HARRIS, CHAD E. Ph.D. Educational Viewing Meets Educational Conversation: Phenomenology, Classrooms, and Film Reception. (2022)
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"Educational Viewing Meets Educational Conversation: Phenomenology, Classrooms, and Film Reception" is a philosophical dissertation by way of phenomenology. It is based in cultural foundations of education, which has us confront our basic assumptions about education generally and schooling specifically—that is, informal education and institutionalized education. This work embraces cultural foundations' interdisciplinarity, integrating and expanding film reception studies, film phenomenology, podcast studies, aesthetics, and women's, gender, and sexuality studies. Phenomenology "seeks to uncover the taken-for-granted presuppositions, habits, and norms that structure everyday experience" (Weiss et al., 2020b, back cover); it is "concerned with how the world gives itself to appearances, and the structures of consciousness through which we apprehend that givenness" (Salamon, 2018a, p. 15). Inspiring this work are the commonalities between the ubiquity of schooling as an institution and that of film as a popular, artistic medium. Ubiquity leads to repeated actions that become habitual. Thus, both schooling and filmgoing are taken for granted, and assumption and expectation stifle conversations about film. This study offers thought and practice toward conversations not mired in debate or "opinion." It asks: (a) What would it mean for a filmgoer to have responsibilities beyond mere reception? (b) What would it mean to have a *phenomenological attitude as a filmgoer*? and (c) What could it mean for education generally and schooling specifically to take a phenomenological approach in making pedagogical investments in more nuanced ways of receiving film? In posing these questions, this work recasts "educational" from merely facilitating learning to directly necessitating an *openness to grapple* with what might arise. Facing up to this challenge means embracing paradox and tension, engaging in conversations other than those in which one directly participates, and acknowledging that, while film might be the most visible and aural example of a "received" medium, reception itself is ubiquitous.

EDUCATIONAL VIEWING MEETS EDUCATIONAL CONVERSATION:

PHENOMENOLOGY, CLASSROOMS, AND

FILM RECEPTION

by

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Dr. Glenn Hudak
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DEDICATION

To those who have wonder about the everyday and encourage that wonder in others.

APPROVAL PAGE

This dissertation written by Chad E. Harris has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of The Graduate School at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION; OR, ARRIVALS THAT DO NOT FORECLOSE

> Fiction has never been entertainment for me. It has been the work I have done for most of my adult life. I believe that one of the principal ways in which we acquire, hold, and digest information is via narrative. So, I hope you will understand when the remarks I make begin with what I believe to be the first sentence of our childhood that we all remember: the phrase, "Once upon a time."
>
> —Toni Morrison, Nobel Lecture, December 7, 1993

Classroom Conversations, Filmic Jolts, and the Reception of It All

Two pivotal events have led to this dissertation: my nascent interest in reception as a high school student and, due to an encounter with a single film, my cinephilia. I integrated the latter during my undergraduate studies and further reconnected with the former as a master's student. This dissertation is the result of those moments and those of my doctoral studies in cultural foundations of education and women's, gender, and sexuality studies.

For my master's degree in education, which I earned in 2007, I based my work primarily in reader-response criticism in the secondary English classroom. In literary theory, reader response focuses on the reader's experience—the individual reader as a whole person (Rosenblatt, 1995, p. xix, Chapter 2, especially pp. 34–35). As Judith Rae Davis (1992) notes, reader response does not center the brain as a psychological view would, nor does it, in the way of the New Critics, offer a text-centered view (pp. 71–72) "as though [the text exists] apart from any reader" (Rosenblatt, 1995, p. 29). In *Literature as Exploration*, Louise Rosenblatt (1995) writes that "meaning is not 'in' the text or 'in' the reader. . . . The poem or the novel or the play exists in the transaction that goes on between reader and text" (p. 27). As Robert E. Probst (1988) puts it, meaning "is the product of a transaction between active minds—it does not reside in the ink, to be ferreted out, unearthed. Rather, it is created, formed, shaped, by readers in the act of reading, and thus it is *their* meaning" (p. 34). Teachers are key in encouraging readers to take on their role with the text, to take part in the transaction in the act of reading.

Toward this, Rosenblatt (1995) states that teachers of literature should not be "too modest about their possible contribution" (p. 4), arguing that this modesty has caused them to

"[leave] to others [the] more mundane preoccupations [which reside outside of] purely literary matters" (p. 4). Instead, they should take seriously that through literature they can expose students to "knowledge about [humankind] and society," the "future development" of which they will "influence for good or ill" (p. 3). This knowledge, she continues, "should be assimilated into the stream of [their] actual [lives]" (p. 3). Rosenblatt is stressing that to silo literature away from what it speaks to and what stimulates it is to miss those intrinsic opportunities for individual and collective lived connection (see Harris, 2006).

Rosenblatt's (1995) work in the teaching of literature has become synonymous with reader response in the field of education even though it was not credited for what, in the first edition of *Literature as Exploration* in 1938, it suggested, laid out, and introduced decades before the 1970s when reader response came to prominence in literary criticism, namely with the work of David Bleich, Stanley Fish, Wolfgang Iser, and others (J. R. Davis, 1992, p. 71). J. R. Davis (1992) maintains that Rosenblatt's work was ignored as part of the overall devaluing of scholarship in pedagogy and teacher education:

> Her conspicuous absence in the literature might be explained by the fact that she was a woman writing in a field dominated by men (Allen, 1991), or it might be that the development of her theory was totally enmeshed with pedagogy, and this pragmatic aspect of her work tarnished its theoretical impact. (pp. 71–72)

Additionally, Rosenblatt's scholarship became identified with reader response despite the fact that it is more complex. It asks more of not just the teacher but also the student.

Rosenblatt (1995) writes that "there is, in fact, nothing in the recognition of the personal nature of literature that requires an acceptance of the notion that every evocation from a text is as good as every other" (p. 267). "We," she goes on to say, "need only think of our successive readings of the same text, at fifteen or thirty or fifty, to know that we can differentiate" (p. 267; see also Booth, 1995, pp. x, xi). Wayne Booth (1995), in his foreword to *Literature as Exploration*'s fifth edition, faces that he, like many others, "failed for too long to see that

[Rosenblatt's work] was not just a valuable guide to pedagogy in secondary teaching; it was a necessary antidote to the excesses that result when this or that element in any rhetorical transaction is turned into an exclusive center" (p. viii). Rosenblatt, in fact, speaks to secondary as well as postsecondary pedagogy, and her work would lead me to newer and newer questions.

From Discussion to Conversation

Although I had no concise terms with which to name it, I had a strong sense early on as a student that the meaning for which Rosenblatt and Probst argue and the assimilation with which Rosenblatt joins knowledge and the literary imagination could come profoundly into being through interactions with my classmates and teachers as we engaged in discussions in the classroom. Having been a student who enjoyed the classroom discussions that ensued each day, I was drawn to the possibilities of what might occur in a particular room on a particular day. I wanted the discussions to continue. This fascination, eagerness, and wonder extended far beyond the English classroom. Indeed, some of my best memories took place during calculus lessons. More broadly—and more in tune with the possibilities of what might occur in a particular room on a particular day—I wanted the *conversations* to continue. Conversations, more than discussions, take into account not only what arises out of the "precise subject" of a discussion but also "all [the] talk" that emerges "without effort and without affectation" (d'Alembert, 1754/2008). Furthermore, I realized that being "on topic" often rendered less originality of thought or connective insight than what was deemed "off topic." In other words, what might seem like a "tangent," a conversation rather than a discussion, could lead to a meaningfully useful place of learning, even if that meaningful place had a delayed payoff.

As a first-year undergraduate in 2002, I marveled at what literary critics wrote in the *Norton Anthology*. But what I could not realize at the time was that my then "settled" ideas about criticism would become *un*settled. Critics have particular knowledge, but the specificity of that knowledge and details of taste might result in the critic *going in looking* for something in

particular. Bad faith on the critic's part is not a feature but a potential concern here: Ignoring the facets of what the critic or academic brings in could spell a similar shortsightedness often levied against the "non-expert" reader or viewer.

Cinephilic Emergences

In 2003, I was struck with wonder about the art of motion pictures when I watched *The Hours*. The film is directed by Stephen Daldry (2002), written by David Hare, and based on the novel by Michael Cunningham (1998), which is itself inspired by Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925). *The Hours* helped me realize that films can jolt one awake but with gestures so subtle that sometimes the jolt happens well after the screening. I saw how people can suffer from suffocating regret, an experience that is universal yet singularly felt. I saw how some can have a *presentiment* and how others can be "ridiculous . . . [but] fortunate, too" (Daldry, 2002, 50:10–59:20). But it was discovering *how* those realities were executed in *The Hours* that led to my advocacy for film. *The Hours* tells of three women from three decades across two centuries. It calls in visceral ways, as only film can.

Match cutting can convince us, filmically, that Virginia Woolf (Nicole Kidman), Laura Brown (Julianne Moore), and Clarissa Vaughn (Meryl Streep) are all waking up on something like the *same* morning in 1923, 1951, and 2001, respectively (Daldry, 2002, 3:44–8:51). Seemingly paradoxically, the film's subtleties *punctuate*. In the interplay between the implicit and the explicit, we are given new possibility in how we think, how we see, and how we relate to others' thinking and seeing. When *The Hours* jolted me within, I found myself in a new space of understanding, not that I had answers, but that I had questions. It was in the continued class conversations in my undergraduate courses that I encountered and asked these questions. Thus, I was receiving, educationally, fulfilling jolts that made the times generatively fruitful and memorable. And I had become a cinephile.

The "Film Festival Accusation"

In my master's program, there was a lot of talk of students "making meaning" of texts—literary, filmic, and otherwise—through how much they see their own lives in them. If they cannot "relate," the teacher cannot expect to "reach" them. I was intrigued by the reader-response approach in the English classroom, and in my research, I observed classrooms for the types of questions and activities teachers prioritized. I concluded that what was "best" was a mixture of "relatability" and pushing students to imagine worlds that are not their own (Harris, 2006, p. 78; see also Arendt, 1963/2006, pp. 78–79; Spelman, 1997, Chapter 3; Tippett, 2017, 10:22–11:49).[1]

As an English teacher, I assigned "agree/disagree continuums" as prereading activities to ignite interest, to get students "invested" in the text. "Opinion" surveys would follow. I saw how film was used at the school where I taught for a decade: It was a babysitter. It was a reward for doing "real" work. For a Shakespeare elective, students read Act 1 of plays then watched a film adaptation. There was a teacher in the English department known for having "film festivals," but the term festival was used disparagingly because, as the story went, the teacher was not "doing much" with the films other than "showing" them to buy himself time. The tone of this accusation, and the directives against "showing too many movies" that would come from the administration, must be noted from the other direction: Described in these ways, films were held in little esteem, both by the teachers "showing" the films and by those accusing teachers of misusing them.

This dissertation has emerged out of my thinking about this "film festival accusation" for the better part of my time as an English teacher and then as a student and candidate in my current doctoral program in cultural foundations of education. Cultural foundations asks us to

[1] Timestamps for podcast episodes may be approximate rather than exact due to dynamic ad insertion (DAI), which allows advertisements to be added or changed automatically. Therefore, when an episode is accessed online at different times, timestamps across streams or files may not be identical.

consider what undergirds our basic assumptions about education generally and schooling specifically. We take up this task critically, with an interdisciplinary approach to the philosophical, sociological, and historical dimensions of both informal and institutionalized education. I think back to those opinion surveys I prized and that students (seemingly) largely enjoyed. I ask myself what that enjoyment meant. I came to question what it means to have an "opinion" and to "agree or disagree," and I came to ask what possibilities lie in orientations toward something more, something deeper.

Film, as a ubiquitous and relatively accessible art form, is an education. It shows us what *appears* to be life as we live it. This appearance amplifies our reactions; we react to *others' lives*, and we inevitably encounter others' reactions to a particular film or to *film* in general. As I have described, I am most intrigued by the *conversations themselves*, by what might arise during conversations between viewers when mastery and "settled" conceptions are not aimed for or centered. As such, I put pressure on reader response–type approaches, including Rosenblatt's. Even as starting points, such approaches tend to reinforce what is already in the background, centering "taken-for-granted presuppositions, habits, and norms that structure everyday experience" (Weiss et al., 2020b, back cover). Phenomenology, the philosophical approach I take, seeks to turn to this structure in order to (re)consider it so as *not* to take it for granted, reinforce it, or center it. If there is no "generic reader" (Rosenblatt, 1995, pp. xix, 24), how can there also be acknowledgments that there is no generic way to engage in close reading (a practice endorsed by the New Critics), that "impersonality" need not be a close reading's characterizing trait? How could "the poem or the novel or the play" exist *outside of* what might be considered "relevant" or "valuable" to a reader's "ongoing life"? (here, I bring into question Rosenblatt, 1995, pp. 29–30).

Reader response can be compared to reception theory in film. Reception theory focuses on "how a film is received by audiences rather than on who made a film or what its thematic content or formal features are" (Corrigan & White, 2018, p. 397). I work *with* reception theory—

and theory and “method” in general—while also not centering it (see Manning, 2016, Chapter 1, “Against Method”). Thus, I enter a philosophical contribution into the literature and posit that phenomenologies of film *reception* can offer new ways of thinking what it might mean to receive. I posit that filmgoing can be *educational* rather than simply entertaining or already inscribed in a preexisting “logic.” By educational, I mean something specific: By it, I mean *with an openness to grapple* with what one encounters. Before, during, and after the encounters, the educational offers itself to those who receive and to those who create, and it also resides in and offers from the overlaps and interstices between reception and creation.

The Matter of Audience

This work is intended for scholars and educators who engage film, but it is also intended for those who engage in *conversation* with themselves, with their students, and with each other. My arguments focus on film reception and the ways in which we take film for granted. But more broadly, their scope can ask us to bring into question how we receive *any* text and how that reception manifests in how we approach curriculum and pedagogy, in how we engage in conversations about texts with our students, and in how we talk about these matters with our colleagues. I think film is especially instructive, specifically and broadly. As a ubiquitous and relatively accessible art form, so much of the “shorthand” of how we make reference and connections in and out of the classroom and our scholarly work relates back to film. I am interested in what it means when film is a shorthand; what is *made up for* in that shorthand; what is lost, gained, and maintained in that shorthand; and in how shorthands can be *presented as* just the opposite: as “well-researched,” as “objective,” and as “academic.” That is, so much of reception itself is a shorthand. Film might be the most visible and aural example of something in mass culture that is “received,” but reception itself is ubiquitous.

This dissertation is also for students, cinephiles, and filmgoers who might desire something else from current practices of reception, who might seek new ways of thinking about the “educational,” who might be glad to read something not entrenched in a disciplinary silo, or

who might desire a perspective about the possibilities of grappling with the connections the filmic medium has with the phenomenological. I cannot know and do not presume to know how one might read or receive my own readings of reception, or what one might take away from them, but I do hope that the readings allow for something to come later: insights that might connect to something outside of these pages, and to an interdisciplinary approach.

Research Questions and Contributions to the Literature

This dissertation is intended to be a contribution to cultural foundations of education by way of philosophy of education. Generally, it is an interdisciplinary work integrating education, reception studies, and phenomenology. Specifically, this work is an original, interdisciplinary study in education, film reception studies, film phenomenology, and women's, gender, and sexuality studies. In offering new ways of thinking what it means to *receive* both inside and outside of the classroom, I ask what it could mean to take a phenomenological approach in making pedagogical investments in more nuanced ways of receiving film and teaching and modeling that reception as educators or as filmgoers engaging in informal encounters with others. When we discuss a text with ourselves and inevitably with others in formal or informal settings, we are making explicit our reception, whether or not said reception is framed by scholarly research. When we receive, we face paradox and tension in a temporal engagement with our own past, present, and future—with history—in relation to the text we read. The phenomenological project, at its core as I see it, is an *ongoing thinking otherwise*, as it has us live with and grapple with, rather than consciously or unconsciously avoid, the paradox and tension our natural attitudes veil over. In sum, my research questions are as follows:

RQ1. What would it mean for a filmgoer to have responsibilities beyond mere reception?

RQ2. What would it mean to have what I term a phenomenological attitude as a filmgoer?

RQ3. What could it mean for education generally and schooling specifically to take a phenomenological approach in making pedagogical investments in more nuanced ways of receiving film?

To begin to approach phenomenological reception in the educational context of potential pedagogical investments in nuance, I start with phenomenology's beginnings and then take departures. In the following subsections, I (a) lay out the elements of the tradition according to its founder, Edmund Husserl; (b) lay out the departures I take along with scholars such as Max Scheler and those in women's, gender, and sexuality studies; (c) describe how what I call *un*settlement was a transformative interdisciplinary connection for me, and inextricably tied to how I imagine phenomenological offerings; and (d) show how my orientation toward the assemblage of interdisciplinarity, critique, and reflexivity is shaped by my doctoral education. Together, these subsections present the backgrounds of my philosophical work. These backgrounds are how I *arrived* at this project. They are backgrounds in a different sense: They are *active, ongoing* contexts.

Introductory Overview of Phenomenological Contributions

Husserl, the intellectual founder of phenomenology, introduced what he called the "natural attitude." Our natural attitudes facilitate the bracketing of paradox and tension, rendering them pushed to the side, not needing consideration. In other words, in the natural attitude we take existence for granted in the sense that the world appears as experiential facts and realities upon which we base our interactions with it (see Husserl, 1913/1983, p. xx). Earlier, I wrote that reader response–type theories emphasize what is already in the background; I do not take for granted such reception-based practices as "naturally" the "best" pedagogical methods, as the natural attitude is *already* serving the function.

Lanei M. Rodemeyer (2020) puts it this way when describing Husserl's adoption of different attitudes he has, as he calls it, "on hand" (for example, see Husserl, 1913/1983, pp. 51–55), depending on the context in which he finds himself: "The natural attitude . . . is special:

it remains constantly in the background when I shift to other attitudes" (p. 237). Using his example of the "arithmetical attitude," Husserl (1913/1983) states it this way:

> *The arithmetical world is there for me only if, and as long as, I am in the arithmetical attitude*. . . . The *natural* world, however, the world in the usual sense of the word is, and has been, *there for me continuously* as long as I go on living naturally. As long as this is the case, I am "*in the natural attitude*," indeed both signify precisely the same thing. (p. 54)

The aforementioned ongoing thinking otherwise is ongoing for two reasons: the "composition of [the natural attitude's] contents" can themselves change (Husserl, 1913/1983, p. 53), and phenomenology is not a method in the typical sense—its aim is not repeatable formulas for predictable procedures and results (for this latter point, see van Manen, 2016, pp. 29, 283). Instead, the *phenomenological* attitude can have us embrace and see possibility in paradox and tension, not from working from the stasis of "settled" thinking but from grappling and struggling with what might arise. Therefore, I am exploring the conversations themselves in terms of film reception. I am interested in what takes us unawares in the midst of conversations about what we receive (For the philosophical task and being taken unawares by the questions themselves, see Cohen, 1982/1985, p. 4). Thus, phenomenological approaches to reception link educational viewing with *educational conversation*. When educators and then, by extension, more of us can make these *pedagogical investments*, more nuanced ways of encountering films can carry over to our conversations with other filmgoers about films.

As indicated in the overview of chapters below, I will present a path to thinking otherwise that is not drawn from or as a conclusive, one-size-fits-all method, but rather posited as offerings for possible connection and application in the changing, ongoing contexts that meet us at arrivals that do not foreclose. As stated above, I question what it means for something to "work" and what it means to "like" something. I am interested in getting to places of being able to allow for what might arise, moments of grappling that cannot be foretold, predicted, or

planned—the *unplanned* that lies beyond the planning. Conversations in the classroom so often provided these moments for me as a student and as a teacher. And I have come to see that phenomenological approaches can strike at, or rather *not strike at* these *un*planned moments.

> Duane H. Davis (2020) explains phenomenology as
>
> an attempt to offer prescriptive descriptions of the world in which we live. It involves the transformation of the way we understand our world such that we can be astonished before it—the attempt to see our world as if for the first time, through unjaded eyes. This transformation is to be affected by suspending our habitual and theoretical presuppositions and thus allowing the world to appear as it becomes what it is and as it matters to us. (p. 4)

Prescription implies a method, which provided Husserl (1913/1983) a "pure or transcendental phenomenology [that] will become established, *not as a science of matters of fact, but as a science of essences* (as an *'eidetic'* science)" (p. xx). Here, in *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy: First Book: General Introduction to a Pure Phenomenology* (known as *Ideas I*), Husserl gives his full attention to developing his "new science" of phenomenology, which he had only introduced in *Logical Investigations*, first published in 1900 and 1901 (Husserl, 1913/1983, pp. xvii–xviii; Smith, 2013, 3. From Phenomena to Phenomenology section, 4. The Histories and Varieties of Phenomenology section). He is clear that phenomenology is not a "substratum of empirical psychology" but is distinct from it not only in its dealing in essences rather than in matters of fact but also in its phenomenological reduction (or epoché or transcendental reduction)—a procedure that is reductive, but in the sense of bracketing, or placing to the side, "all hitherto prevailing habits of thinking" that are employed in the other sciences, including the social sciences (pp. xviii–xx).

The epoché places us in a "new *style of attitude* . . . which is *entirely altered* in contrast to the natural attitude in experiencing and the natural attitude in thinking" (Husserl, 1913/1983, p. xix). Thus, Husserl calls for a shifting away from the old patterns of thinking that are the

habits with which we are born and that are then later further inscribed temporally as simply there, “our normal way of being in the world, taking things as they are” (Rodemeyer, 2020, p. 237). But he does so by proposing that consciousness transcend lived-through phenomena, not that consciousness is enveloped within them in an involution. This is his effort to make phenomenology “pure,” a science and a method, albeit a different “type.” As such, I follow Max Scheler, an admirer of Husserl but one of his earliest critics at the foundational level. According to Scheler, phenomenology is neither a science nor a method, for a method by definition makes presuppositions that negate the goal of returning to the things themselves “as opposed to operating with the material of past theses and ideologies” (Mohr, 2012, p. 219). For Scheler (1957/1973b), phenomenology is not a science or a method but an *attitude*. In other words, the phenomenological attitude is not a vital component toward something else that is ultimately at stake; it is, instead, the end in itself—the orientation that is ongoing and not foreclosing.

According to Scheler (1957/1973b), a method is a “goal-directed procedure of *thinking about* facts, for example, induction or deduction. In phenomenology, however, it is a matter, first, of new facts themselves, before they have been fixed by logic, and, second, of a procedure of *seeing*” (p. 137). Thus, a phenomenological attitude is one in which “that which is seen and experienced is *given* only in *the seeing and experiencing act itself*, in its being acted out [*Vollzug*]; it appears in this act and only in it” (p. 138). My aim, philosophically and pedagogically, is to engage in an ongoing thinking otherwise that resists shades of “hyperreason,” an orientation, philosophy, or practical stance that, as Joe L. Kincheloe (2008) describes, centers “means in preference to ends” and “delimits its questions to ‘how to’ instead of ‘why should’” (p. 52). Facing paradox and tension seems inevitable in working *with* rather than prioritizing science, theory, and method. Sensitive questions of good and bad faith are also elemental to a study that is also *about the conversations themselves* in reading and interpreting written and moving picture texts themselves, reading and interpreting what is said and written about them, and “reading” and “interpreting” ourselves and those with whom we are in

conversation. For instruction as I do my own instructing, I look outside of what might be "officially" phenomenology and turn to three scholars to whom I was first introduced in courses in feminist research analysis and critical sexuality studies and queer theory.

Into Conversation with Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies

As I will further lay out in the overview of chapters below, I will specifically place the work of Saidiya Hartman (1997, 2007, 2008, 2018, 2019, 2020a, 2020b), Julietta Singh (2018), and Kathleen Stewart (2007) into conversation with phenomenologies of film reception. In their scholarship in African American cultural history, "critical fabulation" and "historical poetics"; decolonial thought and "unthinking mastery"; and cultural anthropology and affect and the ordinary, respectively, these scholars provide ways of embracing and living with (a) the paradoxes and tensions inherent in phenomenological studies and (b) the confrontations with logics that define certain knowledges as empirically enshrined as "settled" conclusions. By bringing these scholars' work into conversation with phenomenologies of film and film reception, I am engaging their work in a questioning of the practices of reception and method—practices of viewing and receiving as well as scholarly methods of researching, writing, and teaching.

Arrival to *Un*settlement

My approach to interdisciplinarity is both specific and broad. It affords me opportunities to imagine connections between seemingly disparate texts and fields of study. Most importantly, it allows for the possibilities of capturing, not for foreclosure but for ongoing arrivals, where one scholar leaves off and another continues. In other words, these links and junctures go beyond the *content* of connections themselves. They consider the spaces themselves, before any connections have been made. This *interstitial space* remains, and with it "final" links cannot occur. This space does more than move forward with an outward momentum.

Phenomenologically speaking, new ideas flowing back or backward by way of the not-yet of an interdisciplinary connection is a *different type of building* on previous or contemporaneous work. One might think of this as an experiencing of the mental and physical

acts of locating a text referenced in another, except that there is no such reference—the work is done solely within the researcher in a recalling back to previous and ongoing work in another field, and it takes place before any locating of connecting texts takes place. When I arrived to *un*settlement, I arrived back to the phenomenological, that is, back to a way of sensing and writing and thinking the phenomenological. This is a connecting back, not to move on (forward) for the sake of a new contribution, but to contribute something new by *staying with*. The description of settlement and unsettlement that is central to this dissertation came from my engagement with work that is not phenomenological, but I was able to draw, because of my previous and continuing phenomenological work, connections that can go alongside it to offer new ways of learning, studying, and teaching in both contexts. This is not just about bringing phenomenological thinking to what had been approached otherwise; connecting in this way also involves phenomenologies of the very areas that lead *back* and those of the very spaces and paths that bring about connections.

I arrived at this central description of this interdisciplinary philosophical dissertation—the "settlement" and "*un*settlement" of thinking, of ideas, and of the structures of induction and deduction that make up the natural attitude—through working with three chapters in two texts in a course in critical sexuality studies and queer theory: "The Biopolitics of Settler Sexuality and Queer Modernities" and "Conversations on Berdache: Anthropology, Counterculturism, Two-Spirit Organizing" in Scott Lauria Morgensen's (2011) *Spaces Between Us: Queer Settler Colonialism and Indigenous Decolonization*; and "The Law of Kinship: *Lawrence v. Texas* and the Emergence of Queer Liberalism" in David Eng's (2010) *The Feeling of Kinship: Queer Liberalism and the Racialization of Intimacy*.

Morgensen (2011) traces the current and binary heteronormative and heteropatriarchal logics of sexuality, which dominate here on the land that became known as the U.S., to the original (and still ongoing) settler colonial project of elimination and appropriation, the "wholesale replacement of Native peoples to establish a white settler majority" (p. 32). These

logics could only take hold if the White invaders veiled them over, if they were thought as the only available or most viable logics, as simply spreading to a new geographical location from a "discovery" of so-called virgin soil. "Settlement" can then be thought of as establishing *ready-to-travel*, already legitimized ideologies; the only requirement is that the physical land accommodate them. As Darder et al. (2017) write, ideology can remake structures of belief and practice such that they seem natural, or at least exempt from questioning:

> Ideology can best be understood as a societal lens or framework of thought, used in society to create order and give meaning to the social and political world in which we live. . . . [It exists] at the deep, embedded psychological structures of the personality. Ideology, then, more often than not, manifests itself in the inner histories and experiences that give rise to questions of subjectivity as they are constructed by individual needs, drives, and passions, as well as the changing material conditions and class formations within society. (p. 11)

Phenomenologically speaking, we can attempt a non-foreclosing arrival at the structures that give rise to the ideologies themselves: those that have laid "meaning" and "perfectly reasonable" explanations on top of the fabricated yet materially and psychically real violations and negations that those endowed with (at least the inner and outer appearance of) the control and characteristics that legitimize colonial ideologies perpetrate on racialized and queer bodies and consciousnesses.

We can also attempt non-foreclosing arrivals at encounters that occur *within* the everyday as settler colonial ideologies struggle not only to survive but to appear as having *no such need*. These moments happen when a young boy asks his mother, "Is that a boy or a girl, Mom?" after, as Stacey Waite (2017) writes, he "has been reading over my body with his eyes" (p. 143–144). They happen when a neighbor asks Sara Ahmed (2006), referring to Ahmed's partner, with whom Ahmed has arrived home, "Is that your sister, or your husband?" (p. 95). They happen in situations like Frantz Fanon's (1952/2008) when on a train a child points to

Fanon and exclaims to his mother, “Look, a Negro! *Maman*, a Negro!” (p. 93). When settled logics do not fit the present situation and they stop the fundamentally uninterrupted execution of “go[ing] about our daily business” (van Manen, 2016, p. 42), efforts to make those logics fit the situation, to correct what has gone awry, manifest themselves in questions whose purpose is to *re*-foreclose. The reproducibility of words and themes is required to make daily business what it is (van Manen, 2016, p. 42)—a series of “productive” tasks not too concerned with stopping and looking differently at the things that must be repeated for “production” to maintain its forward trajectory.

As Waite (2017) puts it, “the tools the young boy has to guide his interpretation, in a sense, fail him” (p. 144), so he asks a question in the hopes of reestablishing the ideological binary that has been inscribed in him and that appears to be correct. With, “Is that your sister, or your husband?” Ahmed (2006) brings several phenomenological readings to mind, but she then states that even if the attempt is made to push assumption to the side, the question seems rooted in shaping a re-appearance of the lesbian couple so that the lesbian couple “appears straight”: “Is that your sister, or your husband?” reads as, “If not sisters, then husband and wife”; even if both people are women, there can be a *forced* appearance of a heteronormative difference between two partners whereby one is categorized as butch (pp. 95–96). This emphasizes the either–or dichotomy so fundamental to *hetero*normativity and *hetero*patriarchy. Bodies that “blur” straight lines or make them go askew, and arrangements that give a shape to queer domesticity (see Shah, 2003), make one stop to consider the forward, repeated lines (Ahmed, 2006, p. 66) of our daily business. Max van Manen (2016) does not consider phenomenology from queer points of being and embodiment, but his descriptions of what phenomenology does, of what we can come to by doing phenomenology, can speak to what occurs at the obfuscation and negation of queer orientations and those bodies that take them: Phenomenology aims *at*, not past, the “originating thoughts and poetic images that make the reproducibility of life possible,” and it aims to become and to remain open to new originating

starting points (p. 43). These new starting points, van Manen continues, are where phenomenological inquiry begins (p. 43). This includes phenomenology itself: when the philosophy itself makes room for some but not others (Ahmed, 2006, p. 11, Chapter 1).

For Fanon, there is no opportunity to realize himself. Sartre's being-for-itself—that one can be, as Kris Sealey (2020) describes, "*more than* or *other than*" what one is currently—is disrupted before it can begin due to the violences that mark out racialized subjects as *outside of settlement* (pp. 31–32). In *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre lays out his phenomenology of the human. In being-for-itself, people come to a sense of themselves as themselves even through the alienation of encountering the other (Sealey, 2020, pp. 33–34). For Fanon, this is not the case for colonized, racialized subjects. They cannot settle in; their presence unsettles the settled: "The world [they encounter]—the 'white world, the only honorable one' [Fanon, 1986, as cited in Sealey, 2020, p. 34]—is a world that is constituted by and for the white colonizer" (Sealey, 2020, p. 34). Because being-for-itself is "stalled in the context of colonial violence" (p. 35), there can be no "being-for-others," Sartre's third structure of his phenomenology of the human, of which the first is being-in-itself, which inert objects—stools, cups, vases, cars—objects that are not self-aware—possess; they are "full of what they are and, as a consequence, cannot be anything other than what they are" (Sealey, 2020, pp. 31–32). Because colonized racialized subjects are always already defined politically, they cannot realize being-for-itself; in the scope of the colonial world that determines their subjectivity, they cannot change what they are. Thus, they cannot reach being-for-others, which requires that they are able to discover "that I am a 'somebody' before the other's look" (p. 35). Even though there is alienation from this "somebody" one is for somebody else, for the White subject, the European subject who is not colonized, there is still no loss of "one's fundamental sense of grounding in the world" (p. 34), the world Fanon describes as the "white world, the only honorable one."

For Fanon, there is no such grounding. On the train and elsewhere, no longer aware of his body in the third person but instead "in triple" (Fanon, 1952/2008, p. 92), there is a "fullness

of being, brought on by the look of the colonizer" (Sealey, 2020, p. 35) *in* Fanon, which recalls Sartre's being-*in*-itself, not being-*for*-itself or the subsequent being-*for*-others. This triple fullness is a "racial epidermal schema" (see Fanon, 1952/2008, p. 92) that Sealey (2020) writes is "not the 'corporeal schema' that might facilitate a transcending relationship between being-for-itself and its body" (p. 35). Fanon (1952/2008) describes this phenomenological structure of fullness: "I was responsible not only for my body but also for my race and my ancestors" (p. 92). Sealy quotes bell hooks, who, in her book, *Black Look*, captures the disjunctures of the disrupted path from Sartrean to Fanonian phenomenologies of the human:

> For black people, the pain of learning that we cannot control our images, how we see ourselves . . . or how we are seen is so intense that it rends us. It rips and tears at the seams of our efforts to construct self and identity. (p. 35)

There can be no self for others in this context if there is no self *for itself*, no ground to fall back on in the face of alienation.

The "stable," settled, albeit ideological, grounding afforded to the European consciousness might be described as something similar to how Elena Flores Ruíz's describes European existential grounding, according to the analogy Sealy draws between phenomenology and Flores Ruíz's work in existentialism and its "methodological racism":

> Since we do not choose the social matrix into which we are born, there is a certain amount of alienation (as self-estrangement) that is required simply for socialization. . . . Yet what is distinctive about this kind of basic, grounding alienation is that it . . . establishes a kind of *continuity* of experience that is not present in the colonized subject's experience of being thrown into the world. (Flores Ruíz, 2016, p. 20)

Because race and sexuality are inseparable in the settler colonial project, this description can also be applied to queer subjects. Otherwise separated in the settler colonial project to obscure the connections that, if *un*obscured, would shake up, uproot, and *un*settle settler colonialism's operational establishment as always already legitimate and, to return to Fanon, "honorable,"

race and gender are sometimes—and seemingly paradoxically—brought "together" *in service to* obscuring the connections between the two. The contradiction that is connecting to disconnect makes sense if we consider the full endorsement of a temporal, "step-by-step" approach to "progress," and, in this direction, which connections are put forth and which are left out. This so-called progress is, quite literally, enshrined in statute, "settled in" by declarations of an "end" to the "gay problem" by means of attaching it to that of race—a conclusionary matter that was supposedly decided decades earlier.

Eng (2010) writes of the mobilization of the idea that so-called racial progress in the U.S. has been completed via statute and that race is now "a completed project . . . consigned to a prior historical moment" (p. 38), as is evidenced by Supreme Court decisions *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), which ruled segregated public schools were unconstitutional; and *Loving v. Virginia* (1967), which legalized interracial marriage nationwide. Then, Supreme Court decisions *Lawrence v. Texas* (2003), which decriminalized same-sex sodomy nationwide; and *Obergefell v. Hodges* (2015), which deemed marriage equality legal nationwide, extended this spirit of "progress" to situations of sexual orientation. (Not so) under the surface, *Obergefell v. Hodges* enlisted gay and lesbian citizens into the palatable domesticity of marriage and, thus, into the interests of capitalism, under which the individualism of the self and the nuclear family predominates. This is an inclusion that Eng calls "queer liberalism": a "confluence of political and economic conditions that form the basis of liberal inclusion, rights, and recognitions for *particular* [emphasis added] gay and lesbian U.S. citizen-subjects willing and able to comply with its normative mandates" (p. 24). Continued "progress" was endorsed by Justice Anthony Kennedy, who invoked the *Loving* decision in the majority opinion in *Lawrence v. Texas*. This post hoc evaluation of what led to the *Lawrence* decision ignores the racialized origins of *Lawrence* and the anti-gay shadows around *Loving*.

As Eng (2010) writes, in the *Lawrence* case, it was not a claim of "consensual sodomy" that brought the police to John Geddes Lawrence's apartment but rather Robert Eubanks's false

accusation that co-petitioner Tyron Garner was causing a disturbance in the apartment, an accusation involving Eubanks referring to Garner as “a nigger going crazy with a gun” (pp. 35–36). The continued “progress” of *Lawrence v. Texas* also ignores the fact that, 3 weeks before the *Loving* decision, the Supreme Court upheld, in *Boutilier v. Immigration and Naturalization Service* (1967), a lower court’s decision to deport Clive Michael Boutilier, a Canadian man seeking U.S. citizenship, after he disclosed that he was homosexual (pp. 36–37). Regarding race and sexual orientation as separate entities to be regarded independently does not end with public declarations of seemingly unobscured links—rather, here, links drawn so explicitly are always already obfuscations.

The expectation that cases concerning sexual orientation must or should follow, or appropriately follow, those concerning race seems largely accepted and constructed in what Dipesh Chakrabarty (2000) has called the “imaginary waiting room of history” (as cited in Eng, 2010, pp. 25, 34, 38), a root of heteronormative and heteropatriarchal settler colonial notions of “progress.” But these structures of waiting and progressing are part of the work that it takes to make “settled” logics appear *free of the need* for maintenance.

Settlement In and Out of Text: Interdisciplinarity and What Makes Critique

“Settled” notions of race and sexuality that arrived with settler colonialism take *work*. Because they are, in fact, sitting on shaky, veiled-over, *un*settled ground, their *adaptability* is essential to their continued operation as continuously masquerading as always already the “proper” or the “only” ways to live. Settlement is always in motion, as the earth moves under a foundation, as Earth itself is always in motion. (Mis)appropriation and the law are two avenues of adaptability. Their claims are *set down* or *type*set but not settled or realized in material or lived reality. I am interested in how beliefs or systems of thinking become habitual, in the reactions when they are revealed as such, and in the moves made when they become *un*settled.

I am also interested in how settler colonialism, due to its adaptability, became the groundwork for capitalism, modern liberalism (Lowe, 2015), and now neoliberalism (and queer liberalism), and in how, following Eng, such ideologies were based on false notions of racial "progress" enshrined ("settled") in the law. An ideological framework that never loses sight of its goals can be, through the actions of those who carry it out, repurposed and reframed without really changing. That is the paradox. Things look just different enough to maintain the ostensible appearance of a settled state of affairs; but adaptations below the surface are necessary because the original settlement was built on shaky ground, made-up fabrications that became archives that were then, are now, *taught as natural* occurrences. This teaching takes place in schools specifically and in education broadly, and it is often done through or as a reaction to the texts we encounter, read, receive, or teach.

As such, this dissertation is not a work of philosophy alone. The connections I make are rooted in and ultimately go beyond even the interdisciplinary nature of cultural foundations and women's, gender, and sexuality studies. At the same time, dwelling in the philosophy *that is enveloped in* what is also *other than* philosophy is also instructive in an interdisciplinary approach. In other words, what ensues from what is explicitly stated as the "method" might reveal other implicit, or even tacit, modes that are worthy of attention. In this same vein, I must note here that central to my approach is the reminder that "critique is not critical if it refuses to situate itself, to recognize the limitations and liabilities of its own perspective" (Weiss et al., 2020a, p. xiv). This reminder is central if I am to emphasize discursive intersections of race, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, and queer theory in ways that are not cursory and exclusionary.

True critique requires an ongoing reflexivity. We cannot, authentically and in good faith, critique what we read, see, and hear, or point out what is missing unless we are critiquing what we ourselves write, say, and interpret, and unless we point out what is missing from our own work, acknowledge it, redress it, and cite others who have done and are doing that work. These aims, intentions, and practices would be moot if not enacted in instruction as well as in the work

informed by that instruction. The connections I make have been encouraged by the fields of study of which I am a part; they work together genuinely and authentically, not just metaphorically or ostensibly.

Professors who taught me made their classrooms spaces to uncover “the often obscured connections” (Lowe, 2015) that have shaped how knowledge is received. They encouraged resistance against the pull to overlook as unremarkable, *not* connected, and in no need of further examination the astonishing links that are astonishing due to, as discussed above, active efforts to keep us from seeing them and instead keep us seeing as settled the authorized stories already told. I will focus on film reception but will make it clear that reception is ubiquitous. Sometimes “reception” is a *discipline*. Sometimes the taking in of, dismissal of, or reaction to an entire medium, other discipline, or even a *word or term* seems prefigured, preordained by the frames of the discipline to which one belongs. Receiving in this way is no different from that of the “non-expert,” the one who is assumed to be less knowledgeable. But when scholars silo themselves, it is legitimated; or, rather, they legitimate their own pride in disciplinary gatekeeping that fosters pride in being ignorant of other fields, even related subfields in their own. Donaldo P. Macedo (1993/1999) calls this a hyper-specialization that chases after “the mythical need to discover absolute objective truth” and that “represent[s] a rupture with philosophies of social and cultural relations . . . [and] hides behind an ideology that creates and sustains false dichotomies rigidly delineated by disciplinary boundaries” (p. 41). On the other hand, interdisciplinarity can help scholars better understand each other, better understand other fields of study, and most importantly, better understand the limitations of their own fields and the possibilities that arise from those limitations when thinking emerges out of established silos.

Macedo (1993/1999) tells an anecdote about a former fellow linguist classmate—a theoretical linguist who had no knowledge of historical linguistics. When Macedo shared with her readings on pidgin and creole languages, she responded, “half apologizing but with a certain pride in her voice,” “‘If I want to be a great theoretical linguist, I just can’t be reading too

much outside theoretical linguistics. I can't even keep up with all the reading in syntax alone'" (p. 41). With this, as Macedo notes, the label "scholar" does not mean that one is not "an uncritical, 'objective,' and 'efficient' distributor of information" (p. 41) rather than one who seeks questions of what influences one's work or how one's work has multilevel outside impacts. This is not a critique of Macedo's classmate's lack of "expert" knowledge in Macedo's own linguistic focus; it is a philosophical question about what is troubling about her query after learning of it ("What's a pidgin language?") followed by her reaction to texts outside her specific area of "expertise." It is a question about the overall conversations that ensue between scholars, even within the same discipline but in different subdisciplines. This issue is certainly bigger than one interaction; it is the ongoing result of the acceptance of the settled parameters of disciplines and the agreed upon guidelines for what makes scholarship, publication, teaching, hiring, and even promotion and tenure most "efficient" for "daily business," which has social and economic consequences.

When there are social and economic realities at stake for scholars and educators who make a living teaching, it can be easy to forget that teaching involves interacting with students. It is also easy to "forget" to confront the contradictions of rhetoric and practice. Macedo's anecdote about his former classmate brings to mind for me that, during my time as a high school English teacher, there was a constant push to "create lifelong learners" while at the same time there was a strong siloing of subject areas, as if English took place in a vacuum, science in a different vacuum, and so forth. In a note of student feedback, I remember the line, "This is more like a history class than an English class." I assume that those words were a response to how seriously I took the contexts in which literature emerged and was read and reacted to, and the literary quality of historical documents. It seemed to me that "lifelong learner" meant someone who had unwavering curiosity that did not stop in its tracks because of "prohibited overlaps" between subjects, as it is the lines between them that are artificial and part of the *work* of settlement.

I remember an ongoing sentiment among many teachers, a type of self-deprecating humor similar to what Macedo describes. I remember an example: We were often required to attend workshops during our “free” period, called a “planning period.” On this occasion, we were instructed on new software for which students could answer teacher-generated questions using their own smartphones. The facilitator chose “basic” questions such as, “Why do we have seasons?” so that we could try out the program. I heard such jokes as, “I don’t know that. That’s why I teach math.” On the one hand, the ongoing philosophies of “playing to students’ strengths” and “differentiating instruction” facilitate the types of instruction that might result in dismissals of whatever is not one’s greatest strength—or, in terms of reception, one’s interest, what catches one’s eye in an instant. On the other hand, such hyper-specialization on the teacher’s part might do the opposite for students whose natural proclivities lie in seeing connections and using them to do well across courses despite their spatial arrangement in different rooms and likely in completely different buildings, halls, or floors. As noted above, I am interested in the reception of *texts*, as a single text may be a path into an entire medium, or mode, or field of study. I am known as a scholar who sees connections between seemingly disparate texts. For me, this is not contrived or performative; it is an orientation that refuses to silo ideas that keep disciplines and, thus, knowledges, separate.

Disciplinarity maintains fragments that stifle possibility and obscure startling and seemingly mundane connections that might betray the discursive adaptation of what is *adapting beneath the surface*. “Disciplinarity,” when taken as a primarily “academic” term, obscures the ideologies that so much of academia is rooted in—a furthering of settler colonial logics as *rooted*, scientific, and, thus, legitimate. As Lisa Lowe (2015) argues in her book *The Intimacies of Four Continents*, the connections that do make it into the disciplines are limited in order to attempt to reconcile the irreconcilable:

> What we know of these links and intimacies is shaped by existing fields and by our methods of disciplinary study. Europe is rarely studied in relation to the Caribbean or

> Latin America, and U.S. history is more often separated from studies of the larger Americas. Work on comparative U.S. racial formation is still at odds with American history, which disconnects the study of slavery from immigration studies of Asians and Latinos; the histories of gender, sexuality, and women is often separated from the study of race. Native Caribbeans have been rendered invisible by both the histories that tell of their extermination in the sixteenth century, and the subsequent racial classifications in which their survival is occluded. (p. 37)

Such a view threatens to show the shaky ground that has been thought stable, natural, bracketed, exempt from a second look. Formal education and filmgoing are two embedded places on this ground that, being so often a reflection of the mores of that ground, can benefit from destabilizations of the assumed and the "settled."

Arrival to the Phenomenological: Education, Film, and Basic Assumptions of Habit

Cultural foundations asks what undergirds our basic assumptions about and our current practices in education. It does so in its interdisciplinarity, in its attention to the influences that have shaped our educational experiences, and in its emphasis that education is a broad, general phenomenon that happens in schools but is not schooling itself. Indeed, I refer to "education" as the overlapping ways in which social, cultural, historical, and political factors outside the institution of schooling impact schooling and are impacted by schooling. Above, I stated that film is an education. It is. In film, as in no other encounter, we can see someone else's vision and our own visions and reckon with our own response-abilities, and with those of others. I say that we *can* to encourage the notion that it is not a given that we *will*, as far as we can, embrace paradox and tension so that we might see what lies beyond habitual expectation, beyond our most basic assumptions.

Educationally speaking, so much is defined by basic assumptions and enforced ideologies about gender, sexuality, and race. That is why women's, gender, and sexuality studies provides a central approach to this work and why I place the work of scholars in this and

related fields into conversation with that of scholars in education, film reception studies, and film phenomenology. Gender, sexuality, and race accompany education at the most basic level. How we are educated formally and informally begins with them. This includes spoken and unspoken messages, violent coercion, hegemonic shaping, rampant expectation, tacit messaging, and automatic modeling. I grew up being asked and hearing children presumed to be boys asked, “How many girlfriends do you have?” implying that children (at least those perceived as male) should be “playing the field” in the way of “conquest.” One day, these children may be *all of a sudden* bound to the opposite expectation. Or there may be both tacit and explicit permission to continue in the actions and associated beliefs of how they were initially taught to behave. But it is likely that there will be a mixture from both directions.

My first-grade teacher required her class to walk up and down the school hallways in a “boy line” and a “girl line.” I still witness the inevitable “girlfriend question” put to those perceived as young boys; my class taking up most of the hallway space sticks with me as a metaphor (or a *not-so-indirect* example) for there being only two genders, the imposition or assumption of a binary that still seems more common at this moment than the acknowledgment that gender subsists otherwise. This is to say that in our bodies and minds, the two structures that come into shape and that are shaped in tandem, reside what we learned about how we occupy space as gendered, sexualized students, family members, and subjects. This learning is deeply ingrained—and by consequence is invisible: settled logics of our daily business.

Within (or perhaps *prior to*) the dynamics of gender and sexual socialization, those of us who are racialized have a different experience from those who have been deemed as “not having a race.” Race and sexuality in the law and the violences inflicted when preconfigured gender and racial calculuses do not compute bring out connections to “education” and schooling. One might say, “This goes against what I was taught,” that is, what I have learned from my schooling specifically and from my education broadly, from the two worlds that inform and are informed by the other, the two worlds that “teach us what we know.” It is in those

spaces that we learn basics about gender, sexuality, and race, or rather the “basics” that have been decided for us. Not learning or not being told about certain topics is also learning; it is learning what was deemed “of no concern.” On another hand, one might also say, “I know that from the movies” or “What I have learned from the movies is . . .” Whether or not they are used in jest, these expressions are widely used and reveal that movies also teach, fill in, and *leave gaps*. Film might also leave—due to their visual nature and cultural status—long-lasting images that imprint stronger “teachings” than those of school or other situations. Most importantly, the various permutations of these possibilities are my concern.

I did not arrive at the philosophical from the path that is often presumed to be the case: that of a “detached” scholar who is “ungrounded,” unconcerned with “real” problems. When we consider philosophy in a broader sense—one’s “teaching philosophy,” for example, or one’s deeply felt perspectives on a topic or issue at hand, it seems that everyone has a philosophy, and that philosophy might be employed below the surface, veiled over as a “method” seen as more “concrete” or “practical.” But it is the philosophical that begins with and *stays* with the questions themselves; it is philosophy that has given me the language and the transformative experiences to ask about what is going on under the surface, about what can still be veiled over as something else even when it is *un*covered, and about what becomes *re*-covered with every uncovering.

