

Weariness, Waiting: Endurance and Art Cinema's Tired Bodies

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What characterizes gesture is that in it nothing is being produced or acted, but rather something is being endured and supported. The gesture, in other words, opens the sphere of *ethos* as the more proper sphere of that which is human. But in what way is an action endured and supported?

—Giorgio Agamben, "Notes on Gesture"

Mediating the border of art cinema's ontology of acting and an epistemology of narrative action, we find a permeation of fatigue.¹ From Vittorio De Sica's slowly stretching maid Maria to Robert Bresson's dedramatized "models," from Andy Warhol's diffident portrait subjects to Tsai Ming-Liang's itinerant sleepy drifters, from Agnes Varda's vagabonding Mona to Pedro Costa's Vanda, and from Chantal Akerman's Jeanne Dielman to Lynne Ramsay's deracinated Eva, art cinema presents a boundless corporeal lexicon of figures, gestures, and affects of exhaustion.² Yet tiredness also presents a set of exegetic problems in terms of its visibility and invisibility, and at the level of an experienced, sensed temporality.

That is, fatigue, weariness, tiredness, and exhaustion emerge from a relation to a sense of a time that passes, passes on, and passes through the actor's laboring body, but also never ceases to pass on, to pass through.³ This is the constancy of an indeterminate state of abeyance, of lassitude, torpor, the intertwining of its metaphysical, aesthetic, and political dimensions. Can we extrapolate from a physiologically pervasive and collective commonplace an epistemic tool for reading filmic corporeality, focusing in this particular instance on the profilmic performing body, its weariness and wearing out? Following Agamben, might we uncover the gestures of tiredness, that which the gestures of tiredness endure and support?

One of the most prominent mobilizations of fatigue as a figure in art cinema appears in Gilles Deleuze's *Cinema 2: The Time Image*, which maps the telos and genealogy of an emergent postwar aesthetic form. A much-noted passage expresses the condition of art cinema's embrace of the corporeal, producing an image of the body in a state of delay and arrest, its "tirednesses and waitings"⁴ attitudes that bespeak an essentially modern, fundamentally elliptical pose, and announcing an emergent cinema of gesture:

The body is never in the present, it contains the before and the after, tiredness and waiting. Tiredness and waiting, even despair are the attitudes of the body. . . . The daily attitude is what puts the before and after into the body, time into the body, the body as a revealer of the deadline. . . . Perhaps tiredness is the first and last attitude, because it simultaneously contains the before and after: what Blanchot says is what Antonioni shows, not the drama of communication, but the immense tiredness of the body, the tiredness there is beneath *The Outcry* and which suggests to thought, "something to incommunicate," the "unthought," life.⁵

For Deleuze, tiredness insists on a belated condition, that which comes after, a state that lies at the precipice of the futural. Challenging the present as a viable mode, the belatedness of tiredness superimposes past and present in an overlay of sensation. Tiredness is both a trace of action, converted into malaise or enervation for which the body cannot fully account any longer, and an inscription of expectation. Thus, weariness falls into a state of waiting, a signification of expiring time and expiration's anticipation. Fatigue foregrounds the body's ineffable presence as the "unthought," evading signification, a condition of liveliness in an image of dissipation. Deleuze reads the films of Michelangelo Antonioni, Jean-Luc Godard, Jacques Rivette, John Cassavetes, Philippe Garrel, and Chantal Akerman, and this is one of the few places where he discusses experimental film and female authored cinema.⁶ To the

extent that Deleuze innovatively produces an archive of gestures linked to tiredness, the account of tiredness itself remains relatively descriptive—a feature of the body’s indexing of temporality, a vehicle for an account of the undoing of the action-image in the tracing of a cinema of the time-image—a cinema of attitudes, postures, and gestures.

To expand this territory and to conceptualize tiredness as a registration of unseen temporal relations and as a performative surplus is to query the cinema’s capacity to make perceptible otherwise imperceptible experiences of the ordinary endurance of bodies on the margins. The oft-noted turn in recent international art cinemas toward a realist, contemplative, “slow” aesthetic, as well as toward a “cinema of sensation,” returns to some of the hallmarks of the postwar modernism that Deleuze so creatively contoured.⁷ This slow, materialist cinema prizes the everyday rhythms of the phenomenal world and an immersion in dilated duration—through the use of long takes, camera movements, and static framings—over and above exposition, fast-paced editing, or narrative hydraulics. In these materialist traits, we appraise a key site of the political and aesthetic potential of tiredness: its very location and emplacement within the acting, performing, laboring bodies that produce a crucial factor of this cinema’s aesthetic cohesiveness. Weariness implies or forces a slowed pace, a distended, delayed, or arrested productivity, and the temporal processes of recent contemplative cinema ask us to observe a waning and fluctuating corporeal, material energy—bodies wander, take their time, lose, or rather never gain their course, but nevertheless they act and are acted upon by the weight, gravity, and force of their own motion or immobility. In films such as *Liverpool* (2008, directed by Lisandro Alonso), *The Turin Horse* (2011, directed by Béla Tarr), *I Don’t Want to Sleep Alone* (2006, directed by Tsai Ming-Liang), and *Hunger* (2009, directed by Steve McQueen), corporeal endurance is tendered through an aesthetic of bodily attrition and perseverance, continuity in the face of insoluble, excruciating effort. Weariness is taken up as an aesthetic force and structuring principle—in the relation of bodies to the plurality and alterity of their quotidian duration. A mapping of tiredness’s traces, from its theoretical and philosophical manifestations to its historical and socioeconomic contexts, will serve to frame two art films that articulate the stakes of fatigue for a contemporary worn-out subject. Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardennes’s *Rosetta* (1999, Belgium) and Kelly Reichardt’s *Wendy and Lucy* (2008, U.S.), while on the margins of a more emphatic durational or “slow” cinema aesthetic, nevertheless provide a fertile manifestation of the temporality of fatigue and endurance. These films’ very



Figure 1. Wendy's drift and dispossession, in Kelly Reichardt's *Wendy & Lucy* (2008).

distinct material rhythms are tendered through an observation of women's labor and nonlabor, their bodies' drift, dispossession, and "endurance." In this sense, they suggest an alternative feminist course toward discussions of duration and art cinematic temporality. Allied in their production of gestural economies of exhaustion, these films imagine fatigue as a form of both foreclosure and possibility, a paradoxical politics of both appearance and evanescence (figure 1). Most importantly, they ask what fatigue allows or conditions us to endure.

Weary Ground

[W]hat weariness makes possible, weariness makes difficult.

—Maurice Blanchot, *The Infinite Conversation*

In contrast to idleness, boredom, and inertia, which depend on an oppositional relation to both work and action, tiredness is a problem of work expended and strain made manifest, a bending under weight, a bulging distension, a flexing shape. It is a question of endurance, how much a body can endure as a condition of its continuous survival, set against the entropic and deteriorating force of gravity, decomposition, decay. Weariness is inexorably a concern of

and for duration. Tiredness may be an indistinct, liminal, or imprecise affect and yet an incontestable state. We can apprehend fatigue as the register of bodies in interval states, after collected attenuation from an accumulation of willful effort, laborious action, or erotic intensity. Tiredness exists as a threshold, always at the edge of something else, often allied with a drift or fall toward sleep at one end or a rebounding rejuvenation at the other.⁸

Tiredness's difficulty is also linked with and troubled by political aspiration. For example, in the organization of collective action, such as strikes, protests, and occupations, the horizon of a collective's fatigue is always a palpable site of resistance, a necessary space of overcoming. As a consequence, tiredness is often linked with a subject's capacity and capaciousness; tiredness can proscribe action and delimit or foreclose action. An active inactivity, fatigue troubles a body's self-knowledge and performs a reflexive questioning of endurance. A corporeal threshold made temporal, the contingency, threat, and potential of tiredness lies in the question of its mutability, of when it will abate or transform into an energetic state. How much fatigue and how long until one falls into sleep or rebounds into more vigorous states of action? How is action—or how can action be—catalyzed by fatigue?

