

Of windows and country walks: frames of space and movement in 1990s Austen adaptations

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The recurring moment of the woman at the window captures a particular quality of feminine stillness, constraint and longing that runs through 1990s film and television adaptations of Jane Austen's novels. Consider, for instance, the sequences in Ang Lee's *Sense and Sensibility* (1995) where Elinor Dashwood (Emma Thompson) sits at a writing desk facing the window. Muted sunlight streams in through the thick glass, bathing her face in a soft golden light; her cornflower blue eyes exactly match her simple frock. Cut to an over-the-shoulder shot from Elinor's point of view as she glances out of the window. In a pre-framed vignette set in the landscaped garden, her precocious younger sister Margaret appears with Edward Ferrars (Hugh Grant). They pantomime a fencing match with long sticks, and Edward demonstrates the 'lunge' for Margaret, who promptly guts him when he is unprepared. Elinor glances up to watch them, smiles indulgently, then returns to her letters.

With its frames within frames, this sequence indicates the importance of gendered interior and exterior space at work in contemporary Austen adaptations. Elinor, the responsible older sister, sits demurely indoors, attending to the tasks at hand for the small fatherless family living in genteel poverty; meanwhile, Mrs Dashwood and her daughters hover by the window, hoping for the arrival of some eligible suitor. *Sense and Sensibility's* male characters (Edward, Colonel Brandon, Willoughby), in contrast, tend to come and go, moving freely through the countryside. This brief

- 1 Richard Dyer suggests that in the musical, dance numbers offer the possibility of abundance, release and intensity as an antidote to the 'social tensions' explored in the narrative. This article, as well as his recent work on 'whiteness', has provided an important conceptual grounding for my interest in the social significance of textual space and movement. See Dyer, 'Entertainment and utopia', in *Only Entertainment* (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 17–34; Dyer, *White* (New York: Routledge, 1997). I would like to thank Richard Dyer and Adrian Heathfield for their helpful comments on my work.
- 2 Mikhail Bakhtin, 'Forms of time and of the chronotope in the novel', in M. Holquist (ed.), *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, trans. C. Emerson and M. Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), p. 248.
- 3 Other film theorists have pointed to the recurring image of the woman at the window in related genres and historical cycles of film. For instance, see Mary Ann Doane, 'The "woman's film": possession and address', in Christine Gledhill (ed.), *Home is Where the Heart is: Studies in Melodrama and the Woman's Film* (London: British Film Institute, 1987), p. 288; and Thomas Elsaesser, 'Tales of sound and fury: observations on the family melodrama', in *ibid.*, pp. 61–2.
- 4 For a discussion of costume drama's spatiotemporal economy of constraint, see my 'Travels with Sally Potter's *Orlando*: gender, narrative, movement', *Screen*, vol. 38, no. 2 (1997), pp. 172–89. The *Orlando* article, along with this present essay, forms part of a larger investigation into questions of genre, gender, space and movement in contemporary feminine costume drama.
- 5 See Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, trans. H. Tomlinson and B. Habberjam (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1986).

sketch brings into relief a gendered spatial play between a formal, cluttered and mannered treatment of interiors, and a more 'natural' blocking of outdoor sequences (country walks, picnics, coach rides). In contrast to the precise dialogue and intricate human interaction condensed into Austen's parlours, libraries and balls, exterior sequences (often leavened by swelling orchestral scores) tend to create a sense of spatial and emotional expansiveness, not unlike the role of dance numbers in the musical.¹

