



**ERASMUS MUNDUS MASTER
IN WOMEN'S AND GENDER STUDIES**

**Cinema of Affects:
A Deleuzian-Feminist Analysis of Body and Space
in Contemporary Vietnamese Films**

M. A. Thesis

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1. Spanish summary

Esta Tesis de Máster es un estudio de Deleuze-feminista del cuerpo y el espacio en el cine vietnamita contemporáneo. El punto de partida de esta Tesis es desafiar un análisis fílmico feminista tradicional que se basa a menudo en las construcciones sociales y culturales del cuerpo y el espacio de las mujeres. Mientras que en la epistemología tradicional, el cine es visto como un reflejo de un lejano, ya hecha realidad, esta Tesis—inspirado en la obra del filósofo francés Gilles Deleuze—considera el cine como potencias de los afectos. En este marco afectivo, el cuerpo y el espacio se descorporealizan y redefinen como fuerzas moleculares, intensidades, capacidades y relacionalidades. A través de esta reconfiguración, el cuerpo y el espacio en las dos películas vietnamitas contemporáneas *Don't Be Afraid, Bi!* (2010) and *Adrift* (2009) han ido más allá de una estructura binarista de sujetos y objetos, hombres y mujeres, culturas y naturalezas y, por lo tanto, han representado devenires dinámicos.

2. English summary

This MA thesis is a Deleuzian-feminist study of body and space in contemporary Vietnamese cinema. The starting point of this thesis is to challenge a traditional feminist filmic analysis which is often based on social and cultural constructions of women's body and space. Whereas in traditional epistemology, cinema is seen as a reflection of a distant, already-made reality, this thesis—inspired by the work of French philosopher Gilles Deleuze—considers cinema as powers of affects. In this affective framework, bodies and spaces will be de-corporealized and redefined as molecular forces, intensities, capacities, and relationalities. Through this reconfiguration, the body and space in the two contemporary Vietnamese films *Don't Be Afraid, Bi!* (2010) and

Adrift (2009) have moved beyond a binaristic structure of subjects and objects, men and women, cultures and natures, and thus accounted for dynamic becomings.

Approval signature

MAIN SUPERVISOR

AUTHOR

Signed:

Signed:

In memory of my grandmother who spent the rest of her life in Hanoi...

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Introduction

'What is immanence? A life...'

(Deleuze 2001, 28)

*'The plane of immanence is not a concept that is or can be thought
but rather the image of thought,'*

(Deleuze 1994b, 37)

In *Negotiations*, the most accessible work to his thoughts, French philosopher Gilles Deleuze (1925-1995) states that one of the main purposes of his philosophy is to challenge Hegelianism and dialecticism (see Deleuze 1995, 6). This MA thesis, entitled, *Cinema of Affects: A Deleuzian-Feminist Analysis of Body and Space in Contemporary Vietnamese Films*, aims to engage Deleuzian anti-dialecticist and anti-representational thoughts into the study of cinema, body and space. Although Deleuzian philosophy has been attacked as erasure of geographical difference (Spivak 1988), Eurocentric romanticism (Kaplan 2005), fantasies of the Other (Ahmed 1999), and historical unaccountability (Wuthnow 2002), there are certain aspects of his philosophy that feminists should not dismiss. For instance, in her first revision of Deleuze's perspectives in *Patterns of Dissonance*, Rosi Braidotti (1991) criticizes Deleuze's notion of becoming-woman for its support of masculine interests and its ignorance of women's rights and their struggles for liberation. Yet, interestingly enough, later on Braidotti revises her critique and argues that Deleuzian concept of becoming-woman can indeed advocate a non-binaristic understanding of woman, and therefore, support a feminist politics of anti-discrimination (see Braidotti 2002, 2003, 2011). This shift in feminist revision of Deleuze's works can also be found in Elizabeth Grosz (1993), who after initial doubts and criticism realizes that the Deleuzian anti-dualism 'may nevertheless help clear the ground of metaphysical concepts' (1993, 169) for

feminist knowledges and practices. She acknowledges that Deleuze and Guattari's notion of the body as flows of forces and intensities can be extremely useful for theorizing and empowering 'women's bodies outside of the binary polarization imposed on the body by the mind/body, nature/culture, subject/object and interior/exterior oppositions' (Grosz 1993, 170). This similar point is also reiterated in Grosz's comprehensive introductory book *Volatile Bodies. Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (1994) when she points out the risks—but also the benefits—of using male philosophies, especially in the case of Deleuze and Guattari's works. Earlier, in their textbook *Feminist Knowledge: Critique and Construct*, Grosz and Gunew (1990) suggest that apart from negative critiques, which are of course crucial in constructing knowledge, feminists need to move beyond oppositional criticism in order to create new knowledge. This is because 'to say something is *not* true, valuable, or useful *without posing alternatives* is, paradoxically, to affirm that it *is* true,' (Grosz 1990, 59, italics in original).

While acknowledging feminist critiques of Deleuze, I attempt to enrich feminist film scholarship by making creative use of Deleuze's affective approach. The original contribution of this thesis therefore rests on its offer of an alternative view of the body and space in affective cinema. Through my reading of the two contemporary Vietnamese films *Don't Be Afraid, Bi!* (dir. Phan Dang Di, 2010) and *Adrift* (dir. Bui Thac Chuyen, 2009), I attempt to challenge the very notions of 'cinema', 'space' and 'body' in traditional understandings, and make a radical reconfiguration of seeing body and space beyond corporeal functions and social-cultural constructions. This thesis thus does not situate in a traditional framework of feminist film analysis. Moving away from the metaphysics of representation, the academic and political contribution of this thesis lies in its capacity to *think differently*. By thinking differently, in this thesis I try to develop another way of understanding cinema, body, and space in its univocal ontology—which means to revolt against equivocal, incompatible levels between the signifier and the signified, the real and the unreal, the representation and the origin (see Colebrook 2004a, 291). Consequently, I will demonstrate that thinking with Deleuze on the univocal concept of affect, i.e. bodily affect, spatial affect, cinematic affect, is indeed political, and may ultimately enable strategies of liberation and empowerment for feminisms.

Furthermore, I must add that the film directors of *Adrift* and *Don't Be Afraid, Bi!* are urban, middle-class, non-Western men. Recently, feminist film studies have called for a creation of female archetypes in 'countercinema' (Thornham 2012, Johnston 2006, Chaudhuri 2006). Yet,

from my point of view, this concept of ‘countercinema’ is problematic because in sustaining gender difference, it reinforces an essentialist assumption that a female director will create a more empowering women’s story than a male filmmaker. In fact, it is not always the case that women are harmfully stereotyped in masculine mainstream cinema and actively empowered in ‘countercinema’. In my analysis of body and space in the two films *Adrift* and *Don’t Be Afraid, Bi!*, this binary opposition will be questioned.

It is worth noting that the affective approach to the study of cinema is very recent and still underdeveloped. Although this approach has been adopted by Patricia MacCormack (2008), Barbara Kennedy (2002), Teresa Rizzo (2012), Patricia Pisters (2003) or Elena del R  o (2008), their applications depart differently from Deleuze’s own works. For instance, del R  o considers affects as performances and integrates Deleuzian affects with phenomenology, whereas Kennedy opts for posthumanist and postfeminist perspectives. Nonetheless, it is noticeable that most of the available applications of Deleuzian affects to film studies are carried out by Western scholars and most of the films chosen are Western mainstream pieces. There is almost non-existence of an engagement between Deleuze and non-Western visual culture. With this thesis, I therefore expect to make a bridge between Western filmic scholarship and philosophy with non-Western feminist issues of body and space. This goal is two-fold. On the one hand, joining a non-Western feminist struggle for a process of decolonization (hooks 1990; Collins 1989; Spivak 1988, 2006), my purpose is to destroy a monolithic conception of Third-World woman (see Mohanty 2003). By dismissing the submissive category of Third-World woman as universal victims and universal dependents (Mohanty 2003), I reconstruct on the other hand a non-static understanding of Third-World woman. In this non-binaristic understanding, I argue that woman herself is capable of affirming power, a power that is always/already active in her.

Concepts: Immanence and Virtuality

Throughout *Cinema of Affects: A Deleuzian-Feminist Analysis of Body and Space in Contemporary Vietnamese Films*, my filmic analysis will be constructed within the Deleuzian philosophical paradigm of immanence. Unlike the paradigm of transcendence on which Hegel, Husserl, Heidegger, Lacan, Derrida and feminist scholars (e.g. Spivak 1988, hooks 1992) rely, in immanence there is nothing outside itself, there is nothing higher than or prior to itself (see

Deleuze 1993, 132). Importantly, this plane of immanence is inseparable with the plane of the virtual. Throughout my thesis, the virtual should be understood as the potential, the possible of the not-yet-to-come. However, this virtuality is always ‘engaged in a process of actualization’ (Deleuze 2001, 31) and therefore it is real, not at all fantasized. This means that there is no dualistic opposition between the virtual and the actual because the virtual and the actual are now all equal and inseparable. Also, from this Deleuzian univocal ontology, the real (where we are living, for instance) is always virtual-actual or virtual-real. This is because the actual is not the plane of only things that already happened, but each actual thing also ‘maintains its own virtual power’ (Colebrook 2002, 98). In other words, the virtual is also the actual, and our beings therefore can be seen as virtuals, and contain only virtuals (see Deleuze 2001, 31).

Inspired by the Deleuzian thought on the power of the virtual, in *Cinema of Affects: A Deleuzian-Feminist Analysis of Body and Space in Contemporary Vietnamese Films* I do not impose an actualized pre-given gender order and cultural coding to my reading of the selected films. Working within the framework of virtual immanence, I divorce my filmic reading from the transcendental tradition of feminist film theory, i.e. ideological apparatuses, psychoanalysis, semiotics, constructivism, and deconstruction, because this tradition has ignored the virtual power (the power of creation) which makes cinematic images transform and affect. Furthermore, while we only realize virtual potentialities after they have been actualized (Colebrook 2002, 99), in my thesis I insist on ‘the virtual or the power of simulation itself’ (2002, 99). That is to say, I want to see the transformative process, the non-teleological becoming (the in-between, not the coming-before or the coming-after) of the body and space on the plane of the virtual. Thus, throughout my thesis I aim to develop a Deleuzian-feminist filmic analysis in which its locus is the in-between-virtual-actual, the becoming process of powers.

Cinema of Immanence

When watching a film, we experience a moment of suspension of disbelief. Patricia Pisters identifies this suspension as ‘epistemological uncertainties’ (2008, 114). For Pisters, because of the uncertainty to distinguish between the true and the false, the real and the non-real, the actual and the virtual, cinema shifts from the old paradigm of visibility (in transcendental apparatus theory) to the paradigm of invisibility. In the latter paradigm, cinema of immanence does not

produce representation (or re-presentation) of a visible reality. Instead, as Pisters has noted, it offers a visible reality of invisible illusions. These illusions are in fact the virtuals—which are very real—although not yet actualized.

Ethically, on the plane of immanence, due to these virtual-actual uncertainties (Pisters 2008), cinema can be capable of affecting and being affected. In *What Is Philosophy?*, Francis Bacon: *The Logic of Sensation* and his two books on cinema (*Cinema 1: The Movement-Image* and *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*), Deleuze offers a new understanding of cinema and the visual art as power of affects and sensations. Affects and sensations here should be understood as the virtual (the potential). In this regard, the affective cinema becomes the political cinema due to its capabilities of rendering ‘visible forces that are not themselves [visible]’ (Deleuze 2003, 56). These capacities also include the ability of thinking in cinematic-images. Hence, throughout my thesis, I consider the two films *Don’t Be Afraid, Bi!* and *Adrift* as affective cinema—which are capable of producing new concepts, new thoughts, through visceral affects and sensations.

Aesthetically, on the plane of immanence, cinema must be a work of art. As Colebrook (2002, 24) puts it, ‘art may well have meanings or messages but what makes it art is not its content but its affect, the sensible force or style through which it produces content’. From the vantage point of this immanent-affective ontology, the film aesthetics of *Don’t Be Afraid, Bi!* and *Adrift* cannot be seen as a substitute for ideological discourses. Any favor to ideological discourses in traditional film theory is no longer sufficient for an understanding of the complexity of the two films as works of art. Also, in the paradigm of immanence, film aesthetics can no longer be seen as Kantian taste or judgment of beauty and ugliness. The use of lighting, framing, editing, voicing, camera movement, and the like is no longer something decorative for the content of the two selected films. On the plane of immanence, the form (the aesthetics) and the content (the narrative) are fully equal. Therefore, each of them can stand itself, for itself, and in itself.

Ontologically, on the plane of immanence, *Don’t Be Afraid, Bi!* and *Adrift* are no longer representative of an absolute (other) reality. It is not a representation of anything other than itself. Hence, in my thesis, I am not interested in seeing or judging whether the two films accurately or inaccurately reflect reality. In the representational paradigm, there is always an ontological gap between the films and the reality. Therefore, any attempt to fulfill this gap is

impossible. On the contrary, the plane of immanence enables the two films to bypass dualism and to stand alone.

Epistemologically, cinema of immanence works with images of movement and time (Deleuze 1986, 2000a). Yet, the point here is in the Deleuzian paradigm of immanence, the signified and the signifier do not constitute a master/slave relationship. Revolting against de Saussure's semiology, in the two cinema books *Cinema 1* and *Cinema 2* (1986, 2000a), in *Proust and Signs* (2000b), and in *A Thousand Plateaus* (2005), Deleuze sees 'the condition of possibility' (2005, 85) in image-signs. By 'possibility', Deleuze affirms that the image and meaning do not serve as a referent for the other. There is no longer arbitrary pre-signifying regime in which one signifier takes control over a signified (for example, imposing gender role as a signifier) (Colman 2011, 106). In this open-ended image-sign system, Deleuze (2005) invents new regimes of image-signs: movement-images and time-images. From these two regimes, he creates perception-image, affection-image, impulse-image, action-image, recollection-image, and generates a series of temporal signs including opsigns, sonsigns, chronosigns, lectosigns, noosigns, etc (see Deleuze 1986, 2000a). These image-signs can be perceived. Yet, unlike de Saussure's model, in Deleuzian image regimes, each image-sign transforms and translates into each other and up to infinity in a non-fixed, non-hierarchical, and non-dialectical relation. Importantly, for Deleuze and Guattari (2005), these transformations of meanings and signs must be incorporeal and cannot be subjugated to any foundation. This Deleuzian conception is indeed an invitation for feminists to 'crack apart' (Colman 2011, 110) the patriarchal signified/signifying system and then 'invent our [feminist] own names for signs' (2011, 110). In my reading of the two Vietnamese films, I will therefore try to crack the dialecticist relation between cinematic-images and meanings, and then create my own image-sign system for the two films in order to enable incorporeal transformations and to develop a feminist politics of de-centralizing, de-subjectifications, and de-anthropocentrism.

Body and Space: Affects, Forces and Intensities on the Plane of Immanence

Following my clarification of the concepts which I am going to make use of in my thesis, the main research questions of my thesis will be:

- 1) In the two films *Don't Be Afraid, Bi!* and *Adrift*, how do bodies affect and how are they affected by other bodies?
- 2) How are bodies and Hanoian space affecting and being affected by one another?
- 3) What is a new thought on female bodies and spaces that emerges in the two films through their affective connections?

Concretely, the space that I refer to is Hanoi, the capital city of Vietnam, where the film characters experience their dwelling. Abstractly, I acknowledge that space is our embodied belonging (Rose 2002, Sassen 1996, Soja 2002, Tonkiss 2005, Lefebvre 1991), and also, space is the sphere of gender relations, of biological, cultural, and symbolic reproductions (Yuval-Davis 1997). Nonetheless, it is not my intention to lean my spatial filmic analysis on a Heideggerian 'dasein' or Bachelard's phenomenological 'poetics of space' (1994) or Foucault's constructivism of 'other spaces' (1980, 1986, 1995).

Methodologically, working with the paradigm of immanence, I employ an affective non-representational approach to capture the virtual bodies-spaces in the two selected films. In *Non-representational Theory: Spaces—Politics—Affect*, Nigel Thrift (2008) refers to four current major affective frameworks to spatial studies: from the phenomenological tradition, from the psychoanalytic framework, from the Deleuzian vitalism, and from the Darwinian evolutionism. Here I want to clarify that in *Cinema of Affects: A Deleuzian-Feminist Analysis of Body and Space in Contemporary Vietnamese Films*, I do not consider affect as phenomenological or psychological emotions and feelings of the individuals. In the Deleuzian paradigm, I conceptualize affect as a vital force, as an intensity or an intensive force. While I argue that spaces in the two selected films contain 'no master territories' (see Soja and Hooper 2002, 384), the move to a vitalistic affect redefines bodies from properties into capabilities in each spatial encounter with other bodies. In Deleuzian words, this affect enhances 'laws of composition and decomposition of relations' (1990b, 211). For instance, within the laws of decomposition, 'the bodies that meet are either mutually indifferent, or one, through its relation, decomposes the relation in the other, and so destroys the other body' (1990b, 211), whereas the laws of composition 'regulate the coming into existence' (1990b, 211) of the bodies.

Using this Spinozist-Deleuzian notion of affect in my filmic analysis, I will look into the transformations (either by an increase/composition or a decrease/decomposition of the virtual

power) of the female bodies with other bodies in spatial encounters. More importantly, I want to highlight that the corporeal bodies in the two selected films *Don't Be Afraid, Bi!* and *Adrift* are not seen as higher than or superior to other incorporeal bodies. This is because, following Deleuze, I do not limit my understanding of 'body' to the flesh and blood. From my viewpoint, a body can be(come) anything, and therefore we can call 'body' a corporeal animal, a non-corporeal linguistic corpus, a material female body or an immaterial body of sound and thunderstorm (see Deleuze and Guattari 2005). I agree with Deleuze (2005) that in a univocal-relational ontology, the corporeal and incorporeal bodies are not in opposition and negation. Furthermore, because a body has no pre-given origin, it can only transform itself, for itself and in itself. On the plane of immanence, I therefore consider a body (either in a corporeal or incorporeal form) an assemblage of forces and intensities. That is to say, a body can only be defined through its transformations and its capabilities of affecting and being affected. Drawing on this affective conception of the body, in my thesis I aim to offer a new understanding of filmic experience that is not restricted by the lived experience of the flesh. What I am more interested is to discover a (new) materialist experience of the incorporeal, the molecularity, the dynamic matter. From this radical empiricist Deleuzian notion of 'experience' and 'bodily experience', I contend that the lived body, the human body—which has been taken for granted in corporeal feminism (e.g. Susan Bordo, Susie Orback) as a response to Cartesian binarism—needs to be de-essentialized and de-corporealized. In this radically materialist reconfiguration of the body and space, I will thus throughout my thesis argue for a process of de-subjectification, de-corporealization, and de-anthropocentrism between the human and the nonhuman, the corporeality and the incorporeality, and between nature and culture.

Outline of the Thesis

My thesis includes two main chapters. In the first chapter 'Cinema Beyond Representation: On Deleuzian Affective Aesthetics', my target is two-fold. In the first part of the chapter, I will point out the limits of representational cinema, in terms of epistemology. This critique comes from my dissatisfaction with the applications of psychoanalysis in feminist film studies since Laura Mulvey's essay *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* (1975)—which I consider as a reinforcement of Freudian-Lacanian dichotomies between men as bearers of the look and women

as images ‘to-be-looked-at’. Meanwhile, the uses and abuses of semiotics (see Metz 1974, 1983) have restricted our understanding of cinema into a mere representation of an unattainable reality. Besides, attempts to see cinema from the transcendental paradigm of poststructuralist constructivism/performativity have not succeeded in destabilizing binarism. Therefore, in the second part of the first chapter, I propose a turn to Deleuze’s immanent framework and his conception of affect. As such, I seek to define cinema by its capacity to affect and to be affected. With an aim to de-essentialize and ultimately eliminate binarism, I theorize affect as virtuality, non-intentionality, incorporeality, and becoming. From this affective conception, I reconfigure bodies and spaces as forces, intensities, relationalities, and capacities of affecting and being affected on the plane of immanence.

