

Kate Ince: *The Body and the Screen: Female Subjectivities in Contemporary Women's Cinema*

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The Body and the Screen illustrates the ways in which feminist phenomenological philosophy can be mobilized to shed light on film theory. Guiding us through the history of how film theory has approached the question of female subjectivity since the 1970s, Kate Ince sets her project in opposition to psychoanalytic film theory. Ince argues that a phenomenological account of embodiment is key to offering a robust theory of women on screen. With a focus on British and French cinema from the 1990s to the present, the films discussed in the book are directed by women, and feature female protagonists. A useful introduction to both feminist philosophy and film theory, *The Body and the Screen* underscores the intersubjective possibilities opened up by phenomenological approaches to art.

Acknowledging her indebtedness to contemporary British feminist film scholars, Ince situates her work in dialogue with Catherine Constable's *Thinking in Images: Film Theory Feminist Philosophy and Marlene Dietrich*, Caroline Bainbridge's *A Feminist Cinematics*, Lucy Bolton's *Film and Female Consciousness*, and Jenny Chamarette's *Phenomenology and The Future of Film:*

Rethinking Subjectivity Beyond French Cinema. In terms of methodology, Ince characterizes her approach as "a descriptive mode of analysis that constitutes, if not a fully-fledged methodology, then a flexible and heuristic method" (p.42). Simone de Beauvoir, Luce Irigaray, and Charlotte Battersby provide the theoretical scaffolding for Ince's intervention into film. Through a series of interweaving scene interpretations, *The Body and the Screen* constellates a particular mode of feminist cinema that cultivates relational encounters between two subjects rather than rehashing a phallogocentric subject-object relation. Rooted in the fluidity, relationality, and fleshiness of the female body, these films disclose a phenomenological account of situated, ethical female subjectivity. For example, Ince turns to *Fish Tank* (2009), *The Tango Lesson* (1997), and *Girlhood* (2014) in order to locate the moving body as the locus of freedom, subjectivity, and desire by carefully analyzing the female protagonists' relationship to dance. The first two chapters of the book sketch out a useful literature review of feminist phenomenology, first in relation to continental philosophy and, second, in relation to film studies. By way of

introduction, Ince offers an overview of the cross-cultural context in which these films were produced and received, and provides background information on the careers of the featured directors more broadly. While multiple film genres are considered, the works of Catherine Breillat, Agnès Varda, Sally Potter form a “core or nucleus” (p.45) around which *The Body and The Screen* takes shape.

Each remaining chapter of the book is centered on a broad theme: Body, Look, Speech, Desire, Performance, and Freedom. While each of the themes are approached through a phenomenological, feminist lens, this structure results in unnecessary repetition, since some films are analyzed in more than one chapter, and in an arbitrary organization, which leaves the relationship and movement between chapters

underdeveloped. Despite its dynamic title, *The Body and The Screen* focuses on the female character’s body as a locus of desire, potentiality, and freedom to the detriment of the relationship between the embodiment within the film and the female artists and audience members outside of the film. As a result, the project neglects how the mediations of the screen might intersect with the immediacy of the body. Although it remains limited in terms of analysis, *The Body and The Screen* provides ample examples of how to read contemporary women’s cinema in light of phenomenological relationality and would be a useful introductory resource for students interested in European cinema, feminist ethics, and gender studies.

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