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Film Theory

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### Logics and Affect in *Scent of a Woman*

When considering what makes a movie a successful box office hit, an important aspect is how it draws affect from the audience. Aside from having interesting plots, many films draw people in because they give out the feeling of thrills or draw on the sentiments of the audience's past experiences. Laura Mark introduces in her book *The Skin of the Film* that there are two kinds of memory that people register: the instrumental and non-instrumental. Instrumental memories are the remembered sensations, while non-instrumental memories are triggered by perceptions. In other words, people get feelings after being stimulated by instrumental senses, but non-instrumental perceptions are retained after getting the feelings. As a media, film presents the audience the instrumental perceptions which had been explored by film theorists for a relatively long time throughout film history, particularly in the apparatus theory. There seems to be a juxtaposition between the instrumental and non-instrumental memories that films register, in the sense that the instrumental ones seem to be what is real and logical, and the non-instrumental ones appear to be impressionistic and emotional. This paper will dismantle this preconception and argue that the emotional gives rise to the logical with the support of the affect theory in the film world.

Indeed, the non-instrumental memories are often said to be "just a feeling". Chances are that these memories are just senses that we should not be able to perceive effortlessly, which are also the ones closer to the body. For example, anxiousness as a feeling can sometimes translated

into the “butterfly in the stomach”. Mark discusses in her book that memory is a combination of the senses, and how they are combined vary based on past experience and culture. In a traditional 2D cinema space, visual and auditory senses are what can be provided by the film form. But other senses of the audience can also be stimulated by films with the atmosphere they create and memories they trigger. Senses such as touch and smell, senses that Marks classifies in her book as senses closer to the body, can only be explored on an individual level, senses that cannot be registered in films as instrumental memories. In the book, Marks points out that these senses closer to the body may be better capture at capturing memories than the visual. She argues that in film, meaning often escapes the audiovisual register, and that “cinema itself appeals to contact - to embodied knowledge, and to the sense of touch in particular - in order to recreate memories.” People have the natural tendencies to draw logics from films because logical arguments is what gives films their meanings. Everyone has their own logical interpretation of a film, and the meanings are personal. What is more universal between the audience, and from the filmmaker to the audience, is the intended feeling that people take away from films.

Filmmakers would say that films are works of logical orders that attempt to capture the orders of reality. The filming locations, casts and crews, rehearsal and shooting schedules, shots that follow at least some sort of temporal and spatial order (or the consistent choices of the divergence from the orders), even the mood of the casts (a.k.a. They way that they are treated) all need to be carefully stitched together throughout the production process. What the films leave the audience with, however, is an impression on the viewing experience, a memory of the pseudo-reality within the film. Therefore, for the sake of the targeting audience, the logics of the film should be a means to the affective end without overpowering it. The filmmakers must not

impose on the audience what the meanings of the films are. All they can offer to them through the film is the feeling.

But at the end of the day, logistical choices (where to cut scenes, what to show, what music to put in, the speed of the film, etc.) are the only tools that the filmmakers can take control of. Because logics are generally easier to discuss than feelings, society uses them to form a collectiveness in creating institutions and structures to make some default decisions and processes, to build a sort of production line so that everyone can “be productive”. Throughout all the collectivism is a lost sense of self and sense of feelings which should have been the primary guide to why people do what they do. Therefore in recent years, various fields such as psychology and sociology return to the study of affects. Eugenie Brinkema’s book *The Forms of the Affects* takes off from the fact that the recently studied affect had been positioned as what resists systematicity and structure, in response to the emergence of structuralism and materialism since the last century:

The contemporary critical investment in affectivity across the humanities has to do with a post-structuralist response to perceived omissions in structuralism- or, indeed, may be part of a post-poststructuralist or anti-poststructuralist response to perceived omissions in poststructuralism. The turn to affect, thus, is part of a larger reawakening of interest in problematics of embodiment and materiality in the wake of twentieth-century Western theory that, for many, was all semiotics and no sense, all structure and no stuff.

Brinkeman takes on a somewhat sinister point of view on the return to affect from people of various disciplines as a sort of divergence from a bundle of issues of materiality, structuralism, and various other issues from the society as a sort of temporary solution to all. This concept helps to remind us that the goal of our productivity is to make meanings with our lives and the lives of all humanity. People are obsessed with power, fame, reputation and materialistic goods, things that are products of the structuralism of the society, because at some degrees they are the

symbols of making meanings of life and impact on society, although the significance of the symbols has become misinterpreted and relabelled.