In the second chapter ‘Affective Reading of Body and Space in Contemporary Vietnamese Cinema’, I offer a Deleuzian-feminist analysis of bodies and spaces in the two Vietnamese films *Don’t Be Afraid, Bi!* and *Adrift*. Here I aim to introduce a novel understanding of the female body, sexuality, and desire that goes beyond a social-cultural understanding or a biological construction of the flesh and blood. In other words, I de-corporealize the body, sexuality, and desire. In so doing, I capture its incorporeal transformations, I pay attention to its affective becomings—in which I emphasize the becoming-nature of culture and the becoming-incorporeal of the corporeal. Finally, I will demonstrate that it is the vitality, the dynamic materiality, the molecular force that is already/always in the body, is what makes it transform. Together with bodily transformations, Hanoian space is no longer a static space, a space that is already there, waiting to be inhabited. This space therefore also experiences metamorphoses when it affects and is affected by the body.

Chapter 1

Cinema Beyond Representation: On Deleuzian Affective Aesthetics

1.1. Introduction

How far can feminist film studies go after four decades of exploiting psychoanalysis? What will be the future of feminist film theory if the current debate cannot overcome the nineteenth and twentieth century perspectives of Freud and Lacan? Is it possible to both criticize binaristic patriarchal structures and to enjoy visual pleasure without being concerned with the dark history of women written by such patriarchal theorists? Laura Mulvey in her essay *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* (1999/1975) urges us to destroy visual pleasure because she believes that such pleasure is detrimental to women as it derives from the look of the male spectator together with the look of the camera, which is also masculinized. As such, to destroy visual pleasure, there are only three unsatisfactory options for women, i.e. masculinized, masqueraded, or marginalized. This is because according to the Mulveyan model, masculinity is authentic while femininity is inauthentic, just like a mask (see Doane 1982). For Mulvey (1999, 60-63), as long as cinema is subsumed under the dominant patriarchal order, women are on display whereas men are bearers of the look. This Mulveyan belief of men gazing at women (as an adaptation of Christian Metz's psychoanalytic film theory) has spread throughout academic feminism since the late 1970s. Though it is not unquestionable and indeed there have been a number of critiques and amendments to the Mulveyan mode of seeing (e.g. from queer, transgender film theory), this essentialist and binaristic conception of man/active/authentic and woman/passive/inauthentic is still being used as a powerful analytical tool for films and the visual arts (see Stacey 1987, de Lauretis 1998, Mayne 1981, Humm 1997).

Yet, the blindest spot of the Mulveyan model is that Mulvey has forgotten or ignored that a film—no matter men's mainstream or women's 'counter-cinema' (Johnston 1999/1973)—first and foremost must be an artistic creation, a work of art, rather than a mere mimetic and ideological reflection. In a non-dialectical understanding, this aesthetics stands alone rather than

supplementary to the content. Thus it is understandable that no matter how hard Mulveyan feminists try to destroy, the film as a work of art still gives us visual pleasure through our experience of suspension of disbelief in watching.

In *The Oppositional Gaze: Black Female Spectators*, black feminist bell hooks (1992) claims that an oppositional reading and racial consciousness-raising should be employed as a resistance to the dichotomy of woman/image and man/the look. Yet this argument is still problematic. The point is visual pleasure cannot be simplistically destroyed just because of hooks' refusal to identify with the white woman on screen. Similarly, it is not unproblematic when she appeals for oppositional cinematic representations of black women and then expects this strategy will prevent blackness from being subjugated to the white male gaze. This negation cannot guarantee that women will be immune on screen unless the ontological question of visual pleasure has been tackled. In short, although bell hooks' oppositional gaze seems to be critical to the Mulveyan gaze, both ways of gazing eventually fail to binarism.

To de-essentialize and to destroy discriminatory binarism, which is damaging to feminist political goals, I argue that feminists need to search for a more powerful epistemological framework in which we cannot only enjoy visual pleasure but also challenge essentialism and dialecticism. In this chapter, I will thus point out the limits of available feminist film theory and further discuss possibilities of engaging feminist visual studies with the turn to Deleuzian affect as a new methodology to study cinema, body and space.

1.2. Limits of Representational Cinema

Traditional¹ feminist film theory of the 1970s and the 1980s has paid strong attention to combat the unfair treatment of women on screen. Feminists such as Mary Ann Doane (1987), Ann Kaplan (1983), Linda Williams (1989), Kaja Silverman (1984, 1988), Annette Kuhn (1985), Claire Johnston (1999) have been upset about the submissive representation of women in mainstream cinema. The starting point of their resistance is that they demand a better, more subversive representation for women. This subversion is therefore regarded as a strategic practice to deconstruct dominant representations (see Kuhn 1985).

¹ By 'traditional', I mean this way of theorizing has already been established and widely accepted in the academic community.

Yet the problem is early feminist film scholars do not thoroughly question their epistemology, and therefore, their end cannot justify their means. There have been hot debates about the use of Lacanian psychoanalysis and Althusserian ideological interpellation in feminist film theory (see Stacey 1987, Mayne 1977, de Lauretis 1988) and about whether feminist film aesthetics does really exist (see Citron, Lesage, Mayne et al. 1978, de Lauretis 1985, French 1990). Nevertheless, cinema is quickly defined as a work of representation (see Gledhill 1978, Kuhn 1985, Kaplan 1983, Mayne 1985). Representation—as a methodology for the study of cinema—is unquestioned. Jennifer Hammett (1997) concludes in her article on feminism and film theory that she does not need a different epistemology because she believes ‘representation *per se* is not a problem for feminists (though particular patriarchal representations certainly are)’ (1997, 96, italics added). For Hammett, feminists ‘need not escape the logic of representation in order to achieve the goals of feminism’ and ‘if the problem is generating feminist responses to patriarchal texts, the solution is not and never will be epistemological’ (1997, 96). However, I would contend that feminist film theory needs to challenge the very notion of representation, which is often taken for granted in patriarchal thoughts since the Platonic time.

In *Representation* (2003), Stuart Hall theorizes three modes of representation derived from the mimetic approach (dating back to Plato), the intentional approach (dating back to Kant and including Marxist notion of ideology and Lacanian-Althusserian interpellation) and the constructionist framework (i.e. the works of Michel Foucault and Judith Butler). Yet, the three ways of seeing—to a certain extent—replicate dualistic separation, and therefore using these paradigms, feminist film theory risks failing to discriminatory binarism. In the following part I will respectively analyze the shortcomings of these three representational approaches, as well as point out the epistemological crisis in current feminist film scholarship.

First, the methodological flaw of traditional feminist film theory lies in the way feminist film scholars consider cinema as a mirror of an outside reality. Though Claire Johnston in *Women’s Cinema as Counter-cinema* (first published in 1973) realizes that a film is a ‘work of art’ (1999, 36) which allows creativity, she still insists that the image of woman on screen must reflect accurately the woman in real life. Therefore she is dissatisfied with what she calls ‘stereotyping’ when the representation of woman is ‘repressive’ and ‘manipulative’ (1999, 31) in mainstream cinema. More than 20 years later, in a similar vein, while stressing that ‘visual culture reflects society’ (Humm 1997, 8), Maggie Humm in *Feminism and Film* is discontented

with mainstream cinema because she believes that it ‘did not represent women’s lived experience but only stereotypes of women’s social status or, indeed, lack of status’ (1997, 12-13). For Humm, a film is ‘a social mirror’ because its function is to ‘reflect social power structures at large’ (1997, 13). This representational thinking is problematic because it reveals that feminist thought has not yet overcome the dualistic Platonism. In this mimetic Western metaphysics, cinema is treated as a copy or a simulacrum of an original reality. Ontologically, this paradigm indicates two incompatible and separable levels—the real and the copy—and thus filling in the gap between these incommensurable levels is impossible. That is why, as Karen Barad (2007) puts it, any attempt to request a more accurate representation can hardly lead to a satisfactory resolution.

In *Speculum of the Other Woman* (1987), feminist philosopher Luce Irigaray, a Lacanian rebel, devotes half of her book to her critique of Platonism. This is because for Irigaray, Platonic thinking has been used to enslave women throughout two millennia. Under the name of the Father (in terms of Freud and Lacan’s psychoanalysis), this asymmetrical Platonic representation—which can be expanded upon the relationship between the Father/the man/the real and the Mother/the woman/the copy—is the way of thoughts to dominate women. For Irigaray, our thoughts will still be imprisoned in this Platonic cave unless we try to demystify it. To destroy the myth of the cave, Irigaray urges us to realize that there is indeed no copy because from the very start the Platonic cave has deceived us. It ‘functions as an attempt to give an orientation to the reproduction and representation of something that is *always already there* in the den’ (1987, 244, italics added). She points out that ontologically, the copy/the woman/the signifier/the cinema is ‘symmetrical’, but living in the dark cave, we are deceived that the copy is ‘reproduced as being *less* beautiful, *less* true than its model’ (1987, 290, italics in original). Thus Irigaray encourages us to go out of the cave in order to see the collapse of the mirror and witness the confrontation of the man with his own shadow (1987, 286-288). Yet, it is not easy to find the way out of the Platonic prison if we do not dare to break the mirror image and if we are not courageous enough to get rid of our discriminatory thinking about the copy and the real—as Irigaray clearly warns.

Maggie Humm declares in her book *Feminism and Film* (1997) that she has been concerned about the daily representations of women’s social, political and economic disadvantages, and therefore her aim is ‘to match feminism with film’ (1997, 4). On the one

hand, Humm is critical when recognizing ‘the visual is epistemologically privileged in Western knowledge’ (1997, 3). She is thus enthusiastic about finding a way out to challenge this Western privileged power. That is why she encourages women to enter the arts in order to ‘make visible the insignia of the women’s movement’ (Humm 1997, 10). However, on the other hand, Maggie Humm seems to be rushed to condemn mainstream cultural images for ‘backlash’ misogyny (1997, 3). She jumps to conclude that ‘gender discriminations are the common semantic of *all* cultures, including media cultures’ (1997, 8, *italic added*). Yet, what Humm refers to is in fact political representations. These political representations (or gender discriminations) do not have anything to do with ‘man’ or ‘woman’. In the eighteenth century, Mary Wollstonecraft, the foremother of feminisms, writes in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* that men and women are equal. This statement seems to be easily justifiable in today’s modern time. Yet with a careful reading, it is noticeable that Wollstonecraft uses the concept of ‘man’ and ‘woman’ strategically. She never defines what it really means to be a ‘man’ or a ‘woman’ at the ontological level. Thus at the representational or political level, ‘man’ and ‘woman’ can be used to refer to a variety of incommensurable things—as Helene Cixous points out—such as: activity/passivity, sun/moon, culture/nature, day/night, father/mother, head/heart, intelligible/sensible, logos/pathos, form/matter (see Cixous 1981, 90). From her reading of ‘gender’ before modernity (e.g. the time of Plato and Aristotle), Claire Colebrook in *Gender* (2004b, 1) argues that it is not until the advent of feminism and the demand for equal rights that we start to think about gender, sexual difference or the relation between male and female. Colebrook points out that indeed ‘from the pre-Socratics and Plato to Freud and New Age philosophy the concept of gender has been inextricably intertwined with questions regarding the generation or genesis of the universe’ (2004b, 1). In this regard, gender is understood as a metaphysics, and talking about gender is talking about a metaphysical difference ‘between two polarities, tendencies or principles—two *kinds* or modes’ of life (2004b, 1, *italics in original*) rather than about a particular male and female body. Meanwhile, from Wollstonecraft to Maggie Humm and other feminist fellows (e.g. Mayne, Johnston, Mulvey, Kuhn, and Kaplan), ‘man’ and ‘woman’ are taken for granted as dichotomized representations. This representational thought therefore reveals the paradoxical goal of feminist film theory. That is, on the one hand, feminist film scholars want to criticize and challenge dualism. On the other hand, by acknowledging and using political representations,

feminist scholars fall into discriminatory binarism. Their logic (first negate and then to affirm) is exactly the trap of transcendence that they fail in and have not yet overcome.

Claire Johnston (1999) makes a dualistic separation between women's cinema and men's cinema when she accuses male-dominated cinema of being sexist. Yet again, 'man' and 'woman' should not be understood as static concepts. The problem is it is in her accusation of a sexist mainstream cinema that Johnston (already) confirms 'woman' is (already) a victim. In sum, the drawback of feminist film theory of the 1970s and the 1980s is that it does not really question 'what is a woman' (to borrow Toril Moi's words, 2005) on screen. In order to really empower women, it is therefore necessary that feminist film theory has to work out through the very notion of 'woman'. By this, I do not mean women's struggles for empowerment and women's history of oppression should be forgotten. The point here is from an anti-Platonic thinking, we should acknowledge that the woman on screen is not a mirror of the woman in real life. From a non-essentialist and non-dialectical understanding, 'woman' is not a fixed category. For a moment of 'essentially speaking' (to borrow Diana Fuss's words, 1985), we may relate this 'woman' to the historical discourse of the master and the slave. Nevertheless, if we go far enough, we should be critical that the dialecticist epistemology is not productive enough because it cannot offer a mobile, non-discriminatory, and rhizomatic understanding of what a woman is. In terms of politics, it may make re-action, but it does not encourage action.

Second, though there have been a number of feminist discussions on the use and abuse of psychoanalysis and ideological apparatuses for the study of cinema, this intentional approach might be epistemologically flawed because it poses a dualistic separation between the subject/the represented and the object/the represent. Dating back to Kant, in this approach, the subject is the authentic knower of the outside world whereas the world is a reflection of and decided by the subject.

Early feminist film theory is very much concerned with the applications of Marxist ideology and Althusser's notion of interpellation. Claire Johnston (1999) sees that a film is eventually a product of economic and ideological relations. For Johnston, ideology is not an illusion, it is real, and therefore 'there is no way in which we can eliminate' it (1999, 36). Annette Kuhn in *The Power of the Image* agrees on the relevance of Althusserian thought to feminism because she believes that our ways of thinking about the world, of representing the world are constituted and 'naturalized' by ideology (1985, 4-5). In a more critical sense, Jennifer

Hammett (1997) seems to be skeptical about the feminist celebration of Althusserian interpellation in film studies. She claims that feminists need to escape ideology because ‘the marriage of representation to ideology severely limited feminism’s strategic options’ (1997, 86). For her, feminist film theory should ‘be alert’ (1997, 86) to any essentialist patriarchal definition. Yet, unfortunately, Hammett does not further articulate her thoughts on how this ‘impediment’ (1997, 85) of ideology is constructed and how it creates a devastating impact on feminist politics. This blind spot makes her argument less justified. Believing that representation can be separated from ideology by ‘a critical distance’ (1997, 87), Hammett insists on the importance of constructing feminist representation in cinema. Yet, this argument is paradoxical because within the paradigm of representation, it will be impossible to divorce from ideology. Thus Hammett’s problem is that she does not consider the need to overcome the metaphysics of representation.

Louis Althusser in *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses* clearly explains that ideology in general ‘has no history’ (1971, 159). Yet, ideology produces the subject through hailing, interpellation and misrecognition. Ideology ‘has a material existence’ (1971, 165) because it ‘represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence’ (1971, 162). By granting ideology an autonomous and eternal status, Althusser sees that there is no way to escape from ideology. He confirms, ‘the category of the subject ... is the constitutive category of all ideology, whatever its determination (region or class) and whatever its historical date’ (1971, 170-171). However, this Althusserian notion is discriminatory because, ontologically, it demonstrates two asymmetrical levels: the ideology/the referent and the subject/the reference, which is impossible to reconcile. The same transcendental logic is applied to Lacanian psychoanalysis when ‘man’ is seen as the real, the original, the authentic whereas ‘woman’ is considered as the shadow, the unreal, the inauthentic at the other side of the mirror. Feminist film scholars (e.g. Kaplan 1983, Mulvey 1999) are too eager to believe that this transcendental paradigm will be a ‘radical weapon’ (Mulvey 1999, 59) in order to ‘see clearly the patriarchal myths’ through which women have been positioned as Other (Kaplan 1983, 24). Another argument raised by psychoanalytic feminists is that Freudian-Lacanian theory can help to ‘unlock the secrets of our socialization within (capitalist) patriarchy’ (Kaplan 1983, 24). To go further, scholars even believe that feminism and psychoanalysis share the same concerns, i.e. ‘the relation between gender and identifications’ (see Humm 1997, 15).

Nevertheless, Christine Gledhill (1999, 166) argues that there is a must to question this binaristic psychoanalysis, and unless the masculinized perspective is challenged, the theoretical convergence of psychoanalysis and cinema will still be problematic for feminisms. This is because notions of cinematic voyeurism and fetishism that serve as norms for psychoanalysis cannot help to theorize the feminine as anything other than ‘lack’, ‘absence’, ‘otherness’ (see Gledhill 1999, 166). Ontologically, Irigaray (1987) already attacks psychoanalysis for being the theory of Sameness. In this Sameness, only the father/the man does exist, and thus the outside world is just his own projection. That is to say, this feminist Freudian-Lacanian argumentation eventually goes back to the Platonic metaphysics of the real and the copy.

Third, the constructivist approach refers to the construction of power-knowledge through discourse. This approach is preferred by feminists who apply Foucault’s discursive formations and Butler’s performativity in their study of films and visual arts (e.g. Munoz 1999, Halberstam 2011, Fleski 1996, or Butler 1988a). Yet, this representational approach in various ways replicates binarism, and therefore it will be an inconsistency between non-discriminatory goals and binaristic tools if this approach is made use by feminists.

According to Foucault (1972), discursive formations refer to discourse. He argues that we are constituted by discourse. Yet, discourse does not necessarily mean linguistics (Foucault 1981). For Foucault, discourse has a ‘material reality’ because it ‘belongs to the order of laws’ and it exists ‘all around us’ (1981, 51, 52, 58). Nevertheless, Foucault emphasizes that discourse is not a preexisting signification. Discourse does not express meaning. For Foucault, discourse produces knowledge and power through its constitutive practices or through its *doing* (through the way it does). Foucault writes, ‘we must not imagine that the world turns towards us a legible face which we would have only to decipher; the world is not the accomplice of our knowledge; there is no prediscursive providence which disposes the world in our favor’ (1981, 67). Therefore, discourse is ‘which we *do* to things’ or ‘in any case as a practice which we impose on them; and it is in this practice that the events of discourse find the principle of their regularity’ (1981, 67, italics added). Foucault attempts to decentralize the subject by placing it in constitutive relations of discourse (see 1982, 778). Yet, despite this decentering (or anti-humanist) view, his conception of discourse is still binaristic. This is because Foucauldian discourse does not go out from representation. Discourse is still a system of representation, since

Foucault believes ‘nothing has any meaning outside of discourse’ (quoted in Hall 2003, 45). In this regard, discourse is equivocal—as Foucault admits (see 1972, 107).

Also, according to Foucault, his notion of discourse ‘is very unfaithful to the Hegelian logos’ (1981, 74). Elsewhere, he says the Hegelian skeleton cannot be accountable to explain the always open and ‘hazardous reality of conflicts’ and complexities (1980, 114-115). However, by assuming an equivocal relation between an abstracted discourse and a de-centered subject which is subjugated by this discourse, Foucault has not yet escaped from the negative Hegelian dialectic. In a similar sense, Foucault himself realizes how hard it is to leave Hegel and he also has to confess ‘how close Hegel has come to us, perhaps insidiously’ (1981, 74).

