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Corporeal and sonic diagrams for cinematic ethics in Rolf De Heer's *Dance Me to My Song*

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Rolf De Heer's 1997 Australian feature film *Dance Me to My Song* was devised with the late Heather Rose, a person with Cerebral Palsy. The film also features a central performance by Heather (as the character of Julia) and is clearly about 'her world'. The ethic of engagement exemplified by this film resonates with what Gerard Goggin has termed an 'ethics of listening' that entails 'listening-as-if-disability-mattered'. This article takes up Deleuze's concepts of the diagram in order to argue that *Dance Me to My Song* is a valuable, although at times problematic, cinematic framing of disability. Deleuze's two concepts of the diagram offer a useful frame through which to consider the film, because respectively they map the potentiality of social relations and act as a means of erasing cliché. The film is a raw, visceral text, rich in diegetic sound intended to 'fold' the experiences of the protagonist into the subjectivity of the spectator/aurator. This folding blurs and re-aligns relationships between disabled and non-disabled bodies and can be seen as a step towards erasing clichés attached to the disabled body. The disabled/able boundary is further blurred through ambiguous representation of Julia's carer, Madeline, as potentially disabled. The characters in the film perform a diagrammatic function of shaping possible relations between bodies and erasing cliché. Building on the platform provided by *Dance Me to My Song*, I contend that when cinema engages with the disabled body and soundscapes associated with the disabled body through an 'ethics of listening', new sonic and filmic bodies can be – and are – created.

Keywords: disability; film; listening; ethics

Introduction: social and artistic diagrams

Breathing, listening, feeling are the stuff of which our life is made. *Dance Me to My Song* (De Heer, 1997) prompts us to breathe with the protagonist, Julia, to feel and be embodied again (with) the screen. The narrative in *Dance Me to My Song* tells the story of Julia, a woman with Cerebral Palsy who lives independently with the support of a carer, named Madeline (Joey Kennedy). The relationship between the two women is constituted through power struggles, competition for Eddie's (John Brumpton) affections and their psychological and physical needs for sexual intimacy. Rolf De Heer devised the film with the late Heather Rose, who performs the character of Julia, and the film is clearly about 'her world'. The ethic of engagement exemplified by this film resonates with what Goggin (2009, p. 499) has termed 'the ethics of listening' that entails 'listening-as-if-disability-mattered'. At the time of its release in 1997, this ethic of cinematic engagement offered a welcome change for

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spectators who had become accustomed to the more exploitative techniques of 'representing' disability featured in mainstream releases such as *Rain Man* (Lavinson, 1989), *What's Eating Gilbert Grape?* (Hallstrom, 1993) and *Forrest Gump* (Zemeckis, 1994).

The cinematic engagement with disability presented in *Dance Me to My Song* can be read through Deleuze's (1981/2005, p. 69) notion of art as a diagram – a 'stopping or resting point' from which new sensory structures emerge. In what follows I offer an extended précis of the film, in order to set up the terms for my analysis as the paper progresses. What I offer in the précis is a mapping of the film as a diagram of a social field, or, rather, I want to suggest that the film can be read as a diagram for social relations/sociability that are disability inclusive. Specifically, I suggest that on screen Heather Rose's body can be read as a diagram, a 'possibility of fact' (Deleuze, 1981/2005, p. 77) for a new texture of cinematic engagement with disability.

The proposition that *Dance Me to My Song* opens up, or maps, new social relations between bodies brings together two different ways in which Deleuze talks about the diagram. In his work on Foucault, Deleuze talks about the diagram in terms of mapping social relationships to reveal the archive, or 'expose relations between forces or... particular strategies' (1986/2006, p. 36)¹ while creating new possible maps for social relations. In his book on Francis Bacon, Deleuze considers art as a diagram that is expressive of possible facts or new experiences which he explains by stating that 'the operation of the diagram... is to be "suggestive"... to introduce possibilities of fact' (1981/2005, p. 71). The artistic diagram as a resting point generates an event (which Deleuze calls a 'catastrophe' (1981/2005, p. 77) that must be *passed through* in order to create a new textual form (the form which Deleuze calls *the Figure* (1981/2005, pp. 23, 47). The respective features of Deleuze's two concepts of the diagram are very different and I want to be clear that I am synthesizing these two concepts. Drawing on *Foucault*, I examine the social relationships in the film in terms of the history of the social construction of disability they reveal and the possibilities for new relationships between bodies that they create. Drawing on *Francis Bacon*, I focus on the affects produced by each of the characters in terms of the qualitative capacity for action generated by the respective bodies. In bringing together the two concepts of the diagram introduced above, I argue that through technologies of film sound and cinematography, *Dance Me to My Song* creates an original 'cartography which is coextensive with the whole social field' (Deleuze, 1986/2006, p. 30) through which to know our own bodies and relations between bodies via the body-figure of the film text.