For me, phenomenology, and specifically the phenomenological attitude, is an *un*settling, a destabilizing in the everyday—a disruption of the smooth, forward motion with which we move from task to task and from encounter to encounter because the actions of such moves have become, for various reasons, automatic, already oriented. The phenomenological attitude is an unsettling of the ordinary. The ordinary stays ordinary due to the assumptions that facilitate it *as* ordinary, that is, repeated, reproducible, habitual. If there is not a reason to step back and look again, the forward motion continues, and life is seemingly easier for the lack of paradox and tension in any given confrontation. By stepping back and looking, I do not mean to

say that we meet an event and then proceed to “make it phenomenological” by way of a set of methodological steps to an arrival. I mean to say that the phenomenological attitude *has been* the stepping back and looking: stepping back and looking again at the habitual that covers up the singularity or meaning of an experience, at what falls through the cracks of awareness as we categorize or thematize our engagements based on past experience, assumption, or conceptions previously formulated to make the everyday *the type of everyday to which we are most accustomed*, the type of everyday that facilitates getting more tasks done from the standpoint of efficiency, of having our expectations met to “make the most of our time.”

Various forces of “logic” have fashioned daily business to include a marginal slither for “entertainment,” which films are expected to satisfy (see Giroux, 1983/2017, p. 43). But if films *must* “entertain” us and we see a film that does not, is this an automatic, foregone conclusion that the film *must* be the culprit? Or could it be a matter with which to *grapple*? A phenomenological attitude involves the nuance of the latter; at the very least, it involves a continuous openness in considering what entertainment means and how entertainment can take different shapes at different times. It allows for acknowledgment that the film is not the only entity in the room that has responsibilities for what it is transmitting into the world. The filmgoer has the capability to receive and to transmit the results of that reception. The filmgoer changes or does not change. The filmgoer has ideas that impact how the film is watched. At most, the phenomenological attitude is an ongoing thinking otherwise.

Filmgoers engage in one film after another, an action that is repeated and can become habitual. Relatedly, and to use the terms of Dasein in following the work of Shawn Loht (2017) in his *Phenomenology of Film: A Heideggerian Account of the Film Experience*, we *already know how* to watch films. Unlike the readiness-to-hand of a tool—its usefulness in terms of its function, not the qualities of its being—for a purpose of concrete structuring or a computation on an electronic machine, film objects are of use in their being a part of Dasein’s shared world where film is a cultural activity and part of Dasein’s inherited because inherent “ability to

communicate in language and [its] . . . facility for comprehending the discourse that is already present in one's surroundings" (p. 5). But the true wonder of filmgoing, as I see it, is the *interplay between repetition and difference*—the negotiation between our tendency to compare and take for granted what we already know and *think* we already know about our encounters with film and what occurs that is unlike what we had ever seen, heard, or felt before.

In Heideggerian philosophy, *Dasein* (literally, *being-there*) is "Being-human" in what comprises our uniqueness as human (Dreyfus, 1991, p. xi); the world appears coherent to us, as "individuals are understood as *always already* having an understanding of themselves within the world, even if they are not constantly, explicitly and/or consciously aware of that understanding" (Neubauer et al., 2019, p. 94). In opposition to transcendental phenomenology in the Husserlian tradition, Martin Heidegger's focus was ontological—on the nature of Being and temporality—rather than epistemological, which is concerned with the nature of knowledge (Neubauer et al., 2019, p. 94; van Manen, 2016, p. 231). Dreyfus (1991) explains this aim toward what is more fundamental: Heidegger poses questions about the nature of what we do not *know* about our understanding of our Being, about what is "not a representation in the mind corresponding to the world"; instead, he asks about the nature of what "we simply *are*" (p. 3). In elucidating this structure of what we simply *are*, Heidegger (1927/1962) wrote in *Being and Time* that "Being-in-the-world," a "fundamental structure in Dasein," is "*'a priori'*; it is not pieced together, but is primordially and constantly a whole" (p. 65). However, through a *hermeneutic* phenomenology, we can learn to interpret and reinterpret where we find ourselves in tacit understanding within the world (Heidegger, 1927/1962, p. 65; Dreyfus, 1991, pp. 2–3; George, 2020, 1.3. The Hermeneutical Circle section). Hermeneutics involves interpretation—interpreting the entirety of an idea or a text based on the parts that compose it. That is, hermeneutics involves considering those parts in themselves and then back in relation to the whole.

To return to Heidegger's structure of Dasein, Being-in-the-world (the structure or background) and Dasein (the Being itself) might be thought as more fundamental than what

makes up the natural attitude; it seems to be what *leads us to* habits, assumptions, methods, theories. Thus, working *with Dasein* (in ways similar to those I have argued for working with theory)—rather than foreclosing with it as a settlement into the always already—can be fruitful. In this case, what might arise in our encounters with moving pictures and in the conversations they ignite can go beyond—but not deny—the underlying, basic capacity we have to take in stories and converse with others. Pedagogically, this presents an expansive field of view that can be deeply instructive across the gamut of reception, from the pleased to the disaffected, and allow for more nuanced ways of confronting the impulse to be entertained, the disappointment and delight in seeing stories unfold, and the overlapping practices around these reactions that *will already occur* and that educators attempt to encourage.

In *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*, Ahmed (2006) provides a note that has been transformative to my work:

> It might be possible to rethink Husserl's concept of bracketing. Rather than the bracket functioning as a device that puts aside the familiar, we could describe the bracket as a form of wonder: that is, we feel wonder about what is in the bracket, rather than putting what is in the bracket to one side. (pp. 199–200)

Resisting the practice of bracketing to *leave to the side* and instead having wonder about what is in the bracket is entailed in working *with* the natural attitude, with method, and with theory, to recall my earlier arguments. Working *with* but not centering also entails resisting the centering of the always already of Dasein, as what "we simply *are*" has the potential to become a left-to-the-side bracketed notion.

Working with rather than centering the familiar, even as our bodies go through motions that are so habituated that we tend not to be consciously aware of them, is where a phenomenological attitude as a filmgoer (including "going to" a film inside a classroom, or at home) can instruct us in the direction of recognizing the settled, limiting structures in both our own reception and in those of the films we view. The habitual acts of filmgoing and reception

combine with those of schooling. Film is so often "used" in masterful, technocratic, and reductive ways in which the film is ostensibly important but, in actuality, is an afterthought (see Gibbs, 2017). With a phenomenological attitude, making pedagogical investments in more nuanced ways of receiving film can do and mean more (RQ3). It can approach film for what it can offer as itself—beyond, among other things, a "ready-to-hand" tool to "teach" concepts and a taken-for-granted extension of one's "opinionated" way of thinking.

Such pedagogical investments can allow educators and students to engage more authentically with what I have argued to be two of the most ubiquitous aspects of U.S. culture—schooling and popular media (Harris, 2019, p. 95). Here, I use "popular" not only in a literal sense (liked or endorsed by a great number) but also in the sense that any film has the potential to offer salient dimensions to popular conversations and the overall landscapes of what could be deemed mainstream. I also mean to reiterate the universal yet singularly experienced impact moving pictures, through the combination of their cinematic language and their writing (see van Manen, 2016, pp. 249–260), have on viewers. Brought together as an ongoing thinking otherwise rather than separated in terms of what the latter *can do for* the former, schooling and filmgoing can transform how we think about *reception*. And this transformation is not a foreclosing one but an active, reflexive, and ongoing one that resists "settlement."

Overview of Chapters

As I have stated, this dissertation takes a phenomenological approach in offering new ways of thinking what it means to receive film—and *receive* in a broader sense—both inside and outside the classroom. The offerings are not drawn from a conclusive method. Rather, they are posited as offerings for possible connection and application in the changing, ongoing contexts that meet us at arrivals that do not foreclose. Phenomenology is described as "the account of appearances" (D. H. Davis, 2020, p. 4; see also Salamon, 2018a, p. 22). It is "concerned with how the world gives itself to appearances" (Salamon, 2018a, p. 15). It attempts to describe (and interpret) the "prereflective meaning of the living now" (van Manen, 2016, p. 34). Put another

way, phenomenology is “the study of phenomena as they manifest in our experience, of the way we perceive and understand phenomena, and of the meaning phenomena have in our subjective experience” (Neubauer et al., 2019, p. 92). It affords us opportunities to see the extraordinary in the ordinary (van Manen, 2016, pp. 38, 39, 188, 223, 298). Through *interpretive-descriptive* phenomenology (hermeneutic for short), I trace the *appearances of reception* as they emerge from educational viewing to what I call educational conversation. Interpretive-descriptive phenomenology assumes interpretation to be taking place alongside and intertwined with description (van Manen, 2016, p. 26). Thus, the epistemological focus at the center of transcendental phenomenology is not the beginning and the ending.

Pedagogically, the progression from educational viewing of film to *educational conversation* about film—both educational because of the manifestation of *an openness to grapple* with what arises and of the grappling itself—is not a progression that goes in only one direction or in a straight line. It is an interdisciplinary progression that brings together the fields of study I have introduced: education, film reception studies, film phenomenology, and women’s, gender, and sexuality studies. In the following chapters, which I summarize below, I take the path I posit from educational viewing, a singular, subjective experience, to educational conversation, a collective, intersubjective encounter. With an interpretive-descriptive phenomenological attitude, I can write in circles (see Waite, 2017), make connections *back*, and attempt to realize, in the execution of my own instruction, an ongoing thinking otherwise rather than an arrival that forecloses.

Chapter 2 Overview

Chapter 2, “Begin With the Film and Not With a Feeling? Paradox, Tension, and Phenomenological Projects,” sets up the scenario where my contribution lies: Film offers phenomenological possibilities for reception that implore filmgoers to embrace and grapple with paradox and tension. First, I articulate what I mean by paradox and tension. Second, I give literature reviews of the three main bodies of literature that I take up educationally:

phenomenology, film phenomenology, and film reception theory. Finally, I place Singh's (2018) *Unthinking Mastery: Dehumanism and Decolonial Entanglements* into conversation with phenomenological possibility. Resisting mastery and the theoretical circumscription that keeps us engrossed in practices of reception founded on preconceived notions about and taken-for-granted encounters with the everyday is the goal of the phenomenological approaches I offer. These projects (phenomenological investigations, anecdotes, *doing* phenomenology) are involved with the films themselves and with conversations about film, as our own reception is essentially a conversation with ourselves that is heavily, consciously or not, undergirded by conversations among others, culturally, educationally, on the internet, and in the classroom. Teachers who guide conversations about film can benefit from phenomenologies by tracing gestures to push students beyond their settled logics, and students can come to value the conversations themselves, not simply "agreeing or disagreeing," voicing "opinions," or performing intelligence, wit, or debate.

Chapter 3 Overview

Chapter 3 is titled, "The Review is Not the Point; Or, the Ubiquity of Reception Meets Educational Viewing." I look at reception in a broader sense and show how the natural attitude and the resulting preexisting logics are often grafted onto our reception of film if we enter *already expecting* to see our logics and frames confirmed. This applies also to cinephiles and to filmmakers, actors, and directors, as they are filmgoers themselves. I call this tendency to graft the *ubiquity of reception*. Film is also ubiquitous, and conversations about the ubiquity of reception are the first step in my first research question: What it might mean if we as filmgoers had responsibilities beyond mere reception, both individually and collectively? This first step is also the first move to discover what the benefits might be of taking on such responsibility.

Phenomenological Attitude as a Filmgoer

First, in confronting reception in its ubiquity and the unique place film holds in this ubiquity, I introduce the phenomenological attitude as a filmgoer, in line with my second

research question. After laying out its three tenets, I argue that this attitude gives way to *educational viewing*. Here, I dwell with what it means to grapple, drawing on the work of Özlem Sensoy and Robin DiAngelo (2017), who state that "'grappling with' ideas means to receive, reflect upon, practice articulating, and seek deeper understanding; grappling is not debate or rejection. The goal is to move us beyond the mere sharing of opinions and toward more informed engagement" (p. 8). I return, at this point, to *un*settlement, as I argue that grappling involves *unsettling* our reception.

Ubiquity of Reception

Second, I return to delve deeper into what I term the ubiquity of reception—the tendency to graft preexisting assumptions or logics onto each new situation. In this vein, I (a) make connections between the ubiquity of reception and disciplinarity boundaries. Then, I (b) take up a *conversation itself*—an episode of the *Next Best Picture Podcast* (Neglia et al., 2019) in which the cohosts review the film *The Farewell* (Wang, 2019). This podcast rarely demonstrates grappling, and instances of embracing paradox and resulting tensions are few and far between but not completely absent. Still, it is generative to examine the gestures that give shape to the *Farewell* episode, as they say much about good and bad faith and the pitfalls of "critique" (see Gordon, 2020, p. 17; see also Gordon, 1995). Next, I (c) look at the relationship between "narrative" and the grafting of the narratives of our own personal pasts, presents, and futures onto our reception of film. Here, I will engage Janet Staiger's (2000) *Perverse Spectators: The Practices of Film Reception*. To close out this section, I (d) move to filmgoers' seemingly perpetual "disappointment." I specifically engage and build upon Julian Hanich's (2018) "Great Expectations: Cinematic Adaptations and the Reader's Disappointment."

Film in the Everyday Classroom: The Meanings of "Educational"

Third, in offering concrete ways teachers can make pedagogical investments in more nuanced practices of film reception using phenomenological approaches (RQ3), I have, across disciplines, surveyed the literature on film in formal classrooms and, specifically, "educational

film." The prevalence of technocratic and reductive "uses" of film informs my encouraging of a phenomenological attitude as a filmgoer/teacher/student. Included in the literature (as in Hobbs, 2006) are studies that critique technocratic and reductive practices only to describe films as learning "tools," circumscribing parameters of "optimal use" that may filter out profound possibility. For all the literature, I contribute my ideas on the ubiquity of reception, build upon the phenomenological inquiry or introduce it to works outside phenomenology, and argue for grappling with paradox and tension, with what might arise. For works that meet film as it gives itself rather than as it fits into preconceived frames imposed from elsewhere, Alexis Gibbs's (2017) "'What Makes My Image of Him Into an Image of Him?': Philosophers on Film and the Question of Educational Meaning" and Jon Morris's "Against the Comfort of Catharsis: Teaching Trauma and the Sobering Lesson of *Train De Vie*" are of particular importance. In sum, I offer new ways of approaching the "educational" and the materials and ideas that have become integrated into the commonplace, everyday practices of schooling.

Into Conversation with the Work of Saidiya Hartman

Fourth and finally, and as I did in Chapter 2, I close the chapter with a scholar of women's, gender, and sexuality studies who, in another context, also researches and writes in resistance against mastery. I argue that the work of feminist scholar Saidiya Hartman, while not explicitly phenomenological, offers dimensions to phenomenological thinking—in the thinking otherwise about our settled knowledges, usually grounded in an acceptance of "authorized" histories and in the aesthetic turn all but required in phenomenological interpretation-description (Sepp & Embree, 2010, p. xv). As a scholar of what cannot be known of history, Hartman's speculative histories are extraordinary in their orientation toward what I describe as a temporal relationship between the past, present, and future. She does not pretend to "know" and expands "unknowable" to include recorded histories—those histories that exist only to make legible the lives of African American women in contexts that do not recognize their lives outside of settler colonial boundaries founded in Black enslavement (see Hartman, 2018, 2019).

As we see in her later work beginning with “Venus in Two Acts,” Hartman (2008) describes her practice as “critical fabulation.” She seeks to “jeopardize the status of the event, to displace the received or authorized account, and to imagine what might have happened or might have been said or might have been done” (p. 11). In her latest book, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Riotous Black Girls, Troublesome Women, and Queer Radicals*, Hartman (2019) takes an aesthetic stance, describing her approach as “historical poetics” as she both uses and writes against the archive that holds as a cardinal quality its violence against Black women (Bradley, 2019; Hartman, 2020a). In her historical poetics, which center the lives of Black women from their own gaze, Hartman (2019), at key points, references film, as metaphor and as concrete object, and the pull toward moving pictures. The women of *Wayward Lives* are pulled toward film’s ability to carry them into its world, to transport them to a place in which their living does not have to be a living *otherwise* that places them already in peril, but a living that extends to them according to their reaching out for it.

My contribution is drawing connections between Hartman’s approaches—how she faces paradox and tension and how she deals with, as she writes in “Venus in Two Acts,” “trying to represent what we cannot” (p. 13)—and the phenomenological project of film reception—how we can face rather than flee from the tension that arises when what I call our stories of reception hit against the potential of allowing a film to give itself as itself, even when we must write or speak or otherwise act against it (a film).

Chapter 4 Overview

In Chapter 4, “Unsettled Reception and the Films Themselves,” I expand to my educational purview in phenomenology of film and reception Kathleen Stewart’s (2007) work in affect, cultural anthropology, and the ordinary, and I expand to education and other approaches to reception Loht’s (2017) work in ontology and phenomenology of film and reception. In doing so, I link three areas that are central to a phenomenological attitude as a filmgoer: sitting and

waiting, unsettled reception, and films that *do* phenomenology. In other words, films that do phenomenology (Loht), create conditions for educational viewing and unsettled reception, which, in turn, require a sitting and waiting through which a filmgoer is in tune with what is immanent and shifting rather than fixed and constructed (Stewart).

The chapter opens with an engagement with Stewart (2007), the third of the three major scholars I first encountered in women's, gender, and sexuality studies and whose work I am putting into conversation with phenomenological inquiry. I open with Stewart—in contrast to how I close with Singh in Chapter 2 and Hartman in Chapter 3—because I will argue that reading Stewart is analogous to receiving what a phenomenological *film* has to offer. Thus, it encourages the sitting and waiting a phenomenological film requires and provides preparation for actual encounters with those films on the screen. Reading Stewart also provides preparation for my philosophical engagement with phenomenological films themselves—the focus of this chapter.

In *Ordinary Affects*, Stewart (2007) writes of what she calls the "reeling present," which is "composed out of heterogeneous and noncoherent singularities" (p. 4), the immanent in the ordinary. This ordinary is not based in reification that *fixes* the present and the past to *construct* the future but rather in assemblages that *shift* (p. 1). Through vignettes of the everyday (encountering a stranger in a café, on the television, or in a traffic jam, to name a few), there is no reliance in *Ordinary Affects* on obviously constructed commentary that introduces, comments on, or concludes. The vignettes emphasize what I call disparate potential—what happens next beyond any predicted potential, expectation, codified "meaning," or promise of a degree of change (see also Harris, 2020, pp. 4–5). Stewart describes and demonstrates an orientation in the direction of ordinary affects. She writes, "To attend to ordinary affects is to trace how the potency of forces lies in their immanence to things that are both flighty and hardwired, shifty and unsteady but palpable too" (p. 3). Meaning is secondary (pp. 33, 39–40, 41–43), and living and sitting and waiting are primary.

I associate such sitting and waiting with living and with the phenomenological attitude as a filmgoer: the sitting and waiting are not concerned with associations with passivity as a sign of weakness (as if weakness were an undesirable trait), as they are not grounded in predicative standards but rather in how the film gives itself and in *not* endeavoring to know, prognosticate, or find out. And as I write in Chapter 3, it is the phenomenological attitude as a filmgoer that leads to educational viewing—viewing that is educational because it requires grappling, which *unsettles* reception.

Chapter 4 continues Chapter 3's idea of unsettled reception. It does so with films that *do the unsettling*. The goal of Chapter 4 is to present phenomenological films—films that *do* phenomenology, regardless of whether this philosophical orientation is an expressed intent of the filmmaker. By simply approximating our lives as we live them, these films let paradox and tension *sit*, without needing to manufacture; they set up, as Loht (2017) argues, "barrier[s] for understanding, in the form of human characters and situations that refuse easy articulation, while nonetheless drawing attention to these precisely in their very refusal of intelligibility" (p. 165). These barriers are left to the viewer to attempt to resolve by way of the viewer's factical state—that is, for Dasein, "on the basis of its own past experience and future planning" (p. 63)—and "understanding projection" into the world of the film (p. 165, see also pp. 163, 166). In various ways, these films unsettle reception, necessitating not a foreclosing resolution but an ongoing thinking otherwise.

To think Dasein's "basis of prior, contextual understanding [and its] futural direction"—according to which the world already appears coherent, and that coherence is carried for and into the future (Loht, 2017, pp. 63–64)—alongside Stewart's reeling present of noncoherence and attentiveness to what is both steady and unsteady in that present is to embrace paradox and tension in being and in the ordinary. Thus, reception itself, before it is attached to reception *theory*, is worthy of phenomenological study, and it is the films that do phenomenology that

open up for filmgoers an approach toward—in the viewing itself—a phenomenological attitude as a filmgoer, moving toward educational viewing.

I chose three films that do phenomenology and that comport with what I call educational viewing. The list includes films in line with my interdisciplinary study. Aforementioned scholars are pertinent here: D. H. Davis, Hanich, Harris, Gayle Salamon, and van Manen. Also of importance are Jean-Luc Marion (1997/2002) in phenomenology of givenness; Alberto Baracco (2017), Harald A. Stadler (1990), and Daniel Yacavone (2015) in film phenomenology; Lisa Guenther (2020) in critical phenomenology and feminist and women's, gender, and sexuality studies; and Stephen David Ross (2014) in beauty and aesthetics. In the chapter, I will expand on what the films offer phenomenologically, individually and collectively. The films are *If Beale Street Could Talk* (Jenkins, 2018), *Queen & Slim* (Matsoukas, 2019), and *Wildlife* (Dano, 2018).

Chapter 5 Overview

Chapter 5—"Educational Conversation: Aural, Aesthetic, and From Different Types of Classrooms"—completes the path I offer toward more nuanced ways of receiving film in the formal classroom and beyond (RQ3). First on the path was facing and embracing paradox and tension (Chapter 2, RQ1), which led to a phenomenological attitude as a filmgoer (Chapter 3, RQ2). A phenomenological attitude as a filmgoer sets the stage for the capacity to grapple, from which educational viewing can ensue. Educational viewing allows for the possibilities in receiving what a film (phenomenological or otherwise) gives (Chapter 4); it does not encourage reception bound in preconception, prefabrication, or expectation.

This chapter is a conclusion, but it is not a conclusion that forecloses. Rather, I intend for it to open up to new paths of the unforeseen, which educational conversations also foster. Rather than stay a preset course to confirm a predetermined outcome, educational conversations take their *own* paths as pedagogical investments in what *might arise*. As conversations, not performances of intelligence, "wit," or debate, educational conversations are

such because they are good-faith manifestations of grappling. They *educate because they grapple*.

As I have stated, my intervention is in tracing *appearances of reception*. Toward this, I offer new approaches to educational discourse. These new approaches can engender a proliferation of original educational conversations about film inside and outside the formal classroom. I conclude with conversations due to one of my most important findings in this interdisciplinary study: On curricular and pedagogical levels, ideas and practices around film—film as individual motion pictures and film as a medium—stand little chance of turning toward greater nuance and reflexivity unless the everyday conversations around those ideas and practices change. At stake are the needed, not yet realized possibilities of a unique pair that is more than the sum of its parts: schooling as an institution and film as a popular, artistic medium. These ubiquitously influential aspects of culture and society make up a unit too potentially transformative to remain relegated to the category of what is "settled," pushed aside as not much more than repetitive habit confirming logics of technocratic "truth."

I argue that listening to *other conversations* about films can offer moves away from authorized, masterful "uses" of film and classrooms mired in solipsistic debate. A phenomenological experience of what might emerge in a conversation about film is analogous to the way films can show without telling, giving in the moment new ways of thinking otherwise beyond direct "relatability." As such, I turn directly toward listening and specifically to the aural in the podcast medium. Podcasts are a generative space for engaging in the shared responsibilities of film reception (see RQ1 and RQ2). Over the past decade, podcasting has been a burgeoning medium and has reached a level of ubiquity underscored by ease of access (Berry, 2006, 2016, 2018; Llinares, 2020; Sullivan, 2018; see also Llinares et al., 2018b). I posit using film podcasts in formal classrooms, not as learning "tools" that provide technocratic claims of "answers," but as means of accessing conversations that can enhance those that take place

in the classroom. I argue that the best examples of film podcast conversations for the classroom are those that educate because they grapple.

In taking further what I write in Chapter 3 about what could be called the aesthetic imperative in phenomenology, I then dwell in what I see as the aesthetic (del Río, 2010; Holub, 2014; Kelly, 1998/2014a, 2014b) qualities of educational conversations. This is comparable to how films are both art and "subject matter," both form and content. The givens are not from method; they are remade anew (Sepp & Embree, 2010; van Manen, 2016, pp. 41, 221, 226, 372) in each conversation. Overall, in building on the academic research in the nascent field of podcast studies, including the little that exists in the phenomenological study of the film podcast, I ask what this means for reception.

Media Sites of Film Reception: A Different Type of "Classroom"

In elaborating on the possibility in engaging podcasts in the classroom, I offer more on my phenomenological stepping back (see Chapter 1, "Arrival to the Phenomenological" section). This is especially pertinent, as I put pressure on the jump to creation (as in, "Watch this film and create your own podcast episode!"). I propose listening before (or instead of) creating. Listening to other conversations about film is a pedagogical investment in more nuanced ways of receiving film and teaching and modeling that reception as an educator, as a student, or as a filmgoer in informal encounters with others (RQ3). But recognizing and then choosing conversations that educate because they grapple are essential practices.

Reception inevitably results in conversations with others, which can do more to shape a film's impact than the viewing itself. As I connect them to the receptive, I use *media sites of film reception* to denote podcasts that practice, endorse, and support educational conversation about film. I describe how educational podcast conversations are a different type of "classroom," as well as spaces from which to find openings toward new questions and new investments in more nuanced ways of receiving film. This distinction is important in thinking otherwise about

the aural and the aesthetic and the possibilities that emerge from conversations of reception in the formal classroom and beyond.

To instruct in engaging podcast conversations in the classroom, I include the following podcasts for what they offer, in line with my (always already) interdisciplinary and intersectional approach: *Black Men Can't Jump [In Hollywood]* (Braylock et al., 2019, 2020a, 2020b, 2020c), *Fresh Air* (Gross, 2018), *Film Comment* (Hynes, 2018), *Playback* with Kris Tapley (Tapley, 2019), and *Awards Chatter* (Feinberg, 2020b).[2] As different types of "classrooms," the episodes I selected from these shows demonstrate the overall orientation of their respective productions: open to, facing, and embracing paradox, tension, and the *educational* in an ongoing manner.

In Educational Conversation

In bringing together educational viewing and educational conversation and in connecting phenomenology, classrooms, and film reception, I argue that listening to other educational conversations on an ongoing basis is continual preparation for participating in conversations with a phenomenological attitude. Film's impact is a neglected reality as far as there is a need for approaches to it that are more nuanced and reflexive. Meanwhile, the impact affects us beyond what we can fully articulate. This disjuncture makes it vital that reception theory is considered an as yet *incomplete* approach. A phenomenological attitude as a filmgoer is a crucial step in moving beyond simply sharing opinions in the classroom. Educational viewing can bring into closer proximity more authentic encounters with film and, consequently, the thinking otherwise that can lead to the types of conversations necessary in authentically facing educational issues of reception: educational conversations that stimulate our capacity not to be content in the comfort of our "settled" logics.

[2] Although *Fresh Air* does not have a scope focused exclusively on film or, more widely, arts and entertainment, it is explicitly attuned to film and frequently engages thoughtfully and reflexively with the medium through conversations with those who work in front of and behind the camera.

CHAPTER II: BEGIN WITH THE FILM AND NOT WITH A FEELING? PARADOX, TENSION, AND PHENOMENOLOGICAL PROJECTS

> You must begin with a text . . . not with a feeling.
>
> —Dr. E. M. Ashford in *Wit* (1999)

Feelings of Reception: Paradox, Teaching, and Performances of Scholarship

In Margaret Edson's (1999) play *Wit*, then undergraduate English literature student Vivian Bearing struggles (or, rather, thinks she has not struggled) with a paper on John Donne's Holy Sonnet VI ("Death Be Not Proud"). Her professor, Dr. E. M. Ashford, instructs Vivian to do something that is to Vivian insufficient: "You must begin with a text, Miss Bearing, not with a feeling" (p. 13). This leaves Vivian perplexed. Dr. Ashford expounds upon the importance of the poem's original punctuation, the edition Vivian does not read because it was checked out of the library (p. 13). To Dr. Ashford's frustration, Vivian engages in a *performance* of scholarship, a veiling over of what Dr. Ashford calls "truth" with terminology that scholars have applied to Donne's work:

> E.M.: Nothing but a breath—a comma—separates life from life everlasting. It is very simple really. With the original punctuation restored, death is no longer something to act out on a stage, with exclamation points. It's a comma, a pause.
>
> This way, the *uncompromising* way, one learns something from this poem, wouldn't you say? Life, death. Soul, God. Past, present. Not insuperable barriers, not semicolons, just a comma.
>
> VIVIAN: Life, death . . . I see (*Standing*) It's a metaphysical conceit. It's wit! I'll go back to the library and rewrite the paper—
>
> E. M.: (*Standing, emphatically*) It is *not wit*, Miss Bearing. It is truth. (*Walking around the desk to her*) The paper's not the point.
>
> VIVIAN: It isn't? (pp. 14–15)

This *dynamic between a teacher and a student*, on which I elaborate throughout this opening, is illustrative and instructive toward the goals of this chapter. It brings out what I call appearances of reception, and it is an example of a teacher's attempt to challenge her student to face paradox and tension as features of the reception of any text, be it written, visual, or sonic. Thus, arguments I make from this encounter run concurrent to and precede my arguments for the unique offerings of phenomenological film reception.

The goal of this chapter is to lay the groundwork for my overall project of elucidating how film offers unique phenomenological possibilities for reception that implore filmgoers to embrace and grapple with paradox and tension. I argue that how we receive texts in the first place so often gets bound up in *some other* latent or manifest goal that leaves the text behind in service of something else. In terms of reception, this finish line—or arrival that forecloses—deals in avoiding paradox and tension or resolving them through shortcuts of habit or what we take for granted. In this vein, after (a) delving further into the convergence of what I call Vivian Bearing's performance of scholarship and Dr. Ashford's effort to push her back to the text (so that I can lay out my use of "paradox" and "tension," the importance of conversations as texts, and the perils of technocratic education), I (b) offer literature reviews of the three bodies of literature that are foundational and thus most vital in approaching my research questions: phenomenology, film phenomenology, and film reception theory. In the literature review on film reception theory, I ask my first research question explicitly: What would it mean for a filmgoer to have responsibilities beyond mere reception? Then, I (c) place the arguments that emerge into conversation with Singh's (2018) *Unthinking Mastery: Dehumanism and Decolonial Entanglements* to show connections between "unthinking mastery," the phenomenological attitude, and resisting technocratic approaches to schooling, which tend to create technocratic approaches to education and learning broadly.

Questions of Paradox and Tension

At the start of their conversation, Dr. Ashford says to Vivian that her essay "is a melodrama, with a veneer of scholarship unworthy of you" and instructs her to "do it again" (p. 13). After this we see that she, paradoxically it seems, insists that the paper is not the point. Vivian cannot grasp such a combination of declarations and instructions; revealing no deeper truth to her, it is only a contradiction and not a paradox. Her understanding of the relationship between reading, writing, feeling, and the point of all three ends in an inability to reconcile "simple human truth" with "uncompromising scholarly standards" (p. 15). She reads a text (albeit one that is "inauthentically punctuated" [p. 13]) and relies on an intellectual understanding of "wit." It seems, though, that those *are* the steps in executing exactly what has been asked of her—she has not started with a feeling.

But we could say that what is asked of Vivian requires an ongoing thinking otherwise. This orientation is not founded on method or habit based on what one is already going in looking for to easily categorize, thematize, and label information in the direction of some other goal at stake that is separate from the text or phenomenon one is encountering. I have described this ongoing thinking otherwise as an essential part of having a phenomenological attitude. Unlike phenomenology as a method, phenomenology as an attitude offers that we can embrace and see possibility in paradox and tension, especially in the moments when we feel furthest away from insight and places to start, continue, or simply *move*. At the impasse where Vivian finds herself, if what is being asked of her is that she think otherwise about the relationships between beliefs and practices of scholarship—between reading, writing, and feeling—what arises is a set of questions that is different from those that presently appear to her. The relationships between beliefs and practices of scholarship so often have to do with the *reception* of a text's form and content. I offer something like what Dr. Ashford might say: Vivian's reception is not of the text itself, but of *something else*—her own presuppositions, preconceptions, prefabrications of what it might mean to be a scholar. From Probst's (1988) reader response, Vivian's response shows

that meaning “does not reside in the ink, to be ferreted out, unearthed [but is instead] created, formed, shaped, by readers . . . [as] *their* meaning” (p. 34). Were Vivian engaging in film analysis, Timothy Corrigan and Patricia White (2018) would likely note in the context of film theory that her response itself is paramount, independent of considerations about who made the film text, its themes, or its content from a formal standpoint (p. 397). To be sure, with reception, it can be difficult to know whether, or to what extent, the reader or viewer is responding to the text at all.

But there lies the place where the meeting of phenomenology, film reception, and education is so intriguingly full of potential: in *tracing the appearances of reception*, I work with the gamut of “reception” and offer ways that we—as readers and viewers, scholars and teachers, students and filmgoers—can be reflexive as we receive—that is, recognize the limitations we possess and impose upon ourselves and upon the texts we encounter. As van Manen (2016) states, “Phenomenology orients to the meanings that arise in experience” (p. 38). He goes on to write that “any and every possible human experience . . . may become a topic for phenomenological inquiry” (p. 38). Tracing the appearances of reception, recognizing phenomenologically the complex and complicated nature of human *experiences* of reception, allows possibilities for non-foreclosing conversations with ourselves and with others that encourage us to recognize when we have put the text to the side. In extending Ahmed’s (2006) rethinking of Husserl’s bracket (that I present in the “Arrival to the Phenomenological” section of the introduction), I contend that putting the text to the side to leave it to the side involves veiling over the tension of encountering paradox with reactions that are only ostensibly reactions to the text itself. Questions of what constitutes the “text itself” are not easy questions, but easy questions are not the province of philosophy of education, and it is the questions themselves that are the true task of philosophical approaches to reception studies.

What is asked of Vivian goes beyond mere question and answer, beyond the application of terms (“It’s a metaphysical conceit. It’s wit!”). In response to Vivian’s inability to see the paper

as more than a performative display of intellect, a practice to be carried out with the goal of foreclosure, Dr. Ashford gives Vivian a final instructional note—about simple human truth—that is in Vivian's mind irreconcilable with the first note about an uncompromising reading of Donne: "Vivian. You're a bright young woman. Use your intelligence. Don't go back to the library. Go out. Enjoy yourself with your friends. Hmm?" (p. 15). Ultimately, the tension from what she cannot reconcile sends Vivian back to the library, and she does not truly grapple with the contradictions between what is truth and what is uncompromising until she is in her 50s and dying of Stage 4 ovarian cancer, having become, herself, a renowned, and to many, notorious, professor specializing in the Holy Sonnets of John Donne. Until that point, she had, with a technocratic approach rooted in aims of mastery, railed against the details of what her professor brought up to her many years earlier.

As such, Dr. Ashford and Vivian's conversation—a dynamic between a teacher and a student, as I first described it above—and the individual effect it has on Vivian provides an instructive prologue to this chapter and its goals. Toward classroom conversations about film that do not foreclose or passively reinscribe what is already thought to be known, first it is necessary, I argue, to consider how the reception of a text should begin with a facing up to the paradox and tension that condition how we receive at the outset and how we react to the conversations around the text as it is integrated and received into the context of the classroom and schooling. It is also important to note that, as it is with what I call the "film festival accusation"—the adverse attitude against "showing too many movies" in the classroom shared by teachers and administrators alike—reception of a text is often bound up in the reception of its medium rather than founded from an authentic engagement with the text itself. Cultural foundations of education asks us to continually call into question our assumptions about how we see something as "having a place" or not having a place in the classroom; more importantly, it would have us continually question the ramifications of our responses to the questions we ask and examine the questions we do *not* ask.

As a dynamic between a teacher and a student, Dr. Ashford and Vivian's conversation offers a meaningful introduction to this chapter in the field of cultural foundations of education, which asks us to confront our basic assumptions about and the complicated relationships between education generally and schooling specifically. As a *conversation*, it offers much to the possibilities that might arise from the conversations themselves when the classroom is not a stage to perform intelligence, wit, or debate, and not a place that stops at practices of "agreeing" and "disagreeing" and voicing "opinions." As a text itself, the exchanges between Dr. Ashford and Vivian can be a model not to mimic or dissect as a specimen from which to obtain arrivals that foreclose but rather a model that teachers and students can look to for possible openings, by way of the prereflective, toward classroom conversations not cemented in the already settled logics of each participant, or those of a particular group of participants. Additionally, how each part of the conversation relates to the whole in interpretive-descriptive (hermeneutic) engagement maintains the *ongoing* in the phenomenological thinking otherwise, thinking not bound by stabilized habits, preconceptions, and assumptions.

Film already has such a pervasively significant influence on how we view ourselves and on the psychic and physical structures inside and around us. Film influences in ways no other medium can, art or otherwise—it does so through the strong possibility of immersion in visual and sonic creations that resemble how we live and breathe. Enveloped in the revelations of these special capacities is the moment-to-moment reception of a film and the engaged moments of exchange with ourselves and with others about what we saw, heard, learned. Most effecting, I think, are exchanges about what struck us with wonder or stopped us in our tracks. As we have seen, experiences of wonder and being stopped in one's tracks can carry with them the difficulties of *allowing* such uncertainty and destabilization in and around one's life and mind. Therefore, it is crucial to face the difficulties of paradox and tension on the way to the filmic medium's inimitable capability to move us.

Dwelling in Paradox and Tension

Toward the goal of presenting the groundwork for how film offers unique possibilities for reception through a phenomenological approach, it was and is necessary to dwell in what it means to face paradox and tension, as I argue facing paradox and tension is the first barrier to the reception of any text. That is, it is the first barrier to receiving texts as they give themselves, not as we receive via the centering of our habits, preconceptions, assumptions, theories, and methods. These encounters with paradox and tension are both preliminary and reoccurring. By *paradox*, I mean lived experience without the ability to easily encapsulate it into theoretical frameworks. By *tension*, I mean the *un*settlement resulting from a conscious or subconscious confrontation with paradox. As I have argued, the phenomenological attitude, rather than the natural attitude, would have us value what is immanent in a phenomenon, not what appears to be true due to commonsense knowledge or what veils it over as the most "efficient" or "palatable" explanation of the world as it is most comfortably seen.

Furthermore, the way I take up the phenomenological attitude *works with* but aims *away from* circumscribing experience, which utilizes taken-for-granted expectation, theory, and "settled" logics that are both automatic and deliberate in their ways of working against destabilizations of the everyday and habitual. Phenomenological reflection in the phenomenological attitude allows for a moving *toward* paradox, the source of tension, to see experiences of *un*settlement as places not to deflect away from or veil over but to continue from and to begin from. Moving toward paradox and tension in more nuanced ways of receiving film is a pedagogical investment (RQ3), as I posit a moving toward what it might mean to have responsibilities beyond mere reception (RQ1), beyond the attitude that reception theory is a complete approach inside and outside the formal classroom.

Education and Lacking the Text

I ask straightforwardly: How can one begin with a text if the paper's not the point? Vivian Bearing, as many in formal and informal educational settings have, sees the paper as an

instrumental task to be completed. The goal of completion—part of our "daily business" as van Manen (2016) calls it (p. 42)—veils over what the text itself can offer. When Dr. Ashford realizes that Vivian is not capable of writing a paper as the vehicle of the text's offering as itself, of arriving at that offering but not foreclosing with it, she tries the different strategy—skipping over the paper itself for another point: "using her intelligence" to connect with others in in-person interaction, perhaps in the sharing of ideas in real-time, possibly in "rough draft" as they come out. The idea and practice of the intersection between the poem (or any text), the paper, and "the point" can be approached if one thinks otherwise about "beginning with a text" and sees the text beyond mere mechanics and punctuation, theories and methods. Further, as not the point at all, the paper is merely the way of bearing out what the text gives, important as a product but at the same time important only in the truth—not a scientific or empirical truth but an immanent truth—it offers in life as life is lived. Phenomenologically speaking, this adds a different dimension to what Dr. Ashford is asking Vivian to do.

I offer, phenomenologically, that Dr. Ashford is asking Vivian to read the text by "going back to that through which the phenomenon [the poem] gives itself," as Marion (1997/2002) writes in his *Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness* (p. 4). In this work, Marion states that his "one and only theme" is that a phenomenon cannot show itself unless it first gives itself (pp. 4, 5). Reception as "the thought that does not do justice to the given" is, mostly and firstly, incapable of approaching many phenomena as they are. This is the case because, as Marion writes, phenomena are "givens that show themselves" (p. 4). In refusing to relegate givenness to the background as if it were of lesser importance and as if nothing depends on it, Marion's contribution, the third reduction of givenness after Husserl's objectness and whatness for knowledge and Heidegger's Being for *Dasein*, can be thought similar to Scheler's and also to my accounting of phenomenology as not a method but an attitude. This is the case due to the limiting ways in which method places priority, as I have said, outside of a text and instead in service of some other goal or set of steps that may not be appropriate for what presents itself

after it gives itself. Marion, however, writes of phenomenology as a method, but one that "does not run ahead of the phenomenon, by *fore*-seeing it, *pre*-dicting it, and *pro*-ducing it, in order to await it from the outset at the end of the path (*meta-hodos*) onto which it has just barely set forth" (p. 9). This calls back to mind van Manen's (2016) description, as noted above—phenomenology as a method but not a method "in the usual scientific sense of the term [which] . . . generally assumes a mode of conduct that is impartial, impersonal, and free from the idiosyncrasies or personal styles of the persons who employ such scientific method" (pp. 28–29).

In terms of film reception, the challenge is seeing something as vivid, realistic, and formally situated as a film—and, consequently, something with such observable and varied effects on our everyday—as first *given* when the *showing* is so *right there* and thus seems to insist upon an immediate, in the sense of a *decided*, foreclosing reaction. It is this challenge that lends itself to a phenomenological approach, as such an approach allows one to attempt to commit to finding out what can be gained *educationally*—that is, with an openness to grapple with what one encounters. Such orientations demand no time limit or delimiting structure for a reaction, and they can offer pedagogical possibilities that do not, subtly or otherwise, discount film as a medium or regard it as having a subordinated place in the classroom. Again, stances that discount and disparage can come from those who discourage its use and from those who "use" film but with *some other* goal in mind. As Marion articulates, these methods have "run ahead of," or passed over, the phenomenon for what is prioritized as having more "value." Thus, the "film festival accusation" lacks the texts of individual films as well as the "text" of the filmic medium as a whole; the reception of both are bound up in something *other than* and in the anticipation of predetermined finish lines—settled logics—of what teaching and learning already are and must already be.

Vivian Bearing cannot imagine "Death Be Not Proud" beyond the technical endeavor of schooling. Her paper—a metaphor for any task undertaken for completion only—is ostensibly

about the text, but it *lacks* the text. Phenomenologically speaking, it does not move beyond "our most common ways of understanding [that are] motivated by biases and habits that can originate individually or culturally" (D. H. Davis, 2020, p. 4). Habits often "render the world comfortable, familiar, and predictable [but they also] limit our horizons, foreclosing some perspectives and possibilities by privileging others" (Weiss et al., 2020a, p. xiv). Thus, in this case, completion operates not only to complete a task, but to complete it quicker and freer of paradox and tension, eschewing pausing or deviating from the most straightforward trajectory to proceed forward at a staggering rate to a real or imagined finish line.

As I have mentioned, this real or imagined finish line attached to "efficiency" often shows itself in technocratic approaches to schooling, teaching, and learning. To provide readers with a starting point rather than a tool of "fixed definitions and the mechanical process of rote memorization" (Leistyna et al., 1999, p. 333), Leistyna et al. (1999) write that *technocratic* approaches and applications are invested in habit and what is comfortable, and that they "emanat[e] from the positivist tradition":

> Technocratic models . . . conceptualize teaching as a discrete and scientific undertaking, embrace depersonalized solutions for education that often translate into the regulation and standardization of teacher practices and curricula, and rote memorization of selected "facts" that can easily be measured through standardized testing. As such, the role of the teacher is reduced to that of an uncritical, "objective," and "efficient" distributor of information. (p. 344)

This enumeration of technocratic effects further shows how the ways in which film is typically "used" in the classroom—as I have seen in the literature as well as in my firsthand experience as a teacher and a scholar—reflect and further become the ways in which teaching itself is seen and practiced. In other words, technocratic modes of teaching and "education" are rooted toward mastery, which seems to require reductive stances toward information that make teaching and learning into "daily business" to be gotten through as quickly and as *measurably*

as possible in order to foreclose and *move on to the next thing*. Here, measurable, as is almost exclusively the case, means something particular; it is the link between the technocratic and the positivist tradition from which it comes, which the centering and reliance on theory and method can very well support.

Down the path of technocratic measurement is a moving away from rather than toward paradox and tension: As Leistyna et al. (1999) note, *positivism* is associated with Enlightenment and modernist thinking and "refers to a belief system or paradigm that makes claims to objectivity, truth, and certainty *in defense of a scientific basis for the study of culture* [emphasis added]" (p. 340). Accordingly, and consequently, within the positivistic scope "knowledge and reason are seen as neutral and universal, rather than as social constructions that reflect particular interests and ideologies" (p. 340). It is within the positivist scope that classroom conversations stay within the parameters of the concrete in the sense of the either/or where a devotion to "objectivity" is favored over nuance that falls outside accepted notions of what appears to be free of subjectivity, free of what stops us in our tracks and destabilizes our everyday, "settled" sense of the world and how it operates. That the world "operates" is just what creates senses of comfort. If *how* we operate as operators in the world becomes *too much of a concern*, paradox and tension result, as "operate" implies a method, a set of steps, or a habitual maneuver, and the destabilization of taken-for-granted "mechanisms" may cause the much-resisted struggle of endeavoring to thematize what cannot be easily thematized or what resists being characterized solely or primarily as inside a thematic frame.

It is appropriate at this point to reiterate that my scope in this project is not "film in the classroom" alone. More precisely, my purpose is to offer phenomenological approaches to *reception*. Toward that purpose, my aim is to elucidate the role of the conversations themselves. In other words, pedagogical investments in more nuanced ways of receiving film in formal education settings depend on investments in more nuanced conversations about film in those settings (RQ3). Specifically, these conversations are the outcome of facing and embracing,

personally and collectively, paradox and tension. If teachers and administrators embrace paradox and tension in their conversations among themselves, those conversations can also engender authentic, reflexive change in the way students go about classroom conversations; they also may simply allow for the potential that already existed but was stifled by technocratic theoretical or methodological "teaching styles."

As I introduced in Chapter 1, have returned to here, and will fully explore in the context of each subsequent chapter, conversations that do not begin and end with the grafting of preexisting logics onto each new topic at hand require reading, as texts, *other conversations* that *educate because they grapple*. These conversations are read through aural, visual, and written language. Such a conversation in the form of a podcast episode, for example, is a different type of "classroom" that, when brought into the formal classroom, can transform classroom conversation. Conversations that educate because they grapple are not such because they are "tools" to mimic but because they are ongoing, living examples of the types of exchanges that are largely thought superfluous or are actively railed against in the interests of the technocratic.

Reviews of the Literature

Literature reviews of phenomenology, film phenomenology, and film reception theory match the path I am taking in asking what it could mean to grapple with questions that arise (a) when a film or the conversations around it destabilize everyday understanding, (b) when a film—unlike any other art form or form of popular media—presents unique challenges in this destabilization of the everyday, and (c) when educators and students face the weight that is the pedagogical investment made when they embrace the paradox and tension that is all but inevitable when they no longer automatically bracket out the everyday as taken for granted and left to the side for no further, reflexive look. The filmic medium, due to its accessibility and ubiquity, effects major influence on the substance and conditions of societal, cultural, political, and online conversations. Those "arenas" of conversation and debate—inextricably linked

despite moves to veil over connections with artificial or imagined silos—are, indeed, always already inextricably tied up in the general realm of the educational and in the specific realm of the pedagogical within formal schooling. I propose that what can be exceedingly beneficial is an ongoing thinking otherwise about both formal and informal teaching and learning as they are related to the reception of both individual films and the filmic medium. My overall contribution lies in bringing together as a philosophical, reflexive intervention spaces of thought and practice and scholarship that are seemingly disparate or actively separated. I take my particular phenomenological stances—stances that are inherently interdisciplinary—with the intention of making connections rather than perpetuating siloing.

Review of the Literature: Phenomenology

Phenomenology is contested terrain. Although many try to limit it within boundaries, it cannot be "fitted to a rule book, an interpretive schema, a set of steps, or a systematic set of procedures" (van Manen, 2016, p. 29). Nor does it "name a unified school of thought"; rather, it "designates a diverse number of thinkers in philosophy and the social sciences concerned with perception, the relation between human existence and meaning, and what Husserl named the 'lifeworld' and its structures" (Salamon, 2018a, p. 15). When social scientists do phenomenology, however, they are not doing social science. Social science brings in assumptions and theories about human experience with the aim of finding patterns toward answers. Phenomenologists let experiences *unfold*. Phenomenology is about generating questions; it is not about finding answers, and it is not linear. As I have shown above, you cannot put your own prejudices into phenomenology, but you can and should acknowledge your biases (see Delpit, 2006, pp. 46–47), and you can bring yourself into your own phenomenological work.