Feminist philosopher Judith Butler develops further Foucault’s notion of discourse into her concept of performative gender. Like Foucault, Butler emphasizes the *doing* of gender. Throughout her works, Butler attempts to ‘denaturalize’ gender (1999, xx) and contests that gender is neither stable nor preexisting but rather, it is an identity that is constructed through a stylized and subversive repetition of acts (1988b, 520). To make it clear, Butler compares these acts—by which gender is constituted—to performative acts in theatrical contexts (1988b, 521). Importantly, although Butler acknowledges the contribution of corporeal acts, she particularly underlines socio-cultural constructions when insisting that these acts ‘*wear* certain cultural significations’ (1988b, 525, italics in original). Like Foucault, Butler also decentralizes the subject by arguing that repetitive and subversive acts are performed discontinuously and somewhat unreflexively by an abstracted subject.² It seems at first Butler’s gender performativity disavows any foundation and presumption of an autonomous master subject. However, unfortunately, since her first book *Subjects of Desire: Hegelian Reflections in Twentieth-Century France* (1987), Butler has never stayed away from Hegel.

On the one hand, Butler commits to a non-given, non-preexisting gender identity. She claims ‘there would be no true or false, real or distorted acts of gender’ (1988b, 528) because gender identity has ‘no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality’ (1999, 173). On the other hand, Butler acknowledges an equivocal ontology of these acts. She takes culture—which is in fact a representational construction—as a frame of references to

² At this point, I have been inspired by Lise Nelson’s critique of Butler. Nelson (1999) argues that Butler’s performativity has been misread by linking performativity to an unproblematic notion of agency.

gender acts. In that sense, Butler's performativity goes back to the Platonic cave. Her postmodernist-poststructuralist notion of gender as something fluid may lead to a misunderstanding that this fluidity does not base in any ground. Yet, in fact, Butler's notion of performativity is identical to Jean Baudrillard's concept of simulacrum. This simulacrum again dates back to Platonism but develops further into an immense, infinite gap between the real and the copy so that the copy is no longer any resemblance to the real.³ Due to its lack of resemblance, we misunderstand that the copy stands alone—in its performative terms—whereas there is no authenticity. The point is that in Butler's theory, the copy is still an image of an origin or a foundation—though without resemblance. As Baudrillard (1983) would say, since even God himself loses his own resemblance, God is now only an image, a simulacrum. Yes, when God is just a phantasm, everything has been reduced to a mere sign, to another phantasm, another simulacrum. Our reality—which has been saturated by images—becomes hyperreality that we mistake for real (see Baudrillard 1983). Butler's gender performativity—while appealing for the loss of originality but still relying on some certain ground (e.g. culture)—is no more than Baudrillardian simulations in that hyperreality. Furthermore, the turn to culture in order to 'denaturalize' gender (in Butler's words) has indeed presumed a Hegelian dualistic separation between culture and nature. On her reading of Butler, Vicki Kirby (2007) criticizes Butler for not thoroughly questioning culture and erasing nature entirely outside culture. For Butler's dualism, 'nature is prescriptive' (Kirby 2007, 81) whereas in fact, if seen from a monistic ontology, 'there is nothing immutable or *prescriptive*' (2007, 84, italics in original), including nature.

Butler's loyalty to Hegel lies in her hesitation to divorce from his dialecticism. On the one hand, she does not accept representationalism uncritically. In *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, Butler (1999) wants to dismiss any categorical understanding of women because she realizes that this way of understanding has kept women confined in preexisting patriarchal representation. Yet, on the other hand, Butler drives back to Hegel because she still sees there is a need to activate political representationalism which—for her—is 'to extend visibility and legitimacy to women as political subjects' (1999, 3-4). At this point, Butler is less critical, and Barad may be right when she points out her frustration with our habit of mind,

³ I owe to Gilles Deleuze's critique of Plato in *The Logic of Sense*. In Platonism, the copy is the image with resemblance to the real, whereas the simulacrum is the image without resemblance to the real. Yet, both of them are unreal, even if they are all reflections of the real (see Deleuze 1990a).

which is—as Barad (2007, 49) puts it—indeed a heritage of Western dialecticism rather than a logical necessity.

In sum, the three modes of seeing (i.e. mimesis, intentionality, performativity) have revealed their limitations. The blindest spot of current feminist film theory is that it does not question its epistemology—which in this case is representationalism. While representationalism becomes a common sense so that it seems ‘natural’ and ‘inescapable’ (Barad 2007, 48), it is clear that representationalism is binaristic, and inarguably, it is the discourse for domination and submission. Feminist film scholars have made a big effort to criticize and destabilize this discrimination. However, their methodology may be fragile in some aspects, needing a radical paradigm shift. Their uncertainty and inconsistency between their goal and their means leads them to return to the legacy of Plato and Hegel as shown above. To attain a truly non-discriminatory goal, we must learn to see beyond the framework of representationalism, which is not at all an easy task. In search for a new epistemology which is not restricted by that dialectical tradition of thought, I shall demonstrate in the following parts the turn to Deleuze’s affect as an alternative tool for the study of cinema, body and space. I shall argue that this Deleuzian framework is indeed feminist-friendly and thus it can be extremely useful to de-essentialize and destabilize binaristic discrimination.

1.3. A Turn to Deleuzian Affect

In the current social sciences and humanities, affect is not a new term. If we trace it back to the 1960s, affect already appeared in the seminal work *Affect Imagery Consciousness* by the American psychologist Silvan Tomkins. Since the mid-1990s, with Brian Massumi’s seminal essay *The Autonomy of Affect* and his declaration of affect taking over ideology, affect has become a fashionable term. Today’s an affective-based research can be conducted from a variety of approaches, e.g. cognitive psychological-phenomenological framework (see Tomkins 2008; Sedgwick 1995, 2003; Ahmed 2004, 2000), bio-techno-science (Barad 2007; Haraway 1997; Clough 2008, Blackman 2013), or Deleuzian philosophy (Colebrook 2000, 2002, 2010; Massumi 1995; Featherstone 2010). In *The Affect Theory Reader*, Melissa Gregg and Gregory Seigworth (2010) mention at least eight disparate approaches to affective studies, derived from phenomenology, technology, posthumanism, psychology, feminist studies, cross-disciplines

between hard science (e.g. physics, neurology) and humanities, critical discourses of emotions, materialism. Despite this disparity, the thriving affective scholarship is still a relatively new approach as it is not easy to conceptualize under one umbrella or to put into concrete practice. It is thus understandable that there have been a lot of excitement, skepticism, anxieties, misunderstanding, and controversies over this affective matrix. Within the Deleuzian affective framework, Claire Hemmings (2005) and Ruth Leys (2011) have raised strong critiques and doubts about the role of affect in feminist theory. Yet, as discussed below, these critiques are not yet justified. However, to thoroughly understand the mechanism of the Deleuzian affective framework, I want to begin first and foremost with his paradigm of immanence and his critique of representation.

Paradigm of Immanence: The Onto-Ethic-Epistemological Turn

Throughout Deleuzian philosophy, it is unarguable that immanence is the paradigm that Deleuze constructs his thoughts. To make this point clearer, it is worth listing here some notable distinctions between immanence and transcendence—the two most important traditions of Continental thought. For Daniel Smith (2003), in terms of subjectivity, immanence refers to the sphere of the subject itself whereas transcendence refers to what transcends the Other to the subject in the sphere outside the subject. Ontologically, transcendence is about the ‘beyond’ or ‘higher than’ or ‘otherwise than’ Being whereas immanence is about the Being itself, in itself, and there is no Other beyond or superior to this Being (see Smith 2003). Transcendence is dualistic due to its belief in the existence of a foundationalism, of ‘an absolute Other’ (2003, 59) whereas immanence is monistic due to its univocal ontology. Epistemologically, as Smith has pointed out, transcendence stresses experience of the impossibility (the impossible experience) whereas immanence believes in the possibility of experience (the potential experience). In transcendence, overcoming metaphysics is a problem due to the condition of impossibility, and therefore, one can only deconstruct metaphysics from within (e.g. deconstruction) (see Smith 2003). Meanwhile, overcoming metaphysics is no longer a problem in immanence because metaphysics itself ‘is dynamic and in constant becoming’ (2003, 50), and therefore, creation and transformation are of course possible within (2003, 49). Ethically, transcendence is a negative theory because of its negation (neither... nor) whereas immanence is positive and affirmative

because of its ability to say ‘yes’ (and... and... and...) and to transform up to infinity (without any teleology) (also see Smith 2003). In this regard, the primary ethical question is ‘not *What must I do?* (the question of morality) but rather *What can I do?* [or] what are my capabilities and capacities?’ (2003, 62, italics added).

Pure Immanence: Essays on A Life is the title of the last book that Deleuze writes before his death. In his final message, Deleuze makes a last attempt to convince what he previously believes that ‘the world does not exist outside of its expressions’ (Deleuze 1993, 132). Thus he argues for a pure immanence, an absolute immanence in itself, ‘not *to* something’, ‘not immanence *to* substance; rather, substance and modes are [all] in immanence’ (2001, 26, italic in original). Translating this Deleuzian immanent ontology into feminist studies, Claire Colebrook (2002, 2005) argues that revolution can really begin if we free ourselves from the illusions of transcendence—the illusion that there is already a ground or law higher than ourselves (the law of human culture, class, gender, language for instance) and that law simply needs to be obeyed or revealed because we are the lower, the representation, the copy of that absolute law (other). In this immanent understanding, ‘the fact that we cannot secure a foundation ... means that we are given the opportunity to invent, create and experiment’ (Colebrook 2002, 2). In this way, Deleuzian ethic-onto-epistemology of immanence prevents us from being enslaved *to* the other as well as being enslaved *to* ourselves. On not being enslaved, we no longer need to seek power from the outside because our power is already immanent, everywhere, pure, absolute, and bliss.

On the Ruin of Representation

As I have shown (see 1.2.), representation is the legacy of Western metaphysics dating back to Plato. Revolting against this habit of thought, Deleuze sets out a main task for his philosophy as anti-representationalism and anti-dialecticism. In *Difference and Repetition* (1994a), he points out that representation is a transcendental illusion, whereas in *The Logic of Sense* (1990a), he reveals that the hidden agenda of representationalism/dialecticism is ‘to select lineages: to distinguish pretenders; to distinguish the pure from the impure, the authentic from the inauthentic’ (1990a, 254). Deleuze thus urges philosophers of the future to reverse Platonism. This means to abolish any hierarchy between essences and appearances, ideas and forms, models and copies, the real and the phantasm. The ultimate task is to affirm the power for the

simulacrum, which has been considered as the false, the degraded copy of the copy in Platonism. Unlike the Baudrillardian simulacrum which is still faithful to the Platonic heritage (by his consideration that the simulacrum is just hyperreal but we misunderstand as the real), Deleuze affirms the univocal status of the simulacrum. For Deleuze, the simulacrum is real,⁴ it does not oppose itself to the real. It does not lack or lose any reality, and therefore does not need to be in any process of realization. Deleuze's affirmation disregards any illusionary foundation because—as he notes (1990a)—this founding myth is a source for subordination through judgment of good or bad, ill-founded or well-founded copies and images. Deleuze believes 'groundlessness' (1994a, 276) is a condition for 'a universal breakdown' of the Model and for 'a joyful and positive event' of the Copy (1990a, 263). In this hierarchical breakdown, the image stands alone. It is no longer a representation. Its difference becomes different *in* itself rather than difference *from*.

This Nietzschean-Deleuzian call for rebellion through overthrowing the distinction between the signifier and the signified is a revolutionary thought. From a feminist perspective, this thought encourages us to remove the 'burden of representation' (to use Yuval-Davis's words, 1997) that is given to women—who are treated as the copy, the false, the simulacra in patriarchal Western tradition. As Dorothea Olkowski (1999) puts it, on the ruin of representation, women affirm their power of existence and thus come to exist, without being imprisoned in any fantasy of Oedipal structures. In other words, by affirming the power of the false, Deleuze's philosophy of pure immanence can help solve the very problems of essentialism and discriminatory binarism that feminist politics faces. Particularly, in the collapse of representation, women no longer need to be imprisoned within any essentialist identification or strategic identity politics.

On the ruin of representation, Deleuze argues that aesthetics will not suffer from 'a wrenching duality' (1990a, 260) between transferring possible experience on the one hand and reflecting real experience on the other. This point is crucial because liberated from representation, arts do not need to be enslaved to any foundation. By the power of affirmation, arts will enjoy their freedom to invent unlimited forms of experience beyond limited foundational grounds. Creation—rather than mere reflection, mere criticism, and destruction—

⁴ Elsewhere, Deleuze calls the simulacrum the false. In *Cinema 2*, Deleuze (2000a) devotes one chapter to write about the power of the false with his inspiration from Nietzsche and Bergson.

thus becomes the power of the arts. In this Deleuzian non-representational paradigm, cinematic ontology has shifted from the equivocal plane of transcendence (where two incommensurable substances, two kinds or modes oppose, negate or transcend each other) to the plane of immanence (where each being is univocal). Hence, every cinematic image is no longer a copy of an imaginary original reality. This also means issues of women's representation and female spectatorship which are central to traditional feminist film theory and criticism (see Smelik 2007, 491) are no longer of importance. In this sense, as Jill Bennett (2005) puts it, arts in general and cinema in particular should be best understood in terms of transaction. By 'transaction', cinema is defined by its affective experience, and more precisely, its capacity to affect and to be affected.

What is Affect?

Throughout my thesis, I consider affect as a critical-creative tool for feminist film studies rather than a *per se* object of study. Seeing affect as a methodological tool, I want to make clear that the term 'affect' I am using here refers to affect in experiencing (affective experience) and not to a separated object. Inspired by Deleuze's anti-representational philosophy, I conceptualize the affective framework into four characters: virtuality, non-intentionality, incorporeality, and becoming. In the following parts, I shall demonstrate my justification for this conceptualization.

First, affect is virtual.

Claire Hemmings, in *Invoking Affect* (2005), claims that she becomes frustrated and 'genuinely confused' with the current celebration of affect because she does not believe affect can be a critical tool for feminism. Yet, Hemmings has missed a crucial point that the power of affect lies in its virtuality. In this Bergsonian-Deleuzian indebtedness, the virtual does not oppose to the real, it is real, but not yet being actual. In *Bergsonism* (1991) and in *Difference and Repetition* (1994a), Deleuze clearly distinguishes the immanent virtual from the transcendental possible. For Deleuze, the possible is still a resemblance of the real so that it needs to be realized, whereas the virtual is no longer any resemblance and therefore it is real in itself and does not need to be in realization. Yet, as Deleuze (1991, 97) argues, the virtual only needs to be actualized by being

differentiated and differentiating itself (rather than being resembled and resembling to the other as in the case of the possible). Because the actual is the effect of the virtual, Deleuze believes that our world is created by virtual potentialities. In reading of Deleuze, Colebrook (2002) develops this point further by arguing that we only realize these virtual potentialities after they have been actualized, but what we should rather see is the virtual or the power of simulation itself because each actual thing already maintains its own virtual. In this immanent understanding, we are ourselves virtual.

In the Deleuzian paradigm, affective experience can only be constituted by the powers of the false—the powers of the simulacrum. In *Cinema 2*, Deleuze (2000a) devotes one chapter to affirm these powers. Taking Nietzsche's concept of power as power to will and to act (rather than a transcendental power that opposes to and is taken over from the other), Deleuze argues that cinema has the power to make visible the invisible (e.g. sound, thought, time, movement). That is to say, cinema has the power of actualization. Yet, since the actual already contains the virtual and the virtual already has the potential of the actual, cinema must be best understood as the real-virtual or the virtual-actual. This virtual-actual character, as Deleuze has noted, should be seen as the crucial mechanism of cinema. Here, the not-yet-being-actual of cinema should not be mistaken as the possible in dialectical thought. Whereas in dialecticism, the possible is unreal therefore it does not have the real power to act, in Deleuze's radical immanence, the possible is converted into the real-virtual and therefore it experiences the real condition of possibility. This point is critical in a sense that it does not only attack the dialectic but also creates a new perspective to think otherwise and to affirm power. Due to this affirmative virtual, the function of cinema has shifted from an ideological apparatus and a mimetic tool into power of affect. This affective power can also be understood as transactive power. It is the power of transaction from cinema to the viewer that makes the viewer become with cinema. In Deleuze and Guattari's manifesto for art, philosophy, and science in *What Is Philosophy?* (1994b), the two make this point clearer when they discuss the transactive power of art. They write, 'it should be said of all art that, in relation to the percepts or visions they give us, artists are presenters of affects, the inventors and creators of affects' (1994b, 175) because 'they not only create them in their work, they give them to us and make us become with them, they draw us into compound' (1994b, 175).

Second, affect is non-intentional.

From my anti-foundationalist point of view, I want to demonstrate that affective experience is non-intentional. I am aware of a heated debate about whether affect is intentional or unintentional (see Hemmings 2005, Ahmed 2010, Leys 2011, Massumi 1995). In his article *The Autonomy of Affect*, Brian Massumi (1995) argues that affective responses to cinematic images are autonomous whereas Ruth Leys (2011) attacks him for reproducing dichotomies between the mind and the body. While Claire Hemmings (2005) emphasizes the role of judgments and socio-cultural contexts over bodily responses, Sara Ahmed (2010), following her phenomenological tradition, is skeptical about the use of the term ‘autonomy’, because for her, it does not show connections between bodies and outside worlds.

Yet, Hemmings and Leys’ criticisms are not justified enough. In her critique of Massumi, Leys claims that Massumi has misinterpreted the half-second delay of the brain in response to the film images in order to celebrate the triumph of bodily affect. Thus she denies the autonomy of affect because for her, affect is neither non-signifying nor unintentional. From her transcendental paradigm, she does not think of affective experience outside ideological representation. Furthermore, her argument fails to be a thorough critique and construction for the emerging affective turn when she does not clearly differentiate affective experience in Tomkins’ psychological-phenomenological framework and that in Spinozist-Deleuzian paradigm. In a similar sense, Hemmings doubts whether affect is autonomous because for her, individual affect cannot be placed outside socio-cultural contexts. Yet, her argumentation is not fully convincing because she fails to challenge representationalism. In her attack on Massumi’s thesis, Hemmings takes the socio-cultural foundation for granted and thus shapes a transcendental understanding of affect as something totally constructed by culture. Since culture is unquestioned whereas non-culture is assumed to be muted and not taken into account, she turns back to the logic of discriminatory binarism.

In a common understanding, Sara Ahmed (2010) is critical of the use of the term ‘autonomy’ because it can be mistaken as a study object rather than an encounter that we experience. From the phenomenological paradigm, affect is intentional—as Ahmed (2010, 32) rightly puts it. Yet, moving beyond the phenomenological framework, affective experience is indeed non-intentional or autonomous. In the paradigm of radical immanence, this autonomy or

non-intentionality is shaped by virtuality and intensity in each encounter. What Massumi is trying to achieve in his Deleuzian-inspired essay is to offer an alternative understanding of bodily affect in a non-representationalist thinking although elsewhere, his argument is not always made clear by a quick reading. One of the key points that Massumi accounts for the autonomy of affect is his emphasis on the virtuality. It is the virtual that makes affect transfer from intentionality—which is in fact a Platonic foundation—to non-intentionality—which is non-foundational. As Massumi has tried to explain, what is being termed affect in his work is ‘precisely this two-sidedness, the simultaneous participation of the virtual in the actual and the actual in the virtual, as one arises from and returns to the other’ (1995, 96). In this actual-virtual, affect has the real power to escape ‘confinement in the particular body’ (1995, 96) and thus becomes autonomous in itself and for itself.

