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The image of walking

The aesthetics and politics of cinematic pedestrianism

Özgen-Tuncer, A.

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English Summary

*The Image of Walking: The Aesthetics and Politics of Cinematic
Pedestrianism*

Asli Ozgen-Tuncer

This dissertation investigates the ways in which pedestrianism, as an everyday act of engagement with the dominant politics of space, has informed, shaped, or inspired cinematic aesthetics. Through a cultural analysis of six film historical moments, this study approaches the history of cinema from the perspective of urban walking experience. Such approach is informed primarily by three key theories: firstly, Henri Lefebvre's contention that all spaces, including the public space of cities, are constructions that are shaped by certain ideologies that determine and control the ways in which the constructed spaces function; secondly, Michel de Certeau's focus on the pedestrian as an everyday practitioner of the city and on the everyday pedestrian acts that elude, subvert, or disrupt the dominant spatial order of the city; and finally, Jacques Rancière's notion of *distribution of the sensible*, which sheds light on the political structures implicated in all constructed spaces and shapes all sensible experience, i.e. what is allowed or not allowed to be said, seen, or shown. From this standpoint, pedestrianism can be perceived as a constructed aesthetic experience in the city, and *pedestrian acts* as dissenting practices, which transgress the established aesthetic order of the public space by walking the unwalkable trajectories, saying the unsayable, or showing the unshowable. This

Summary

study elaborates on the ways in which the cinematic medium evolved in conversation with such experiences and the new images, styles, and techniques that emerged to articulate such dissent.

Even though the cinematic image of walking is abundant in film history especially in scenes that depict everyday life in a city, it has not been analysed as an aesthetic practice that has informed film theory and praxis since its earliest days. This research into pedestrian acts in the history of cinema revisits a selection of canonical works to investigate the transposition of specific walking experiences and pedestrian acts into cinematic aesthetics. In this way, it aims to draw attention to an under-examined dimension in film historiography, namely the influence of the changing aesthetic experience of pedestrianism with the rise of modernity on the aesthetics of the emergent filmic medium. Alongside canonical works, a selection of relatively understudied films, filmmakers and theorists, which have been overlooked in canonical film historiography is also examined. Given this historical dimension, this study can be seen as a historical revisionist venture, in which I seek to re-interpret and re-explain certain moments in canonical and non-canonical film history through pedestrian acts.

Chapter One analyses the philosophy of movement that informed the scientific studies of human locomotion in the nineteenth century before the rise of the Lumière cinématographe. Through a comparative analysis of Muybridge and Marey's studies, this chapter focuses on pre-cinematic images of walking and explores the aesthetics that resulted from dissecting movement, or aiming to capture the ephemeral and unrepresentable movement.

Chapter Two, taking its departure from a conceptual affinity between the flâneur and the ungraspable movement explored in the previous chapter,

investigates *flânerie* as a filmmaking practice undertaken by Lumière cinématographe operators. Exploring the socio-historical context that vilified *flânerie* as unproductive movement, it analyses the *flânerie*-inspired cinematography in Lumière filmography.

In nineteenth century, women did not enjoy the same freedom as men to *flâner* in the city. By the turn of the century, however, the ethics that prescribed women's movement, visibility and behaviour in public spaces became strongly challenged as women were increasingly integrated into the urban workforce. This sociological phenomenon transformed both public space and the cinematic aesthetics that reflected those public spaces. In Chapter Three, I analyse the pedestrian acts in Lois Weber's progressive film *Shoes* (1916), a powerful discussion of underpaid female labour, the bourgeois ethics imposed on lower-class women and the ways in which their increasing visibility in the public space challenged those ethics. I also discuss Lois Weber's activist filmmaking as an aesthetic practice that ruptures the distribution of the sensible by questioning middle-class ethics, consumerism, class struggle and power balances in the family.

In Chapter Four, extending my focus on the pedestrian acts of working-class, I analyse Dziga Vertov's theory and practice of filmmaking to investigate the function of pedestrianism. Through the analysis of a stop-motion sequence from *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929), where the revelationist aspirations of Vertov's cinema are manifested through the image of what I call a *kino-pedestrian*: a camera which is mounted on a tripod and which can walk, observe, and record at its own will. The combination of machine-like qualities of camera, which is superior to human sense of vision and can show what remains unrecognisable to human eye, and the anthropomorphic qualities of walking, which allow the camera to be

constantly on the move, could be seen as a prototype of drifting prosthetic camera, which characterises the realistic and documentary-like aesthetic of uncut long takes in the later years of film history.