Weariness also implies prior disappointments, failures, and an economy of loss, a reduction or deflation of the aspirational and the aspiratory modulated in the downward breath, the heaving sigh—an aesthetic motif to which I will later return. Roland Barthes, in his lecture course "The Neutral," offers a set of notations regarding the weary as figure. He suggests that weariness resides at the "crossroads," between labor and fatigue, where labor falls into fatigue,

b. *Fatigo*: to wear out. . . . We easily reconstruct the image: "burst," by blow or pressure, following which a slow, progressive deflation; fullness that empties; walls whose tension slackens. The topical image = that of the flat tire that deflates. Cf. the older Gide: I am a tire that flattens. In the very image, an idea of duration: what doesn't stop leaning, emptying itself. It's the paradoxical infinity of weariness: the endless process of ending.⁹

In this sketching out, tiredness encourages substantiation, symbolization through material form, even as it threatens a risky abstraction or dematerialization. In the "flat tire" of Gide, we have the economic sense of the seepage of a scarce substance—of time or liquid or air or energy escaping—and the sense of an object made asymmetrical due to a fundamental imbalance, or a destabilization, the lean becoming a temporalizing form of "relation-to." In this

sense, fatigue calls up questions of relationality and dependency in that the fatigued body, in its slackening, implicitly requires a support. Deleuze, in his discussion of postwar art cinema's embodied sensibility, notes one convention of corporeal attitude that we can link to fatigue, a "sliding of postures," as a body suddenly leans against a wall and lets itself fall to the ground, losing its sense of balance and uprightness, becoming loose, moving from solid toward liquid, acquiescing to gravity.¹⁰ A faltering stance, a less rectilinear pose signals tiredness in its most histrionic register. Fatigue cannot but evoke energistic evacuation. Despite and through this quality of spoliation and an air of mundane ruination, all these conceptual images point to the capacity and capaciousness of tiredness, even as it is associated with depletion, emptiness, inexorable loss.

At the same time, fatigue is not necessarily antithetical to action, agency—it can sit adjacent to it or coexist with it, even if fatigue drags or delays action. Barthes further cites Maurice Blanchot's articulation of the weary in the *Infinite Conversation*, in which the latter observes that "not only does weariness not impede the work, but the work demands this being weary without measure."¹¹ Thus, weariness is coextensive with labor, a condition for its continuity; through immeasurable weariness, one completes the task. Barthes goes on to suggest that:

weariness doesn't constitute an empirical time, a crisis, an organic event, a muscular episode—but a quasi metaphysical dimension, a sort of bodily (and not conceptual) idea, a mental kinesthesia: the tactile experience, the very touch of endlessness: I use its infiniteness as an accompaniment of my work. Here, one grasps this: fatigue: in one sense, the opposite of death, since death—the unthinkable definitive ≠ fatigue, the infinitude but livable in the body.¹²

Here, weariness again presents a set of paradoxes: it takes a place as uneventful, as event's antithesis and as death's antipode—a form of life and liveliness, a thinkable, nondefinitive but livable infinitude. As a bodily idea, a "mental kinesthesia," a "touch of endlessness," tiredness indexes the site where time is felt by the body as the body confronts its own limits or capacities—lingering, hanging at the cusp between a physical and mental state, the physis of reflexivity. Weariness is the tangibility of the infinitely livable as that which one can live through or endure.

For Emmanuel Levinas, writing about fatigue as both a limit and a horizon of subjective self-consciousness, the place where the existent confronts his existence, a key element rests in the relation of weariness to effort. Fatigue, as the trace of an ongoing

effort, fosters a belated sense of oneself, constitutive of a reflexive form of delay.¹³ The drag produced by a faltering relationship to the demand of the continuity and the drive of labor's injunction produces a vital component of the subject's sense of self-regard. As John Llewellyn notes, for Levinas "fatigue troubles the forward flight of effort," and lassitude thus represents for him a necessary tension within the struggle of the duration of existence.¹⁴ Levinas wrote part of this text while imprisoned in a Nazi work camp, and his relation to labor's necessity, or its solvency for the production of the ground of the subject's coherence or stability, is considerably and compellingly cynical. The condemnation to effort, effort as condemnation, is bound up in a reading of the instant as "an inevitable present" while simultaneously serving as the space of distinction and recognition of the existent as distinct from their existence.¹⁵ Effort is thus not independent of fatigue but instead is constituted by it in a reversal—as Levinas writes. "Effort as it were lunges forward out of fatigue and falls back upon it. . . . Effort is an effort of the present that lags behind the present."¹⁶ Fatigue for Levinas thus indicates a "condemnation to being,"—a "being no longer in step with itself"—and due to this structure of delay, one for whom to be "weary is to be weary of being."¹⁷ This ambivalent relation to effort, to action, to labor is one of the central problematics of weariness, to which we will shortly return.

Cinema's Weary Modernity

Within the rich discourses of twentieth-century aesthetic theory and among the principal interlocutors of the century's modernity, the condition of exhaustion is overshadowed by more privileged states of consciousness such as boredom, ennui, distraction, and shock.¹⁸ Fatigue, ancillary to the overwhelming stimulus and resulting tedium of the modern city and of a world of reproducible moving images, lurks at the edges of works by Walter Benjamin, George Simmel, and Siegfried Kracauer.¹⁹ Yet in Jean Epstein's writing, recently translated and extensively annotated, we see the most overt articulation of fatigue's virtues for the project of cinematic aesthetics—examined in sociocultural, phenomenological, and affective terms.²⁰ As Stuart Liebman and others attest, Epstein transvalues fatigue for its capacity to be seized and employed by cinematic form as a wilting, lyrical state within which the spectator's poetic experience can take place, a space for reverie within the medium's language of oneiric signs.²¹ As Christophe Wall-Romana further explains:

in marked contrast to Freud who tends to define the modern condition as a series of endings, destructions and lacks (spiritual hunger, isolation, alienation, etc.), Epstein treats it instead as the experience of a new kind of excess—a nervous condition which he paradoxically encapsulates in “la fatigue.” This is one of Epstein’s more radical redefinitions: rather than being caused by energetic depletion, for him modern fatigue proceeds from an inchoate potential and desire for expression which leads to a state of restless stimulation. Fatigue is an un-actualized potential.²²

As a potential, and counter to the dead time or listless distractions and the existential refusals of boredom, weariness, as Wall-Romana characterizes Epstein’s relation to it, implies a vital pulse, a homeostatic condition of an organism’s sustaining endurance, but also proposes cinema’s homeopathic relation to fatigue, its palliative and dynamizing value. Fatigue for Epstein serves as a formal goading, a space for the reconfiguration of the perception of new, unlimited poetic structures. Following Epstein, can we imagine tiredness, then, as a resource, a ground for a reconfigured condition of perception? Weariness, forged through endurance and the durative, presents us with a wager of whether to apprehend it in terms of plenitude or loss. Barthes too reminds us in his concluding remarks on the subject that:

Weariness is thus creative, from the moment, perhaps, when one agrees to submit to its orders. The right to weariness . . . thus shares in the *new*: new things are born out of lassitude—from being fed up [ras-le-bol].²³

What if we figure tiredness as a form of interruptive potential and not just of strain, if we apply Epstein as much as Barthes? Tiredness as a temporal framework can allow us to better appraise the linkage of cinema’s formal experiments with action, acting and enactment, and the things that make life livable, endurable. Fatigue in this sense, in its intervality, conjoins endurance and duration: endurance. Endurance designates the experience and perseverance, the durability of bodies onscreen and offscreen.²⁴ The endurance of fatigue assigns a corporeal persistence, a certain resilience through and toward, a physical withstanding, a bearing of pressure, and a relation to something that passes through the flesh as well as a capacity to withstand the abrasion, the distress of the temporally and physically wearying. Endurance thus can operate as a concept that has valence for understanding the temporality of cinema’s corporeal aesthetics (and its attendant modes of spectatorship); it can be a means of accounting for the processes of remaining, enduring, and persisting through forms of duress and despite them.

Working through Fatigue

One could propose that what we take pains to endure most are the conditions of our labor. Weariness, fatigue, and exhaustion are inextricable from our latter-day understandings of work's embodied rhythms, effects, and temporalities. Fatigue's history is found most readily in accounts of industrial capitalism's transformation of modern subjectivity. Anson Rabinbach details in *The Human Motor* the materialization of fatigue as a social, scientific, and industrial problem.²⁵ Fatigue comes to eclipse idleness and moral valuations of work and nonwork in the mid to late nineteenth century with the emergence of a new model of understanding the working body's relation to technology and industry and the technologization of labor, as well as through discoveries in the physical sciences, specifically in thermodynamics. In this period, through a variety of scientific epistemologies of the human as organism, the working body becomes despiritualized and mechanized, a "human motor" whose energy must be managed and whose fatigue becomes a form of anxious surplus that must be eliminated, if not forestalled, in the interest of social and economic productivity. At the same time, the work of measuring and identifying physical fatigue overlapped with the exploration of its psychological manifestations as the study of the perplexing pathology of "neurasthenia" developed, examining "weaknesses of the will" and disorders of the nerves assailed by the onrushing stimuli of industrial modernity. By the twentieth century, Taylorization introduced a new system of scientific management of the shop floor and countered earlier physiologists, physicians, and psychologists who hoped to eliminate fatigue by accepting tiredness as an irrevocable and implicitly necessary property of labor. Rabinbach suggests that the notion of the body as a human motor is itself superseded by the transition from a manufacturing economy dependent on physical labor to the operationalizing of forms of mental, immaterial labor and an information economy in the twentieth century.²⁶

Fatigue's fate takes a certain course in our present post-Fordist, postindustrial, capitalist economy, what many have heralded as a new era of attentive, affective, and cognitive labor, which has become standardized at all levels of social production and reproduction.²⁷ Gaining a privileged relation to psychological, subjective, and affective modes, the flexibilization of work time outside of the factory or the office space enables its complete permeation of nonwork time, or what was once distinctly cordoned off as leisure. It is no wonder, then, that stress and affective disorders emerge alongside this shift toward the elasticity of the working day

as well as the widening financial insecurity of larger swaths of the world population. In a perverse reversal of effects (tiredness) and causes (labor), fatigue is thus no longer a consequence of work but instead is a precondition for survival, a product of this indistinction between work and leisure, of work's flexibilization. Thus, fatigue seems to become a necessity for the seeking and securing of a livelihood of any sort. This is something that the films *Rosetta* and *Wendy and Lucy* reproduce as explicit social reality, the grounds for their diegesis. In these films, fatigue becomes the baseline for a subproletarian existence and forces a recalibration of the possible and the endurable. The strivings of Rosetta (played by Émilie Dequenne) and Wendy (played by Michelle Williams) to find employment, or to get nearer to a space within which one might possibly be employable, require feats of endurance, exhaustion, and waiting, even as their fatigue formally becomes an end in itself, a wearying loop.