Pivotal in this topography, the window marks the threshold of inside and outside. For Mikhail Bakhtin, the threshold is 'highly charged with emotion and value . . . whose fundamental instance is as the chronotope of *crisis* and *break* in a life'.² In a cycle of texts organized around the viewpoint of bourgeois female characters who are both actually and metaphorically 'housebound', windows and doors where arrivals and departures occur provide focal points of narrative interest. As the Misses Dashwood, the Misses Bennet, Anne Elliot and, to a lesser degree, Emma Woodhouse, pass sleepy days embroidering, the arrival of a suitor becomes a highly anticipated event. A formal and narrative framing device, the window marks a transparent filter between the ordered, confined lives of Austen's female protagonists, and the comings and goings of visitors. From the Dashwoods, to Emma's startled rush to the window at the outset of *Jane Austen's Emma* (United Film and Television Network/Chestermead Network/A. & E. Network/Meridian Television, 1996), to the Bennet girls' ongoing vigilance at their windows in *Pride and Prejudice* (BBC/A. & E. Network, 1995), to Catherine Moreland's enforced confinement in Bath due to rain in *Northanger Abbey* (BBC/A. & E. Network, 1987), to Anne Elliot trapped inside another Bath town house in *Jane Austen's Persuasion* (BBC, 1995), the woman at the window may condense a gendered 'structure of feeling' at work in Austen and in costume drama more generally³ – a generic spatiotemporal economy of physical and sexual constraint, a barely masked register of longing.⁴ This essay mines the intriguingly persistent 'movement-image'⁵ as a metonymic point of departure for a series of spatial frames of representational power relations from gender to class to colonialism.

What then are we to make of the woman at the window, poised so graciously at this threshold? As implied here, this recurring moment often implies a lingering quality of anticipation, a poignant desire – the digressive yet inexorable pull of the romance narrative towards the inevitable double weddings concluding *Pride and Prejudice* and *Sense and Sensibility*. Indeed, the spatial compression of feminine interiors pressed up against the lush, green, 'natural' offerings of the wider world works as an audiovisual condensation of the tremendous force of repressed female desire at work more generally in costume drama. As Claire Monk suggests of *A Room with a View* (James Ivory, 1986), the woman at the window may be read as a cinematic

instance of 'active female sexual agency and active female looking'.⁶ In the Austen adaptations, the apparently passive figure of the woman at the window, wistfully waiting, indicates a polite, yet coyly lascivious, desiring female gaze that fully appreciates Hugh Grant's (Ferrars's) tight period trousers with that soft bulge at the crotch, Crispin Bonham-Carter's (Bingley's) shapely calf, or the exaggeratedly masculine, square-shouldered cut of Ciaran Hinds's (Wentworth's) uniform.

Rather than undertaking a psychoanalytic reading of the female gaze, however, I shall pursue interpretations that open up questions of power and desire through the audiovisual plotting of space and movement. If psychoanalysis has furnished feminist film theory with a powerful and problematic vocabulary for sexual difference and desire, the topographical approach developed in this essay opens up questions of gender, class and colonial relations in cultural texts. As a point of departure, if the window marks a hinge in the topography of the Austen adaptation, the camera, with its careful, mannered *mise-en-scène*, rests undoubtedly *inside* with the female protagonist looking out. However, to follow the trajectory of that active, desiring gaze *outwards*, I extend the question: aside from Messrs Ferrars, Bingley, Wentworth, Darcy or the others, what *do* these women want? Recalling the careful framing of this exterior sequence, pretty as a picture, our eye is drawn towards the inviting outdoors, where Norland's picturesque grounds come into sharp relief as the Dashwood daughters' rightful inheritance denied them by patriarchal law. Similarly, in *Pride and Prejudice* Elizabeth finds herself gazing out of an upper window of Darcy's Pemberley estate after refusing his offer of marriage. In a typically ironic Austen moment (heightened by Andrew Davies's knowing screenplay) she muses to herself, 'Of all this I might have been mistress.'

Sharing a contemporary liberal feminist sensibility, the Austen adaptations highlight the precariousness of their heroines' situations through their exclusion from property ownership: the romance's narrative tug towards heterosexual courtship and marriage is inextricable from early nineteenth-century property relations. In this sense, the gaze from the window may also be read as an acquisitive gaze, a retrospective yearning for the middle-class entitlements of citizenship denied Austen's female protagonists by accident of sex. Considered from a slightly different angle, the woman at the window might imply not only social or sexual *constraint* – but also a certain *potentiality*. Within the grammar of Austen's demarcated social sphere, this retrospective potentiality is deeply yearned for, if not realized, and represents a threshold for a whole spectrum of desires for personhood, social mobility, corporeal and sexual freedom. This essay considers how this desiring gaze intersects with historical and contemporary discourses of class and colonialism through the audiovisual language of cinematic and televisual realist adaptation.