Bracketing—at least in transcendental, or classical, phenomenology in the Husserlian tradition—allows you to step outside of the world, even though there are branches of phenomenology and certain phenomenologists who see such transcendence as impossible,

irrelevant, or harmful. Ahmed, as do I, sees the bracket as a form of wonder (Ahmed, 2006, pp. 199–200, 2004, Chapter 8). Having wonder about our biases takes us more toward the lived now than does resisting that part of ourselves that can go as far as *conditioning* our lived experience as we live it. An analogy can be drawn between phenomenology and quantum mechanics—both are aimed at *approximate* locations, not at exact locations. Phenomenology is about wonder, about generating *new* questions and creating new spaces, not recreating existing ones. (For example, in his early work, Karl Marx can be seen as a quasi-phenomenologist when he was asking questions in novel ways about laborers—who owns our energy?) It is about explaining (or, as I prefer to say, describing) without presupposition and without theory or foreclosure—because you can actually do it, practice it, improve upon *doing* phenomenology the more you engage in it and get a "feel" for it in your *own* way (see Dreyfus, 1991, pp. 68, 86, 93, 185). Therefore, there can be phenomenologies in all topics and fields, and phenomenology has no template. Phenomenology is not a discipline. It would be better described as a movement, albeit an evolving one, evolving as new phenomenologists expand it in new directions.

Yet not everything that is interpretive is phenomenology, and not every accounting of experience is phenomenology. In *The Life and Death of Latisha King: A Critical Phenomenology of Transphobia*, Salamon (2018a), after her statement that phenomenology does not represent a unified school of thought, writes that "common to all phenomenology is careful attention to how the world is delivered to us through our perceptions" (p. 15). In "But Is It Phenomenology?" van Manen (2017) is clear when he states that "phenomenology is not to be confused with case studies, ethnographies, narrative inquiries, or empirical studies that aim to generalize their findings to a certain group or population, and so forth" (p. 775). Phenomenological meaning is approached through the study of the primal, lived, prereflective, prepredicative nature of an experience (p. 776). Van Manen goes on to state that phenomenology is not the study of how people make sense of their own, personal experiences. This sense-making is instead

“psychological sense-making or reflection” (p. 776). And to call on van Manen once again to restate the differences between phenomenological approaches and those of theories and methods, differences I have laid out here and in Chapter 1, this point deserves the utmost attention: “The serious student of phenomenology should be cautious and shy away from simplistic schemes, superficial programs, step-by-step procedures, and cookery book recipes that certainly will not result in meaningful insights” (p. 779). These words point toward “the enigma of life as we experience it—the world as it gives and reveals itself to the wondering gaze” (p. 779). Thus, what makes a phenomenon phenomenologically meaningful is that it grasps at—but does not capture because it always already *cannot*—lived experience in its unfolding in and through the “just now” (van Manen, 2016, pp. 57–62, 79–81, see also pp. 367–369). Once something has happened, it has already happened. But it is within the scope of phenomenology to nonetheless approach, move toward, and grasp at the lived now, finding fruitful possibility in impossibility.

Enigma is paradox and tension, the destabilizing of the everyday, taken-for-granted settled notions we tend to attempt to *settle back down* rather than embrace when their instability stops us in our tracks. Enigma is how a fictionalized onscreen world can move us and engulf us due to what Heidegger calls *de-distancing* [*ent-fernung*]—in this case, a feeling of being there in the world of the film no matter the *gulf* between the centuries or continents or streets or spaces of our theater chairs and those of the film’s shooting location or setting (see Loht, 2017, pp. 16–17, 27, 44–48, 158–159). Describing enigma turns into myths like the ones about filmgoers at a screening of the Lumière brothers’ 1896 film *Arrival of a Train at La Ciotat*: Viewers are said to have cowered or run from the train barreling toward them (Corrigan & White, 2021, p. 380; for more on the myths and historical events of the time, see Loiperdinger, 2004; Zone, 2005).

When I call phenomenology contested terrain, I am putting to words what I discover through my critical and interdisciplinary phenomenological scholarship and research as it connects not only to itself but also to education and to women’s, gender, and sexuality studies.

A literature review on such a broad philosophical movement includes the “founders” and the “major” figures, but attending to who may be left out of a long list of phenomenologists of note is inevitably informed by one’s orientation to the “field” (in the sense of wideness or narrowness or existing between and across multiple areas of study) and one’s values and how one responds to the pressures of outside forces and the pressures of questions of what Robyn Wiegman (2012), in *Object Lessons*, calls “citational ubiquity” (p. 240; see also Nash, 2019). This can, of course, be the case for any field of research, but in the case of phenomenology, it seems to be emphasized by phenomenology’s status as not a discipline.

Phenomenologists’ relationships with the transcendental phenomenology of Husserl (the intellectual founder of the movement), the ontological phenomenology of Heidegger, and the existential phenomenology of Maurice Merleau-Ponty inform the extent to which they prescribe, at the foundational level of their own work, to whatness, being, and embodiment, respectively, when it comes to encounters with phenomena. Indeed, debates abound as to the extent to which Husserl is “critical” and as to the extent to which the “phenomenological” as a “pure science” or method is possible, relevant, or harmful. Phenomenological scholars’ stances on consciousness, on the bracket, on the reduction, and on race, gender, class, and sexuality also reveal much about how they as academics reside with asking questions about matters as fundamental as how the everyday—or what is taken for the everyday—gives itself.

Matters of scholarly research interests are not just *stances* but are also *matters of attention*. They lead to cultural, political, and educational conditions that shape ideas about life that are settled, progressive, and/or in flux. In other words, where scholars focus their attention reveals just as much about where they do not do so. Phenomenology reminds us that in every revelation, in every uncovering, there is also a covering up of something else. As phenomenology is an accounting of appearances, it is important that scholars account for the appearances of their *own* work and writing and account for how their own work shows itself.

Attending to the basics of the taken-for-granted habitual and everyday is an offering of phenomenology in the lived experiences of both life and work.

Husserlian Phenomenology: Transcendental and Contested

As we have seen, Husserl fully turned his attention to developing the new "science" of phenomenology with *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy: First Book: General Introduction to a Pure Phenomenology* (*Ideas I*), published in 1913, thinking he had introduced in *Logical Investigations*, published in 1900 and 1901. In *Ideas I*, as the beginning of this differentiating between the natural attitude and his phenomenological attitude and his "phenomena" and "phenomena" in other sciences, he writes this:

> Pure phenomenology, the way to which we seek here, the unique position of which relative to all other sciences we shall characterize and show to be the science fundamental to philosophy, is an essentially new science which, in consequence of its most radical essential peculiarity, is remote from natural thinking and therefore only in our days presses toward development. It is called a science of "phenomena." (Husserl, 1913/1983, p. xvii)

But in 1911, between the publication of *Logical Investigations* and *Ideas I*, "Philosophy as Rigorous Science" was published. In this work, we can see transcendental phenomenology before it reached the point of fuller development in *Ideas I*. As translator Quentin Lauer explains in his introduction to *Phenomenology and the Crisis of Philosophy*, the volume that includes "Rigorous Science," *Ideas I* was "his first published attempt to justify theoretically a method which had already proved successful in practice" (Husserl, 1965, p. 3). "Philosophy as Rigorous Science" is the link connecting Husserl's pre-transcendental thinking to his transcendental thinking (Husserl, 1965, p. 3). In it, Husserl directly provides a prelude who what he theorizes as a science that can accommodate inquiries no other science had been able to accommodate.

In "Philosophy as Rigorous Science," Husserl (1965) sets out to understand "objectivity," which involves understanding "consciousness itself . . . in its entirety" (p. 90). But at the same

time, he recognizes that when one is conscious, there is always “consciousness-of”; in other words, one is always conscious *of something* (p. 90), what is referred to as intentionality (pp. 19, 22, 42–50, 58–59, 66, 113, 184, 186, 190; Jacob, 2019). Therefore, he notes that “the essential study of consciousness includes also that of consciousness-meaning and consciousness-objectivity as such” (p. 90). This always already combined concern, this dual consideration, is what created a need for a new science. Husserl then gives the differentiation he later gives again in *Ideas I*. In presenting phenomenology—“a science of whose extraordinary extent our contemporaries have as yet no concept” (p. 91)—as up to the task of approaching objectivities in a way that gets to their essences as they are given to consciousness, he is clear that phenomenology is not psychology or natural science: “With this [the dual consideration of consciousness itself and consciousness-of], we meet . . . a science, it is true, of consciousness that is still not psychology; a phenomenology of consciousness as opposed to a natural science about consciousness” (p. 91). In this “meeting,” Husserl does not ignore but confronts, head on, the undergirding aims of other established sciences that purport to study consciousness—sciences such as psychology.

Not evading the “close relationship” phenomenology and psychology share, Husserl (1965) clarifies the difference: psychology makes its focus “‘empirical consciousness,’” while the new science of phenomenology has as its focus “‘pure’” consciousness (p. 91). When it comes to the phenomenon under investigation, Husserl wants to arrive at its essence, as he saw phenomenology as an “eidetic” science. Here, in “Philosophy as Rigorous Science,” he puts it like this: “The true method follows the nature of the things to be investigated and not our prejudices and preconceptions” (p. 102). And he goes on at a later point to elaborate and directly address intentionality:

> Research will be meaningful here precisely when it directs itself purely to the sense of the experiences . . . above all where one admits no absurd naturalizings. One must . . . take phenomena as they give themselves . . . as present or pre-present, as imagined or

> symbolic or copied, as intuitive or represented emptily, etc. Thus, too, we must take phenomena as they turn this way or that, transforming themselves, according as the point of view or mode of attention changes in one way or another. (pp. 108–109)

By the time of *Ideas I*, Husserl (1913/1983) had encapsulated the idea of meeting—in his method, to do so *objectively* as in a scientific pursuit—a phenomenon at its essence, as it gives itself, with a phrase for which he has become known and that has become famous: “the things themselves.” In *Ideas I*, he presents the idea with this assertion:

> To judge rationally or scientifically about things signifies to conform *to the things themselves* or to go from words and opinions back to the things themselves, to consult them in their self-givenness and to set aside all prejudices alien to them. (p. 35)

Husserl gives us his formulation of how phenomenology accounts for experience without preconceived notions of habit or what is comfortable in expectation of the everyday. He does so, though, by creating structures that turn into rational exercises the experiencing of phenomena as they give themselves to consciousness. These rational exercises depend on removing oneself from phenomena to look down upon them, to *evolve from* them rather than to become in touch with and *involved in* them.

So, the establishment of a science that depends on transcendence to account for experience has its beginning in work after *Logical Investigations* and prior to *Ideas I*. Lauer describes the intention of “Philosophy as Rigorous Science” to be “an introduction to the phenomenological ideal rather than to its methods or conclusions” (Husserl, 1965, p. 3). In these efforts, though, Husserl foregrounds science and method rather than the phenomenological attitude. As I highlight in Chapter 1 and as we see when we return to *Ideas I*, he does so by proposing that consciousness transcend lived-through phenomena, not that consciousness is enveloped in an involution. This requires that he bracket out the natural attitude—where our assumptions reside and where the habits with which we assume become inscribed temporally as simply there, which (automatically) directs us to take existence for

granted in the sense that the world appears as experiential facts and realities upon which we base our interactions in it (see Husserl, 1913/1983, p. xx; Rodemeyer, 2020, p. 237).

Through the epoché (the transcendental reduction), the bracketing, or placing to the side, "all hitherto prevailing habits of thinking" (Husserl, 1913/1983, p. xix), Husserl leaves the natural attitude to the side to transcend it, not to see it as a "form of wonder" (Ahmed, 2006, pp. 199–200, 2004, Chapter 8), not to work *with* it without centering it, as I have argued, and not to endeavor to do phenomenology "*within* the natural attitude" (Natanson, 1986, as cited in Salamon, 2018a, p. 106). With the third point, Salamon (2018a) is describing a departure from Husserl taken by one of his students: Alfred Schütz. She notes that Schütz "worked at the intersection of phenomenological philosophy and social science" and that Maurice Natanson interprets Schütz as carrying out a phenomenology of the social world *within* the natural attitude (p. 106).

Salamon (2018a) goes on to explain that Natanson worked from Schütz's stance that the transcendental and the lived (the social) cannot "cancel each other out" (p. 106). The presence of these "alternatives," or, rather, these two presences that present themselves at the same time as possibilities, returns us to the question that Merleau-Ponty, Schütz, Heidegger, and Husserl begin with and continue to ask as they give their substantive and different answers to it: What is Phenomenology? (p. 107). In other words, phenomenology remains enigmatic enough for the question of what it is to be pertinent and pressing enough to be asked. Salamon quotes Natanson here: "A constitutive phenomenology of the natural attitude—even one carried out within the natural attitude—is an interpretive demarcation of the estate of phenomenology, not a repudiation of the results of transcendental reduction" (Natanson, 1986, as cited in Salamon 2018a, p. 107). This is to say that the "demarcations" are asking, again, the question, "What is phenomenology?" In this asking, phenomenologies that take different approaches or ways in or out but that still share those features that all phenomenologies share are—in expanding, clarifying, or extrapolating or departing from that shared tradition—showing that phenomenology

remains wide open in the sense that what comes forth from its fundamentals is not set—neither is the interpretation of "fundamental." Because of the way I embrace the openness and possibilities inherent in lived experience, I follow the interpretation of Max Scheler that phenomenology is not a science or a method but is, rather, an attitude.

Max Scheler and the Immanence of the Phenomenological Attitude

Unlike Heidegger and Schütz, Scheler, while an admirer (see Scheler, 1966/1973a, p. xix), was not a follower or student of Husserl who then departed in significant ways from the principles of his teacher. In other words, Scheler was providing significant phenomenological insight at the *foundational* level at the time when Husserl was developing the philosophical tradition, and Scheler (1957/1973b) was, very early on and not after the decades it would take for Husserl's students to do so, taking phenomenology in a different direction, breaking from the delimiting of the new "science" and claiming that it is not a science, not a discipline, and not even a school, "which would have to offer commonly accepted theses" (p. 137). In his manuscript of "Phenomenology and the Theory of Cognition," which dates from around 1913–1914 (Lachterman, 1973, pp. xxxii–xxxiii), Scheler (1957/1973b) writes that in phenomenology there is "only a circle of researchers, inspired by a common bearing and attitude [*Einstellung*] toward philosophical problems, who take and bear separate responsibility for everything they claim to have discovered . . . including any theory of the nature of this 'attitude'" (p. 137). Scheler and Husserl were contemporaries. When they first met in 1901, Scheler already had the foundations for his major work, *Formalism in Ethics and Non-Formal Ethics of Values*, first published in 1913 (Lachterman, 1973, p. xix).

But, as translator and introduction writer David R. Lachterman (1973) writes in *Selected Philosophical Essays*, Scheler has become most known for his work in ethics. He is most known for *Formalism in Ethics* (p. xv) and is largely seen as a transitional figure between the Munich School and Heidegger at the moment of his *Being and Time* (p. xiv). Lachterman does note that "in Latin America, owing, no doubt, to Ortega's influence . . . Scheler's ideas have wide

currency" (p. xiv). Because of various circumstances, including the Great War, his unexpected death in 1928, and political upheaval in the 1930s, the complete volume and diversity of work that Scheler intended to publish did not make it to publication. Only after the efforts of his widow, Maria Scheler, supported by a committee Heidegger originally headed, was much of this work first edited and published as part of the *Gesammelte Werke*, his collected works, a project still in development (pp. xiv–xv; The Max Scheler Society of North America [MSSNA], n.d.).

Above I mentioned the manuscript of Scheler's (1957/1973b) "Phenomenology and the Theory of Cognition" from 1913–1914. It existed only as a manuscript until 1933, when it was published in the *Gesammelte Werke*; currently, it is included in Volume 10 (Lachterman, 1973, pp. xxxii–xxxiii; Z. Davis & Steinbock, 2018). "Phenomenology and the Theory of Cognition" and "The Theory of the Three Facts," whose manuscript dates back further, to around 1911–1912 (Lachterman, 1973, p. xxxiii), are lesser-known essays that did not appear in English until 1973 (Z. Davis & Steinbock, 2018; Scheler, 1957/1973c). They carry immense importance as Scheler's shaping of phenomenology as the movement was in its nascence.

It was Eric J. Mohr's (2012) essay, "Phenomenological Intuition and the Problem of Philosophy as Method and Science: Scheler and Husserl" that led me to the two essays. Mohr elucidates the relationship between Husserl's and Scheler's ideas—from the outset of phenomenology. He brings together where their notions meet and where they diverge. When it comes to method versus attitude, Mohr describes the key difference: "Philosophical methods, according to Scheler, must presuppose, and not distract from, important preconditions of knowledge that pertain more to the philosopher than to logical procedure"; therefore, he continues, "the phenomenological attitude serves as a foundation for, and is not the result of, the phenomenological method" (p. 218). This restates what Scheler (1957/1973b) writes in "Phenomenology and the Theory of Cognition": It is in what individual phenomenologists posit within the shared orientations of phenomenology that makes the phenomenology what it becomes. As not a unified school, the matter of focus in it lies in how each philosopher takes up

the phenomenological attitude, or perspective, and those manners of taking up belong to the philosophers themselves (p. 137).

To put it another way, what phenomenologists share is not a circumscribed set of procedures (a method) from which they find the geneses of their work. They start from the attitude, as a method by definition makes presuppositions that negate the goal of returning—as Husserl wanted—to the things themselves. Much the same as the phenomenological attitude is the basis for rather than the result of phenomenological method, Mohr (2012) argues, using *Ideas I*, that intuition is the basis for cognition, not cognition itself (p. 219). Therefore, as one must start with intuition and not cognition to get back to the things themselves, one must also not start with method. Starting with or prioritizing method is "operating with the material of past theses and ideologies," which runs counter to phenomenology's attempt at essences and its claim to come into or simply be in an engagement with the things themselves (p. 219). Ultimately, for Scheler, phenomenology is independent of other previous formulations or philosophies (Lachterman, 1973, p. xxii). It is "the most intensely vital and most immediate contact with the world itself, that is, with those things in the world with which it is concerned, and with these things as they are immediately given in experience" (Scheler, 1957/1973b, p. 138). This contact happens "in the act of experience," and the things that give themselves are "'in themselves there' only in this act" (Scheler, 1957/1973b, p. 138). Phenomenology does not need its philosophers to apply the "rubrics" of other philosophies, as Husserl does with Immanuel Kant's "'critique of reason,'" and it is not just a place to provide those rubrics for experiences that are not phenomenological (Lachterman, 1973, p. xxii).

These are the connections between phenomenology and the potential of pedagogical investments in nuance. The first barrier is embracing paradox and tension and, educationally, classroom conversations not mired in performative rubrics of technocratic responses. Then, more nuanced ways of viewing film and engaging in conversation about that viewing (in what I call the phenomenological attitude as a filmgoer, which I take up in Chapter 3) can be

continually approached with ever-increasing freedom from stifling models of expectation and grafting from prior structures of preformulated reception. However, the expectation cannot be that the uneasiness of *un*settlement will disappear, for if it did, it seems there would be a need for increased reflexivity, and a need to remember phenomenology as an *ongoing thinking otherwise*.

Martin Heidegger on Being and Jean-Luc Marion on Givenness

In putting the focus on Being-in-the-world and embodiment, Heidegger (1927/1962) and Merleau-Ponty (1945/2014), respectively, echo Scheler. As I have written earlier in this chapter in the "Education and Lacking the Text" section, it is Marion (1997/2002) who uniquely centers givenness, furthering that aspect of Husserl's, Scheler's, and Heidegger's work, and also Merleau-Ponty's (whose work I will include in the film phenomenology literature review), in a move toward recognizing our engagement with the world without the need for "method." But he does so by making the case that givenness is not just one important aspect but *the* important aspect in the accounting of appearances: "letting appearances appear in such a way that they accomplish their own apparition, so as to be received exactly as they give themselves" (p. 7). Phenomena cannot show and appear unless they first give themselves. They are givens that show what they are (p. 4).

In *Being and Time*, Heidegger (1927/1962) brings into focus the question of Being. Because we take "Being" for granted, we no longer find complications in our inability to know what we mean by the expression (pp. 1–2, 22–24). This means, according to Heidegger, that we need to "reawaken an understanding for the meaning of this question"; that is, "our provisional aim is the Interpretation of *time* as the possible horizon for any understanding whatsoever of Being" (p. 1). This going back to the questions we assume we know, and fundamentally going back to Being, is one of Heidegger's invaluable contributions to phenomenology, as it returns us, both backward and forward, ontologically and existentially, to the Being of the inquiry itself as an entity and to what that Being brings to what is questioned

(pp. 24–33). Thus, for individual and collective film encounters and the conversations that ensue in the classroom and outside the classroom, Heidegger's *Being and Time* illuminates the possibilities that bringing together these experiences can produce. And considering those possibilities poses challenges—especially to educators—to see anew what we take for granted.

In *Phenomenology of Practice: Meaning-Giving Methods in Phenomenological Research and Writing*, van Manen (2016) writes, as I quote him in Chapter 1, that any possible human experience can be inquired about phenomenologically. What makes phenomenological inquiry so meaningful is its possibilities for insights that come from its offering of seeing, through wonder, "the extraordinary in the ordinary" (pp. 38, 39, 188, 223, 298); its way of showing us that "any ordinary experience tends to become quite extraordinary when we lift it up from our daily existence and hold it with our phenomenological gaze" (p. 38); and its proclivity to induce us to ask phenomenological questions—these are not positivistic questions of "fact" but questions of meaning: "What is this experience like?" What does it mean to have this experience? "What is the nature, meaning, significance, uniqueness, or singularity" of this experience "as we live through it or as it is given in our experience or consciousness?" "How does this experience present itself as a distinguishable phenomenon or event?" (pp. 31–36, 38–39). These questions are concerned with the lived experience before we have thematized it (pp. 28–30, 39, 42–43). This *before* challenges us to continually go back to our concerns for questions of what is covered up.

Heidegger poses this idea of before in *Being and Time* (1927/1962). He poses the idea as "the ontological priority of the question of Being" (p. 28), writing that "Being is always the Being of an entity" and that the "basic structures of any such area have already been worked out after a fashion in our pre-scientific ways of experiencing and interpreting that domain of Being in which the area of subject-matter is itself confined" (p. 29). Heidegger's subsequent thoughts at this point are as follows:

> The ‘basic concepts’ which thus arise remain our proximal clues for disclosing this area concretely for the first time. And although research may always lean towards this positive approach, its real progress comes not so much from collecting results and storing them away in ‘manuals’ as from inquiring into the ways in which each particular area is basically constituted [Grundverfassungen]—an inquiry to which we have been driven mostly by reacting against just such an increase in information. (p. 29)

Here, Heidegger is arguing for the idea and practice of putting “on new foundations” research in disciplines and fields of study (p. 29). With this, there is serious attention given to the importance of not only what is being asked about—its Being—but also of inquiry itself, which is, as “the behaviour of a questioner,” an entity with “its *own* [emphasis added] character of Being” (p. 24). Consequently, as “‘Being’ means the Being of entities, then entities themselves turn out to be *what is interrogated*” (p. 26). This—the necessity of forming a new question from a question that has been taken for granted to the extent that it has become “obscure and without direction” (p. 24)—leads us “back to the things themselves,” the seminally influential “direction” and “destination” of phenomenology.

I consider Heidegger’s (1927/1962) Dasein, the “entity which each of us [are ourselves] and which includes inquiring as one of the possibilities of its Being” (p. 27), our “facility for comprehending the discourse that is already present in [our] surroundings” (Loht, 2017, p. 5), and ask how I can work *with* Dasein rather than place it at the forefront. I ask this so as not to foreclose with what is phenomenologically posited to be what we *already* are and what is *already* there. I ask: how can the meaning of Being, the meaning of the *question* of Being, the Being of inquiry as an entity, and inquiry into the Being of *ourselves as questioners* come together in the conversations themselves? How can we return and step back to use phenomenological inquiry to ask about meanings of Dasein (our Being, or existence, as people) (Heidegger, 1927/1962, translators’ note, p. 27) as we see *approximal* phenomenological descriptions (see van Manen, 2016, p. 248) on the screen and have *actual* phenomenological

experiences as we view the screen and then *attempt* to capture those experiences as we describe not only the during but also the before and after as we live through having seen a film and as we find that these temporalities always already affect one another (see Yates, 2006)? How does the phenomenology of the subjective first-person encounter *intersubjectivity*?

Queer and Critical Phenomenologies: A Brief Introduction

Facing up to the contradictions of lived experience and transcendence—and to the study of lived experience as it is lived and the repeated assumptions that erase the living of people who possess different positionalities (realities) in the immanence of experience—is to face paradox and tension. To see the contradictions as paradoxes rather than as conditions to avoid, displace, or push to the side is to see worth in paradox and to see what it offers, not with the expectation of clean, smooth outcomes that foreclose, but with an openness to grapple and gain new insight. To confront and follow through with paradox and tension is to be stopped in one's tracks in aporia—"a state entangled in a contradiction *without* solution" (Bauman, 1993, p. 89), '"having no resources,' . . . 'no way to progress,' . . . 'stuck'" (Waterfield, 2005, pp. viii–ix),—and to think in possibility, even in that state. The deeper "truth" in paradox need not be a straightforward, "objective," foreclosing one. It is not enough to limit these "truths" to the comforts of what one has already deemed manageable in the sense of having not exposed the unsettled ground upon which notions of difference sit. In his introduction to *Meno and Other Dialogues*, Robin Waterfield (2005) notes something that is likely well known by readers and scholars of Plato:

> Socrates clearly believed that aporia was good for the soul . . . and at *Gorgias* 458a Plato has Socrates even say that it is better to be refuted than to refute others. Our basic and worst sin, he thought, is believing that we know something when we really do not, and *aporia*, unlike plain ignorance, is a state where we are compelled to be aware of our ignorance and will hopefully be motivated to do something about it. (p. viii)

At this point, in thinking about how Socrates tests, questions, and "educates" his interlocutors while Plato educates through his creation of the "character" of Socrates, I emphasize the challenges that are to varying degrees put to teachers more so than I emphasize those put to students. As teachers and educators broadly—all those who teach, instruct, and support—how can we be aware of our own ignorance and continually act against it while not entering a state of believing we have eliminated the possibility of needing those acts to be *ongoing*?

I argue that to begin this, questioning our most basic assumptions about identity (namely race, gender, and sexuality) goes a long way, as it would mean extending the Socratic/Platonic ideas about aporia. To extend those ideas means to face—and to "do something about"—where *aporia meets the background* of what has been placed to the side to be left to the side about the deepest aspects of what makes us who we are. This bracketing is imposed to move forward in "daily business." Recognizing the importance of contending with the taken-for-granted and often ideological background leads me to queer phenomenology and critical phenomenology.

Queer Phenomenology. With her queer phenomenology, Ahmed (2006) takes Merleau-Ponty's spatiality and the effect it has on the body and perception, and his "queer" moments—"where the world no longer appears 'the right way up'"—and applies them to spatial experience in a body that is "queer" in terms of sexual orientation (pp. 65–67). As she writes, "queer is, after all, a spatial term, which then gets translated into a sexual term, a term for a twisted sexuality that does not follow a 'straight line,' a sexuality that is bent and crooked" (p. 67). With this, Ahmed demonstrates how power operates to make disorientation embodied and lived in someone who does not retrace the "straight lines" of expectation—the expectations of compulsory heterosexuality (which are tied to and find their origins in ideologies of colonialism, orientalism, and race). As she describes, these expectations take the form of, for example, the pressure to carry on the "family line," represented quite literally by straight lines drawn to extend from other straight lines on a family tree (p. 83). Heteronormative expectations "shape" spaces, and those spaces do not extend to someone whose orientation is not in line with or in the mold

of “the repetition of norms and conventions” that form “lines of thought as well as lines of motion [that are] also created as an effect of this repetition” (p. 16). These lines are so taken for granted that they are rendered invisible as created or structured and are, thus, seen as natural (p. 16).

The drawing, following, and challenging of straight lines recall my “Arrival to *Un*settlement” section in Chapter 1 and my anecdotes about how gender and sex roles in children are bizarrely, inappropriately, subtlety, and forcefully imposed by adults in and outside school (“How many girlfriends do you have?”); Waite’s (2017) anecdote about a child, who has apparently taken those impositions to heart as he struggles to size her up (“Is that a boy or a girl, Mom?); and Ahmed’s (2006) “Is that your sister, or your husband?” anecdote. Again, Ahmed asks us to do something that is vital. She proposes that “we feel wonder about what is in the bracket, rather than putting what is in the bracket to one side” (pp. 199–200). What is “too everyday” leaves to the side lived experiences of people whose identities are passed over as inconsiderable because they do not dovetail with what is *seen as* familiar. Bracketing out the taken for granted makes space *disorienting* for those not *really seen*. Inconsiderableness has material and psychic effects to be seen all around.

In other words, in rethinking Husserl’s epoché, Ahmed (2006) tells us that the bracket can and so often pushes to the background the lives, identities, and work *that make possible the ability to* bracket out what *seems* inconsequential or nongenerative. Hence, a great many who clear the path to bracketing are not afforded the same privilege (pp. 27–37). Calling on Merleau-Ponty’s writing on perception, she elucidates the role *orientation* plays: “What is perceived depends on where we are located, which gives us a certain take on things. Merleau-Ponty makes this point directly when he suggests that ‘the word perception indicates a direction rather than a primitive function’” (p. 27). Thus, perception “is a way of facing something. I can perceive an object only insofar as my orientation allows me to see it (it must be near enough to me, which in turn means that I must be near enough to it)” (p. 27). This means facing *away from* other directions and objects (p. 27). Ahmed calls for wonder about the bracket rather than

leaving what is in the bracket to the side (pp. 199–200, Ahmed, 2004, Chapter 8). In these ways we can begin to approach the taken for granted as possibilities for new ways of rethinking and refining the phenomenological that resist the dangers of ideological "settlement," which cannot be disentangled from the bracket as a tool that obfuscates the use of certain lives to maintain the appearance that the ground holding up systems of exploitation or erasure are stable rather than foundationally and functionally unsettled. Queer phenomenology puts seeing the "extraordinary in the ordinary" into another sense—one in which the habitual has no stage. In queer phenomenology, what is queer is not extraordinary in the sense that it is to be looked on from the orientation of "not" queer or from the perspective of the "straight" body. What is extraordinary is the ordinariness of any and every experience of queerness that is not given from the gaze of any of the deep-seated and pervasive manifestations of compulsory heterosexuality. Intersubjectivity—in this sense as it relates to power—is taken up by critical phenomenology.

Critical Phenomenology. In *The Life and Death of Latisha King*, Salamon (2018a) writes this concerning the "tension in phenomenology between the personal and the transcendental," getting right down to the different situated roots of what might be called "critical phenomenology": "Critical phenomenology may answer to that name, or it may go by others. It might depart from classical phenomenology, or it might locate itself squarely inside phenomenology's most traditional forms. For some phenomenologists, 'phenomenology *is* critical philosophy'" (p. 17). Guenther (2013), with *Solitary Confinement: Social Death and Its Afterlives*, inaugurated what is now formally called critical phenomenology. In *50 Concepts for a Critical Phenomenology*, Guenther (2020) says this of classical, or transcendental, phenomenology:

> Rather than bumping our philosophical heads against the bell jar of solipsism, classical phenomenology gives us a language to articulate the relationships without which we could not be who we are or understand what we experience. It lights up the

> transcendental structures that we rely upon to make sense of things but which we routinely fail to acknowledge. In other words, phenomenology points us in a *critical* [emphasis added] direction. (pp. 11–12)

In fact, we know that Husserl claimed—from *Ideas I* and "Philosophy as Rigorous Science" to "Philosophy and the Crisis of European Man" (the 1935 lecture that became his last major work in philosophy, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, published in 1936) and *Cartesian Meditations*, published in 1935—that, as D. H. Davis (2020) notes, "*all subjectivity is intersubjectivity*" (p. 3). But, as I note above, classical phenomenology places its priority in the subjective "I," not in what is pushed out to get there, and in doing so it formulates phenomenology as a "strict science" (Guenther, 2020, pp. 12–13; Husserl, 1965, Lauer's Introduction).

Guenther (2020) cites a particular passage from *Cartesian Meditations* in which Husserl writes that even in the event that a "'universal plague'" leaves one utterly alone, one "would still have access to 'a unitarily coherent stratum of the phenomenon world,' as 'the correlate of continuously harmonious, continuing world-experience'" (pp. 12–13; Husserl, 1991, as cited in Guenther, 2020, pp. 12–13). Guenther then notes her critical phenomenology of solitary confinement, which shows quite starkly the deleterious effects of isolation: "Even a relatively short period of extreme isolation from others . . . [can] erode my capacity to experience the world in a coherent, harmonious fashion" (p. 13). This intimates that "noesis [intentional act] is not absolutely prior to noema [intentional object] but rather implicated in a complex reciprocity through which the world really can influence my capacity to perceive it" (p. 13). This question of centering, of priority, is a crucial one. Husserl's centering of the first-person does not account for the ways in which conditions—material and historical—can affect perception—*what* I perceive as well as *how* I perceive it (p. 13). Guenther writes that Merleau-Ponty's accounting of noesis and noema as a *relation* and his subsequent accounting of *intercorporeal* Being-in-the-world as a chiasmatic structure offer "more promising starting point[s] for critical phenomenology" (p. 13).

This is because Merleau-Ponty's faces up to the effects the world can impose without bestowing on it a primacy that forecloses on the real ways the consciousness of the first-person "I" influences the world. Merleau-Ponty shows, as Guenther puts it, "how the world shapes consciousness, without depriving consciousness of the agency to shape the world in return. I don't think critical phenomenology can get off the ground without these two insights" (p. 13). If one thinks of reciprocity as a form of *un*settlement and reception as a form of reciprocity, there is a direct link here between what is educational in terms of an openness to grapple and what accounts for the intersubjective.

In viewing a film and in the conversations about it that ensue, there is a negotiation between my perceptions, perspectives, and syntheses of what I see, those of others, and "material, historical changes in the world" (Guenther, 2020, p. 13). Within that relationship, there is my capacity to accommodate or resist the "settling" of my logics and knowledge, which directly informs where I am on the spectrum between obstinance and grappling at any given moment. There is also no guarantee of an "agreement," but there is a state of flux. Critical phenomenology helps us to see something else that is vitally important: How we accommodate or resist what we see should also depend upon how what we see accounts for the conditions of intersubjectivity. In other words, the films themselves—that is, the people responsible for making, promoting, and exhibiting a film—also have the responsibility to address how the world shapes consciousness and the conditions that shaping creates. It is not an easy task to make judgments about what we see in this respect and to have conversations about such observations and perceptions. I immediately take pause here; I do think that this is often *not* such a difficult task. But there is complication nonetheless, and there are the layers of the "I," the other, and the world.

Critical phenomenology further extends the question, "What is phenomenology?" It does so by authentically addressing "disciplines that did not exist when phenomenology's foundational texts were being written" (Weiss et al., 2020a, p. xiii). In the introduction to *50*

Concepts for a Critical Phenomenology, Gail Weiss, Ann V. Murphy, and Gayle Salamon (2020a) go on:

> It is our conviction as phenomenologists that the diverse disciplinary perspectives offered by feminist theorists, critical race theorists, queer theorists, decolonial and indigenous scholars, disability studies scholars, and others are crucial for phenomenology's future. They are also producing exciting readings of the phenomenological canon from marginalized perspectives that breathe new life into its foundational texts. (p. xiii)

My first introduction to phenomenology was in a course that also included a feminist reading of Plato's *Republic*. In my first course in phenomenology, I was introduced to the origins of the movement, and I was introduced to Ahmed and queer phenomenology, and Fanon and Lewis R. Gordon and phenomenologies of racism and postcolonialism. In women's, gender, and sexuality studies, I was introduced to Salamon. Thus, I have come to work from readings of Black, queer, feminist, and other phenomenologists who read the works of the original tradition while creating their own traditions that do not foreclose.

In other words, what first attracted me to phenomenology during my 1st year in my Ph.D. program was its openness—a focused openness. This focused openness allows for a diversity of perspectives that share a common interest in "how the world gives itself to appearances, and the structures of consciousness through which we apprehend that givenness" (Salamon, 2018a, p. 15). That phenomenology is contested ground (as I describe it at the start of this review of literature) is, to me, what makes it so rich in its offering as a movement. How we go about phenomenology, how it is engaged, is open around the shared tenets, but how those tenets are engaged in and what is given primacy or a relation at that point can take different shapes. Phenomenologies can combine different perspectives. Being a movement rather than a discipline, or even—to follow Scheler—a school, certainly lends itself to that capacity.

Critical phenomenology gives a sufficient and rigorous "account of how contingent historical and social structures . . . shape our experience, not just empirically or in a piecemeal fashion, but in what we might call a quasi-transcendental way" (Guenther, 2020, p. 12). D. H. Davis (2020) reminds us that, from Husserl's first works on phenomenology, he has described it as "a response to crisis—a critical inquiry into the very nature of our being" (p. 3). This makes "race, gender, and class and their intersection" all the more relevant and "not ancillary to phenomenology if it is to be relevant today for addressing the ongoing crises we face daily" (p. 3). And, finally, critical phenomenology is "rooted in first-person accounts of experience but also critical of classical phenomenology's claim that the first-person singular is absolutely prior to intersubjectivity and to the complex textures of social life" (Guenther, 2013, as cited in Salamon, 2018b, p. 9). I shape the world, and the world also shapes me. For me, critical phenomenology *is* phenomenology. But it is not enough to leave it at that. The "critical" must be stated, and it must be made clear what crises it is accounting for and attempting to alleviate.

Review of the Literature: Film Phenomenology

In "The Text-in-the-Spectator: The Role of Phenomenology in an Eclectic Theoretical Methodology," Frank P. Tomasulo (1988) calls for a return to transcendental phenomenology in the tradition of Husserl. He says, "Attention needs to be directed away from the strain of affective, intuitive, and psychological phenomenology that has become the *sine qua non* in film circles (Bazin, Metz, Cavell, Linden, Andrew)" (p. 21). This attention, Tomasulo continues, should be put "toward the pure phenomenology of consciousness originally posited by Husserl" (p. 21). In the film context, in addition to channeling Husserl's "pure science," Tomasulo also seems to be asking the same question van Manen (2017) asks: "But is it phenomenology?" In their excellent and detailed synthesis of the genealogy of the field, "What is Film Phenomenology?" Christian Ferencz-Flatz and Julian Hanich (2016) highlight that the contested ground of phenomenology no doubt extends to phenomenologies of film: "For every Tomasulo-like scholar who advocates a strict phenomenological methodology, we find numerous authors

who appropriate the term ‘phenomenology’ without grounding it in any theoretical reflection, simply applying it in a loose sense” (p. 13). This recalls the gamut of phenomenology as primarily method or attitude, as well as the necessity to remain continuously vigilant that phenomenology does not become folded into psychology, or social science, or something else wearing a phenomenological veil. So, it seems quite clear that it is within existing phenomenological debates that film phenomenology’s terrain is defined—or described or set down to gradually evolve.

According to Baracco (2017), film phenomenology “concerns our perception and understanding of film and the way in which we perceive and experience represented film worlds” (p. 39). As what I see as a foundational acknowledgment of the contested application of phenomenology to film, Ferencz-Flatz and Hanich (2016) provide a “broad” definition and a “narrow” one (p. 13). The broad description “identifies film phenomenology with all approaches in which film scholarship and phenomenology intersect in one way or another” (p. 13). The advantage of this broad depiction, write Ferencz-Flatz and Hanich, is that “it mirrors more adequately what in current language use goes in the name of film phenomenology” (p. 13). Their narrow demarcation is closer to Baracco’s, as it “designates film phenomenology more unmistakably as an attempt that describes *invariant structures* of the film viewer’s *lived experience* when watching moving images in a cinema or elsewhere” (p. 13). Baracco’s work follows a hermeneutic approach.

Baracco’s (2017) film phenomenology emerges out of his recognition of Ricœur’s (1981) hermeneutic phenomenology, according to which “phenomenology remains the unsurpassable presupposition of hermeneutics” (as cited in Baracco, 2017, p. 38). In *Hermeneutics of the Film World: A Ricœurian Method for Film Interpretation*, Baracco considers a phenomenological approach foundational to a hermeneutic approach to film, as “any *interpretative* reflection on film meaning can only follow a phenomenological description of film experience, and thus, a hermeneutic and methodological investigation of the film can be conducted only through film

phenomenology" (p. 38). Ferencz-Flatz and Hanich (2016) home in on the important particularity of the filmgoer's theatrical experience. They do this after setting up the landscape of broad and narrow definitions of film phenomenology based on the range of different approaches to phenomenology, from the Husserlian transcendental to those who apply it "in a loose sense" (p. 13). Thus, the nexus of (new) perception and understanding can originate from thinking "*film*-as-intentional-object" or "*viewer*-as-experiencing-subject" (pp. 13–14), from which comes many different possibilities depending on the film philosopher.

Tomasulo's (1988) call for a "return" to transcendental phenomenology came 2 years before the publication, in 1990, of a monumental special issue of *Quarterly Review of Film and Video*, "Phenomenology in Film and Television" (see J. Stadler, 2011; Ferencz-Flatz & Hanich, 2016). The issue includes H. A. Stadler's (1990) "Film as Experience: Phenomenological Concepts in Cinema and Television Studies" (which became his dissertation, "Film as Experience: Phenomenology and the Study of Film Reception" [H. A. Stadler, 1991]), as well as Vivian Sobchack's second version of "The Active Eye: A Phenomenology of Cinematic Vision" (see Sobchack, 2016, pp. 64–65). Following this special issue, Allan Casebier's (1991) *Film and Phenomenology: Toward a Realist Theory of Cinematic Representation* added to this body of work, and Sobchack's (1992) *The Address of the Eye: A Phenomenology of Film Experience* "define[d] the field," inspiring a wave of new publications (J. Stadler, 2011, p. 87). Sobchack's "contemporary phenomenology of film" (Yacavone, 2016, p. 163) came after 1946–1948, the years that saw the founding of the filmology movement in 1946, essays in film phenomenology by Merleau-Ponty and Roman Ingarden in 1947, and Albert Michotte van den Berck's experimental phenomenological study in 1948 (Ferencz-Flatz & Hanich, 2016, p. 23).

H. A. Stadler (1990), however, argues that phenomenology never disappeared. Responding to Dudley Andrew (1984), who, in *Concepts in Film Theory*, locates 1964 as the year of the "fall of phenomenology" (Andrew, 1984, p. 14), H. A. Stadler counters Andrew's claim that phenomenology "'died out' with the advent of structuralism, the 'arch rival' of

phenomenology that came into fashion in the 1960s," arguing that phenomenology, albeit "traces" of it, have stayed present (p. 38). In his dissertation, he writes, "Phenomenology has not vanished at all. It has instead been, regardless of whether one sees this as something positive or negative, a continuous and crucial contributor to past and current debates in film as well as literary theory" (H. A. Stadler, 1991, pp. 45–47). H. A. Stadler's main thesis is that there should be phenomenolo*gies* instead of monolithic theories or "closed systems" (H. A. Stadler, 1990, pp. 37–38) and "methods" that ignore the gap between, as Sobchack (1992) puts it, "metaphysics and the dynamic social world of fractious and fragmented concrete subjects" (p. xiv). In other words, working *with* rather than centering existing conceptions can stave off notions that can limit what might appear or, rather, what is recognized as appearing.

Jane Stadler (2011) describes the focus of Malin Wahlberg's (2008) work on documentary film, locating the experience of time: "Wahlberg's focus is on philosophical problems of time and film, seeking conceptual reconciliation of the instant of the image with the flux and flow of movement through time, including the fragmentation of temporal linearity with memory and imagination" (p. 89). H. A. Stadler (1990) puts the outside life of the filmgoer into sharp consideration: "Film phenomenology tries to define the differences and similarities between the experience of everyday phenomena and the experience of film" (p. 44). His "*film as experience*" is of a specific use: it applies to *active* viewers who, individually or collectively, "perceive and respond to screen events" (p. 40). Sobchack (1992), on another hand, places the filmmaker, the film, and the spectator into a "mutual possession" of the "cinematic expression" (p. 5). Yacavone (2016), in another view, writes that Sobchack's portrayal of a film as an "expressing subject and object," an idea she develops through a phenomenology of celluloid and technological filmic devices, renders her work "unable to account for most of the artistic features of films, including those that may be a significant part of their direct perception and affective experience" (pp. 165–166; see also Yacavone, 2015). Yacavone's argument that Sobchack omits important elements of the aesthetic experience reflects the differences between

her work and H. A. Stadler's in terms of the filmgoer's location in the phenomenological description. However, a phenomenology of the *relationship* between H. A. Stadler's active viewer, the film gestalt that occurs *through* technology, and—most importantly—the aesthetic experience of film, is an intriguing one that sociohistorical context can enhance (H. A. Stadler, 1990, p. 40) but need not dominate.

In her critiques, J. Stadler (2011) makes integrations that, if taken too seriously, might stifle, become "method," and present "lived" experience as something generic, to say nothing of rendering film experience stripped of *experience*. H. A. Stadler (1990), especially, would likely see the danger that would occur if phenomenological concepts were applied to film theory "in a single-handed and isolated effort" (p. 39). In short, phenomenology cannot, at any point in time, "cope with this task" of finding "a new simulating model for the construction of a filmic complex that we are able to accept, at the present conjunction of scholarly and social demands, as real" (p. 39) if it takes on the characteristics of "closed systems" (p. 37). Thus, the diverse paths of the literature in scholars' approaches toward their focus and toward "method" lead to deep phenomenological questions: How *is* film the closest medium we have to *lived* life? What does film phenomenology offer film theory and film analysis that destabilizes settled assumption, *un*settling it to ignite, in the style of Ahmed's perspective on the epoché, conversations of wonder about what had fallen into the gaps of habit? An inspiration to the definitions above, a strong insinuation by Merleau-Ponty (1948/1964) presents perhaps the most profound question of all: What is it that makes film the phenomenological art *par excellence*? (p. 59; see also Baracco, 2017, pp. 39–40, 55; Sobchack, 2016).

In his only work on film, the 1945 lecture turned published essay "The Film and the New Psychology," Merleau-Ponty (1948/1964) describes the confluences that make the film experience, a *gestalt*, a transformative phenomenology:

> Let us say right off that a film is not a sum total of images but a temporal *gestalt*. . . . The meaning of a shot therefore depends on what precedes it in the movie, and this

> succession of scenes creates a new reality which is not merely the sum of its parts. (p. 54)

The experience of this gestalt is phenomenological; it happens beyond shooting, editing, and mixing—it can only happen with the *convergence* of picture, sequencing, cutting, and montage. And thus, it can only happen in the *prereflective experience* of the convergence.

Quoting Roger Leenhardt (1936), Merleau-Ponty (1948/1964) goes on to note that it is not just the selecting and arrangement of shots, views, scenes, and sequences that make a film but also their order and length: “You will get to know that constriction of the chest produced by an overlong shot which brakes the movement and that deliciously intimate acquiescence when a shot fades at the right moment” (p. 54). These moments occur in nonfilmic experience, but at the movies, nothing short of looking away from the screen (to a certain extent) or leaving the room can give us respite. Meanwhile, all the viewers who did not look away or leave *had* the experience (see Hanich, 2018). (There *is* a certain phenomenological film experience *in* the looking away and in the leaving, but that is the province of film reception.)

For sound in film gestalt, Merleau-Ponty (1948/1964) states, “Sound movies . . . are not a sum total of words or noises but are likewise a *gestalt*. A rhythm exists for sounds just as for images” (p. 55). Furthermore, making lived experience *lived* and not presenting it as pieced together artificially, “a sound movie is not a silent film embellished with words and sounds. . . . The bond between sound and image is much closer, and the image is transformed by the proximity of sound” (p. 55). For dialogue and this whole greater than the sum of its parts, Merleau-Ponty continues: “It is not by accident that characters are silent at one moment and speak at another. The alternation of words and silence is manipulated to create the most effective image” (p. 55). Citing André Malraux (1940) in *Verve*, Merleau-Ponty applies Malraux’s three types of dialogue: expository, which is avoided in novels and films; tonal, which occurs more in novels; and dramatic, which is film’s main type, but is *relied upon* onstage in the theater (pp. 55–56).

In dramatic dialogue, we are given “the discussion and confrontation of the characters,” but the difference is that “one speaks ceaselessly in the theater but not in the film” (Merleau-Ponty, 1948/1964, p. 56): “Directors . . . *break into* dialogue after long stretches of silence, just as a novelist breaks into dialogue after long narrative passages” (Malraux, 1940, as cited in Merleau-Ponty, 1948/1964, p. 56). Merleau-Ponty (1948/1964) tells us that films do not present us with *thoughts* as novels do; they “directly present to us that special way of being in the world, of dealing with things and other people, which we can see in the sign language of gesture and gaze and which clearly defines each person we know” (p. 58). As a result of this close approximation of prereflective lived experience, films tend to produce in us visceral reactions *to life* as we live it singularly while we grapple with what our individual experience means in the sense of collectives. This presents an interplay worthy of our attention: the interplay between what is universal and what is singular. Phenomenology shows that the universal is singularly experienced (see van Manen, 2016, pp. 249–260).