Being in a state of constant exhaustion and wearing out, of "energy departing," is what many theorists of our economic and affective present describe as the basic condition of the postindustrial, information driven, neoliberal global economy.²⁸ The normativization and subjectivation of fatigue accedes to the state of the "new normal" in a climate of economic precarity; this is what Lauren Berlant has eloquently described in her project on the affective landscape of the present economic impasse as a state of "crisis ordinariness."²⁹ Cinema's prime facility to articulate the wages of this situation lies in its ability to produce and archive corporeal duress, document and chart the dispossessions of performance labor and the labors of performance, and narrate through the hyperboles of a renewed realist idiolect the stresses, strains, and impacts on the body.³⁰ The cinema's status as a medium that privileges the lively (if not live) presence of bodies stages the persistent corporeal surplus of tiredness, its stubborn physiological presence, its gestural acts of doing and undoing—falling, aspirating, waiting. Through and with the cinema, we see fatigue as both a depletion of energy and a form of accumulation—an archive of gestures, a residual collection, the tracing and remains of effort in the body that falls, breathes, waits.

Cinema's Tired Masses

How does cinema intervene in producing and tracing this sense of tiredness as both depleted force and vital pulse? Most fundamentally, cinema as a technique, a practice, and a temporal process exhausts bodies, not only profilmic ones but also the body of its

own apparatus and of its material, celluloid. But cinema can also provide the register, archive, and index of these bodies' exhaustion. We could say more broadly that fatigue pervades cinema's history, its languorous trace left everywhere.

However, it is difficult to think of weariness in cinema without understanding the medium's historically troubled relation to labor and its representation. Work, effortful human activity, is the essential undergirding principle of cinematic representation, from the Lumières' *Workers Leaving the Factory* (1895) onward. Yet the temporality of the titular action of the Lumières' film indicates work as a residual trace, a space abandoned for the site of nonwork. Harun Farocki, in his film of the same name (*Workers Leaving the Factory*, 1995), an archiving of scenes of workers leaving factories across film history, attests to the ways that the flight of workers from the spaces of work in cinema is a historical convention of labor's elision, one that persists from 1895 to the present and is perversely suited to the virtual tendencies of the medium.³¹

For the bodies in front of as well as behind the camera, what does it mean, then, to film work? Is work a filmable subject, or can it not help but always be converted into the ludic principles of the cinema's affinity and constitution as a commodity form, a site of leisure, pleasure, spectacle? Jean-Louis Comolli provides an eloquent analysis of this representational conundrum in which the filming of work privileges a machinic time and an abstraction of bodies:

Tireless, relentless, the beat of the machines condenses and accelerates—cutting off from sight anything in work (in all work) having to do with slow process, with destruction/construction, with decomposition/recomposition, with organic metamorphosis. . . . The undeniable arduousness of work in the steel mill is thus informed, through cinema's magic, with lightness and grace. Representing work means de-realizing it, through the estheticization of gesture and of posture, through the body's ludic mechanization and virtualization.³²

The question of whether the history of cinema has effaced the laborious temporalities and harsh realities and exploitations of work has emerged as a crucial one in recent accounts of contemporary production cultures, in historical considerations of industrial, independent, and artisanal labor structures, and buried at the center of representational, ethical, and aesthetic questions.³³ Yet the belatedness of the structure of the cinematic imaginary's insistence on the time outside and after work—in the space of leaving—also connects with fatigue's belatedness, a linkage to the slow processes of labor's pained forms.

The depredations of work on the body of the worker have a wide range of instantiations in film history, from Sergei Eisenstein's revolutionary *Strike* (1925), to Charlie Chaplin's apogee of the ill-timed worker's body in *Modern Times* (1936), as well as the psychological wear of the anonymity of the urban white-collar workplace in King Vidor's *The Crowd* (1928). Chaplin's comic disorderliness in the opening of *Modern Times* is one of the apogees of the cinematicization of labor fatigue as a modern occupational hazard. The dulling, desensitizing repetition of factory machines incites the tramp to lose or muddle the distinction between work tasks and nonwork tasks and between the spatial boundaries that define work and nonwork spaces. Becoming a parody of hyperproductivity in the factory, Chaplin's actions disrupt the very space that his body and psyche so slavishly imitate in the regimented gestures of the automaton's mimesis. Chaplin's disruptions eject him outward, his performative excess marked as being unproductive by social institutions: his employer, the law. Replicating a fatigue that cannot help but propel his actions toward delusion, madness, and involuntary motion, Chaplin models the worker's exploitation through a critique of liberal ideals of progress, productivity, and value. Yet even in this canonical example, we confront Comolli's insight that the "estheticization of gesture" in cinema's conversion of performance into nonwork reinstates the premise that a true picture of labor cannot emerge in a medium so slavishly devoted to the ludic nature of spectacle.

As a countertradition to the classical cinema, the art cinema has often been linked to a different kind of excess, what Karl Schoonover proposes is an investment in the dilated durations of "wasted time."³⁴ This mode often features subjects who shirk work, who drift, who exemplify an existential exploitation of leisure and a refusal of the measured time and lockstep of the industrial workplace, who joyously or dangerously luxuriate in indolence and lassitude. This tradition of cinematic idleness—traced from Chaplin's Tramp to Jean Renoir's *Boudu Saved from Drowning* (1932) and to later films such as Barbara Loden's *Wanda* (1970) and Agnès Varda's *Vagabond* (1985)—has deployed fatigue as a figure of existential refusal. Yet in these latter two films we can discern an alternative feminist trajectory of nonwork and antiwork in which the labors of social reproduction are jettisoned in the interest of nonproductive time as well as nonreproductive time, of their wasted capital.³⁵ *Wanda* and *Mona*, the weary malcontents who drop out of a socially utilitarian, productivist society, represent a radical weariness archive achieved through other means, through their claim of a right to be weary, finding a route back to their own beatific and

risky freedom. Wanda refuses the motherhood plot, giving up her children to her ex-husband early in the film, not in the register of some moral sacrifice or glamorized rebellion, but rather in an act of unambivalent taking leave, finding herself, as Berenice Reynaud puts it, “to drift in the sea of her own insignificance, clinging to unworthy men as a way to avoid drowning.”³⁶ *Vagabond*’s Mona shirks all forms of institutional regimentation (work, welfare, family, charity) and normative attachment (friendships, couple forms, indebted relations) with joyous anarchy, choosing to indulge in a life lived “without roof or law” (the original French title of the film). Mona follows the times of her own body, rhythms set to the itinerant measure of her own drive for pleasure. Her life ultimately ends in death through a wearing down, exhaustion, expenditure, an extinguished energy that marks the opening of the film in the image of her frozen corpse in a field. This legacy of feminist, anti-work wanderer films is one that *Rosetta* and *Wendy and Lucy* engage with as a point of departure in a mode of evocation, an inheritance readily visible through the arc of a shared investment in the wearying and wearied female bodies, constituted by drift, dispossession, and endurance.

Run Down, Breathing, Falling

What does it mean that, for so many, the labor of reproducing life itself exhausts the bodies that perform it and the imaginaries that must forge through this or that way of being?