In this Deleuzian monistic framework, the body is not only inseparable from the mind but also cannot be treated as a representation of the mind. When Massumi concludes ‘the skin is faster than the word’ (1995, 86), one may interpret this finding as a celebration of the body over the mind by a quick and dismissive reading. Yet, what Massumi really wants to convey here is an affective response to the film images that hits both the body and the brain. In so doing, Massumi argues that affect must be in intensity. This intensity is a necessary condition for the impersonality (or autonomy, or non-intentionality) of affect. Both Hemmings and Leys fail to address this point and therefore the two quickly dismiss Massumi’s attempt to propose a different understanding of body-mind relation before they really engage with his argument. For Massumi, on the one hand, intensity is visceral because it is embodied directly in the skin (see 1995, 85). On the other hand, he believes intensity is ‘unassimilable’ (1995, 88) because it goes beyond any pre-structure, meaning, and signification. But this does not mean intensity is outside the social as Hemmings’ critique of Massumi. As Massumi articulates, intensity ‘is asocial, but not presocial—it *includes* social elements, but mixes them with elements belonging to other levels of functioning, and combines them according to different logic’ (1995, 91, italics in original). In its own logic, that intensity travels immediately between brain and body, between consciousness and non-consciousness in ‘a surprising mixture’ outside any expectation and adaptation (1995, 85-87). This immediate, unexpected, and non-mediated intensity can refer to Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of the saturation of affect. In their reading of Virginia Woolf, Deleuze and Guattari explain how saturation goes beyond our lived body:

How can a moment of the world be rendered durable or made to exist by itself? Virginia Woolf provides an answer that is as valid for painting and music as it is for writing: “Saturate every atom,” “eliminate all waste, deadness, superfluity,” everything that adheres to our current and lived perceptions, everything that nourishes the mediocre novelist; and keep only the saturation that gives us the percept. (Deleuze and Guattari 1994b, 172)

In *Cinema 2*, Deleuze notes that while pictorial images themselves are immobile and choreographic images remain attached to a moving body, only saturation in every atom of images makes images achieve ‘self-movement’ or ‘automatic movement’ (2000a, 156). At the saturated peak, this self-movement is no longer dependent on its representational forms (e.g. a moving body, an object, a spirit). Importantly, Deleuze argues ‘it is the mind which has to “make” movement’ (2000a, 156). This means affect is always affect with percept. Considering that affect is not intentional does not imply it is simply out of consciousness. In fact, affect resides in between the unconscious and the conscious. This in-betweenness is a moment of overlapping actual-virtual where affect becomes what Deleuze calls ‘a shock to thought’ (2000a, 156). Only in this shock, our cerebral systems are touched directly without any mediation so that we can no longer say ‘I see, I hear’, but ‘I FEEL and I THINK directly’ (2000a, 158, capitals in original). This is a critical point that Deleuze has made regarding the ethic-epistemology of cinema. On the one hand, it demonstrates the capacity of cinema in thinking itself. In *Negotiations*, as a response to Foucault, Deleuze calls himself ‘the most naïve philosopher’ (1995, 88) of his generation because he prefers ‘almost raw concepts’ (concepts without mediation), while others like to ‘work with more mediation’ (1995, 89). Yet, it is this Deleuzian naïve belief in raw concepts and pure capacities that has challenged the nihilistic and pessimistic tradition of thinking. When Heidegger says: ‘Man can think in the sense that he possesses the possibility to do so. This possibility alone, however, is no guarantee to us that we are capable of thinking’ (quoted in Deleuze 2000a, 156), Deleuze argues the opposite: ‘It is this capacity, this power, and not the simple logical possibility, that cinema claims to give us in communicating the shock. It is as if cinema were telling us: with me, with the movement-image, you cannot escape the shock which arouses the thinker in you’ (2000a, 156). On the other hand, in a Deleuzian understanding, cinema is neither a capitalist commercial entertainment nor a fetishistic fantasy. Going beyond the negative critique of the Frankfurt school and psychoanalysis, Deleuze sees each cinematic-image as an ‘action-thought’ (2000a, 161) because ‘the concept is in itself in the

image, and the image is for itself in the concept' (2000a, 161). It is this Deleuzian 'naïve' belief in the capacity of thinking itself that makes cinema become political and philosophical.

Additionally, Deleuze warns us not to mistake affect—shock—with the actual physical violence or blood on screen. This is because affect does not depend on its representational and intentional form. Instead, affect—shock—comes from the virtual violence of the movement-image itself when it encounters other images and saturates in the mind of the viewer. In a more detail, Deleuze explains, 'there is shock of images between themselves according to the domain characteristic, or shock in the image itself depending on its components, and, again, shock of images depending on all their components; the shock is the very form of communication of movement in images' (2000a, 157). That is to say this shock produces an immediate transaction, in which the image, the camera, and the viewer are integrated and elaborated into each other like 'a circuit' (2000a, 161) so that cinema can communicate and its artistic essence can be realized.

Third, affect is incorporeal.

Corporeal feminism often looks into phenomenology to search for accounts of women's lived experience (see Fisher 2000, Kruks 2006). Yet, it is not unproblematic. First, while defending the phenomenological tradition from being charged with essentialism and universalism, corporeal feminism considers experience of 'my body' (Fisher 2000) as an authentic resource for knowledge. The point here is that the notion of 'my body', of women's biologically and culturally situated experience, is not unquestionable if this experience is still a reflection of prior ideas or certain grounds rather than experience itself. As Ramazanoglu and Holland (2002) have also pointed out, it is not always the case that personal experience can be authentic or reliable as long as that experience is socially constructed. Second, to make phenomenology work, some corporeal feminists quickly adopt 'gender' for this lived 'experience'. For instance, with Linda Fisher (2000), experience is always 'gendered experience'. That said, gender as a form of representation remains unquestioned and the body—as a priori—is taken for granted. Moving into the paradigm of immanence, gender, experience and the body are independent substances. Each of them stands itself and cannot be any foundation for the other. Yet, relying on the transcendental paradigm, phenomenology and corporeal feminism cannot get rid of dialecticist foundationalism. In *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty (1999), talks about a 'pre-

established' body as a condition of being-in-the-world whereas the world is already there, waiting for the body to inhabit. The transcendental body in Merleau-Ponty's existential phenomenology is always drawn to the other. Although the flesh can be a site of possibilities and actions towards the world, it 'never quite falls back on to itself' (1999, 165). This is because Merleau-Ponty believes 'bodily existence is never self-sufficient, it is always a prey to an active nothingness, it continually sets the prospect of living before me' (1999, 165). The lived experience is always the experience based on a foundation because 'what is given is not the thing on its own, but the experience of the thing, or something transcendent standing in the wake of one's subjectivity' (1999, 173).

Here it is not to argue that the phenomenological framework should not be in use as long as it still strategically addresses the question of women's lived experience. However, to overcome dialecticism, a phenomenological paradigm may not suffice. In her critique of corporeal feminism in *Incorporeality—The Ghostly Body of Metaphysics*, Colebrook (2000) points out that the association between the body and femininity is indeed representational, culturally contingent, and structural rather than ontological. It is because in fact, 'thought is always embodied; and masculine subjects are as much affected by passions as others' (2000, 28). Colebrook (2000, 39) reminds us that the history of philosophy has offered no shortage of substances, essences, foundations or humanisms that have defined, normalized and fixed what it means to think in corporealization, e.g. from the 'soul' in ancient philosophy to Husserl's transcendental subjectivity. Therefore, she suggests what twenty-first-century feminist theory needs to achieve is not to *re-embodiment* the mind—which has already been embodied as proved by philosophy, neurology and science—but rather, to *de-corporealize* the body (e.g. as Foucault did with the concept of panopticon) in order to challenge this hierarchical difference.

For the task of feminist de-corporealization, Deleuze's philosophy can be of relevance. It is clear that the incorporeality is much more important than the corporeality in Deleuze's works (see *The Logic of Sense, A Thousand Plateaus, Cinema 1, Cinema 2, Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation, What Is Philosophy?*). The type of experience that Deleuze advocates is not the experience of the flesh (he often criticizes phenomenology), but rather, the experience of the nonhuman, machines, plants, matter, animals, and materiality. Deleuze considers arts and cinema as significant factors to invent such kinds of experience. That is why he writes, 'art begins not with flesh but with the house' (Deleuze and Guattari 1994b, 186) or 'the smile on the canvas is

made solely with colors, lines, shadow, and light' (1994b, 166). On the Deleuzian plane of immanence, experience is no longer experience to some ground and the world is not already there to be experienced (or to be constructed) by a separate subject. Neither the world nor the subject has any ground outside itself. Experience, including women's experience, is no longer enslaved to any transcendental (patriarchal) foundation. For Deleuze, experience is experience itself, in itself—without subjects or objects, inside or outside, human or nonhuman. In these multiplicities of experiences and connections (between human and nonhuman, corporeality and incorporeality), the subject is made (see Colebrook 2002).

Perhaps, the easiest way to think about affective experience is to equate it with emotion. Yet, in the anti-foundationalist Deleuzian framework, affect is not emotion. While emotion is mediated through the flesh, affect has its own capacities to transmit and to be transmitted without any mediation. This point is critical of phenomenology. As Deleuze and Guattari have noted, affect needs to free from the flesh because the flesh is 'too tender' (1994b, 179) (or too self-insufficient as defined by Merleau-Ponty) so that it cannot stand up by itself. We can only attain to affect and percept when affect and percept no longer owe anything to those who experience or have experienced (1994b, 169). As Deleuze and Guattari explain, 'the artist creates blocs of percepts and affects, but the only law of creation is that the compound must stand up on its own' and must 'exist in the absence of man' (1994b, 164). In a similar sense, the two declare that the aim of art is 'to raise lived perceptions to the percept and lived affections to the affect' (1994b, 170) or 'to wrest the percept from perceptions of objects and the states of a perceiving subject' and 'to wrest the affect from affections as the transition from one state to another' (1994b, 167). This is because—as Deleuze believes—affect constitutes 'a *zone of indiscernibility or undecidability* between man and animal' (2003, 21, italics in original). In other words, affect is the 'nonhuman becomings of man' (Deleuze and Guattari 1994b, 169). This Deleuzian statement clearly advocates a posthumanist understanding of the relation between the corporeal and the incorporeal. This is not to romanticize the nonhuman, the incorporeal as a dismissive reading of Deleuze might note. Indeed, this posthumanist notion of de-corporealization is no more than a strong politics of liberating the marginal/the incorporeal/the nonhuman/woman from foundational subjugation—which in this case is the human/the corporeal/culture/man. In Deleuzian posthumanism, there is nothing higher than or prior to the being itself. Also, it is in this Deleuzian posthumanism that de-corporealization becomes an urgent political task because

de-corporealization means de-anthropocentrism and de-Eurocentrism—which eventually resonates with feminist political targets.

Similarly, from this posthumanist anti-foundationalist perspective, in *Cinema 2*, Deleuze continues emphasizing on affective experience of ‘the non-indifference’ (2000a, 163) between the incorporeal, the cinema, the nature with its viewer, the corporeal, the culture. In his radical immanence, Deleuze says ‘cinema does not have the individual as its subject, nor a plot or history as its object’ (2000a, 162). This is not to universalize cinema. For Deleuze, cinema is not indifferent to the people because cinema is ‘art of the mass’ on the one hand and ‘its object is nature’ (2000a, 162) on the other hand. Thus cinema is historical in a sense that—instead of a static and deterministic view—through affective experience of the non-indifference, humans will pass to a new quality, and become ‘the collective subject’ while ‘nature becomes the objective human relation’ (2000a, 162).

Traditional feminist film theory has put the gaze/the eye into much power. This is problematic. Drawing from quantum physics experiment, feminist physicist Karen Barad proves that visual clues may be misleading because seeing is not always constituted with knowing (2007, 155). Thus, Barad suggests searching for ‘a new starting place’ (2007, 137). This starting place is we must learn how to create other experiences, including a sensory-unity experience between cinema and humans, humans and nature, nature and thought rather than just worshipping the (distant) look. In other words, we should better see cinema as a combination of haptic vision and affective senses.

Fourth, affect is becoming.

Becoming is one of the most important concepts in Deleuze’s philosophy. Deleuze creates this concept as a response to traditional metaphysics of being. If affect is ‘a question of freeing life from wherever it is imprisoned’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1994b, 171), Deleuze then believes affect is our ontology, affect is incorporeal transformations and affect is becoming (1994b; 2005). In Deleuze and Guattari’s works, there are several types of becomings: becoming-tree, becoming-plant, becoming-rat, becoming-bird, becoming-molecular, becoming-zero, becoming-intense, becoming-animal, becoming-woman, becoming-universe, becoming-imperceptible, etc.

There are different feminist readings of this concept that I shall diagnose as dismissal, acceptance, uncertainty, and invention. The resistant reader questions its masculine conspiracy, finds it romancing, fantasizing, and valueless for feminism to make use (Jardine 1985, Ahmed 1999). The positive reader employs it strategically, tries to explain, interpret, and make it work for feminism (Grosz 1999, Pisters 2008, Braidotti 2010). The hesitant reader acknowledges some relevance to feminism but doubts whether it is applicable (Braidotti 1991, Grosz 1990, 1993). The inventive reader takes it as a point of departure in order to create something else (MacCormack 2008, Kennedy 2002, Colebrook 2009, 2010, 2011, Blackman 2012). In this thesis, I am arguing for a critical and creative reading of affect as ‘becomings’.

By ‘critical’, I do not mean a simplistic criticism and opposition, though ‘critical’ implies a certain technique of necessary caution, disbelief, some doubts, and hesitation over the concept of ‘becomings’. Yet a critical reading means more than that. It means engaging the concept in a broader spectrum in order to understand its own perspective and to see whether it is workable in other perspectives. In that sense, a critical reading also means a close and careful reading. In reading ‘becomings’, especially the becoming-woman, Sara Ahmed (1999) in *Phantasies of Becoming (the Other)* argues for a close reading, which she defines as reading ‘against’ (to criticize) the text rather than reading ‘through’ (to see how it can work). Ahmed identifies her reading ‘against’ as disobedience towards the canonical text and the high status of the author. She is certain that this disobedience can do more than a reading ‘through’, which implies some degree of acceptance and dutifulness. Although Ahmed is critical of a narrow understanding of reading into either asking what the text means or letting it go on its own without asking what it means, her close reading of ‘becomings’ is eventually about finding the meaning of the text. What Ahmed aims is ‘questioning the status of such canonical texts’ (1999, 49). This means she already assumes a pre-established status for the author before conveying his text. Yet Deleuze’s work should not be seen as a ‘high theory’ (Ahmed 1999) because calling a ‘high theory’ means making a dualistic separation between ‘high’ and ‘low’ theory, between theory and practice. In sum, a close and careful reading of ‘becomings’ should include an understanding of how the concept communicates to us in its *own* context and at the same time, making the concept work for us in *our* context. In that regard, a critical reading becomes creative.

In fact, there is no perfect theory that is workable in any context. Feminist scholars need to resist or to accept it at some certain levels. But importantly, feminists need to create something

else by transforming the theory from its own context to feminist context, and even making it become a ‘monstrosity’ that its author does not expect. In *Negotiations*, Deleuze (1995, 6) states his method of reading over the philosophical texts of his predecessors is to see the history of philosophy as ‘a sort of buggery or immaculate conception’, in which he forces the authors of the texts to produce a monstrous offspring as their own child. In other words, it is the method of being critical-creative when making use of the theory. It is because critique without creation—without proposing something rather than what the text has said—is simply to confirm the status of the text (see also Grosz 1990).

Back to Ahmed’s frustration with Deleuzian becomings. When Ahmed reads the concept of ‘becomings’ as phantasies of the other, she fails to communicate it in its *own* context. When Ahmed says a becoming-woman ‘is a phantastic narrative organized by the privilege of the masculine subject to move from (beyond) himself’ (1999, 50), she already predicates upon a universal binaristic ‘man’ and ‘woman’, masculinity and femininity. Yet, in fact, Deleuze does not use the term ‘woman’ in such an essentialist way. It should be noted that the starting point of Deleuze’s philosophy is anti-representationalism, anti-dialecticism, anti-Hegelianism as he clearly states in *Negotiations* (1995), *Difference and Repetition* (1994a) and *The Logic of Sense* (1990a). Therefore, the term ‘woman’ cannot be simplistically read as a representation for a woman in reality. In a Deleuzian anti-foundationalist understanding, the woman in his context does not reflect or stand for anything except herself. Again, Deleuze (2005, 237) explains in *A Thousand Plateaus* that becoming is not a resemblance, an imitation, or identification to anything other than itself. Becoming does not have any foundation or teleology. Becoming does not occur in the imagination, and it is neither a dream nor a fantasy (2005, 238). In her reading of Deleuzian ‘becomings’, Barbara Kennedy (2002) has made an interesting point that if Deleuze had chosen another term rather than ‘woman’, his position with feminism would have been less vulnerable. But he did not.

Ahmed has missed a crucial point which is omnipresent in Deleuze’s works, that is his account of molecular materiality. Materialism here is not identical to Marxist materialism because Deleuze places an emphasis on the biological (but not in an essentialist way) and matter—all the dynamic material nature of the body (in a de-corporealized sense). In a clear manner, Deleuze and Guattari confirm that ‘all becomings are already molecular’ (2005, 272). Yes, they add, ‘all becomings are molecular: the animal, flower, or stone, one becomes are

molecular collectivities, haecceities, not molar subjects, objects, or form that we know from the outside and recognize from experience, through science or by habit' (Deleuze and Guattari 2005, 275). That is to say, molecular materiality itself is the key for understanding Deleuzian processes of becomings (see Kennedy 2002). This materialist affect has its own autonomy, vitality, and virtuality so that it can break down binary aggregations into dynamic multiplicities and assemblages. The term 'woman' therefore should be understood as a molecular assemblage. As Deleuze and Guattari note, they use the term 'woman' to refer to 'a molecular woman' (2005, 275), which is a result of a process of becoming-woman through material affect. This becoming-woman is thus to destroy all molar organs and functions assigned in a subject—to de-subjectify. In a Deleuzian sense, the process of becoming a molecular woman should be placed together with other vitalist molecular transformations of birds, rats, houses, walls, rivers, animals, plants, etc in a zone of indiscernibility and on a posthumanist principle of non-indifference.

Perhaps the Deleuzian concept of becomings does not directly support a molar feminist politics of recognition and identification. Nevertheless, this becoming molecular of woman can be seen as a micro-politics to 'render more mobile, fluid' transformations (Grosz 2002, 471) and opens up more possibilities for woman. In the field of cinema and visual arts, where woman is often taken as a fetishistic object, this process of becoming molecular can be a productive strategy to liberate woman from being trapped into a static and binaristic identity. Practically, but not in a molar sense, the concept of becomings—to a certain degree—hence can be relevant for feminist film theory as it suggests a different way, a molecular and vitalist way of approaching feminist power.

Affective Reconfiguration of the Body

In traditional feminist film theory, the body is a pre-given property defined by gender and sexuality, which is socially or biologically constructed. This construction is binaristic because the female body is often represented in opposition and negation to the male body. For instance, the female body is seen as lack, castration or a passive image 'to-be-looked-at' (Mulvey 1999) whereas the male body is active, phallogocentric. It is dialectical because the body is considered as a representation for gender and sexuality whereas gender and sexuality themselves are understood as representational structures of a socio-cultural-ideological and biological

foundation. This way of understanding does not help the body, especially the female body, liberate from its foundation in order to become an autonomous and self-sufficient substance. In other words, in representational feminist film theory, the female body does not really obtain a chance to transform, to stand itself, in itself, and for itself.

In the affective framework, the body is no longer a pre-given property. Therefore we can no longer define a body by its forms, its organs, its functions or treat it as an already-made subject (Deleuze 1988, 127). The body is no longer binaristic or essentialist because it can only be defined by its capacity to affect and to be affected by other bodies. As Deleuze has noted from his reading of Spinoza's *Ethics*, 'we know nothing about a body until we know what it can do ... what its affects are ... how they can or cannot enter into composition with other affects, with the affects of another body, either to destroy that body or to be destroyed by it, either to exchange actions and passions with it or to join with it in composing a more powerful body' (Deleuze and Guattari 2005, 257). In other words, in the Deleuzian paradigm, a body is redefined by a constitution of capacities (latitude) made up by intensive virtualities and relations (longitude) made up by extensive connections with other bodies. From this understanding, we can call anything a body if it has formed relations and capacities to affect and to be affected. In this regard, the notion of the body can be expanded beyond a common understanding of the body as the flesh, the blood, the corporeality. Deleuze suggests that we can even call the incorporeality (e.g. an idea, sounds, a linguistic corpus, a painting, music, a machine) as bodies. For Deleuze (1990b, 217), a body's relations and its capacities to be affected are inseparable because the body will cease to exist if it is incapable of being affected or cannot maintain its relations with other bodies. However, not all bodies have the same capacity to be affected. When being affected, 'they are not affected by the same things, or not affected by the same things in the same way' (1990b, 217). In another Nietzschean-Deleuzian sense, bodily capacities to affect and to be affected can be read as forces. Here, we should not mistake forces as something spiritual and mysterious. In the Deleuzian materialist philosophy, forces are molecular, physical, material. Yet, forces are 'the most natural postures of a body' (Deleuze 2003, 59). Forces are real, but not yet actual. When a body encounters other bodies, forces are actualized and made visible through their capacities to compose/create or decompose/destroy other bodies.