Sobchack (1992) quotes from Merleau-Ponty’s *The Visible and the Invisible*:

> In a sense the whole of philosophy . . . consists in restoring a power to signify, a birth of meaning, or a wild meaning, an expression of experience by experience, which in particular clarifies the special domain of language. And in a sense . . . language is everything, since it is the voice of no one, since it is the voice of the things, the waves, and the forests. (p. 3)

To this, Sobchack writes that, while it is not likely Merleau-Ponty was drawing implications into the power of film with this text, “it is precisely this emphasis on the material and carnal foundations of language [that is] particularly relevant to the semiotic and hermeneutic questions posed by the medium of cinema” (p. 3). “What else is a film,” Sobchack asks, “if not ‘an expression of experience by experience’”? (p. 3). In keeping with the embodiment of Merleau-Ponty and Sobchack, Baracco (2017) refers to film experience as “*re-perception* (i.e., *perception of a perception*)”: “What we perceive, those images and gazes, movements and actions, are

already perceptions" that we perceive again as a film world, a perception "re-given to us" to re-perceive (p. 45). Thus, as Sobchack writes, "a film is an act of seeing that makes itself seen, an act of hearing that makes itself heard, an act of physical and reflective movement that makes itself reflexively felt and understood" (pp. 3–4). Film combines embodied existence with structures of direct experience (pp. 4–5). It is the "wild meaning"—the prereflective experience for which phenomenology reaches—that film approximates. And it is the power of film that makes us feel so carried away with wonder, so lifted into a film world, so de-distanced in the Heideggerian sense, that when we are "there in the moment," it, for a certain time in a certain space, feels *not* like an approximation but a type of *reality*.

Film phenomenology reaches out to explore in its vastness what it is that can lift us into a film as we remain seated—what is but cannot be explained away with studies of technological devices and the steady projections that are dependent on the *smooth operation* of the instruments *of* projection (Barker, 2009; J. Stadler, 2011). So, here we are: the "wild meaning"—"the pervasive and as yet undifferentiated significance of existence as it is lived rather than reflected upon" (Sobchack, 1992, p. 11)—that we experience as filmgoers at the cinema *and in* everyday life where films are cultural touchstones that spark contention, unity, division, diversion, ambiguity, and endless conversations that progress, divert, digress, devolve, and continue. Sobchack (1992) uses Merleau-Ponty's quotation from *The Visible and the Invisible* to explain that film, "more than any other medium of human communication . . . makes itself sensuously and sensibly manifest as the expression of experience by experience" (p. 3). Jean Mitry (1965) describes film's capabilities in this way, as we see in Sobchack's translation in *The Address of the Eye*:

> Whereas the classical arts propose to signify movement with the immobile, life with the inanimate, the cinema must express life with life itself. It begins there where the others leave off. It escapes, therefore, all their rules as it does all their principles. (p. 5)

Film offers unique possibilities that are already phenomenological due to the immediacy of immersion, the unique possibilities that often result in viscerally felt responses that happen before interpretation.

Baracco (2017) comments, “Before any interpretation, [filmgoers are] already involved in film experience, with analogies and similarities with respect to [their] relation with the (real) world. These analogies and similarities should be carefully examined in a phenomenological study of film” (p. 40; see also H. A. Stadler, 1990, especially pp. 41–45). This is a matter of attending to the immanent, as H. A. Stadler (1991) states when laying out his “film as experience”: “With the film-as-experience paradigm one can examine the act of viewing from an immanent rather than a transcendent point of view [as with the metaphor film-as-mirror]” (p. 28), where it is not enough to rely on the “quotidian meaning” of the term “experience” (p. 33) (see pp. 26-29, 33). As filmgoers, *reflexively* embracing what is immanent and what already *involves* us, even when those things are accompanied by paradox and tension, means making pedagogical investments in more nuanced ways of viewing film that phenomenology uniquely makes possible as an ongoing thinking otherwise. But if film is the phenomenological art par excellence, film already makes nuanced viewing possible. Put another way, film offers unique phenomenological possibilities that implore filmgoers to embrace and grapple with paradox and tension. The result of these challenges can be seen in the appearances of reception.

Review of the Literature: Film Reception Theory

During the September 6, 2019, edition of *Screen Talk*, their podcast from *IndieWire*, Eric Kohn, executive editor and chief critic, and Anne Thompson, editor-at-large, engaged in a thought-provoking, nuanced, and educational conversation about the film *The Aeronauts* (Kohn & Thompson, 2019). The film is inspired by the lives of Amelia Wren and James Glaisher, who, in 1862, embarked on a pioneering hot air balloon flight, aiming to discover principles of the emerging science of meteorology. Kohn and Thompson (2019) commence: Although praising the actors who she said do impressive work with what they were given, Thompson describes

the finished product as “totally unbelievable” (5:04). She goes on to explain her position: “I knew they were in a sound stage somewhere with makeup on her [Felicity Jones] fingers, and they were spraying this giant balloon, and she was in the . . . I don’t know how to explain it to you. I am a VFX [visual effects] wonk” (5:31). Kohn jumps in: “I don’t mind the artifice, though” (5:44). Thompson continues, “It was totally unbelievable,” and Kohn rejoins as Thompson continues to speak (the two interrupt each other and talk over each other as if a script were written with dual dialogue): “It doesn’t need to be believable if you’re there in the moment” (5:46).

Being “there in the moment” is truly transformative if it has the effect of making you forget something you would normally notice and that would, in most other circumstances in which the effect is not total, take you *out* of the moment. Kohn acknowledges many of the same observations Thompson makes about the film’s storytelling and visual aesthetic, but there was something about the hot air balloon scenes that put him *there* in the moment (Kohn & Thompson, 2019, 3:43, 5:51) and gave, I argue, a *phenomenological* film experience that *withdrew* him from a focus on method [as in filmmaking] and *immersed* him into the phenomenological attitude, which “keeps us reflectively attentive to the ways human beings experience and are conscious of the world before reflecting on it and thematizing it” (van Manen, 2016, p. 58). He does not have to say that he “imagine[d] [himself in those] situations”; his viewing “can be described as being-there, as de-distanced projection otherwise continuous with [his] everyday being-in-the-world” (Loht, 2017, p. 61). Here, we have Scheler’s (1957/1973b) phenomenological attitude, and, at least for Kohn, an example of a film received as “an expression of experience by experience” (Sobchack, 1992, p. 3), an expression of life with life itself (Mitry, 1965, as cited in Sobchack, 1992, p. 5) “before any interpretation” (Baracco, 2017, p. 40). And it is the conversation between Kohn and Thompson that is intriguing as an *appearance of film reception*.

The phenomenological film experience, and the film experience generally, is tied to film reception. Whether or not a film is credible—convincing or, on another level, appealing (H. A.

Stadler, 1990, p. 46)—fundamentally relates to reception, as prereflective experience, reflection, and mediated experience are informed by how a filmgoer *sees* a particular film. An experience in the moment, *as it is* received, can influence how the film is—or will be—received: The phenomenological experience as phenomenological will cause the film to be seen in a particular way for what it did or did not do to create an immersion (or *not* create one). Perception, that is, becomes reception (Corrigan et al., 2011). In other words, phenomenological experience *carries over* to reception.

Kohn and Thompson (2019) watched the film, had engagements with it, and then *presented* those experiences to listeners in the form of a podcast episode. If we think of the podcast episode as a *finished* product, and account for *Screen Talk*'s mission (Penske Business Media, 2021), we can say that Kohn and Thompson approach their microphones each week knowing they are expected to parse what films could be in the conversation when it comes to topics ranging from production value and box office to aesthetic impact and awards potential. In sum, they use *their* reception to describe the reception of insiders who see films at festivals and early screenings and to *predict the reception* of those who are yet to see the films. In the case of *The Aeronauts*, Kohn was able to be carried away by the film world in the moments of the film's unfolding, while Thompson was not, and we hear this difference play out, an experience that could itself be a subject of phenomenological inquiry.

Thus, a result of the film experience is how the film is received, how it is *thought*. This result can change at any point, just as the contents of the natural attitude can (Husserl, 1913/1983, p. 53; see also Chapter 1 above, Introductory Overview of Phenomenological Contributions section). This is not to say that a "positive" phenomenological experience will necessarily result in "positive reception" or that an "ambivalent" experience will automatically lead to "ambivalent reception." This is to say that experience and reception are meaningfully linked, and the links are worthy of study because they are not easily theorized as self-evident (Flory, 2006; Mayne, 1993/2011; Staiger, 2000). Reception can change in time on its own,

independent of media, other filmgoers, or other filmgoers who act *through* media (e.g., the internet) as otherwise unaffiliated filmgoers, as journalists, or as critics. Likely, though, film reception changes independently and *along with* those forces. And in this coexistence, there are preexisting logics, "settled" and otherwise, on all "sides" and in all areas and permutations. It is not my aim to separate the "independent" from the mediated, nor is it to make the independent and the dependent one and the same. Across and within each other, these influences on and manifestations of reception are interplays between the everyday and its destabilization. If paradox and tension are embraced, *real* viewers and real conversations might emerge.

Real Viewers and Real Conversations: From Spectatorship to Reception

Corrigan and White (2021) write that film reception theory emerges from a cultural studies approach and "studies the ways different kinds of audiences regard different kinds of films" (p. 394). Cultural studies is "a set of approaches drawn from the humanities and social sciences that considers cultural phenomena in conjunction with processes of production and consumption" (p. 394). As my scholarship demonstrates, the cultural foundations approach takes these concerns into the educational and schooling contexts. Reception theory "focus[es] on how a film is received by audiences rather than on who made a film or what its thematic content or formal features are" (p. 394). According to Bernard F. Dick (2010), audience reception "depends on a number of factors" (p. 368), such as type of film, mode of exhibition, nature of the viewer, makeup of the audience (see Hanich, 2014, 2019), level of identification, ideological perspective, aesthetic considerations, and marketing and distribution strategies (Staiger, 2000, as cited in Dick, 2010, pp. 368–369). Dick then states what is endlessly intriguing about audience and reception theory and what lends itself so well to phenomenological inquiry: "As movie audiences grow increasingly diverse, there is little likelihood that there will ever be an all-embracing theory of film reception—only more studies" (pp. 369–370; see also H. A. Stadler, 1991). Insights that go beyond the natural attitude and positivistic presumptions of "answers," and having wonder rather than a resistant attitude toward

what we cannot know, allow reception theory to be approached phenomenologically. The assumption that audiences were ever *not* diverse, though, seems positivistic.

Corrigan and White (2021) tell us that theories of spectatorship are "concerned with the unconscious patterns evoked by a particular text or by the process of film viewing in the abstract" (p. 395). Unlike spectatorship, reception studies "deals with actual audiences rather than a hypothetical subject constructed by the text" (p. 395). This argument reminds us of the importance of remembering that the film experience is not uniform but has been framed as such by academics who need a "method" to "legitimize" their work. Staiger (2000) puts it this way: "The more I study spectators, the more perverse I find them to operate, relative to what academics claim are the real or appropriate moviegoing behaviors" (p. 24). However, as not to discount the enriching theoretical work that does allow for foundational and evolving ideas that take a more generalizing view, Judith Mayne (1993/2011) reminds us that the assumption that cinematic institutions project an ideal viewer is very different from the assumption that those projections prove legitimate *under scrutiny* (p. 92).

Mayne (1993/2011) writes that what we end up with to investigate and, in my case, explore phenomenologically, is "the gap opened up between the ways in which texts construct viewers, and how those texts may be read or used in ways that depart from what the institution valorizes" (p. 92). Again, Staiger (2000) uses the term "perverse" to describe viewers who do not adhere to the monolithic, idealized behaviors of cultural studies; they "[turn] away from dominant notions of 'right' or 'good'" (pp. 2, 19). She saw complexities that prompted her to rethink the history of cinema and question the traditional ways scholars—which I extend to journalists, pundits, critics, and reviewers—view audiences. Her work signals a critical and reflexive orientation toward methods and practices in reception studies. This involves looking at real viewers and why they went to the movies.

Critical and Reflexive Scholarship in Film Reception

In *Perverse Spectators: The Practices of Film Reception*, Staiger (2000) implements theories in psychoanalysis, cognitive psychology, and sociology (p. 2). Staiger explains how historical materialism aids her "theoretically mixed" methodological approach (pp. 1–2), as "a historical materialist approach acknowledges modes of address and exhibition, but it also establishes the identities and interpretative strategies and tactics *brought by spectators to the cinema*" (p. 23). Mayne (1993/2011), in "Paradoxes of Spectatorship" from her *Cinema and Spectatorship*, points out the "maleness" of the unconscious in psychanalysis, of which the "disadvantages far outnumber [the] advantages," and in which "the work of the psychoanalytically inspired critic becomes just as framed by a master code as any other application of a method" (p. 91). Mayne decries the polemics of apparatus theory of the 1970s, which defines cinematic meaning as already-assigned "cinematic institution" ideology, and of "some versions of reader-response theory and cultural studies" (mainly in the U.S.), which, "disavowing any power of institutions," position viewers as in all ways untethered to institutional power (p. 92). New ways of philosophizing about film reception are required to seek underlying structures, real viewers, and the collective conversations that ensue.

Staiger (2000), in her historical analyses, examines real viewers and why they went to the movies and discovers that "modes of exhibition," "spectator address," and what actually went on in the movie theater do not always fit neatly into existing histories of cinema, with their dividing lines between the "popular" and the "bourgeois," which correspond to the exhibitionist and voyeurist, respectively, and the "short-term and incessant sensorial stimulation" and "lengthy observation of single event or object," respectively (pp. 13–15, see also 16–20, 26). In fact, in one instance in 1915, it was the working-class filmgoer who left the cinema in frustration because of incessant talking, and it was the middle-class filmgoer who instigated an open discussion during the film (pp. 18–19). This goes against existing histories that divide the pre-classical, classical, early modern, modern, and postmodern (pp. 12–17) and associate the

“cinema of attractions” with the “popular” and the sober, “cinema of narrative” with the bourgeoise (pp. 12–13).

Staiger (2000) finds that the prevailing idea of silence that would come to be defined as characteristic of “classical cinema” (1917–present in one configuration, 1930s–1950s–present in another) and the middle class does not reconcile with the fact that “during the 1930s and 1940s many live events still occurred in movie houses: at the start of the Depression, bingo and giveaways were part of the evening’s events; into the war years, bond drives were routine” (p. 20). This leads Staiger to propose a reconfiguration of the respected scholarly histories of cinema, using those histories’ “initial speculations” (p. 24). In this way, according to Staiger, we can remember the real people who actually went to the movies and also remember what actually occurred once they arrived.

Providing a cautionary note, Mayne (1993/2011) warns that even the “real viewer” can be a projection. This occurs when scholars, critics, journalists, or otherwise unaffiliated filmgoers, subconsciously or not, slip on the label of “real” to suit their own purpose (pp. 94–95). In terms of academic work (in teaching and in research), with this in mind we as scholars can see the reception of filmgoers and see that we, too, are *receiving* films and *receiving* the scholarly goals, methodologies, and stakes of our work. This reflexive orientation is paramount toward making pedagogical investments in more nuanced ways of viewing film and reading and participating in conversations that result from an openness to grapple (RQ3). And my first research question—What would it mean for a filmgoer to have responsibilities beyond mere reception?—is one that pushes the individual and also film reception theory itself.

Continued Evolution in the Conversations of Film Reception

Hugo Münsterberg saw movies as “photoplays,” as between photographs and plays on the stage. His *The Photoplay: A Psychological Study* (1916) is widely seen as the first influential work of film theory (Corrigan et al., 2011, p. 9). In “Why We Go to the Movies,” Münsterberg (1915/2011) restates time and again why we go to the movies: the cinema embraces *its own*

capabilities as “the art of the future” (p. 17) and does not simply attempt to imitate the theater or any other art form (p. 12). As he details, “the close-up . . . is indeed most characteristic of the emancipation of the moving pictures,” and through tracking, sequencing, and cutting, the camera creates “possibilities which the real drama does not know by allowing the eye to follow the hero and heroine continuously from place to place,” eliminating the confinement of “space-reality” as settings and locations seamlessly shift (p. 13; see also Corrigan & White, 2021, pp. 381–382). What has, more recently, shifted the locations of the appearances of film reception (and, also, the film experience) and created a seismic shift in the very meaning of cinephilia (which goes hand in hand with but is not required for reception) is the internet.

In *The New Cinephilia*, Girish Shambu (2020) details current states of what active internet use has done to transform cinephilic practices, how film is received, and the conversations of film reception. Use and engagement include user-created material in the forms of social media posts, blogs, other sites, and—as my work explores—podcasts, and active engagement with those sites and with online magazines and journals (pp. 6, 24). The internet in its current form contributes immeasurably to the expanded description of cinephilia:

> Cinephilia, as we know, is not simply an interest in cinema or even a propensity to see a great number of movies. These are necessary but not sufficient conditions for cinephilia. Not only watching but also thinking, reading, talking and writing about cinema in some form, no matter how unconventional: these activities are important to the cinephile. In other words, cinephilia involves an active interest in the *discourse* surrounding films. (p. 6)

Thus, cinephilia is an interest in the discourse, not just the films. And the ease of sharing one’s reactions, thoughts, and analyses—an ease that the internet provides—takes these acts outside of cinephilia and into reception generally while it extends and diversifies cinephilic circles.

Shambu’s observations dovetail with my attentiveness to the conversations themselves and to the importance of listening to *other conversations*—those that educate because they

grapple—to challenge ourselves beyond our assumptions of habit. In “For a New Cinephilia,” published first in *Film Quarterly* and then as part of the current edition of *The New Cinephilia*, Shambu (2019) reflexively turns the spotlight onto cinephilia’s *settled* habits. As a result, he advocates for cinephilic practices that resist the male-centered tradition of “the old cinephilia,” which centers “list making, rank ordering, [and] the creation of hierarchies” focused on male films, male directors, and male-curated traditional film theories (p. 33). As implications for my phenomenological attitude as a filmgoer, my educational viewing, and my educational conversation as I bring these ideas into phenomenology and education in later chapters, Shambu’s work holds boundless importance in showing the ubiquitous potential in how film reception theory can be pushed beyond foreclosing categorizations.

*Un*settled Language and Thought: Singh’s *Unthinking Mastery*

The preconceptions of taken-for-granted and technocratic approaches to schooling are rooted in the effort to *master* what we find in our midst. Mastery in matters of lived experience and intersubjectivity allows for putting to the side to leave to the side what destabilizes the smooth operation of what is the “settled” ground of so-called “efficient” knowledges. In *Unthinking Mastery: Dehumanism and Decolonial Entanglements*, Julietta Singh (2018) makes a transformative intervention into notions of thinking so taken for granted that they are virtually unseen. Singh articulates that the desire to master implies a desire to subjugate what is already there (see Chapter 4, “Humanimal Dispossessions,” pp. 121–148). She turns on its head the “settled” notion that mastery is always already the presumed goal and *unthinks* the concept. In unthinking mastery, she does not simply repudiate it. In not simply repudiating mastery, Singh does not define it. Instead, her attempt is to “unfold mastery,” as “mastery is ‘everywhere,’” so a definition would be unachievable (p. 1). Furthermore, definitions have a foreclosing tendency (p. 1), including in the all-too-prevalent case of disciplinarity. Rather than formulate a definition in an act of foreclosure, Singh engages “mastery’s *qualities*” (pp. 1, 12). She aims not to disaffirm it from the masterful distance of entitlement but to “dwell on its emergence where it is least

expected" (p. 1). This corresponds with an openness to the new and the not yet, to the entanglement oriented toward new materialist thinking, according to which matter cannot be mastered because it is not seen as objects for the discipline and choice of humans who possess the dominion and sovereignty of coloniality (p. 18).

In Chapter 1 of *Unthinking Mastery*, Singh (2018) elaborates on how the works of Frantz Fanon and Mahatma Gandhi hold on to, in idea and practice, colonial mastery over, among others, women, animals, and nature. Popular legacy and voluminous scholarship shape their work as diametrically opposed and flattened where it has been situated: violence for Fanon and nonviolence for Gandhi. Singh writes that both men espoused complex and complicated ideologies, arguments, and practices that were not static, and that one man's work cannot be dichotomously split from the other man's work (see also p. 24). With her close readings of Fanon and Gandhi, Singh aims not to foreclose through simple repudiation (see pp. 2, 30)—which would be a reproduction of the very mastery she puts into question as the source of the violences we perpetuate against ourselves, the lives of animals, the planet, and our studies.

To engage in simple repudiation would be to "prove mastery" over decolonization in the form of pointing out inherent problems in Fanon's and Gandhi's life and work. Rather, Singh's (2018) offering is "born of real indebtedness and driven by the profound potentialities still embedded in their political writings" (p. 63). Singh is reflexive (pp. 30, 63) in her intention of bringing out rather than subjugating what is already there. In other words, by *what is already there*, she means what can be generative about Fanon's and Gandhi's work in terms of what is *newly* viewed (again, Chapter 4 is a key site here) and not yet imagined. Even though it is not directly a work of phenomenology, *Unthinking Mastery* directly influences my phenomenological study and has a place alongside the literature I include in these literature reviews. Singh's instruction against masterful circumscriptions of thought informs the endeavors I offer—endeavors in teaching, in filmgoing, and in thinking the purposes and impacts of an academic life. Thus, Singh's work, as a link at the junctures of phenomenological givenness and practices

of reception, is an ongoing reminder that beginning with a text (and not with a feeling) does not mean that feeling is left to the side. Instead, it means *meeting the text* rather than readings of the text that foreclose through consensus or that are consensus readings *because* they foreclose.

For teachers, I suggest that these connections to Singh's (2018) work go beyond reading the text to "apply" it to teaching. In other words, I challenge teachers, at the level they deem appropriate, to share Singh's ideas directly, to challenge students to grapple with mastery, even within environments in which mastery is construed as *already the settled goal*. What does "success" look like when mastery is imagined differently, complicated, *unthought*? What are the contradictions in educational mantras that seem to orient away from stifling practices of mastery but that also seem, (not so) under the surface, to have the end goal of "producing" and promoting only certain types of "success"? In other words, technocratic aims veiled over with a thin layer of what appears to be otherwise show themselves in the limits that become apparent: when students are expected to "get serious" and view their goals in the context of what has already been decided for them. This includes how they are expected to think about the images they see. In terms of film reception, asking critical questions about "success" and mastery can encourage ways of viewing that do not cast students and teachers as simply purveyors of what is established but instead as active participants in engaging in what it means to move in and out of film worlds and the worlds of their production and accompanying influence.

CHAPTER III: THE REVIEW IS NOT THE POINT; OR, THE UBIQUITY OF RECEPTION MEETS EDUCATIONAL VIEWING

> That's the challenge of living in a polarized society, where it's like everybody is either, like, "Yes" or "No"; *Rotten Tomatoes* tells us "Rotten" or "Fresh," "Fresh" or "Rotten." If people want to see something that is either just "yes" or "no" . . . people just want to know something that just reduces the information to whether or not it's worth their time as opposed to giving you some context and then allowing you to sort of make your own consumer decisions by thinking things through. . . . It's hard to figure out what's worth your time.
>
> —Eric Kohn, *IndieWire: Screen Talk*, June 11, 2021

> "Grappling with" ideas means to receive, reflect upon, practice articulating, and seek deeper understanding; grappling is not debate or rejection. The goal is to move us beyond the mere sharing of opinions and toward more informed engagement.
>
> —Sensoy and DiAngelo, 2017, p. 8

Grappling With *Un*settlement: Ubiquity, Reception, and the Phenomenological Attitude

In Chapter 2, I asked philosophical and educational questions about beginning with a text and what it might mean to proceed *with* the text rather than without it in service of *some other* goal. Toward this, I offered phenomenology as an attitude rather than a method. I concluded with Singh's (2018) *Unthinking Mastery* to attempt to show that mastery might be the welcomed, unwelcomed, or reluctantly sought-after pursuit undergirding technocratic approaches to education generally and schooling specifically. Approaches to education and schooling include what we do with and how we think the images we see, especially those on moving picture screens.

In this Chapter, I move to the possibilities of what might happen amid thinking about, talking about, or writing about a film as a teacher among other teachers and administrators and as a teacher or student in formal classrooms. In the style of this dissertation, I bring *the point* of this thinking, talking, and writing into question; by "the review is not the point," I mean that the acts and products of stating "opinions," thoughts, musings, or scholarly research about films are not end points from which to foreclose but are, in my thinking, *incomplete approaches* that can fall easily under readings situated in (film reception) theory, in method, or in mastery. In other

words, I expand the statement, “The paper’s not the point” from Chapter 2 to the context of film reception and what *might become possible* when filmgoers and those who “study” filmgoers embrace paradox and tension when what they encounter does not dovetail with their preconceptions. I say *might become possible* as a reflexive reminder: As is also noted in Chapter 2—and as reception theorists Staiger (2000) and Mayne (1993/2011) remind us in their work that breaks through the barriers of traditionally “settled” scholarly practices of studying viewers—even “real” viewers fall outside the lines that would make the “cleanest” data; “less clean” stories of filmgoing are ignored, downplayed, or *interpreted as clean* to make historical data look “tidy”; and even some readings against the grain can become, themselves, limiting frameworks. With this in mind, while I work with theories such as Staiger’s “perverse spectators,” I work beyond theory to, as Marion (1997/2002) writes, get closer to phenomena—the “givens that show themselves” (p. 4).

The Ubiquity of Reception Meets Educational Viewing

My goals for this chapter are to look at reception in a broader sense to show how the natural attitude and its preexisting logics are often grafted onto subsequent encounters, causing us to enter *already expecting* to see our logics and presumptions confirmed. I call this tendency to graft the *ubiquity of reception*. It does not take much engagement with our selves, with others, or with media to remind us that this is the case for film or each new film experience. By my use of the first-person plural here, I mean readers generally and filmgoers specifically. The grafting (generalizing, transferring) of logics and expectations seems to be an outgrowth of our proclivity to make “sense,” thematize, categorize, and fall into the habits of repeated actions, which lessen the chances of seeing such actions or their objects anew or with wonder. By filmgoers, I mean everyone who watches—including, among others, the producers, directors, and actors who make films, and the scholars, journalists, and critics who research, report on, and “evaluate” films. All filmgoers, at some point, albeit in different contexts, talk about films, and many write about them.

Because film itself is also ubiquitous, the combination of that ubiquity and the ubiquity of reception guides on the path and is the first step to my first research question: What would it mean for a filmgoer to have responsibilities beyond mere reception? Then, with my second research question, I move into the phenomenological: What would it mean to have what I term a *phenomenological attitude as a filmgoer*? The phenomenological attitude as a filmgoer links the ubiquities of reception and film to the paradoxes and tensions that arise when we confront those ubiquities in conversation in the classroom and beyond. A phenomenological attitude as a filmgoer is a phenomenological attitude toward film reception that (a) recognizes the ubiquities of reception and of film, (b) recognizes the cultural impact of film due to such ubiquities, and (c) is willing to face up to the tensions that arise when confronting, in conversation, these ubiquities and how they shape film's cultural impact.

Embracing paradox and tension sets the stage for grappling, as it is unlikely that rejecting paradox and, consequently, refusing tension, can lead to moving past the mere sharing and grafting of "settled," preexisting logics in the practices of reception. Accordingly, a phenomenological attitude as a filmgoer leads to *educational viewing*. Educational viewing links my *educational* orientation to the practices of viewing—that is, educational as I mean it as an openness to grapple. Thus, educational viewing means viewing film with an openness to grapple with what one encounters. Because grappling "moves us beyond the mere sharing of opinions and toward more informed engagement" (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017, p. 8), toward the questions themselves, toward confronting our own limitations as well as the limitations of what we view (see Weiss et al., 2020a, p. xiv), educational viewing *unsettles* our reception. This recalls the importance of my introduction of *un*settlement in Chapter 1. Furthermore, through my engagement with three phenomenological films, or films that *do* phenomenology, unsettled reception is the focus of Chapter 4.

The Ongoing Importance of Conversations

Neglia et al. (2019), the conversation I read in this chapter, is not a conversation I consider *educational*. Educational conversations, as a whole and involving all participants, educate because they grapple. The conversation, however, is important in that it brings out the ubiquity of reception in ways that demonstrate the potential for moving in the directions of educational viewing (this present Chapter) and educational conversation (Chapter 5). As I have begun to illustrate and explore with my third research question in Chapters 1 and 2, a phenomenological approach can be beneficial and transformative in making pedagogical investments in more nuanced ways of receiving film and modeling that reception as an educator. However, I have also found that the possible benefits and transformations to and in practices of reception depend on the *conversations about them* changing. In other words, accusing a teacher of having "film festivals" and announcements to teachers not to "show too many movies" reflect and shape attitudes about film in formal educational settings.

The talk in and around this matter shapes practices. With adjustments in this talk can come pedagogical investments in nuance. Then, it can become clear that the teacher who uses film to disengage from his students and the teachers and administrators who see little to no worth in film, as evidenced by their words and actions even as they do not blatantly "misuse" film, share *similar* attitudes toward film. These colleagues can then come together to figure out what their responsibilities might be (RQ1) as educators dealing with such a ubiquitous art form and popular medium. And they might even grapple with film's shared ubiquity with education and schooling.

Conversations are appearances or nonappearances of educational viewing—viewing film with an openness to grapple with what one encounters. As such, *educational conversations* are goals that do not foreclose. Those who take part in educational conversations see *un*measurable value in the conversations themselves. Educational conversations in all their varieties are models not to mimic as "data" but models from which to find openings toward new

questions and new investments in more nuanced ways of receiving film. As I have stated, it is important to note that possibility does not lie solely within the conversations in which one takes part or plans or facilitates, whether as a teacher, student, or administrator. Immeasurable possibility also lies in other educational conversations, those of which one is not a part.

Thus, listening to *other conversations*—"classrooms" of a different kind—and incorporating them into the formal classroom means engaging with conversations that educate because they grapple. This engagement encourages classroom conversations not framed by the habitual, technocratic performances of "debate" and sharing of "opinions" that veil over the pursuit of mastery with a thin, outer shell comprised of so-called meaningful exchanges. I say listening, as I advocate for the use of podcasts in the classroom, hence the medium as a "classroom" students observe, read, and learn from. Out of the introduction to educational viewing, educational conversation is the ultimate destination of this dissertation. It is, again, a destination that does not foreclose, and it is the focus of the final chapter, Chapter 5. This is the case because I posit that practices have a lesser chance to change, or, rather, engaging in an ongoing thinking otherwise is less likely, if the conversations we have with ourselves and with others are not, first, changing.

The act of grappling holds in itself potential for an ongoing thinking otherwise—the phenomenological attitude. In the ongoing-ness of grappling, the conversations with our selves, with others, and in the formal classroom engage with nuance and involve pedagogical investments in more nuanced ways of receiving film. Elsewhere, "reviews" that foreclose—or those aggregates, as on *Rotten Tomatoes*, of reviews that formulate a single numeric or alpha "score" that supposedly represents the quality of a film—pose a settled, discursive thought from a particular standpoint. It is important to note, though, that, on the one hand, there are such reviews; on the other hand, there is what people *do* with them, how they—or whether or if they—think through them, read multiple reviews, simply look at a score and decide "yes" or "no"

based on someone else's "yes" or "no," attempt to avoid reviews altogether, or act based on a combination of a number of factors.

When I look for grappling in the conversations themselves, I look for *movement*, not to impose a method under the guise of resisting method, but to stay in tune with the possibilities of movement in the natural attitude itself—how we come to take new things for granted the more we get settled into the ideas we hold to be true (see Chapter 1, Introductory Overview of Phenomenological Contributions section). Reception thought as an investment in nuance rather than as a calculation to be *set down* not to be returned to again is a way of good-faith interpretive-descriptive (hermeneutic) reception: returning to (the ideas and paths of) wherever it was we previously stood each time we move ahead, to revisit to discover if we are grafting rather than approaching givens that show themselves.

Chapter Overview

In this chapter, I focus on the pervasiveness of grafting preexisting logics onto new experiences. I offer new ways of thinking and practicing otherwise to develop a phenomenological attitude as a filmgoer on the way to educational viewing. In three sections, I do this by (a) *placing into* conversation two pieces of literature and then reading an *actual conversation* (presented as it played out orally and sonically in real-time); (b) surveying the literature on film in the context of schooling; and (c) considering a work that, while not phenomenological in a direct sense, offers new dimensions at the junctures of reception, pedagogy, and the phenomenological attitude.

In Section 1, "Phenomenology and Pedagogy: Investments Through the Conversations Themselves," I first delve into the ubiquity of reception generally. Expanding the ideas of Elena del Río (2010) and Tomasulo (1988), I locate a scholarly "conversation" that emerges between these works in phenomenologies of film reception, showing parallels between the ubiquity of reception and disciplinary boundaries. Second, I delve into the ubiquity of reception specifically, with an actual conversation in the context of film punditry and criticism outside the academic

arena: an episode of *The Next Best Picture Podcast*, in which the co-hosts review Lulu Wang's 2019 film *The Farewell* (Neglia et al., 2019) and in which moments of grappling with paradox and tension are few and far between. To further elucidate this conversation as a moment of reception that offers opportunities and potential to confront nuance even if not altogether educational due to certain principles and participants who are unable or unwilling to grapple, I turn to Staiger (2000) and the relationships between "narrative" and the grafting of our own personal narratives onto our reception of film. And I turn to Hanich (2018), who asks from a film phenomenology standpoint in the context of the reception of filmic adaptations of literary texts what it could mean that filmgoers seem to be in a perpetual state of "disappointment." Here, I draw pointed connections between adaptation, preexisting logics, and the tensions between taken-for-granted expectations and what shows itself after it is given. I do this to show how the ubiquity of reception might press onto us even more strongly when our tightly held "truths" are "adapted"—posed or presented differently—against the comforts of how we envision them.

In Section 2, "The 'Educational' in the Literature on Film in Formal Classrooms," I take a multidisciplinary look at the literature on film in secondary and postsecondary classrooms generally and on "educational film" specifically. Working with rather than centering film reception theory allows for nuances of possibility at the intersections of phenomenology and reception. To state it another way, phenomenological reflection offers ways of approaching reception that challenge "real" viewers directly. Phenomenological reflection asks more of real viewers. It asks real viewers to face the paradox and the accompanying tensions that result when filmgoing is no longer just one of the daily, prereflective experiences that "we live through for most, if not all, of our day-to-day existence" (van Manen, 2016, p. 28) but is one that is embraced for its ongoing and changing givenness. The everyday acts of filmgoing and reception combine with the repeated acts of schooling in the formal classroom. In their repetitiveness, ideas and practices in both arenas become habitual; integrated, they form a unit, perpetuating the ways in which the other is taken for granted as "settled," "natural," or "technical." As Gibbs (2017) articulates, in

terms of film's position in formal classrooms, film is so often "used" in masterful, technocratic, and reductive ways in which the film is ostensibly important but is, in actuality, an afterthought.

Few and far between are studies not centered on or highly influenced by the masterful and the technocratic, the "use" of film to serve *some other* goal. In contributing new ideas on the ubiquity of reception, I delineate telling intersections between the reception of the "educational" in educational film (here, I build on the important work of Bruch [2016], Ellsworth [1991], and Fuchs et al. [2016]) and "educational" as applied to films not specifically made for the classroom. With Singh (2018) in mind, I read the literature not to repudiate but rather to work with it to recognize as yet unrealized offerings and to reflexively underscore what I see as the need for scholars to take responsibility for making authentic space for what might occur, for the unforeseeable impacts of the film experience. The ongoing thinking otherwise—the phenomenological attitude—are the words I put to this thinking and practice, but meeting phenomena in its givenness and grappling with what takes us unawares is, in the moment, the unfolding of what can then become the subject of phenomenological reflection.

With Section 3, "The Ongoing Thinking Otherwise and Hartman's Historical Poetics," I will close the chapter in the manner that I close Chapter 2—with a scholar of women's, gender, and sexuality studies. Here, I close with feminist scholar Saidiya Hartman. I argue that to read Hartman is to be immersed in a full-fledged ongoing thinking otherwise that is more than merely a response to the "settled" ideologies of history as it has "traditionally" been written and "legitimized." As I write in Chapter 1, the "settled" ground of settler colonial logics might appear stable, but it is, in fact, shaky due to its negations of those cast to hold it up but not partake in its freedoms. Hartman's work, while not explicitly phenomenological, offers dimensions to phenomenological thinking that make placing it into conversation with questions of the primal, lived, prereflective, and prepredicative an endeavor of involution into the results of careful historical research, aesthetic prowess, and relentless *un*settlement.

Considering Hartman, I take another look at history, the "counterfactual," and the idea that the speculative is somehow always already subordinate to "real" histories. I also take up the roles film plays in Hartman's (2019) latest book, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Riotous Black Girls, Troublesome Women, and Queer Radicals*. I am intrigued by these roles when I think about both the content of Hartman's histories and the form of her writing. I argue that *Wayward Lives* approaches in the written form filmic effects of "de-distanced projection[s]" (Loht, 2017, p. 61) that place me *right there* in senses more immediate, more intimate, and more lived than in the typical sense of picturing the events in a book as if they were a "movie" playing in my head. Film as imaginative glimpses into the ongoing otherwise of what might emerge, and teaching and reception and conversations beyond the technocratic, beyond "ready-to-hand" tools, are among Hartman's offerings to this chapter. Ultimately, I argue that reading Hartman can profoundly engender the ongoing thinking otherwise of both educational viewing and educational conversation.

Phenomenology and Pedagogy: Investments Through the Conversations Themselves

Part I: Un-siloing Texts Into Conversation

In aiming to make pedagogical investments in nuance by reading *other* conversations, I expand tracing the appearances of reception (see Chapters 2 and 5) to tracing the appearances of the *ubiquity* of reception. Grafting preexisting logics onto new encounters often shows itself as adherences to disciplinary boundaries. Coming in expecting to see one's assumptions and presuppositions confirmed is often founded on and justified by disciplinary frames that circumscribe point-of-view down to employed terminology and the seemingly prescribed reception of terminologies from "other" disciplines.

In response to disciplinarity's restrictiveness, I *place into* conversation and expand into my educational purview Tomasulo's (1988) "The Text-in-the-Spectator: The Role of Phenomenology in an Eclectic Theoretical Methodology" from *Journal of Film and Video* and del Río's (2010) entry, "Film," from *Handbook of Phenomenological Aesthetics*. I argue that these

pieces on phenomenology and film reception share theses that resist siloed formulations of thought. However, they have been placed into separate scholarly conversations that have passed each other by in both phenomenology and film studies. Consequently, when these works are read in film phenomenology, the distance between them remains and is even magnified. I chose these two pieces and read them as a conversation not to force commonality that is not present but to show that a relationship exists beyond how they are discussed within film phenomenology. That relationship offers much to existing conversations regarding phenomenology's relationship to its critical and aesthetic concerns.

I have wonder about the impressions, tones, and content that separate "The Text-in-the-Spectator" and "Film," and I have wonder about the attention to nuance required when placing the articles into conversation. This wonder is important to classroom conversations not centered on performances of "opinion" and debate. First and throughout, a nuanced approach is crucial to encountering conversations already marked with lines of demarcation.

From Spectator-in-the-Text to Text-in-the-Spectator

H. A. Stadler (1990) recognizes his indebtedness to Tomasulo (1988) as he gestures toward interdisciplinary (and transdisciplinary and multidisciplinary) thinking and research and directly decries "closed systems" of scholarship within and outside of phenomenological circles (H. A. Stadler, 1990, p. 37). In my literature review on film phenomenology in Chapter 2, I highlight H. A. Stadler's (1990) argument that phenomenology did not "die out" to make way for structuralism in the 1960s (p. 38) and that it "has instead been . . . a continuous and crucial contributor to past and current debates in film as well as literary theory" (1991, pp. 45–47). It becomes clear that H. A. Stadler is expanding upon Tomasulo's "The Text-in-the-Spectator." Partially a reaction to Nick Browne's (1975/1985) "The Spectator-in-the-Text: The Rhetoric of *Stagecoach*," "The Text-in-the-Spectator" is more than a strict Husserlian call back to "pure" phenomenology, which seems to be the tone at its outset and the interpretation that fits into Ferencz-Flatz and Hanich's (2016) broad/narrow distinction as they ask, "What is film

phenomenology?" Tomasulo (1988) asks the question common to any seriously reflexive phenomenological endeavor in a way that resists disciplinarity even as he asserts his particular starting point: "What is phenomenology?" (p. 20).

In resisting the structured boundaries of disciplines, Tomasulo (1988) writes, "Phenomenology has more in common with the theoretical paradigms that supplanted it than is generally assumed" and continues to name structuralism/semiotics, Marxism, and psychoanalysis as areas of interpretation that have been "assumed to be totally incompatible with phenomenological premises" (p. 20). The *rapprochements* (p. 20) for which he advocates confront classical phenomenology's criticality (pp. 21, 25–26), which I consider in the literature review on phenomenology in Chapter 2 and in my introduction to Section 3 of this present chapter. This is a point of contention among phenomenologists, as some view Husserl as too removed or "transcendent" to be critical while others such as D. H. Davis (2020) and Guenther (2013, 2020) see criticality as fundamental to phenomenology's very beginnings.

Tomasulo (1988) puts it this way as he defends the epoché, or bracketing, also called the transcendental reduction: "Rather than merely justifying and legitimating a reified social order, the bracketing out of preconceptions and the intentionality of consciousness can help to create an authentically *active* subject, as well as an authentically *critical* one" (p. 21). In addressing the intersubjectivity that is a concern of phenomenology as critical and what is now called critical phenomenology, Tomasulo notes that "film viewing . . . becomes an active process of demystification toward apodictic axioms, and not merely for individual spectators, but on the social level of intersubjectivity as well" (p. 30). This active viewer points back to Tomasulo's *text*-in-the-spectator, what the text does in the spectator, or rather, what the spectator does with the text. This phenomenology allows us to reckon with and account for *reception*, that is, the notion that "individuals can rewrite or reread even the most domineering of textual interpellations, according to their own racial, sexual, psychological, or class disposition" (p. 29). Tomasulo does not restate this common expression of "no two people see the same

work of art in the same way" in order to espouse idealism in centering the *I* or a cinematic Materialism (as he interprets it in Christian Metz's work) but instead to posit an idea of the "Double Projection, in that the film is projected onto a screen and then out at us, yet we also project *into* the film" (pp. 29–30). Thus, a "spectator" is not necessarily an abstract or idealized viewer made by way of theory and method rather than encountered as living and dynamic.

I emphasize viewers who can embrace tension and perhaps grappling, not viewers (mostly) created to serve research purposes. Because of this, I use "filmgoer" rather than "spectator." And earlier I cite Corrigan and White (2021) in distinguishing between reception theory and theories of spectatorship. But how one really thinks about the "viewer" reveals itself in the actual approaches and practices of research, teaching, writing, and discourse—how one gestures in conversation, how (the ubiquity of) reception shows itself after it gives itself. Tomasulo's spectators continue as active in his descriptions of what is already connected between the phenomenological and the structuralist/semiotic, even as his approach is interpreted as "narrowly" Husserlian.

In his section on structuralism and semiotics, Tomasulo (1988) argues that the narrative claiming structuralism grew out of phenomenology in order to replace and separate from it "is plausible only up to a point" (p. 22). He states that phenomenology was always present, urging scholars to consider the listening subject, the reader, the spectator, and the "productive interplay between the text and the reader's quest for intelligibility" (p. 22). He articulates that this interplay is the definition of *meaning* according to Heidegger's philosophy of language and that meaning in this sense reveals structure that is implicit (p. 22). He goes on to trace the building of ideas from "mechanical structuralism," a strict intratextual mode in which language is a "closed, already constituted corpus or system" (p. 22), to applications to film viewing experience that include viewers who are not passive and ignored due to their not being part of the text, a subject chained to a fixed view in the way of the characters in Plato's cave allegory (pp. 22–23). Tomasulo charts an ostensibly gradual turn, in literary and film theory, toward models of viewers

who can influence their subjectivity, directly and indirectly, consciously and unconsciously. The gamut runs from Colin MacCabe's "text-as-bribe," in which the viewer submits to both the text and its ideology (Tomasulo, 1988, p. 23), to Paul Abbott's declaration that attention must be paid to the experiencing subject and to the founding of the experience (the text): "The point is to account for both the experience of subjects and the structuring of subjectivity which founds that experience" (Abbott, 1979, p. 18, as cited in Tomasulo, 1988, p. 23). Also on this "viewer pole" is Peter Wollen's assertion that it is the "mode of reading . . . in the context of a sociohistorical conjuncture" that determines the text's effect (Willemen, 1978, p. 57, as cited in Tomasulo, 1988, p. 23). These emphases within structuralism toward the viewer and how the viewer *interprets* a text rather than merely decodes it (p. 23) is a contribution of the ground laid by phenomenology, which "limits one to the data presented in consciousness—to describing rather than explaining" (p. 20). This link recalls the notion within phenomenology that description is already interpretation (see van Manen, 2016, p. 26).

Interpreting rather than merely decoding (from pure textual structuralism) and describing rather than explaining (from classical phenomenology) carry over to Tomasulo's (1988) connections and imbrications between phenomenology and Marxism and phenomenology and psychanalysis. Describing rather than explaining becomes *changing* the world, not just explaining it, as Tomasulo writes that Marxism theorizes that "the individual subject (and that subject's society) becomes free by uncovering and understanding the laws and structures of nature, society, and thought" (pp. 24–25). In critical phenomenology, Guenther (2020), in my thinking, pushes these progressions further by calling for change to be the result of singular encounters with phenomena, not presumably detached or universal descriptions: "The ultimate goal of critical phenomenology is not just to *interpret* [emphasis added] the world, but also to change it" (p. 16). Nevertheless, the parallels and intersections between structures, subjects, and change are the inseparable elements of consciousness/consciousness-of, subject/structuring of subjectivity, and viewer/film and the return to the "things themselves" that

Husserl implores and that Tomasulo (1988) calls analogous to the goal in psychanalysis of bringing the unconscious to consciousness (p. 27). When it comes to questions concerning meaning, self-consciousness, and representation, these ties to psychanalysis are important to film studies (p. 27). For Marxist critiques, the concern is that spectators are an invention and overdetermined, “a result rather than a cause” (p. 26). However, as has been argued, phenomenology’s assertions for intersubjectivity lie in the criticality of the viewer’s ability not to be passive in the face of the structures of filmic codes (pp. 25–26).

In this final section, “Spectatorship,” Tomasulo (1988) elaborates the commonality between textual structuralism, reductionist Marxism, determinist psychoanalysis, and deconstructionism: for scholars in all these fields, “it is *the text* (or the author) that does the meaning. All avoid the more radical conclusion that texts (like other events in the world), in and of themselves, do not provide or determine any particular meaning” (p. 29). This says volumes for *reception*, as filmgoers make meaning from films. They interpret them, they speak to themselves and others about them, and they might also disseminate their ideas. Tomasulo goes on to describe further how the idea of the text doing the meaning is attached to filmgoers’ meanings, which are attached to the filmgoer, not some other already determined certainty: “Spectators, like it or not, use film texts to make meaning, and meanings differ according to the disparate strategies of different viewers” (p. 29). To illuminate this point, Tomasulo tells an anecdote of when he moved into his first apartment in New York City.

Tomasulo (1988) recalls unpacking his belongings in his first New York apartment while Beethoven’s “Ode to Joy” played in the background. When a neighbor knocked on his door expressing distress at the volume of the music, the subsequent conversation points to what is so intriguing to me about reception and why I want to attempt to uncover or see the appearances of it phenomenologically, as it is so elusive yet so rewarding a task. Asking about “Ode to Joy,” a song he did not know the name for, Tomasulo’s neighbor asked, “What is that morbid, depressing music you’re playing?” (p. 29). In terms of film reception, this hits at the core

of the “Yes or No” conceptions of which *Rotten Tomatoes* is only one example. How a film strikes you, how it makes you feel, how you recognize its “merits,” are universal yet singularly experienced phenomena. I ask this: How can you dwell *between* and *outside of* the “Yes” and the “No”? What is *enveloped in* that “Yes or No” structure? How much is being “worth your time” the responsibility of the film or a facing up to a choice to view, even if the viewing turns out not to be (immediately) felt as a sort of a “return on the investment”? What could it mean if an investment were not attached to the expectation of a certain return, if Tomasulo’s neighbor’s “morbid, depressing” were neither a “No” nor a rejection but an opening for a more nuanced engagement?

The “scientific rigor” and “pure phenomenology of consciousness” (p. 21) for which Tomasulo (1988) advocates in “The Text-in-the-Spectator” are not my orientations in arguing for phenomenology as an attitude rather than a method, and philosophy, filmgoing, and pedagogy toward embracing what might arise rather than as they fit into theory and method. However, here I argue that “The Text-in-the-Spectator” is about more than “strict” and “narrow” application. It is also about the disadvantages of disciplinary siloing in studies and practices of reception. Thus, engaging with this work takes a different shape and aim than it does in Chapter 2. As far as the ubiquity of reception, this ability to shift perspective and angle (see Diller, 1998) is of utmost importance, as it means that citation, as a mode of reception, can go beyond what was or is currently imagined. How scholars decode, interpret, explain, describe, or aim for change takes shape with respect to the perspectives we bring in.