—Lauren Berlant, “Precarity Talk”

The remaining itinerary I will take here puts in dialogue two art films about women on the economic margins: Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne’s *Rosetta* and Kelly Reichardt’s *Wendy and Lucy*. These films anatomize the conditions of fatigue as a product of social reality while simultaneously partaking in an aesthetic and profilmic gestural economy of exhaustion. Both films present liberal humanist accounts of their female subjects’ simultaneous constitution by and exclusion from institutions of work and narrate fatigue as a consequence—corporeal and affective—of the desire to work, the drive to be employed from a position outside it. The work of survival registered in the protagonist’s performative exhaustion reinforces the fantasy ideal of a productivist economy of full social participation through labor as citizenship. Yet at the same time,

we can see the untenability of work as a structure, institution, or habitus: work's succor for these cinematic subjects persists in its fantasmatic accretion of liberalizing subject effects, in an illusion of coherence, as both *Rosetta* and *Wendy and Lucy* show. Berlant notes in describing the Dardennes' films that their protagonists are "actually stuck in what we might call survival time, the time of struggling, drowning, holding on to the ledge, treading water, *not-stopping*."³⁷ In this sense, *Rosetta* and *Wendy and Lucy* challenge their own explicit narrative drives toward their protagonists employment as their successful goal, and through a keenly descriptive register, they edge into a thornier critique that can align with an antiwork or, as Kathi Weeks designates it, a "postwork" feminist imaginary.³⁸ The fantasy of social utility and the capitalist ideology of productivity are both exposed as structures of dispossession in these films by the dogged efforts, ceaseless fatigue, and capacious aspirations of Rosetta and Wendy. Following on Levinas's claim, fatigue here supercedes effort, and effort can only suffice to lurch out from an ever-present fatigue.

Through different registers and referentiality to realist traditions (from neorealism to *vérité*), these films formally construct durative economies of bodily duress and temporal suspension—either in the hyperboles of figure and camera movement in the Dardennes' idiom, or through a syntax of editing, framing, lighting, and composition in Reichardt's. In terms of a metric of speed, *Rosetta* registers a feverish, materialist figuring of ceaseless corporeal motion, whereas *Wendy and Lucy* signals a muted, understated aesthetic of slowness, stillness, and arrest. In these films, fatigue becomes a threshold of a set of agonistic potentials—of political possibility and impossibility, activity and inactivity, motion and inertia, speech and silence. The films' female characters are suspended, even while frenetically mobile, in states of fatigue and waiting. Furnishing a sphere of ironic generosity and thorny sacrifice, tiredness thus presents itself as both a condition for possible action—acting differently, on a different course—and of giving up, giving in, of dispossession—giving up the job in *Rosetta*, giving up the dog in *Wendy and Lucy*.

In this sense, these films connect to what Thomas Dumm eloquently describes as the "politics of the ordinary" resident in the act of resignation—in which the ordinary failures of quitting are given a formalization in the act of "taking leave" of a post or an enshrined commitment, a promise or contract that must be broken. As Dumm writes, a "resignation is an ending that is incomplete. It fulfills the test of a certain difficulty identified with the loss of a world and a finding of oneself."³⁹ This incomplete ending

registered in the act of resigning reconstitutes, as Levinas suggests, the terms of fatigue as the encounter with one's own duration, tendered in a fundamental solitude.

While *Rosetta* has been said to have "influenced" *Wendy and Lucy*, both films owe much more to the tradition of Italian neorealism in general and to the films of Vittorio De Sica in particular, most notably *Bicycle Thieves* (1948) and *Umberto D* (1952). These affinities rest in the capacity of neorealist cinema to describe the cruelly prosaic conditions of mundane privation, the simple absurdity of scarcity, and the frayed, even if assiduous, attachments that nevertheless persist within such lack. *Bicycle Thieves* introduces the drama of lack and the need of a simple object—a bicycle—as the axiomatic drive of the narrative's motion and propulsion, the quest for a mundane object that can either furnish or deracinate a world. The singularity and scarcity of a friend or a companion animal, as in *Umberto D*, the alterity of such relational possibility, is made appropriately strange by this cinema, just as the "actuarial" logic of costs, risks, and benefits quickly insist on their disposability.⁴⁰ The political subjectivation of the protagonists in these diegetic economies requires an internalization of the most brutal laws and demands for life's reproduction, for endurance and survival.

Additionally, in neorealism's prizing of the nonprofessional actor whose corporeal labor cements the experience of the cinema's currency and authenticity, we see a set of convergences with *Rosetta* and *Wendy and Lucy*, the ways this currency depends on its location within particularized bodies marked by class, ethnicity, age, race, and gender. The critically consecrated scene in *Umberto D* of the maid Maria, stretching and closing the kitchen door with her foot as she works grinding coffee, gains a bit of intensity with respect to an archive of gestures of fatigue.⁴¹ Maria's actions in this private moment of extension, of tired reverie, of empty "uneventful" time, become emblematic of art cinema's dilated temporality.⁴² The notably gendered labor of her character in this minor role, marginal and thus in alliance with the old pensioner, is overlaid with the knowledge that she is pregnant. A sense of expectancy, of a reproductive futurity, is set against the formal expectancies of this scene of nonproductive and seemingly wasted time, even as Maria's body strains to multitask while waiting for the day to begin. This small ritual provides the material convention for a wider observation of gestic habits and rituals in the recent art films under discussion here, as small, minor, uneventful moments, expanded and dilated to serve the crux of each films' narratives, are yoked to women's laboring bodies and temporalities, even while in the service of a nonreproductive trajectory in which self-preservation,

by necessity, has primacy. *Rosetta* and *Wendy and Lucy* take up the elements of this quotidian, embodied *durée* as an inheritance but restrain their protagonists' signification of normative conventions of femininity or of sexual desire. This reduction is a symptom of the films' aesthetics of austerity in that their politics of endurance and endurance prioritize qualities of maintenance and capacity over a claim to futurity.

Rosetta pursues the titular character through an exhausting itinerary of immediacy, vis-à-vis the Dardennes' trademark mobile camera, often following or hewing close to the young woman's body as she moves through diegetic space at relative speed. Rosetta is constantly in motion, her activity a simultaneous register of her fatigue, showing the complexity of an imaging or instrumentalization of weariness. The film formally presents the sensation of both urgency and the exhausting temporality of precarity, the squandering of the present in a drive for and toward legitimate work. The opening scene begins in the throes of struggling action. Often in jerky handheld midshots, we see Rosetta, her back to the camera, running in white coat and hairnet from one room to another in what looks like an institutional space. We realize as the scene of the chase unfolds that Rosetta is fighting to keep a job from which she has been let go; her corporeal energy is also precisely the field of her inexhaustible exhaustion (figure 2). The uncertainty of any future beyond the minute or the day duplicates itself as a formal device of proximity to Rosetta's vital body, her firm, sturdy gait and bullish recalcitrance representing a propulsive energy that channels contingency through a liberal model of staunch determination, even when that determination is naive. Rosetta needs a job; this is the primary vector of her singular drive, her desire. This drive is set against our rather oblique knowledge of her home life. She lives with her alcoholic mother in a trailer park called the Grand Canyon. Her mother exchanges sexual favors for alcohol and in sober moments mends clothes for Rosetta to sell at thrift shops.

Rosetta constructs a path through this privation through her everyday gestic habits, routines, and idiosyncratic rituals of departure and returning home. We see her trudging through the woods through a secret pathway, depositing her galoshes in a hidden sewage pipe, putting on regular shoes, and running across the highway, avoiding the proper trailer park home entrance/exit. Rosetta also buries a glass bottle contraption, which she uses to fish in a small murky creek at the edge of Grand Canyon. We see Rosetta in pain, using a blow dryer to soothe chronic stomach pains or cramps (figure 3), and stuffing toilet paper methodically into the



Figure 2. Rosetta running to escape termination.



Figure 3. Rituals of survival and endurance—the hair dryer.

cracks of the trailers windows in order to stanch a draft. These repetitive rituals, actions of laborious, wearying survival, of tending to and tamping down the corners of her world, constitute the temporal rhythms and thresholds that mark Rosetta's relation to the outside world. These rituals agglutinate the conditions of her sociality while also atomizing her willfulness, the force of her will.

The film's ending is a manifestation of the film's formal and narrational strategies in its figuring of weariness and its limits. Film



Figures 4–7. (*This page and opposite.*) The gas tank, Riquet, the fall, the end.

endings are the privileged narrative zone of such exhausted and exhausting situations, as they collect the winding or lurching retines of the drifting characters' actions and inaction in a culmination and actualization of narrative energy and of the wear on the actor's body. As Adrian Martin notes, a particular tendency in slow or contemplative cinema juxtaposes a glacial pacing of profilmic action with endings of incredibly violent or energetically jarring explosiveness.⁴³ In the Dardennes' idiom, which is inordinately focused on movement and action, this feral energy is more evenly distributed, inverted into a constant rhythmic hum of motion; the



film's ending produces the pitch of an anticlimactic climax in the inverse formulation, in Rosetta's coming to stillness. Rosetta, after having gotten a job at the waffle stand and having made a friend in Riquet, her coworker, ends up getting laid off when her boss hires his nephew. In order to regain the job, Rosetta reports Riquet to the boss for selling his own waffles under the counter. Riquet gets fired promptly that day, and Rosetta, for a short time, occupies a state of relative calm. After she finds her mother drunk and insensate at home one day, Rosetta quits the job, presumably in order to fulfill her sense of obligation to care for her mother. In revenge,

Riquet trails Rosetta throughout this latter part of the film, haunting her.

