; an image that disturbs the chronology of their exchange and is revelatory of Alex's miswriting

³ The misdirection constituted by this sleight of hand reveals a level of interpretation. The mediation of reading the gesture through a framework of interpretation, of translating a bodily register into language, dispels the immediacy of response and betrays the work of conscious recognition which is already in the dimension of meaning (Said 1967, p.62; Merleau-Ponty 2004, p.39).

⁴ Ross notes that in the women's films of the 1940s romantic relationships were based on "intimate confessions and a sharing of emotions and life stories" (1995, p.198); the confident of details and scenarios articulated and through which subjectivity is shaped. A similar practice is sketched out in conversations between Milena and Alex, but diminished or refuted by the distraction marked by a gesture. This can be found in Milena's momentary captivation in the flight of an insect as Alex speaks evocatively of the changing architecture of a city in which he feels at home.

of the event. This gesture marks an instance like Kendon's concept of a parenthesis in the verbal articulation of a tale (2004, p.137). For filmic discourse, a parenthesis which denotes a pause in speech introjects meaning on to the words spoken. Gesture performs a similar function earlier in the film as Milena's invitation to a conversation away from the physicality of sexual intercourse is countered by Alex's petulant remarking of language as his territory.⁵ Alex's protests at Milena's desire to talk attributes to her a reticence to consider the issues he would choose to discuss. This plays on the economy of power for which the body and language are intermedial of knowledge and exchange in their relationship and in doing so, positions her as focus of the conversation rather than a participant. A subsequent sequence inter-cuts shots of a conversation mediated by a telephone; the gestures of each reflect those of the other whilst Alex's speech marks an intermittent response to the slurred words uttered by Milena. Alex records and replays the distressed phone calls Milena makes throughout the duration of her attempted suicide, before travelling a circuitous route to her apartment where he pulls the phone cable from her reach, an action which thwarts the possibility of her summoning assistance. Thus Alex marks his territory in language, whilst gestures solicit attention as ephemeral movements that inflect meaning in speech to reveal an economy of exchange and resistance operative between the body, language and memory. The privileging of vision and language in relation to knowledge in film and its analysis remains open to a reading of the significance of gesture as a form of

⁵ Their exchange escalates as she riles him and is met with the ill-judged response of a violent and sexual encounter.

expression which lies between language and the sublimation of the body (Butler 1989, p.90).

The articulation of meaning in this sequence is both through anomalies in Alex's spoken account and the counterpoint of gestures. In *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* writing-mistakes, misreading and chance actions can reveal "an unintended display of candour" (Freud [1901] 1991, p.169). The immediacy of gestures traces the effects of latent desire called into play by context and conversation. Nervous saccadic movements such as Alex's tapping of a pen knife in his hand marks the "idle play" which "regularly conceals a sense and meaning which are denied any other form of expression" (Freud [1901] 1991, p.250). Milena's repetitious flicker of a hair pin signals the subtle reciprocity of bodily movement as integral to the formation and exchange of meaning in conversation.⁶ Conversely, "bungled actions", such as Alex Linden's inadvertent glance toward Milena's bed where crumpled sheets trace the absence of her body, deviate from the intended expression of the speaker (Freud [1901] 1991, p.178 and pp.220-221). Such "chance symptomatic actions" seem inappropriate (Freud [1901] 1991, p.215) to the intentions of the subject, a residual effect of the transgression he seeks to conceal from Inspector Netusil, that is, his ravishment of Milena as she lays unconscious on her bed. The surreptitious gesture of his glance traces the reactivation of what has made an impression as a memory trace, which even if forgotten from consciousness,

⁶ Although the bodily tics and expressions of Alex and Milena rarely connect in conversation, those of Alex and Netusil are so entwined, so insidious that they seem to "establish a parallel, a duet, a duel" (Maslin 1980, p.70). Following Netusil's comment that "we are not unlike", the sequence divulges a close-up of his arms interwoven with those of Alex, clasping the sleeve of his jacket and imploring a confession, whilst the camera turns to focus of the repetitive movement of Alex's hands as a mark of his hesitation to respond.

