

DISCIPLINE AND MOVEMENT

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There is a formal and conceptual rigor to Sharon Lockhart's films; they are carefully thought out and painstakingly constructed. Characteristically her films over the past two decades have presented a relatively immobile image that moves—or doesn't—in real time; they are not easy to watch, at least in the way one watches conventional films. Rather, they seem to demand a viewing that matches the camera's stillness and its insistent attentiveness. That is to say, the discipline Lockhart's films call for matches her own disciplinary engagement, her own taking up of the material and affective lessons of structural film. "I don't mind that affiliation at all," Lockhart told an interviewer in 2005,¹ but it's clear that her engagement with film as a discipline is different from that of her predecessors—precisely around the question of discipline, which for Lockhart has come to characterize not just a way of working but an ongoing, abiding subject matter. In films such as *Goshogaoka* (1998) and *NŌ* (2003) (figs. 6–8), and certainly in her work with Noa Eshkol's legacy, one discipline is mapped by another. The repeated, regularized actions Lockhart records—whether of basketball drills, agricultural chores, or spare and practiced choreographed movements—grid and echo the rectilinear frame of the screen. And their duration structures hers. This essay is an examination of, or better a rumination on, Sharon Lockhart's engagement with the discipline of film, and with the questions of discipline, practice, and the body that her subjects open up.

In an explanatory aside in his now-canonical 1967 essay "Art and Objecthood," Michael Fried insisted that "the cinema, even at its most experimental, is not a *modernist art*."² Not engaged, that is, in the ongoing project of self-criticism that would establish the medium in its historical and material specificity

or, in Clement Greenberg's famous words, "to entrench [the discipline] more firmly in its area of competence."³ Cinema's problem, for Fried, was not that it was "theatrical," his name for those artistic practices that refused or erased their disciplinarity (famously, "*what lies between the arts is theater*") but that it escaped the taint of theatricality so "automatically, as it were" that it could not be enlisted in the war he imagined between modernism and theater.⁴ "Exactly how movies escape theater is a beautiful question, and there is no doubt but that a phenomenology of the cinema that concentrated on the similarities and differences between it and the theater—e.g., that in the movies the actors are not physically present, the film is projected *away* from us, the screen is not experienced as a kind of object existing, so to speak, in a physical relation to us, etc.—would be extremely rewarding."⁵ While the text that Fried called for might not yet have been translated, a number of filmmakers had already begun to produce such a phenomenology.

By 1967, the year Michael Snow first screened *Wavelength*, there clearly was a cinema very much engaged with mapping itself out as a discipline, emphasizing film's technical apparatus and what Étienne Souriau had by 1950 already termed the *filmographic* and *screenic* (or *filmophanic*) realities of film, the facts of the celluloid filmstrip and the projected image, over spatial illusionism and narrative construction.⁶ Structural film, as it came to be called, foregrounded the specific conditions and conventions of cinema—of making and viewing—as historical and technical forms in terms that recall, and indeed were learned from, the language of modernist criticism. The stilled, frontal, planar images of Hollis Frampton's *Nostalgia* (1971)—like the slow, relentless, continually enframing zoom of Snow's *Wavelength*, which (as Frank Stella once said of the regularized patterning of his stripe paintings) "forces illusionistic space out ... at constant intervals,"⁷—worked to flatten the film screen and reinforce its boundedness. "Flatness and the delimitation of flatness," one could say,

1. Lockhart, in Fiona Ng, "O/A: Sharon Lockhart," *Independent Film and Video Monthly* 28 (March 2005): 14.
2. Michael Fried, "Art and Objecthood," in *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Gregory Battcock (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1968), 141.
3. Clement Greenberg, "Modernist Painting," in *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism*, vol. 4, *Modernism with a Vengeance, 1957–1969*, ed. John O'Brian (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 85.
4. Fried, "Art and Objecthood," 141.