In order to attain such power of suggestion, *Dance Me to My Song* first dismantles the clichés about disability that already populate the film text. That is, before a film is made, we can imagine it exists within a genre of already-made films about disability, and these existing films make clichés about disability that pre-empt the possible content of the film. In his work on *Francis Bacon*, Deleuze describes *clichés* as anonymous and floating images:

which circulate in the external world, but which also penetrate each of us and constitute our internal world, so that everyone possesses only psychic clichés by which we think and feel, are thought and felt, being ourselves one cliché among others in the world that surrounds us. (Smith, 2003)

To this, I would add that cliché is also a transcendent mode of thought that generates what Deleuze calls 'sad passions' (1968/1990, pp. 262, 270, 283). For example, depictions of people with severe disabilities as being 'retarded' or 'mentally disabled', filmic representations of people with disabilities as 'special' people, historical images of 'freak' bodies, celebrated disabled athletes, all such public knowledges and figures, alongside the private beliefs surrounding them, fold together as mediascapes and lived cultures join in cultural imaginaries to produce depictions of disability. These depictions also become clichés. *Dance Me to My Song* both dismantles and re-inscribes existing filmic clichés about disability to offer a sonic and filmic figure of the [disabled] body.

Dance Me to My Song constructs its spectators primarily as listeners, or what I have elsewhere called aurators (Hickey-Moody & Iocco, 2004). This sonic focus is achieved via binaural sound, which is the product of recording microphones that are attached to actors' heads during filming. These microphones pick up left and right sound tracks, in a manner similar to most human ears. Through this technique, seemingly insignificant noises (such as swallowing and breathing) are brought to the forefront of the listener's awareness. When listening to the sound track wearing headphones, Julia's breathing reverberates through the listener's body, as it would do through her own small frame. This diegetic sound is intended to 'fold' the experiences of the protagonist into the subjectivity of the spectator/aurator and operates to blur and re-align relationships between disabled and non-disabled bodies. Through this relationship *Dance Me to My Song* creates new sonic and celluloid diagrams which are pedagogies of the disabled body that constitute a step towards erasing clichés attached to the disabled body.

A key problematic of both this paper and the film itself is the production of Julia's aural and celluloid body through a mapping of differential relations of friendship, care, femininity, sensuality, sexuality and the ingestion of food and its expulsion. Julia and her search for intimacy deconstructs dominant filmic representations of disability in many ways and I focus on these articulations of disability on screen that dismantle existing clichés. I also consider some ways in which, across the film text, the disabled body is expressed as a site of ambivalence (Kumari-Campbell, 2009, p. 25), primarily to the disabled character herself but secondly, to the viewer. My point in doing this is to gesture towards some of the ways in which *Dance Me to My Song* offers a sympathetic engagement with the daily labour and complexity of Julia's life. Rather than Julia's body being presented as a site of monstrous difference, Julia's experience of her own body is presented to the viewer, and part of this daily experience is that Julia experiences ambivalence (Kumari-Campbell, 2009, pp. 25, 47, 129, 131, 138, 158, 159) about her corporeality, but other times it is a source of pleasure. When Julia can't effect direct change, or act upon herself and others, Julia experiences internal ambivalence (Kumari-Campbell, 2009, p. 158) about her self and her relations with the world.

Madeline, Julia's carer is psychologically disabled (Starrs, 2008), although somewhat ambiguously represented as such, and her character blurs distinctions between able/disabled characters in the film. I will suggest there are problematic aspects of the ways in which Madeline is presented as disabled, however, the overarching ambiguity around her disability is useful to the extent that it deconstructs any binary between disabled and non-disabled bodies.

In many ways, *Dance Me to My Song* works to problematize easy distinctions between abled and disabled bodies. Through the use of non-diegetic sound and an intimate engagement with Julia's body on screen, the film offers a new celluloid modulation of disability.