can be reawakened. Similarly in conversation, Netusil's comment that the toxic effects of the overdose left Milena unable to even "move a finger" is juxtaposed with the jolt of Alex's hand first pressed into the bed sheets and then withdrawn from view (figures 1.2, 1.3, 1.4). The subsequent image, displaced from the spatial logic of the sequence is of Milena, hospitalised, with a cannula inserted into the skin of her hand. The detective's words elicit a physical reaction in Alex which indirectly betrays his violation and the failure of his compassionate response to a lover lost. These gestures, as parentheses, sketch threads of connections across the temporal and spatial disorder of the images, in which these ellipses indicate the affectivity of material that is otherwise illegible to the system in which it occurs. In this sense, gesture signals something beyond material that is directly represented or comprehensible according to the textual system of the film. For Heath, such instances call to the concept of excess as a paradigm for ideological positions that are considered to deviate from the system of representation. In classic cinema, this system is reliant on the repression of feminine desire on which signification depends. The organisation and disruption of the filmic system echoes "the function historically allocated to woman: sexuality, its prohibition" (Heath 1975b, p.107).⁷ Toward the end of the film, Alex's response to Milena's distressed phone calls and then the ravishment are played out in detail. The grasp of her hand as she sits in a disconsolate haze in the corner of the room and later, in close-up, the flicker of her eyelids opening as Alex cuts the remnants of lingerie from her body mark the retroactive rewriting of this sequence from opening sections of the film. This process

⁷ My development of an analysis of gesture in *Bad Timing* draws from my short essay on cinematic excess: Watkins, *Excess, Cinematic*. 2013. *Encyclopaedia of Film Theory*. eds. E. Branigan and W. Buckland. New York: Routledge, pp.178-181.

of cross-cutting between the time of the investigation and the events that form the focus of Netusil's inquiry signals both the work of memory and the forgetting of the specificity of feminine desire in the filmic system through the demarcation of the female body as the site of difference. The rewriting this sequence signals suppression of the feminine desire as the violence implicit in the cinematic articulation of the image of Woman. The complexity of her desires and the violation of the act of effacement in Alex's articulation of her history, are written on the body: the shudder of her hand and the minute movement of her eyelids signal her vulnerability in the muted response of an overdose. In this last instance, the images rather than performance are gestural as they trace the latent unease in elision of sexual difference in a system that is irresponsive to the specificity of feminine desire.

Ernest Jones' note on Freud's concept of parapraxis as an everyday action incorrectly performed, indicates it as a temporary disturbance for which no motive can be immediately perceived (1911, p.478). What is "incorrect" is the inflection of a gesture in a particular context and moment, the forgetting of a word from speech or writing, or the misplacing of an object. Each refers to a sensory perception or motor process. Jones categorises these as: 1) symptomatic acts such as forgetting or a "failure" of seeing or hearing and erroneous perceptions such as false recollection; 2) instances of unintended performance or the misplacing of objects that are revelatory of "non-conscious motives of conduct" (Jones 1911, pp.256-7). Doane notes that in the *Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, Freud suggests gestures are determined and within this framework contingency could be read as a "failure of interpretation" (2002, p.167). This "failure" is a question of legibility, a hesitation to invest meaning in every contingent occurrence, but which as a "failure" of sensory

perception (of seeing, touching or hearing as modes of reading) (Jones 1911, p.256) marks a disturbance that is symptomatic of a system of representation that is proscriptive of gender in the production of knowledge and reliant on an imbalance of power in the subjugation of the feminine.

In *Bad Timing*, the ellipsis in the temporality of Alex's account of Milena's suicide attempt through the complexity of cross-cutting and associative editing reveals an effacement of the ravishment Netusil investigates. The *bad timing* of the film's title lies in the constant rewriting, the deletions and revisions of a process that produces a text with a history. This history is of cinematic representation and of Milena as feminine subject caught between the social and cultural organisation of the body as prescriptive of the expression of desires that transgress a heterosexual and monogamous contract. In a narrative that relies on numerous genres and invokes classic cinema in its disillusion, gestures question and betray the memory of the historical allocation of a disarticulated image of woman. The repetition of images, such as the double-take of her apartment sourced from different moments in the plot infers Netusil as voyeur to series of intimate and volatile exchanges. From the darkened space of the corridor Netusil's perspective of a room in disarray ceases as the camera pans right at a speed which blurs the image. The subsequent shot reveals Alex entering Milena's ornate but orderly apartment as she walks toward him smiling. The spatial continuity of the juxtaposed shots emphasises an ellipsis in the chronology of the narrative. Alterations in the arrangement of her room, trace the imprint of inhabitation, from a drift of papers fallen from the shelf and the detritus of clothes, cigarettes and ash cast from everyday incidents of movement, to the upturned bottles, bed sheets twisted under the grasp of her hand and the drag