In a Nietzschean-Deleuzian understanding, since a body is already a force, it has power to become, to transform. Therefore, the body can stand alone as a self-sufficient substance. It does

not need any representation and does not depend on any foundation. Thus in *A Thousand Plateaus* (2005) and *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation* (2003), Deleuze proposes a concept of Body without Organs (BwO). The BwO is the living body, but beyond any organism and has no need of organs. Deleuze believes that we need to become a BwO because becoming the BwO is ourselves overcoming. Thus Deleuze invites us to open up our infinite capacities. ‘Why not walk on your head, sing with your sinuses, see through your skin, breathe with your belly?’ (2005, 151). The BwO can also be understood as the nonorganic, the incorporeal. Yes, it is the BwO—the incorporeality, not the tender flesh—that makes the body transform. Deleuze argues that becoming a BwO is becoming ‘animalized’ (2003, 46), becoming nonhuman. In this sense, the BwO can be read as Deleuze’s attempt to de-subjectify. To de-subjectify is not to enslave to yourself, to ourselves, or to pure ‘reason’, to the cogito, to the signifier. Because ‘a subject is never the condition of possibility’ (Deleuze and Guattari 2005, 130), to become a BwO is to become subjectless. A subjectless does not obey the organism, the system, the structure, the dominance. It is because ‘the more you obey the statements of the dominant reality, the more in command you are as subject of enunciation in mental reality’ (2005, 130). Hence, the BwO is a condition of liberation, but it must never be a condition of the death drive, self-destruction, and nothingness. This leads to Deleuzian ethics of the BwO that we should not destroy ‘with a sledgehammer ... [but rather] ... use a very fine file’ (2005, 160). It is no less direct that Deleuze’s notion of a transformative subjectless BwO can be in coalition with feminist politics because in becoming the BwO, the female body is no longer static or passive. Feminist film scholar Barbara Kennedy (2002, 96) acknowledges that in this Deleuzian becoming, whereas nature, matter are no longer perceived as negative terms, but relational, changing and creative, ‘woman’ will no longer bear earlier connotations of ‘otherness’.

Affective Space Without A Place

When James Joyce writes in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916) that:

Stephen Dedalus
Class of Elements
Clongowes Wood College
Sallins
County Kildare

Ireland
Europe
The World
The Universe

Andrienne Rich replies in *Notes Towards a Politics of Location* (1986) that:

Adrienne Rich
14 Edgevale Road
Baltimore, Maryland
The United States of America
The Continent of North America
The Western Hemisphere
The Earth
The Solar System
The Universe

From Joyce to Rich, a place, a location, has always been a focal point to respond to the ontological question of who I am. Feminist epistemologists consider the politics of location as a site of perspectivist situated knowledges that can challenge a universal ‘god-tricks’ (Haraway 1991) of seeing everything from nowhere. For feminism, it has been a deep belief that ‘a location is an embedded and embodied memory’ (Braidotti 2006, 199), and a ‘spatial site of co-production of the subject’ (2006, 199). Though in the wake of poststructuralism, a location can be unfixed, unstable, multiple, mobile, fluid, and the like, the politics of location is still crucial for a feminist understanding of women’s experience without falling to the risk of universalism. Nevertheless, this belief in situating in-the-world or being-there, being-in-the-world also poses a problem of ‘epistemology of provenance’ (Kruks 2006) when only the one who lives in her location can have the right to claim for her lived experience and her privileged knowledge about that location whereas the other cannot be accountable. A phenomenological reading of the body as the lived experience and a location as a corporeal belonging is thus problematic because it assumes that there is already a pre-given body (‘you have a body’) and a pre-given location (‘you are somewhere’).

Space and cosmology appear frequently in Deleuze’s work. But Deleuzian space is never static or muted. Deleuze believes ‘we are not in the world, we become with the world’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1994b, 169). To become with the world, a constructivist account of socio-culture

does not go far enough because it does not take into account the dynamic of nature, matter and molecularity. Only from the Deleuzian affective framework, we may think of a de-essentialist, non-foundationalist, and non-representationalist space—a space without a prior place. When we think about the body, we often contemplate space. In traditional patriarchal thought, women are assigned to space whereas men are postulated in time. Space is believed to be passive, silent, fix whereas time is said to be active, moving, and changeable. Yet, in the affective paradigm, the binary discourse of space-time, women-men, is destroyed. The two divided dimensional spaces—space of the public and space of the domestic, space of the margin and space of the centre, space of the Other and space of the Same—become inadequate. In other words, affective space is space of multiplicities because it marks ‘the end of dialectics’ (Deleuze and Guattari 2005, 483). Affective space is space without outside or inside, without form or background, without beginning or end. Affective space is ‘a zone of indiscernibility’ (2005, 488), where nature and culture, humans and nonhumans are connected in non-dialectical and non-indifferent relations. Affective space can be seen as space of the BwO, space of the inorganic and incorporeal, where all becomings occur (2005, 479). But affective space is also a space that stands itself, in itself and for itself because it is structured by relations (longitude) and capacities (latitude) to affect and to be affected. Therefore it has its own power to transform, to become.

As I have conceptualized, affective experience is virtual, non-intentional, incorporeal, and becoming. On the plane of immanence, spatial experience is ‘nothing more than a play of forces’ (Deleuze 1988, 86). For Deleuze, forces are intensive rather than extensive. In his reading of Deleuze’s affective space, Manuel de Landa (2005) makes a distinction between intensive and extensive forces by referring to magnitudes and quantities in thermodynamics. For example, de Landa notes that if one adds two equal volumes of water one gets twice the amount of water—this is extensive. But if one adds two quantities of water at forty-five degrees of temperature one does not get a body of water at ninety degrees but one at the original temperature—this is intensive (see de Landa 2005). Only in intensity, two quantities of water produce a change, a difference in their degree (2005, 81). This means, it is only in this zone of intensity ‘that difference driven morphogenesis comes into its own, and that matter becomes an active agent’ (2005, 82) without being imposed from the outside. That is also, for Deleuze (2005), all becomings only occur in affective (intensive) space.

Importantly, to understand Deleuze's thought on affective space, it is necessary to familiarize with his concepts of the virtual and the actual, which derives from his reading of Bergson. Without the virtual, there is no affect. Affective space must be virtual. It is real, but not yet actual. In other words, it is real-virtual because it is 'a space of possibilities' (de Landa 2005, 83). These possibilities are all real and do not need to be in a process of realization as they are structured by the plane of immanence rather than transcendence. This is a crucial point. In another sense, Dewsbury and Thrift (2005) have also reminded that we can only see spatial movements and transformations in Deleuze's thought in terms of immanence.

In sum, taking the Deleuzian affective approach, I want to argue for a non-dialectical understanding of the body and space as dynamic, productive and transformative relationality. The Deleuzian notion of the body as a constitution of capacities and relations can help feminists to de-essentialize and destabilize the discriminatory binaristic discourse of the female body as docility, passivity, lack, and castration. His account of affective space as space of intensity, virtuality, and immanence can help to combat an essentialist understanding of women's space as muted, immobile, and unchangeable substance. Ultimately, the Deleuzian affective approach invites us to explore unlimited experiences, potentialities, and becomings not only of bodies and spaces, but also of nature and culture, humans and nonhumans in non-contradictory and non-discriminatory encounters.

Chapter 2

Affective Reading of Body and Space in Contemporary Vietnamese Cinema

2.1. Introduction

This chapter will be a Deleuzian-feminist analysis of body and space in contemporary Vietnamese cinema. Specifically, I will read *Don't Be Afraid, Bi!* (dir. Phan Dang Di 2010) and *Adrift* (dir. Bui Thac Chuyen 2009) through the Deleuzian notion of affect in order to analyze how the two films reconstruct body-space from the perspective of the marginal. Though *Don't Be Afraid, Bi!* and *Adrift* have been internationally recognized by a number of awards and honors from Cannes, Venice, Stockholm, Toronto film festivals, the primary reason for my selection of the films is that, unlike mainstream Vietnamese cinematography, which is faithful to the master narrative of a masculine heroic national space, these two films focus on women and their 'petty' stories (e.g. love, sex, desire) in Hanoian space. By not victimizing women, the two films destabilize the binaristic discourse of active masculinity and passive femininity, active public space and submissive domestic space, as well as break down the division between the space of the marginal and the space of the central. Aesthetically, the two films challenge conventional storytelling by offering a new cinematic language, i.e. a bodylanguage. Diminishing the significance of the linguistic (diegetic) dimension, the films open the narrative up to visceral sensations and affects.

As I have already theorized in chapter 1, affect is virtual, non-intentional (or autonomous), incorporeal, and becoming. In this chapter, I attempt to read the two films through this framework. However, I have to admit that due to the lack of a concrete analytical and empirical model, the Deleuzian conception of affect might seem somehow abstract. Despite the fact that it is radical, critical and creative, Deleuze's work is not easy to make use of unlike other more applicable theories. Nonetheless, here I will not make a dualistic separation between theory and practice because the Deleuzian framework indeed underlines our capacities to act, to transform, and to become in practice. As such, Deleuze himself also insists that his work is 'a practice: a

practice of the seemingly fictive world that empiricism describes; a study of the conditions of legitimacy of practices that is in fact our own' (2001, 36). Thus, although the Deleuzian terrain does not refer to any concrete empirical analysis, my use of it for analyzing a specific case study, e.g. the two Vietnamese films, will be pragmatic and strategic. By this, what I aim to do in this chapter is to create an alternative feminist filmic reading with the Deleuzian lens in order to think otherwise about issues of visual culture, body and space.

2.2. Notes on Deleuzian Affective Methodology and Feminist Readings with Empirical Data

There can be several ways of reading the two selected films, and feminist readings can also be taken in disparate approaches. For instance, Claire Colebrook in *Gender* (2004b) differentiates at least three ways of feminist readings: first-wave feminist or humanist reading, second-wave or radical feminist reading, and third-wave or non-binaristic feminist reading. A first-wave feminist reading, for Colebrook (2004b, 239), is identical to a humanist reading, in which the reader will analyze the ways texts maintain a sexist or deterministic ideology between women's biology and social inferiority. Meanwhile, a second-wave feminist reading will look closely at the exclusion or inclusion of masculinity and femininity, or nature and culture in the texts, whereas a third-wave reading will be a move beyond this binarism (2004b, 240-241). Nevertheless, Colebrook argues for a new materialist reading in which the very meaning of gender as a formed category or a cultural construction is highly contested. In this way of reading, instead of assuming that gender is already there and then looking at the way in which texts perform and destabilize gender binaries, Colebrook suggests a focus on the force of life, on the dynamic of materiality, molecularity, and the physical energy of substances before any hierarchies are made. In other words, with a third-wave materialist reading, texts are read beyond gender because the point of departure is to break down 'constituted values of the texts' (Colebrook 2004b) and advocate a non-binaristic, non-hierarchical, and non-foundational understanding of nature and culture. In that sense, the locus of reading lies on its attempt to think about the very origin of experience as experience itself, in itself and for itself, an experience that goes beyond any representational structure. By not 'seeing one side of the binary as deriving from the other' (2004b, 252), this way of reading in fact offers a univocal point of view. Departing from traditional reading which is

equivocal and privileges gender as a pre-given form, third-wave materialist reading, to a larger extent, shares a common view with Deleuzian affective-materialist philosophy.

According to Colebrook's outline of three ways of gender reading, I can either concentrate on the ideological discourses of the two films in order to find out sexist ideologies (first-wave reading), or focus on affective filmic experiences in order to see how bodies and spaces affect and are being affected (third-wave reading). From a macro-politics, the films can be read through a categorical gendered lens. For instance, regarding a number of awards from Western film festivals that the two films have won, there may be a claim that the films are exoticized or self-exoticized to please the white Orientalist male gaze. Indeed, *Don't Be Afraid, Bi!* and *Adrift* have received severe criticism from local media and audiences for their unconventional graphic content. This is because naked female bodies and graphic sex scenes are often censored and considered a taboo in Confucian Vietnamese culture. Yet, *Don't Be Afraid, Bi!* and *Adrift* break this tradition and thus, for the first time in Vietnamese cinematography, graphic acts are directly shown on screen. Sheridan Prasso (2005, 5) in *The Asian Mystique* points out that the Western gaze has always been a mixture of adulation, fascination, and lust for the Asian exotic beauty and nudity. Applying Prasso's critique into the case of *Don't Be Afraid, Bi!* and *Adrift*, it may be true that the selection committee at Cannes, Venice, Toronto, Stockholm film festivals has been remasculated by breaking and penetrating the Orientalist taboo. From a molar postcolonial perspective, the exotic beauty and nudity in *Don't Be Afraid, Bi!* and *Adrift* also illustrate what Edward Said writes in *Orientalism* that 'the Orient was almost a European invention, and had been since antiquity a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences' (1978, 1).

However, on the other hand, this molar perspective is not unquestionable because in the end, it still does not overcome a static dialectical understanding. Postcolonial feminist Chandra Mohanty (2003) in *Under Western Eyes* has already made a strong attack on this binaristic Western discourse of third-world women as a monolithic submissive category, as men's victims and as universal dependents. Mohanty argues that there is no such universal patriarchal framework, but rather, there is only 'a particular world' in which 'any analysis of culture, ideology and socio-economic conditions has to be necessarily situated' (2003, 51). In so doing, women in the situated Vietnamese context are indeed not always exoticized or subordinated to the male gaze. As Phan Dang Di—director of *Don't Be Afraid, Bi!* and script writer of *Adrift*—

replies to local film critics, ‘the women [in his films] sometimes look like the victim but in fact, they are very strong ... much stronger than the men. The men are weak like babies, but when women interact with the men they are always silent and never fight with them because they know that the men are weaker than them. ... the men are like kids, only looking for pleasure for themselves. ... Sometimes the kids are kids and at other times the kids are men who never became adults’ (Phan 2010).⁵ Furthermore, Phan Dang Di explains that he considers sex as one of the most important subjects for art, literature, and life. Therefore, by showing graphic sex, he wants to go outside the box, or ‘to go through the limit’ (in his own words) and ‘make people think’ about life experience rather than about women being commodified (Phan 2010). In this regard, I believe that a particular perspective—as Mohanty suggests—or a micro, molecular analysis—as Deleuzian accounts—should be employed for a non-static, anti-essentialist understanding of the two complex and debatable works of art—*Don’t Be Afraid, Bi!* and *Adrift*.

From a Deleuzian micro-politics, the two Vietnamese films can be read beyond gender representation, in the dynamic becoming rather than static being. Yet, the point here is still how to do that *empirically*. In *Thinking with Deleuze in Qualitative Research*, Lisa Mazzei and Kate McCoy (2010, 505) agree that no wonder if Deleuzian scholars can write book after book when they are not dealing closely with data, because when coming to empirical data, the difficult theoretical part of Deleuze’s works becomes the easy part, whereas the process of doing analysis becomes more difficult. Like Mazzei and McCoy, I am more interested in using Deleuze for empirical research, as I believe this is the most important but also challenging task that needs to be achieved if we want to put Deleuzian political agenda into concrete action. As I already analyzed in Chapter 1, I have been inspired by the Deleuzian turn to affect due to its commitment to overcome dichotomies. Nevertheless, I argue that *doing* Deleuze empirically does not mean a turn to reductive simplifications of a complex theory which is already rhizomatic, non-linear, non-hierarchical, and chaotic. According to Hillevi Taguchi (2012) in *A Diffractive and Deleuzian Approach to Analyzing Interviewing Data*, a Deleuzian affective approach to empirical data is ‘an embodied engagement with the materiality of research data —*a becoming-with the data*’ (2012, 265, italics in original) rather than an interpretation of the data from a distant, observable position.

⁵ See: <http://www.cama-atk.com/director-phan-dang-di/>

Such an interpretation ‘falls into the representational trap’ (Taguchi 2012, 269) of trying to figure out the meaning of the data—which is eventually to separate the entanglement of the data themselves and their meaning. From a molecular perspective, a Deleuzian methodology is a ‘methodology-against-interpretivism’ (Taguchi 2012, Jackson and Mazzei 2012). Yet, this does not suggest that the meaning of the data can never be perceived or known. In fact, a method-against interpretivism is *a-becoming-with* the data, which implies that our knowing is never complete while becoming is endless. It is the undone of the data and the undone of knowing that invites us to ‘open it up and imagine what newness might be incited from it’ (Taguchi 2012, 271). Needless to say, in doing Deleuzian empirical research, knowing and becoming are interdependent. Because our realities are ‘open-ended’ (Deleuze and Guattari 2005, 193), ‘neither unities nor totalities, but multiplicities’ (Deleuze and Parnet 2002, vii), a method that seeks a precise, smooth, coherent account will fail to understand that complexity (Coleman and Ringrose 2013, 5). In other words, knowing means intervention and creation of an undone reality rather than observation and reflection of a distant, already-made reality (Taguchi 2012, Coleman and Ringrose 2013). To say the least, epistemology (knowing) and ontology (becoming) must be entangled in doing Deleuzian-inspired empirical research.⁶

As I have analyzed above, the becoming-with-the data should be understood as a process of transcorporeality, acknowledging the constitutive force of materiality in the social and cultural sphere, as Taguchi (2012, 270) puts it. Applying this anti-anthropocentric persistence into empirical visual data, Jamie Lorimer (2013) in *More-Than-Human Visual Analysis: Witnessing and Evoking Affect in Human-Nonhuman Interactions* calls for ‘a more-than-human visual analysis’ to recognize ‘our multispecies worlds’ and ‘the excessive and unpredictable nature of life’ (2013, 62-63). Similarly, Rebecca Coleman (2008) in *The Becoming of Bodies* highlights the inseparability of bodies (including viewers’ bodies and researchers’ bodies) with material images in doing visual analysis. While Carol Taylor (2013) insists on thinking with visual data in its vitalist materialism, Estelle Barrett and Barbara Bolt in *Carnal Knowledge: Towards a ‘New Materialism’ through the Arts* (2013, 3-6) emphasize a ‘rethinking of the relationship between humans and non-humans’ as ‘a reaction against the cultural turn’ that solely defines our making

⁶ This point exactly coincides with Karen Barad’s use of the term ‘ontoepistemology’ in *Meeting the Universal Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (2007).

and experience of art by social and cultural construction but neglects the vitality of the nature and the non-human subject.

In the case of the two selected Vietnamese films, my transcorporeal becoming-with the filmic data (images) derives from my adoption of a non-binaristic point of view that takes the molecularity and materiality of visual images into consideration. Here, I want to add that every image (sign) in the Deleuzian paradigm is univocal. In relation with meanings, images are transformative and non-hierarchical whereas meanings are never fixed or pre-described. In this open-ended image system, as Felicity Colman (2011) has put it, personal meanings can be invented for the film images. In this sense, in this chapter I will not impose a gender coding into my affective reading of bodies and spaces in *Don't Be Afraid, Bi!* and *Adrift*. I am discontented that the female bodies in the films are inscriptions of already-made culture or biological-giveness, whereas Hanoian spaces are already there, waiting for the bodies to inhabit. I therefore consider the female bodies and Hanoian spaces as molecular forces, intensities, assemblages. This molecularity is not something spiritual or mysterious, but it is indeed the dynamic energy, the material physicality and vitality of all modes, forms, substances. In other words, while doing Deleuzian-feminist analysis of the two Vietnamese films, I want to underline the 'autoconsistency' or 'autopoiesis' (Kennedy 2002, 89-90) of Vietnamese female bodies and Hanoian spaces. This 'autoconsistency' or 'autopoiesis' refers to a sense of aliveness, a process of capable self-maintaining, self-enjoyment beyond structural linguistics, psychoanalysis, phenomenological or rational Cartesian accounts (see Kennedy 2002, 89-92, 196). In Deleuze and Guattari's thought, 'autoconsistency' or 'autopoiesis' is the pre-personal, the impersonal or the singular (Deleuze 2001; Deleuze and Guattari 1994, 2005), which—due to its unattachedment to representational systems—seems to be far more liberating than an ideologically-interpellated subject.