Dance Me to My Song: the text

The film begins by introducing some differences in Madeline's and Julia's lives. These differences are important because Madeline's psychiatric disability is evidenced through her worldview and actions, which consistently erode her capacity to act. Julia's actions produce her subjectivity as a mixture of physically needing others so much that she is limited in her capacity to act on herself, but Julia also has more capacity to engage with the complexities of the world than Madeline. We see this discrepancy in the women's capacities as soon as the film begins: Julia has to wait every morning for Madeline to arrive before she can go to the toilet, because she needs to be assisted into her chair. Madeline is a stereotypically 'hysterical woman': depressed, self-obsessed and desperate for sexual attention from men. She resents having to work and, rather than rising and heading to work to assist Julia with her toilet, Madeline dresses slowly, staring at her breasts in the mirror. This first scene contains themes that foreshadow key events in the film such as Madeline's narcissism and her disdain for Julia. Needing to feel 'better' than other people, feeling insecure and hopeless, Madeline consistently puts Julia down while talking about her own need for a man. Madeline tries to find a man, without much success. However, her attempts extend to great length – she disables Julia's wheelchair and puts sunglasses on Julia's face while she makes out with a new boyfriend on Julia's couch and then has sex with him in Julia's bed. Julia wants to watch. Julia hasn't had sex and is curious to see what it looks like. Madeline later teases Julia for watching, saying her man had ridiculed Julia in her chair and Madeline is happy that her sexual partner found her more attractive than Julia. They fight and Madeline leaves the house – screaming at Julia 'you'd be dead without me'. Madeline can only love Julia to the extent that Julia makes her feel needed, or 'better than' Julia.

Reluctant to call for help and scared of being returned to institutional care, Julia waits on the front veranda, hoping for a helpful stranger to pass after Madeline leaves her alone. In so doing, she finds herself a man – Eddie. Julia accosts Eddie in the street, interrupting his path repeatedly until he realizes she 'wants something'. Julia badgers Eddie – she wants a glass of water, she needs her voice machine on her chair, 'please plug the phone in the study'. Eddie needs to go but is also amazed at Julia's tenacity. Julia doesn't quite reach Eddie's chest in her chair and her tiny frame looks almost childlike in comparison to his tall, muscular body. Through her voice machine, Julia asks Eddie repeatedly to 'come back, come back, come back'. Eddie leaves and we are not sure if he is coming back. Julia's friend Rix comes over and they get drunk and hoon around the suburb – Rix sitting on Julia's commode on wheels, attached to Julia's chair (Figure 1). Madeline comes back and tries to ban the return of Rix, stating that 'I don't want you having that dyke in here, Julia, she makes a bloody mess, and she'll give you all sorts of germs' (Rix is a Maori lesbian). Julia responds: 'She's not a dyke. She's gay.' Madeline finishes the exchange with: 'There's no fucking difference, come on, into the bathroom'.



Figure 1. Julia drives Rix.

Eddie comes back. With flowers. He is helpful and attentive. Madeline is jealous. Her boyfriend has been put in gaol for breaking his good behaviour bond and she feels hopeless without her man. While shovelling food into Julia's mouth (at a speed that seems like it is about to choke her), Madeline comes up with a plan to seduce Eddie. She wants Julia's handsome and caring friend for herself. Madeline proudly details the plan to Julia, who fights back by spraying her food all over Madeline. Madeline screams: 'Think about what it feels like to be sprayed with somebody else's shit.' Julia is left in her chair, immobilized, and covered in 'victimized' food. Eddie comes to visit, but without her voice machine and with her chair immobilized, Julia can't answer the door. Eddie breaks in and finds out that Julia has been abandoned. She needs Eddie's help to go to the toilet. Afterwards, Eddie finds a condom given to Julia by Family Planning² in the bathroom. They joke about Julia having the condom and Eddie takes them out for an ice cream. But it's the wrong kind of pleasure – Julia doesn't want ice cream, she wants sex. In front of the Delicatessen owner, while the owner is serving up two 'double tornado' ice creams, Julia asks through her voice machine 'Fuck me? Fuck me?' Eddie downplays her request, assuming she is not serious.