In the final scene, shot in one continuous long take, Rosetta goes to purchase a tank of gas. We can only speculate whether this is part of a suicide attempt or whether the gas is needed for the trailer. The mobile camera follows her in duress and strain as she carries the tank back to her trailer, heaving, breathing heavily. We hear Riquet's arrival via the buzzing sound of his motorbike, plaguing Rosetta, circling her in the frame. At one point Rosetta drops the tank and pauses to throw gravel at Riquet as he momentarily retreats. As the sound escalates, Rosetta drags the tank falteringly, drops it again, and falls on top of it. Riquet circles her noisily in the mobile frame. Rosetta's toughened exterior wavers as she yelps and cries in heaving sobs while lying on the gas tank. After watching her collapse face down on top of the tank, Riquet grabs her and pulls her up. Rosetta stands in close-up with her face slightly sidelong to the direction of the camera, breathing heavily, looking over her shoulder at Riquet (figures 4–7).

A scene of endurance, encounter, and persistent attachment, Rosetta's breakdown, her vanquishment by fatigue, her engulfment in the force of her own exhaustion, is a consequence of the scene's stress on failed relationality. The economic demand of the socio-economic world of the diegesis, a brute universe of scarcity—either a friend or her job—has forced Rosetta's choice and manifested its risks in the proximal return and invasion of the frame by an angry Riquet, rendered sonically by the wild buzz of his motorbike, and by his intrusion into a frame dominated primarily by Rosetta's body. Her fall—her discomposure and dispossession, the subsequent pause that it produces in her gesture, a movement into a still pose, into a state of controlled breathing—also suggests something of the arrest of Rosetta's mobility by the contingent forces of relational attachment. Riquet and Rosetta's chaste relationship, even if intensely corporeal and agonistic, is here the horizon of disrupted attachments and nonreproductive, tentative contacts. The film ends on her sidelong gaze and her depleted yet still defiant stilledness, just as it began and was constituted through her ceaseless running motion. Weariness here aspirates into waiting, counter to the propulsive logic of Rosetta's movement, as she is finally run down. Rosetta's collapse also marks an interruption in the incandescent fury of her flushed face and an entreaty that passes through the offscreen Riquet to the spectator.

As close to a direct, unmediated gaze that we get from Rosetta, her depletion could be normatively read as the scene of a potential coupling, deferred or displaced. Rosetta's unmatched sight



Figure 8. Almost drowning.

line—her gaze, which looks off sideways to the corner, to the edge of the frame—suggests an extrafilmic reality that synchs with the film's final cut to black. If we take Rosetta to have been attempting self-harm or suicide, the scene's implications point to Riquet's perverse rescue of Rosetta through the pursuit. Yet the ambiguous motivations of Rosetta's action are made irrelevant by the mobile abstraction of the activity's goal into the process of pained motion itself. What we have instead is a sense of Rosetta's effortful, hyperbolically driven act of laboring, of endurance, its endurance, overlapping with her oncoming collapse. The structural precepts of Rosetta's movement enact a fundamental anxiety: stillness = non-work = death. The actualization of the interruption and lagging of fatigue in this moment of her fall signals at once both resignation and lively tenacity. Can a fall be a beginning?

A series of falls haunts this last fall. Earlier in the film, Rosetta chases her drunken mother to attempt to get her to enter substance abuse rehabilitation. Her mother escapes as Rosetta falls into the small creek on the park grounds where she secretly fishes. Rosetta calls out for her mother's help but is left to fend for herself (figure 8). This scene is directly echoed later in the film when Riquet comes to visit Rosetta while she is still looking for work. Riquet too falls in the creek by accident. Rosetta runs away and then pauses deliberately and for too long, agonizing whether to help Riquet, whose employment she so covets and needs to live. In this echoing and breaking with the repetition of her mother's inaction, Rosetta

finally finds a tree branch and pulls the beseeching Riquet out as he gasps for air. In both of these battles with gravity, the pull of murky water and thick mud produces a trope of falling as being swallowed up, of drowning. In the concluding scene of the film, Rosetta's fall operates differently, as the bog becomes allegorical. It is not clear from what precisely Rosetta is being pulled out—from her fall, from despair, from resignation?—as Riquet helps her up with one arm. Janice Morgan suggests regarding the two falls in the water that “the metaphor of ‘falling into the hole’ and the reality come together, with all of their connotations of losing control, losing one’s life, one’s identity.”⁴⁴ Rosetta’s exhaustion here articulates something perhaps more contingent, inconclusive, and ambivalent about falling and the dependencies inscribed in the figuring of fatigue.

Adding to the experience of the fictional diegesis are the details of performative labor and its extradiegetic elements, which deepen and substantially complicate the viewing of Rosetta’s endurance and her exhaustion. The performance of then seventeen-year-old Dequenne, who won a Best Actor award at Cannes in 1999 for the role, fortifies the sensation of authenticity of the film and its immediacy.⁴⁵ In an interview, the Dardennes indicated that they shot the final gas tank scene ten times and chose the last one, as it was the take in which Dequenne was the most tired; they add that “the moment when she falls is the moment in which we improvised in the frame. We didn’t plan it, so those are the happy accidents.” Discussing this scene and their preference for retaining a documentary aspect in the film’s fictional mode, the directors state that “we try to . . . film something that resists us.”⁴⁶ The intensity of Dequenne’s performance is catalyzed by this admission of sought resistance in which the film converts from constructed diegesis into unvarnished document; the despair of Rosetta and the endurance of Dequenne congeal in this cinematic moment as the two forms of labor—acting labor and the physical labor of carrying the tank—are laminated onto one surface. The capacity of Dequenne’s female body to bear and to endure the specific demands of the Dardennes’ intense form of realism are here made material in the performance and actuality of expiration as endurance, of getting worn out and run down, its multiple confrontations with the possibility of an ending.

Stillness, Waiting, Sleep

Weariness: the demand for a position. The present-day world is full of it (statements, manifestos, petitions, etc.) and it's why it is so wearisome: hard to float, to shift places. (However, to float, i.e., to live in a space without tying oneself to a place = the most relaxing position of the body: bath, boat.)

—Roland Barthes, *The Neutral*

Was there ever actually a time when one could float through one's fatigue? Floating is distinct from falling; in floating, buoyancy replaces weight. Released in the wake of economic collapse in late 2008, Kelly Reichardt's *Wendy and Lucy* describes a woman's life lived at the frayed edges of America's bootstraps idealism, off the grid and without a net. If *Rosetta's* drive, movement, and propulsion into fatigue produced a sense of windedness, of a gasping for breath, Reichardt's film is organized by a desolate stillness, a temporal arrest that is bound up in the stalling of movement. The film's modesty, its concern with the minimal resources required to sustain a life, is also in a sense an aesthetic ethos that indexes the economic limitations and modest means of the film's artisanal, low-budget mode of production. In the press notes, Reichardt makes the analogy between Wendy's and the film's economic predicament as a shared necessity for austerity and sparseness.⁴⁷ Indeed, Reichardt's often remarked upon minimalism is keyed between a certain naturalistic tradition and a terse aesthetic of undemonstrative perseverance.

Wendy is a reticent drifter caught in a set of escalating binds as she passes through and pauses in a small town in Oregon with her dog Lucy. Wendy is certainly not a joyous malcontent or an existential proponent of a flaunted indolence, such as in the comic tradition of Michel Simon's Boudu in Renoir's *Boudu Saved from Drowning*, who manages to float away down the river from a bourgeois world that attempts to put him to work, to channel his unruly desires, and to make his excesses serve the purpose of social or economic productivity and social reproduction. (Boudu escapes from his own wedding—an arranged reformation of his promiscuously feral libido.) The scale of Wendy's plight is much more modest and grave and far less existential, a minor history of a deflated aspiration: she is on her way to the promise of summer work at a fishing cannery in Ketchikan, Alaska. We do not know about her past, but

we do know that she has little—few origins and no roots. Reichardt is noted to have conceived of the character in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, and Wendy's economic predicament—whose causes are unspoken in the film—is couched in a sense of offscreen catastrophe and loss. The stripped-down narrative is modest in its own right. The story—which at first appears to be couched as a road film, a genre of mythic, masculinist American mobility and individualist adventure—stalls, never leaving this unnamed town. The film precisely and tautly describes Wendy's mounting stuckness as a series of minor events—her car breaking down, an arrest for shoplifting two cans of dog food, the loss of her dog Lucy while she is taken into police custody—create a widening chasm between the aspiration and achievement of a modicum of not even a “good life,” *pace* Berlant, but a life, any life at all.