Phenomenology offers the ongoing vigilance of confronting how and to what extent a perspective is “disciplinary” (somewhere on a spectrum from open to or separate from or held in opposition to the ideas and interpretations of other fields, disciplines, approaches, or movements). This is to say that phenomenology offers ways to face up to what might be gained, lost, uncovered, or re-covered by the assumptions, perceptions, and languages of a perspective and those of others. As will be evident as I place Tomasulo (1988) into conversation with del

Río's (2010) study of film reception, outside of an interdisciplinary approach, phenomenological offerings follow the nature of "phenomenology" itself: not a unified school of thought but rather representative of the outlooks of a variety of thinkers (see Chapter 2 above, Review of the Literature: Phenomenology section, which includes, especially, Salamon, 2018a, p. 15, and Scheler, 1957/1973b, p. 137).

What Phenomenology Offers Aesthetic Film Reception

Del Río (2010) resists "disciplinarity" in perspective and the carrying over into actual disciplines certain modes of receiving and "making sense." Citing Sobchack's (1992) *The Address of the Eye* as foundational in taking perception into new directions, del Río (2010) writes that "equally crucial to the reconfiguration of perception carried out by Sobchack's phenomenological model is the idea that perception is not only always attached to corporeality, but is also *synaesthetic* and *synoptic*" (p. 112). Here, I recall Merleau-Ponty's (1948/1964) film gestalt but in terms of an "interdisciplinary," or better yet a "transdisciplinary," attention to how the senses come together, how they *already are* together. Ignoring the other senses in favor of sight, as tempting as it might be in the filmic context, can be thought as analogous to focusing so intensely on a siloed theory or method or field or discipline that there is an inability to recognize paradox, much less embrace tension in the processes and practices of grappling with what might arise outside of the domains of habit.

These conditions are unlikely to lead to what I call educational viewing, and they reveal the ubiquity of reception. As del Río (2010) describes, perception does not find its bases in vision alone, nor are the senses separated from one another. She continues: "Our different sensory modalities . . . form a system of cooperation and commutability whereby any resulting perception is undoubtedly more than the sum of the different senses participating therein" (p. 112). Del Río's *un*settling of siloing in film phenomenology directly influences film reception. First, though, it is important to elaborate on phenomenological aesthetics, the context in which she writes her entry, "Film."

"Film" is del Río's (2010) contribution to *Handbook of Phenomenological Aesthetics*, edited by Hans Rainer Sepp and Lester Embree. As I have alluded to above, phenomenology and aesthetics are a natural pair in their aims (Sepp & Embree, 2010, p. xv), especially as aesthetics has become wider and more critical in scope (Kelly, 2014b, para. 3). Initially, "aesthetics" was not associated with art but was, due to the influence of Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten, a relatively direct outgrowth of *aisthēsis*, "the field of the sensuous" (Sepp & Embree, 2010, p. xv; Guyer, 2020). Aisthēsis (or aesthesis) is the Greek word for "perception or sensation," and the term "aesthetics" derives from it (Kelly, 1998/2014a, paras. 1–5, History of Aesthetics section). As Sepp and Embree (2010) write, aesthetics is "a late emerging subdiscipline within philosophy" (p. xv). Over the last three centuries since 1790 when, with *Critique of Judgement*, Kant joined generalizations about art with "sensory knowledge independent of logical knowledge" (Kelly, 1998/2014a, para. 5), aesthetics has been received as inferior to logic, epistemology, ontology, and ethics within philosophy and, more specifically, as inferior to ethics within phenomenology (Sepp & Embree, 2010, p. xv).

Still, Sepp and Embree (2010) find it "astonishing to see how many phenomenologists have previously worked in aesthetics and how aesthetics is of central interest for such a considerable group of them today" (p. xv). Aesthetics and phenomenology have intuition in common, as aesthetic themes are already involved in questions of the visibility and invisibility of phenomena (p. xv). Although the ordinary and the everyday that is experienced and "shaped in action" is not fundamentally the realm of the fine arts, the ways phenomenology would have one interpret-describe the "nearby things," "the world near us, the lifeworld," are oriented aesthetically: As Sepp and Embree put it, "phenomenology clearly analyzes phenomena of the lifeworld and the artistic relation to that world" (p. xv). Van Manen (2016) calls this poetizing (pp. 240–241). Hartman (2018, 2019), as I argue, calls it historical poetics. Both the sensual attention of aesthetics' beginnings and its statements about art, which were incorporated later,

are at work. In Chapter 5, I elaborate on aesthetics and its history and change and as the philosophical branch is related to educational conversations about film.

Phenomenological aesthetics offers me ways to develop this thinking toward pedagogical investments in more nuanced ways of viewing film—investments that teachers can discuss and model in the classroom (and in their professional development with their colleagues) so that conversations concerning film reception and the films themselves might move beyond mere performances of scholarship rooted in repurposing the same (tired) assumptions for each new encounter. The aesthetic is in the educational, and the educational is in the aesthetic. Both involve—if we are to encounter and respond in good faith—accounting for our modes of reception. That is, we must consider if we are simply grafting to foreclose or if we are thinking beyond the ideologies of defending taste (Kelly, 2014b, para. 3) and beyond preconceived notions about what is—as Kohn notes in the epigraph opening this chapter—"worth your time."

Pertinent here are the ways in which there is inherent interdisciplinarity between aesthetics and phenomenology and the complexities involved with placing into conversation Tomasulo (1988) and del Río (2010), two scholars who argue for a dissolving of disciplinary boundaries but have different points of view about what those boundaries are. Typically, the tendency is to see these two studies as two phenomenological poles not to be put together unless for the purpose of emphasizing how they represent two poles. This tends to allow for a flattening, or a single reading, of both scholars' work that best suits the prefabricated frame already constructed for it. However, I see placing the work into conversation as having *un*measurable valuable in itself, as it is an investment in nuance that provides enhanced attunement toward and preparation for engagement with *other conversations—actual* conversations that involve others rather than ourselves.

Del Río (2010) echoes Tomasulo (1988) as far as she also calls for an acknowledgment of phenomenology's continued presence in subsequent movements and methods and,

consequently, calls for the interdisciplinarity needed to address the complex relationship between viewer and film. Those echoes, or “agreements,” at the widest base of phenomenology include two key places in del Río’s (2010) entry, “Film”: The first is at the start of the piece when she writes, “Instead of the subject-object relations that prevail in other theoretical accounts of spectator and film, phenomenology considers both medium and spectator as always already enworlded, always mutually implicated and inclusive of each other” (p. 111). The second comes at the end:

> As is apparent from the recent and developing work by film scholars in the field, phenomenological theory has much to contribute to the innovation and expansion of cinema studies, even in those areas such as gender, cultural, media, colonial, and historical studies that were previously deemed off-limits to the purview of a serious philosophical discourse such as phenomenology. This breakdown of disciplinary and institutional boundaries shows, in fact, that there is hardly an area of cultural or human concern that can be bracketed off from the interests of the phenomenologist—the lived body is no doubt here to stay. (p. 116)

Echoes at the bases of a general phenomenological interdisciplinarity, these statements depart from Tomasulo as more detail shows itself.

The former statement, which sounds similar to Tomasulo’s (1988) assertions about Husserl’s criticality and his argument that viewing is an active process that extends to intersubjectivity, is by contrast del Río’s (2010) response to what she finds to be the limitations of “the deterministic bent of the psychoanalytical unconscious and of the social/political relations of a Marxist theory of commodity fetishism” (p. 111). Here, Tomasulo’s advocacy for keeping close to classical phenomenology as it is embedded in rather than divorced from structuralism/semiotics, Marxism, and psychoanalysis meets del Río’s nuanced considerations of psychoanalytical and Marxist film theory. Del Río’s considerations take different turns.

For structuralism and semiotics, del Río (2010) cites *The Address of the Eye* and how it distances itself from Husserl's transcendental ego "by the premises of existential, semiotic phenomenology," which are not "at odds with" Merleau-Ponty's "wild meaning," which she describes as "a pre-linguistic or pre-reflective realm" (p. 111). What is intriguing is that, for Tomasulo (1988), the phenomenological roots of implicit structure in language and meaning, itself "rooted in the perceptive body, continuing or extending its intentions in and toward the world" (del Río, 2010, p. 11), is grounded in a commitment to Husserlian phenomenology (see Tomasulo, 1988, p. 25, for his references, for similar purposes, to Merleau-Ponty). But, for Sobchack, Husserlian phenomenology is incompatible with her commitment to Merleau-Ponty's existentialist phenomenology and her overall project. This recalls phenomenology's relationship to Husserl and where departures occur or do not occur. This also recalls the notion of reception and its ubiquity, not only at the level of the spectator or filmgoer, but also at the level of the scholar at work.

Referencing her own work on Michael Powell's 1960 film *Peeping Tom* and in citing, among others, Laura Marks's *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses* (2000) and *Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media* (2002), as well as Sobchack's *Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture* (2004), del Río (2010) resists psychoanalytical film theory's separation of the corporeal from the voyeuristic and the separation of the sense of sight from that of touch (p. 114). She also resists psychoanalytical and Marxist tendencies to read bodies "according to preselected binary categories (male/female, white/black, etc.) whose effect is to homogenize bodies" (p. 113). She goes on to state that feminist film theory in the 1970s "unwittingly tended to reinforce and extend" male repression of the female body (a practice widespread in classical narrative cinema) by "reducing the female body in the cinema to the Freudian concept of fetishism" (p. 113). Del Río describes that phenomenology can present new ways, through self-reinvention and agency, of defining the female body onscreen and not merely reproducing the ways that Merleau-Ponty "simply

assum[es] the white, male body as the universal measure of all bodies"; to do this, del Río examines how select female filmmakers have "reconfigured the female body onscreen as something other than a fetish serving male interests and desires" (pp. 114–115). In all, technology (Sobchack and also André Bazin), performance (Stern & Kouvaros), and affect (Merleau-Ponty and also Deleuze) studies can benefit from phenomenological applications at the intersections and overlaps with the body as the body "figures as the constantly moving and deterritorializing surface that can put us directly in touch with the unthought" (pp. 115–116)—that is, as the body *receives* a film.

Del Río (2010) points out with prescient insights that work in performance studies and affect is phenomenological even though authors do not make that explicit and instead take the directions of transcendental empiricism (p. 115). She fills gaps not just for the sake of drawing connections but to show what is missed through flattened readings of phenomenology, "the kind of charges of idealism or naiveté" (p. 113) framed around it to crib it into logics that betray ubiquities of reception that should be avoided in both film reception and *scholarly* reception. In other words, disciplinary siloing can come in many forms and can hit right down to the words we use and what we see as separate or going together in a "system of cooperation and commutability" (p. 112). The grafting of preexisting logics onto new encounters often shows itself as adherences to disciplinary boundaries, and this seems to be why del Río calls for a "breakdown of disciplinary and institutional boundaries" (p. 116). Speaking to the themes of this dissertation, this profound passage, the latter statement that ends del Río's entry, "Film," left me with a culmination that does not foreclose.

Conversations: Developing One's Voice in an Ongoing, Reflexive Manner

Here, putting del Río's (2010) "Film" into conversation with Tomasulo's (1988) "The Text-in-the-Spectator" was not for the purpose of claiming my own stances on phenomenology's relationships with the social sciences, criticality, psychoanalysis, Marxism, or structuralism/semiotics. I have done that in the previous chapters. Rather, in this chapter, I

placed del Río and Tomasulo into conversation to introduce how—in so much scholarship across fields—what gives itself as *un*settled is often *read as settled*. I intended to introduce what it might mean not to *leave scholarly work in its silos* to reinscribe boundaries but to take it out of its silos to engage in both comparison and disjuncture in ways that challenge disciplinarity in all its forms. Challenging disciplinarity in all its forms includes recognizing the differences between meeting givens that show themselves and taking cover *away from* the tensions of paradox and grappling. If we cannot recognize these differences in our own readings and conversations, there might be even less of a chance that we can better meet our responsibilities as teachers, administrators, or students in formal educational settings or as filmgoers encountering artistic works that call on us to meet them where they give and show themselves, not think, talk, or write about them from an elsewhere we have decided for them. Meeting this task does not take away a filmmaker's own responsibility to be reflexive; it leaves to filmgoers the task of good-faith reception.

The ubiquity of reception may be thought of as a way of confronting disciplinarity's limiting effects. With a phenomenological attitude, vigilance toward what might arise otherwise can lead to pedagogical investments that encourage students to place seemingly disparate arguments into conversation for more than the purpose of confirming established frames of interpretation. This, in turn, can guide toward the educational—the willingness to grapple with what one encounters—when the times come for viewings of and conversations about the films themselves. For me, conversations are about developing one's voice in an ongoing, reflexive manner—hence my advocacy for embracing paradox and tension, grappling, and the ongoing thinking otherwise (the phenomenological attitude).

The formal classroom is a space to develop a voice that is authentic rather than stifled or stuck in mere performative action. Furthermore, as a process and a practice, developing one's voice in conversation is a task that does not belong to students alone. If we all are to develop, in conversation, our voices rather than reproduce already settled responses repurposed for each

new occasion, it is vital that scholars and educators, too, resist a different type of "development": that of a reproducible, disciplinary response. For us—scholars, teachers, administrators—resisting a reproducible disciplinary response means considering whether our reactions are stifling the development of our *own* voices. Allowing an ongoing, reflexive development of our own voices can be thought of as allowing authentic, good-faith reception of what arises.

Part II: Critics, Aesthetics, and the Ubiquity of Reception in a Film Punditry Podcast

Actual conversations about film are presented as they play out in real time. Critics, writers, and pundits are also filmgoers, and they act *through* media—they talk and write about film. They, too, receive film. The *Next Best Picture Podcast* (Neglia et al., 2019) is an example of a media product that includes such critics, writers, and pundits, and it shows the ubiquity of reception. In weekly episodes that dig deeply and widely into film releases, festivals, and awards (actual nominations and wins and "losses" as well as predictions and the reactions to those outcomes), and in interspersed episodes dedicated solely to reviewing a particular film, *Next Best Picture* is attempting to foretell—as its name indicates—the next winner of the Academy Award for Best Picture of the Year. Matt Neglia, film critic and the founder and main host of the podcast, even cleverly includes, at the start of each weekly episode, the audio of the Best Picture announcement from the most recent Academy Awards ceremony. *Next Best Picture* does demonstrate and represent a love of cinema, but at the center of the show seems to be what Shambu (2019, 2020) calls the "old cinephilia." As I noted in Chapter 2, the old cinephilia denotes film analysis in the service of creating lists, devising rankings, and maintaining hierarchies—in the traditions of filmmaking and cinephilia as (White) male–centered interests. Orienting itself toward these pursuits, *Next Best Picture* gives itself an air of detachment that veils over the co-hosts' *reception* with an implicit adherence to "objectivity" as a reified concept. This technocratic aim mixed with purported artistic and cultural appreciation hearkens back to aesthetics as defending the tastes of dominant groups (Kelly, 2014b, para. 3).

These appearances of reception, which show themselves under a thin veil, show up as half-acknowledgments. That is, instead of grappling with the tensions that arise between assumptions of habit and conversations of reception, there are only individualized, brief, and even oft-repeated mentions of bias or assumption. In other words, the disciplinary siloing of reception is spoken but then immediately pushed to the side to be left to the side (recall Ahmed, 2006, pp. 199–200, here). Hosts get settled in their "takes" and logics—theories and methods—which are transferred to each new film and each new episode. To use the keywords of this chapter, the ubiquity of reception does not meet the task of educational viewing. Still, these moments are important to listen to. They can be models not for foreclosure but for openings toward what they do *not* (adequately) offer through conversation—"critical reflection on art [and] culture" (Kelly, 1998/2014a, para. 1) and, thus, pedagogical investment in nuance.

In going outside academia not only to show an actual conversation but also to show the ubiquity of reception appearing in another form, I have chosen the review episode (Neglia et al., 2019) in which Neglia and his co-hosts review *The Farewell* (Wang, 2019). I chose this episode for its demonstration of the ubiquity of reception and for its moments that *nearly* demonstrate educational viewing. Old cinephilic practices and half-acknowledgments abound instead. If educational conversations educate because they grapple, this episode *almost* educates because it *almost* grapples. But a sonic, phenomenological reading of the conversation is not simply to repudiate it, nor is it to silo it as "data" into a category to be left aside. This reading is preparation for engaging conversations that *are* educational (Chapter 5); and it is a reminder that even educational conversations require an ongoing thinking otherwise. They are not foreclosed arrivals.

In the first act of *The Farewell*, Jian (Diana Lin) says to her daughter, Billi (Awkwafina), "Chinese people have a saying. When people get cancer, they die. . . . It's not the cancer that kills them. It's the *fear*" (Wang, 2019). She expresses this to Billi's consternation. Billi's grandmother, Nai Nai (Zhao Shuzhen), has been diagnosed with terminal cancer and has 3

months to live, and the family decision not to reveal this diagnosis to Nai Nai herself is a decision Billi cannot fathom. Billi is an outsider in her family, a first-generation Chinese American who ends up traveling to China to see Nai Nai one last time, despite the family's wish that she stay away, not because she *shouldn't* see her grandmother, but because, as Jian describes, "Look at you. You can't hide your emotions! If you go, Nai Nai will find out right away! (Wang, 2019). Phenomenologically, this brief scene brings together fraught familial dynamics and the reception of those dynamics as they play out on film: Here, "deciding" whether or not to reveal, facing up to what is revealed *regardless* ("You can't hide your emotions!), confronting how "the world gives itself to appearances" (Salamon, 2018a, p. 15), and attempting to describe and interpret the "prereflective meaning of the living now" (van Manen, 2016, p. 34) converge.

Next Best Picture review episodes all start the same: As Neglia moderates, co-hosts deliver monologues "revealing" their initial thoughts on the film. In the *Farewell* episode, the co-hosts are Tom O'Brien, Beatrice Loayza, and Celia Schlekewey (Neglia et al., 2019). But what shows itself during these initial "takes" and through the rest of the episode includes what is above, on, and beneath the surface. "Above the surface" might be thought of as the meeting point between what is intended and what is said. As a phenomenon, the podcast conversation is pedagogically rich: Because there is no picture and only sound, what gives itself in the form of what is said may be homed in on with more focus, as, paradoxically, gestures are rendered *more pronounced*.

On Individual "Takes" and What Is Intended

Individual "takes" in monologue form are one aspect in the format of every *Next Best Picture* (Neglia et al., 2019) review episode. Specifically, such monologues can be found at the beginnings of episodes across many film review podcasts. Generally, across the podcast medium, a specific format is assumed to be key in engaging and retaining listeners. But for film review podcasts, I have wonder about how formats also structure what is said and what is thought. What sticks to the format? How can the format not bring along with it logics and ideas

unchanged, those grafted onto a new film not to create something new but to preserve the structures that keep the podcast intact as an entertaining entity through avoiding destabilizations to the taken-for-granted assumptions of the everyday? In other words, how does a podcast format not also reinforce preexisting logics and assumptions of habit? If the everyday cannot be *un*settled, how can *reception* be unsettled? If film is ubiquitous, and podcasting has also become ubiquitous, how can the two meet in a phenomenological attitude? How can format be preserved without it (the natural attitude, theory, method) bracketing out nuance from the actual conversation?

By "what is intended," I do not mean to invoke a psychological interpretation. On the contrary, I mean to say that what is said and what appears are an indication of what was intended, in the sense that speakers endeavor to *frame* what they say or prefer what they say to have a *certain* appearance. Their "takes" on *The Farewell* reveal not only the *Next Best Picture* (Neglia et al., 2019) co-hosts' overall thoughts and critiques but also seemingly automatic shifts between the singular and the universal. The co-hosts seem to be responding to an expectation that they place their own feelings, experiences, and "ratings" alongside their senses of how others feel, experience, and "rate" the film. I call this "above the surface" because it gestures not toward authentic grappling with the first person and the intersubjective but rather toward an opposition that is self-interested—that is, especially with Beatrice's response, it is *almost* concerned with embracing paradox and tension, but on close reading, it is rather *blatantly* concerned with the comparisons, lists, ratings, and hierarchies of the old cinephilia. The intended meets what is said and falls to the surface.

Beatrice starts with, "So, I'll start by saying that it's probably not one of my favorite movies of the year, but I certainly agree that it is *one of the best* movies of the year," to which

Matt interjects with, “That makes sense” (6:36–6:47[3]). Beatrice goes on to talk about how, as a first-generation American with immigrant parents (like Billi), she really liked the film and a lot of it *did* resonate with her—especially Wang’s ability (as also the writer of the film) to balance “rather morbid subject matter with the film’s humor” (6:47–7:13). She also says, “And visually, there was also just some beautiful tableaus, especially when we get into the sham wedding scenes” (7:17–7:24). Then, Beatrice expresses what she sees as flaws in the film:

> However, I think that there were, for me, some writing flaws in Billi’s character development that, for me personally, didn’t feel kind of earned towards the end. And some of the sentimentality, I think, didn’t really work for me. It felt a little staged. Granted—I am really into Chinese film, uh, definitely this story was unique because it’s about the Chinese *American* immigrant experience. . . . But, in general, I’m really into Chinese film, and this actually felt really similar to a lot of sort of epic Chinese family dramas. . . . And, compared to those, I guess *The Farewell* just felt a little underwritten. Umm, but I still think it was a really beautiful film, and I was really impressed. So, that’s my take. (7:25–8:35)

Soon after, Matt asks Celia if the contents of her monologue were motivated by sentiments similar to Beatrice’s. Celia had expressed that although she “really enjoyed it” and that it was “very, very *good*, like capital-G *good*” (4:22–4:28), the film did not impress her as much as it seemed to impress others: “I don’t think it necessarily stuck with me as much as maybe it has with other people, but that probably speaks more to *me* than to the film itself” (4:29–4:41). In response to Matt’s question, Celia responds that Beatrice’s critiques are not necessarily hers.

Celia shares that, when viewing *The Farewell*, she was mostly concerned with comparing it to her own experiences when her own grandmother passed away (13:40–13:54).

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[3] All time stamp citations in this section refer to Neglia et al. (2019).

While she does have trouble understanding why Billi makes some of the choices she makes [the character development], she does not think it is "meant to make sense to me, as like an American who thinks the way most Americans do. . . . I don't think I'm supposed to understand. I think it's just supposed to be like a conscious choice that she made, and then we just go with it from there" (14:40–15:42). Meanwhile, in his monologue, which he delivers in the second position after Celia, Tom says that for him the "relatability" factor took a different turn:

> When I first heard about it [the film], I thought, "Well, it sounds very rooted in Chinese culture, and I might not relate. And I saw it, and I was like, "Oh, my god, she's telling my story," because I wanna say that the more *specific* she gets with Chinese culture, the more I related to it. And, uh, I'm an Irish Catholic, you know, raised in New England, and, like Lulu, we didn't talk about *anything*. You know, something like this would be simply foreboden. (4:55–5:39)

Despite Tom's declaration that the film is "terrific" (4:50) and his seemingly astute observation concerning the paradoxes of the universal and the singular, at the crux of his statement is that his meeting the "specifics" of Chinese culture as they give themselves in the film only goes as far as the extent that they remind him of the specifics of his *own* upbringing and cinephilic mindset. In this sense, his sentiments match Celia's and Beatrice's.

What seems to stick to the format and carry over into the review of this film are four appearances of the ubiquity of reception: comparisons of what the filmgoer received to what "everyone else" says and feels (read, consensus); the direct aim of incorporating the film into lists, rankings, hierarchies, and "genre" categories; a focus on first-person preconceptions; and predetermined foci through which the film was viewed that hold the film accountable for the attainment of *some other* effect outside of how it gives and shows itself as itself. Celia says the film did not stick with her, Tom says the film has done the opposite for him, and Beatrice states that she thinks the film is *one of the best* movies of the year. What would not be as evident in written text and even less in direct language is the *tone* of the statements, which seems to

reveal a restricted anxiousness. In phenomenology, interpretation-description takes poetizing (see again van Manen, 2016, pp. 240–241), and the sonic offerings of a podcast make available what written text cannot, which in turn offer nuances of slight shifts, abrupt turns, and the *movements* of settlement (settlement takes *work*, as I write in Chapter 1. Also, compare to Manning, 2014, pp. 170–173) as they occur in real-time conversation. It is as if the co-hosts know they are transgressing unwritten rules; they relish the transgression but ultimately abide by the restrictive frameworks of consensus and the old cinephilia. They go against the theories and methods of resisting paradox and tension only up to a point.

There is a restricted anxious tone as Celia adds, “As much as maybe it has with other people,” and when Beatrice notes, “It’s probably not one of my favorite movies of the year,” to which Matt, with “that makes sense,” gives *only up to a point* technocratic confirmation, so to speak. These words might have been acknowledgments of intersubjectivity, but they are instead half-acknowledgments: They note its presence but do not engage with it outside of what preexisting logics allow. In short, the comments lack reflexivity, do not “situate” themselves or “recognize the limitations and liabilities of [their] own perspective[s]” (Weiss et al., 2020a, p. xiv). Celia’s seemingly critical comments are mired in the fact that her main focus when viewing the film was capturing it within the scope of her *own* life; Beatrice’s reasons for her critiques are that *The Farewell* does not measure up to particular great Chinese films (lists, rankings, hierarchies, male-curated theories). She makes these critiques *even after she mentions* that *The Farewell* is a different type of film. Tom’s moments of recognizing, embracing, and interpreting-describing paradox (“The more *specific* she gets with Chinese culture, the more I related to it”) are caught up in first-person preconception, as are Celia’s and Beatrice’s statements.

Phenomenologically speaking, a universal singularly experienced is different from relatability. Universal experiences are experienced differently by each person doing the experiencing. It is the extraordinariness in the ordinary, the singularity in phenomena that gives this orientation its possibility, began each time anew, not reproduced and repeated as a formula

(van Manen, 2016, pp. 41, 221, 226, 372). “Relatability” is the natural attitude unquestioned or bracketed to be left to the side. What would it mean if films were not treated as items on a list to check off, to be incorporated inside an existing, ever-present list—if the formulas that made this “efficient” were rethought to make room for more nuance, for reception to be *un*settled? What would it mean if films were not “penalized” for not being a filmmaker’s “best” or a filmgoer’s “favorite”? Superlatives such as “best” are, themselves, limiting structures with their own preexisting logics manufactured based on things *other than*.

Toward Format as Paradox

The imbrications among the four appearances of the ubiquity of reception make even more complex the grafting of preexisting logics onto new experiences, as does the enmeshing of the appearances into the repeated format of *Next Best Picture*’s (Neglia et al., 2019) review episodes. Part of that format is the segment at the end during which each host “rates” the film on a scale from 1 to 10: Potential nuance in the conversation is sacrificed to the need to use a method to place films in hierarchies and, as I state at the start of this chapter, to pose a settled, discursive thought from a particular standpoint. I also state that there is possibility in what filmgoers *do* with such ratings, as that need not be settled. In this case, this potential must be left to *Next Best Picture*’s listeners; the hosts do little with their foreclosing determinations.

Placed at the end of the episode, there is no time to do much of anything with the numerical “rating,” and across episodes, there is more of a focus on reproducing the formula than there is on what might be new about any given film in terms of how the formula is realized or fulfilled anew in each iteration of it. There is no room for paradox. In other words, there is no consideration of how a formula can remain *dynamic* even as it is followed as a proven way to *engage in what becomes dynamic*. This consideration is akin to a central theme of this dissertation and its phenomenological and interdisciplinary import: working *with* but not centering theory and method. Educational viewing is hard to come by on *Next Best Picture*; this is due to the lack of paradox or, rather, the hosts not fully acknowledging and embracing it when

it gives itself and then shows itself. But there is potential, and there is potential for listeners—teachers and students in the formal classroom and beyond—to grapple with how what they hear is *almost* but not quite a conversation that educates because it grapples.

Past, Present, and Mastery: A Conclusion That Does Not Foreclose

In "Securing the Fictional Narrative as a Tale of the Historical Real: *The Return of Martin Guerre*," the 11th chapter in *Perverse Spectators*, Staiger (2000) writes of film reception as a practice of attempting to master the past through narrativizing (p. 191). But this endeavor of "fixing" the past turns out to have more to do with the present:

> Such a fixing, securing, or pinning down of the past as coherent is attempted not for the past's sake but for the sake of the present—such a representation appears to ward off the threatening anxiety of having to recognize the inability of an individual to control and master the self-as-subject. (p. 196)

Staiger's chapter here is in the context of films purported to be based on truth (or myth, or legend). I draw connections to other contexts of film reception when "truth" (or theory, or method) is challenged by what arises, creating paradox and tension that may or may not be recognized or acknowledged. Attempts at mastering the present through "fixing" the past bring to mind how Singh (2018) describes mastery as an attempt to subjugate what is encountered (see Chapter 4 of *Unthinking Mastery* and the final section of Chapter 2 above). Attempts at mastering the present through the past are also attempts to use consensus and lists and rankings and hierarchies to legitimize practices of reception that are not reflexive. The systemic criteria for consensuses, lists, rankings, and hierarches were established in the past. They set the dominant patterns for what people find "worth their time" and are often veiled over as "new" insights about a film. With *Next Best Picture*'s (Neglia et al., 2019) *Farewell* review, format and other circumscribing structures can be thought as the (un)moving parts that mobilize the *continued settlement* of the old cinephilia and the natural attitude. Hanich (2018), in film

phenomenology and reception, writes of filmgoers' seemingly perpetual disappointment with film adaptations of literary works.

In simultaneously parallel, imbricating, and intersecting ways, what Hanich (2018) writes is aligned with what Staiger (2000) writes. "Mineness" in Hanich is related to the strong desire, in Staiger, and in Singh (2018), to fix and to master. Hanich explains that "mineness" is a phenomenological expression closely associated with a "reader's [of a written text] desire for recognition, an important term in social and political theory that has more recently also sparked interest in aesthetics" (p. 427). In phenomenological aesthetics, as Hanich describes, the work of art (e.g., a novel) has "spots of indeterminacy and blanks" that the reader fills in, turning the work into an *aesthetic object* (pp. 426–427). The reader concretizes the text to fill in the gaps, after which the reader desires "aesthetic recognition: an intersubjective acknowledgment of what the reader has conjured up mentally while reading" (p. 427). When it comes to film adaptation, this recognition becomes difficult, as the film is *someone else's* concretization *already realized* (see pp. 436–437, and also Endnote 68 on p. 446). Often, what is "mine," what is very much personal to me, is not treated with care, not reflected back to me, not seen. As Hanich notes, "this amplified sense of mineness [see p. 431] psychologically complicates the experience of accepting and appreciating the adaptation" (p. 427). Mineness is amplified by the ability to have control over one's reading experience—that is, to be able to hold the book in the hand, to leaf through it, to annotate it, to pick it up and put it down at will. (For Hanich's complete list, see pp. 431–439.)

One cannot control what happens on the screen in a theater, nor can one control the projection (see Hanich, 2018, pp. 432–433). But one can talk and write about a film, and one can embrace a film at first mention, or refuse it as "not worth the time." If the phenomenological attitude is an *un*settling of the ordinary, it is also a destabilization of what in the present has become ingrained, i.e., taken for granted, as ordinary. As Staiger (2000) tells us, the past might be used to resist this destabilization, but the past is not the final target. In scholarly work and in

journalistic criticism, disciplinarity, reproducible formats, and the old cinephilia make it easier for (what van Manen aptly calls) “daily business” to proceed and for the ubiquity of reception to fail in meeting educational viewing, according to which conversations are more than facsimiles of what has already been “settled.”

The “Educational” in the Literature on Film in Formal Classrooms

In a 1945 issue of *The Elementary School Journal*, Stephen M. Corey writes, “After pupils have reacted to a good instructional film, they will behave differently” (p. 324). These behaviors include the ability to “read with greater understanding” and to “assume a different attitude toward a practice or an institution or an object” (p. 324). After his list of desirable behaviors a good classroom film can elicit, Corey continues: “Persons trying to appraise a classroom film will have clearly in mind definite ways of behaving which they want to teach and which, in their opinion, the film will help them teach” (p. 324). Although my focus is on the secondary and postsecondary levels, Corey’s piece has importance across grade divisions. This possibility is why I allowed for K–16 and beyond in my survey of literature that is the topic of this section. There are two reasons why I include Corey specifically, outside of the fundamentality of elementary school. First, included in my survey of literature on “film in the classroom” are “educational” or “instructional” films, which have been received and have developed separately from feature films, those films not made for educational or classroom purposes.

Second, and most importantly, what emerged from my engagement with Corey (1945) was that much of what he wrote in the early 20th century still persists today at all levels of formal education. In other words, when it comes to teachers and administrators *receiving* film (individual films and film as a medium), what might be dismissed as “outdated” in Corey is, in fact, still present in thought and practice. And it is, as I argue, up for *un*settling—ongoing, critical reconsideration in a reflexive manner. Having clear instructional and curricular objectives is a seemingly indisputable aim. But, with the ubiquity of reception in mind, I reiterate nuanced considerations of what undergirds the most basic and complicated assumptions we (educators)

make about film in and out of the formal classroom. I reiterate nuanced considerations of how those assumptions shape the behaviors we take for granted as settled in their authority to decide the behaviors and learning we prioritize and impart. In phenomenological reflection, this means attention to givens that show themselves, to what might arise beyond what is and what becomes established habit in viewing film and in teaching, schooling, and the actual conversations that take place in those settings.

Indeed, in the literature, many of Corey's (1945) sentiments are shared and underscored. Combined with what arises in the departures, there is a different kind of conversation that is not actual or direct, nor do I place authors into conversation. Instead, the conversation is one in which there are close ties and also indirect ties to one or more of three general orientations: "using" films for, as I introduce in Chapter 2, *some other goal* (Golden, 2007; Hobbs, 2006; Marcus, 2005; Sewell & Denton, 2011); teetering between *some other goal* and what I call educational viewing (Berlak, 1996; Colter & Ulatowski, 2013; Goble, 2010; Johnson, 1998; Katz, 2007; Parkes, 2009; Wright & Bowery, 2003), in which there are closer encounters with the films themselves as they give themselves; and embracing more fully what it might mean to proceed *with* films rather than without them in service of *other* goals, approaching most closely educational viewing toward educational conversation (Gibbs, 2017; Morris, 2005).

The Places of Film Itself

The literature comprises works that include rich moments that *un*settle the taken-for-granted ordinary. These moments include intriguing contradictions that provoke and linger. Overall, however, there is a need for deeper engagement with the films themselves and with an ongoing, fuller acknowledgment of the role the ubiquity of reception plays in the repeated and reproduced gestures and practices of film in the classroom. For example, if a disciplinary aim, such as illustrating a theoretical concept, renders a film's meaning "essentially the same whether against this background or that background" (Gibbs, 2017, p. 268), perhaps film is not

the source for that endeavor. Although financial concerns might be less prohibitive (Corey, 1945; Parkes, 2009), I argue that it is still important for teachers to ask themselves if film is appropriate for their aims if they are not going to let the film give itself as itself—that is, if the film, in its *entirety*, is "secondary to the pedagogic principle under discussion, and its effectiveness in illustrating the principle is therefore more dependent on an intervention on the part of a teacher" (Gibbs, 2017, p. 268). In other words, when the unique characteristics of film are not recognized, the impact of such thinking, of such reception of film, reverberates.

On the singularities of the cinematic artform, Graham Parkes (2009) writes, "Clearly it is another nature which speaks to the camera as compared to the eye" (p. 40). Robert Colter and Joseph Ulatowski (2013) say it this way: "While the use of film may introduce a variety of complexities that thought experiments do not, the films offer the benefit of concretizing the issues in a way not easily replicable by thought experiments" (p. 255). What Goble (2010) notes is also what makes film distinct from other mediums: "Learning about . . . film can be daunting [due to the interplay between] art and design . . . lighting, photography, cinematography, acting, writing, directing, music, editing, choreography, and a considerable range of . . . technologies like CGI," which all converge with filmgoers' imaginations (p. 30) and reception.

At times, these three essays "utilize" film technocratically, limiting it to the aims of demonstrating a wide range of philosophical concepts in the university classroom, a narrower range of concepts concerned with moral philosophy in the "pre-college" classroom, and a "mindful use" of film in the K–12 English classroom, respectively. But, at several points, what arises is film organically pushing the authors beyond the assumptions of habit and, in turn, pushing them to encourage their students and readers to embrace paradox and tension toward educational viewing. Educational viewing necessitates a phenomenological attitude as a filmgoer, which necessitates facing up to the tensions that arise when confronting the ubiquities of reception and film. It is important, then, to (re)consider traditional, settled ideas about

“educational” both in the category “educational film” and in how it is thought more broadly. I posit that “educational” be not only received but also expanded in thought and practice.

“Educational” Expanded

Fuller acknowledgment of the role the ubiquity of reception plays when film is brought into the formal classroom involves having wonder about the gestures and practices involved, and it involves imagining and acting toward the expansion of “educational” to bring “educational” beyond the institutional and the concomitant technocratic frames. It is to this expansion of the “educational” in the context of film in the formal classroom that I now turn. This expansion also brings to mind my own expansion of the “educational” from merely learning something to a thinking otherwise, a grappling that, for me, is the phenomenological attitude.

Fuchs et al. (2016) describe educational film as “films that were primarily produced for use in schools and the classroom, or which appeared in national educational film libraries and received appropriate official sanction” (p. 2). Educational films have been relegated to lesser status behind more popular films, or films made principally for entertainment and art. In the epigraph to their introduction to a special issue on educational films in *Journal of Educational Media, Memory, and Society*, Fuchs et al. (2016) highlight this widespread predisposition with a quotation from Eugen Schwarz (1976): “If you are bored to tears in the cinema, you are most likely watching an educational film” (Schwarz, 1976, p. 90, as cited in Fuchs et al., 2016, p. 1).

In “I Pledge Allegiance: The Politics of Reading and Using Educational Films” in *Curriculum Inquiry*, Elizabeth Ellsworth (1991) decries the “long-standing assumption that education films subordinate aesthetic expression and formal innovation to such an extent that they become insignificant as *film* practice” (p. 42). Media education scholars and film scholars perpetuate this subordination, and this has, as Ellsworth also argues, resulted in the inability to address how a prominent film practice has contributed to the maintenance of unequal power relations in formal schooling, one of the “central institutions of socialization” that has the tools to reify its own authority and continually present hierarchies of race, gender, class, ethnicity, and

sexuality as “natural” (pp. 41–42, 52, 55, 58–62, and elsewhere). The *people* in positions of producing social issue documentaries, propaganda films, and educational documentaries are *at work* to—in the case of educational documentaries—impart the message that *new knowledge* is available but has *already solved* the problem at hand: There is no need for the viewer—the student—to participate in social action or “join in a struggle for survival” in the “‘public’” sphere outside of school—as if the school were somehow outside of the world of the public (p. 50, see also pp. 45, 49).

Anne Bruch (2016) notes that there has been movement toward serious scholarly engagement with aesthetics and form in educational films. This is due to the move toward the iconic or visual in the humanities, according to which “pictures do not exist as mere illustrations of texts and supposedly authentic documentation of historical events, but rather they are themselves semiotic elements that are created for particular purposes” (p. 121). I argue that a phenomenological attitude can help this “shift in the perception” (p. 121) spread to film reception. Facing up to the paradox and tension that result when what arises does not confirm the assumptions of habit can lead to grappling with what we encounter, not accepting or rejecting according to the amount of deviation from preexisting logic. A phenomenological attitude can also be a reminder that forcing a film into the service of a teaching objective is proceeding without the film, which speaks to the reception of film as a medium.

These concerns about the reception of “educational” also exist for feature film—films categorized as “popular,” “entertaining,” arthouse, narrative fiction or documentary, or most generally not specifically made for the classroom. When these films are brought into a formal classroom, they, to a large extent, become “educational” due to the preexisting logics that have already come to define the sense of the term. And teachers themselves perpetuate this when they attach films to the teaching of *something else*—when they mine films for the concepts attached to the subject matter at hand (see again Gibbs, 2017). All around there is disengagement based on assumptions of habit: “Educational” is deemed “boring,” unaesthetic,

not worth the time for authentic engagement. Aesthetic, popular, or art films are pushed to the side as not important enough to the classroom. When included, they are used for technocratic purposes to the point that the films themselves are lost to *some other goal*. As I state in Chapter 2, this involves going in already looking for what can be categorized, thematized, and labeled in the direction of something else that is at stake separate from the film as a phenomenon. And it can also mean *presenting* films as such to students. It would not be unexpected, then, if students come to attach a disapproving "educational" to feature films and educational films alike, especially when educators themselves perpetuate the same ideologies that Fuchs et al. (2016) and Ellsworth (1991) resist. I encountered in the literature teachers and scholars who perpetuate that feature films are mostly for entertainment, unworthy to have a legitimate place in the classroom unless buttressed by the "educational." In "Meaningful Teaching Tool and/or 'Cool Factor'? Instructors' Perceptions of Using Film and Video Within Teaching and Learning," Marquis et al. (2020) find that these attitudes about film are pervasive.

Using anonymous email surveys across seven Canadian universities in business, health sciences, humanities, interdisciplinary and social sciences, engineering, and science, Marquis et al. (2020) gauged university instructors' "motivations for and methods of using film and video in their teaching, as well as the challenges and obstacles they encounter in doing so" (p. 142). Wijnker et al. (2019) used a film theory perspective—separating the educational film "genre" into its own genres (pp. 3177–3178)—to suggest a focused rather than intuitive system for secondary science teachers in the Netherlands to utilize when they choose educational videos for the classroom. They used teacher interviews, video analyses, open and axial coding, and the constant comparative method for data that also included student evaluations. For both of these studies there is exceptional attention to detail and confrontations with the settled logics of film and video in the formal classroom. Working *with* them rather than centering numerical representations of reception and "aims" and the theories and methods of "genre," I ask what role intuition might play and what preconceptions are not made explicit.

Resisting the Comforts of the "Settled"

In the literature on film in the formal classroom, the paradoxes and tensions that emerge from irony and contradiction emphasize the possibilities that arise when we account for the ubiquity of reception as a significant motivating factor in educators' gestures, habits, and decision making, which find their way into theories and methods of pedagogy, lesson plans, and curriculum. Accounting for the ubiquity of reception in this context is an investment in more nuanced ways of receiving film. In "Against the Comfort of Catharsis: Teaching Trauma and the Sobering Lesson of *Train De Vie*," Morris (2005) asks destabilizing questions in the context of teaching the Holocaust *with* film. These questions are about the confrontation between comforts so ingrained that they might not feel like comforts at all. *Train De Vie un*settles the very notions of what it means to be what Judith E. Doneson (1991) calls an "active participant in history" (Doneson, 1991, p. 21, as cited in Morris, 2005, p. 3), what it means to be shocked, and what it means to engage with humor and crisis on the screen.

Just as "catharsis" is a literary term and also something a film can provide, comforts in teaching (read, *teaching itself*) are bound up in film reception—what we go in looking for or go in expecting to feel, especially by the end of a film or class session, even while pressing concerns remain. In arguing *with* film rather than without it in the service of *some other* goal, Morris (2005) captures in *ongoing* ways how facing up to the limitations of the tendency to graft preexisting expectations onto new encounters can lead to an openness to grapple rather than to the continued settlement of the already established status quo, or of *variations* of it. Educational viewing as a phenomenological attitude creates new senses for what film reception can mean.

The Ongoing Thinking Otherwise and Hartman's Historical Poetics

In "An Atlas of the Wayward," in Book One of *Wayward Lives*, Hartman (2019) includes her first refence or analogy to moving pictures. She does so in introducing "two young women walking hand in hand along the sidewalk":

> One girl nudged the other with her elbow, and they stopped in front of one of the shops and peered into the window filled with rows of shoes. The large plate glass window allowed them entry into the world of radiant objects, and they too became part of the beautiful display. Their reflections floated on the surface of the glass, the brown faces resplendent as they hovered above the sea of items, lulled by the surfeit of goods. The shop window fascinated them and for a few moments interrupted their stroll while they gazed at the display window as if it were a moving picture. . . .
>
> Two colored girls, not yet futureless, desired a beautiful pair of shoes that lured them into a world so much better, so much bigger than ugly tenements and the press of poverty. They looked long and hard at all the objects on display in the shop window, expectant and dreaming of a way out. (pp. 81, 83)

This story is more than a typical recounting of entrancement via the phenomenon of moving pictures. Hartman's orientations toward the materials she gathered for the story and the aesthetics of how she puts the words on the page rearrange and unsettle authorized histories (p. xiv), combining a fundamental questioning of "authorized" with a rethinking of—by extension—film reception. Rather than maintain what *has been* (legitimized by archival documents), she reinscribes the profound effects of moving pictures from an otherwise that presents new possibility. In doing this, Hartman defies "settled" scopes of historical practice, aesthetics, reception, and method.[4]

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[4] In "A Note on Method," Hartman states, "The aim is to convey the sensory experience of the city and to capture the rich landscape of black social life. To this end, I employ a mode of close narration, a style which places the voice of narrator and character in inseparable relation, so that the vision, language, and rhythms of the wayward shape and arrange the text. . . . This story is told from inside the circle. . . . I prefer to think of this book as the fugitive text of the wayward. . . ." (pp. xiii, xiv). It is important to note that, in the three-page statement of method, there is no one concise, one-word term that, at one fell swoop, "covers" or encapsulates *all* she does or reduces it to an easily reproducible "standard."

Reception and the Speculative: Critical Fabulation and Historical Poetics

Hartman (2008, 2018, 2019) unsettles “authorized” histories simply by writing from another gaze. I say *simply* not to insinuate that the work is easy. I say it to mean that she places stories of Black women *into* history, not beneath it, alongside it, or adjacent to it. She tells stories of lives and upholds them as worthy of being told with boundless respect and full attentiveness to the dynamism with which those who lived those lives saw their own lives. In *Wayward Lives*, her histories are of Black women from 1890–1935 (Hartman, 2019), but her other work delves into times before and after. Importantly, all Hartman’s work shows a time period’s irrevocable aftereffects and afterlives. Hartman engages deeply the fragments of what she can find, fragments of Black lives, fragments *by design* meant to push those lives out of consciousness except for the idea of Black life as *vagrant*, *a drain on civilized society*.

From the speculative histories of her early work (Hartman, 1997, 2007) to the “critical fabulation” (Hartman, 2008, 2018) and “historical poetics” (Hartman, 2018, 2019) of her later work and her latest book, respectively, Hartman has conducted her research from “authorized” documents, but she has not centered them; in this way, she works from what is available but also gives her subjects lives not relegated to the “criminality” they were *written into* by laws that prevented them from taking full possession of their own bodies, their own whereabouts, and their own security in the eyes of the state (see “imminence of future criminality” in Hartman, 2019, p. 223, and following). As is clear in “The Anarchy of Colored Girls Assembled in a Riotous Manner” and in *Wayward Lives*, Hartman’s (2018, 2019) subjects are Black women who *lived otherwise* and refused to submit to a legibility that cribbed them into contexts that deemed them criminal for existing on their own terms and categorized them as unworthy of being at the real forefront of their own lives, much less fully realized people in “official” records such as social work case files, court documents, history books, and captions under photographs.

Histories, especially so-called long-established histories, are at best “speculative” when they are founded on assumption and the casting of certain groups into roles of flat characters

serving the purposes of buttressing *some other goal* whose founding principle is the bracketing out to forever leave to the side the reality that the people in those groups live lives *through their own gazes*. Therefore, I argue that the term “speculative” in reference to history be recast as not to exclude those histories that have been most widely disseminated into print and into minds as the mainstream, “traditional” narratives that dominate the conversations of scholarship, education, and thought. On the other hand, to call Hartman’s work speculative is to denote her resisting the violences of “authorized” histories—calling her work speculative is to honor how she conducts it and what it accomplishes.

I have said that reading Hartman can profoundly engender the ongoing thinking otherwise of both educational viewing and educational conversation. While her thinking and writing in its form and content are not explicitly phenomenological, Hartman offers dimensions to phenomenological thinking—the thinking otherwise about our settled knowledges grounded in an acceptance of “authorized” histories and “authorized” ideas about the aesthetic turn all but required in phenomenological interpretation-description (see Bradley, 2019, paras. 21–23, for a different reading of “phenomenological”). Hartman unsettles “traditional” and “authorized” and “official” histories, false and legitimized histories that have become the sought-after *materials of mastery*. “Legitimacy” has come to mean mastering and endorsing the stories that have been espoused and “settled” to form the foundations of settler colonial logics. These logics try to keep the foundation from betraying itself as unstable ground, as the ground is shaky due to its negation of and assaults against those whom settler colonialists have cast to hold up the ground but not share in its freedoms. As what it means to be settled reveals itself in this way, there can be a destabilization of what it means to be “traditional,” “authorized,” or “official.”