Madeline comes back. She's got herself a new man – 'found him at the shopping centre'. She's off for a date with her new man and Julia rings Eddie, asking him to come over while Madeline is out. Eddie does come over and, at Julia's request; he dances with her to her favourite song. Things with Madeline's new man don't turn out quite as planned. He's not the gentleman Madeline hoped for. He rapes her. She returns to sleep at Julia's house, and clinging to Julia, cries 'you are the only person in the world who loves me, Julia'. Having seemingly given up on her own love life, Madeline pries into Julia's – she rings Eddie with Julia's voice machine, and pretending to be Julia, sets up another date for the pair. But Julia doesn't want to be set up with Eddie while Madeline is around. Madeline forces Julia into a candle-lit bath with Eddie, but Julia protests. Madeline quickly takes Julia's place in the bath with Eddie. Initially shocked, he then acquiesces to her seduction. Julia has to lie in bed and listen to them have sex, until Rix and her partner drop in to visit and take Julia out. But the distraction is only temporary. Madeline has 'fallen in love' with Eddie and tells Julia she could 'spend the rest of her life with him'. Julia responds by

making a play for Eddie. It seems she was keen to sleep with him, just not while Madeline was in the house. The seduction takes place, while Madeline's car stalls in the middle of a street, leaving her late for work and leaving Eddie and Julia safely alone. For a while.

Madeline, who until this point had harboured hopes of a future with Eddie, enters Julia's house while the lovers lie naked on the bed. Madeline screams: 'Jesus – you bastard. You low life shit. You fuck cripples now, do you?' Madeline throws Eddie out of the house but Julia is furious. Madeline has ruined her precious moment and Julia can't contain her anger: she tries to run Madeline down with her electric wheelchair; she hits and bites Madeline. Seeing Julia and Eddie together and suffering Julia's anger also sends Madeline into a fury – Madeline threatens to kill Julia and means it. She leaves Julia in her immobilized chair all day; returning late in the evening with an eerie, make-believe 'it will be ok' attitude. Madeline puts Julia into bed, but the non-diegetic sound warns us things are not safe for Julia. Madeline decides to sleep on the sofa rather than return home, as she usually does. Julia is desperate to get rid of Madeline and as soon as she leaves the next morning, Julia rings Eddie to try to talk. His phone has been disconnected. Julia blames Madeline and when Madeline returns that evening Julia attacks her ferociously as soon as she opens the door. Madeline is taken by surprise and narrowly escapes being hit, front on, by Julia's chair. Keen to hold on to her job, but more so, desperately needing to feel needed, Madeline tries to smooth things over and make the situation with Julia work.

On her way to the shops one day, Madeline casually mentions to Julia that Eddie had sent Julia a letter from Italy and Madeline had torn it up and thrown it away. Madeline didn't think Julia needed to read what it had to say. As far as Julia is concerned, this is the last straw. She phones her homecare provider and asks them to stop Madeline's visits. She would rather return to institutional care than live under Madeline's control. A temporary worker is sent in while Julia's future care is organized, but once she leaves Julia tucked in bed we again hear the clumsy, low notes of warning telling us Madeline is on her way back to the house. She knows where the spare key is kept and she is furious. Madeline demands to know why Julia fired her. Julia offers a rather reductive take on the relationship, stating: 'I stole your boyfriend'. This is partially true, but is also an oversimplification that pushes Madeline's buttons. Julia wants to fight back. She repeats the statement, inciting Madeline's anger. Rix and her partner arrive with a carton of beer just in time to stop Madeline strangling Julia. Rix punches Madeline, who then crawls out of the house accompanied by Rix's polite request: 'please don't come back'. Julia wins. Her homecare provider organizes a series of interviews with new carers and, just before the first interviewee arrives, Eddie comes back, laconically asking 'have there been any phone calls for me?' Eddie and Julia dance around together, while the film cuts to Madeline kicking her old Toyota Corolla, which has broken down. Again.

Re-reading the text: unpacking *Dance Me to My Song*

The visceral realism depicting Julia's resistance is important for ethical and cinematic reasons. In ethical terms, the ways in which Julia's experience of embodiment is portrayed alerts us to the everyday labour associated with Julia's lived experiences

and produces an awareness of context. This awareness of context is a point Deleuze makes in relation to the ethics of affect. Taking up Spinoza's philosophy, he argues:

The great theories of the Ethics...cannot be treated apart from the three practical theses concerning consciousness, values and the sad passions. (Deleuze, 1970/1988, p. 28)

These 'three practical theses concerning consciousness, values and the sad passions' (Deleuze, 1970/1988, p. 28) constitute building blocks for Spinoza's philosophy. His first thesis, concerning consciousness, is that our consciousness is an illusion. Spinoza argues that, rather than being the origin of our thoughts and actions, we *are* the affects that our thoughts and actions have on us. We act, and through acting, produce ourselves. Julia produces herself as an expanded, productive body through relationship with Eddie, but as a limited, aggressive, controlling body through her competitive relationship with Madeline.