In Chapter Five, I research the writings of filmmakers from fascist and post-fascist Italy to explore their conceptions of the city and everyday life. Going out on the street with a camera to observe the everyday life in its uninterrupted flow and to shoot without intervention was a recurrent urge voiced by many filmmakers, primarily Cesare Zavattini. Taking departure from Zavattini's concept of *pedinamento*, I analyse cinematographic images of pedestrian acts in three films – *Romà, Città Aperta* (Roberto Rossellini, 1945), *Germania Anno Zero* (Roberto Rossellini, 1948), and *Ladri di Biciclette* (Vittorio de Sica, 1948) – which I selected for comparison to explore the alteration of social and political background and its effect on the cinematic image of walking.

Chapter Six focuses on Agnès Varda's filmography and practice of *cinécriture*. Through the analysis of three films – *Cléo de 5 à 7* (1962), *Sans Toit Ni Loi* (1985), and *Les Plages d'Agnès* (2008) – it explores the female protagonists' experiences of public space, which contain significant parallelisms with Varda's journey as a woman filmmaker in a male dominant industry. I approach these films and Varda's filmmaking through Deleuze and Guattari's concept of nomadism, which provides a philosophical angle to discuss pedestrianism as a signifier for constant transformation and transgression of established conventions.

Consequently, this study on the pedestrian acts in the history of cinema has revealed an aesthetic connection between the corporeal experience of the city on foot and the transposition of that experience into cinematic aesthetics. In each socio-cultural context that is analysed in each chapter, the aesthetic connection between

walking and filming differs to some extent, making this research relevant to other social, cultural, and political contexts that remain beyond its scope.

Nederlandse Samenvatting

In Beeld Lopen: Esthetiek en Politiek van het Voetgangerverkeer

Asli Ozgen-Tuncer

In dit proefschrift onderzoek ik de wijzen waarop lopen, beschouwd als een dagelijks treffen met de dominante politiek van de publieke ruimte, van vormende of inspirerende invloed is geweest op de esthetiek van de film. Aan de hand van een cultuur-analytische benadering van zes filmhistorische ‘momenten’ bestudeer ik de filmgeschiedenis vanuit het perspectief van het stadse lopen. Drie theoretische sleutelbegrippen waren van belang voor deze benadering. Ten eerste, Henri Lefebvre’s stelling dat alle ruimten, de stedelijke openbare ruimte inclusief, constructies zijn, gevormd door ideologieën die het functioneren van deze constructies bepalen en controleren. Ten tweede, Michel de Certeau’s nadruk op de voetganger als alledaagse ‘stadspracticus’ en op het alledaagse lopen als ontwijking, ondermijning of ontwrichting van de dominante ordening van de stedelijke ruimte. En tenslotte, Jacques Rancière’s ordening van het waarneembare, een term waarmee hij licht werpt op de politieke structuren die geconstrueerde ruimten met zich meebrengen en die vorm geven aan alle waarneembare ervaringen, d.w.z. wat wel of niet gezegd, gezien of getoond mag worden. Vanuit dit standpunt kan voetgangerverkeer gezien worden als een geconstrueerde, esthetische ervaring van de stad en het handelen van voetgangers als tweedracht-zaaiende praktijken die inbreuk maken op de gevestigde esthetische orde van de openbare ruimte: door niet voor lopen bedoelde paden te

belopen, het onzegbare te zeggen of het toonbaar te tonen. Deze studie behandelt op gedetailleerde wijze hoe het medium film zich ontwikkelde in samenspraak met de opkomst van nieuwe beelden, stijlen en technieken die uiting gaven aan zulk een tweedracht.

Er is een overvloed aan filmbeelden, met name in scènes van het alledaagse leven in steden, die het lopen in beeld brengen. Maar die beelden zijn niet onderzocht als een esthetische praktijk die van invloed is geweest op de filmtheorie en haar toepassingen sinds haar beginjaren. Dit onderzoek van het handelen van voetgangers in de filmgeschiedenis keert terug naar een select aantal canonieke werken teneinde de omzetting van specifieke loopervaringen en handelingen van voetgangers in filmesthetiek te bestuderen. Aldus vraagt het aandacht voor een nauwelijks onderzocht aspect in de filmhistoriografie, namelijk de invloed van de veranderende esthetische ervaring van het voetgangerverkeer gedurende de opkomst van het modernisme op de esthetiek van de film. Behalve een aantal canonieke werken behandel ik tevens een selectie van betrekkelijk weinig onderzochte, in de filmgeschiedenis veronachtzaamde films, filmmakers en theoretici. Deze studie, gegeven deze historische dimensie, kan dan ook worden gezien als een historisch-revisionistische onderneming waarin ik streef naar een herinterpretatie en nieuwe verklaringen van bepaalde momenten in zowel de canonieke als niet-canonieke filmgeschiedenis aan de hand van het handelen van voetgangers.

Hoofdstuk 1 analyseert de filosofie van beweging, die van invloed was op wetenschappelijke studies van menselijke voortbeweging in de 19e eeuw, voor de komst van de Lumières' Cinématographe. Aan de hand van een vergelijkende analyse van het werk van Muybridge en Marey richt dit hoofdstuk zich op prefilmische

beelden van lopen en onderzoekt de esthetiek die uit de ontleding van beweging, d.w.z. het vangen van vluchtige, onrepresenteerbare bewegingen, voortkwam.