of her unconscious body. Whilst de Lauretis notes that “excess, the sexual, physical, and domestic ‘disorder’ that [...] in the movies marks women who choose to be outside the family” (de Lauretis 1984, p.91), such images trace the sediment cast off of diurnal movements, of paths worn through habit and instances of deviation to offer an archaeological trace of Milena’s life. The tension of memory and narrative echoes the “history behind things being kept in place in ‘order’ on a writing table” (Freud [1901] 1991, p.190) and the fascination of parapraxis, of miswriting, or a misplaced object. Memory is operative in the emplacement of objects and the history that can be read of their disarray, not simply as disorder, but as a site that demands to be deciphered. This “disorder”, the fragmentation that is associated with a feminine subject position, is echoed in the narrative structure of *Bad Timing*. The historical image of woman in classic cinema is invoked by the complexity of associative editing and critiqued by the work demanded of the spectator by the differences marked in repeating a gesture, such as the flicker of Milena’s hand, which disquiets, inscribing as it does the everyday of violence in the image of Woman.

The recurrence of certain images through editing and the series of images which modulate and animate the body return us to the sequence of photographic studies which constituted Charcot’s iconographie of hysteria and reveal the complex interrelations of language, body and the symbolic. The succession of static images infers bodily movement through the segmentation of the hysteric’s gestures as they

unfold over time.⁸ As a translation, this photographic process diminishes the hysteric's voice in to notes in the accompanying text leaving her gestures to mark the "absence of speech across the body" (Heath 1978, p.82). This "silence" then can be interpreted as the forgetting of the orders of discourse and as an effect of the technology in presenting an incomplete account. The abstraction of the hysteric's gestures into a series of still images stages a scene of which a narrative is written. The duration of study is intercut with elisions in the temporality of movement, the selection and effacement of information. The process of miswriting in narrative, as the repetition of an image situates it in a new context, can be discerned as a filmic process which itself takes on a gestural function, where two threads of association converge to elicit a failure in a cohesive filmic system. Such repetitions signal the inconsistency that emerges through fractures and mistiming in the story told and which are symptomatic of discontent. As Alex walks into Milena's apartment she lies uneasily against the corner of her bed. A reverse shot of the inspector retracing Alex's footsteps notes her absence. The film repeatedly returns to this corner of her room: from a gesture which beckons Alex to her bed, to the unconscious shudder of her hand and later the fall of his and then Netusil's gaze. Here technology inflects the viewer's perception as the differences between the two shots of Milena's apartment are marked by a comparison. The juxtaposition of two gestures through the process of associative editing can mark a parapraxis, like a slip of the tongue, in the filmic system as the "convergence of two causal series" in narrative form (Laplanche 1999,

⁸ Heath notes that Charcot's photographic studies are attentive to the duration of the hysteric's symptoms. The images as a sequence emphasise repetition rather than "disorder" and so call for interpretation (Heath 1978, pp.57-8).

p.105) neither of which is determinate of meaning, but is symptomatic of an “excess of message” (Fletcher 1999, p.45) that is disquieting in its timing.⁹