The portrayal of Julia and Madeline's relationship in *Dance Me to My Song* is one part of the film that cannot be read as a diagram for a cinematic ethics. The relationship clearly positions Julia as the better person, and I am left feeling like Julia could have at times shown more empathy and concern for Madeline because Julia generally seems more capable of demonstrating respect for others than Madeline. Although Madeline is not physically disabled, she appears to have a psychiatric illness or personality disorder and is much less able to have any kind of relationship with people than Julia. The fact that Julia only seems to see Madeline as help or as a threat surprises me, because Julia's reading of the other people in her life is more nuanced than her approach to Madeline. Julia erases clichés associated with the disabled body in many areas of her life and this film, but not in her relationship with Madeline.

Madeline uncovers an archive of pathological thought about female sexuality and psychiatric illness. While on the surface she problematizes a simple disabled/abled binary, her actions also limit possibilities for relation between differently disabled bodies. Madeline as a character brings together clichéd ideas about stratified social identities (such as the single woman, the poorly educated, the carer). She also embodies clichés of the hysterical woman, whose womb or sexual desire drives her, and makes her heartless. Deleuze argues that cliché embodies transcendent, or totally abstracted, thought. As cliché, transcendent thought is folded into subjectivity, decreasing a body's ability to act through limiting engagements with materialities. The character of Madeline limits how we might know carers, although De Heer is clearly making a point about the power imbalance between carers and their clients through the relationship dynamic. The relationship is nightmarish. In the film, these clichés of female sexuality and the power of the carer become a performance of a historical social condition of a woman in need, rather than an active way of dealing with a situation: Madeline can't care emotionally for Julia. Rather, she hurts Julia because she needs attention from men. De Heer's prior judgment, founded on the clichés from which the character of Madeline is composed, discounts the potentiality of Madeline and Julia's relationship.

Deleuze argues that transcendent thought encourages the experience of, what Spinoza calls, the 'sad passions' (Deleuze, 1970/1988, 1990). These 'sad passions' are affects that diminish a body's capacity to act. Essentializing beliefs about people with

disabilities not only limit the capacities of people with disabilities to act upon others but also foreclose ways in which they may be acted upon by others. An everyday example of a sad affect in *Dance Me to My Song* can be found in the relationship between Julia and Madeline, who is, as I have noted, very abusive and who is described by Bruno Starrs (2008) as having a psychological disability. Starrs retells the narrative of the film in a fashion that foregrounds Madeline's predilection for producing sad affects, recounting that: 'Madeline has an emotional disability rather than a physical disability: several scenes in the film show her reduced to helpless tears' (Starrs, 2008, p. 4). This evidence of Madeline reducing her own capacity to act is expressive of the ways in which she also reduces the capacities of those around her. Starrs explains: 'The callous Madeline . . . soon realizes Julia's strength is in her voice machine and she withholds access to the device as punishment: if she takes it away then Julia is less demanding' (Starrs, 2008, p. 4).

Such petulance can be considered a performance of Spinoza's 'sad passion' (Spinoza, 1996, 2001), an act prompted by the feeling that one's actions will have no positive impact, so one may as well act for self-serving purposes. Madeline creates sad passions through demonstrating a very clichéd way of understanding disability, which Julia's sexuality fundamentally disturbs. *Dance Me to My Song* then somewhat displaces these transcendent, clichéd ideas of disability through exploring ways in which Julia acts upon herself and others and by interrogating the ways in which other people in Julia's life grapple, or fail to grapple, with their own transcendent beliefs relating to disability.