7 See Tana Wollen, 'Over our shoulders: nostalgic screen fictions for the 1980s', in John Corner and Sylvia Harvey (eds), *Enterprise and Heritage: Crosscurrents of National Culture* (London: Routledge, 1991), pp. 178–93; Andrew Higson, 'Re-presenting the national past: nostalgia and pastiche in the heritage film', in Lester Friedman (ed.), *Fires Were Started: British Cinema and Thatcherism* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), pp. 109–29.

8 See Monk, 'Sex, politics and the past'; Richard Dyer and Ginette Vincendeau, 'Introduction', *Popular European Cinema* (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 1–14; and Richard Dyer 'Feeling English', in *Sight and Sound* (March, 1994), pp. 16–19. For a discussion of the importance of gender, costume and fantasy in the Gainsborough costume drama, see also Pam Cook, *Fashioning the Nation: Costume and Identity in British Cinema* (London: British Film Institute, 1996).

9 I have chosen not to discuss one 1990s Austen adaptation, Douglas McGrath's *Emma* (1996) with Gwyneth Paltrow. Although many of my observations pertain to this film, I find it (and also to some degree *Northanger Abbey*) stylistically divergent from the dominant British realist aesthetics of adaptation that unite the other texts.

10 In order to draw out key recurring spatiotemporal thematics, this essay treats cinematic production, made-for-television movies and television serials as an aesthetically coherent cycle. However, it is also important to consider the undertheorized formal specificities of television aesthetics. See John Caughie, 'A culture of adaptation: adaptation and the past in British film and television', *Journal for the Study of British Cultures*, vol. 5, no. 1 (1988), pp. 55–66.

11 See Deleuze, *Cinema 1*.

This simultaneous treatment of gender, class and colonialism parallels and extends recent debates about British heritage cinema. Most centrally, the powerful critique of the genre's nostalgic, conservative treatment of British history put forward by Andrew Higson and others⁷ has been countered by a claim that the Merchant-Ivory films, for instance, may also be read as evocative dramatizations of female desire and transgressive sexuality.⁸ These debates tend to pit the critique of an aestheticized, regressive 'tourist gaze' (landscape, mise-en-scene) against the pleasures of the gendered text (sexuality, desire, corporeality). This essay, in contrast, considers the interlocking desiring-movements of gender, class and colonialism through the topographical lens of social space and movement. Taking up some aspects of these debates, my project examines points of contact, complicity and contradiction between projected historical female sexual desire and other class-based and colonial power relations.

A body of texts sharing an iconic authorial vision projected into the hegemonic forms of realist British period adaptation, much of the contemporary cycle presents a fruitful case-study for such a project.⁹ Ranging from the high-budget feature *Sense and Sensibility*, to the made-for-television movies *Jane Austen's Emma* and *Persuasion*, to the television serial *Pride and Prejudice*,¹⁰ this cycle has been highly successful not only in the UK, but also in the USA and Canada. Austen carries an ongoing purchase in international English-speaking 'quality' culture across television, video and cinema. With her cherished role in imagined English and feminist histories alike, Austen in adaptation synthesizes several interlocking gender, class and colonial 'structures of feeling' employed in a contemporary projection of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century England.

The topographical approach to textual analysis derives implicitly yet centrally from the thought of Gilles Deleuze, as well as from the insights of critical geography, literary criticism and art history. Deleuze posits a philosophical approach to the cinema based on a distinctive conceptualization of the 'movement-image'.¹¹ The movement-image foregrounds the spatiotemporal and audiovisual properties of cinema. To imagine audiovisual texts as the splicing together of 'mobile sections of duration' or 'movement-image' is to suggest a dynamic, spatiotemporal approach to the moving image. Working around more familiar cinematic theories of narrative, psychoanalytic forms of the gaze, mise-en-scene or semiotics, this topography maps out the frame as a dynamic interaction of figure, movement, ground. Deleuze's underlying Nietzschean philosophical carriage of desiring-movement transforms the cinematic frame into a field of force characterized by movement and transformation, by figures and forms traversing, and interacting with, a social 'milieu'.