As I write in Chapter 1, I refer to Hartman as a scholar of what cannot be known of history. Her speculative histories are extraordinary in their orientation toward a temporal relationship between the past, present, and future and the place of narrative in resisting confrontation with what it is we fear would go too far in destabilizing the comforts of the stories

we have already set down or accepted. This brings back to mind Section 2 above and Staiger's (2000) work in film reception. In "Venus in Two Acts," Hartman (2008) holds herself to account in acknowledging this in her own research and writing. The result was critical fabulation, and later historical poetics, rethinking further what it might mean to be a scholar of what cannot be known of history. In not pretending to "know," she expands "unknowable" to include recorded histories, histories that make the lives of African American women legible only in contexts that do not recognize their lives outside of settler colonial boundaries founded in chattel slavery (see Hartman, 2018, 2019).

Film as Imaginative Glimpses Into the Ongoing Otherwise

If Singh (2018) asks us to, along with her, unthink mastery, Hartman, with her historical poetics, takes us *there*. In *Wayward Lives*, Hartman (2019) describes other instances of the transportive effects of film and moving picture technologies having profound impacts on some of the women in her histories (pp. 110–111, 137–138, 143, 238). In "A Chronicle of Need and Want," also in Book One, Mamie Sharp, a resident of Philadelphia, felt that attending musical theater was "the antidote to the stereopticon views of the poor in dilapidated homes" and also that picture plays "in a darkened auditorium . . . seemed more real to her than the three-room flat in which she lived. . . . The images flickering across the screen transported her from a decent tenement on an awful block" and were the "opposite of staying in place, locked inside the cramped rooms of Saint Mary Street" (pp. 137–138). What also transports is the manner in which Hartman puts her descriptions to the page.

Approaching with the written word those filmic effects it describes, the book *itself* is a series of tremendously crafted "de-distanced projection[s]" (Loht, 2017, p. 61) that place me *right there* as if I were observing in the moment, as in a film, "what might have happened or might have been said or might have been done" (Hartman, 2008, p. 11) as Hartman (2008) "jeopardize[s] the status of the event" and "displace[s] the received or authorized account" (p. 11, see also 2019, pp. xvi–xv). I do not experience this in the typical sense of picturing the

events in a book as if they were a “movie” playing in my head. My reading—as a result of coming into contact with the writing and the research—is deeper, more immediate, more lived. In specifically describing historical poetics, Hartman (2020a) says that she “had to engage the materiality of the document, study and remake it through transposition and augmentation, redaction and annotation” (para. 6). In the *Wayward Lives* note on method, she puts it this way: “*Wayward Lives* elaborates, augments, transposes, and breaks open archival documents so they might yield a richer picture of the social upheaval that transformed black social life in the twentieth century” (p. xiv). This is what must be done to the negating White gaze in order to destabilize and have wonder about what is taken for granted in the everyday.

Thus, it can be said that phenomenology’s critical and aesthetic components are indirectly faced in Hartman’s work. They are, for me, *directly* faced. In her research and writing, Hartman critically, aesthetically, and *in a reflexive manner* poses questions about history, which means she, toward complete stories of Black women’s lives, confronts the established norms of authority in doing history. This brings new dimensions to what it can mean to have a phenomenological attitude beyond the ubiquity of reception.

Hartman’s works offer an involution into the elemental questions found in the phenomenological attitude: What is the *singular status* of the event? How can we approach the singularity of the meaning of the event (see van Manen, 2016, pp. 29, 31–36, 38–39) rather than the assumptions about it that confirm not the event but something other than? How are “authorized” and “official” veiled-over terminologies for “taken for granted,” “assumed,” “preexisting, settled logics,” and “resistance to having wonder about what is in the bracket”? Reading Hartman presents a mode of reception: film as imaginative glimpses into the ongoing otherwise of what *might* emerge. This can present new dimensions to teaching and conversations beyond the technocratic and the “old cinephilia.” Reading Hartman is preparation for new receptiveness not only in the written medium but also in the filmic, in which the ubiquity of reception is an *ongoing transformation* into educational viewing.

CHAPTER IV: UNSETTLED RECEPTION AND THE FILMS THEMSELVES

> The necessity of trying to represent what we cannot, rather than leading to pessimism or despair must be embraced as the impossibility that conditions our knowledge of the past and animates our desire for a liberated future.
>
> —Saidiya Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts" (2008, p. 13)

> I think what we're all taught, not only in film school but in film books and just by popular culture in general, [is] that the *most* important question to ask is, "Who is your audience? Who are the strangers that you're sort of pouring your guts out for?" And let's make all of our creative decisions based on *that* hypothetical. Whereas I always balked at that, because I was like, well, I actually want to make things for *me* [emphasis added] because . . . I'm not getting—you know, me as a gay, Black lover of cinema—I'm getting hardly *anything* that's geared specifically *to* me.
>
> —screenwriter, director, producer Justin Simien, *Scriptnotes* podcast, July 14, 2020

If reading Hartman is preparation for new types of receptiveness that offer an attitude in which filmgoers can grapple with what they encounter and not remain settled in the ubiquity of reception's shortcuts and patterns, reading Stewart (2007) extends that preparedness to potential encounters with phenomenological films, or films that *do* phenomenology. In other words, if Singh asks us to unthink mastery and Hartman takes us *there* in the writing, Stewart puts us, in a manner of speaking, *in the seat* to receive *films* that, simply by approximating our lives as we live them, let paradox and tension *sit*, presenting the "ordinary" in ways that may not confirm preestablished habit and that starkly reorient or reconfigure it. "An assemblage of disparate scenes that pull the course of the book into a tangle of trajectories, connections, and disjunctures" (p. 5), Stewart's *Ordinary Affects* is without the scaffolding that frames, constructs, and comforts by presenting the ordinary as typically ordinary. It is without the narrative distance of that typical guiding force that explains in its role of making legible according to established assumptions of habit even those things that are otherwise *un*measurable or unexpected.

Ordinary Affects offers perspectives about what we do with our relationships to the past, present, and future. This adds to Staiger's and Hartman's perspectives, about which I write in Chapter 3. With respect to reception's ubiquity and phenomenology as an attitude (and not a

method), this has implications for both (film) reception and scholarly work. As an academic, what would it mean to let go of the futurity of one's work and the incessant questions, "What will the impact be? Who is the audience?" What if the questions of "who will read or watch" and "what if *no one* reads or watches" did not condition research and creation? What might it mean to dwell in the *impossibility* in discerning affects, or to acknowledge more fully that trying to predict future impact is always already *reception*? By this, I mean to consider that what we take for granted—what we expect to see, what we pay attention to—is shaped by how we negotiate the pervasive "economy of attention" (see Spelman, 1997, pp. 1–14, 33, 170), which is based on what we have already made matter from notions of the future—how we and how others will evaluate in the future. In other words, assumptions of habit circumscribing within the modes of researching, creating, or sharing one's work are appearances of the ubiquity of reception.

Furthermore, teachers cannot know how assigned texts will affect students. They can be ethically aware but cannot control the response. Additionally, it is not knowable whether activist intent will land the way one imagines. Presuming we can predict the future relies on the false sense that accompanies the feeling that the future can be predicted with the right approach (read, theory or reproducible method). Stewart (2007) asks us to "slow the quick jump to representational thinking and evaluative critique" so that uncertainty can enthrall us in its givenness and in the force it exerts on us (p. 4; Harris, 2020, p. 4).

Chapter Overview and the Path Ahead

In this chapter, I develop my expansion of Stewart's (2007) ordinary affects to getting us in the seat to receive phenomenological films. That is, I argue that *Ordinary Affects* can contribute to a filmgoer's approaching educational viewing. With Stewart, Loht (2017), and other scholars, I then proceed to the three films I have chosen for this chapter to elucidate how they, as givens that show themselves, put forth conditions for educational viewing on the way to educational conversation. In advancing my central arguments, I continue in arguing for the

classroom as a space for the ordinary toward sociality rather than sociality's demise via technocratic and positivistic approaches.

This chapter—between 3 and 5—delves into three films: *If Beale Street Could Talk* (Jenkins, 2018), *Queen & Slim* (Matsoukas, 2019), and *Wildlife* (Dano, 2018). Films themselves cannot be left out of the (ongoing) path from educational viewing to educational conversation. Contrary to common practices within the ubiquity of reception, film reception requires, first and foremost, *films*, not a veiled-over engagement that is really in the service of *some other goal*, and not merely a general idea of "audience," "film," or "media." In Chapters 2 and 3, I laid out what it might mean to begin with the text and not with a feeling, to take on a phenomenological attitude as a filmgoer, to recognize and acknowledge the ubiquity of reception, and to engage in educational viewing, which combines my educational orientation (an openness to grapple) with what it might mean to embrace paradox as paradox and the tension that accompanies it when what arises does not confirm assumptions of habit. In Chapter 5, I will fully expand upon educational conversation as individual and collective pedagogical and curricular thought and practice via phenomenological film and reception in the formal classroom.

Phenomenological films push filmgoers to see responsibilities beyond mere reception (RQ1), and they push filmgoers to consider taking on a phenomenological attitude as a filmgoer (RQ2), leading them to ask questions like, "How might traditional notions of 'audience' circumscribe possibility in film reception?" Overall, engaging with films that do phenomenology is a pedagogical investment in nuance (RQ3): If teachers and students take on such engagements, *finding*, reflexively *engaging*, and ultimately *having* educational conversations would become more likely. These conversations result from and extend and return to spaces in which teachers and administrators—as colleagues—are attentive to the heretofore taken-for-granted ideas and practices of film in the classroom, which, I argue, can only change when the conversations around those ideas and practices change.

The *Ordinary Affects* of Sitting and Waiting and Unsettled Reception[5]

In *Ordinary Affects*, Stewart (2007) tells us that the ordinary is "a shifting assemblage of practices and practical knowledges, a scene of both liveness and exhaustion, a dream of escape or of the simple life" (p. 1). For ordinary affects, she writes this:

> Ordinary affects are the varied, surging capacities to affect and to be affected that give everyday life the quality of a continual motion of relations, scenes, contingencies, and emergences. They're things that happen. . . . Ordinary affects are public feelings that begin and end in broad circulation, but they're also the stuff that seemingly intimate lives are made of. They give circuits and flows the forms of a life. They can be experienced as a pleasure and a shock, as an empty pause or a dragging undertow, as a sensibility that snaps into place or a profound disorientation. They can be funny, perturbing, or traumatic. (pp. 1–2)

Contingency—or not knowing or trying to predict, frame to evaluate, or read or view with prognostication as the goal—is exemplified by the phrase *or something*. Stewart uses the phrase throughout the volume across scenes, or vignettes. The effect is an orientation toward certainty that is not stifled by presenting outcomes as predictable, or a sort of *predicting the present* in order to conceptualize the past and foreclose the future in already-determined conclusions.

In "Traces," people snatch objects they find off the (literal or metaphorical) side of the road, and "the snatching practice mixes a longing for a real world (or something) with the consumer's little dream of spying a gem or tripping over a bargain" (p. 21). In "First

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[5] I expand to educational and phenomenological film reception a presentation I wrote and delivered in feminist research analysis, a course in the Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies program at UNC Greensboro (Harris, 2020). My engagement with Stewart focused on my ideas about how *Ordinary Affects* speaks to the limiting structures of "method" and to the related pre-fashioned conceptions of "past" and "future." I am grateful to Dr. Sarah Jane Cervenak and to my colleagues in the course for their feedback and conversation.

Impressions," a scene has "the moving stillness of an apparition of some kind of life marked as southern, or western, or rural, or small town, or ranch, or something" (p. 25). In "The Vagueness of the Ordinary," two people walk through a neighborhood and observe "the vagueness or the unfinished quality of the ordinary" (p. 127). In one yard there are numerous cement statues, and we read, "They've built an ugly aluminum fence around them as if to protect them from theft. Or something" (p. 127). "Or something" implies—*is*—the embracing of what I call disparate potential—what can change the course of our expectations, or plans, or our engagement with another's story or *other conversations*. Toward *no expectation*, it is what can happen next beyond any predicted potential, expectation, codified "meaning," or promise of degrees of change. But it works *with* the natural attitude, Dasein, and our proclivity to "make sense," thematize, and categorize, as not to deny those tendencies in an advocacy in line with mastery.

In "slow[ing] the quick jump to representational thinking and evaluative critique" (Stewart, 2007, p. 4), *Ordinary Affects* focuses on what is immanent in the present. Certainty and uncertainty are one and the same; the distinction is of no matter. If Staiger (2000) shows that fixing the past has more to do with veiling over a challenging present than it has to do with the past (see Chapter 3 above), Stewart (2007) shows that formulaic, restrictive orientations toward the present (and, thus, also the past) have to do with fixing—predicting—the future. What I call disparate potential is encountered in the "heterogeneous and noncoherent singularities" of Stewart's "reeling present" (p. 4). The reeling present underscores that disparate potential is not only the potential for the "opposite" to happen subsequently or consequently, but also the potential that after the ordinary happens, it can "endure or can sag defeated. . . . It can shift in the face of events like a shift in the kid's school schedule or the police at the door" (p. 4). It is the effect of the *potential* of *something* happening next. It is "watching and waiting" in Stewart (pp. 6, 16 ["The Politics of the Ordinary"], 35 ["Scanning"], 50 ["Master Planned"]). I expand this to sitting and waiting, with the implication of a filmgoer watching a film while seated during the film's (literal or metonymical) *reeling* present projection.

As one thing happens after another in Stewart's (2007) vignettes, things happen to people, but the emphasis is on what happens, what might happen, and on how people react, not on a transcendent conceptualization of what happens or of a "character" turned into an allegorical representation or symbol. There is no veil of command over the future by way of foreclosing the present (and the past). As Stewart states, "each scene begins anew the approach to the ordinary from an angle set off by the scene's affects" (p. 5). In "Road Rage," "Danny goes over and tells the cop about the something reached for on the floor. He points out that there are all kinds of people on the sidewalk. Danny sees the cop is afraid. Danny goes over and pulls the guy out of the car. He brings him over to the cop. The cop arrests him" (p. 45). Even meaning is secondary, as meaning is not the event, and meaning is not what happens. In "Color Therapy," for instance, Stewart writes, "But the people who are really into color therapy don't read colors as symbols or codes. They're into the real surface qualities of colors and what they can do. They don't care what colors 'mean'" (p. 33). Formulating or working from theories and methods is not the point.

Phenomenologically speaking, lived experiences—not "experience" as a concept but experience as a phenomenon in itself, impossible-to-reattain encounters with phenomena—are what inspire wonder and questions of meaning or essence or singularity. But the response need not be totalizing, and it need not be without shifting—the *or something* in the reeling present. In the contingency of *or something*, there is disparate potential, which engenders receptive grappling. When what happens does not continue the flow of assumption, "daily business," or preconception, rather than resorting to a simple "Yes" or "No," performances of debate or rejection, or the comfort of a perpetual bracket, grappling begins with recognizing and embracing "the strange *or* [emphasis added] predictable progression in which one thing leads to another" (Stewart, 2007, p. 6) when the "strange" or "predictable" or even the "progression" might get turned on its head, or when the given simply *gives itself anew* (see Marion, 1997/2002, p. 4; see van Manen, 2016, p. 41). This requires an orientation toward the future in

which we do not predict what we will think or will feel or will say. This requires recognizing the forces that shape our surroundings and then reflexively facing up to contradiction, tension, and paradox in resistance against foreclosure and mastery. This is how a phenomenological attitude as a filmgoer can turn into educational viewing, which unsettles reception.

Finally, similarly to how Singh (2018) does not define mastery so as not to impose what she writes against, Stewart (2007) provides critical analysis without naming the reified terms that have become the way of naming destructive forces. Reified terms can and often do take us out of the felt present of the lived and into unlived checklists of stops and starts that do not affect, surge, and circulate. They do so by way of the ideologies they mobilize. In “Learning Affect,” Stewart notes, “Ordinary affects highlight the question of the intimate impacts of forces in circulation. They’re not exactly ‘personal’ but they sure can pull the subject into places it didn’t exactly ‘intend’ to go” (p. 40). In “Hardwired,” she, in fewer than four lines, highlights the paradox of circulation and what can be thought of as the fixedness that is a consequence of reification: “We take our cues so directly from circulating forces that the term ‘hardwired’ has become shorthand for the state of things. Little undulations are felt as pleasures and warning signs, as intoxications and repetitions in daily routine” (p. 28). A question here, which I relate to reception, is this: To what extent might the affects of what moves us or does not move us get far enough to evoke a thinking otherwise that is more than temporary? Moreover, what in our ideas about the past and the future limits what is *now*? How can a concept or a term not be totalizing?

In “The Affective Subject” (p. 59), “The Body Gyrates” (p. 75), and “Body for Life” (p. 109–113), Stewart (2007) condemns (commercialized) neoliberal “self-transformation,” i.e., “self-help” for the body, both in how we *accept in our minds* and in how we *buy into* with our money. But she never uses the word neoliberalism—or advanced capitalism or globalization (p. 1)—as the word does not “begin to describe the situation we find ourselves in” (p. 1). Instead, she writes, in part, that “there’s something *to* a little extreme self-transformation” (p. 109). In “the

effort to approach a weighted and reeling present," she goes on to explain why she does not use the term itself:

> The notion of a totalized system, of which everything is always already somehow a part, is not helpful (to say the least). . . . This is not to say that the forces these systems try to name are not real and literally pressing. On the contrary, I am trying to bring them into view as a scene of immanent force, rather than leave them looking like dead effects imposed on an innocent world. (p. 1)

By not naming neoliberalism in vignettes of ordinary affects but rather "[bringing it] into view" through unabstracted renderings, Stewart shows and tells without adopting the conventions that remove *reflexive activity* from the account but not the reality. This letting what gives itself appear brings to mind phenomenology as the account of appearances (Salamon, 2018a, p. 22; D. H. Davis, 2020, p. 4) "concerned with how the world gives itself to appearances" (Salamon, 2018a, p. 15) and my concern for appearances of reception that require watching, sitting, and waiting.

Film reception as it has been theorized and as it is largely "studied" has been always already a *prediction* using formulas, categories, themes, and reproducible methods. It has been always already a particular orientation toward the past and the future—using the past to prognosticate how people (usually thought as *groups* of people) will receive. As this dissertation asks, how can this be otherwise? How can we work *with* rather than center those formulas, categories, themes, and methods? How can conceptions or notions like "audience," "representation," "genre," or, as with Hanich (2018), "adaptation" or "disappointment," not stifle the thinking, listening, reading, and viewing reception of what *someone else* creates, of what we create individually, of what is said in conversation?

When I argue that Stewart puts us *in the seat* to receive a phenomenological film that is such because it unsettles reception, I mean that Stewart's writing attempts to take us out of predetermined systems of what we are already "hardwired" to expect and assume, releasing us into *another receptive mode* to behold someone else's idea onscreen. Because film is onscreen,

approximating life as we live it, filmgoing is a formal experience that is perhaps the most direct aesthetic version of not being in control. This most direct version of not being in control can incite *or* inspire the most visceral reactions. Ordinary affects are important in preparing for such a phenomenal encounter. In conversation with ourselves and with others in the classroom formally, in other spaces informally, and in academic work, ordinary affects can help make unsettled reception, instead of a nonstarter, an ever-evolving engagement in educational viewing, the ongoing thinking otherwise of a phenomenological attitude as a filmgoer. And for film reception, the films themselves are the ongoing arrivals that do not foreclose.

If Beale Street Could Talk **in "America (My Country 'Tis of Thee)"**

In the final scene of the film *If Beale Street Could Talk*, written and directed by Barry Jenkins (2018) and based on the 1974 novel by James Baldwin, 10 seconds before the final shot gives way to the end credits against a black background, the end credits song begins. We hear the song alongside the two main characters and their son just before we hear it alongside the scrolling list of names and contributions and whatever remains, emerges, or resurfaces in feeling, mind, and body. A song playing a film toward and through its final cut to black is certainly not atypical editing, but in giving itself anew it gives and then shows itself as atypical in the sense that in no other film could an assemblage of images and sounds meet, be greater than the sum of its parts, and combine with a song in the same way. The start of an end credits song shows yet another example of how films not only tell but mainly show. Music may be described as telling, as it, lyrics or not, speaks to events as well as aesthetic (artistic and critical sensory knowledge) and cinematic (artistic/technical) import, both in individual and unified aspects. However, music also enhances the showing; it emphasizes (in a multitude of ways) what is seen, which is unique to film in live action and animated storytelling. A film does not necessitate telling in the way that a stage play demands it.

The Song

In *Beale Street*, the song is “America (My Country ’Tis of Thee),” sung by Billy Preston (1971). Preston’s rendition uses the original lyrics with only a few minor but poignant and seemingly deliberate changes or additions. It does not suggest a wholesale celebration of the U.S. as *the* beacon of freedom. Against the lyrics, the tone is imploring and mournful: “Let freedom ring” is not a rhetorical question in declarative form. It is not sung as a restatement of what already is. “The glove has [been] pulled inside out” (see Rose, 1998, 25:00–32:10), but tacitly. What puts this forth is the song’s tone—through soul and gospel—combined with the film itself in its showing and telling. To state this another way, the film and the song come together to show and tell something new, and I am astonished before the screen. Separately on their own, the film and the song accomplish a critical, beautiful,[6] and visceral confluence of hope and protest that defies easy categorization even if put into descriptive words.

I posit that this final scene/closing credits sequence is phenomenological. It *does* phenomenology in the same sense that phenomenology “involves the transformation of the way we understand our world such that we can be astonished before it—the attempt to see our world as if for the first time, through unjaded eyes” (D. H. Davis, 2020, p. 4; see also Chapter 2 above). *Astonishment before* a film is a form of unsettled reception—reception that does not flow easily with the assumptions of habit and expectation. In the case of *Beale Street*, the ability of the final scene—amid all that precedes and connects to it—to create the conditions in which it can be viewed with unjaded eyes is the film allowing paradox and tension to *sit*; this sets up grappling with what it means to “see . . . through unjaded eyes.” It suggests seeing more questions, more possibility—educational viewing that has begun perhaps without notice.

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[6] I refer to Ross’s (2014) “inclusive sense” of beauty, in which beauty “pertains to anything worthy of approbation, to human virtues and characters, to nobility and goodness, to hidden things and truths, to the natural and the divine worlds,” in which “beauty resists binary oppositions and joins disparate and opposing terms,” and in which “artistic beauty expresses something immeasurable in finite things” (Overview section, paras. 3, 11).

The Scene

The scene that precedes and overlaps the song's beginning (it is also the song's first appearance in the film) takes place in a prison's visiting area. Tish (Kiki Layne) has brought her son, Alonzo, Jr. (Kaden Byrd), to visit her partner and his father, Alonzo, known as Fonny (Stephan James). In the wider shot—the one we get as the song begins—we see other visitations in the narrow room. Striking in this shot for me when my eyes drift away from the family of three—whose only time together must be within a New York City "correctional facility"—are the guards, pacing, waiting for anything against regulation, anything unsettling in the eyes of the state. This wide shot juxtaposed with Preston's rendition of "My Country 'Tis of Thee" is what makes me "astonished before it" when I see it—astonished before the world Jenkins creates, before the world created by the people Tish and Fonny represent. These are African Americans who live life from their own gazes. They do not center the power of the White gaze, the racism that forces Fonny to take a plea for any hope of physical freedom from the false charges the state brings against him. Tish, Fonny, and Alonzo, Jr.'s loving visitation stands alone, but it also represents their families and their neighborhood and their friends who did and do their best, not according to the standard of the White power structure but according to their own standard and to the extent to which they must work within the sovereignty of the White gaze only as far as it is absolutely necessary.

The Epigraph

In the film's epigraph, there are quotations by James Baldwin. Temporally at this other end of the film, it begins with background sounds of the very thing it suggests—a street, or a neighborhood. The words on their black background give way to the first of Nicholas Britell's (2018) score in exquisite brass and strings, a finite thing in which something immeasurable is expressed in its artistic beauty and in which "opposing terms" and "binary oppositions" are joined together (Ross, 2014, paras. 3, 11; see Footnote 6 above). Baldwin's words refer to the novel on which the film is based. His words can also speak to the intricacies and simplicities that

mark the paradox and tension that phenomenological films set up and let sit and to which *Beale Street* is no exception. The words read, in part, “Every black person born in America was born on Beale Street, born in the black neighborhood of some American city. . . . This novel deals with the impossibility and the possibility, the absolute necessity, to give expression to this legacy” (Jenkins, 2018, 00:35–1:00). The final sentence can speak to Loht’s (2017) account of “film-as-philosophy [as having to do with] the phenomenological nature of, on the one hand, the film affording a certain disclosure to the viewer, and on the other hand the viewer’s questioning, factical projection that discloses the film’s meaning” (pp. 164–165): “Beale Street is a loud street. It is left to the reader to discern a meaning in the beating of the drums” (Jenkins, 2018, 00:44–1:00). As I have stated in Chapters 1 and 2, Loht argues that such films set up barriers for understanding by presenting human characters and situations “that refuse easy articulation” (p. 165). But in refusing easy articulation, intelligibility, or legibility—in refusing in their givenness the smooth integration into preexisting logics—the characters and the situations captivate (p. 165). And, through “Dasein’s structure of care” (p. 165), in which filmgoers project themselves into the film’s world (by way of de-distancing), filmgoers endeavor to resolve the destabilizations the film carries out (pp. 61, 165; see also Review of the Literature: Film Reception Theory section above, paras. 1–2).

Already Reception

In my educational orientation, “resolution” is not the goal, but rather *learning more* from grappling. As I write in Chapter 2, I work with but do not center Dasein. If we do *already know how to watch a film*, if the world both onscreen and off does already seem coherent to us, if we do always already have “an understanding of [ourselves] within the world, even if [we] are not constantly, explicitly and/or consciously aware of that understanding” (Neubauer et al., 2019, p. 94), I ask, how does one sit outside of that? I ask about the possibilities of not already knowing, about what “coherence” can mean when it comes to film reception. Film is already reception, but

not in the traditional sense of reception as critique, totalized notions of “audience,” “method,” or *going in looking* for something in particular.

Film is already reception in that the bond between the elements of filmmaking is meant to be seen and heard. A phenomenological film asks viewers to do more than “feel something” and prepare an “opinion.” By giving what does not coalesce into easy conceptions or prefabricated frames, a phenomenological film asks filmgoers to dwell with what they may have placed into unconsidered brackets or dismissed as incidental or accessory, what they have ignored in plain sight when it is presented separately or placed alongside other offerings or as part of assemblages. As I say in Chapter 1, the place of hermeneutic phenomenology, according to which we can learn to interpret and reinterpret in whatever place we find ourselves in tacit understanding within the world (Heidegger, 1927/1962, p. 65; Dreyfus, 1991, pp. 2–3; George, 2020, 1.3. The Hermeneutical Circle section), contributes to my ongoing thinking otherwise that underscores phenomenology as an attitude and not a method. My phenomenological attitude as a filmgoer faces up to the ubiquities of film and reception. Otherwise, one might place on these ubiquities the veil of Dasein, or one might *capitalize on* Dasein so as to foreclose rather than grapple.

In other words, I reiterate here that phenomenology “remains the unsurpassable presupposition of hermeneutics” (Ricœur, 1981, p. 114, as cited in Baracco, 2017, p. 38) and that film phenomenology, as Baracco (2017) writes, “concerns our perception and understanding of film and the way in which we perceive and experience represented film worlds” (p. 39). I am interested in how what is settled—and, thus, preexisting logic—in film viewing, film interpretation, and filmgoing gives way to astonishment in D. H. Davis’s sense of seeing the world as if for the first time. I argue for astonishment that takes sitting and waiting and that takes reception that is *un*settled. Such a phenomenological attitude meets perception and understanding and asks for more than a sort of methodological filling in of the blanks. Like Baldwin’s intentions for his novel, the film *If Beale Street Could Talk* indeed leaves it to the

filmgoer to discern meaning, but in the gestalt of an extensive list of artistic and technical elements that only the filmic medium possesses, and from the extensive care that the film exudes. What might have seemed too disparate to exist together—"the impossibility and the possibility"—is infused within every shot. To be sure, the song, the scene, and the epigraph are never isolated as *just the* song, *the* scene, or *the* epigraph. Phenomenologically speaking, this enhances the richness of witnessing moving pictures and presents boundless possibilities for thinking about "the relationship of self to art" (Casebier, 2014, para. 9) in terms of reception in the moment and giving accounts of appearances.

The Acting and What Must Be Said

Through Daniel Carty, played by Brian Tyree Henry, I see a transformation as if I had never before seen a transformation of the kind. It is a facial transformation that happens when what had hitherto been latent comes to the surface. The change is overwhelming even independently of its contrast to whatever moods had previously made themselves manifest. Henry's acting—what he gives that then shows itself—is a visual of what words cannot achieve. But words do not fail—they are simply and wholly unsuited to giving what the face can in the case of an actor so attuned. During a chance meeting with Fonny, his longtime friend, Daniel tells Fonny of a death that he lives through, the death that does not initially show on his face *in a way that would betray it* to us or to Fonny but that does so when he begins to tell Fonny of what has happened to him since the last time they saw each other. He had been framed for a crime and had spent 2 years in prison. When Fonny asks, "How long you been out"? Daniel lets him know that being out is only a physical state: "About three months. It was bad, man. Very bad. I mean, it's bad *now*" (Jenkins, 2018, 53:18–53:41). This brings back to mind an earlier sequence narrated through voiceover and the narrated sequence that directly precedes the final scene. Here, I will recount these before returning to the conversation between Fonny and Daniel.

Tish narrates the film through voiceover at key moments. What she does might be described as "moving the narrative forward," but it is so much more than that. In a narration

accompanied by *montage* that intercuts moving images of Fonny in his earlier life with still photographs of people of color in the grips of the "law," Tish tells of Fonny's forging his own path in life. She also proceeds with an indictment against the U.S. legal system, the racism of those who follow it, and the death that it doles out—death that comes in many forms:

> Fonny used to go to a vocational school where they teach kids to make all kinds of shitty things like card tables and hassocks and chests of drawers which nobody's ever gonna buy. But Fonny didn't go for it at all, and he split, taking most of the tools from the workshop with him. He started workin' as a short-order cook—so he could eat—and he found a basement where he could work on his wood, and he was at our house more than he was at his. It was all so simple. Learn this, build that. Get a job and work it until the job became you. But Fonny had decided on a whole new view. You see, he had found something that he wanted to do. And this saved him from the death that awaited the children of our age. And though it took many forms, the death itself was very simple. And the cause was simple, too. The kids had been told that they weren't worth shit. And everything they saw around them proved it. (5:45–7:00)

In introducing the final scene of the film in another narration—after the deaths of a false charge and prison have reached Fonny—Tish expounds on the events that led to the decision that Fonny would take a plea. A plea is a death. There is a death in Puerto Rico when Tish's mother, Sharon Rivers (Regina King), travels to Puerto Rico and is unsuccessful in getting aid to clear Fonny's name (1:26:33–1:37:39). In the U.S. legal system, the plea is the most expedient way for Fonny and Tish to see this injustice to a type of an end. The place of "rights" extends to the courts: "The game has been rigged, and the courts see it through. The trial is your right. But to bury you beneath the prison for forcin' the judge and the D.A. to do their jobs is the court's right, too" (1:48:22–1:48:50). Tish explains that she and Fonny "can't afford to be" young anymore and must now "live the life we've been given, and live it so our children can be free" (1:47:36–1:48:21). This narration and its associated montage and subsequent scene make

“My Country ’Tis of Thee” all the more poignant and also less graspable. Thinking and feeling this sequence with the former in light of the terror that still tortures Daniel—the terror that we saw in his face nearly 1 hr earlier—only add to a sense of foreboding that subsists.

The Cinematography

Continuing from, “It was bad, man. Very bad. I mean, it’s bad *now*,” Daniel goes on as terror occupies him: “They were just playing with me ’cause they knew they could. . . . When you in there they can do with you whatever they want. You hear me? *What . . . ever they want*” (53:49–54:16). The men are shot in medium close-up as they sit at Fonny’s kitchen table. In this portion of the scene, the camera relies on panning rather than on shot-reverse shot. The two instances of reverse shot are from Daniel to Fonny. The camera always pans to Daniel. Because it is Daniel who is recounting the death that more than lingers and will always weigh him down, panning allows for sitting and waiting *continuously*, so that we can listen, and panning sustains Daniel’s delivery so that we can fully show his story respect. There is the sense of sustaining without interruption or cutting. The sustaining—maintained by the editing—supports the import of Daniel’s words for Fonny to fully absorb them so that Daniel can secure the reaction that lets him know that Fonny understands and *does not want to go* to prison. Fonny must see what Daniel means in a way that cannot be communicated with words but only with Daniel’s face, which includes his glances and the way he moves his eyes to attempt to show Fonny the truth of what the violence of prison did to him. He hopes to get through to Fonny: “The White man has *got* to be the devil. Because he sure ain’t a man. Some of the things I’ve seen . . . I’ll be dreaming about it until the day I die, man” (54:16–54:59). These words must be said.

After Fonny responds, “Hey, it’s all right, man. You out now. And you young,” putting his hand on Daniel’s neck, and the camera follows the path made by Fonny’s arm, Daniel wants to, once again, be clear: “Man, I hear what you’re sayin’ . . . and I appreciate it, but . . . you don’t know. . . .” Daniel is now in close-up from the side: “The *worst* thing, man, the worst thing is that

they can make you so fucking *scared*, Fonny. Just . . . *scared*, man" (54:59–55:08). I sit astonished by this scene not only because it underscores the inevitability that awaits Fonny and countless others whose legacies are given expression here and elsewhere. My astonishment also comes from witnessing the unification of the work put forth by the cinematographer, the actors, the writer/director, and many others whose work makes the scene and the film.

Barriers of Astonishment

The technicalities of the creation of a finished product dissolve in a film's unfolding moments. For phenomenological films, the technicalities do not foreclose. Knowledge about how the final cut happened does not take away from the coming together of parts that do occur separately but that could only come into true existence, subsistence, and being through conversation and ongoing collaboration. The acting is not just the acting; the words the actors say are more than just words. The cinematography is not just the cinematography. The direction is not just direction. *As if for the first time*, this means grappling with seeing and hearing and feeling what we think we have seen, heard, and felt before but never have in that same way. *If Beale Street Could Talk* sets up *barriers of astonishment* for the filmgoer to confront. But it does so with a care that sends the message that the barriers are worth the engagement. These barriers are not put forth to block the viewer but to present something new from places that are unexpected because they might seem familiar.

Queen & Slim **and the Rhythm of a Relationship**

One might describe *Queen & Slim* (Matsoukas, 2019) as a film about the titular characters, Queen (Jodie Turner-Smith) and Slim (Daniel Kaluuya), evading the "law" for 6 days after Slim shoots a police officer to death in self-defense in response to the officer's shooting Queen at the climax of his show of racist brutality toward the couple after he initiates a traffic stop. But ending reception there—and then beginning, from there, to share reactions to the film—leaves *Queen & Slim* to static intertextual comparisons to another film (a film with White stars; see Yahoo Entertainment, 2019) and to a fixation on the ending, in which the two

characters are caught and killed by “law enforcement.” The jump to what already seems coherent—do they or do they not get to escape forever, one outcome or the other—does not involve sitting and waiting, finding out what the film is giving beyond the preconceived frames one *goes in looking for*.

Flattened ideas about evasion veil over the characters and circumstances. For example, such a lack of nuanced viewing might lead filmgoers to pass over the realities and knowledges that take Queen and Slim from their first date to what director Melina Matsoukas calls “the worst version of Black life and experience that you could imagine, which, I think we sadly *can all* imagine” (“Melina & Lena,” 2019, 2:57–3:09). Furthermore, Queen and Slim only leave the scene of the traffic stop because they know that there is no way their actions will be seen as anything but unjustifiably criminal. The law has never been and is not and will not be on their side. It is similar with media coverage.

As Daniel Kaluuya has noted in reference to his and Jodie Turner-Smith’s characters in *Queen & Slim* and also to the real-life situations that the film depicts, “How they’re perceived as Black people *escalated* the situation where they had to, in the bid to survive, they had to just *do things*. That needs to be interrogated. It’s the criminalization of Black life” (Yahoo Entertainment, 2019, 2:23–2:46). He goes on to condemn media portrayals “in how they describe something that’s happened. And a lot of times *subconsciously* they *blame Blackness* for things happening” (Yahoo Entertainment, 2019, 2:47–2:55). The “law’s pursuit” involves not only those employed to carry it out with the media’s assistance (although the media seems to have its own, separate pursuit as well). Those outside both fields also give aid. Among other ways, the cinematography in the film portrays this in notable instances of two subjective shots in which the camera pulls out into a wider view that only crosses the street or goes just off the sidewalk to a front porch or yard (Matsoukas, 2019, 15:57–16:06, 1:29:11–1:29:24). In only one of those instances do we actually see a person and a porch or yard, and it is only implied that a neighbor across the street contacts the authorities. The camera simultaneously communicates involvement and

distance, and it juxtaposes one concern—Queen and Slim's growing intimacy—with a different kind of concern—one that categorizes Queen and Slim as nothing more than the hunted.

Embracing Tension/"Frictional Surfaces," *Un*settling/Unflattening Reception

When it comes to film reception, flattened ideas of evasion include the either/or of life or death—are they or are they not allowed by the writer to escape to Cuba? Are they or are they not allowed to live rather than die? I argue that receiving *Queen & Slim* in this way takes *work*, despite the ease with which reproducible practices of reception can generate such frameworks. This is because the film is a phenomenological film that does not lend itself to such readings. H. A. Stadler (1990) discusses how phenomenological orientations take a different approach. Here, he interrogates the *film as dream* metaphor (pp. 44–46) and the relationships between "reality" and "fiction/illusion" and realistic/documentary and fictional/narrative film, but I draw analogies and parallels to *intertextuality as foreclosure* and dichotomous thinking around a plot's so-called denouement:

> While film theories propounding the dream metaphor simply "fade out" the state of consciousness and the sphere of "reality" in order to impose the unconscious as the sole or major "reality" to deal with, a phenomenological film theory will insist on the very frictional surfaces between "reality" and "fiction." (p. 46)

"Realistic" can be thought of as what appears coherent—what we think we already know and, thus, find ourselves (or are subconsciously) expecting. "Fictional" can be thought of as what does not adhere to those structures—what emerges and takes us unawares (see Cohen, 1982/1985, p. 4).

The idea is not to bracket out one or the other to leave it permanently to the side, or to veil over reality's or fiction's influence; rather, it is to consider a "continuum of 'realities'" (H. A. Stadler, 1990, p. 46) in which "perception, imagination, fantasy, dreams, and memory are simply different *modes of experience*, all of which constitute a sense of reality" (Laing, 1967, Chapter 2, as cited in H. A. Stadler, 1990, p. 46). It is also to recognize, acknowledge, and embrace—with

a phenomenological attitude, and with phenomenology as itself an attitude rather than a theory or a method—the tensions (H. A. Stadler's "frictional surfaces") that will arise when these and other modes of experience appear.[7]

In refusing easy articulation in the areas of genre, reality and beauty, and race and love, *Queen & Slim* asks filmgoers to engage with what is immanent and face up to what entices us to succumb to the shortcuts of preconception. As it juxtaposes seemingly disparate images, ideas, and conflicts onscreen, the film implores viewers to embrace, in reception and in conversation, what might be read as paradox and tension. It insists on a seeking toward questions that are not necessarily "deeper" but simply *different*, and it asks viewers to do the same. Phenomenologically, *Queen & Slim*, in the midst of refusing easy articulation, is not about either/or, do they or do they not, but about the *rhythm of a relationship*.

The Rhythm in the Lines

There is rhythm in the lines as Jodie Turner-Smith and Daniel Kaluuya speak to each other as Queen and Slim. The rhythm in the lines is both the changing status of their relationship and also what is everlasting in it, from the first date at a diner after Queen finally returns Slim's message on the dating app Tinder to the road journey during which they fall in love alongside, within, and before backdrops of, among so much more, dark roads, a night out dancing at a bar in which they know they are safe from betrayal, and coastal landscapes that inspire their appreciation (Matsoukas, 2019). The rhythm does not come to fruition on the page; acting, direction, and rapport had to converge to create relations that would allow it to give itself and then show itself on the screen. In describing it here, I must attempt to use language of the vocative, as phenomenologically such an aesthetic impression, due to its "indirectness, [its]

[7] This hearkens back to Singh (2018), Staiger (2000), Hartman (2018, 2019), and Stewart (2007) and resisting the practices that, for the purposes of denying or obfuscating paradox and tension, manipulate our relationships with the past, present, and future, three temporalities to which "continuum of 'realities'" can be extended directly and in analogy.

iconicity[,] belongs to the structure of poetic meaning" (van Manen, 2016, p. 46), which, unlike "the clarity of rational argument or scientific proof[,] is subservient to the phenomenological intent of letting something 'show itself' and having us 'see' what is given in prereflective experience or consciousness" (van Manen, 2016, p. 48). Indeed, the directions in a screenplay include such language, as do the in-person interactions between director, actor, and other filmmaking artists and technicians.

By rhythm, I do not mean a taken-for-granted pattern, but the in-the-moment shaping and the qualities of what is within the shape as it presents itself as itself again and again, but again and again anew in the changing and the re-forming, and in the returning and departing, partially or completely. As a filmgoer—a beholder of an aesthetic appearance—this can mean receiving something different no matter how many times one sits and waits and watches and listens to what is seemingly repetitive, or a *given*. And within that seemingly common experience, there is no promise of a certain degree of change. At the start of Queen and Slim's first date (and the film), the rhythm in the lines begins with a delayed start and culminates in a key element that is repeated later, but with a difference. Before any words are spoken, Queen has to wait for Slim to finish praying over his meal. The directions in the screenplay say, *This is how he was raised. Queen sits awkwardly waiting for him to look up* (Waithe, 2019, p. 1). Once that happens, she begins:

> QUEEN: Didn't you ask for scrambled eggs?
>
> SLIM: Yeah. It's all good.
>
> QUEEN: No, it's not.
>
> SLIM: It's just eggs.
>
> QUEEN: I have a thing about that.
>
> SLIM: Eggs?
>
> QUEEN: No, about people not doing their job well.
>
> SLIM: She's got four kids and an alcoholic husband at home. She's doing the

best she can.

QUEEN: How do you know that?

SLIM: She comes through my line every Sunday, yelling at her kids, giving me a stack of coupons. She can never find her Costco card so I always let her use mine so she can get a discount.

QUEEN: That's nice of you.

SLIM: Can I ask you something?

QUEEN: I don't know, can you?

SLIM: Easy, I know good grammar.

QUEEN: Do you?

SLIM: We're not in a classroom.

They have a quick standoff. (Matsoukas, 2019, 1:27–2:08; Waithe, 2019, pp. 1–2)

Later in the conversation, Queen says to Slim, "Do you really like this place or is it the only spot you could afford?" Slim quickly responds, "It's black owned." In this moment it is clear that Queen did not expect this response, and all she can say is, "Touché" (4:06–4:15). During this portion, the cinematographer uses shot-reverse shot wide enough to show both characters in the booth in which they sit on opposite sides. At "Touché," the camera moves to a two-shot from the side, just before Jodie Turner-Smith sits up straight in her seat to deliver her line. The rhythm in the lines and the relationship is indeed enhanced by the camera's language and the language of the actors' bodies.

The rhythm of these opening exchanges, in its flows, "standoffs," slowdowns, and re-starts, shows that there is an emerging respect between two people, even in their difference. Somehow, this respect also seems as if it has always existed. It involves not only asserting their own beliefs but also conceding to the other's when that is warranted. It is as if Queen has always treated Slim the way he would like to be treated, and not just as *she* would like to be treated (see Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017, pp. xix–xx). And it seems as if Slim has always done the

same for Queen. There is a give and take in which both are fully themselves. It is not either/or; it is “more or less” (H. A. Stadler, 1990, p. 46) depending on the situation at hand, and it is both. But fundamentally, the rhythm of the relationship unfolds *as it is*. It resists easy articulation, as does the film’s genre.

Inside and Outside of Genre

In the conversation “Melina & Lena” (2019), writer Lena Waithe describes Queen and Slim’s first meeting as “the Blackest meet-cute I’ve ever watched” as part of her calling this portion of the film a “subversive rom-com a little bit.” This is part of a larger conversation in which she and Matsoukas describe how the film does not settle into one genre but rather resists siloing itself. Matsoukas comments, “The film navigates, to me, through so many different genres. I think, yes, it’s protest art, but it starts off almost as like a horror film.” That is the point at which Waithe rejoins, saying the film also starts off as sort of a subversive rom-com meet-cute, to which Matsoukas adds, “that then turns into the worst version of Black life and experience that you could imagine, which, I think we sadly *can all* imagine now” (2:45–3:09). Encountering a film as it gives itself outside of the boundaries of one genre (or several genres) can lead to thinking a film as being about the rhythm of a relationship, or about something else more rooted in a less established or less traditional formula.

This is not to say that there are not filmmakers who intend to mix genres, include elements of a few genres, or resist settlement in genre. This is to say that genre—in filmgoers and in filmmakers—creates expectation, is *almost already* expectation. This includes simply explaining a film using a *combining of terms of genre* (“crime/drama/romance” as it currently stands on the imdb.com page for *Queen & Slim*) without going further. Siloing in genre shows up as appearances of the ubiquity of reception in conversations that emerge about film. “Takes” and “critiques” often *stay there* when, in actuality, a film may be one that resists easy articulation. *Queen & Slim* is an example of a film oriented in understanding genre but also in not making the story subservient to it. *Queen & Slim* asks filmgoers to move and dwell with it

(the film), to move and dwell through the tensions of, for example, placing elements of romantic comedy alongside notions about the horrors and realities of fear and police brutality. But for me, above all, the film pushes me to see how a relationship gives itself in ways that have *nothing to do with* the "chase." That is, Matsoukas notes that the film is about "black unity and people coming together—black love" ("Melina & Lena," 2019, 0:16–0:22). This is beyond genre. And this is lost on the viewer if reception is dominated by attention in the direction of law enforcement and its machinery hunting down Queen and Slim in order to take their lives.

Reality and Beauty in Filmmaking

At the first show of sunlight on the first full day after embarking on the journey to their first stop—New Orleans to seek help from Queen's uncle, Uncle Earl (Bokeem Woodbine)—Queen and Slim have a rhythmic exchange that also signals further development in their relationship. They learn more about each other—they say what they really feel. They are driving through Kentucky in the second of four vehicles they possess throughout the film:

> SLIM: How long before a helicopter starts flying over us?
>
> QUEEN: I don't know.
>
> SLIM: Please tell me you didn't fuck with that cop on purpose.
>
> QUEEN: Of course not.
>
> SLIM: I don't know you like that. You could be crazy.
>
> QUEEN: It should be a sin to call a Black woman crazy.
>
> SLIM: Oh, you one of those people that thinks God is a black woman, huh?
>
> QUEEN: I don't believe in God.
>
> SLIM: Lord help me. (Matsoukas, 2019, 31:37–31:53)

With this exchange, Queen and Slim match each other line by line. This is not, it seems, matching for the sake of symmetry, but instead the authentic flow with which the pair already communicates due to what has already been established in their relationship. What is and cannot be established, or fixed, is how new information arrives (Slim questions Queen's actions

from the scene with the police officer; Queen does not understand why he or anyone would question those actions) or how information is clarified (Slim is religious; Queen does not believe in God).

As Queen and Slim drive through the backdrop of a rural landscape on that morning on their way to New Orleans, we hear the lines, in part, while seeing a shot from the back window of the pickup truck they are driving. We also see through the perspective of a side-view mirror and a straight-ahead view of the road, presumably from the windshield. But the shots from the mirror and the windshield do not feel like point-of-view shots from the eyes of Queen or Slim. They feel like a juxtaposition of reality and beauty in filmmaking, what Matsoukas describes as "showing reality, but . . . in really beautiful ways . . . show[ing] culture in an artful way that's still real" ("Melina & Lena," 2019, 1:13–1:16, 1:26–1:37). This is the case for the film as a whole.

Waithe comments on Matsoukas's proclivity for holding on a "beautiful shot [of a landscape] that could be hung in somebody's house" ("Melina & Lena," 2019, 1:16–1:26) next to desperate and painful situations of lives under continual threat. Matsoukas speaks of the importance of going further and using those beautiful, artful ways to present "us [Black people] authentically ourselves and how we truly lived and how we suffer and how we dance and how we thrive" ("Melina & Lena," 2019, 1:05–1:13). By showing the complete lives of Black characters, something rarely seen onscreen in the U.S., Matsoukas shows that Black people's lives are more than what they have been reduced to by those who only see our lives through the rubrics of suffering and persecution. There is more to the picture and more to the reality, and it can be just as if not more aesthetic than anything else. These pictures onscreen are rhythms that support the rhythms in the lines, which themselves reveal lives in their completeness.

Barriers That Invite: The Making of *Queen & Slim*

When Queen and Slim arrive in New Orleans, Queen knocks hard and frantically on Uncle Earl's door. Slim comments, "Damn, why you knock like you the police?" to which Queen offers no response. So Slim continues, "If you didn't throw our phones out, we could've called."

This time Queen has a parallel response that her sharp timing makes even more effective: “If I didn’t throw our phones out, the police would’ve caught us by now.” Slim can only respond the way Queen responded to him in the diner at the start of the film—for viewers this was nearly 40 min ago: “Touché” (Matsoukas, 2019, 36:37–36:53).