Julia's relationship with Eddie is a more positive ethical diagram for social intimacies between disabled and non-disabled bodies. The relationship is romantic, perhaps unrealistically so, as it isn't that often one accosts a stranger on the street who turns out to be a best friend and romantic, sexual match. But the communication between Eddie and Julia is a valuable contrast to the alarming lack of communication between Madeline and Julia. Eddie offers a fabulous instance of ethical engagement. For example, to believe that a person is incompetent – like Madeline believes of Julia, denies Julia the chance to act freely. In contrast to Madeline's beliefs that abstract her opinion from lived events, Eddie's performance of ethics is an engagement with practicalities. *More than this, ethics is Eddie's engagement with practicalities that performs an awareness of context.* It is this awareness of context and acting in response to such awareness that makes Eddie's acts ethical. 'Ethics' is a way of acting and thinking that constitutes paying attention to practical details in relation to their political, historical and social context. Eddie respects Julia, listens to her feelings, needs and offers her emotional and physical care in a manner that is rarely patronizing. In the instance where Eddie does patronize Julia, in the ice-cream shop, she brings it up with him afterwards. He promises not to do it again. Their relationship has its very real, liveable moments as well as its more absurdly romantic aspects.

The fact that the film features a naked, sexually-themed scene between a woman with Cerebral Palsy and a man without a disability does not necessarily make the text useful in terms of thinking through disability (Figure 2). However, the focus on, and production of, Julia's body is important – this is not romanticized and it is foregrounded throughout the text. The first time Julia meets Eddie she needs him to help her have a drink of water. The second time she meets Eddie she needs him to help her go to the toilet. When Julia and Madeline fight, it usually involves food, and Julia



Figure 2. Julia half naked in her chair.

making a mess with food. Madeline ridicules Julia's body out of cruelty and Julia cracks jokes about her body in jest. Julia wants to dance and to be naked. Her body is composed of times of not working, and she wants sensuality: joyous sensations. Julia goes mad when Madeline temporarily ruins her intimacy. It was offering her respite from her body as a site of ambivalence (Kumari-Campbell, 2009, p. 158). Julia brings together a range of discourses of disability and remakes a new configuration of affects produced by, and attached to, the disabled body.

Breath with me, feel through me: sonic and celluloid diagrams

Dance Me to My Song creates new sonic and celluloid diagrams, which are pedagogies of the disabled body. The sound of Julia's breath and her swallowing shape the experience of listening (Goggin, 2009) to the film. The non-diegetic sound is really quite terrible – for the most part, it sounds like a cheap acoustic re-make of *Jaws* with a tango tune thrown in for the dance scenes. But the diegetic sound is original and very powerful. Julia's breath is heavy and her swallows are thick. The foregrounding of pedestrian noises that is noticeable in De Heer's films provides alternatives to assertions such as Michel Chion's suggestion in *The Voice in Cinema*

(1999), that spoken dialogue in the cinema soundtrack is the most privileged site of aural significance (Iocco & Hickey-Moody, 2005, p. 125). Voice is important for De Heer, but as a form of expression, not a just a vehicle for language. *Dance Me to My Song* contains more action and movement than dialogue. A range of sounds such as gurgling, swallowing, screaming and snorting express Julia's emotions, along with the mechanical modulation of her voice machine.

A critical aspect of what Deleuze, after Spinoza, calls 'joyful', or positive, encounters, is that they must fold back into their broader context in ways that enrich this context. This 'folding back in' is an example of the performative nature of ethics: *ethics is a productive movement*. Ethics is a movement in which one body acts on another, or is folded into another, enhancing the capacities to act of both parties in the encounter, while also strengthening broader contexts which extend beyond the specific encounter in question: contexts upon which the encounter implicitly depends. So my employment of the term 'ethical' is a performance of this reading of ethics as the affect of increasing one's power to act. *Dance Me to My Song* features some fabulous moments in which Julia feels sexy and loved — in these moments Julia increases Eddie's (her partner's) capacity to experience affection and Eddie's affection folds back into the context of Julia's life by enriching her experiences of physical affection and intimacy. The film also demonstrates tenacity as the positive affection mobilized through the challenges Julia faces. Moments of intimacy and physicality construct a diagram for an ethic of assembling the liveable, realistic, and inherently 'human' disabled body on screen.

Indeed, *Dance Me to My Song* as a cinematic framing of disability can be read as a public pedagogy in the respect that it teaches the spectator/aurator about the everyday experience of living with Cerebral Palsy through the ethic of engagement that drives the film's production. The engagement with Heather Rose's corporeality which features in *Dance Me to My Song* is a form of public pedagogy³ that can be seen as a critical intervention in a public pedagogy of disability in which the female body of a woman living with Cerebral Palsy is taken up as the lens through which the film is constructed. Heather Rose's body — and her experiences of embodiment — are core modes of visual and sonic expression in the film. While this foregrounds the everyday experience of living with Cerebral Palsy, the employment of Heather's body as a key expressive device does not objectify disability, or construct Heather as 'monstrous' in ways that are common in earlier films about disability, such as Todd Browning's (1932) *Freaks*, Gustaf Molander's (1938) *A Woman's Face*, David Lynch's (1980) *The Elephant Man* or Joseph Marzano's (1977) *The Wheelchair*.