In *Bad Timing* the abstraction of the image of woman is entangled in the cross-cutting of shots as a symptom of cinema as a discourse to which the body, temporality and technology are integral. Both Doane and Väliaho refer to the series of static images that constitute the chronophotographic studies of body and movement made by Muybridge and Marey. Whilst for Doane (1991, p.79; 2002), the cinematographic offered a seemingly permanent record of transient details, of the minutiae of facial expressions or the ephemeral movement of gestures that could be discerned amidst the apprehension of bodily movement in a series of still frames that belie the temporality of the moving image, Väliaho (2010, p.29) suggests the technologies that animate representations of body and gesture signal a crisis in a subject position which he links to modernity as a shift in consciousness and thinking of time and memory. Such studies echo Charcot’s photographic documentation of hysteria where gestures are the manifestation of the affectivity of the repressed. Freud’s note that “hysterics suffer mainly from reminiscences” (Freud and Breuer [1895] 1991, p.58) is read by Heath to suggest that “fiction film suffers from its reminiscence of the woman, its problem of memory, the memory it seeks to control, again and again” (Heath 1978, p.102) of irreducible sexual difference. Milena is not depicted as a hysteric, but among the variously disordered threads of *Bad Timing* the practice of associative editing, marked by repetition, calls for a network of

⁹ In his ‘Introduction’ to Laplanche’s *Essays on Otherness*, Fletcher refers to the “excess of message”, which eludes each interlocutor’s understanding of a slip of the tongue in conversation, where neither “causal series” is determinate of meaning (1999, p.45).

connections to be traced and in doing so formulates a subject position that is evocative of a crisis in the historical representation of women in cinema. Although the subject position constructed around Milena through a flashback indicates the pathologization of a female protagonist noted by Doane of the women's pictures of the 1930-40s (1991, p.76), the rewriting implicit in the film form of *Bad Timing*, initially circulated in the early 1980s where the complexities of female sexuality and questions of cinema and representation affected the reception of the film, if not its production to address the spectator as "historical woman" (de Lauretis 1984, p.102).

Gestures, although transient are caught in a discourse that plays on both memory and the immediacy of perception as the rewriting of each instance through associative editing formulates a text with a history. The contested reception of *Bad Timing* is contiguous with "investments and counter-investments" that are operative in the power structure of the film as it sits uneasily in a cinema which is ideologically complicit as a system of representation by which a society chooses to represent itself (de Lauretis 1984, pp.85-7). In the opening section of the film, the subject position attributed to Milena is constructed through ambiguous point-of-view shots, dialogue and gestures that are reciprocated in conversation, thus indicating her participation in an exchange of knowledge and an economy of power. This sequence marks the dissolution of her marriage to Stefan Vognic, which is depicted by the scene in which they drive across the Austrian – Czechoslovakian border. As they stand opposite each other on the bridge at dusk with rain falling, Stefan's distressed inhalation of breath stutters a lament that remains unspoken. This pause, a gesture in itself is expressive of the questions which remain unanswered, but are met with the distraction of lighting a cigarette: a ritual that is shared as Milena strikes the match

and his hand covers the flame. This sequence cross-cuts between them, to offer a series of point-of-view shots that marks their interaction. The editing of the film, as each shot cuts closer to the cigarette, the match and then the familiar practice that Stefan and Milena share in its lighting, else the correlation of a repetitive movement of Milena's hair pin and Alex's penknife, each tapping the object on their hand, directs the viewer's attention to the subtleties of meaning that are communicable in their interaction. However, Milena's gestures become less legible to the context of the conversations in which they occur as each instance is displaced through the repetitive process of editing and cross-cutting which invests them with new meaning. Milena's gestures connect to those of other characters less frequently as the film progresses and mark asymmetry in communication as an uncertainty in the text. However, this illegibility is embedded in conversation as a discontinuity in the exchange of information as a "failure" of sensory perception inferred by the text and that can be discerned by the spectator. For Freud, such opacity to cognition invests the peripheral details of chance or happenstance as sites close-to meaning that are perceptible through their connection to material that is deemed more significant in the system of representation in which they occur. The fractures in *Bad Timing*, which de Lauretis reads as addressing the spectator as "historical woman" (1984, p102) infer the temporality of a parapraxis that Laplanche notes is not:

reducible to its materiality. A slip of the tongue is no more *nor* less real materially than a correctly pronounced word. But a slip does not boil down to each of the interlocutor's conceptions of it, which are often incomplete and reductive. It conveys a detachable,

observable message, which is partly interpretable by psychoanalysis (Laplanche 1999, p.170).