5. *Ibid.*, 140, n. 16.
6. Étienne Souriau, in Edward Lowy, *The Filmology Movement and Film Study in France* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1985), 81.
7. Frank Stella, "The Pratt Lecture (1960)," in *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art: A Sourcebook of Artists' Writings*, ed. Kristine Stiles and Peter Selz (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 11.
8. Clement Greenberg, "After Abstract Expressionism," in *Modernism with a Vengeance*, 131.

against illusionism and the off-screen spaces of diegetic space.⁸ Such films and many others—particularly those that slowed down the image or that insisted on a single image, on a kind of blank “facingness” (to borrow another term from Michael Fried),⁹ films such as Andy Warhol’s *Sleep* (1963), *Empire* (1964), or *Screen Tests* (1964–66)—linked that flatness and the very real sense that the screen was precisely “a kind of object existing ... in a physical relation to us” to duration: sheer, physical, extra-diegetic duration. Duration figures differently for Fried, of course; it is tied to much that he disdained: theater, surrealism, spatial illusionism. “The literalist preoccupation with time—more precisely, with *the duration of experience*—is, I suggest, paradigmatically theatrical,” he writes, and he posits a “connection between spatial recession and some such experience of temporality—almost as if the first were a kind of natural metaphor for the second.”¹⁰ But duration in film is constitutive, and a way of drawing the screen tight.

In an essay on Sharon Lockhart’s twenty-nine-minute single-image film *Teatro Amazonas* (1999), I noted the peculiar sensation of a tautness in the screen surface: “it is made to feel like a membrane, a surface pushed at from the other side.”¹¹ But I am far from the only writer to note the flatness of Lockhart’s work: indeed Mark Godfrey’s essay on her film *Pine Flat* (2005, fig. 12–16) is titled “The Flatness of *Pine Flat*”; Godfrey links that flatness to painting, specifically to modernist painting. Describing Lockhart’s *NŌ*, he writes: “Over the course of the second half of the film, a monochrome brown surface is slowly turned yellow as one colour is brushed over another. If this field recalls the appearance of mid-twentieth-century paintings, the raking action of the two farmers in some ways recalls the very *processes* of painting.”¹² But painting is not the only possible referent here. More to the point might be film itself and the legacy of structural film in Lockhart’s work, evident in the slowed, single, self-consciously enframed image; in the palpable sense of the screen; in the image’s flatness. And in the conscious references she makes:

in a film like *Lunch Break* (2008, figs. 4–5), to Snow’s *Wavelength*, and in her very early series of still photographs, *Auditions* (1994), or in the ten-minute, single-shot portraits of *Pine Flat*, to Warhol’s *Screen Tests* as well as to François Truffaut’s *Small Change* (1976).

In their refusal of the fictions of diegetic space, many structural films (on the model of modernist painting, perhaps) emptied out the center of the frame, even in such insistently framed and centered works as *Wavelength*. Many “looked at” nothing, or nothing in particular, or situated (as in Snow’s *La Région Centrale* 1971) the camera’s motion at the center of a decentered image. The center was scratched, etched; the emulsion was proved. The facingness of the screen was matched by a kind of effacing of the image, and while one might take Warhol’s *Screen Tests* as, so to speak, realist films (after realist paintings), they too engaged in a kind of effacement. The *Screen Tests* are complex for something so simple as sitting for the camera, or the camera’s looking, staring, but one way to think of them is as corroding the surface of the subject, breaking it down (unless, perhaps, that surface is *for* the camera, knows how to position itself for its gaze). Warhol famously turned on the camera and walked away. Early on, Ronald Tavel remarked on how difficult it was for nonactors to sit for the *Screen Tests*, how much of a different sort of test they were—a kind of entrapment, a test to put or keep oneself together, an inquisition.¹³ Lockhart’s films are different; the relation between duration, surface, and subject is not oppositional but somehow equal, integral. Unlike Warhol’s *Screen Tests*, in which duration and the camera’s insistence threaten to (and occasionally do) destroy the subject, in Lockhart’s films, duration and focus situate and instantiate their subjects, who are subjects not in a psychoanalytic sense—the question of their soul or their reality doesn’t come up—but in a disciplinary sense: they are produced and composed by their *métier*, and in duos and troupes and teams. There are indeed actors in *Goshogooka*, *NŌ*, and *Lunch Break*, but they are actors of a different sort; their roles and (to use an

9. Michael Fried, *Manet’s Modernism, or: The Face of Painting in the 1860s* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

10. Fried, “Art and Objecthood,” 145.

11. Howard Stringman, “Sharon Lockhart: Barter and Kinship,” in *Home and Away: Crossing Cultures on the Pacific Rim*, ed. Deanna Ferguson, curated by Bruce Grenville (Vancouver: Vancouver Art Gallery, 2003), 55.