The detached indifference of the world into which Wendy has arrived is no better articulated than through its failure to appear, to be peopled. It is an emptied-out postindustrial garrison in small-town Oregon that contains sparse inhabitants, and when they appear—apart from Wendy's only temporary friend and resource, Walter, the Walgreens security guard—they are solitary, single figures or faces on the other side of a service window, or merely blurs or voices at the edges of the frame. The only groups of people we see are the nomadic punks at the bonfire that Wendy encounters at the edge of town and the congregation of disabled and homeless men cashing in cans at the local recycling center. The supermarket worker, the clerk at the police station, and the boys passing Wendy's car as she sleeps inside it all operate on a principle of distance and disappearance, outsiders to the interior panic and dread that Wendy so effectively doesn't allow to creep through into the world of appearances. Wendy is radically solitary, alone with her struggles as they continue to snowball—microevents whose gravity intensifies in direct correlation to their absurdity, smallness, and seeming inconsequentiality.

Wendy's fatigue, like Rosetta's, emerges out of a larger neoliberal socioeconomic field and its demands: one must manage things without anyone else's help, one must get by without asking for handouts, one must be purposive and have goals, one must be obesant in the face of that world's indifference to your attempts to act at all. Wendy exists and wanders below the line of the cognizable or the noticeable; her plain, clipped, tomboyishly androgynous looks and clothing are themselves a whittling away of any seeming excess, gendered or otherwise. Both Rosetta and Wendy share a certain boyish, adolescent childlikeness, as if war orphans of the neorealist tradition. Their sexuality and energy, apart from the desire for

the job, or to recover the dog also are considerably tamped down, effaced by the conditions of pursuing a general condition of life, survival, and livelihood. The here deglamorized Michelle Williams exudes a quiet stasis, an aspiration to affective neutrality, her inner emotions and expressions tamped down. Instead of Rosetta's ferocious physical and emotional energy, Wendy barely simmers, even though her countenance evinces a sense of quiet tremulous suffering. In discussing casting, Reichardt notes that "I knew I needed someone who could be very still without coming across as emotionally dead or absent."⁴⁸ Affecting emotional suppression and a willful exteriorization of blankness, Williams's performance highlights the character's effort to not draw attention to herself and her desire to slip quietly by and through. We begin to realize that Wendy's existence is defined by nonexistence, in the absence of any capital that might produce a trace, a capacity to appear and make herself visible, or to give her a figurative or literal location, a place. She has no address, no job, no credit card, no cell phone. This kind of floating is hardly utopian; it imbues the otherwise casual nature of the revelry that opens the film among the bonfire nomads with an element of unease.

Wendy's performative stillness is itself framed by a compositional arrest and an attention to emblematic shots and framings that often highlight emptied-out spaces and stripped-down, evacuated, or flattened opaque surfaces. Shots of freight train cars held in station, birds resting on electrical lines, bus stop intersections, and graffitied walls suggest an eerie motionless world, wound down in a timeless anachrony. This is the visualization of the dead time of postindustrial arrest, of the hypostasis of manufacturing. Wendy is often framed against the blank or monochrome backgrounds of institutional spaces: generic walls of box stores such as the anti-septic Walgreens, the stained white tiles inside the Quickie Mart gas station bathroom, and the abandoned, closed, or shuttered storefronts she walks by as her search for Lucy begins (figure 9). Wendy's quest for her lost dog, which disappears when Wendy is taken to the police station after getting caught shoplifting, involves as much waiting as active pursuit. She waits for the phone call from the pound while she waits for the verdict on her car from the mechanic. In a number of scenes, Wendy's stillness in waiting, her suspension in this dead time of economic evanescence, is articulated in midshots that feature her seated with arms extended away from her lap or head leaning against a wall. An atmosphere of expectancy pervades the film. Wendy's only remote connection and temporary anchor of support, Walter, reminds her that his job is also to be still, to stand all day and wait.



Figure 9. Wendy against a deracinated landscape.

In a moment of realized crisis, Wendy calls her sister's house and talks to Dan, her sister's husband. The conversation is presented in medium shot, as we see Wendy standing encased in a glass phone booth on a busy street, the day getting dusky. We see her—nervously, barely moving, with slight adjustments of her posture—at the edge of the frame as she talks on the phone. Her image is filtered through the blue-green tint of glass as the reflections of cars on the street passing by, sounds of honking and exhaust, and the flashing of street lamps, neon signs, and headlights are superimposed over her shrinking figure, haltingly attempting to articulate her bind (figure 10). The image appears to be filtered through another glass surface, further designating Wendy's transient space, one that is both isolating and exposed to the wear of the outside world. The shot, by virtue of these layers of reflection on the glass, seem to inscribe the indifferent movement of the environment that surrounds Wendy, almost effacing her body—she appears simultaneously worn through, camouflaged, and retracted within, swallowed up by the image in a state of slow disappearance. In this awkward conversation, Wendy is unable to ask for help. Help is a possibility quickly foreclosed by the reaction of her brother-in-law and her sister to her admittance of her current situation as a bad one. The conversation becomes markedly tentative. Wendy lets slip that things are going badly, that she has lost Lucy and that her car has broken down. Her sister gets on the phone and refers to Wendy in the third person—"what does *she* want *us* to do about it?" There is nothing to do, as they are also strapped. Wendy defuses any



Figure 10. Worn through.

suggestion of her duress, brushes it off. She leaves the pay phone to sit atop her car hood outside of the Walgreens with its flashing, red sign her darkened figure, again in a position of potential disappearance into the darkness, set in relief by the generic white building behind her, lit harshly by fluorescent bulbs (figure 11). We see Walter get picked up by a car in the distant background, a contrast to the prior scene of Wendy's disconnection from her own distant kin. This sequence, its performative restraint, embodies the film's intensive focus on the bind of retraction into debt and the



Figure 11. Stuck in waiting



Figures 12–14.

exhausting toll that it exacts. Wendy is getting whittled, worn down into disappearance.

All of Wendy's choices are organized by economic frugality, restriction, and anxiety. The spectator is introduced to her travel itinerary and budget in an extraordinarily synoptic scene. Going to sleep in her car on the eve of her arrival in this unnamed town in the Walgreens parking lot, Wendy looks at a list of her expenses as measured against her itinerary. Her doodling and the words "Northwestern Fishery" written at the top of the page indicate her earnestness as well as her dead-end predicament. As she rubs her foot, seen in close-up, we watch her impassive face against the smudged, flickering light outside the car window (figures 12 and 13). As Wendy reclines to sleep, a cut to Lucy's sleepy visage in the car indicates a paralleling and a reduction—human and animal energy depleted, the contingency of a home as precarious as rest itself (figure 14).

Sleep, the other side of waiting, is a consistent point of reference, a state of discomfort and disturbance, and finally an impossibility in *Wendy and Lucy*. If sleep is a refuge from fatigue, Wendy's dwindling sleep spaces and her constant disturbance within them is often a reminder of the harrowing nature of her economic condition, its elimination of respite, and its existence as a fundamental space of risk and uncertainty. Sleep, as Andy Warhol's *Sleep* (1963) can also remind us, is intrinsically private: it requires retreat and cordoned-off property for the fall out of waking consciousness to be attained. Wendy owns little, least of all the luxury of private space, and thus her sleep is the index of her vulnerability, a constant potentiality of rupture and intrusion. Our first scene of sleep described above is edited alongside a harsh waking that starts off the chain of small misfortunes, as Wendy is asked to leave the premises of the parking lot by Walter, the Walgreens security guard. The film's final deprecation also involves the disruption of sleep: an awakened or never fully sleeping Wendy (figure 15), who has gone to spend the night in the woods in the absence of the use of her car, is confronted in the dark by a sinister, logorrheic homeless man (played by Larry Fessenden), who tells her not to look at him as he rants about his own treatment as "trash" by the world outside, a world that we realize has discarded them both. The sense of threat and of Wendy's vulnerability as a woman—will this be a rape?—is catalyzed by a close-up on Wendy's face, held in reaction to the man's rambling. Williams's performance of tamped-down suffering in the trembling of her face, attempting stillness but evincing fear, reminds us of the alterity of her drift and her dispossession from private space to which female bodies have often been relegated.



Figure 15. Barely asleep.

Wendy's sleeping situation continually and doggedly reminds the spectator, who may wish to disavow the evidence, that she is in fact homeless and that her fatigue is thus chronic. The other index of her homelessness is also deeply linked to the performance of corporeal rituals of exhaustion, in particular Wendy's bathroom visits to the gas station in which she washes up. The washing scenes are extraordinary in their precision and in their indication of the segmentation of mundane time into blocks of consciousness and shocks of wakefulness. This is the only private space Wendy has regular access to, and thus the bathroom becomes the site of the decomposing and recomposing of Wendy's perseverance, her bare survival.