To translate and ground Deleuze's abstract framework, this topographical approach borrows from the more specific, historical

and grounded insights of literary criticism and geography. The work of Raymond Williams, Richard Dyer, Gillian Rose and Edward Said, as well as my own feminist framework of gendered movement and constraint, are used to develop the movement-image's potential as a tool for social and historical textual analysis. Applied to the Austen adaptations, this topographical approach highlights terms of corporeal movement and stillness, tempo and landscape. Specifically, I approach these adaptations through three 'movement-images' – the woman at the window, the country walk and the sailing ship – which condense gendered, class and colonial relations of power.

To be face-to-face in this world is already to belong to a class. No other community, in physical presence or in social reality, is by any means knowable. And it is not only most of the people who have disappeared . . . it is also most of the country, which becomes real only as it relates to the houses which are the real modes; for the rest of the country is weather or a place for a walk.¹²

Raymond Williams's class-based reading of the English novel points out the partial historical view afforded from the upper windows of Austen's Great Houses. Although the woman at the window may be persuasively read through a narrative of female sexual repression and desire, her very *location*, and by implication her desiring gaze, is polysemic. The spatial confinement of Austen's interiors, so achingly and self-consciously framed by the window, gains resonance only in relation to some 'outside'. If costume drama may be read as spatiotemporal plotting of social, sexual, physical and emotional constraint, then such 'constraint' figures only against an implied release, movement, expression. Through this movement-image, I have read this 'inside' figure in relation to Austen's mobile male protagonists, and also towards the surrounding countryside as offering more spontaneous and meaningful human interaction, romance or contemplation. However, these iconic English romantic landscapes have as their referent the historical late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century countrysides of Improvement and Enclosure; as Williams points out, these exteriors are as manicured and carefully constructed as the interiors.

Adaptations characteristically render Austen's interiors dense with rich furnishings, heavy oil paintings and expensive ornaments. Part of an economy of realist period detail, this *mise-en-scène* orchestrates a longed-for experience of gracious nineteenth-century living, what have been called 'museum pleasures'.¹³ Yet this panoply of detail at times evokes the claustrophobic weight of history, oppressive patriarchal laws of inheritance, the strict codes of comportment that Austen at once problematizes and upholds. In audiovisual language, this ordered world emerges through the subtle densities of dialogue,

12 Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1973), p. 166.

13 Dyer, 'Feeling English', p. 18.

14 For instance, Robert Z. Leonard's 1940 *Pride and Prejudice*, as well as the 1980 television serial scripted by Fay Weldon, situate the drama substantially indoors, in stark contrast with Simon Langton's 1995 version, scripted by Andrew Davies.

15 Andrew Higson, 'The heritage film and British cinema', in Higson (ed.), *Dissolving Views: Key Writings on British Cinema* (London: Cassell, 1996), pp. 239–40.

gesture, glance. A sense of confinement emerges most poignantly in the Norland sequences of *Sense and Sensibility*, and throughout *Persuasion*'s prison-like depiction of hypocritical aristocratic social convention. Particularly marked in these two texts, there exists across the cycle a more general contrast between mannered interior spaces and the more spontaneous interactions in the countryside – although these boundaries are fluid, as the mannered dialogue often continues apace outdoors, even while the film language opens up.

Viewed in relation to earlier costume drama,¹⁴ contemporary cinematic and television projects increasingly shift settings from the written texts' emphasis on dialogue and mannered interiors to a more dramatic emphasis on the picturesque outdoors. Particularly noticeable in Merchant–Ivory films such as *A Room with a View* and *Howard's End* (1992), or Kenneth Branagh's *Much Ado About Nothing* (1993), such a staging of iconic 'nostalgic' English countryside informs a 1990s costume drama aesthetic. Indeed, in the debates around 'heritage' cinema, what Higson calls the 'alluring spectacle of iconographic stability, providing an impression of an unchanging, traditional, and always delightful and desirable England'¹⁵ aptly describes the quiet countryside and peaceful



Edward (Hugh Grant) and Elinor (Emma Thompson) walk the Norland estate, *Sense and Sensibility* (Ang Lee, 1995).