Instrumental and non-instrumental memories can be classified into different sensory experience that audience get from films. In *The Scent of a Woman* (Martin Brest, 1992), the main character Frank is created to be without the sense of vision. The film portrays the character with his auditory and olfactory senses magnified, along with his understanding of how vision is supposed to work based on memory. Through the character, the film examines memories and memory-making through the argument structure of the senses that Marks theorizes, and it eventually makes logical and moral arguments from its use of affects.

The film is a story between a retired army veteran Lieutenant Frank Slade (Al Pacino) and an on-scholarship high school student Charlie Simms (Chris O'Donnell) who gets the job of taking care of Frank during a holiday to earn some money. In the climax scene in the student court, Frank caught everyone by surprise by showing up in the room without anyone's help to defend Charlie against Charlie's classmates who are corrupted by their sense of their entitlement to their legacy and hiding behind their parents. In the film, Charlie and his friend George (Philip Seymour Hoffman) witness what turns out the next day to be a prank against the school principal by some of their rich kid friends. Charlie faces a moral dilemma of whether or not to tell on his friends. It appears that Charlie is the principal's only hope in finding out who did the prank, because the other witness George has strong family legacies with the school as well as wealth, so it seems like with the help of George's father, George can still keep both his degree and powerful friends. Therefore the principle imposes an ultimatum on Charlie consisted of both bribery and threat, saying that if Charlie tells the principle who did it, then he can get Charlie directly admitted into Harvard; otherwise, Charlie would be expelled from Bard which would supposedly

ruin his future because he would miss the great opportunity of education. Charlie is caught in a moral dilemma, not just because he might be punished by his friends, but also because the reason that his friends pranked the principal in the first place is that the principal “kissed the board’s ass” and gets a brand new sports car with the school fund.

One thing that the film insists in its instrumental portrayal is the structures that dominate the society, particularly in the elitist high school, but also in New York. In contrast, the structures seem ridiculous to Frank who is desperate to make meanings of his experience before his planned suicide. In the film, Frank is the representation of affect, attempting to remind the society what they really should be after. Before the trial begins, the judge asks the trial participants to answer questions based on their “honor”, specifically leaving out the obligation of the speakers to tell the truth. The common practice of the Bard students to keep their “honor”, or to cover for those who are close to them in other words, is criticized by Frank in his speech. “There is nothing like the sight of an amputated spirit. There is no prosthetics for that.”, he says. After hearing the speech, the Bard students clap at their own will despite the attempt of the board to quiet them down, thus validating Frank’s morality by showing how it resonates with the Bard students on an individual level. By breaking down the structure of the social group and isolating each listener of Frank’s speech, Frank helps the school find what is morally just on behalf of individual rights without the pressure from peers and the institution. By reaching the hearts of his audience on an individual level, he surpasses the educational institution that prioritizes order to the righteousness of individual thoughts.

A major complex of the character Frank is that he is an extremely logical person who make efforts into scheduling and pre-planning the chasing of thrills of the senses. From the film we learn about his great master plan for his New York suicide trip: splurge to get the best of

experience in life by going to all the best restaurants and living in the best room of a fancy hotel, spend his days eating and drinking, then sleep with a beautiful woman and kills himself on the hotel bed the next day. Frank likes the excitements and thrills of the senses more than anything else. His favourite things in life are women, and Ferrari as a distant second. His last words to his beloved dog before he left home were: "When in doubt, fuck." But at the same time, as a military-man, he has an iron discipline in the way that he interacts with some characters and in the way that he follows through the plans and resistance when Charlie stops him from following his final plan on the agenda. Frank's perseverance of affect and the rules and structures that he poses on himself demonstrates an affect-driven structure that does not have the structure overpowering the affect.

At the end of the day, Frank gives in to affect because there is a lack of reasoning and meaning without it. As the character's mantra says, when life tangles up, just tango on. He is frustrated at times that he cannot have a life because of his lack of vision, which is his main reason for wanting to commit suicide. He felt frustrated after attempting to drive a Ferrari so fast that he got pulled over by a cop. "You're gonna get us killed" said Charlie before they get pulled over. "Don't blame me Charlie, I can't see", Frank responded. On the trip back to the hotel, he walks straight into traffic, stumbles on the side of the road, sits on the bushes, an attempt of breaking the norms imposed by the structure of vision. Indeed, Frank's role in the film is mostly of commentary purposes. He can sense the world around him very well, but he cannot be a person of importance. The reason that Frank likes women so much is perhaps because of the possibility of doing things with them instead of just observing them. When he drives the Ferrari, he momentarily gains the sense of control and significance which is quickly taken away, leaving him frustrated and suicidal.