Another exchange from the diner that is returned to later in the film is one involving photographs. Slim comments that he does not have many photos of himself because he knows what he looks like. Queen tells him that “pictures aren’t just about vanity. They’re proof of your existence.” Slim tells her, “My family know I exist. That’s enough,” which Queen cannot reconcile in light of her estrangement from her own family and her career as a defense attorney (Matsoukas, 2019, 3:10–3:49). By the time they are making their way to Florida at a little over 1.25 hr into the film to seek the aid of one of Uncle Earl’s friends who has a friend with a plane that can fly them from Florida to Cuba, much has happened, and Queen and Slim are on the verge of falling in love. In speaking to Junior (Jahi Di’Allo Winston), a young man they meet on the way, Queen, in voiceover against images of Slim, Queen, and Junior overlooking a stunning view of a body of water, tells Junior, who is preoccupied with becoming immortal in death, “As long as your family knows you were here, that’s all that matters.” Then, before they depart, Slim asks Junior to take his and Queen’s picture (1:16:44–1:18:48). Unlike the former change, these moments happen without a “Touché” or comment but with responses that go unspoken. The rhythm in the lines is different because the rhythm of the relationship is different, or the overall shape of it. Thus, these changes give themselves and show themselves differently, but both the former and the latter are part of the rhythm of a relationship and a film that defies the dichotomies of either/or, life or death, reality or beauty.

Matsoukas says this about making *Queen & Slim*:

> We’re forcing people to speak our language, not trying to navigate or fit into a space where we don’t necessarily belong or try to fit into a space that we don’t care to belong

> to, but instead inviting them into *our world*. We'll give you an authentic view into who *we* are and what it means to be Black in America today. ("Melina & Lena," 2019, 2:19–2:35)

Waithe describes this as not attempting to break down a door but instead building a new door ("Melina & Lena," 2019, 1:57–2:07). *Queen & Slim* speaks its own language. Thus, with characters and situations that refuse easy articulation as far as categories of genre, depictions of the real and the artful, and ideas about race in the U.S., it sets up *barriers that invite* filmgoers to embrace what that language might mean. To receive the film as it gives itself in this way is to endeavor to find out what you might encounter or discover from the film's language rather than from another, already prepackaged language from elsewhere. That encounter or discovery might be a rhythm of a relationship. But it will most likely be something else, or most certainly a different interpretation.

The Ordinary Uncertainty of *Wildlife*

When director Paul Dano wrote Richard Ford requesting permission to adapt Ford's 1990 novel *Wildlife* into a film, Ford responded with the following:

> I'm grateful to you for your interest in my book, but I should also say this in hopes of actually encouraging you. My book is my book. Your picture, were you to make it, is your picture. Your moviemaker's fidelity to my novel is of no great concern to me. Establish your own values, means, goal. Leave the book behind so it doesn't get in the way. (Gross, 2018, 9:37–9:58)

From novelist to screenwriters (Dano & Zoe Kazan) and filmmaker, this is a message to leave behind an expectation toward *some other goal*—the film's "fidelity," a terminological guidepost frequently used and frequently expressed as a laudable pursuit. For Ford, leaving the book behind would give Dano a freedom to direct in his own style and manner without the pressure of realizing an interpretation he would imagine to be Ford's, of capturing or even foreclosing Ford's words in filmic form, another medium altogether.

A Note to the Filmgoer

Ford's note does not guarantee that filmgoers will extend Dano the same encouragement, but upon extrapolation it does give filmgoers a note of a different kind: Let the film give and show itself; don't hold it accountable for matching your concretization of the novel or that of others (see Hanich, 2018). Allow the director—who is not Ford and who is working in a different medium—to make his own film. Allow yourself to adopt a phenomenological attitude as a filmgoer and to engage in educational viewing. Allow what happens—events in the story as well as *how* the story is told—how it is written, directed, acted, designed, filmed, and edited visually, sonically, and musically—to happen without asserting what you *pre-thought* or expected. Grapple along with the characters and the unfolding of the film's themes and questions; grapple with what the film brings up for you individually without "bumping [your] philosophical [head] against the bell jar of solipsism" (Guenther, 2020, p. 11). Invest in pedagogical nuance. In other words, allow yourself, as a viewer, to learn *from* the film rather than merely *about* it. Allow yourself to fully encounter what the film delves into as a phenomenological film in all its dimensions and their convergences toward what requires an ongoing thinking otherwise.

In the midst of what I call *ordinary uncertainty*, *Wildlife* (Dano, 2018) presents a "reeling present" (Stewart) of the uneasiness of facing situations that make not knowing all the more unsettling. It does so in the ordinariness of not privileging the transcendental. In terms of phenomenology and reception, not privileging the transcendental necessitates a sitting and waiting that lets paradox and tension sit against a background that also sits. In other words, by not utilizing devices that would veil over the immanent, it captures feelings and actions that accompany a preoccupation with the future, but it does so without "run[ning] ahead of the phenomenon" (Marion, 1997/2002, p. 9). The film faces up to a paradoxically tense challenge: to be a filmic involution into rather than an evolution out of what it might mean to, in the present moment, have anxiety about what will come next. *Wildlife* refuses easy articulation, but in those

very refusals it is clear in giving, showing, and telling the ordinary uncertainty of not knowing what will happen, and in giving and showing and telling the actions taken in that uncertainty, whose appearances are just as valid as those actions taken in times of (what is believed to be) certainty.

Questions at the Cusp of Tomorrow

In the third act of *Wildlife*, Jeanette (Carey Mulligan) tells Joe (Ed Oxenbould), her 14-year-old son, “If you’ve got a better plan for me, tell me. I’ll try it. Really. Maybe it’ll be better than this” (1:15:01–1:15:10). This statement recalls an earlier moment at the cusp of the film’s first and second acts. The day her husband and Joe’s father, Jerry (Jake Gyllenhaal), against Jeanette’s vehement opposition, leaves to fight wildfires after losing his job at a golf course, Jeanette says to Joe, “Tomorrow something will happen to make things feel different” (29:32–31:34). Jeanette, Jerry, and Joe Brinson have not had the chance to ease into their new home of Great Falls, Montana, after recently moving from Idaho, by way of Washington State, before Jerry leaves town after turning down an offer to return to work at the golf course (“I have nothing to say to those people. . . . I won’t work for people like that” [13:21– 13:37]). Jeanette does not want to be left alone and sees Jerry’s departure as “running every time something doesn’t go your way” (25:55–27:17). Joe is caught and is placed in the middle, so to speak, as he has his own wishes and is drafted by his parents to listen to their intense deliberations. At times, they even ask him to offer his input even though he really, actually has no say. Jeanette and Jerry, in their worst moments, put these requests before their son to bolster their own arguments or to project their own reactions onto him (see, for example, 25:55–27:17, 32:22–32:27, 42:44–43:09, 1:18:10–1:22:50).

Joe yearns for stability, but he is caught between that desire and understanding, to a certain extent, his dad’s need to seek purpose. Or perhaps this understanding only goes as far as the possibility—no matter the present situation—that Joe can see that his parents will return to the loving, in-home unit he wishes for. We see his look of satisfaction when he sees them

banter affectionately (2:35–3:05). In a finely subtle sequence (overtonal montage) assembling three scenes with parallel editing, concurrently combining portions with and without dialogue, and uniting the scenes further with the piece “Melodia” by Jóhann Jóhannsson, we observe how Joe dutifully secures a job at a photography studio while Jeanette teaches at her new job as a swimming instructor at the Y—and Jerry contemplates taking the job at the fires (21:57–24:49). In these moments with Joe, the film invites us to *search with him* when he asks his parents direct questions about the future, attempting to fashion a modicum of consistency between their words and acts:

- After Jerry declines the offer to take back his golf course job and Joe has been observing his mood, he asks Jeanette, “Mom, is Dad—is Dad okay? . . . Are we gonna have to move again?” (15:06–16:16).
- When, after Jerry leaves, Jeanette suggests she and Joe might have to move into a smaller place, he asks, “Well, have you talked to Dad about it?” (32:11–33:06).
- When Joe notices a change in Jeanette the morning after Jerry leaves that causes him to grow anxious about what she will do next and about how she communicates her whereabouts, he asks her, “Will you be here when I get home?” (32:11–33:06).
- After it becomes clear to Joe that his parents will no longer live together and Jerry avoids broaching the subject to him directly (a response somewhere between preplanned and unplanned), Joe asks, “What’s going to happen?” before having to clarify his question with, “No, I mean, what’s going to happen to *us*?” (1:31:44–1:32:55).

These are a few key questions at key moments for Joe and, thus, for the film. More than what might seem like “simple” questions, they arise from ordinary uncertainty in a life going ahead in

time but that is permeated by pervasive dissatisfaction in the absence of ease—not an ease to take for granted what one has but rather the ease of being able to appreciate that what you love will be there as itself tomorrow. So, Joe acts both to appreciate and to preserve. Ed Oxenbould's performance in acting without delivering spoken words and in asking questions through dialogue as Joe convey in a present that would be lost with the addition of devices that veil over the lived immanence of the filmic and receptive present as it plays out.

The film is, in fact, from Joe's perspective, but Dano did not choose to use voiceover narration for Joe to tell the audience his thoughts. Joe actually says more in his silent face and in his contemplative actions than he does aloud with dialogue. As can only be done in film, we are told Joe's thoughts without words—we are *shown* his thoughts. Showing his thoughts escapes what (would at least appear to be) easy imparting through a transcendental voice outside the lived space and time of the film as the characters live in it or as viewers project themselves into it (see Loht, 2017, pp. 16–17, 27, 44–48, 61–63, 158–159, 163–166). This subjectiveness also escapes easy articulation through a variety of shots; some are subjective shots from Joe's point of view (point-of-view shots); another type involves a shot of Joe observing something we cannot see but then a pan to reveal what he just saw—that is, we are still outside the event but not seeing *exactly* from Joe's eyes. This is the case even when the scenes or shots are not point-of-view or generally subjective but simply include Joe or occur before or after he enters. Common among all of these, still, is the leaving it up to the viewer to receive, the holding back from explaining away the immanent subjectiveness of Joe's experience with a technique that pulls out under the ostensible aim of pulling in.

Exhaling at the Cusp

Just after Jerry is driven off after saying his final goodbyes to Joe ("You're too old to give your dad a kiss? Hmm? You know, men love each other, too. You know that, don't you?" [28:12–28:27]), we see him, in medium close-up, exhale (28:32–29:32). In the next scene, just after Jeanette says that tomorrow something will happen to make things feel different (a line she

does not believe), she, too, exhales (29:32–31:34). Jerry exhales as he sits in the bed of a truck in the open air; the act seems to be the release of finally grabbing a freedom of conviction he had not known until that point. Jeanette exhales indoors as she lies in bed; for her, the move appears as reconciling reality with the feeling of abject abandonment. Yet, Gyllenhaal's and Mulligan's facial expressions and overall body language display a similar distress—a transition into a freedom that they begrudgingly accept because it is necessary in moving forward.

Jeanette says to Joe, "What kind of man leaves his wife and child alone in such a lonely place?" Joe does not think, as Jeanette suggests, that Jerry will leave her for another woman. He relays the message that Jerry "didn't mean to make her mad" (29:32–30:17). In its first act, *Wildlife* has set up how not knowing what will happen affects three people in three different ways. But in its restraint and in its combination of showing and telling in silence and in modulated outbursts that accentuate its overall quiet quality, the film leaves viewers to reckon with the uncertainties of film and life as the characters struggle with immanence in the moment alongside the specters of a "better plan" and "something . . . to make things feel different." That is to say that what is immanent is not always painted with the same brush. At the cusp of the first and second acts, we are about to see more of what Jerry's and Jeanette's exhales might really mean, and what Joe does as he reckons with his own life in the midst of it all.

Over the Cusp; Or, Why People Do What They Do

The next morning—at the start of the next scene and the film's second act—Jeanette seems different—at least different from how she has been to Joe and in the film thus far. In the screenplay, Dano and Kazan (2015) describe her as seemingly *filled with a new, hard energy* (p. 40). She is ready for the day and says to Joe, "You'll have to take the bus today. I'm gonna look for a better job." To Joe's first response, "I thought you liked the Y," she says, "I did," but says so offscreen just after she disappears to put a box into another room and just before she returns back into the shot, completing the two-shot left incomplete by Joe's entering the shot at the instant she disappeared (32:11–32:23). It seems obvious (doesn't it?) that she has returned

anew, moved on in the way she has to believe her husband has if she is to make a life for herself and for her son now that Jerry has abandoned them. Jeanette then attributes her feelings to Joe, more so with her choice of words than with her overall sentiment: “How do you feel? Strange? I wouldn’t be surprised, with your father taking off like that” (32:22–32:27). In some of the most poignant moments in the film, Joe does not ask a question but answers one of his parent’s questions or responds to one of their statements or requests.

Here, he says, “Um. No, I feel fine” (32:28–32:29). Joe, in his confusion, delivers his answers calmly and briefly. It is also in these moments that Joe can be thought his most defiant (see also Joe’s, “I don’t know what you’re thinking” in response to Jeanette’s “You probably think I’m making too big a deal out of this [Jerry’s departure], don’t you?” [30:46–30:57]). A better description would be that he defies labels; he lives his life in navigational negotiation; he knows his parents control the largest structures of his day-to-day life, but he has his own strategies to do more than simply cope.[8] This exchange is the beginning half of the exchange I mentioned earlier in which Jeanette—who is thinking of their uncertain future (Jerry has not only left them but has thrown himself into a life-threatening situation that could continue indefinitely)—brings up the possibility of needing to move to a smaller place, and Joe checks this against his dad’s plans. In other words, he brings Jerry back into a conversation Jeanette has already edited him out of. Later, during a phone conversation, Jerry will not give Joe an answer that further confirms that “he’ll be home soon. As soon as it snows” (32:44–33:06; 48:17–49:17). And when Joe accidentally meets Warren Miller (Bill Camp; 35:08–36:42), a man Jeanette has invited to the house under the mistaken idea that Joe is at work at the

[8] Also of note is Joe’s response, “I don’t have one,” to Jeanette’s request that if he has a better plan for her, he should share it with her (1:10:18–1:15:33). As noted above, this comes late in the film, and Joe is at a peak of frustration and bewilderment. In the next scene, he will act on a new strategy of action because he is, in fact, more invested in a plan than he appears to be at this present moment. Filmically, his actions are part of a sequence that unfolds and resolves with showing (visuals with sound) rather than telling (words, dialogue, music).

photography studio, he begins to realize more deeply the purport of not understanding why his parents are making the choices they are making.

It is not that his parents and other adults do not try to explain or do not think they are explaining to Joe why people do what they do. Or perhaps wishful thinking convinces them they succeed, as the question itself is complex and complicated beyond explanation as a method. When Joe finds himself with his mother at Warren's house for dinner (on what seems like a romantic encounter between the adults even while there is talk of Warren giving Jeanette and Jerry jobs at his car dealership), Warren imparts to Joe what he (Warren) sees as valuable adult wisdom. After defending Jerry's actions as all three sit around the dinner table, Warren takes the opportunity to impart this wisdom after Jeanette has left for the restroom. In the form of a personal anecdote, Warren tells Joe that he once turned off the engine of his plane 4,000 feet in the air in order to listen to flocks of geese flying around him. Even though he knew the danger of what he was doing, and knew of his responsibilities—family, business—on the ground, he did it anyway ("It was the most wonderful thing I ever did in my life. *Ever will* do"). To Joe's question, "Were you afraid?" he notes,

> Yes. I *was* afraid. Because in that moment, I'd lost all humanity. I had all these people on the ground trusting in me: my wife and my mother and my four businesses. But they didn't matter to me in the slightest. Not that I didn't care about them. I just didn't even think about them at all. (58:09–59:19)

When he then *looks at Joe intently* and asks, "Do you understand what I'm talking about, Joe?" and Joe says, "I—Yes, sir," and Warren *smiles as if Joe has passed some secret test* (Dano & Kazan, 2015, p. 66; 59:20–1:00:03), it is not clear whether or not Joe actually "understands," but this moment recalls an earlier one in the film when Joe is seeing Jerry off: Joe asks, "How long are you gonna be gone?" and Jerry's response is, "I got this hum inside my head. I need to do something about it. You understand?" That time, Joe returns no particular reaction (27:56–28:05).

Warren's story carries over from his defense of Jerry while Jeanette is in the room, and it echoes the hum inside Jerry's head. It also parallels Jerry's and Jeanette's exhales: Doing something you have to do for yourself even if it is frightening or dangerous or puts your relationships with loved ones—those literally and figuratively "on the ground"—in peril or disarray. Doing what you do does not mean you do not love those you are or have been close to, even if it does mean they might question your love or commitment. In this moment with Warren, Joe expresses interest midstory, says, "I—Yes, sir," and smiles instead of simply continuing his same gaze. It could mean he understands (or does not), or it could mean he understands *better*, not only Jerry's actions but also Jeanette's—why she might be acting in ways unrecognizable to him. She may not be thinking about him in the ways in which he expects, and at times she may not be thinking about him at all. But that does not mean she does not care for him and love him. She feels a "hum" in her head, or she is "losing all humanity" in trying to forge a life not conditioned upon Jerry's presence.

In this moment alone with Warren, a fuller encounter with ordinary uncertainty offers itself. It introduces one to or reminds one of a fuller realization: Why people do what they do does not always involve them thinking about those they love the most—at least not in the ways in which those they love might imagine. This offering of a fuller encounter with ordinary uncertainly is even more striking when one considers what the film has previously set up, given, and shown. At this point filmgoers might see a pivotal development in their encounter with the film. No matter the extent to which Joe understands what Warren is talking about, it is plausible that the moment influences his actions in ordinary uncertainty, as it is not long before he—in a sequence that only shows (see Footnote 8 above)—acts on his decision to go to his father, likely to remind him to think of his family in a moment when he (Joe) can see the family unit about to become severed beyond the point of maintaining the shape onto which it barely holds. In that moment with Warren, perhaps Joe begins to *approach better attunement* with his own actions—past, present, and future. Ultimately, Joe acts in and through ordinary uncertainly once

his parents do separate and he uses his skills in the photography lab to, paradoxically, preserve what remains permanent as he chooses to embrace and adapt to, rather than resist and rail against, cusps of new tomorrows.

Not an Ease to Take for Granted

When Joe is hired in the photography studio, his boss (John Walpole) introduces him to the equipment and the friendly principles of helping customers through the process of creating their portraits (22:16–23:16, 24:33–24:41). But more meaningful is what he tells Joe about the true importance of the service photographers provide:

> You see, people like to come in here to remember something good that's happening in their lives. They want to make that happy moment *permanent*. That way, they can keep it forever. And we're here to help them do that. You understand? (24:07–24:28)

When, in the final scene of *Wildlife*, Joe brings in his parents and asks them to pose for a photograph that includes all three of them, his enthusiastic "Yes, sir" in response to his boss's words seems to have evolved into something much deeper than what was behind what he conveyed during that earlier time (in Act 1) before his father left for the fire and before the drastic change in his family's dynamic. *Wildlife*'s final scene is an *ongoing summation* of showing that is a mark of the film as a whole. It shows the interplay and the interstitial spaces between certainty/ease/understanding and uncertainty/tension/sitting and waiting. The ongoing summation blurs while also making clear lines that move, reappear, and disappear.

When it becomes evident that Joe has brought his parents to the studio to take a family portrait, the mood becomes uneasy. Jeanette has moved to Oregon and is visiting for a long weekend. Joe has stayed behind with Jerry, and Jerry has taken a sales job (1:34:20–1:38:49). After his parents have sat down in front of the camera with a chair between them as Joe sets up, both are visibly uncomfortable, and Jeanette offers to take a photo of Joe and Jerry instead. But this is not how Joe acts in ordinary uncertainty, so he kindly and swiftly rejects this proposal, saying, "Because I want one with all of us in it" (1:39:31–1:40:23). The film immediately ending

after Joe takes the photo is the preservation of an ease through giving and showing, but this is not an ease that forecloses or that one uses to take for granted what one has. I noted earlier that the ease for which Joe yearns is the ease of being able to appreciate that what you love will be there as itself tomorrow. At this point, however, this ease appears more generally as the ease of making something good last forever. One can recognize and acknowledge a good, or a beauty (see Ross, 2014, paras. 3–4; see also Greiner, 2009, Aesthetics as a Moral Compass section, paras. 1, 3), in its earlier shape without privileging that shape over what the new one gives and shows and offers. In this way, by unpretentiously refusing easy articulation, *Wildlife* unsettles reception. It does not evade tension. It *also* sits and waits.

Phenomenological Films, Phenomenological Reception

In describing film phenomenology, three authors who have played major parts in this dissertation take different approaches but at the core say similar things about philosophizing phenomenologically: Baracco (2017) writes, “Film phenomenology concerns our perception and understanding of film and the way in which we perceive and experience represented film worlds” (p. 39). H. A. Stadler (1990) states that “film phenomenology tries to define the differences and similarities between the experience of everyday phenomena and the experience of film” (p. 44). And, finally, Loht (2017) says this:

> I want to contribute to the dialogue on film-as-philosophy . . . a general appreciation of the phenomenological nature of, on the one hand, the film affording a certain disclosure to the viewer, and on the other hand the viewer’s questioning, factical projection [into the world of the film] that discloses the film’s meaning. (p. 165)

I have argued that viewing a film is already reception in that the bond between the elements of filmmaking is meant to be seen and heard. Before, during, and after perceiving, understanding, and experiencing film, reception happens in the form of reaction and response in all their forms.

Baracco’s, H. A. Stadler’s, and Loht’s descriptions of film phenomenology and film-as-philosophy reflect this in that they, too, include filmgoers: At the root is the comparison between

the film and filmgoers' own comparisons between the film and what they already see as coherent. This is an important distinction that phenomenology can draw, as reception as "focusing on how a film is received by audiences rather than on who made a film or what its thematic content or formal features are" (Corrigan & White, 2021, p. 394) severs connections and makes theoretical assumptions that leave to the side challenges toward reflexivity. I have offered my own educational argument about how phenomenological films challenge: They push us (filmgoers) to grapple with the very notion of comparing what we find coherent to what a film is giving and showing. They push us to grapple with what we cannot easily reconcile and with what cannot be reconciled at all because reconciliation is not the goal or because reconciliation is rethought or *presented anew* beyond our preconception.

Phenomenological films, such as *If Beale Street Could Talk*, *Queen & Slim*, and *Wildlife* as they are presented above, create ongoing conditions for educational viewing by requiring sitting and waiting in an offering to meet them as they give and show themselves. *Film as barrier of astonishment*, *film as barrier that invites*, and *film as ordinary uncertainty* guide in the possibilities of embracing the tensions involved when we cannot immediately act but can observe characters who can in what is *in* and *of* the film world (Yacavone, 2015). Phenomenological films as I see them delve into what is immanent in what changes and in what stays the same. They encourage that thought and practice in viewers. These films do this by showing more than they tell. In other words, the appearances on the screen bear out ideas in ways that are not easily intelligible. They require something other than mere reception (RQ1) and theories and methods based on habits and assumptions.

Working *with* rather than centering theories, methods, habits, and assumptions leads to *thinking barrier and uncertainly as ordinary*, not in the sense that they are to be taken for granted or seen as prospects to be resisted, but in the sense of immanence and not running ahead of the phenomenon (Marion, 1997/2002, p. 9; see again The Ordinary Uncertainty of *Wildlife* section above). The immanence of not running ahead requires acknowledging nuance,

the pedagogical investment that is slowing down to “slow the quick jump to representational thinking and evaluative critique” (Stewart, 2007, p. 4; Harris, 2020, p. 4; RQ3). This orientation is necessary for engaging with conversation about film that educates because it grapples, or what I call educational conversation.

CHAPTER V: EDUCATIONAL CONVERSATION: AURAL, AESTHETIC, AND FROM DIFFERENT TYPES OF CLASSROOMS

> Often in our kind of *quest* to . . . break down the doors of a sometimes not very inclusive industry, and, in our well-meaning but slightly misguided desire to carry the burdens of representation for our community, we end up kind of trying to *represent* and try and *enter* rooms that we don't normally belong in. . . . The more radical thing to do is not to try and enter rooms where we may have been unwanted but actually *go home* and actually to not try and represent other people but to *present ourselves*.
>
> —actor, screenwriter, producer, musician Riz Ahmed, *New Yorker Radio Hour* podcast, September 3, 2021

> When I first started pitching *The Farewell*, it took people who could see what it could be. . . . It takes vision to make something that hasn't existed before that you don't have a comp [comparable] for. And I think similarly with distributors it takes somebody with vision for how it could be presented to the world—how it *could* be seen, not how it *is* seen.
>
> —screenwriter, director, producer Lulu Wang, *Awards Chatter* podcast, July 31, 2019

In Chapter 1, I made a distinction between "discussion" and "conversation" in describing my sense of wonder as a student. Citing Jean-Baptiste le Rond d'Alembert (1754/2008), I wrote that conversations, more than discussions, consider not only what arises out of the "precise subject" but also "all [the] talk" that emerges "without effort and without affectation." Conversations piqued my curiosity about education and led me into teaching. Conversations are the ongoing possibilities that led to this dissertation; with them, I merge what I call educational conversation with my enduring interests in film and reception that first grabbed me during my years as an undergraduate and then master's student. In Chapter 1, I introduced my phenomenological approach as an attitude, an *un*settling or destabilizing of the everyday. Then, in Chapters 2 and 3, I turned to paradox and tension and the ubiquity of reception, respectively, and their roles in developing a phenomenological attitude as a filmgoer. This led to the application of *educational* to film viewing and then, in Chapter 4, to accounts of the types of films that most closely challenge viewers toward such viewing.

Overall, this chapter encourages orientations away from the preexisting logics and assumptions of disciplinary habit. However, preexisting logics and assumptions are not to be bracketed out to be left to the side. Instead, they must be recognized, acknowledged, and faced up to, even as a form of wonder. In Chapter 3, I write that ubiquity links film and reception to schooling. Perceptions of personal/institutional "everydayness" tend to lead to conclusions that the common *function* of film and schooling is to serve expectation. These ideas show themselves in how educators and students position film in the classroom. Such ideas and positionings reinforce the accepted norms of ever-present aspects of (daily) life remaining in the category of the taken for granted, the already settled. As my research questions and interdisciplinary study suggest, facing up to shared ubiquity and considering it from new angles (see again Diller, 1998) can mean different arrivals.

Connecting film, reception, and schooling in bringing into question the logics and assumptions that undergird habit can be among the most transformative practices toward pedagogical investments in how we might think and act outside the (shifting) structures of what already appears coherent, "best practice"/"logical," and decided (see Chapter 1, "Arrival to the Phenomenological" section, and Chapter 4, Already Reception section). Thinking otherwise about what is taken for granted in one context as part of the work in another taken-for-granted context can bring about profound, new questions about the settled notions in both. Included in profound, new questions is what can result from reconsidering "old" questions from different perspectives and orientations. Most importantly, this inter-contextual thinking otherwise shows that the contexts are not, in fact, as separate (read, siloed) as they have been made to seem. The ubiquity of reception is at play here—filmgoing and schooling are situations onto which those involved graft their preexisting assumptions (see Chapters 3 and 4).

As I have said, film and schooling are a unique pair. They are a unit united by, in addition to their shared ubiquity, what it is that makes film unlike any other medium and what it is that makes schooling full of potential for educational conversation. Here, arising dynamics

give way to what might happen (in conversation) when educational viewing meets the formal classroom. The focus of this chapter, then, is educational conversation itself and what it can mean for film reception in formal classrooms and in spaces that are similar and/or informal.

Other Conversations and the Podcast Medium

In developing and maintaining the capacity to engage in educational conversation about film in the formal classroom, I advocate for listening to *other conversations* by way of the podcast medium, specifically to those therein that are themselves educational. When those conversations educate because they grapple, they are models not to mimic as "data" or "tools" but rather models that serve as spaces from which to find openings toward new questions and new pedagogical investments in more nuanced ways of receiving film (RQ3). Most importantly, they are the access to the conversations themselves. When done as part of the ongoing thinking otherwise that is the phenomenological attitude, listening to other conversations, on the part of educators and students, is vital in recognizing what can be possible outside direct participation and in moving beyond mere reception (RQ1 and RQ2) and authorized, masterful "uses" of film focused on illustrating theoretical concepts (see Chapter 3, The Places of Film Itself section) or setting up solipsistic performances of debate. This listening must be done on an ongoing basis. It is listening with an openness to grapple with paradox and tension, and it is not an exercise with an end point. Educational conversations require other educational conversations.

Aural, Aesthetic, and From Different Types of Classrooms

As the title of this chapter indicates, I put forth as educational podcast conversations about film and delve into their aural, aesthetic, and what I call their "classroom" qualities, doing so with a phenomenological approach. But before I interpret-describe the conversations, I elaborate on those qualities and make other clarifications and reconnections. First, in order to illustrate how I apply them and what I mean by each, I discuss the qualities *more or less* individually, but I keep in mind that educational conversations are not a "sum total" of the aural,

aesthetic, and “classroom”; they are the qualities flowing out as a convergence, creating new and greater givens that show themselves (here, I borrow from Merleau-Ponty’s film gestalt; see Chapter 2 above, Review of the Literature: Film Phenomenology section). Second, I provide a final introductory detailing of educational conversation in which I reiterate its tenets through complexity and important considerations concerning individual and collective experience and practice. Third, I reconnect educational conversation, cultural foundations, and film as a transitional introduction to the educational podcast conversations themselves. The episodes I consider are from the podcasts *Black Men Can’t Jump [In Hollywood]* (Braylock et al., 2019, 2020a, 2020b, 2020c), *Fresh Air* (Gross, 2018), *Film Comment* (Hynes, 2018), *Playback* with Kris Tapley (Tapley, 2019), and *Awards Chatter* (Feinberg, 2020b; see Footnote 2 above). The episodes include actors, writers, directors, producers, journalists, and critics, and they include interview, panel, and film review formats. It is with these notable conversations that I, in the final section, bring this dissertation to a conclusion that does not foreclose.

Aural (and Flexible and Intimate)

Aurality is the basis of the podcast experience, but it is also part of a *culmination in flux* that allows listeners to take *themselves* anywhere while the podcast itself can, in a different sense, take *listeners* anywhere. The podcast medium started with RSS (Really Simple Syndication) technology that depended on a user’s computer. Now, that content delivery arrives directly to podcast apps on smartphones (Berry, 2018, pp. 20–21; Bishop, 2021; Llinares, 2020, p. 347; Sullivan, 2018, pp. 37–39; Sternbergh, 2019). Podcasting is a “converged medium” (Berry, 2006, pp. 144, 157) that has become “neither limited to nor defined by its technologies [but rather] a specific set of practices and cultural meanings that are entirely entwined with the technologies for its distribution, organization, and consumption” (Morris & Patterson, 2015, pp. 221–222; see also Berry, 2018, pp. 18–19). Dario Llinares (2020) calls podcasting a “hybrid, flexible and liminal medium because its ontology is based on a collection of technologies and practices that are associated with other media contexts” (p. 346). RSS, for example, was utilized

for blog sharing before it was applied to podcasting, facilitating a major point of differentiation between the medium and broadcast radio (p. 346). Podcasts can appeal to niche as well as mainstream audiences, as they can proliferate without the oversight of radio (Berry, 2006, pp. 145–146, 2016, 2018, pp. 21–28). Combined with this aurality outside such parameters, advances in smartphone technology and the advent of earbud use (Berry, 2016, pp. 12–14; Llinares, 2020, pp. 347–350) have made podcast listening remarkably flexible and intimate.

Providing no picture but instead homing in on the sonic experience, podcasts free the listener from not only a particular visual orientation but also from a stationary device as the point of access (Berry, 2006, 2016; Llinares, 2020). “What the eye sees and the ear hears are decoupled,” Llinares (2020) writes, “meaning attention to the outside world can be maintained in parallel to an inner world shaped by the podcast” episode (p. 347). Phenomenologically, Llinares calls this flexible, intimate freedom “one of fundamental mutability” (p. 347). At the same time, as I note in my reading of the *Next Best Picture* episode on *The Farewell* in Chapter 3, this pictureless, free aural attentiveness makes evident gestures that typically go unnoticed when accompanied by a picture.

Flexibility and intimacy present a freedom on the part of listeners. On the part of podcasters, freedom from traditional parameters of creation and production opens up to flexibility and intimacy. Podcasters and listeners feel more connected (see Berry, 2016, pp. 13–16; Llinares et al., 2018a, pp. 2, 9–10; see also Berry, 2006, pp. 148, 151, 153, 2018, p. 28; Sullivan, 2018, p. 42). In both these directions, freedom calls for a vulnerability, as does an openness to grapple, and as thinking otherwise calls for reflexivity. This is toward the educational. Thus, in delving into podcast conversations, I elaborate on how one might listen to and participate in this interplay between freedom and vulnerability. I do this while taking on what aurality, flexibility, and intimacy could mean for educational conversation when individuals listen to an episode and then reconvene to talk about it in a formal classroom (and in other spaces,

similar or informal), in the process “listening to the episode again” but in collective conversation. This, no doubt, has implications for aesthetics.

Aesthetic

In taking further what I write in Chapter 3 in the section on del Río’s (2010) study, I also dwell in the aesthetic qualities of educational conversation. For educational conversations in podcast episode form, this includes both listening and directly participating. In terms of listening, these conversations are comparable to how films are both form and content, an overlapping interplay between art and subject matter that can show without telling, in the moment giving new ways of thinking otherwise. In terms of direct participation, interlocutors often express that these conversations have affected or do affect them in ways that could be described as aesthetic.

It is self-evident that educational conversation is not part of, as Sepp and Embree (2010) would say, “the core of aesthetics as concerned with the fine arts” (p. xv); it is, rather, a way of receiving fine arts or other phenomena. It can be practiced not only by casual consumers but also by those who support and/or “critique” the arts more deeply and regularly. It can also be practiced by artists themselves. As I introduce in Chapter 3, by filmgoer I mean anyone who watches, including those who make films and the scholars, journalists, and critics whose livelihoods or cinephilic time depends on filmmaking. Educational conversation is not the province of the fine arts, but it is also not about escaping, performing, proving, or winning. There is no score kept; what sits and moves affects, affecting with*in* and with*out*. There are embraced confrontations *in* each individual and *out* collectively in the overall-ness of what is said and unsaid, in the shape of the whole conversation and the conversation in its parts. Undetermined and unsettled paths form.

Mary Bushnell Greiner (2009) writes that “education that itself is aesthetic” includes what is unexpected, spontaneous, and ambiguous where aesthetics “refers . . . to particular types of interactions with learning and the environment” (paras. 1–3; see also Callejo Pérez et al., 2014, pp. xix–xx, 30–31, 93). I consider these to be apt descriptions for educational conversation and

its undetermined and unsettled paths. Thus, educational conversations as they turn to fine art—here, to film—are intersubjective meetings between aesthetics and reception. Furthermore, outside of the art they consider, they are aesthetic in themselves: Those who take part are reflexively attuned to dwelling beyond anticipation. Educational conversation entails and is inextricably linked with sensuousness and critical reflection.

Identifying and Interpreting Art

Educational conversation can be thought as one of the "sources of art in human experience . . . enjoyed . . . in part at least, because of their esthetic quality" (Dewey, 1934/1980, p. 5). John Dewey (1934/1980) draws this pertinent example: Those who "poked the sticks of burning wood would say [they] did it to make the fire burn better; but [they are] none the less fascinated by the colorful drama of change enacted before [their] eyes and imaginatively [partake] in it" (p. 5). Educational conversations are not just means to a utilitarian purpose, and conversations about art are not just a setting down of records of opinion or taste. When aural, in the podcast form, educational conversations about film offer intimately encountered appearances of reception. Phenomenologically speaking, this moves toward encountering extraordinariness in the ordinary, the aesthetic already there. Despite efforts toward separation, fine arts and aesthetics as philosophy are not distant from everyday lived life.

Here, I am expanding arguments from "The Live Creature" in Dewey's (1934/1980) *Art as Experience*. By "human experience," Dewey is referring to one's actions as one acts in one's own profession or "casual recreations," or observes others acting in theirs (pp. 3–5). But these occupations and recreations are not considered to be in the realm of engagements with art, as art has been "set . . . upon a remote pedestal," separated from the everyday "stream of living" (pp. 5–7). Dewey contrasts this bifurcated way of life with periods during which there was "no division between [what characterized the] . . . places and operations" of "war, worship, [and] the forum" and that of "the arts that brought color, grace, and dignity, into them" (p. 7). For ancient

Athenians, for example, “painting and sculpture were organically one with architecture, as that was one with the social purpose that buildings served” (p. 7). A divide was not merely unthinkable; it was, more fundamentally, something that “would not have been even understood” (pp. 7–10).

Dewey (1934/1980) includes “the movie” in a list of “the arts which today have most vitality for the average person” (p. 5). For him, this catalog includes “things [people do not] take to be arts” due to their accessibility, for “when what [they know] as art is relegated to the museum and gallery, the unconquerable impulse towards experiences enjoyable in themselves finds such outlet as the daily environment provides” (p. 6). This touches on what I have related concerning the relative accessibility of film (and its ubiquity and influence). However, I have made it a point to account for the ubiquity of reception: Filmgoers—now and in Dewey’s time—are not *this or that*, and there are other factors involved. Another way of responding to one’s “daily environment” is to take that environment for granted. Grafting preexisting logics onto new experiences, relegating film to a narrow notion of “entertainment,” or using film primarily to illustrate theoretical concepts or as an “insignia of taste” or a “[certificate] of special culture” (p. 9) will show itself whether or not one “takes” film to be art. By expanding these ideas from *Art as Experience* and by delving into perspectives about film today, I bring nuance to considering how identifying and interpreting “art” can show itself in a variety of ways. This includes ways that bring unexpectedness, spontaneity, and ambiguity to aesthetic experience, which continues to evolve.

Aesthetics in Development and Change

As is noted in Chapter 3, at its inception, “aesthetics” was not associated with art. Rather, due to the influence of Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten, it was a relatively direct outgrowth of *aisthēsis*, “the field of the sensuous” (Sepp & Embree, 2010, p. xv; see Guyer, 2020). “Aesthetics” derives from aisthēsis (or aesthesis), the Greek word for “perception or sensation” (Kelly, 1998/2014a, paras. 1–5, History of Aesthetics section). In 1790, with his

Critique of Judgement, Kant joined generalizations about art with “sensory knowledge independent of logical knowledge” (Kelly, 1998/2014a, para. 5). Accordingly, Sepp and Embree (2010) describe aesthetics as “a late emerging subdiscipline within philosophy” (p. xv). It has come to denote “the principal form that art takes within philosophy” (Kelly, 2014b, Art, Aesthetics, and Philosophy section, para. 4) and “critical reflection on art, culture, and nature,” the latter coming about as aesthetics moved away from the (sole) focus of chronicling the tastes of dominant groups (Kelly, 1998/2014a, para. 1, 2014b, paras. 1, 3). As Kelly (1998/2014a) reminds us, though aesthetics is an “eighteenth-century European development that has not been duplicated anywhere else” and a “single branch of philosophy concerned with art,” it also encompasses more: “Aesthetics is also a part of other disciplines—such as art history, literary theory, law, sociology—that reflect equally, if differently, about art in its natural and cultural contexts” (para. 1; see also Sepp & Embree, 2010, pp. xxvii–xxviii). In their reflections about art and in their artistic and aesthetic qualities and endeavors more generally, phenomenology, film and reception, education, historical poetics, and ordinary affects can be counted in that list. And for the same reasons, I expand this list of “disciplines” to include educational conversation.

Additionally, with my aural readings of conversations in their unfolding, I further challenge the “widely held opinion that phenomenological research is exclusively confined to the visual” (Sepp & Embree, 2010, p. xviii). Indeed, as Llinares (2020) writes, “Although verbal analysis and discussion of cinema and film culture is the underpinning of film podcasting, most podcasts also interweave sonic elements using modes of aural production that directly call to a listener’s cinematic imagination” (p. 342). The production in podcast form of enthralling “cinematic” soundscapes aimed at “actualiz[ing] an audiocinematic experience” is not my purview, nor is it a homing in on podcasts as “secondary platform[s] whereby sound properties are utilised to affirm the primary experience of cinema” (p. 342). Still, I do focus on elements of aural conversations and appearances of reception that are nonetheless aesthetic. Further, I

argue that seeking out a podcast space for engaged listening, or learning from one, is a seeking out or learning from a classroom, but a classroom of a different sort.

Different Types of Classrooms

The podcast medium brought me back to the classroom, even though, paradoxically—as a student and teacher—I never left. Podcasting, I should say, brought me back to the classroom in a difference sense: It took me back to the origins of my enthusiasm for attending classes as a high school student. It took me back to my delight in the conversations, which became, in turn, the origin of my present research. This not always intentional returning has been, nevertheless, an instructive presence. As a student in the formal 9–12 classroom, I took to the conversations: to the talk, to the ideas, and—to borrow from Greiner (2009)—to the unexpected, the spontaneous, and the ambiguous. During those years, I would not have described these occasions as aesthetic, and I was only learning how to practice grappling, only just developing an appreciation for it. Now, I can describe those occasions of classroom conversation through the relationship between (a) the aesthetic that arises in educational conversation and (b) the aesthetic imperative in phenomenology.

Before I began to study cultural foundations of education, phenomenology, and aesthetics, I recognized and embraced the talk, the ideas, and the unexpected in film podcasts. I saw opportunities to learn and confront different ways of engaging film. I started grappling before the term itself became a regular part of my vocabulary and vernacular. In other words, eventually I came to think of the podcast as a classroom of sorts—the medium is where I go to connect to and develop new ways of thinking about and practicing film reception. Although it was not one of my initial pronouncements, as I had no such explicit realization, podcasts—specifically, those made up of episodes of conversations that educate because they grapple—are what reminded me of the unmeasurably vital possibilities in the connections between conversations, classrooms, and what might occur beyond expectation or habit, beyond the already planned. Hence, educational conversation in podcast form—through form itself and

through content—is more than an agential reminder; it is, as I have written, suitable as part of the *formal* classroom on the way to more nuanced ways of receiving film (RQ3).

From Expanding Reception to Expanding the Classroom

When I began to connect the importance of podcast conversations to the importance of classroom conversations, I began to see the potential for incorporating podcasts into the classroom for pedagogical investments in more nuanced ways of receiving film. Because I work *with* reception theory rather than center it, I am expanding reception itself so that it is open to what theory circumscribes out. Podcasts are, then, what I call *media sites of film reception*, as they are the appearances or nonappearances of reception. This expansion is also an expansion of the classroom. I see educational podcast conversations as classrooms of a different type. When teachers and students in formal classrooms engage these spaces, thought and practice can be considered anew while the ongoing phenomenological attitude at the root of educational conversation manifests as universals singularly experienced. These phenomena—*conversational phenomena for the classroom*—show themselves as givens in and beyond the classroom space. Consequently, settled logics can be continually confronted so that the classroom is a place to develop one's voice, supportive toward socialities that do not enforce technocracy (see Callejo Pérez et al., 2014, pp. 35–36, 38–39, 39).

Podcasting is a medium whose burgeoning ubiquity over the last decade could be said to be approaching—albeit on an as yet slighter scale—that of film and schooling. Educational conversation about film is but one aspect of this ubiquity, but it is one with vast potential. Particular shows and episodes add to the possibility of educational conversation ensuing from the educational viewing that can emerge when filmgoers (students and educators) can embrace paradox and tension in reception and take on a phenomenological attitude as a filmgoer. This is ongoing—there must be a continual reflexive engagement with what changes and does not change, as there can be movement in the contents of the natural attitude with the formation of new habits in thinking and practice. Ideas can become newly "settled" or taken for granted even

when others are (newly) unsettled. This is to say that change and what might arise are linked. As conversational phenomena for the classroom, educational podcast conversations possess qualities that include and go deeper and beyond those qualities I highlight in the section on aurality. Going further, several lend themselves well to the formal classroom.

Overall, these qualities provide ease of access, which further demonstrates podcasting's growing ubiquity. More specifically, ease of access extends the flexibility the medium affords. It presents potentially transformative phenomenological challenges for students and teachers as they recognize and then choose conversations that educate because they grapple. Ease of access involves and supports (a) *longform* conversation (free from broadcast parameters of structure and content) that allows for in-depth, sustained engagement; (b) on-demand listening ("time-shifting" [see Berry, 2006; Llinares, 2018, 2020; Sullivan, 2018]) and the ability to download episodes, which allow for long-term or permanent access; (c) choice within the immense breadth of material available (see Llinares, 2020, p. 350; Morris & Patterson, 2015), which allows for locating intriguing conversations and combinations unique to the listener's questions and sense of wonder; and (d) the free (no-cost) availability of podcasts themselves, which can be accessed through show or network website or through a variety of podcast apps that—using RSS—house shows and their components conveniently on a single digital platform. In my phenomenological sense, ease of access means access not to "tools" but to the things themselves, to the aesthetic already there, to givens that are showing themselves.

On Educational Conversation

It is important to reiterate here that individual engagements in grappling and their resulting aesthetic experiences do not, in and of themselves, make *conversations* educational. I am referring to those moments experienced by a portion of those participating in a conversation. In Chapter 3, I stated that educational conversation involves all participants, meaning that all participants grapple. This is not to say that individuals do not grapple in authentic and even transformative ways, nor is this to say that conversations *being on the way* to educational are

not meaningful in possibility. (I lean toward the latter in Chapter 3 in my reading of the *Next Best Picture* podcast review.) This is to say that for conversations to be educational, good-faith grappling cannot be piecemeal. Grappling changes, undulates, and varies, coming about and ebbing and flowing, often with more ebb than flow, or vice versa, but it *is* the grappling that makes the educational distinct from simply sharing opinions or debating. Grappling calls for readjustments in criticality and reflexivity. These readjustments are appearances of disparate potential (see Chapter 4)—they offer no guaranteed degree of change from the present to what happens next. For educational conversation, all this occurs both individually and collectively.

Conclusions That Do Not Foreclose

This final chapter is a conclusion that does not foreclose. It is intended to lead to new, as yet unforeseen paths. Educational conversation creates its own paths not defined by proclaimed answers or frames. It does not mold itself to fit into those structures, as the grappling that is necessary for it to occur is open to what might arise, and the necessary thinking takes place as an ongoing thinking otherwise not bound my expectation, theory, or method. Furthermore, a particular phenomenological reading of a conversation is of a particular moment and may be expanded or extrapolated from, but it is not the only reading. A phenomenon can be read from different phenomenological angles and placed into conversation with other readings in innumerable combinations. The boundless possibilities in bringing together phenomenology, classrooms, and reception are the generative benefits of working with instead of centering theory and method.

Cultural foundations' interdisciplinarity is rooted in the imperative to confront what undergirds basic assumptions concerning education (generally) and schooling (specifically). This necessary confrontation requires authentic grappling: grappling that cannot be siloed into one field of study, one subject on a class schedule, or one classroom. It requires being in conversation, not in the space of always already looking for something in particular or resisting the resulting paradox and tension when what arises does not confirm preexisting logics. Thus,

interdisciplinarity, specifically (i.e., fields of study not siloed) and generally (i.e., not simply "this or that" / thinking and acting *beyond* / *also* rather than either/or), informs my work in all its aspects. With the familiar term "educational," I describe encounters that necessitate grappling, not simply learning. Having a phenomenological attitude means embracing phenomena as they give and then show themselves when we desire to think and act beyond debate or rejection. There is no arrival where grappling will never again be required, but a phenomenological attitude also allows for dwelling with phenomena during moments when grappling is not evoked. Film, like no other medium, can take us through (and back through, continually) this gamut from grappling to a "mere" embrace.

Through a "mere" screen, film can reveal by enhancing and enhance by revealing. Film confronts us with living—the very thing we can take for granted the most due to perceptions of everyday mundanity or the intense protection of notions of entertainment. For this reason, among others, film reception should be thought as more than the theories and methods of categorizing audiences and sharing opinions. Reception can be the reflexive nuances of how we confront film (read also as *life*) and how film confronts *us*. Educational conversations also enhance and reveal. They are confrontations of reception in which filmgoers challenge themselves and others beyond the comfortable lines of settlement. Listening to those conversations as others have them is an additional dimension from which we can ask the questions of how we challenge film as it challenges us.

Intimately Encountered Appearances of Reception: Podcast Conversations Themselves *Black Men Can't Jump [In Hollywood]* on Art, Race, and Opportunity

In reviewing the traffic stop scene in *Queen & Slim*, *Black Men Can't Jump [In Hollywood]* podcast co-hosts Jonathan Braylock, Jerah Milligan, and James III, along with guest co-host Anissa Folley (a writer, director, and photographer), realize they have run into a second occasion on which they (specifically Jerah and Jonathan) have critiqued as flawed the "logic" of the film's script only to find out that what the film depicts can in fact be compared to real-life

occurrences (Braylock et al., 2019, 57:03–1:00:27). Finding out that these key moments in the film can be deemed true to life (and found in news stories) is important because, in these moments in the episode, congruence with real life is presumed to be the proper deciding factor in what should or should not be included in the screenplay. In these moments, instead of bracketing or placing *in*congruity to the side, the co-hosts embrace the paradox and incorporate the resulting tension into their individual, complicated personal reactions to the film. With incongruity, they confront their own ongoing thinking and practices of reception when it comes to *Queen & Slim* in the context of Black cinema, including its standing as a comment affecting existing debates about systemic racism and prejudice in U.S. law enforcement. How the co-hosts think and feel through this second scene in *Queen & Slim* is but one example of the grappling that is a characteristic quality of *Black Men Can't Jump [In Hollywood]*.