Georgian houses of the Austen adaptations. These are the vistas enjoyed by Austen's heroines as they gaze hopefully out of the window awaiting male suitors, or throw open the shutters to air their still and quiet rooms. Coach rides, horse rides, picnics and especially country walks are important in the spatial economy of these texts, offering moments of respite and respiration away from the pressures of social convention. From Lizzie's constitutional ramblings in *Pride and Prejudice*, to Emma's matchmaking strolls with Harriet Smith, to *Persuasion's* seaside expeditions, the 'walk' figures centrally in the Austen adaptations. If the woman at the window marks a poignant 'structure of feeling' of feminine constraint and longing, the movement-image of the country walk places Austen's protagonists in the broader social space of the countryside.

Consider, for instance, the sequence in *Sense and Sensibility* in which Elinor and Edward walk out from Norland Park. Leaving behind the prying eyes and listening walls of Norland, the pair's first private *tête-à-tête* transpires as they walk out into a gentle green field with the Great House in the background. The line of the hill draws the eye towards the manor, nestled cosily behind a stand of trees. The film's first extended exterior sequence, this movement-image perfectly sets the nineteenth-century picturesque landscape painting into motion. The protagonists' walk through the middle ground marks out a sense of depth; and their trajectory into the foreground towards frame-right traces a diagonal leading back to the house, which serves as the vanishing point. Marianne's piano score follows the pair outside, layering the precise banter, the romantic nuance of the scene.

Accompanied by the camera in a medium travelling shot, they discuss Edward's 'prospects', where he modestly states 'a country living is my ideal'. Then a cut to a long shot prompts a subtle temporal ellipse, even as the conversation continues seemingly unabated to bridge the edit. Edward and Elinor now proceed at a leisurely pace on horseback (towards the foreground, frame right, on the same diagonal as their walk) and the landscape opens up to their progress. Norland has receded further behind them, and a shepherd, sheep and running sheepdog briskly cross their path in the foreground moving in the opposite direction. In a classic cinematic technique for blocking out movement, this brief countercurrent of contrasting trajectory and tempo further emphasizes the protagonists' own progress. The sheep in the foreground scatter with the riders' approach. The shepherd, his dog and the sheep (Dashwood sheep, most likely) complete the blocking of the shot. Even as tiny riders in the distance, Elinor's and Edward's modulated voices project across the mute and obliging countryside.

This movement marks a subtle but important shift of location from Austen's novel, in which the conversation about Edward's prospects occurs at breakfast between Edward and Mrs Dashwood. In the

adaptation, the scene is transported outside into the 'quiet countryside' idealized by Edward, and by the film's visual language. To Austen's dialogue, scriptwriter Emma Thompson adds the following exchange:

Elinor: You talk of feeling idle and useless. Imagine how that is compounded when one has no hope or choice of any occupation whatsoever.

Edward: Our circumstances then are precisely the same.

Elinor: Except that you will inherit your fortune. We cannot even earn ours.

Edward: Perhaps Margaret is right. Piracy *is* our only option.

This leap from the literary substance of Austen's dialogue into the audiovisual trajectory of the walk marks both a renewed generic interest in iconic English landscapes and a liberal feminist 'update' of Austen's narrative. In a moment of simultaneity, godsent for the film theorist, Elinor's and Edward's near encounter with the shepherd coincides with this significant 'feminist moment' in Thompson's script. In a sense, this exchange superimposes a feminist commentary on land tenure over the mute countryside. Laid out like a feast in the background, the Norland estate is the prize at stake in Elinor's wry commentary. From her comfortable spot by the window, Thompson's script deliberately poses a critique of patriarchal laws of inheritance.

This movement-image highlights certain audiovisual plottings of power in the costume drama, namely the layering of voice (associated with a significant class-bound narrative and subjective authority) with the visual dynamics of corporeal movement and historical landscape aesthetics. The cultural encoding of these 'natural' landscapes has been explored in a substantial body of work in literary theory, art history and geography that examines how capitalist and patriarchal relations of ownership inform the British landscape painting tradition.¹⁶ For instance, referring to Thomas Gainsborough's painting 'Mr and Mrs Andrews', Gillian Rose writes: 'Their ownership of land is celebrated in the substantiality of the oil paints used to represent it, and in the vista opening up beyond them, which echoes in visual form the freedom to move over property which only landowners could enjoy. The absence in the painting's content of the people who work the fields . . . denies the relations of waged labour under capitalism.'¹⁷

Rose goes on to point out the further *gender* relations of landscape implied in this painting, noting Mr and Mrs Andrews's differently implied access to physical mobility. Mrs Andrews appears rooted to the spot, under the shadow of the oak tree's symbol of generations. 'Like the fields she sits beside, her role was to reproduce and this role is itself naturalized by the references to trees and fields.'¹⁸ Reading this eighteenth-century painting against the contemporary *Sense and Sensibility*, however, we find a deliberately egalitarian

¹⁶ See, for instance, John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: Penguin Books, 1972); Denis E. Cosgrove, *Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape* (London and Sydney: Croom Helm, 1984).