Hoofdstuk 2 neemt als uitgangspunt de conceptuele verwantschap tussen de flaneur en de ongrijpbare bewegingen die in het vorige hoofdstuk waren onderzocht. Het bekijkt het flaneren als een praktijk van filmmaken van Lumière's cameralieden. In een studie van de socio-historische context waarin het flaneren werd weggezet als een vorm van onproductieve beweging analyseer ik de Lumière-filmografie als door flânerie geïnspireerd.

In de 19e eeuw hadden vrouwen niet dezelfde vrijheid als mannen om in de stad te flaneren. Maar rond de eeuwwisseling werden de voorschriften ten aanzien van beweging, zichtbaarheid en gedrag van vrouwen in de openbare ruimte toenemend betwist naarmate vrouwen werden opgenomen in het stedelijke arbeidsproces. Dit sociologische fenomeen veranderde zowel de publieke ruimte als de filmische esthetiek die deze ruimten weerspiegelde. In hoofdstuk 3 analyseer ik het handelen van voetgangers in Lois Webers progressieve film *Shoes* (1916), een indrukwekkende behandeling van onderbetaalde vrouwenarbeid, de burgerlijke ethiek die aan vrouwen uit de lagere klassen werd opgelegd en de wijze waarop de toenemende zichtbaarheid van die vrouwen in de publieke ruimte deze ethiek uitdaagde. Tevens bespreek ik Lois Webers activistische wijze van filmmaken als een esthetische praktijk die breekt met de ordening van het waarneembare door deze middenklasse-ethiek, de consumptiemaatschappij, de klassenstrijd en de machtsbalans binnen het gezin aan een kritisch onderzoek te onderwerpen.

In hoofdstuk 4 verbreed ik mijn focus op het handelen van voetgangers uit de arbeidersklasse. Ik analyseer theorie en praktijk van Dziga Vertovs wijze van filmmaken om de functie van het voetgangerverkeer te onderzoeken. Deze analyse

richt zich op een stop-motion sequentie uit *De man met de camera*, waarin Vertovs streven naar openbaring tot uitdrukking worden gebracht in wat ik een kino-pedestrian noem: een camera op statief die naar willekeur kan lopen, observeren en vastleggen. De combinatie van de camera in haar hoedanigheid als machine – superieur aan het menselijke gezichtsvermogen en in staat datgene te tonen wat het menselijke oog niet herkent – en de antropomorfische loopfunctie die de camera in staat stelt voortdurend onderweg te zijn, kan worden opgevat als een prototype van de dolende, prothetische camera, karakteristiek voor de realistische, documentaire esthetiek van ononderbroken long takes in latere jaren van de filmgeschiedenis.

In hoofdstuk 5 onderzoek ik de publicaties van Italiaanse filmmakers gedurende en na de periode van het fascisme en hun opvattingen over de stad en het leven van alledag. Met een camera de straat opgaan om het leven van alledag in zijn ononderbroken stroom te observeren en vast te leggen zonder ingrijpen was een veelgehoorde aansporing onder filmmakers, Cesare Zavattini in het bijzonder. Met Zavattini's begrip *pedinamento* analyseer ik beelden van het handelen van voetgangers in drie films: *Roma: città aperta*, *Germania: anno zero* en *Ladri di biciclette*. Deze selectie maakt een vergelijking mogelijk van de veranderende sociale en politieke achtergronden en hun effect op de filmische weergave van lopen.

Hoofdstuk 6 richt zich op Agnès Varda's filmografie en haar praktijk van *cinécriture*. Aan de hand van analyses van drie films – *Cléo de 5 à 7*, *Sans toit ni loi* en *Les plages d'Agnès* – onderzoek ik hoe hun vrouwelijke protagonisten publieke ruimten ervaren, ervaringen die in belangrijke mate parallel lopen met Varda's tocht door de door mannen beheerste filmindustrie. Ik benader Varda's films en haar wijze van filmmaken met behulp van het begrip *nomadisme*, van Deleuze en Guattari. Dit

verschafft mij een filosofische invalshoek om voetgangerverkeer te bespreken als signifiant van voortdurende omvorming en overschrijding van gevestigde conventies.

Aldus onthult deze filmhistorische studie van het voetgangerverkeer een esthetische relatie tussen de lichamelijke ervaring van het lopen in de stad en de omzetting daarvan in film-esthetische termen. In elk van de socio-culturele contexten die in de hoofdstukken worden behandeld verschilt de relatie tussen lopen en filmen in zekere mate. Dat maakt het onderzoek relevant voor andere sociale, culturele en politieke contexten die buiten het bereik van deze studie vallen. (Vertaling: Nico de Klerk)

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