The materiality of a gesture as parapraxis is not explicative of meaning. For Freud an instance of parapraxis must be temporary, not particularly unusual “‘within the limits of the normal’” and, if perceived, then considered an instance of chance (Freud 1953 [1891], pp.300-301). Every gesture, forgotten detail or word eludes meaningfulness as for Freud it can in part be retraced to the impression of a memory but forms only an unwitting reaction to it that intersects with present context. Milena’s gestures if not the intentional work of conscious perception occur in the repetition of the image, which like a tremor on a web of connections solicits the spectator’s attention to affectivity of discontent in the convergence of threads of association that can be traced throughout the film’s narrative form.

For de Lauretis it is the achronology of *Bad Timing* that draws the spectator into a process of recognition and its effacement. This practice of rewriting addresses the spectator as historical subject as it foregrounds the ineluctably cinematic and elusive immediacy of *now* and the indeterminacy of *nowhere* to position the feminine at the borders:

It is such a figure, constructed by the montage as a memory of borders, contradiction, here and there, now and nowhere, that addresses me, spectator, as historical woman. And it is just in the split, in that non-coherence between registers of time and desire, that figural and narrative identification are possible for me, that I

can pose the question of my time and place in the terms of the film's imagining (de Lauretis 1984 p.102).

In *Bad Timing*, gestures signal the disquiet of the everyday, of the familiar of cinema and its scenarios to question the "imagining" of the film (de Lauretis 1984: 99 -102). The recurrence of a scenario in which Milena leaves a lover, details the gesture of returning a ring or a door key as a symbol of a bond and its negation. In the shots that follow the lighting of cigarette on the bridge, the hesitant resignation of her wedding band to Stefan is countered by her reassurance that "it's not really like going away." Her remark is diminished by his painfully minimal response that it is not so "for you." In this sequence, the film continues to cut between Milena and Stefan, the shots alternating between the perspectives attributed to each of them in turn. Each image is initially framed at an ambiguous angle, before the camera closes in on a series of gestures. These movements detail an exchange that enacts empathy and the difference of the meanings that can be discerned of dialogue.¹⁰ The second instance is intercut with shots of a bridge, which marks the border as a site of exchange, of mediation and refusal. Milena places a key on the bedside table as she turns toward the door and away from Stefan's tired reproachful glance. Smiling, she walks and looks directly toward the camera in acknowledgement of its presence. The emphasis on the fetishistic display of Milena, who is so frequently the focus of others, from the fall of a furtive glance to the words exchanged between investigators and lovers, is countered by the return of a key which signals a decision

¹⁰ In the shots that precede this exchange as they cross the border Milena's discontent belies their interaction. As Stefan hands his passport to Milena, he does not turn to see as the spectator does toward the periphery of image, the curiosity in her expression at the familiarity of this action. The tilt of her head and the turning of the passport in her hands constitute a gesture that denotes her comprehension and unease.

to leave and disturbs the economy of power, knowledge and desire familiar to classic narrative form.

An emphasis on interactions and conversations in *Bad Timing* as film which reconfigures aspects of the love story and film noir discerns gesture as a vital, but often overlooked aspect of the representation of gendered bodies and the female voice. Milena's speech is nuanced and provocative; full of questions rarely met by a response. There is a sequence that recurs through the film in which her voice is recorded on an answer machine. The film cuts between shots of Alex as he replays and interrupts the sound of her distress with the touch of button and the visual record of her gradual intoxication.¹¹ The mediation of the tape machine and Alex's manipulation of her speech marks the disembodiment of her voice as his actions, rather than the words spoken organise the image. In her analysis of the power structures of gender and the female voice in cinema, Kaja Silverman notes a similar scenario, in which the female voice is recorded and replayed in *Klute* (Alan J. Pakula, 1971). In each of these films, the heroine's voice is disembodied as it registered on tape (Silverman 1988, p.81).¹² The female voice is "often shown to coexist with the female body only at the price of its own impoverishment and entrapment. Not surprisingly, therefore, it generally pulls away from any fixed locus within the image track, away from the constraints of synchronization" (1988, p.141). Composed and inscribed by the symbolic, the human form becomes a signifying complex of gestures

¹¹ A close-up of Alex's wrist watch set at almost twenty minutes past ten o'clock betrays the delay that he manipulates in responding to Milena's plea. The image of the watch precedes a shot of Milena in her apartment where the rhythmic ticking of a clock can be heard, measuring each second closer to irrecoverable damage from her overdose.