Wendy's final decision, her act of letting Lucy go after the dog has been found, stands as a supreme moment of performed resignation, of giving up and giving in to the duress and enduring relentlessness of fatigue, a fatigue that can never fully catch up to the effort, the labor, from which it volleys and retracts. Having tracked her devoted quest for Lucy for the bulk of its running time, the film presents us with the recognition of the impossibility of even this animal attachment, made suddenly and horribly unsustainable (figure 16). One is struck by the fact that suddenly Lucy, the dog, is better off than Wendy, the human. Lucy has found a place, a home, a space to float. In contrast to *Umberto D's* more affirmative ending, in which the dog Flik refuses to part ways with the old pensioner, Wendy's act of resignation is harrowing in its sense of rupture, a break with both the sense of the film's own narrative drive and its

exhaustion of Wendy's avenues for relations and relationality. All attachments, not just animal but also human, have been let go. This is endurance positioned poignantly, radically outside productivist, reproductive, and relational trajectories. If, as Thomas Dumm suggests, that resignation signals an ending that is incomplete, resignation for, Wendy also launches her out of stillness, lurching her into a mobile sphere. It is no wonder, then, that we find Wendy returning to and reuniting with the freight train—a motif that has subtly and aurally leavened the entire film from its opening moments. One world has been foreclosed, and a new way of being needs to be constituted in what Dumm reminds us rests in the difficulty of “the loss of a world and a finding of oneself.” The pain of this taking leave, the willed rather than accidental loss of the dog, marks the boundary of fatigue as a state of endurance, survival, endurance. Wendy resigns and disappears from the frame, her point of view inscribed from the position of the moving freight train, a mobile shot that indicates a release from stillness and waiting as well as an evanescence into the trope of itinerancy itself.

Conclusion

Wendy's and Rosetta's capacity to live, especially as women, outside capitalist circuits of exchange and circulation, outside of the productivity regime of work, seems an impossibility; the burdens of social production and reproduction exact a cost in the intensity of



Figure 16. The pain of resignation.

the seemingly unendurable. The fall in *Rosetta*—giving in—and the taking leave in *Wendy and Lucy*—giving up—are imbricated with the figuration of fatigue across the bodies of female (non)workers who strain and aspire but fail to be counted and accounted for, to find a place, a ground, within a sphere of stable employment and viable, livable conditions. Is it possible to “get a life,” a “life against work” within these circumstances and through these terms?⁴⁹ Both films do far more in their gestural and aesthetic economies than in their narratives to critique the institution of work itself and its regimes of social utility, placing an emphasis on fatigue as a baseline symptom of survival, the constitutive condition of early twenty-first-century modernity.

Making things both possible and difficult, weariness delays, interrupts, arrests, and pauses us in time; weariness draws us out, to reflect, to feel, and to wait. Tiredness is not inaction but instead is a reflexive holding in abeyance, the body waiting for itself to recharge, reenergize, or waiting for a shifting desire, drive, event, or an approaching relation to the world. This event may never arrive. But it is the qualitative expectancy of waiting that infuses the banality of tiredness with its potentiality, a potentiality never shorn of struggle.

Notes

The epigraphs in this essay are from Giorgio Agamben, “Notes on Gesture,” in *Means without End: Notes on Politics*, translated by Vincenzo Binetti and Cesare Casarino (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 57; Maurice Blanchot, *The Infinite Conversation*, translated by Susan Hanson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993, 2003), xiv; Jasbir Puar, ed., “Precarity Talk: A Virtual Roundtable with Lauren Berlant, Judith Butler, Bojana Cejic, Isabell Lovey, Jasbir Puar and Ana Vujanovic,” *TDR: The Drama Review* 56, no. 4 (Winter 2012): 166; Roland Barthes, *The Neutral: Lecture Course at the College de France (1977–1978)* translated by Rosalind Krauss and Denis Hollier (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 18–19.

¹ I would like to thank Jennifer Johung, Seb Franklin, and Alex Pickett for their generosity, sharp insight, and encouragement during the course of writing this essay. Many thanks to Genevieve Yue and the editors of *Discourse* for their feedback and stewardship of this piece.

² Needless to say, cinema—and durational cinema in particular—can also exhaust and tax its spectator through its demand that the spectator occupy the work’s own seemingly inhospitable or distended time. This would be the subject of a different, if related, study of the phenomenology of art cinema spectatorship in respect to viewing endurance, boredom, distraction, and attentive fatigue but for which space here is limited.

³ For the rhetorical purposes of this essay, I am using weariness, tiredness,

fatigue, and exhaustion interchangeably. Tiredness is more productively ascertained in its subtle gradations of reflexive physicality. Gilles Deleuze's text on Samuel Beckett, "The Exhausted," which informs this essay, makes a strong distinction between the ordinariness of fatigue or tiredness as a state that eradicates achievement, a condition of no longer realizing (exhausting realization), whereas exhaustion is when one can no longer "possibilize," in that exhaustion exhausts the possible. Deleuze examines the formal principles of Beckett's works: their relation to the limit of language, their exhaustively permutational form, their "unactualized possibility." Yet in this project, thinking cinematic corporeality and the materiality of performance means not as speedily foreclosing on the potential and utility of seemingly banal, inactive, brutally physiological states—particularly for questions of form. See Gilles Deleuze, "The Exhausted," translated by Anthony Uhlman, *SubStance* 24, no. 78 (1995): 3–28.

⁴ Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, translated by Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), xii.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 189.

⁶ The marginality of both modes of production (and implicitly their distinction from Deleuze's grounding in an account of the art cinema) as well as their proximity to each other in this section of the book is striking. Experimental cinema is represented most overtly by the narrative driven Morrissey/Warhol film *Flesh*, which for Deleuze shows most clearly a sense of the "fatigues and expectations" enacted by the underground mode's performing subjects, its "marginals." The production of new gestures is thus linked to marginal bodies and the temporality of everyday rituals and theatrical ceremonies specific to them, and a similar line of argument is taken with woman-authored films, as a specifically rendered "female gest" is typified by Chantal Akerman's 1970s films such as *Jeanne Dielman, 23 Quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles* (1975) and *Je Tu Il Elle* (1976), as well as the work of Agnes Varda. Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, 191–92, 196–97.

⁷ While critical accounts and debates about slow cinema abound, scholarly literature on the subject is gradually developing. See Matthew Flanagan, "Toward an Aesthetic of Slow in Contemporary Cinema," *16:96*, no. 29 (November 2008), http://www.16-9.dk/2008-11/side11_inenglish.htm; Karl Schoonover, "Wastrels of Time: Slow Cinema's Laboring Body, the Political Subject and the Queer," *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media* 53, no. 1 (Spring 2012): 65–78; Tiago de Luca, "Realism of the Senses: A Tendency in Contemporary World Cinema," in *Theorizing World Cinema*, edited by Lucia Nagib (New York: I. B. Tauris, 2011), 183–206. Recent work on contemporary art cinema and aesthetic experience has foregrounded phenomenological approaches and the framework of the haptic and corporeal. See Martine Beugnet, *Cinema of Sensation: French Film and the Art of Transgression* (Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press, 2007); Jennifer Barker, *The Tactile Eye: Touch and the Cinematic Experience* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009).

⁸ A fascinating phenomenology of the glide into sleep and sleep's liminal existence at the border of self-reflection, consciousness, and subjectivity is Jean Luc Nancy's *The Fall of Sleep*, translated by Charlotte Mandell (New York: Fordham University Press, 2009).

⁹ Barthes, *The Neutral*, 16.

¹⁰ Deleuze, *The Time-Image*, 193–94, 196.

¹¹ Blanchot, *The Infinite Conversation*, xvii.

¹² Barthes, *The Neutral*, 20.

¹³ Emmanuel Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, translated by Alphonso Lingis (London: Kluwer Academic, 1995), 29–36.

¹⁴ John Llewellyn, *Emmanuel Levinas: The Genealogy of Ethics*. (London: Routledge, 2004), 35.

¹⁵ Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, 34.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 31–32.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 35.

¹⁸ The theoretical and historical literature on boredom in particular is formidable. See Patricia Meyer Spacks, *Boredom: The Literary History of a State of Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995); Lars Svendsen, *A Philosophy of Boredom* (London: Reaktion Books, 2005); Elizabeth Goodstein, *Experience without Qualities: Boredom and Modernity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005); Patrice Petro, “After Shock/Between Boredom and History,” *Discourse* 16, no. 2 (Winter 1993–94): 77–99; Richard Misek, “Dead Time: Cinema, Heidegger, Boredom,” in *After Taste: Cultural Value and the Moving Image*, edited by Julia Vassilieva and Con Verevis (London: Routledge, 2011), 133–41.

¹⁹ Walter Benjamin, “The Storyteller” and “On Some Motifs in Baudelaire,” in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, edited by Hannah Arendt, translated by Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 1968), 83–110, 155–201; Walter Benjamin, “Convolute D: Boredom, Eternal Return,” in *The Arcades Project*, edited by Rolf Tiedemann, translated by Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 101–19; George Simmel, “The Metropolis and Mental Life,” in *On Individuality and Social Forms*, edited by Donald Levine (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972), 324–39; Siegfried Kracauer, “Boredom,” in *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays*, edited and translated by Thomas Y. Levin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 331–34.