There is a difference between the instrumental and non-instrumental senses that film gives, in the sense that the instrumental ones (vision, hearing) happen to be the ones in which people have less of a sense of control over, and the non-instrumental ones (smell, touch, taste) can supposedly be controlled because of the proximity to the body and the choices that people make to retrieve the sensory experience. It is hard for people to unsee things they do not want to see, or unhear things they don't want to hear, but they can control their breathing to control their sense of smell, and they have to choose to touch things by their own will. As a blind person, Frank has to use senses that he can control to replace the senses that he cannot control. This is perhaps the reason that Frank feels amputated, because he has to make an effort to translate other senses into vision when it is supposed to require no effort to receive. In the film, Frank feels the need to control everything around him. He would not let Charlie hold him, he wants to be the one holding Charlie when he wants to. In the substitution of the senses, Frank's personal expression of sense of touch from the perspective of the norm is taken away. On the other hand, Frank gets a unique perspective of the world because of how he senses it with touch, smell and hearing, making him hyper-aware of the things around him and having a sense of humor centered around his observations.

In his interesting perception of reality, Frank has a humor for things that are obvious but not necessarily realized because of normal people's prioritization of vision. During Charlie's interview with him, Frank says "I know exactly where your body is. What I am looking for is an indication of a brain." when Charlie attempts to assist Frank in locating him. This is a satire on people's tendency to think that the prioritization of vision and precise locations as the norm. Frank has the skill of locating people because of the societal rule of personal bubble, but he also states the obvious fact that this is a chance for Frank to get to know Charlie, not to locate him.

While humorous, this comment is also a valid reasoning for his critical view of the world constructed of logics, in which he draws his affective saltiness towards the world. This comment of his suggests that he assumes not a lot of people have real brains that can make logical decisions. There are way too many people whose significance in the world is purely based on their physicality. There is a lot of physically healthy human beings in the world that do not have minds, while the only thing that Frank can have in abundance is his brain activity.

Also amongst Frank's oddly realistic sense of humor is his refusal of inference and the default assumption that makes so many people not have real brains in his opinion. In the hotel room before his attempt at suicide, Frank asks Charlie if he has a watch. After Charlie tells him the time, he says, "I didn't ask you for the time. I asked you for the watch." By refusing to infer, Frank rejects the rules and assumptions that social structures impose on the individuals. Juxtapositions of this philosophy of his as a social norm are embedded within the world of the film. When Fran and Charlie went to the restaurant, for example, the waiter gives Charlie a suit to wear and says that he might feel more "comfortable" in it instead of just wearing his rather informal outfit. A more obvious example of the societal sarcasm occurred after the tango scene, where the young lady's boyfriend exclaims on how it is amazing that she found a person to tango with as ridiculous as this interest of hers is. "I'll shake your hand," he says to Charlie. After realizing that Frank is the one who tangoed with the young lady, he remarks again "I'll shake both of your hands." and does exactly that. In this instance, the man shakes their hands because that is what he is supposed to do in a normal encounterance, despite their abnormal reason of meeting each other. It is as if the guy does not know what to say or do, therefore defaults to the social norms of shaking hands and saying anything close to interesting that is available.

Frank's criticism of structuralism joins the discussion of pre-affectivism and post-affectivism in film history. As a World War II soldier, Frank has seen what went on in the battlefield, and he lives the rest of his life contemplating about the sentiments that remain from the war. After World War II, there is a dramatic shift in American cinema from the traditional Hollywood narrative style to a more affective style that makes the audience reflect on the film and let the film cure them or educate them from the traumas of the war. However, the old-schooled educational institution still insists on the old-fashioned style of teaching that leaves behind what is important to have during and after the war which is integrity, and the importance of affect and true logical reasonings that help people find the sense of self. In Vivian Sobchack's article "What My Fingers Knew", she quotes Sergei Einstein's claim that "'intellectual cinema' has as correlate 'sensory thought' or 'emotional intelligence,' and is worthless without it". In other words, the meaning of cinema lies in the way that it produces affect which is commonly considered as the raw emotions. A lack of structure does not mean a lack of thoughts, although it might appear to be the case. Affective cinema means that the emotions and reasonings are drawn from pure senses instead of false assumptions, so that the intellectual ideas can be direct and not misled. On the film's topic of academia, Frank carries out the filmmaker's hope that people can learn not about what to do, but about how to think.

In a world guarded by systematic structures, it is important to turn to affect to find the true sense of self and origination of meanings. Meanings need to be supported by senses and emotions to not digress too much from the truth which lies in the memory of reality captured by films. Only with the help of affect can films become films of thoughts.

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