'Jumping Generations' or 'Generational Dilemmas'?

A final note on Deleuzian intervention in feminist research that I want to discuss here is related to the current heated debate over feminist generational issues, of which feminist epistemologies cannot be placed outside. One of the relevant questions that needs to be raised is whether one should be loyal to feminist canonical tradition in order to be considered as a feminist. In *Third*

Wave Materialism: New Feminist Epistemologies and the Generation of European Women's Studies (2008) and *Jumping Generations* (2009), Iris van der Tuin points out the issue of being dutiful or undutiful daughters in regard to second-wave epistemologists. For van der Tuin, the non-dialectical, non-foundational position of third-wave epistemologies forming a strong alliance with the untimely work of Deleuze and Guattari is a leap, a jump, a 'breakthrough' (2009, 22), a dis-identification with the legacy of second-wave epistemologies founded on positivism, social constructivism or deconstruction. By relating but not confirming the epistemological model of the second wave, third-wave genealogies can be recognized in monist, materialist perspectives. Van der Tuin and Dolphijn (2010) define this (new) materialism as transversality that is not governed by dialecticism, but instead a deterritorialization of false dichotomies between cultures and natures and a cross over academic territories (e.g. between the social and the natural sciences). Here materiality—in a third-wave understanding—is no longer a pre-existing nature, but it is made through its affective relation with the social from within, from its autopoiesis or autoconsistency, and in an immanent, non-linear, non-opposite way. That is to say, the material 'has to be made socially effective' (Tuin and Dophijn 2010, 161) rather than to be seen as the polar opposite of the social.

In response to van der Tuin in *Generational Dilemmas*, Claire Hemmings (2009) has triggered a tension between second-wave and third-wave epistemologies regarding the question of being dutiful or undutiful to the feminist past. On the one hand, Hemmings agrees that feminist researchers need to challenge a generational linearity. Yet, on the other hand, moving away from the heritage of the previous generation does cause a pain. Hemmings appears to be vulnerable when the aging feminist mother is said to be 'stepping aside to let her daughter take centre stage' (2009, 35), whereas the youthful are too eager to celebrate their methodological triumph and too 'compelled to position themselves in opposition to ... second-wave subjects as well as epistemologies' (2009, 34). Hence, Hemmings (2009, 35) is skeptical whether van der Tuin's use of the term 'generation' can be productive for doing feminist research and for rethinking about feminist pasts, presents and futures.

In my viewpoint, both van der Tuin and Hemmings' arguments are not unproblematic. Van der Tuin seems futuristic whereas Hemmings seems nostalgic. It is paradoxical that on the one hand, feminists want to be critical because they want to challenge binaristic knowledge and epistemology produced by mainstream science (see Harding 1986, 1991). Yet on the other hand,

it seems that feminists are not yet ready to take criticisms from and cooperate with other feminists. This has already led to a dualistic division between feminist academics and feminist activists, feminist second-wave and feminist third-wave, feminist 'us' and feminist 'other' although ultimately these feminists all share the same political agenda: destroy the patriarchal binaristic discourse, establish a non-discriminatory account of understanding women's lives, and affirm women's power. In fact, in her critique of second-wave feminisms, van der Tuin does not take into account of the diversity and difference of second-wave feminisms regarding their attempt to break discriminatory binary boundaries, and therefore her argument may be harsh for Claire Hemmings to receive. Hemmings' argument, consequently, is a reaction, a dissatisfaction, a defense of a feminist being excluded. The new materialist perspective appears to blur dichotomies between the object and the subject, the inside and the outside, the real and the represented, the self and the other, etc, and highlight the politics of affirmation rather than negation. This is exactly what feminists yearn for. However, from my point of view, a new feminist canonical work being built according to Van der Tuin (2009) needs not to dismiss the second-wave's legacy, but rather, to inherit it. It is rather not to jump, but to link the feminist past, present and future together, in a rhizomatic, non-linear way. It is not to reconcile different epistemologies or to fight against each other, but to make at least a constructive dialogue. In so doing, the question of whether one should be loyal or betraying to the feminist predecessor may no longer be of importance.

2.3. Becomings in Hanoian Space: *Don't Be Afraid, Bi!*

In this part, I aim to intervene and invent a Deleuzian molecular feminist reading of bodies and spaces in the film *Don't Be Afraid, Bi!* (dir. Phan Dang Di 2010). By molecularity, I will take into account of the materiality of bodies and spaces. My purpose is not to limit my understanding to the inclusion/belonging or exclusion/un-belonging of the bodies in Hanoian space or critiques of the binaristic discourse of bodies and spatialities. Though I consider this issue is critical in doing feminist analysis, I intend to search for the dynamic and potential in itself and for itself of bodies and spaces. Rather than criticizing a social and cultural encoding, I want to see bodies and spaces in transformations, beyond gender or sexual representation, in the vitalist becomings rather than in static beings. My affective reading of *Don't Be Afraid, Bi!* is thus four-fold: 1) on

the level of the virtual, 2) on the level of non-intentionality, 3) on the level of the incorporeal, and 4) on becomings. As I conceptualized in chapter 1, this four-fold level is neither linear nor separable, but instead, it is causal and interrelated. The bodies and spaces in *Don't Be Afraid, Bi!* will therefore be reconfigured in this four-fold affective experience, in which their transformative processes, their becomings, are emphasized. Also, as I have analyzed above (see 2.2), the film is not an empirical visual data waiting there to be interpreted, whereas my knowing about it is still undone. Thus, I choose not to read the film from a distant, observable position, but rather, to become with the film—to engage with the film from inside by creating my own system of transcorporeal and univocal filmic images and meanings.

From the Collapse of Sexual Dialectics to Bodily Becomings

From a molar perspective, *Don't Be Afraid, Bi!* is a film about sex, an embarrassing and even unspeakable topic in Vietnamese culture. Against the structure of the Confucian family and marriage, where sexuality has been traditionally kept inside the bedroom door for centuries, and despite the strict censorship of the Vietnamese authority, the film with its openness to sexuality can be seen as a sexual revolution on the Vietnamese screen. Clearly, all the sensual, the haptic, the physical images of the film demonstrate a fearlessness in showing the flesh and letting women express their sexual feelings and longings. In this macro-politics, it is easy to see that the film is a success to liberate Vietnamese women from orthodox cultural and social constraints.

However, as Deleuze and Guattari have noted in *A Thousand Plateaus*, every society and every individual are not solely defined by a molar/macro-politics (the politics of categories, of laws, rules, and social traditions), but in fact every politics is simultaneously a molar/macro-politics and a molecular/micro-politics (the politics of immanence, the power to act in itself and for itself). If these macro- and micro-politics are distinct, it is because they do not share the same nature whereas 'if they are inseparable, it is because they coexist and cross over into each other' (Deleuze and Guattari 2005, 213). Thus, there is still a molecular perspective—that should be ignored—to approach the film. In this perspective, when the transcendence lens is being removed, the transcendental secret that subjugates sex to the family structure or to the reproductive model will be disclosed (see 2005, 20). That said, in this micro-politics, there is no longer a wanting to liberate sexuality 'from', but rather there is only a liberation in itself and for

itself. In other words, sexual experience—from the Deleuzian lens—is no more than experience itself, an experience that does not enslave to anything higher than or prior than that. To go further, binary sexes (that restrict sex to the two) or sexual dialectics (whether it is subordinated under representational categories of hetero-, homo-, bi-, trans-sexuality) collapse on the immanent paradigm. That is to say, if we move beyond transcendental representation, the phallogentric and anthropomorphic sexual model falls apart. From this molecular point of view, it is not enough to say that the film *Don't Be Afraid, Bi!* is about sexuality of the lived body, the flesh. In relation to the body, sex is no longer foundational or confined to the human physical genital satisfaction, and therefore the film is indeed more than about corporeal sex. At this point, Deleuze (2004, 243) reminds us that 'sexuality needs to be thought also as a relation between the human and the non-human', but 'this non-human is not understood in terms of animality but rather in terms of what is non-human in human sexuality itself'. This means sexuality should be better defined by its unlimited connectivity, relationality, and affectivity in a monistic, non-contradictory ontology rather than in a dualistic hierarchical structure or organism. From this connectivity and affectivity, there will be multiple molecular combinations that lead to 'a thousand tiny sexes' (Deleuze and Guattari 2005, 213). If we agree that sexuality in a Foucauldian sense explicates power relations, the Deleuzian viewpoint—that takes the molecularity, instead of the molar, as a point of departure—has in fact desubjectified and decentralized the power of the major while at the same time empowering the marginal.

As Deleuze and Guattari have revealed, the immanent truth is that 'sexuality is everywhere' (2000c, 293). Seeing *Don't Be Afraid, Bi!* in this immanent paradigm, it is noticeable that there are 'flows of sexuality' (2000c, 115) from thousands of molecular connections between bodies, no matter if they are corporeal or incorporeal, human or non-human. Here, I want to reiterate that in a Deleuzian understanding, everything can be seen as a body as long as it has potential to make relations and capacities to affect or to be affected with other bodies. As such, in the film, not only the corporeal body, the flesh and the blood, but also the incorporeal body, the leaf, the tree, the flower, the ice, the water, nature are all sexual in its own procreation and vitalist force. In that immanent sense, nature in *Don't Be Afraid, Bi!* is not biologically deterministic. It is neither muted nor pre-given. Neither does it oppose culture. Instead, nature and culture are inseparable, and importantly, both nature and culture are constantly on the making (see also Barad 2007). This is true if we trace back to the archaeology

of sexuality in the social and cultural context of Vietnam. It is no wonder that sexuality is not totally a social or cultural construction and that the sexual discourse made solely on social constructivism is too reductive. For instance, before the Chinese invasion of Vietnam and its spread of a Confucian ideology, sexuality was never a social taboo and, on the contrary, women's sexuality was seen as a dynamic materiality, a vitalist physical energy. In the eighteenth century, despite the control of the orthodox Confucianism, Ho Xuan Huong was famous for her poetry on women's bodies and sexual experience. In *Three-Mountain Pass*, she used the cave to describe the woman's womb and her genitals:

A cliff face. Another. And still a third.
Who was so skilled to carve this craggy scene:
the cavern's red door, the ridge's narrow cleft,
the black knoll bearded with little mosses?
A twisting pine bough plunges in the wind,
showering a willow's leaves with glistening drops.
Gentlemen, lords, who could refuse, though weary
and shaky in his knees, to mount once more?' (trans. John Balaban 2000)

Surprisingly, Xuan Huong's idea about the cave in the eighteenth century extraordinarily shares with Luce Irigaray's mid-twentieth-century thought on the woman's womb: a joyful appraisal of the dynamic matter of sexuality. In fact, this provocative joyfulness does not simplistically relate to or is completely made up by cultural and social constructions in her time. If reading from the lens of the macro-politics (the politics of gender representation), we can only see Huong's provocation is a fighting 'against' or a freedom 'from' Confucian restrictions, which is of course important. However, on a molecular level, the autopoiesis, the autoconsistency (see 2.2) or the freedom in itself of the female body, is ignored by that macro/molar reading.

From a molecular perspective, Deleuze and Guattari (2005, 278) believe 'sexuality brings into play too great a diversity of conjugated becomings'. At this point, feminist film scholar Patricia Pisters (2007, 78) comments that these becomings can only be understood on a micro level of perception—which is crucial for a feminist politics of 'liberation itself' but also quite hard to recognize, especially in comparison with the macro level, where our perception aims at divided categories and at a molar feminist politics of 'liberation from'. However, as I have noted from the case of Ho Xuan Huong's poetry, it is not until the modern film *Don't Be Afraid, Bi!*

that Vietnamese women's bodies and sexuality are seen as a dynamic vitalist matter. Therefore, it is not my speculation that in *Don't Be Afraid, Bi!*, sexuality—as an affective materiality—has generated a variety of becomings through its connectivity and affectivity with other bodies. These becomings are results of an increase or a decrease in power (the virtual power to act) of the bodies after encountering other bodies.

In the film, the most recognizable becoming is the becoming-child. Every bodily experience—from sex, love, to aging, and death—is perceived under the eyes of Bi, a preschool-age child. At the beginning of the film, there is a scene in which after having been bathed by his aunt, Bi suggests, 'Let me stay here!' 'What for?' his aunt replies. 'I want to see you washing,' answers Bi. 'No way. It's embarrassing,' she says. 'Why would you be embarrassed?' asks Bi. 'I'm an old hag. I don't want any man to see how ugly I am.' 'Can't I just look a little?' Bi persuades. 'Not even a little,' she insists. 'I'll go in [the house] then.' 'Off you go.' From the transcendental Freudian framework, Bi's curiosity may be interpreted as an Oedipal sexual drive for the mother. However, in the context of the film, this Western interpretation seems to be narrow and implausible. This is because even if only looking at the social and cultural structure of the Vietnamese context, it is socially accepted for the child to ask such a question since it is considered innocent, an absolute proof of pure innocence. Yet, the Freudian transcendence does not take into account of this innocence, which I read as the before or the beyond subjectifications of the child. From this Deleuzian lens, the child Bi is the not-yet-subject governed by ideological interpellation or subjugated to social and cultural norms. Bi is an egg, a not-yet-fully-developed organism. In Deleuzian terms, the egg, Bi, is the de-subjectified, the pre-personal, the impersonal, or a body without organs (BwO). The aunt's body in the film is thus perceived from this de-subjectified point of view. Without being hailed by the ideological discourse, the woman's body is an intensive materiality, an open-ended site for discovery and transformations. In other words, the woman's body, and also her sexuality, can be read as the BwO, which—as Deleuze and Guattari believe—'is tied to childhood' (2005, 164) in a sense that 'it is a childhood block, a becoming' (2005, 164). Importantly, this becoming-child in the film should not be seen as a literary metaphor since in fact it is a metamorphosis. The child here is the virtual power, the power of creation, the power of potentials—which is real, but not yet actualized. In reading Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* and his three metamorphoses, namely the camel, the lion, and the child, Deleuze further explains:

The camel is the animal who carries: he carries the weight of established values, the burdens of education, morality, and culture. He carries them into the desert, where he turns into a lion; the lion destroys statues, tramples burdens, and leads the critique of all established values. Finally, the lion must become child, that is, he who represents play and a new beginning—creator of new values and new principles of evaluation. (Deleuze 2001, 53)

These three metamorphoses are neither linear nor separable. As Deleuze argues, the lion is present in the camel, and the child is in the lion (2001, 53-54). Nevertheless, all becomings must pass through a becoming-child because only children can draw their strength neither from the molar status that controls them nor from the organism and subjectivity they receive, whereas becomings can only be preceded by molecular politics—the politics from the eyes of the child, rather than molar politics under the eyes of the adult (see Deleuze and Guattari 2005, 277). That is to say, in the case of *Don't Be Afraid, Bi!*, all bodily becomings must go through a becoming-Bi, becoming-child. This does not mean these becomings have to imitate a molar Bi with all identifiable forms although it may pass through some similarities. In the film, we experience several becomings-child. It is the becoming-child of Bi's father when he plays balloons with the hairdresser girl to whom he encounters and composes a power to become. Yet, this becoming does not occur between him and his wife because his body does not affect and is not affected. It is the becoming-child of Bi's ill grandfather when he lies in bed all day, plays with Bi's toys and needs to be taken good care of by Bi's mother. It is the becoming-child of the aunt's adult student when he plays football in the sandbar under the heavy rain. It is the becoming-child of the men—with no name—in the sandbar when they wash themselves by mud.

Furthermore, molecular becomings break down binary systems (e.g. masculine vs. feminine, man vs. animal) because the ontology of becomings is monistic. The becoming-Bi, becoming-child in the film thus does not necessarily have to be located in any categorical representation of gender. For example, the graphic scene in which Bi's aunt is hiding in the bush, looking at her high-school student pee under the rain, can be read as an affective encounter for the becoming-Bi, becoming-child, which may have nothing to do with a molar gender. Technically, this scene is exceptional in Vietnamese cinematography because this is the first time a peeing penis is shown directly on screen. From a Freudian understanding, the aunt may be masculinized or masqueraded. Yet, this reading does not go far enough because it does not move beyond static, pre-given gender dichotomies (e.g. men are active and women are passive). There may be another molar Mulveyan reading, in which the power of the look has been shifted from

the man to the woman because the woman now controls the look whereas the man is being looked at. This way of reading may be critical for a molar politics because it assumes that the woman has now been empowered. Yet, this power is only strategic because it is a power that is given to the woman and therefore, we do not see her self-empowerment, her vitalist power itself.

At the molecular level, the aunt's encounter with her student must have made a surprise, a shock, an intensive force because the proof is that her self-discovery of her body and sexuality is actualized. This actualization first leads to her sudden and uncontrollable sickness because her body is now saturated after that affective encounter. Secondly, and surprisingly, it leads to a scene in which she gets up in the middle of the night and masturbates with ice. The ice-masturbation scene is the first time ever shown in the history of Vietnamese screen. According to local media, this scene has indeed shocked a number of Vietnamese audiences who would not expect such a kind of action from a woman. In the eyes of the adults who have been imbued with a Confucian heritage of a docile and even sexless woman, the scene is unbearable or at least embarrassing. On the plane of transcendence, the aunt's ice-masturbation may be read as a lack that needs to be fulfilled. This reading is essentialist because it only sees the masturbation as a physical genital satisfaction for that lack. This reading is also negative and deterministic because it does not believe in a self-creation and liberation itself, in itself and for itself. On the plane of immanence, making love with ice is a creation. It deterritorializes old traditional Confucian values and reterritorializes new values, in which the woman is able to creatively express her sexuality and her body is now becoming a dynamic force that is open for experimentation. Through the Nietzschean-Deleuzian lens, making love with ice can also be seen as a child-experimentation. Indeed, in the film, from the beginning to the end, Bi always likes experimenting with ice (e.g. putting an apple to an ice-making tray in the ice factory or dropping a few leaves into the water in order to make it become ice in the fridge). The aunt's experimentation with ice—though it is unique and does not resemble any of Bi's experimentation—can still be seen as a becoming-Bi, becoming-child. In this becoming-child, she experiences a becoming-molecular woman that goes beyond a molar signification of woman and gender, and also, at the same time experiences a becoming-ice.

There is no doubt that ice is the threshold of deterritorialization/destruction and reterritorialization/creation in *Don't Be Afraid, Bi!*. Ice is by no means a filmic metaphor. Since the opening scene, ice appears in the film not as a muted nature. Ice becomes inseparable with

Bi, Bi's father, Bi's mother, Bi's aunt, Bi's grandfather from the corporeal level of feelings and emotions to the visceral level of sensations and affects. Ice makes visible the invisible force of love, desire, pain, depression, aging, and death in Bi's family. Ice makes every becoming of Bi's family member unique in its own way. Ice releases Bi's father from being constrained in his molar masculine subjectifications. Ice decomposes the physical pain of the aging grandfather when it touches his corporeal skin and then recomposes his incorporeal becoming-ice.



Bi and ice. Still in the film, 2010. Courtesy of Acrobates Films.