In terms of affect, *Dance Me to My Song* can be seen as a critical intervention in cultural imaginings of disability, and the production of clichés about disability, because Heather Rose's body and her experiences of embodiment are remade into sounds, images and affects that generate new relationships between the viewer and partial objects of disability.

Conclusions

Dance Me to My Song arranges and opens up the murmur of the archive of the female disabled body, female sexuality and mental illness, through canvassing the relations of power between a disabled body and a non-physically disabled body, and through interrogating two women's psychological and physical needs for sexual

intimacy. More than this, though, *Dance Me to My Song* expresses sensations that are new to film media: as an art diagram it is expressive of ‘possible facts’ pertaining to sexing and sexualizing the visceral nature of Cerebral Palsy, and generating intimate encounters with the disabled body.

Julia, Madeline and Eddie’s relationships map new possibility for relations with/ across/about disability. They ‘make . . . history by unmaking preceding realities and significations, constituting hundreds of points of emergence or creativity, unexpected conjunctions . . . [and] improbable continuums’ (Deleuze, 1986/2006, p. 35). The sonic and celluloid body produced by the film offers new cinematic affects of disability to an existing archive of cinematic representations of disability (Ellis, 2008).

Building on the platform provided by *Dance Me to My Song*, cinema as a medium needs to engage more regularly with the disabled body as a cinematic frame in ways which acknowledge the viscerally intense, complex and laborious nature of the lives of people with disabilities. However, film as a medium must be careful not to present the disabled form as completely alien. In cinematic terms, the ways in which Julia’s corporeality permeates the celluloid forms a core aspect of the film’s gritty aesthetic and affective intensity. This becoming-body of the screen draws the spectator’s attention to the joyful affects produced by affection and intimacy and the tenacity mobilized through the challenges of Julia’s daily life.

These moments of ethical movement act as what Deleuze calls a diagram for mapping relations between bodies. *Dance Me to My Song* offers this relational diagram through an artistic diagram: through the cinematic and aural framing of a world in which we breathe with the disabled body. The pedagogical moment through which the film challenges its spectator and aurator to be worthy of these affects (to become in relation to them), constitutes a public pedagogy of disability through which both the body on screen and the body of the beholder/listener can be re-assembled in relation to the lived experience of disability. One might say, then, that the project of developing a cinematic ethics that is responsive to the disabled body is a question of inventing new diagrams for bodies.

The moments in *Dance Me to My Song* in which the aurator breathes with Julia, in which Julia’s body consumes the screen and the subjectivity of the viewer, or Julia feels sexy and loved, are diagrams for a cinematic ethic of the live-able, realistic, and inherently ‘human’ disabled body on screen. It is in hearing Julia and feeling Julia that the spectator/aurator feels their own body differently and the celluloid becomes modulated as flesh.

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Notes

1. Specifically, Deleuze states: ‘every diagram is intersocial and constantly evolving. It never functions in order to represent a persisting world but produces a new kind of reality, a new model of truth’ (1986/2006, p. 35).

2. As the name suggests, Family Planning is a sexual health organization based in South Australia.
3. In considering *Dance Me to My Song* as a public pedagogy, I draw on the work of Henri Giroux (1999), who argues that pedagogy can't be confined to sites of schooling. Rather, pedagogy needs to be understood as applying to everyday political sites in 'which identities are shaped, desires mobilized, and experiences take on form and meaning' (Giroux, 2004a, p. 79). For Giroux, culture, including film, is pedagogical. People learn about themselves and understand relations to others through their position in lived cultures. An explicit consideration of how culture influences identity production and relations of power is, for Giroux, one of the intended outcomes of considering culture and cultural products as pedagogical. This is an important task because such knowledge of the role of culture is intrinsic to acquiring agency and 'imagining... social change' (2004a, p. 79). For example, in his essay, 'Education after Abu Ghraib', Giroux (2004b) draws attention to how the nature of photographs and the technologies that produce them enable particular meanings; how these meanings connect with broader discourses and relations of power; how these sites allow or disallow resistance and challenge.

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