

Bodies of Unpleasure: Von Trier and The Dark Side of Seriality

Whether students or my parents, my environment has always been wary about my cinephilic preferences, which led them to the question: "Why do you watch those films?" By those films, people mean films that follow paths of articulate unease and affective irritation.

After years of film theoretical research and a considerable number of motion pictures, I cannot stop wondering why the masses are still yearning for the pleasures of fictitious stability; and I cannot stop thinking of those others who are looking for a distinctly different experience, because those (like me) are searching for unpleasure.

What I would call unpleasure adds up to the theoretical corpus around what Williams termed "body genres" and complements it with a whole new vocabulary. Not only has the latest fashion of the New Extremity brought up a new sensibility within radicalized auteurism; the films that I put under scrutiny in this category, and among them Von Trier's *Antichrist* and *Nymphomaniac* have moreover established a new understanding of extreme physicality, of visceral sensitivity, and of nauseating the viewer in unpleasurable ways, be it aesthetically, due to narrative strategies or the ambivalence of motifs and topics.

Why does SHE (Charlotte Gainsbourg) unleash our ethical hell, when she uses her excessive sexual nature to punish her female abjection. Why do we feel guilty when we watch Joe's (Charlotte Gainsbourg) insatiable craving, getting lubricated at the deathbed of her father? In my talk I approach unexplored territory, on which the promise for pleasure takes on a different form of bodily experience.

By arguing that in Von Trier's *Antichrist* and *Nymphomaniac* seriality functions as a capitalization of "commercial continuation," I approach Von Trier's recent films exemplarily by looking at the films' framed bodies as reference for a wider truth: How is satisfaction corrupted by a physical bluntness? What kinds of different affect(s) are inscribed in the excessive nature of the corporeal? In how far becomes unpleasure both an addictive quality and a serial policy, which brings its viewer to his/her borders of concern, shame, and will to ethical investment.

I myself belong to an audience that wants conventional satisfaction to be withheld and I am thus looking for what I would call unpleasure. To me, the viewers' repetitive desire for unpleasure seems thereby based on a need to experience the unpleasant through *feeling* rather than *seeing* only and where every *different* 'again' is always a *new* 'more'. To *feel* the loss of stability in the depicted body puts into question the precarious status of myself, i.e. the subject that is looking and thereby exposes its limited stability.

In the study of serial unpleasure, Lars von Trier's auteur cinema puts on another layer to the conventions of capitalist consumption and the status of the ecstatic body in popular media culture. In his films, I argue, the pornographic is by no means taken as a commercial bracket, but creates an alliance with the tainted desire of its audience to unravel its psychosocial identity behind bare satisfaction.

Bio: Sandra Danneil has an M.A. in Film and Television Studies from the Ruhr University of Bochum and received a B.A. for Teacher Education in German and English. She is a Ph.D. candidate and a faculty member of Cultural Studies and the Media at the Institute of American Studies at TU Dortmund University. In her dissertation project Sandra Danneil works on comedy theories of Transgression and Liminality in the American sitcom *The Simpsons*. She worked in the film and television industry for several years and dedicated much of her time to writing about gender issues involving new masculinities, pornography, and the New Extremity. Besides teaching courses in Cultural and Media Studies, she is also involved in the extensive Dortmund-USA exchange program, organizer of the annual Ruhr Ph.D. Forum of the UAR, and equal opportunity officer of the Faculty of Cultural Sciences at TU Dortmund University.