In a Deleuzian understanding, the becoming-ice in *Don't Be Afraid, Bi!* is the non-human becoming of man that creates 'a zone of indetermination, of indiscernibility' (Deleuze and Guattari 1994b, 173) between the human and the non-human, between the corporeal and the incorporeal, and between culture and nature. This does not mean a romancing of the non-human/nature. Yet, in the Cartesian mind, where everything is always/already a cultural construction, nature is just something thoughtless and added to culture (Kirby 2011, 14, 71). In *Natural Convers(at)ions: Or, What If Culture Was Really Nature All Along?*, from a materialist-feminist perspective, Kirby sees 'the need to interrogate the Nature/Culture division and the entire conceptual apparatus that rests upon it' (2011, 68) although she is also aware of the risk

that attributes to matter (nature) (2011, 70). In this feminist regard, a Deleuzian-materialist point of departure—despite its strangeness to our habit of thought—may enable a non-discriminatory understanding of the becomings-nonhuman in the human or becoming-nature in culture in *Don't Be Afraid, Bi!*

If a work of art—in Deleuze and Guattari's manifesto—is a zone of in-between-ness, of indetermination and indiscernibility between things, beasts, and persons, art must be a life because art is no stranger to life (see Deleuze and Guattari 1994b, 173). From this in-between-ness, *Don't Be Afraid, Bi!* is a story of a life rather than a story of sexual liberation. It is not a story of a life standing outside us, a life looking at us, but a life inside us and us in a life. Yet, it is not a life that is higher than or prior to us. It is a life of immanence. A life of immanence is a life that is always/already affective. A life of immanence is 'a life contains only virtuals' and 'is made up of virtualities' (Deleuze 2001, 31). As I have already discussed, virtualities do not lack any reality and do not need in any process of realization (see 1.3). A life of virtualities is real, a real life that can itself actualize and is actualized in itself and for itself. In *Don't Be Afraid, Bi!*, aging, death, love, sexuality of the body are all seen in a life of immanence. For example, in the film, Bi is the first family member to see the aging grandfather enter the house. The camera pans from a high angle to a low angle, from the balcony where Bi is standing and blowing soap bubbles to the ground where his grandfather is lying on a first-aid stretcher. The dying body is not terrifying through the eyes of the child. If we can see through the in-between moment of life and death, this dying body is just 'a life playing with death' (Deleuze 2001, 28), when the individual already goes beyond subjectivity and objectivity of what has happened in the lived experience. In so doing, a life is never enclosed in universal death. The death of Bi's grandfather towards the end of the film is not grieving because 'a life is [still] everywhere' (2001, 29) and a life is still in 'complete power, complete bliss' (2001, 27). In other words, a life is a will to power in a Nietzschean conception or an *élan vital* in a Bergsonian understanding. That is why there is no need to be afraid, Bi! It is also the title of the film (*Don't Be Afraid, Bi!* in English and *Bi, N'aie Pas Peur!* in French) as an immanent message.

In a Deleuzian understanding, the ultimate becoming is the becoming-imperceptible. This becoming can only occur in a life of immanence. Becoming-imperceptible does not mean this becoming cannot be perceived. To become imperceptible is to de-signify, de-subjectify, de-personalize, de-centralize, and de-anthropomocentrify at the utmost. To become imperceptible is

to dismantle all types of identification. Becoming-imperceptible is the becoming that cannot be identified in any molar system of representation and identity politics. In that sense, becoming-imperceptible is a molecular way of revolting against the dominating signified-signifying system. Importantly, to become imperceptible also means to become pre-personal, to become impersonal, and to become singular in its sheer vitality, its utmost autopoiesis, and its powerful affects of life.

In the film, 'Bi' is not yet a name. Indeed, it is a nickname in Vietnamese language. In Vietnam, any child can be called 'Bi'. Thus, calling 'Bi' means calling everyone, but no one. From the beginning of the film, Bi is always curious about life. Bi always wants to touch, to smell, to feel, to surprise and to be surprised, and eventually to wrest the force, the vitality, the affect of life, from his affection, his lived experience. Bi's eagerness for life explorations can be seen as a processuality of becoming-imperceptible. 'What is this leaf?' 'Where does it come from?' 'What is this flower?' 'What kind of tree is this?' These are questions Bi often asks. There is a scene in which he finds a yellow maple leaf in his grandfather's luggage. Here is their dialogue:

'Granddad, what is the name of this leaf?'

'Maple leaf.'

'Where does a maple leaf grow?'

'On a maple tree.'

'Where does a maple tree grow?'

'It grows in the maple forest.'

'Where is the maple forest?'

'Somewhere far from here. In America.'

'In America?' 'Give it to me, won't you?'

'But you must give me something in exchange.'

'I'm sorry. I have nothing to give you.'

'That's not fair.'

'I'll go for another leaf in exchange.'

The transcendental notion of exchange as something given *to* someone other than itself has been so much imbued in the thought of the adult. This is contradictory to the immanent understanding of exchange in the child's thought. Here, the 'nothing to give to' dismantles the ownership of the higher than or the prior to. This leads to the beyond transcendental subjectifications, beyond transcendental individuality. That is why, for Bi, a maple leaf can easily be replaced with any leaf, no matter if it is still a maple or not. On this molecular level,

there is no longer identification. There is only the impersonal, the singular, the imperceptible. Bi's passion with leaves and trees can therefore be read as the becoming-leaf, becoming-tree, and becoming-imperceptible in a Deleuzian zone of indetermination and indiscernibility.

Bi's aunt and her self-discovery of her body and sexuality is also a journey to become imperceptible. As I have mentioned above, this journey starts with her body being affected by another body, her high-school student. At the corporeal level and on the plane of transcendence, it is her lived affection for the student. Yet, through her becoming-child, becoming-ice on the plane of immanence (see my analysis above), her body and sexuality already exist as forces, intensities, capacities to affect and to be affected. This leads to her transformations at both the molar and the molecular levels. At the molar level, it is a rebellion, a subversion against a static, binaristic, patriarchal oppression to the female body. At the affective-molecular level, her body undergoes a metamorphosis so that it wrests from the lived affection to becomings, to vitality, to vigor energy so that it is no longer dependent on the tender blood and flesh. In that sense, she also becomes singular, becomes impersonal, and becomes imperceptible.

... in a Thousand Plateaus of Spaces

Bi's mother is a housewife. She stays at home. Her house is located in the Hanoi old quarter. Following the camera panning to the house, we know that it is French-styled, possibly built during the French colonial time. Through the *mise-en-scène*, we know the family owner belongs neither to an upper class nor to a working class. There are only two men in that house together with the not-yet-a-man Bi. The oldest man, Bi's grandfather, only returns to that house when he is seriously ill. To be more exact, he returns there to die. As observed in Bi's parents' dialogue, 'He came on a stretcher. He just looks bad... He must have been sick abroad...' 'If he weren't so sick, he wouldn't have come back to Vietnam.' The second man, Bi's father, spends the whole day in the street. He only goes home after midnight when his stomach is already full of beer.

At the molar level of the film, we may criticize the binary gendered division between public space and domestic space where women's bodies are linked to the home and men's bodies are associated with the street. We may also disregard a social and cultural construction which assumes women's bodies are static and imprisoned in a fixed space. We may agree with Nira Yuval-Davis (1997) on her objection to burdened representations that women are said to carry in

both social and spatial contexts. We may share with Spike Peterson (2000) that women are treated unfairly when they are told to be responsible for maintaining homes, families, but have historically been denied their access to public sphere. Also, we may not disagree with Linda McDowell (2002) about a biased-constructed gender difference that leads to the difference in spatial use by men and women. From a second-wave gendered reading, it is noticeable—as Nancy Duncan’s analysis of the public/private spatial dichotomy—that the domestic space (as woman) is embodied and apolitical whereas the public space (as man) is disembodied and political (see Duncan 2006, 128-129). That is to say, from this molar political perspective, *Don’t Be Afraid, Bi!* can be seen as a case study for a feminist critique of space and gendered bodies.

However, such a critique does not move beyond dualism because the logic of that critique lies on its attempt to invert to another side of the binary (public/private space, men/women) rather than to de-mystify it in a non-contradictory, non-hierarchical, and non-separable relation. Indeed, even at the molar level, there is no universal oppression of women’s bodies and domestic spatiality. As Chandra Mohanty (2003) makes very clear, regarding women as a universal stable category of analysis and presuming that patriarchal kinship structures are all the same is erroneous thinking. Politically, this way of thinking is dangerous because in reverse, it acknowledges and reinforces false binary divisions between men and women (see Mohanty 2003, 60). In that sense, Duncan’s warning of the private space as ‘a place where aggressive forms of misogynous masculinity are often exercised with impunity’ (2006, 131) is not universally applicable. In the case of *Don’t Be Afraid, Bi!*, the domestic space is not that oppressive. There are two adult men in the house: the disabled man (Bi’s grandfather) and the drunken man (Bi’s father). They are neither misogynous nor violent. In fact, they are powerless. In terms of sexuality or sexual power, they are not even active. The three women in the house are neither dependents (either economically or emotionally) nor victims of domestic violence. The two of them are sexual active (e.g. in the film, there is a bedroom scene in which the woman becomes active while her husband is passive). The real head of the house is Bi’s mother. ‘My wife can do it,’ the husband confesses his uselessness and at the same time acknowledges that his wife is not at all a living doll.



Bi's parents in a bedroom scene. Still in the film, 2010. Courtesy of Acrobat Films.

From a molecular perspective, Deleuze does not think about a body by its corporeal organs and functions. Neither does he want to define a body by its species (whether it is human or nonhuman) nor its genus (whether it is female or male). He is only concerned with the affects, forces, intensities, and relationalities that can compose or decompose a body in spatiality. For Deleuze, a body is defined only by two spatial dimensions: longitude and latitude. Longitude is movement and rest, speed and slowness whereas latitude is intensities, capacities, and degrees of potential (Deleuze and Guattari 2005, 260). In other words, a body is always ‘occupying the space’ (2005, 488) and bodily becomings can only occur in affective space, which Deleuze sometimes calls ‘smooth space’ (see 2005, 479). In *Dialogues* with Claire Parnet, Deleuze (1987), again, demonstrates his emphasis on the spatiality of becomings—instead of temporality. He says:

We think too much in terms of history, whether personal or universal. Becomings belong to geography, they are orientations, directions, entries and exists. There is a woman-becoming which is not the same as women, their past and their future, and it is essential that women enter history. There is a revolutionary-becoming which is not the same as the future of the revolution, and which does not necessarily happen through the militants. (Deleuze 1987, 2)

At the molecular level of the film, I argue that the domestic space can be seen as affective space, space of the marginal, or space of becomings. First of all, I want to demonstrate that the house in the film is a space of the placeless or space of the in-betweenness. Second of all, I want to show that it is in this affective placeless space, Bi's mother experiences her transformation to a becoming-imperceptible.

At first, she seems to be no more ordinary than other housewives in the home. She cooks, cleans, and takes care of the family on everyday basis. If she needs to speak, almost nothing is important in her messages. Her dialogues to her husband, her grandfather, her sister-in-law, and her son can be placed into any context. Nothing specific or special can be addressed to her. Yet, on the other hand, from the beginning of the film until the end, we still know nothing about her. She appears to be no one. She even does not have a name. We do not know if she is angry, happy, or sad, at least at the corporeal level of the body. We do not know if she has ever worked outside the house although we know very clearly about the job of her sister-in-law, a high-school teacher. On the plane of transcendence, when feminists are struggling for women's rights—the rights that are believed to be taken from patriarchal systems, a woman staying at home as a 'no-one' seems to be a serious feminist problem. Yet, if we see it from the plane of immanence, where power is no longer understood as a binaristic power taken from someone or something that is higher than us, we may have another alternative point of view about women's freedom and power. In relation to her husband, Bi's mother does not possess any ownership. He often gets home late, and he seems to have an extra affair outside the house. Yet, she never asks about it. She does not fight for the possession of his love. Her love is no longer a love *to* someone in a transcendent understanding. In other words, her love is no longer enslaved by her husband and she is no longer enslaved to that love. In a Deleuzian understanding, we can only speak of freedom as autopoiesis, as force of life, and as power to act (rather than to react) on the plane of immanence, when immanence is no longer immanence to anything other than itself, in itself, and for itself (see Deleuze 2001, 27). This also means the false dialecticism of self-otherness must fall apart because the subject is no longer dependent on anything outside itself (see Kennedy 2002, 164). As a 'no-one'—with no love enslavement to her husband—Bi's mother becomes a molecular woman whereas her no-love-enslavement becomes a molecular resistance. This resistance is imperceptible because it dissolves her essentialist molar identity. In that sense, she is no longer identified. That is why until the end of the film, we still know nothing about her and

we cannot identify her. She already goes beyond significations, beyond our molar understanding of a woman in a patriarchal signified system. In so doing, together with her becoming-imperceptible, her domestic space also dissolves its identity of an organic place. It becomes a placeless space or an in-between space, a space proper to becomings on the plane of immanence. In Deleuzian words, this space has transformed its essentialist corporeal functions (e.g. sexuality, procreation, aggression, feeding) into incorporeal affects and percepts, into affective space (see Deleuze and Guattari 1994b, 183).

Indeed, this Deleuzian way of understanding of placeless space or space-in-the-between is not new. From a feminist perspective, it shares—to some extent—with Luce Irigaray's notion of the woman's body as a placeless space. In her critique of Heidegger in *The Forgetting of Air in Martin Heidegger*, Irigaray points out that 'space is given first by her' but 'the thinker gives it back to himself', and 'when he gives it back to himself, he encircles it' (1999, 96). Therefore, woman 'has to assume the passage between' (Irigaray 1993, 35) in order to constitute her own space. This is by no means to romanticize the marginal and the living-in-between. In fact, it is even what molar feminists aim to achieve because choosing to live on the edge—both inside and outside, both margin and centre—is to choose a space of radical openness, of multiplicities, and to choose to be a whole universe (hooks 1990, 145, 149).

In the final sequence of the film, on the day Bi's mother visits her father-in-law's grave, there is an airplane across the sky. Her image is dissolved in that moment. The screen turns completely black. We only hear her voice, 'I'm here, Bi!' but we cannot see her. We can find her nowhere. She becomes the body-without-an-image. No name. No identity. No image. She becomes imperceptible. In that imperceptibility, she becomes impersonal, becomes singular, and becomes universe, 'a whole universe'—as feminists long for (see hooks 1990). Here, I want to emphasize that it is the existence of the sheer vitality of matter, its dynamic force, its autopoiesis—as Massumi (1997, 16) puts it—in each becoming that makes it fully real and not at all daydreaming or fantasizing. This existence, in Deleuze's thoughts, is a pre-subjectivity (autopoiesis) that he relates to an egg, full of virtual potentials, but very real. This vitalist force, vitalist pre-subjectivity, pre-personality, or autopoiesis has become unthinkable once we are hailed by ideological apparatuses and subjectified under our dualistic habit of thought. What Deleuze has tried to achieve through his work, even before the last minute of his life (see *Pure Immanence: Essays on A Life*), is to get rid of that dialecticism, a thought of the master and the

slave. In so doing, he wants us to see the power of life, the molecularity of our existence, capture it, saturate it, make it a shock, eliminate all of unnecessary dirt, waste in our flesh, render from it the invisible force, the dynamic potential, the intensity that is always/already in us. This is the affect of becomings. This is the affect of life.

Regarded from this point of departure, *Don't Be Afraid, Bi!* is full of visceral forces and intensities. In that vitalist-materialist sense, the domestic space (the house) and the public space (the street, the Red River, the sandbar, the alluvial soil) have moved beyond spaces of feelings, emotions, and belongings into spaces of affects. Here, there are a thousand plateaus of spaces, in which each plateau contains 'ordinary affects' (to use Kathleen Stewart's words) of life, of ordinary life, of everyday life. It is the summer in Hanoi. The camera captures the rustle of green leaves in the wind, makes its invisible rustling sound become visible to us. There is a watermelon hidden under the alluvial soil. It is Bi's secret. But one day it gives a surprise when two unknown kids suddenly discover it under the Red River tidal. There is water, ice, rain, almost everywhere, in its own complete bliss, but appears all of a sudden in its own speed and slowness. It is as if there are a thousand tiny lives inviting us to join them, to enjoy them, to explore them. The film, as a work of art, is truly a bloc of sensations, percepts and affects. These affects and percepts are saturated in harmonies, consonance and dissonance of tone, color, rhythm in each plateau of spaces. Here, it is a green of leaves and grasses. There, it is a red of watermelon. Elsewhere, it is a piercing sound from a knife cutting the ice. Here, it is a piece of ice slowly melting down under the heat of a summer afternoon, in the rush of a street corner. There, it is a grey of time carved into the wall, and captured by a frozen movement of the camera. Elsewhere, it is the vibration of a night affected by the vibration of ice in an ice-love-making scene. Everything now becomes movement-images and time-images. Everything is now just a shifting assemblage of things that happen (Stewart 2007, 1) in its sheer autopoiesis. Everything is now unfinished, open-ended in excess of its actual, virtual, where each affect 'has neither beginning nor end, departure nor arrival, origin nor destination ... only a middle' (Deleuze and Guattari 2005, 293). All of this brings to us 'the incredible feeling of an unknown Nature—affect' (Deleuze and Guattari 2005, 240).

This demystification of an unknown nature is not only crucial in Deleuzian works on art and cinema, but also a critical task of geography feminism. In *Feminism & Geography*, Gillian Rose (2007, 68) points out that Western thought is not only embedded by the dualistic distinction

between nature and culture, but in human geography which primarily aims to study the social world, there is also a reluctance to discuss physical geography which focuses on the natural environment as a part of its geographical inseparability. This distinction is, for Rose, ‘heavily gendered and power-ridden’ (2007, 68) because nature—from the eyes of male geographers—is often feminized, passive. Through the Deleuzian lens, as I have analyzed above, *Don’t Be Afraid, Bi!* can be seen as a molecular feminist film despite the fact that the film director is a biological man. Here, in the film, the binary between nature and culture, between men and women, as Rose has been concerned, has been demystified. The becomings-nature of humans have been actualized. The boundaries between the centre and the margin have been deterritorialized so that none of spaces in the film has any master territory. There is only, if only, a zone of spatial indiscernibility—in a Deleuzian sense—between nature-culture, men-women, proper to becomings.

2.4. A Rain-Soaked Hanoi, Flows of Desire, and Becomings: *Adrift*

“Adrift” (“Choi Voi”), which the Museum of Modern Art is showing as part of its touring exhibition, Global Lens 2010, is a subtle, melancholy exploration of erotic angst and uncomfortable awakening. Its most heated moments are close-up scenes of foot massages photographed with a soft-core intensity that suggests they are substitutes for something far more explicit.

...

The confusion besetting Duyen is reflected in eerily beautiful shots of the clogged, rain-soaked city streets in which traffic inches along in ankle-deep water. Because the characters are photographed mostly in shadow and often in candlelight, the dimness deepens the atmosphere of psychological mystery and indirection.

“Adrift” evokes a culture whose puritanical restraints have begun to loosen, allowing dangerous sparks to fly. Once desire has been unleashed, smugly settling for less is no longer a comfortable option.

The passages above are from a film review entitled *Marriage and Mores in Rain-Soaked Hanoi* by Stephen Holden in *The New York Times* on 17 January 2010. Jean-Luc Douin in another review published by *The Guardian* on 22 February 2011 claims that the film *Adrift* (dir. Bui Thac Chuyen, 2009) is a picture of female sexuality and desire ‘repressed by tradition’. Unfortunately, most of the readings of *Adrift* in both international and local media share the same tone with Holden and Douin: negative and Freudian-laden, enigmatic, melancholic, libidinous,

frustrated, and illicit. From such a perspective, Vietnamese women are viewed as repulsed victims of their libido and their patriarchal tradition. Discontent with this reductive and binaristic understanding, what I want to do here is to offer another way of seeing, more affirmative, towards the power of becomings, in which the woman in the film can have a chance to affirm her power, a power that is already/always in her. In so doing, I argue for a move away from the Freudian-Lacanian transcendent paradigm in order to realize that desire is no longer an ontological lack and that woman can really have access to her desire. This is by no means romanticizing, naïve, or utopian. The truth is if we dismantle ‘the condition of impossibility’, a delusion that transcendence makes us to believe (see 1.3), we may be able to see that there are indeed flows of desire, and each desire in the film has always been an affective assemblage. Seeing from the Deleuzian immanent lens, in which the condition of impossibility has been shifted to the condition of possibility, I will demonstrate that it is Duyen’s affective desire that leads to her transformations, and it is Hanoian space soaked by rain and clogged by water that becomes a haptic and affective space.