On the first occasion of "logic" *un*settled, Jerah immediately fact-checks his own critique after James responds to his assertion that the scene "makes no sense" with a question about the outcome of a real-life story (Braylock et al., 2019, 43:28–48:38, 46:07–46:22). On the second, James initially questions Jonathan's critique and quickly researches the detail at hand, announcing what he finds. Although not everyone has held to "logic" with the same adamance, *all four* interlocutors acknowledge the moment in which what arises does not confirm expectation. James and Anissa seem to have less of this same "logical" expectation, but they express consternation at once again hearing—as Black people—confirmation of a racial reality. Phenomenologically, it can be said that they react to the weight of subsisting realities landing *anew*. For Jonathan and Jerah, perhaps their adamance entailed a hope that things could be different.

Aesthetically, this conversation—the conversation itself and engaging with it as a listener—is a "critical reflection on art [and] culture" (Kelly, 1998/2014a, para. 1) as well as a delving into sensuousness (see again Sepp & Embree, 2010, p. xv). Jonathan demonstrates the latter as he grapples with what transpires in the film: "The thing about running away—it was

hard for me to shake at certain points: Once you choose to shoot a cop and then *run*, it's a *wrap*. Your life is *done*. You're on the run your *entire* life now. . . . That's *a lot*" (55:39–56:54). In response, Jerah, James, and Anissa express the feeling that had they chosen not to run the chances are low that Queen and Slim would have made it to jail (i.e., made it out alive) or to a verdict of less than the death penalty (56:21–57:03). Here, reception reaches further than attempts at objectivity, and this exchange leads to the second occasion on which "logic" is unsettled. The occasion is an engagement.

The engagement itself—one of grappling with what one encounters—would not have been possible had Jonathan, Jerah, James, and Anissa not been open to it and had they not then *practiced* it. Listening to the educational borne out aurally as it gives itself is an investment in nuance, as this way of the phenomenon giving itself piece by piece and as a whole cannot be duplicated or given in any other form or medium. It is "viewing the film again" through listening as appearances of reception emerge through educational conversation, the elements of which include utterances, inflection, and tone that come through more vividly and intimately through sound. In podcast form, this conversation—a classroom of a different type—is accessible on a long-term or permanent basis even as it unfolds as a series of "just now" moments lost to time. It, like others of its kind, gives depth and breadth beyond the settled notions of a "tool." Through considering art in itself and how art comments on life as we live it, simultaneously enhancing and complicating and sometimes simplifying it, the conversation unites grappling and the aesthetic.

In their grappling, the co-hosts show that aesthetics as "sensory knowledge independent of logical knowledge" (Kelly, 1998/2014a, para. 5) does not eliminate the presence of the persistent pull and push to "make sense of" what we see and experience. Acknowledging that tendency can be compared to working *with* rather than centering our proclivity to "make sense," thematize, and categorize. I have reiterated the importance of this practice in each preceding chapter, as preparation away from the direction of settlement into the comforts of discussions

and conversations mired in debate and opinion. With the preparation laid out, perhaps the beauty of the conversation Jonathan, Jerah, James, and Anissa have as they talk about *Queen & Slim* can be more fully recognized, acknowledged, and embraced. For the formal classroom, this conversation can be an opening to immanence and new paths. Students can follow those paths according to what arises in their own practices of reception, individually and with others.

As a model not to mimic but from which to find new openings toward new questions of nuance between and outside of "Yes or No" or debate or rejection, this conversation can provide places from which educators and students can find other educational conversations, interpret-describe them, share them, and participate in their own, continually honing the criticality and reflexivity required in the ongoing practice of changing the everyday curricular and pedagogical conversations around film in the formal classroom so that those conversations can lead to investments in film as its own phenomenon, not as a vehicle to "entertainment" or the teaching of concepts toward *some other goal* (see Chapter 1, and Chapter 3, "The 'Educational' in the Literature" section; see again Gibbs, 2017). I argue that the vital work of film reception should involve confronting what is passed over under a veil of engagement. Through shared ubiquity and confrontations with basic assumptions, the implications for schooling and education are the intersections with cultural foundations. With the ongoing thinking otherwise that is the phenomenological attitude, it is possible to confront what we take for granted and think about it differently in order to change or add nuance to what has been set down.

Every episode of *Black Men Can't Jump [In Hollywood]* begins with a "cold open" (seemingly) unrelated to the episode's subject matter. As comedians and as actors, writers, and producers, Jonathan, Jerah, and James display their talents. Then Jonathan, the moderator, announces the show's premise: "This is a film review podcast. We review films of leading Black actors and talk about them in the context of race and diversity in Hollywood." The show's final segment, "The Cause," interprets "rating" a film in a new way, allowing for nuanced, educational conversation in something usually utilized for the lists, rankings, and hierarchies of the old

cinephilia (see again Shambu, 2019, 2020). Jonathan describes “The Cause” this way: “We rate and review films not based on how much we like them but whether or not they help the *cause* of more leading Black actors in Hollywood.” The film receives a “black fist” if it fully helps the cause, a “white palm” if it somewhat helps the cause, and nothing if it does not help the cause at all. Each co-host gives a rating, tells why, and then the conversation ensues.

The format (which also includes other, smaller components, comedic and otherwise) is not carried out at the expense of educational conversation or the show’s goals. This could not be possible without goals—and a format—set up not to foreclose but to face up to what might arise or challenge. In this, the hosts support each other as grappling and present in vulnerability. The format does not give itself to me as a repeated formula reproduced or as a template passively filled in. The ratings during “The Cause” are not a locking in of a fixed feeling or statement but rather a manifestation of grappling that remains in flux. Unlike what is done in the final segment of *Next Best Picture* (see again my reading in Chapter 3), the show takes time and leaves space for nuance and paradox.

The more specific aim of viewing films with the opportunities of leading Black actors in Hollywood in mind both narrows and broadens the show’s attention, as the deep emotional and aesthetic impacts of the films are weighed next to the fact that the mainstream (White) entertainment industry does not afford films starring Black actors with the same praising stamp of “relatability,” the same early-career benefit of the doubt, or the same positive reviews and awards as it affords films starring White actors. *Black Men Can’t Jump [In Hollywood]* is unique in its *dynamic* format; nuance in conversation is not sacrificed to method—there is a working *with* method. The results are reviews that can enhance reception in the formal classroom.

Waves*, “Relatability,” and Facing up to Reviewing the Film Differently*

In *Waves*, Tyler (Kelvin Harrison, Jr.), a middle-class high school student, sees his life spiral out of control after the confluence of several crises results in his being sentenced to life in prison after he commits murder. After Tyler goes to prison, the lead role is passed to Taylor

Russell, who plays Emily, Tyler's sister. We follow Emily as she grasps toward reconciliation for herself while supporting her family and starting a new relationship. In the *Waves* episode, the co-hosts grapple with how to review a film in which the leading Black character does not adhere to the "rules" of how Black people "should"—and so often do—conduct themselves in the face of anti-Black racism for the purpose of limiting their interaction with "law enforcement" as much as possible—for survival (Braylock et al., 2020c).

Jerah admits that "we're reviewing it different[ly] because it's a Black dude, even though this Black dude is doing the same thing [White actors do in films]," even though he [Jerah] also knows this dissimilarity in reviewing should not occur (Braylock et al., 2020c, 41:15–46:32). Tyler is deemed "unrelatable," even by Jonathan and Jerah, but Jonathan and Jerah confront their assessment rather than push it to the side. Hollywood did not grant *Waves* reception and acclaim on the level of that of comparable films with White leading actors. Jerah comments that films starring White children or teenagers, such as *Manchester by the Sea* and *Little Miss Sunshine*, *are not "relatable" either*, but "people love those . . . kids" (22:06–28:13). Jonathan's assessment is that *Waves* probably should have been 30 min shorter, is "slightly disjointed," and has "too much air in it," but he also acknowledges that films like *Boyhood* have similar critiques but were loved (1:07:31–1:08:34). (*Boyhood* received six Academy Award nominations and won one, *Little Miss Sunshine* received two wins and four nominations, and *Manchester by the Sea* was nominated six times, garnering two wins.) The hosts frequently bring up White actors and films with White writers and directors, and they emphasize that these are actors, films, and filmmakers they admire, enjoy, and very often think are great. But they do not ignore the stark disparities when it comes to opportunities to work and thrive.

As artists in the industry, they also grapple with taking in and having conversations about the art itself. Here, reception is educational: it is a grappling with what has arisen and with what arises. It is not uniform compartmentalization based on the reactions of a "type" of individual or a "type" of group. For listeners, hearing with a phenomenological attitude the unfolding of these

overlapping phenomena can bring into better focus what direct involvement may obfuscate by favoring mastery and debate over grappling and nuance.

"Relatability" and Reality: Blackbird *featuring Sydney James Harcourt*

During the episode on *Blackbird*, the 2014 film from director Patrik-Ian Polk, actor Sydney James Harcourt, the week's guest host, addresses the almost inevitable turn to "relatability" in film reception and the accompanying tendency to adhere to what would "most likely" happen in real life (Braylock et al., 2020b). In *Blackbird*, Randy Rousseau (Julian J. Walker) is a high school student living in Mississippi who resists his emerging gay identity while dealing with his mother who would oppose his coming out, his father and friends who would support it, and his commitment to his Southern Baptist religious life. Jonathan and Jerah critically and reflexively examine their own upbringings and talk about how they, as men who are not gay, relate to Randy in terms of coming from religious communities that attach sexuality to disapproval and shame (20:35–21:31, 24:48–25:23, 27:02–27:32, 30:11–31:51). Sydney, on the other hand, expresses that he was not brought up in religion (31:53–32:55). This *lack of relatability* contributes a *turn in the conversation* that presents relatability in a different shape. That is, at this point, as relatability leads to its close relative, "reality," and as the virtually inevitable comparisons to *Moonlight* have commenced,[9] Sydney reminds his co-hosts that *Blackbird defies* genre, which unsettles expectation; the film does not give itself in the mode of the "gritty realism" of *Moonlight*.

Elaborating, and addressing criticism that *Blackbird* tries to do "too much" and is "so confused," Sydney states this:

> I kind of thought of this movie as *fantasy* genre more than being in this thing of *Moonlight*, of this gritty realism, of trying to portray that. I thought that the movie lived in

[9] There are *so few* films with Black, gay leading characters that *Moonlight* became the designated "standard" when it won the Best Picture Academy Award (Braylock et al., 2020b, 19:55–20:30).

> a world of fantasy, and that's not shade. *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* is *fantasy*. *Sixteen Candles* is *fantasy*. *Heathers* is fantasy—those aren't real experiences. But that's how young White kids kind of learn how to handle situations that are upcoming in their life—how to handle sexual situations, how to handle unwanted pregnancies, or parents who disapprove of your poor boyfriend. And so, this felt the same to me in the sense that it was a *fantasy* of how friends *could* be in life, what your father *could* say to you, so that if you are a parent who happens to stumble upon this film and you're thinking that your kid might be going through something, here's a way you can handle that. And so, in that sense, I didn't try to take it very literally. (Braylock et al., 2020b, 32:54–34:35)

Sydney calls doing "too much" and being "confused" *ambition* and says that it is this ambition that places the film into the "fantasy genre for me" (1:23:54–1:24:12). He addresses the widespread, vehemently negative reviews of the film, which give the impression that "they want to bury it" (1:28:19–1:31:06). At the same time, he notes, many White actors also at the beginnings of their careers are given the benefit of the doubt and are given opportunities to develop what is seen as promising. But one of the extremely rare films with a Black, gay leading character was buried by critics, the vast majority of whom are White and male. These critics often react based on what they already identify with, want to see, or are *willing to* identify with or see, assigning "potential" and opportunity according to those sentiments (40:31–43:59).

Sydney continues: "We need a catalog of films like [*Blackbird*] so that people who have *these* questions . . . can experience their lives with more ease. Movies teach us so much about how to live our life." He goes on to say that had that catalog existed while he was growing up as a gay young person, he would not have had to struggle in confusion with so many events in his life (Braylock et al., 2020b, 1:28:19–1:30:48). The co-hosts then address the reasons *Blackbird* and its star did not receive the same reactions as films such as *The Blair Witch Project* and *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (which, as Sydney states, "could have [also] used more budget . . . better editing, or better actors, or something"). "Systematic homophobia and, by

extension, racism within the gay community" are included in the reasons, but the reasons do not stop there (1:30:35–1:31:21, 1:42:51–1:43:53).

Jerah states that to start hearing about Black, queer life in the mainstream media only recently "feels like it's being silenced for a reason" (Braylock et al., 2020b, 1:33:56–1:35:51). Meanwhile, he continues, "But when I look at a lot of Black projects that are even coming out right now in the pipeline, it is still *slavery* stuff, it is still *police brutality* stuff, it is still stuff that we have *seen*, the same stuff that we *get mad about White people making* [emphasis added]" (1:33:51–1:36:13). Jerah emphasizes the need for a variety and the need "to hold people accountable [for following through with], 'We have money to change [things]. Maybe we should invest in something that isn't the same thing we've seen every day.'" The need is for "20 more different films for people to latch on to" that star Black actors—not just *Moonlight* and *Blackbird*. He concludes with stating that "*Call Me by Your Name* was such a good film," but there are so many Black men and men of color who experience that, but "those movies never seem to get pushed to the forefront," nor do those not focused on the cisnormative world (1:36:14–1:36:41, 1:38:01–1:39:34).

Black Men Can't Jump [In Hollywood] is a review podcast that I posit as rare. It does more than attempt to shape broad taste. It looks at what *undergirds* taste and at what undergirds opportunity for those onscreen, behind the camera, and sharing their work as reviewers and critics. The hosts' concerns go beyond asserting their own likes and dislikes. Provocatively, the uses and meanings of "like" and "do/did not like" shift. In other words, they are about much more than simply "liking" or "disliking" a movie. Each week the show gives and shows itself anew with educational conversation. Jonathan, Jerah, and James often invite guests who can offer what they cannot, and they fully embrace paradox and tension concerning matters such as how a filmgoer can both "love and question" how a character is written (Braylock et al., 2019, 49:33–50:00), how a character is written to *take control* despite not having a long-term plan (Braylock et al., 2019, 50:01–51:52), or how "representation" as a

practice *restricts* opportunity when “everything is done in archetype” (Braylock et al., 2020b, 1:00:33–1:03:38, see also 1:09:56–1:11:30). They welcome the input and perspectives of others, regularly making statements like, “I’ll figure it out as we discuss it" (Braylock et al., 2020b, 24:48–28:29) and, “It was tough [for me], but I don’t know. . . . Let’s talk about it” (Braylock et al., 2020c, 21:00–24:44). These are not mere words. The conversations bear out these orientations.

The episode on *The Farewell* is an example of when the show broadens its premise and reviews a film with other actors of color in leading roles. Actor Katherine Lerner guest hosts (Braylock et al., 2020a). At one point the co-hosts discuss the merits of a scene near the end of the second act in which Jian (Diana Lin) and Billi (Awkwafina) once again debate the proper way to express grief (see Chapter 3, “Part II: Critics . . .” section). The co-hosts specifically laud Diana Lin’s performance. In praising the performance, James says, “It wasn’t a speech because it was a dialogue” (1:07:16–1:07:46). The same can be said for *Black Men Can’t Jump [In Hollywood]* and for educational conversation in the formal classroom. Rather than a series of speeches (followed by rebuttals according to something like the rules of a debate), educational conversations require meeting phenomena (e.g., the film and the conversations of which one is a part) as they give themselves and show themselves. Unlike Lin’s work as an actor, being in educational conversation is *not* a performance. As one of the “sources of art in human experience” (Dewey, 1934/1980, p. 5) and as a way of receiving that entails grappling with the unexpected, the spontaneous, and the ambiguous (Greiner, 2009, para. 3), educational conversation is another type of authentic being and sharing. Its aesthetic qualities come from a different place where critical reflection meets sensuousness in the moment.

Directly From the Artists: Interview Podcasts and Enhanced Intimacies of Reception

Emerging here is the inextricable relationship between individual and collective reception and film as an approximation of life as we live it. Educational viewing and educational conversation call for a meeting of criticality, reflexivity, and the visceral responses film provokes.

I turn to a phenomenological attitude to meet this call, as it, as I state in Chapter 2, allows for a moving toward paradox, the source of tension, to see experiences of *un*settlement as places not to deflect away from or veil over but to continue from and begin with. If phenomenological approaches to making pedagogical investments in nuance *un*fix film reception, taking it beyond theory and method, notions of "relatability/reality" can be thought alongside any film without foreclosure. For this, *other conversations* in podcast form become even more intimate in their flexibilities (and flexible in their intimacies) when we hear directly from filmmakers in interviews and on panels. Skilled and reflexive interviewers and moderators who grapple with what might arise, rather than push the unexpected to the side due to attachments to the predeterminations of a plan, are supportive of unforeseen encounters that can be transformative to reception. This is where philosophy as pertaining to the fine arts unites with the aesthetic in human experience more generally.

This human experience includes, as Greiner (2009) writes, "education that itself is aesthetic" (paras. 1–3). This is to say that, outside of film itself, hearing directly from an actor, writer, director, producer, editor, cinematographer, or anyone whose skill creates the films that move us in any number of directions is perhaps the most intimate way we can confront and challenge film as it confronts and challenges *us*. As I have stated, podcasts offer with the flexibility and intimacy of longform conversation the time-shifting ability to engage on a listener-defined schedule, free from a fixed visual orientation or attachment to a stationary device. This aurality accentuates gestures and detail picture can obscure or dilute. And when these podcast conversations educate because they grapple, the possibilities for thinking otherwise on an ongoing basis are at their highest, as direct participants and listeners can confront the real and the *fantasy* in the complexities and complications of phenomenological reception.

Disparate Potential in Conversation: Paul Dano and Richard Ford on Wildlife

Fresh Air is a podcast created from the radio program of the same name, which is broadcast daily from WHYY-FM in Philadelphia and through National Public Radio. In 2018,

host Terry Gross interviewed Paul Dano about *Wildlife*, which he adapted with Zoe Kazan from the Richard Ford novel (Gross, 2018; see Chapter 4 above). About a third of the way in, Gross asks a question that is a typical one to ask: “Were there lines from the book that you wanted to make sure were in the movie?” Dano’s response leads us through a different way of approaching adaptation. Dano tells of the “growth” in directing his first film, which for him means “writing the script . . . and then suddenly bringing actors into it who are asking you questions, who are bringing subtext that you might not have even thought of.” Elaborating on observing actors work, he continues: “An emotion passes through them, and it fills out something. . . . And suddenly you don’t need that *line* that you thought was the essence of the film or something” (10:29–11:52). Dano’s response presents what I call *disparate potential in conversation* (see Chapter 4 for my introduction of disparate potential in conjunction with Stewart’s *Ordinary Affects*). The question suggests a list, but that is not what transpires. Immanence and givenness showed what was not needed, what was to fade away after coming to the actors, the acting, the visuals, the set, the collaboration, the questions, the crew (see 12:26–13:41). The *showing* says the words, and different words can convey when a verbatim rendering is unneeded. As for the conversation—the interview—Gross does not press for a response that might be anticipated based on the question or that might be expected by an interviewer who envisions answers and forges ahead to make them manifest, like a director securely anchored to a vision *brought to* the screenplay, set, and editing room.

With what I see as akin to having a phenomenological attitude, Dano let go of a *prior vision* for what his film could be. My point is not to argue that no one has ever directed in a similar way. It is that the aurality of his description gives itself and reveals how he sees filmmaking as collaboration. Taking in his words, I hearken back to Stewart’s (2007) ordinary affects: growth for Dano emerged from “public feelings that begin and end in broad circulation [and are] also the stuff that seemingly intimate lives are made of” (pp. 1–2). I could imagine

ordinary affects on the set and in the editing room, and I observe them play out in this educational podcast conversation.

At the end of his reply, Dano, without any extra prompting from Gross, gives an example of a line he "couldn't wait" to put in the film but did not because "in the edit room, we didn't need it." Gross then says, "Hmm, interesting because it kind of says that": The film communicates the line's purport without incorporating it word for word. Dano returns (with a laugh), "Well, yeah, I probably shouldn't even say it now" (Gross, 2018, 11:52–12:26). As I write in Chapter 3 in the section on adaptation, reception is tied to questions of "loyalty" to source material. Those questions are tied to "relatability" and "reality"—how "well" a film "stays true to" something (a book/concretization) that already exists/subsists. As Dano demonstrates (with Gross's support), there are different ways to receive and adapt text. And filmgoers who grapple with nuance can *adapt* their thinking and practices to meet those differences.

In a *Film Comment* Talk released as an episode of the *Film Comment* podcast from the Film Society of Lincoln Center (now Film at Lincoln Center), Richard Ford, onstage with Paul Dano, says that he does not like to use the expression, "translate a novel into film" (Hynes, 2018, 9:48–9:59). Here, he is speaking to the tense change Dano and Kazan make. The novel is in the past tense, and Joe narrates in first-person; the film is in the present tense and does not use voiceover. Ford calls this change in tense a "huge *ethical* change. It's a huge *formal* change. It's not simple. It's not easy. It affects the dramatics of everything." The reason he gives for this is that, in the past tense, "you have a kind of zone of comfort because you know everybody's survived enough for this to be told" (6:24–10:41). In the film there is no such comfort. The change is more than translating, which implies a relative ease. Dano recounts not abandoning the past tense but rather approaching it differently: for the film to be in the "present tense but hopefully have the feeling of memory almost, or the weight of nostalgia or myth or something." With this feeling, and through "the reveal of information [to Joe]," Dano wanted to "start the film and just be with the kid's experience of, 'Life's good' and 'Life is what I've known it

to be' and then stepping into, I guess, adulthood" (8:53–9:40, 11:57–13:26). For Joe, adulthood introduces ordinary uncertainty, as I refer to it in my *Wildlife* section in Chapter 4.

Film Comment magazine describes itself as "the home of independent film journalism, publishing in-depth interviews, critical analysis, and feature coverage of mainstream, art-house, and avant-garde filmmaking from around the world" (Film at Lincoln Center, n.d.-a). The podcast is "a weekly space for critical conversation about film, with a look at topical issues, new releases, and the big picture" (Film at Lincoln Center, n.d.-b). *Film Comment* offers conversation about film that is more dedicated, more thorough, and more sustained than the coverage *Fresh Air* can provide. This is due to mission, focus, scope, and audience. I mention audience not to categorize or exclude but to emphasize that "audience" does *not* foreclose—it can overlap, include, and be in conversation with others. I also find it important to continue to remember that a moderator like Eric Hynes (a *Film Comment* columnist and a curator for the Museum of the Moving Image) is also a filmgoer like Gross, and no filmgoer is beyond the ubiquity of reception.

Ford famously maintains that a filmmaker's "faithfulness" to his book is of no importance to him ("There *is* no 'faithful to my book.' My book is just my book" [Hynes, 2018, 23:04–24:19]; see Chapter 4). He states this in various ways in the *Film Comment* conversation with Dano that Hynes moderates. Still, at this point Hynes, during a series of questions about adaptation that seems to resist the philosophy, asks Ford, "Did you recognize the characters?" With reflexive nuance, Ford responds, "That's an interesting question" but that seeing a filmic adaptation of his book is "a kind of assault . . . not really different from the assault that any movie makes upon any moviegoer." To a question posed by Dano, he adds that in his experiences of trying to adapt his own work, he learned that the "inexorable wish . . . to hang on to the *best parts*" of the book imperils the possibilities of what the film could be, as the film is a different medium—it is not the book (24:32–27:25). *Still later*, Hynes comes back to this question, again asking Ford about recognizing his characters. This time, he reveals that he asked to perhaps locate a point at which a screenwriter strays so far from the source material that the "spirit or true *core* of [the]

characters," something he imagines would be of utmost importance to a novelist or screenwriter/filmmaker, is lost (31:00–31:41). In these moments, I grapple with the disparate potential in a different direction: expecting a certain degree of change in moderators after they do not get what they assume they will get, not observing what I expected or hoped, and then rethinking the phenomenon.

I can rethink Hynes's follow-up questions because I do find nuance in them. Rather than press for a prior vision of a response from Ford, Hynes's follow-up questions show grappling. In working with Ford's and Dano's accounts of art, Hynes follows up not with the same questions but with honed questions that respond authentically to what Ford and Dano have said. Hynes seems to be endeavoring to better elucidate where adaptation might lie and how it is different from an original screenplay. But we must be prepared for lines that will not fall where we would like them to fall.

In feedback/response in the moment that cannot be achieved by the one-way direction of a lecture or of a reader engaging with a written or visual text, the three panelists talk about Joe's quest to "make *sense* of the mess" of what is happening. Dano notes that he took care not to portray this immanent and shifting quest in a cynical way. He honors what Joe goes through—it is universal yet singularly felt. Next, Ford calls the "sense" we make "a provisional sense that gives the reader something to contemplate and have a conversation with." Hynes responds, "You want to be reassured that there's a meaning, that there's a purpose, that there is something fixed, and instead you're finding out its quite the opposite." Ford then turns directly to art: "It's the virtue of art. It's the virtue of art—that it fixes something *provisionally* while you're *in it*. And then you go out of it. . . . But for that moment there is a solace, and there is a pleasure, and there is a kind of almost renewal" (Hynes, 2018, 42:19–43:45). It would, I believe, help to think of reception, educational conversation, and their aesthetics in ways similar to how Ford sees the virtue of art.

What Ford says about the "virtue of art" can be said for phenomenological reception in the cinema, in finding and listening to educational podcast conversations, and in conversation in the formal classroom. Provisional, fixed, contemplation, solace, renewal, conversation, pleasure—this can be an assemblage that puts us in the midst of paradox through disparate potential. From a phenomenological attitude as a filmgoer, even when we are "out of it" (the provisional fixing of art), I posit that as filmgoers (and listeners), included in Ford's renewal are the parts we take with us. These parts become part and parcel of how we receive next time.

Nuance and Reality: Brian Tyree Henry on Acting

As we have seen, "reality" (what *is*) and "fantasy" (what *could* be) are not mutually exclusive in film, nor are they simple matters.[10] As I state above, in the *Blackbird* episode from *Black Men Can't Jump [In Hollywood]*, Sydney James Harcourt expounds on what he refers to as "fantasy genre" films—films about growing up that stray from "gritty realism" so that they might help young people (and their parents, other relatives, and friends) navigate some of life's confusions. In this current subsection on educational podcast episodes that are conversations with the artists who worked on the film that is the episode's subject, I have, in hearing from Paul Dano, Richard Ford, Terry Gross, and Eric Hynes on *Wildlife*, argued that how we think relatability, reality, and fantasy is integral to how we receive "adaptation" as object and idea. To close out this subsection, I turn to Brian Tyree Henry and his own words about how, as an actor, he aimed to address reality—how things *are*—in portraying Daniel Carty in *If Beale Street Could Talk*. The aim he describes is an aim foundational to his work.

In an episode of the podcast *Playback* with Kris Tapley, Tapley talks with Henry about his life and career (Tapley, 2019). With his easy manner and in-depth knowledge of filmmaking,

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[10] For educational podcast conversations pertaining to *Queen & Slim* that connect these questions to questions of beauty, see the *Queen & Slim* section in Chapter 4 in conjunction with Cobb (2019), "Lena Waithe on Police Violence and *Queen & Slim*," and Horn (2019), "Lena & Melina & *Queen & Slim*."

Tapley lets his guests do most of the talking. By this I mean something specific: With his notable ability to merge the artistic, technical, aesthetic, and personal while concurrently highlighting the contributions of each to what it might mean to have affection for film, work in film, and continuously grapple with the myriad ways in which film moves us, he encourages actors, directors, and others to speak in ways not typical of most interviews, including those in arenas geared to cinephiles.

Daniel Carty is in one scene of *If Beale Street Could Talk*. Tapley calls the scene "a moment in the movie that just grabs you and does not let go of you for those [12] minutes" (Tapley, 2019, 20:21–20:43). In Chapter 4, I call my subsection on this scene, "Acting and What Must Be Said." The sentiments are related: The scene grabs you because Henry's performance grabs you and because Daniel must grab Fonny to let him know something that is a matter of survival or death. I wrote the *Beale Street* section in Chapter 4 before I engaged with this episode again for this chapter. I had not listened since 2019, but the intimacy and vulnerability stayed with me. In aural form, these qualities make this conversation one of the most profound examples of why I advocate for the podcast medium as a pedagogical investment in more nuanced ways of receiving film.

Henry says this about playing Daniel and, by extension, speaks to the role that taking life how it is plays in his work:

> With Daniel, I just wanted to make sure, for *all* the Daniels out there, that they felt like they were being heard, man. Because it's very rare that there's someone that you feel like you can open up to with that experience. . . .
>
> I just wanted to really make sure that every brother out there who has been through that heard it. I wanted to make sure that they knew that . . . you are welcome here and you are free. . . . And even when you don't feel free, there's a freedom in brotherhood, honestly. And it just felt like a space to be free with Fonny in that moment. (Tapley, 2019, 22:48–25:38)

No matter how short the scenes are, Henry is committed to making filmgoers think about these people beyond the theater so that they will want to get to know these men in real life, so they will realize that “you’re missing out if you don’t get to know them” (26:45–29:57). At the same time, Henry is clear that when he gets the opportunity to play such roles, he never wants to pretend as if he knows everything about what they have been through. Additionally, he has not and will not attempt to intrude or mine their experiences by asking them what it was like for them when they were in jail or prison; he has never been and “never want[s] to know what that’s like” (21:46–22:03). He continues:

> There’s no way I will ever go to somebody who’s been locked up—especially a Black *man*—and ask him, “How was it in there?” That’s not my place, for real. The fact that you’re even *out* and that you’re *in this world* and you *made it* through that—that’s enough for me. (22:08–22:22)

Henry is vulnerable here and throughout and is supported in that. We hear Tapley’s utterances and words of feedback. We hear Henry’s sense of what is real and important. There are some things you *don’t* ask. It takes facing up to that to acknowledge the best course of action when you are immersed in the realities of injustice. The unfolding of an aspect of Henry’s process as an actor is a given that shows itself that can be encountered individually and collectively by listeners.

Earlier in the interview, Henry is responding to one of Tapley’s follow-up questions that Tapley asks from a statement Henry makes in the moment. Henry is talking about how, at Yale School of Drama (now David Geffen School of Drama at Yale University), he gradually (and also suddenly) had the exhilarating realization, “You’re literally playing. I was like, Oh! That’s why they’re called plays!” This contributes to why he does not get stage fright: “When I’m playing somebody else, it’s not me. So, therefore, it’s like, well what do I have to be nervous about because this is not me?” (Tapley, 2019, 11:02–12:12). To hear what is on all sides of and going through such an immense talent, to hear Henry describe that the scene between Fonny and

Daniel “is heavy, but it’s still a moment between two friends” (21:37–21:45), is to hear the paradoxes and tensions and complexities of artistic work that is a major source of aesthetic experience.

Henry is devoted to doing right by characters who are “men that I know . . . and that I’ve lived with and could one day *become*” (Tapley, 2019, 27:34–27:44), *and* there are questions he will not pose. He knows these men and has had some similar experiences, but he respects boundaries that he will not cross. As I listen to paradox, tension, and complexity give themselves as Henry speaks, responds, and connects, I acknowledge that if his approach to acting is anything but simple, so is reception itself. For students and educators, and for all filmgoers, conversations like this one from *Playback* are a profound call to return continually to the basic questions of what we mean when we declare, with the discursive language of “relatability,” “faithfulness,” “reality,” or “logic,” what does or does not have a proper place on the screen.

Awards Chatter *and “Run[ning] Ahead of the Phenomenon”*

Scott Feinberg of *The Hollywood Reporter*, where he is the Executive Editor of Awards and host of the podcast *Awards Chatter*, is known for his almost encyclopedic knowledge of Academy Awards statistics and history (see “Scott Feinberg of *The Hollywood Reporter*!” 2019, 6:31–12:45). He is also known for his well-researched interviews. For *Awards Chatter*, he interviews the most recognized actors and filmmakers in independent and mainstream film, often surprising his guests with details from their own biographies or filmographies—details they had themselves forgotten or did not imagine a member of the press knowing. Encyclopedic knowledge means comprehensiveness, but of the “authorized,” “official,” and “masterful” types deemed as such by those with the authority to create and put forth the information for Feinberg to file away. Filed away information is liable to become fixed, settled knowledge. There is potential for this knowledge to become *un*settled when it is necessary for it to be adjusted or

changed. But it takes criticality and reflexivity for individuals working collectively in good faith to adjust or change the gaze so the conversation can shift.

Feinberg's interview style gives in ways that show him *deploying* his knowledge. This is sometimes an impressive display, but it leaves little room for the unexpected, spontaneous, or ambiguous when a guest, simply by responding authentically, stops his interviews' almost technocratic flow. The knowledge deployment carries over to *Award Chatter*'s structure. Feinberg adheres to a format that is a template—he sticks to an opening script that goes much further than the typical and not unwise repetition of show name, host name, host's title, and brief statement about the scope and aim of the show. Feinberg's script for each episode extends to a fill-in-the-blank template all the way through the guest introduction.

The show's seemingly comprehensive, "This Is Your Life" structure gives an air of attention and care as Feinberg accounts for, to varying levels of depth, *every* credit on his guest's filmography. This attention and care, though, are not all surface level. Feinberg's research has a way of encouraging guests to speak pointedly and generously, their responses philosophical, analytical, and brimming with eagerness, whether the topic is "light" or serious. But at times that *executed structure* is a veil over what has *not* been considered. This is especially the case when Feinberg addresses race in Hollywood. The moments in which what an actor or filmmaker says interrupts the flow of Feinberg's *facilitation* are turns from conversation to strict interview/interviewee dynamics. They draw more attention to how easily his tight grip on his "well-researched" template can be pulled loose. These moments that I encounter aurally bring back to mind Marion (1997/2002). As I see them phenomenologically, these moments for Feinberg occur when his method has "run ahead of the phenomenon"—that is, his research, structure, and format *carried out* do not "[travel] in tandem" with phenomena as they give themselves and then show themselves (Marion, 1997/2002, p. 9).

In an interview with actress and producer Aunjanue Ellis in July 2020, Feinberg asks Ellis about her *The Help* co-star Viola Davis's announcement that she regrets playing the role of

Aibileen Clark in the 2011 film. Feinberg says he was surprised: “I understand it’s a maid character . . . but . . . it felt to me like a substantive part that, nobody forced anyone to be in that movie, and it worked out well at the time.” He continues: “I’m White—maybe I missed something at that time, but I felt it was a fairly progressive movie” (Feinberg, 2020b, 39:41–41:13). In responding to Feinberg’s question of if she shares Davis’s sentiment, Ellis focuses on misplaced stigmas:

> The problem with *The Help* was that *The Help* was written by a White woman, and it was directed by a White man. So, it was the story of these Black women through their [the White writer’s and White director’s] eyes. And what I want to be clear [about] is this idea that is sort of attached to this film . . . is the stigma [that] it’s problematic because it was about Black *maids*, and I resent that because it was Black *domestic* workers who were the basic structure of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party. They were the *power* source for the Freedom Movement in Mississippi in a way that paralleled no other movement in the entire country. . . . Domestic workers in Mississippi in the 1960s were heroes. Let’s get that *clear*. The problem is who *tells* the story. . . . And that is where we are in this moment of reckoning right now. (41:14–42:39)

Ellis says that “now that we know better—hopefully we all know better now,” we can make a new course to eliminate the practices of “our stories and our music being pillaged . . . co-opted or stolen by White Americans” (42:39–44:06). Instead of engaging *Ellis’s* words, Feinberg brings into the talk *another* Black actress. That actress is Octavia Spencer, who won an Academy Award for her role in *The Help* and who was a producer of *Green Book*, the Best Picture winner in 2019 that is also embroiled in this same debate. *On the way to* the (typical) response, “If we can only write about our own experiences, I wonder if that’s a good thing,” he cites Spencer’s assertion that there was no one else [Black writers or directors] showing interest in the *Green Book* story (44:07–45:35).

Ellis then, as she has done all along, takes the interview back to embracing paradox and tension; she takes it beyond half-acknowledgments where questions appear to be invested in nuance but in actuality might be a deployment back to settlement. She asks, “How many World War II stories [about White people] are being told? Thank about that. How many World War I stories are being told, just in the last couple of years? There’s no *stigma* attached. There’s a *celebration* attached.” Conversely, Ellis recounts being told by a Black producer, “I don’t want to tell that story because that’s another Civil Rights story.” For Ellis, we must change the conversation by *rethinking the stigma* and facing up to why certain stories about Black people are avoided with the reason given of not wanting to “repeat” them while the same is not the case for common stories about White people. When those things are being done in good faith in an ongoing manner, there can be honest confrontations with the questions of who tells what stories (Feinberg, 2020b, 45:35–47:40).

In the portion on Ellis’s role as Aminata Diallo in the 2015 television miniseries *The Book of Negroes* and her role as Nancy Turner in the 2016 film *The Birth of a Nation*, Feinberg mentions the number of actresses who turned down the *Book of Negroes* role because Aminata Diallo is an enslaved woman, and those who asked, “Why are we doing this again?” when *The Birth of a Nation* was being made. Feinberg asks Ellis, “How did you navigate those questions about what is and isn’t something you are comfortable playing?” Ellis responds, “I’m not uncomfortable playing *anything*, so I don’t have that issue. I don’t have that issue. I’m *excited* about playing roles like that.” For her, in doing what she describes as “living in the footsteps of my grandfather,” playing these characters is the realization of what her purpose is (Feinberg, 2020b, 47:40–51:36).

Feinberg runs ahead of the phenomenon with his question here, which seems mired in the assumption that playing enslaved people or figures in the Civil Rights Movement is a question for all Black actors *in the same way*. The question, specifically in how it is structured and posed, is not calibrated to acknowledge what Ellis *has already said* thus far in the

conversation. Feinberg runs ahead of the phenomenon by not rethinking the stigma on certain stories that portray Black people's lives—by not asking those same questions about certain types of stories about White people's lives that are told repeatedly to, as Ellis also points out, great "celebration." By assuming he already knows the origins or sources or causes of the problems, by *going in looking* for something in particular from a pre-configured frame—e.g., immediately bringing in other Black actresses to "rebut" Ellis's points rather than substantively considering Ellis's words deeply in the moment—he cannot recognize nuances that could actually make lasting, genuine change.[11] What if "I'm White—maybe I missed something" were part of his research rather than just a statement reserved for the interview?

If Feinberg more fully embraced paradox and tension on the way to an ongoing thinking otherwise—if his "method" allowed it—he could travel "in tandem with the phenomenon, as if protecting it and clearing a path for it by eliminating roadblocks" (Marion, 1997/2002, p. 9). Then, the phenomenon for which he would be clearing a path would not be "Black actresses who turn down roles or regret playing roles versus Black actresses who will play any role with no regret," nor would it be "Whether or not we should only write about our own experiences." The phenomenon would be, as Ellis tells us, the long, ongoing story of White supremacy in Hollywood alongside the already embedded implications for film reception. It would be *the phenomenon of* running ahead of the phenomenon. The question remains whether this *Awards Chatter* episode is educational, as I lay out that for that to be the case, all participants must grapple.

I included this episode in this section on educational podcast conversations as an example of, on Feinberg's part, grappling under the influences of running ahead of the phenomenon. This is to say that this episode, and *Awards Chatter* as a show, allows its guests

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[11] For a related instance, this one involving the notion of "colorblind casting," see Feinberg (2020a), "Kerry Washington - *Little Fires Everywhere* & *American Son*," 57:41–1:00:30.

to speak beyond the show's structure and format. This almost paradoxical feature requires practice and thought and is supported by Feinberg's acknowledging each guest as having a complete life and career. But this is also to say that *Awards Chatter* reveals how difficult it can be to grapple and to recognize grappling. Thus, of utmost significance is the episode's importance as an example of structure and format running ahead of a phenomenon—"*fore*-seeing it, *pre*-dicting it, and *pro*-ducing it, in order to await it from the outset at the end of the path (*meta-hodos*) onto which it has just barely set forth" (Marion, 1997/2002, p. 9). Still, for formal classrooms grappling with the complexities and complications of film reception with a phenomenological attitude, it offers stirring instruction from Ellis about what is immanent in paradox and tension. Overall, the episode educates because it grapples in offering no easy answers while still offering ways in which we *can*, in fact, begin acting anew.

In the Formal Classroom/On Grappling

The episodes I have put forth in this section are instances I chose in order to show how integrating educational podcast conversations into the formal classroom can be a pedagogical investment in nuance in film reception and in reception more broadly. These conversations are only *my* examples. This is an invitation to teachers and to students: Find educational podcast conversations in (or out of) the context of what you are watching, what you are studying, and what you are asking. Delving into those conversations, interpreting-describing them, placing them into conversation with each other, and having educational classroom conversations about them are the necessary practices of having a phenomenological attitude as a filmgoer. In podcasting, flexibility and intimacy give way to listening freedom. Creative freedom affords flexibility and intimacy. Accessible technology meets access to the aesthetic in and beyond art, including in human experiences of conversation from one type of classroom to another. In conversation, reception without performances of intelligence, "wit," or debate can lead to paths of new questions outside current or previous imagination (RQ3).

Toward conversations that are not mere stages for performances of intelligence, wit, opinion, or debate, I have offered grappling. I do not advocate for grappling as a form of an answer or as a form of mastery or (re)settlement evasively framed as something else. I have reiterated the ongoing importance of the questions themselves, of being taken unawares, of embracing paradox, tension, and immanence as phenomena give themselves anew. Thus, as not an arrival or conclusion that forecloses, grappling is but one offering. Grappling holds possibility for thinking otherwise that takes more shapes than there are students, educators, and filmgoers to practice it. It is one form of the reflexivity that I argue should accompany criticality. I do not only *call for* engaging paradox, tension, and immanence; I *work within them* to show that actively facing and approaching possibility means actively facing and approaching impossibility. In other words, working outside of prescription means reorientations to the familiar and unfamiliar, moving away from their comforts.

There is paradox and tension in making an explicit offering while emphasizing the cruciality of not being hampered by, while working *with*, disciplinarity or theory or method. But grappling as I posit it has the capacity to be a result of, a prelude to, or an object of, wonder. It can itself be a form of wonder about one's current path, and a path toward nuance that forges new, unexpected paths beyond disciplinarity, theory, and method. It can emerge or not emerge, and it can change, undulate, ebb, and flow (see the On Educational Conversation section in this present chapter). Grappling is thinking and acting that comes from an attitude; it is not a codified process. It can be involved when placing seemingly disparate arguments and texts into conversation. Grappling, then, is also a response to the ubiquity of reception (see Chapter 3, "Conversations: Developing One's Voice" section, see also Chapter 1, Arrival to *Un*settlement section, "Settlement In and Out of Text" section).

Overall, the possibilities of grappling are there for what might arise, for conversation rather than discussion, for the lessons *not* planned. They are an integral part of the path I have

laid out that does not go in one direction or in a straight line. But when or in what form they might come into play is not predicted.

CODA: *IN MEETING*

At this juncture, I stay with as well as return to the aesthetic. As I have expanded it, the aesthetic remains common across phenomenology, classrooms, and film reception. As a branch of philosophy, it is concerned with various areas, including sensory knowledge (Kelly 1998/2014a, para. 5); generalizations about art (Kelly 1998/2014a, para. 5); beauty (Ross, 2014); and "critical reflection on [fine] art, culture, and nature" (Kelly, 1998/2014a, para. 1). And as I have written, aesthetic qualities are common in everyday activities and experiences when we are drawn beyond utilitarian purpose (Dewey, 1934/1980, p. 5). As it pertains to film reception, the aesthetic in encounters between filmgoer and film carries over to the aesthetic in educational conversations about film. The aesthetic is in what is made possible through podcast technologies, as aurality, flexibility, intimacy, freedom, and vulnerability give in ways not previously possible on the part of listeners or creators. Realized through these possibilities are educational podcast conversations, what I call classrooms of a different type. And finally, the aesthetic is present in educational conversation in the formal classroom.

Therefore, I conclude but do not foreclose with the relationship between phenomenology and aesthetics, followed by statements on grappling and education. The connections between phenomenology and aesthetics approach most closely what it might mean to have responsibilities beyond mere reception (RQ1) and what it could mean to take a phenomenological approach in making pedagogical investments in more nuanced ways of receiving film (RQ3). In addition to and as part of how I construe the educational, grappling is of importance due to phenomenology's aesthetic imperative.

Van Manen (2016) refers to phenomenological writing and description as "poetizing," as the aesthetic imperative in phenomenology emerges by way of phenomenology's "vocative aspects" (pp. 240–241). The vocative calls for what cannot be achieved with prose intended for one-to-one correspondence between word and meaning such that a summary could substitute

for the text. Vocative language cannot be mastered (see Singh, 2018) for such a summary, and not even the description is the aim. Yet, a description that approaches but can never reach the lived as it is lived is what the vocative seeks that straightforward language cannot achieve (van Manen, 2016, p. 241). This poetizing that the vocative calls for also happens in work that is not explicitly phenomenological but that adds dimensions to it (the phenomenological): It happens in *Wayward Lives: Beautiful Experiments* as Hartman "engage[s] the materiality of the document" and "stud[ies] and remake[s] it through transposition and augmentation, redaction and annotation" (Hartman, 2019, 2020a, para. 6). In Stewart (2007), it happens in the "varied, surging capacities" of ordinary affects (pp. 1–2). As van Manen (2016) tells us, the aim to approach is finding "in the words, or, perhaps better, in spite of the words . . . memories that paradoxically we never thought or felt before" (p. 241). These paradoxical memories come through words chosen and delivered "in a more primal sense," through language that "speaks the world rather than abstractly speaking of it," through words chosen, placed together, and delivered incantatively and evocatively (p. 241).

Relatedly but in the realm of filmgoing and film reception, actor Willem Dafoe says this during a recent episode of *The A24 Podcast*:

> In many ways, I'm interested in a more . . . *poetic* film. . . . When things are recognizable, it's a beautiful, fun thing. But you hop on a train and you kind of enjoy the ride. But you're not going step by step; you aren't experiencing it in the same way that you experience poetry—poetry in the broadest sense of the word. (Rossellini & Dafoe, 2022, 23:20–24:04)

As both address aesthetics, Dafoe's poetic viewing can be described phenomenologically, and van Manen's poetizing can be applied to filmgoing and film reception. Both arguments can be compared to and placed into conversation with D. H. Davis's (2020) description of phenomenology as an endeavor toward seeing our world "as if for the first time, through unjaded eyes" (p. 4). With this comes an orientation toward the world that allows for the

possibility “that we can be astonished before it” (p. 4). More than other films, phenomenological films such as *If Beale Street Could Talk*, *Queen & Slim*, and *Wildlife* can encourage viewing in these ways, but a filmgoer can also initiate this viewing by viewing with a phenomenological attitude as a filmgoer (RQ2). This filmgoer does not work from the stasis of “settled” thinking. This filmgoer recognizes and embraces the possibility in paradox and tension.

The educational—not merely learning something but grappling in it—is ongoing. It does not foreclose. Throughout this dissertation I have referred to “meetings.” Some of those meetings are the ubiquity of reception meeting educational viewing, meeting the text, meeting phenomena in their givenness (Marion), educational viewing meeting the formal classroom, aesthetics meeting reception, critical reflection meeting sensuousness in the moment, accessible technology meeting access to the aesthetic, and educational viewing meeting educational conversation. I mention this to say that these meetings are also ongoing. Like being *in conversation*, orientations, philosophies, attitudes, and experiences that meet are *in meeting*.

Moreover, advancing from one area or “step” to the next—e.g., moving from acknowledging the ubiquity of reception to thinking and practicing educational viewing—is vital, but more importantly the matter is one of returning back and proceeding forth again, of areas moving in tandem, of rethinking and taking different paths around and through while grappling anew, or as existing ideas and practices emerge as taken for granted for the first time. Thus, by linking it to what it means to grapple, I have recast “educational” in a way that I hope adds an important dimension to educational thinking. Education is not merely *learning something*, and more than the *something* can change us. Like the phenomenological attitude, education can also be described as an ongoing thinking otherwise. It can enable us to continually question what we think we know through the attention we pay to what is immanent in the everyday while we work with but do not center theory and method, which can organize, illuminate, and disentangle but can also negate, assume, and bracket out to leave to the side.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Chad E. Harris is a scholar of philosophy of education, film philosophy, and film reception studies. His specialty areas include film phenomenology; podcast studies; women's, gender, and sexuality studies; and depictions of teachers, administrators, and schools in film and on television. He earned a Bachelor of Arts in English and minor in history from The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in 2006 and a Master of Arts in Education from Wake Forest University in 2007. He taught high school English and speech and debate in Clemmons, NC, before entering the Ph.D. program in cultural foundations at UNC Greensboro, where he taught cultural foundations of education and philosophy of education. He is the current executive committee secretary on the board of directors for a/perture cinema in Winston-Salem, NC, and a program manager for the OUT at the Movies International Film Festival, also in Winston-Salem.