12. Mark Godfrey, “The Flatness of *Pine Flat*,” in *Sharon Lockhart: Pine Flat*, exhibition curated by Chris Martinez (Bilbao: Sala Rekalde Erakustarena, 2006), 112.

13. See J. J. Murphy, *The Black Hole of the Camera: The Films of Andy Warhol* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 2–3: “they were a form of competition. [Marj] Woronov remarks: ‘Like medieval inquisitors, we proclaimed them tests of the soul and we rated everybody. A lot of people failed. We could all see they didn’t have any soul.’”

old-fashioned word, or to use it in an old-fashioned way) their characters are not fictional but performative, produced and repeated socially and physically as and through a practice. Their discipline matches Lockhart's own.

Lockhart's presentation of Noa Eshkol's exercises and dances is particularly formal—formalist, perhaps, or more correctly, minimalist. While her films are, of course, moving pictures, there is a reticence and a stillness to Lockhart's record, and to the architecture on which they are screened. The thick, floor-bound gray boxes that Lockhart calls "volumes"¹⁴ recall the structures of minimal art (the gray cubes that form the backdrop for the *Four Exercises in Eshkol-Wachman Movement Notation* make the reference within the frame) and suggest an oblique nod to Stella's deep-stretched aluminum paintings, forcing illusionism out at a regularized rate. Indeed, the literal depth of the volumes seems to put a limit on the illusion of depth within the frame; it pushes the image as a surface toward the viewer, and that shallowing is reinforced by the relative sparseness of the set. The gray of the volumes is matched within the image by the light gray walls and darker gray floors of the dance studio; the stage space is long (and again shallow), and the intersection of the wall and the floor is situated just below halfway. Part of Lockhart's collaboration, her homage, has been to use Eshkol's "wall carpets" as stage sets for her *Five Dances*, and these too are mounted in gray frames. Individually they are patchwork and colorful, far from minimalist, and yet in Lockhart's frames, they map out the spatial boundaries of the image: stage left in *Strolling (Promenade)*, stage right in *War Dance (Heraldic)*; they situate the floor and wall in *Duet*; measure the stage at regular intervals in *Ländler*, and bound it left and right in *Fugue*.

Lockhart's camera sits still; it doesn't change its position or its focus. There are earlier films of Eshkol's dances, among them rehearsal films made between 1966 and 1993. In each, the camera follows the dancers, moves with them in a way that erases the screen and emphasizes the individuality

and expressivity of the dancers. Lockhart's focus is on the dancers seen together and in plane; they are moving, but the overall sense is one of stillness and task, of discipline (hers and theirs) rather than expression as *Ausdruck*. *Ausdruckstanz* (expressive dance) was the dance Eshkol was schooled in and that she would come to reject or perhaps retranslate. Certainly *Ausdruck* can be translated as "expression"—the bodily or exterior registration of interior emotion, a dance of tension and release—but it can also, and rather more mundanely, mean "print out," as though from a computer printer or copier: code in, print out. Which, weirdly, might be a description of Eshkol's method and suggests another kind of disciplinarity.

In Lockhart's films, one feels the notation, the writtenness of Eshkol's dances, as though what is being screened is a scripted instance, of Eshkol-Wachman Movement Notation (EWMN). The dance is exterior to its dancers, enacted by them; at the same time they are professionals within it. Clearly, and this is a point Lockhart's installation and previous writers have stressed, they are followers, disciples. The sense that the system is outside the dancers, and that they find their way within it, links Eshkol's dancers to the basketball players in *Goshogaoka*, and perhaps to the ironworkers of *Lunch Break*. Unlike the farmers in *NŌ*, whose work, at least on screen, is determined and timed by the task at hand, by a time we might think of as preindustrial, the movements of the dancers, basketball players, and factory workers are governed by one version of the metronome or another, by stopwatch and clock time. While we see the ironworkers on break, they are of course still on the clock, and their tasks, their drills, have been mapped and timed and, most importantly, segmented for them before their arrival. The basketball players are being disciplined, taking on—interiorizing, perhaps, but from the outside—the moves they must make (and in the still photographs, the roles they hope to assume). The dancers and the ironworkers, more mature, are disciplined, self-governing (Lockhart stresses the autonomy and self-sufficiency of