¹² Silverman's analysis is specific to *Klute* and does not extend to *Bad Timing* (1988 pp.81-84). The heroine of *Klute*, Bree differs from Milena as she speaks as voice-over and offers a perspective that undermines that of the image. However, there are instances in *Bad Timing* that temporarily deviate from the proscriptions of classic Hollywood narrative cinema.

which operate between a body that is discursive and anatomical. Gestures which signal stasis or change mark an introjection that disturbs expression in language or narrative and projects meaning on to the voice of another (Silverman 1988, p.81, p.221, p.224). The projection of masculine desire on to the female voice can be discerned in Alex's registration of the guttural rasp of Milena's breathing through the meandering sentences of her plaintive phone call. This imbalance of power disembodies her voice as a precursor to the ravishment scene in which she remains silent, but for the flex of her hand and the shudder of her eyelids opening, each of which is figured in her absence by the direction that Alex and then Netusil look. The intromission of a gesture which may signify psychological activity, the mimicry of bodily movement may conceal asymmetry in the reciprocity that is otherwise imagined of "communication" (Laplanche 1999: 126).¹³ In such instances the gestures of the other, despite their observable form, can breach the boundaries of subjectivity to be experienced as unpleasure. The effraction of the boundaries of subjectivity marks the violence of the internalisation of the gestures of the other as performance and text intersect to destabilise the subject positions constructed as potential points of identification for the spectator recur throughout Roeg's film. Repetition solicits attention through the familiarity and difference marked by its recurrence in various contexts and participates in rewriting the scenography of desire to mark the "now" of Milena's sexed body:

which the montage succeeds in making present at once conscious
and unconscious, alive and dead, there and not there: never totally

¹³ Laplanche revisits Freud's notes on gesture, parapraxis and verbal communication in a critical reading of Lacan's conceptualisation of language as univocal (1999, pp.91-93).

unconscious, for it moves and gasps, shivers and groans –
registering sensations, unknown perceptions, feelings perhaps –
even in the deep coma of the emergency room and the ravishment
scene (especially then) (de Lauretis 1984, p.101).

The immediacy of her gestures disrupts the double temporality of the investigation and the elusive historical event that the rewriting the ravishment through the film narrative evokes. Gestures play on the question of (il)legibility in narrative, that is of recognition of the “irreducible difference” (de Lauretis 1984, p.101) of the excess of feminine desire marked on the body and in language, where performance and text intersect. Of the ravishment, the sadism in the semblance of intimacy can be found in Alex’s utterance of his love for Milena as the meaning of his words is eroded through their repetition against the displaced saccadic movements of his hand, once curled in the cyclical caress of his hair, now, uninvited yet touching her neck. Her call for compassion unrequited, the sexual act is played in detail. High angle shots of Alex leaning across her torso are intercut with those captured from the locality of her shoulder as he cuts the remnants of lingerie from her body. Milena shudders, her eyes wide open yet drifting from consciousness as the progression of the sequence is severed by the sound of a woman screaming. This vocal expression is not synchronized with the image of Milena, but Netusil’s dramatic gesture of dragging stained sheets from the bed up close to his face as he beseeches Alex to confess.

Between the body, language and technology gestures trace the complex relation of history, memory and the image of Woman in narrative cinema. In *Bad Timing* the forgetting of feminine desire is sketched as the miswriting or false

recollection of a scenography of desire that reveals the operations of a gendered economy of knowledge and power. In the final section of the film, on a sidewalk in New York, Alex catches sight of Milena in quiet conversation with her friends. As she looks back in silence a scar, the index of a body that lives and suffers, traces the fall of her neck. Her refusal of verbal response is marked by a moment of stasis – she pauses as she turns toward him - a gesture and image in which the causal threads of body, language and memory converge as the disquiet of the everyday, of the latent unease of the cinematic articulation of feminine desire at the borderlines of what is (il)legible to the “language” and subject positions of narrative cinema as a socially invested space.

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