²⁰ Jean Epstein, “Rapidity and Fatigue of the *Homo Spectatoris*,” in *Jean Epstein: Critical Essays and New Translations*, edited by Sarah Keller and Jason Paul (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2012), 333–39.

²¹ Stuart Liebman, “Novelty and Poesis in the Early Writings of Jean Epstein,” in *Jean Epstein*, 81. Liebman writes: “Epstein, however, did not equate this new condition simply with exhaustion, loss of focus, and mental depletion. Rather, he considered it simply an inevitable, irreversible, and ultimately positive consequence of modernity. According to him, fatigue favored a descent into subconscious modes of cognition that were rich in soothing emotion beyond the reach of the ‘logic’ he identified with the strenuous pragmatic calculations and algebraic communicative speech increasingly demanded of the growing class of white-collar workers. The poets’ delving into these layers of imagery and experience yielded works that helped to relax and soothe the jangled brains, affording compensation to them for their extraordinary exertions. The poems thereby acted as a kind of therapy. Modern poetic works were in this respect both signs of the times as well as a kind of haven for many workers in an increasingly abstract, distracted world” (81).

²² Christophe Wall-Romana, quoted in Sarah Keller and Jason N. Paul, “Introduction: Epstein’s Writing,” in *Jean Epstein*, 267.

²³ Barthes, *The Neutral*, 21.

²⁴ The etymology of endurance is elusive. The term “induration” is commonly used in medical contexts to describe a hardness, obstinacy, a hardening, a loss of

elasticity, or a sclerosis (commonly of skin or arteries); as a noun, it is French in origin, drawn from the root of “endure.” Recently, the term “endurance” has been employed by Eugene Thacker in his account of Morton Feldman’s six-hour-long *String Quartet No. 2*. In describing the experience of listening to this minimalist, durationally intensive sound piece, Thacker indicates that “the SQ2 is not just about listening to sound and silence in time; its duration, or endurance—its ‘endurance’—is also about listening to time itself, or better, listening to duration.” Thacker, “Review: String Quartet No. 2,” *Leonardo* 41, no. 3 (2008): 300. The notion of endurance also intersects with Bergson’s thinking regarding *durée* and with Bergsonism as a theoretical horizon. Henri Bergson, *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness*, translated by F. L. Pogson (1889; reprint, Mineola, NY: Dover, 2001); Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, translated by Arthur Mitchell (1907; reprint, Mineola, NY: Dover, 1998); Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, translated by Nancy M. Paul and W. Scott Palmer (1896; reprint, New York: Zone Books, 1990); Gilles Deleuze, *Bergsonism*, translated by Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (New York: Zone Books, 1990). See also Bliss Cua Lim, *Translating Time: Cinema, the Fantastic and Temporal Critique* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009).

²⁵ Anson Rabinbach, *The Human Motor: Energy, Fatigue and the Origins of Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press), 1992.

²⁶ On immaterial labor, see Maurizio Lazzarato, “Immaterial Labour,” in *Radical Thought in Italy: A Potential Politics*, edited by Paolo Virno and Michael Hardt, translated by Maurizia Bozcalgi et al. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 133–47. Although immaterial labor has been taken up as a way of describing the contemporary conditions of knowledge work and the transformation of late capitalism toward an information-based economy rather than a manufacturing economy, Lazzarato has since renounced the utility of the term “immaterial labor.” Formidable critiques of the notion of immaterial labor and of the affiliated conception of the cognariat (cognitive workforce) have challenged the developmental fantasy that undergirds a claim on work as an “immaterial” form, suggesting that the practices that exist under the umbrella of cognitive and flexible forms of de-skilling and labor’s de-securitization and precarization, a widening freelance-based model of employability, and more cognitive information-based labor models all conceal very persistently material terms of exploitation, displacement, and expropriation that are continuous with the forms and forces of earlier stages of capitalist organization.

²⁷ Michael Hardt, “Affective Labor,” *boundary2* 26, no. 2 (1999): 89–100.

²⁸ Teresa Brennan, *Exhausting Modernity: Grounds for a New Economy* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 11.

²⁹ Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 81–82, 101.

³⁰ The engagement of performance studies with the problem of an aesthetic of endurance in performance art might articulate these questions in distinctly different terms with respect to the ontology of liveness and constitutive ephemerality of performance labor.

³¹ See Harun Farocki’s essay regarding this film, “Workers Leaving the Factory,” translated by Laurent Faasch-Ibrahim, *Senses of Cinema*, no. 21 (July 2002), http://sensesofcinema.com/2002/21/farocki_workers/. Originally published in *Nachdruck/Imprint* (Berlin: Verlag Vorwerk; New York: Lukas and Sternberg, 2001).

³² Jean-Louis Comolli, "Mechanical Bodies, Ever More Heavenly," translated by Annette Michelson, *October* 83 (Winter 1998): 20, 21.

³³ For examples of production studies and industrial analysis, see John Caldwell, *Production Culture: Industrial Reflexivity and Critical Practice in Film and Television* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008); Vicki Mayer, Miranda Banks, and John Caldwell, eds. *Production Studies: Cultural Studies of Media Industries* (New York: Routledge, 2009). Two dossiers in *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media* attest to a heightened interest in historical and theoretical questions of labor's representation, representability, and aesthetic charge: Elena Gorfinkel, guest ed., "The Work of the Image: Cinema, Labor, Aesthetics," and Ewa Mazierska, guest ed., "Working Life Now and Then," *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media* 53, no. 1 (Spring 2012): 43–116, 149–227.

³⁴ Karl Schoonover, "Wastrels of Time," 65–78. Schoonover insightfully unveils the normative presumptions of productivity and relation to waste and queer modes of being in the slow cinema debates, in which slow art cinema's visible linkage of the body's labor and "wasted time" is a touchstone for questions of cultural, aesthetic, and political value. Insisting on unveiling the devaluation of wasted or spoiled labor, of a dawdling, procrastinating form of perambulation in the acts of slow performing bodies and slow spectators, Schoonover suggests that art cinema's stake lies in its inculcation of alternate forms of imagining modes of being and living.

³⁵ An in-depth examination of nonreproductive temporality with respect to labor and assumptions of productivity would have to engage with recent theorizations of queer time. See Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004); Elisabeth Freeman, *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007); Carolyn Dinshaw et al., "Theorizing Queer Temporalities: A Roundtable Discussion," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 13, no. 2–3 (2007): 177–95.

³⁶ Berenice Reynaud, "For Wanda," in *The Last Great American Picture Show*, edited by Alexander Horwath, Thomas Elsaesser, and Noel King (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2004), 223–49.

³⁷ Lauren Berlant, "Nearly Utopian, Nearly Normal: Post Fordist Affect in *La Promesse* and *Rosetta*," *Public Culture* 19, no. 2 (2007): 279. Berlant's reading takes on this question of the constitutive fantasy of the deferred, inaccessible "good life."

³⁸ Kathi Weeks, *The Problem with Work: Feminism, Marxism, Antiwork Politics and Postwork Imaginaries* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011).

³⁹ Thomas L. Dumm, "Resignation," *Critical Inquiry* 25 (Autumn 1998): 69.

⁴⁰ Berlant ("Nearly Utopian, Nearly Normal," 289) characterizes the actuarial force of the Dardennes' films as describing the affective costs of globalization.

⁴¹ The most renowned account of the valence of this scene is of course that of Andre Bazin, "Umberto D: A Great Work," in *What Is Cinema?*, Vol. 2, translated by Hugh Gray (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), 79–82.

⁴² Karl Schoonover ("Wastrels of Time," 70–71) discusses this scene and Andre Bazin's reading of it as a central site of art cinema's durational stake in the nonprofessional actor's body and its manifestation of slowness.

⁴³ Adrian Martin, "A Theory of Agitation, or: Getting Off in the Cinema," *Continuum: Journal of Media and Cultural Studies* 26, no. 4 (August 2012): 519–28.

⁴⁴ Janice Morgan, "The Social Realism of Body Language in *Rosetta*," *French Review* 77, no. 3 (February 2004): 530.

⁴⁵ Guy Austin, "The Amateur Actors of Cannes (1999): A Shock to the (Star) System," *French Cultural Studies* 15, no. 3 (2004): 251–63.

⁴⁶ Bert Cardullo, "The Cinema of Resistance: An Interview with Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne," in *Committed Cinema: The Films of Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne, Essays and Interviews*, edited by Bert Cardullo (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009), 190.

⁴⁷ Kelly Reichardt, Interview, *Wendy and Lucy* Press Notes, p. 3, *Wendy and Lucy* Official Website, http://www.wendyandlucy.com/press_images/wal_pressnotes.pdf.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Weeks, *The Problem with Work*, 231–33.