Violence

It is a hot summer in Hanoi, with showery weather. Downpour is everywhere. Water is everywhere. Humidity and sultriness can be felt in each centimeter of the skin. In cramped bedrooms. In narrow alleys. In zigzag staircases. And even under shadows. But there is something exotic and erotic, there is some flavor of Indochina, some dim reminder of Marguerite Duras and her secret affair in *The Lover*. At the molar level of the film, *Adrift* is a story about woman and family in modern Hanoi. Yet, it may be true—to somewhat extent—that Hanoian space is still a space of confinement, a space that is ‘felt as part of patriarchal power’, as feminist geographer Gillian Rose (2003, 318) puts it. In this space, women are still burdened with family duties. Duyen’s grandmother still fulfils her dutiful role in taking care of her paralyzed husband without any complaints, because for her, ‘there are things about him I’d rather not know.’ This can only make Duyen guess ‘maybe my grandparents weren’t happy,’ but can never receive any confirmation because ‘my grandmother’s never talked about that.’ Cam’s mother can still spend the whole year to embroider a wedding nightgown for her daughter, with an acknowledgement that: ‘Your mother’s duty is to make you a wedding dress.’ In this space, women’s sexuality is

still something that should not be under discussion or in demand. The opening scene of the film starts with the ending of Duyen and Hai's wedding party. Night is falling. The camera makes a long shot and pans towards the dead-end of a small alley. There is an old house with rough variegated walls and cursory decorations. The bridegroom is drinking excessively under the watch of his mother. The bride is patiently waiting in a garret. 'She has my little boy. Let her wait, we're not in a rush,' the mother decides. When the bridegroom is blind drunk, the mother briefly gives an instruction to the daughter-in-law, 'Let the boy sleep!' 'Just let him sleep!' The first night of the married couple passes that way. The following morning, the mother-in-law advises the timid daughter that, 'Hai drives a taxi, he often comes home late, you should always wait for him and warm up his food.' After the daughter does not show any sign of disobedience, the mother-in-law continues with 'one more thing'... that: 'He drives around all day, it's very tiring. When he comes home at night, let the boy sleep. Don't work him too hard.'



Duyen and her husband. Still in the film. 2009. Courtesy of Global Film.

Yet, there are some emerging rebellious signs in this space of confinement. Cam refuses marriage. 'Mother, I'll never wear a wedding dress. Stop working on it!', she declares after giving away her last hand-made wedding nightgown to Duyen, but declines to attend Duyen's wedding because 'I'm into funerals, not weddings.' In the film, Cam's sexuality is a little ambiguous, but her passion with Duyen cannot be easily distinguished between a lesbian

relationship and a friendship. There is no explicit sexual encounter between them, except for only one scene in which the two of them share a steam bath, but it is not uncommon, if seen through the lens of the Vietnamese social and cultural construction.



Duyen and Cam. Still in the film. 2009. Courtesy of Global Film.

From a molar feminist perspective, *Adrift* is a story of infidelity, of a woman betraying her husband, of a woman revolting against Confucian patriarchal tradition. Duyen is a virgin bride. Vietnamese Confucianism has been very much obsessed with women's virginity. This is because virginity is a moral value, a woman's pride and a man's honor. A woman who loses her virginity before marriage or who commits adultery—no matter any specific circumstance—is always blameworthy and, in many cases, she may deserve the death penalty. It is no wonder that even today, in this twenty-first century, Vietnamese media are still heated by debates on women's virginity and family duties. Thus, from a macro feminist politics, Duyen's betrayal of her husband can be read as subversion to the legacy of the patriarchal Confucian system. Indeed, in the film there is a hidden space in a dull, tiny up-stair flat, where Duyen first meets Tho, first experiences an exploration of her body. In this space—if reading from the molar gendered lens—Duyen's body is not simply an object of vulnerability. As Fran Tonkiss (2005, 100) has noted, urban life can be a site of freedom for women by offering subversive space against established social roles and conventional models of gender and domestic relations. At this point, Hanoian space is not only a space of duty and confinement, but also a space for Duyen's secret rebellion.

However, from a molar reading, how can feminists account for Duyen's desire—without falling back to essentialist, binaristic thoughts? How can feminists constitute a desire beyond lack and negation? From Plato to Hegel and Freud, we are always told to carry an ontological lack (a lack of being) that can never be fulfilled. Pleasure as discharge, the only unit capable of measuring desire, is only illusory because its true satisfaction never happens, but is infinitely delayed, and deferred until death (Smith 2003, 58-59). This point is crucial here. The question of woman's desire is still unsolvable in feminist film theory partly because of feminists' hesitation to divorce from Hegelian and Freudian legacies. Rethinking woman's desire beyond binarism thus requires a challenge to the phallic signification system. Unless women can navigate or define themselves as they are, they will always be 'lack' (see MacCormack 2008).

Moving away from the Freudian conception of the made-to-believe unconscious and an already-made narrative of desire (as lack) on the plane of transcendence, Deleuze believes desire is an assemblage, a production, which does not pre-exist, but which must be constructed (Deleuze and Parnet 1987, 89). On the plane of immanence, desire, affect, and the body are inseparable. As Deleuze explains, 'desire concerns speeds and slownesses between particles (longitude), affects, intensities and haecceities in degrees of power (latitude)' (1987, 95). This means desire can only be defined in connections, relationalities, and affects. A bodily desire is a force, a vitalist and dynamic energy, which 'necessarily ties into molecular levels' (Deleuze and Guattari 2005, 215). Desire is therefore a quantum flow, which is everywhere, productive and affective. Considering desire from this vitalist molecularity, Deleuze dismantles the transcendent static binary between the subject and the object so that desire is no longer constrained by any subject or object, and there is only desire itself. In that sense, 'desire no longer lacks anything but fills itself and constructs its own field of immanence' (Deleuze and Guattari 2005, 157). Pleasure becomes the flow of desire itself, and therefore it is no longer a detour through suffering (2005, 157). In sum, a Deleuzian conception of desire should be understood in molecular structures of fluxes or flows of affects rather than Oedipal molar structures of school, nation, family, church, state, and self (Kennedy 2002, 81). Importantly, thinking desire in such flows affirms that desire cannot be stranger to life. If life is a process of striving and self-enhancement, a (life) desire no longer carries a death drive, but instead, it has power to create, to overcome (see Colebrook 2002b, xxii).

Viewing *Adrift* from this vitalist Deleuzian paradigm, Duyen's desire does not need to be masculinized or masqueraded because her desire has always/already been affective. The first time that Duyen meets Tho, when Hanoi suddenly pours rain, when he suddenly hurls her to the floor of his up-stair dim-candlelight flat for a violent kissing, has awaken Duyen's sexual desire. 'She is too young and also too nervous. Seemed like the first time she found out what a man is,' Tho reveals to Cam. Since this sudden and violent meeting, Duyen starts to wonder if her grandmother has ever been happy. Duyen starts to search for her grandfather's photos and discovers his pictures with a mysterious woman whose love diary has become Duyen's obsession. Later on, there is a scene when Duyen, from the bathroom, asks her two-year-younger-husband to give her a bath towel, implying something far more explicit. But he does not seem to understand her encouraging sign. There is another scene in which the two are in bed and Duyen tries to attract him, but he is simply ignorant. In a common understanding, the hurling scene between Duyen and Tho can easily be read as a physical violence, violence against women, or even at worst, it is almost a rape. Yet, the point is, if reading it that way, how can feminists go far enough to explain Duyen's sexual desire? If read that way, how can we understand Duyen's exploration of the outside and her inner side? If read that way, there may be only one option for Duyen: to be Tho's mistress, to be enslaved to 'the pleasures of the flesh, to perverse games and emotional dependence' (see Douin 2011). And, if read that way, sadly enough, Duyen must be a masochist. Yet, does Duyen really desire to be enslaved in such a way? Obviously, such a reading is too reductive and detrimental to women.

In a Spinozist-Deleuzian understanding, this violence goes beyond the sheer physicality of the flesh and blood. It constitutes an affect. The encounter between Duyen and Tho is thus a body meeting another body, a force meeting another force. In his reading of Spinoza, Deleuze (1990b) has noted that our essence is a part of dynamic nature. This means our being is already an active natural power—which is a source of the derivative forces attributed to bodies—with all its virtuality, potentiality, immanence, and inherent becoming (1990b, 227). In other words, all power of essence corresponds with a certain capacity to be affected, and because we are a part of nature, this capacity is always exercised (1990b, 93). In this Spinozist-Deleuzian sense, Duyen's desire belongs to nature. Her meeting with Tho therefore actualizes the existence of this natural power in her essence. Here, I want to reiterate that since our essences have an absolutely infinite power (potential), the capacity to affect and to be affected of the body can be exercised in an

infinity of ways or a very great number of ways (Deleuze 1990b, 95, 218). That is to say, different bodies have different capacities of affecting and being affected in different relations. Even in the same relations, bodies do not affect nor are affected with the same capacities. In the film, Duyen's capacity to affect and to be affected in her encounter with Tho may not be identical to our common way of being affected. Yet, this does not mean it is not possible to be affected in the way Duyen does. The point here is we may see the corporeal violence in her encounter, but we may not see the violence of affect—the formless matter, 'the shock to thought' (Deleuze 2000a)—in it until this shock/violence has been actualized. At a certain level, this shock has brought some strong, uncontrollable impression on Duyen so that she has to confess it to Cam in another scene. This shock, eventually, leads to Duyen's decision to go with Tho on a sea tour. And then, that night, at 3 am, she informs Cam on the phone, 'It's awful. The gown you gave me is all torn.' There comes another shock.

The camera captures a close-up of feet touching. Then it moves to the upper part of the body so that we see the woman is quivering to the background music of a sensual Vietnamese song *Weaving the Hemp Cloth (Det Tam Gai)*. A razor blade cuts her gown. Her body is moving to the rhythm of the blade. There is no dialogue. The woman's face is the final image that the camera chooses to reveal... 'He frightened me and hurt me. But that was the first time I felt my own body so fully,' Duyen recalls. Again, there is cruelty in that encounter. It not only confirms Duyen's capacity of affecting and being affected but it also indicates that this cruelty is indeed a part of the natural force. This force follows 'laws of composition and decomposition of relations which determine both the coming into existence of modes, and the end of their existence' (Deleuze 1990b, 211). That is why through this composition, Duyen can feel her own body—as a part of her inner nature with all its dynamic movements and potentialities—'so fully'. As Deleuze writes, a mode ceases to exist when 'it is rendered completely incapable of being affected in many ways' (1990b, 212). In this sense, Duyen's desire goes beyond the desire and pleasure of the flesh. As an existing mode, her desire has already been Nature and has already been flows of quantum and molecularity. In this becoming-nature of desire, Duyen also experiences a becoming-woman.

Becoming

At the beginning of the film, Duyen is a timid young woman. She seems to be happy and obedient. Duyen's mottos are 'If you don't expect too much, then everything is simple,' 'If you're simple like me, nothing's a problem.' Duyen lives with her grandparents and sleeps with her grandmother. She has never had any chance to sleep alone before marriage. But she does not refuse marriage and family duties. Duyen is married to Hai just three months after her first meeting, and even does not know if she was too much in a rush. As she says, 'I met Hai, I liked him, we got married. That's it!' 'And now I still don't know whether I was too much in a rush,' 'All I know is now I have him. That's enough for me!' When Cam suggests Duyen going further with Tho, Duyen rejects it immediately, 'No I have Hai and I'm not looking for any complications.' Yet, this objection does not last forever. The two affective encounters with Tho have changed Duyen's life unexpectedly. Since then, Duyen begins her self-exploration—in which the first and foremost discovery is to recognize the dynamic materiality of her body. Because of this, she starts to construct a different life apart from a life of a molar woman with a docile body and family duties. In this different life, she refuses to obey patriarchal traditional mores and norms (e.g. virginity value). This refusal is a point of departure for becoming a molecular woman.

Becoming-woman in a Deleuzian sense is a process of de-subjectification. Becoming-woman is to go outside the binary system, to disconnect with the molar woman—who has already been assigned as a subject and already been defined by her form, organs, functions (Deleuze and Guattari 2005, 275). Becoming-woman is to create a new woman—who can only be defined in her autopoiesis, in dynamic Nature, by natural affects (in a Spinozist-Deleuzian understanding), by 'the relation of movement and rest, or the zone of proximity, of a microfemininity' (Deleuze and Guattari 2005, 275). In other words, becoming-woman replaces subjectivity by materiality and molecularity. This enables a view of woman in relation to the material, the forces of Nature, e.g. matter, affect (Kennedy 2002, 96). At this point, Colebrook adds that 'nature is itself art, the creation of forms,' (2004, 39) but nature also 'forms itself *politically*—in relation to other bodies' (2004, 39, italics in original). In the film, Duyen's journey to becoming-woman is a process of de-subjectification and constructing a plane of immanence. Through becoming, Duyen deterritorializes the established molar form of Culture-

woman and reterritorializes a molecular form of Nature-woman. In this regard, *Adrift* is not simply an infidelity story. As a work of art, the film is indeed highly political because it has destroyed established values and it has created new thoughts and new values to redefine ‘what is a woman’ (to use Toril Moi’s words, 2005).

Together with Duyen’s transformations, Hanoian space has also undergone metamorphoses. There is a physical and organic space where Duyen lives—the house, the street, the nation. In this space, marriage is a norm and traditions are to be obeyed. In this space, women’s body, sexuality, and desire must be kept in silence. Yet, there is a haptic space of shadows, candlelight, rain, where Duyen first experiences her sexual awakening. There is an erotic space of touching, feeling, desiring the skin, the sensual, the flesh inside the cramped, the humid, the heat of summer Hanoi. There is also a space of flows of desire. There is also a space of forces, affects, intensities and virtualities where Duyen experiences a becoming-woman.

The film ends with Duyen’s return to Hanoi after that night, after her gown is all torn. Things seem to go back to the beginning. Her neighbor girl still bathes in a water tank. Her husband still drives a taxi. Her grandmother still takes care of her ailing grandfather with a maxim ‘no ask, no talk’. Hanoi is still soaked with rain and clogged with water. The sensual song *Weaving the Hemp Cloth* by Vi Thuy Linh, a Vietnamese female poet, who is celebrated for her verse on woman’s desire and sexuality, is still on. But Duyen has changed. Things cannot be back to the beginning. Hanoian space is no longer a confinement to her. A space of the-in-between has emerged. It is a space of both molarity and molecularity. In Deleuzian terms, it is a mixture of both smooth space (affective space) and striated space (molar space), where ‘smooth space is constantly being translated, transverse into a striated space’ whereas ‘striated space is constantly being reversed, returned to a smooth space’ (Deleuze and Guattari 2005, 474). This may be Duyen’s space, a space of her own.

After all, *Adrift* is a life story, life in its materiality, molecularity, and vitality. From a Nietzschean-Deleuzian lens, our bodies are nothing but quantities of preexisting force, in which every force is related to others (Deleuze 2002, 40). In the film, the two women—Cam and Duyen—can be seen as the two Nietzschean-Deleuzian forces: one is reactive (Cam) and another is active (Duyen). Duyen does not fall in love with Tho. As a part of Nature, her desire does not draw to Tho. In fact, it is to affirm life. It is a will to power, a power of life—a power of creating and giving, not of taking. Cam translates Duyen’s desire by a nihilistic and transcendent point of

view. From this viewpoint, she can only see 'a dissatisfaction', a 'waiting for', and something 'missing' in Duyen. As a negation to life, Cam does not experience becomings whereas Duyen's becoming is an affirmation of life. In other words, Duyen is the saying 'Yes', the active force of life, a life that is too strong, too inviting, but too violent. For Duyen, in life, in life of immanence, adrift (also the title of the film) has already been a position that opens to multiple directions and experimentations rather than a fear and lack of lost directions.

Conclusion

What I have attempted in this thesis is to propose a way of seeing differently. To accomplish this, I have argued to move beyond the transcendental paradigm, wherefrom the three basic modes of seeing, i.e. mimesis, intentionality, and constructivism have derived. As I have analyzed, the three modes of seeing, which are adopted by traditional feminist film theory, exhibit salient limitations. The blindest spot is that these modes rely on representation, which is ontologically dualistic. At the level of metaphysics, representation is rooted in the dialectical tradition of Western thought, which primarily privileges the real over the copy, man over woman, culture over nature, humans over nonhumans. Politically, representation is produced for domination and subordination. Feminist film scholars have been trying to criticize the misrepresentation of women in cinema but representation itself has not been challenged. Therefore, it has led to an inconsistency between feminist tools and feminist goals. To address the limits of current feminist film scholarship, I have offered an alternative approach—an affective methodology— as a truly non-discriminatory tool for the study of women and cinema. Throughout the thesis, I have strategically made use of the Deleuzian notion of affect and his critique of representation. In so doing, I conceptualized affect as virtuality, non-intentionality, incorporeality, and non-representational becomings, located within the molecularity and materiality of matter and nature. From this affective-materialist conceptualization, I have considered bodies and spaces as assemblages, forces, intensities, and constitutions of capacities and relations. As I have demonstrated, this framework has helped to de-essentialize and destabilize a discriminatory binaristic understanding of the female bodies and spaces, and also let the spectator enjoy visual pleasure in a critical and creative manner.

Working with/becoming with/and creating with the Deleuzian affective-materialist framework, together with a feminist materialist reading of the two contemporary Vietnamese films *Don't Be Afraid, Bi!* and *Adrift*, I have argued for a mobile, non-binaristic, and non-static understanding of bodies and spaces. In so doing, I constructed a plane of immanence and highlighted the affective becomings of bodies and spaces in immanence. In these becomings, my

focus was placed on the dynamic nature, the becoming-nature of culture, the becoming-incorporeality of the corporeality, and the becoming-nonhuman of humans in the two films. Seen through the non-dialecticist, non-representational, and non-foundational lens, *Don't Be Afraid, Bi!* offers an alternative way of understanding the body and sexuality beyond a common notion of the flesh and blood. The film has demonstrated that there has been a collapse of sexual dialectics and a rise of a thousand tiny sexes, ranging from the humans to the nonhumans in a non-contradictory, affective relationality. Through affecting and being affected, the bodies in *Don't Be Afraid, Bi!* experienced a becoming-Bi, becoming-child, becoming-ice, becoming-woman, and becoming-imperceptible. Together with bodily becomings, Hanoian space also became a thousand plateaus of spaces, in which each space became an affective space. Reading the film *Adrift* from the vantage point of the Deleuzian affective-materialist framework, I have shown that woman's desire is indeed a part of nature. From my point of view, this naturalism of desire is by no means about romanticizing the nature, but in fact, it has de-subjectified and deterritorialized established values of culture as well as molar ideological systems at the utmost. This revision of woman's desire through *Adrift* is liberating because it blurs gender dichotomies between man and woman, nature and culture, and therefore, it has gained a position—which has been ignored in the representational Oedipal scenario—for woman. In the affective paradigm, desire is productive and has nothing to do with lack, negation, or castration. Desire has led Duyen to becoming a molecular woman and has transformed Hanoian space into space of the-in-between—a space of mixture between space of the marginal and space of the major, between affective molecular space and molar space, and between smooth space and striated space.

All along, what I have wanted to underline in this thesis is an importance and timely adequacy of a molecular feminist politics, a politics of affects. Therefore, it is clear that this politics has moved beyond identification and ideological structures. Its key term is the vitalistic materiality, autopoiesis, pre-subjectivity, and singularity so that the female body exercises its dynamics and potentiality which is in fact to acquire a will to power: a power to life.

(30,285 words)

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