¹⁷ Gillian Rose, *Feminism and Geography: the Limits of Geographical Knowledge* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), p. 91.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 93.

'Mr and Mrs Andrews' by
Thomas Gainsborough.
© National Gallery, London.



blocking of the couple's walk. From the novel's more authoritarian exchange between mother and prospective son-in-law, Thompson's Elinor banters with Edward as they move 'freely' across the countryside, side by side. Through the characters' voices and physical trajectories, this sequence seeks both to include Elinor Dashwood visually in the proprietorial surveying of Norland's grounds and explicitly to record her exclusion from her apparent birthright through dialogue.

This sequence demonstrates how such a feminist critique relies on class-specific conceptions of space and movement. To return to the detail of the shepherd, in audiovisual terms this man, the sheep and the dog are designated as visual details of landscape lending a backdrop, a countercurrent flurry of movement, to the steady progression of the film's middle-class protagonists. Seemingly digressive and without purpose, the country walks and constant matchmaking of Austen's characters, as Williams points out, correspond to a historical flurry of changes in property relations. If marriage marks the culmination of the digressing romantic narrative, in the historical context of the Industrial Revolution and against the embattled rural context of Improvement and the Enclosure Acts, these alliances cannot be separated from the middle class's ascendant wealth. Edward Said situates the narrative momentum of the nineteenth-century English novel within a broader middle-class 'consolidation of power':

The novelistic hero and heroine exhibit the restlessness and energy characteristic of the enterprising bourgeoisie, and they are permitted adventures in which their experiences reveal to them the limits of what they can aspire to, where they can go, what they can become. Novels therefore end either with the death of a hero or heroine (Julien Sorel, Emma Bovary, Bazarov, Jude the Obscure) who by virtue of overflowing energy does not fit into the

19 Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), p. 71.

orderly scheme of things, or with the protagonists' accession to stability (usually in the form of marriage or confirmed identity, as is the case with novels of Austen, Dickens, Thackeray, and George Eliot).¹⁹

This reading of *Sense and Sensibility's* country walk allows for a specifically audiovisual account of the cultural expression of power relations in the Austen cycle. The spatiotemporal economy of movement and constraint unfolds in relation to this neutral, dumb space, always already available to open up to the eye, to the wanderings and wonderings of Austen's protagonists. To return from the country walk to the woman at the window, these audiovisual plottings of space and movement are clearly bound up in complex ways with gender. Williams and Said do not distinguish between male and female middle-class mobility; for a feminist reading, the Austen adaptations map out the *limits* of historical feminine middle-class mobility and aspiration, while at the same time seeking to overcome them. Austen's female protagonists, particularly as rendered through the heightened feminist sensibility of the 1990s adaptations, wish, retrospectively, to partake in the acquisitive ramblings of their male class counterparts.

From a treatment of landscape, I now turn to questions of gendered and classed physical mobility raised implicitly in the reading of Elinor's and Edward's walk. From the static place of the woman at the window, this movement-image wishfully projects the female body into motion. A more dynamic audiovisual treatment of Austen's story, this subtle shift in emphasis also evokes a feminist craving for female physical and social mobility that is written directly into the



Margaret (Emilie François)
rewritten as a tomboy, *Sense
and Sensibility* (Ang Lee, 1995).

20 For a phenomenological account of feminine corporeal motility, see Iris Marion Young, 'Throwing like a girl', in *Throwing Like a Girl and Other Essays in Feminist Philosophy and Social Theory* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1990), pp. 141–59.

21 Emma Thompson, *Jane Austen's Sense and Sensibility: Screenplay and Diaries* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 1995), p. 208.