14. See Eva Diaz, "Sharon Lockhart's Historical Choreography, or, the War of Remembrance That Is History," in *Sharon Lockhart | Noa Eshkol*, ed. Stephanie Barron and Britt Salvesen (Munich, London and New York: DeMonico Books + Prestel, 2012), 11.

the workers at the Bath Iron Works)—it may be that this self-containment and boundedness are what attracts her to these subjects personally, but they also fit her medium, her own disciplinary concerns.

There is something about the EWMN system, particularly under Lockhart's gaze, that recalls Michel Foucault, writing in *Discipline and Punish*, on a subject that we may want to believe is very different. There, the gymnasium and the factory floor, just as much as the schoolroom, the military parade ground, and the prison yard, are disciplinary spaces, structures of behavior and of architectural or formal enclosure that allow us—or our bosses, our coaches, or our choreographers—"at each moment to supervise the conduct of each individual, to assess it, to judge it, to calculate its qualities or merits. It was a procedure, therefore, aimed at knowing, mastering, and using. "Discipline," like structural film, "organizes an analytical space."¹⁵ And as though describing EWMN in a way that might link its aspirations to a broader historical project that runs from dance notation to factory Taylorization, Foucault offers this: "A sort of anatomo-chronological schema of behavior is defined. The act is broken down into its elements; the position of the body, limbs, articulations is defined; to each movement are assigned a direction, an aptitude, a duration; their order of succession is prescribed. Time penetrates the body and with it all the meticulous controls of power."¹⁶

Foucault's shadow isn't arbitrary here. Writing in the Los Angeles County Museum of Art's catalogue for *Sharon Lockhart | Noa Eshkol*, the curator Talia Amar traces the development of modern dance in Israel, intertwining the particular histories of Eshkol and her collaborations with her dancers and with Avraham Wachman with the emerging state and the kibbutz movement. She links Eshkol's dance—particularly a performance she created for a 1953 memorial to the Warsaw Ghetto uprising—to pre-World War II German dance and, in particular, to Rudolf Laban and *Ausdruckstanz*, a movement that she embeds in early twentieth-century German *Körperkultur* (body culture), which "had developed during

a period marked by growing nationalism and the rise of the cult of the healthy body." And she makes clear the continuation of this link between nationalism and the healthy body in Israel's founding generations and in the kibbutz movement, in "the New Jew that the Zionist revolution sought to create."¹⁷

Here, if it had not before, the disciplinary mapping of the body takes on specifically political and historical overtones. And it takes on a peculiar historical irony now, some generations later, given how invested the current state is in mapping movements and classifying other bodies or the bodies of other inhabitants. It is perhaps a breach of boundaries on my part, a certain kind of indiscipline that takes me far away from Sharon Lockhart's careful engagement with the disciplines of film and dance, but I think it's worth noting that among Avraham Wachman's other projects, after his student days as a dancer with Eshkol, and then as a coauthor of EWMN, was his design, first submitted to the Israeli government in 1976, for a border. The "Double-Column Plan" proposed the "annexation of the Jordan Valley and the Judean Desert" and "massive development and settlement." Israel, he wrote in an opinion piece in the *Los Angeles Times* in 1988, in language that returns us again to enclosure and enframing, "must draw lines for a future."¹⁸

15. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Random House, 1995), 143. 16. *Ibid.*, 152.

17. Talia Amar, "Summer Wind in the Thistles," in Barron and Salvesen, *Sharon Lockhart | Noa Eshkol*, 33–34. See also Karl Toepler, *Empire of Ecstasy: Nudity and Movement in German Body Culture, 1910–1935* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), and in particular chap. 97, "Schools of Bodily Expressivity."

18. Avraham Wachman, "Israel Must Draw Lines for a Future," *Los Angeles Times*, April 17, 1988.