22 Significantly, the figure of the (kinetic) female child as a torch-bearer for a feminist future recurs in other contemporary feminist costume dramas such as *The Piano* (Jane Campion, 1993), *Orlando* (Sally Potter, 1993), *Daughters of the Dust* (Julie Dash, 1991) and *Moll Flanders* (Pen Densham, 1996).

23 Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class 1780–1850* (London: Hutchinson, 1987), p. 319.

24 *Ibid.*, p. 403.

script.²⁰ Screenwriter Emma Thompson wryly notes the problem of physicality for the Dashwood women: '[I was] pulled out of reverie by James [Schamus, co-producer] asking, yet again, what physical activities can be found for Elinor and Marianne. Painting, sewing, embroidering, writing letters, pressing leaves, it's all depressingly girlie. Chin-ups, I suggest, but promise to think further.'²¹

Thompson's rewriting of Margaret, the youngest Dashwood sister, as a tomboy introduces female corporeal dynamism to the restrained spatiotemporal economy of the costume drama. Margaret is continually pictured running, playing in the fields outside Barton Cottage, messing about in the pond. With her treehouse, her atlas, her fearless pirate games, Margaret shifts the film's immobile spatial interior balance *outwards* into the inviting green landscape. Often Elinor, Marianne or Mrs Dashwood watch from the window as Margaret plays outside – for instance, in the fencing sequence with Edward mentioned above. In an audiovisual sense, Margaret presents a dynamic, moving detail in the otherwise posed, still shots (and perhaps, more speculatively, the female child as representative of a more dynamic feminist future).²²

For Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, who chronicle the emergent middle-class distinction between private and public spheres in England of 1780–1850, the demarcation of the feminine realm of the home corresponds to a broader class-based focus on 'careful regulation of spatial, temporal and social categories'.²³ This social and spatial demarcation was battled out in the countryside through the Enclosure Acts, and through the relegation of middle-class women to the 'private' realm of the family. 'Growing constraints on the physical and social mobility of women, especially young girls, is a motif across a range of activities. Into the early nineteenth century, a great deal of enjoyment was still gained from walking, often in combination with dropping in to chat with neighbours or relatives.'²⁴ From this – Austen's – period onwards, Davidoff and Hall note, increasing social pressures made it suspect or even dangerous for a respectable young woman to travel unaccompanied through the countryside. The social and physical mobility seen to be the province of bourgeois men of the period was imagined and enacted *in relation to* the increasing confinement of their female counterparts – as well as the 'fixed' existence of the working class or, for that matter, the inviting thresholds of colonial lands and peoples.

In this fraught context of embattled mobility, Austen's female protagonists generally walk with a chaperone or in a group. In *Jane Austen's Emma*, the normally empty and inviting countryside twice becomes a place of danger, or at least discomfort, for ladies out on a walk: when Emma and Harriet Smith are accosted by a ragged group of gypsies, and when their carriage gets stuck in the mud. On each occasion they are rescued by a gallant man on horseback. In *Sense and Sensibility*, Marianne's spontaneous ramblings in the rain

precipitate physical peril (the ubiquitous turned ankle, and two chance downpours) and rescue; and finally, in *Persuasion*, Lydia rashly throws herself off an embankment into the arms of Captain Wentworth, only to incur a concussion. These scrapes provide a romantic rush of physical peril and thrilling rescue. Without fundamentally controverting the inherently empty and benevolent nature of the idyllic countryside, these incidents facilitate the respective romantic developments. With the possible exception of the chicken thieves outside Emma Woodhouse's window, these dangers constitute plot points rather than 'real conditions'. In practice, Austen's protagonists are nonetheless confined to interior spaces through the persuasion of social consensus.

Within Austen and within a liberal feminist mode of thought in which female access to mobility, even for the middle classes, is rarely self-evident, the movement-image of the woman at the window resonates both as a condensed expression of social constraint and social repression and as a figure of potentiality. Thompson's impulse towards a more dynamic feminine past in *Sense and Sensibility* retrospectively craves class and physical mobility, even while critically noting the limits of this dream for Austen's female protagonists. In this light, the mobilization of the female figure in the landscape stands out most resoundingly in *Pride and Prejudice*, where Elizabeth (Jennifer Ehle) consistently strides, cheerful and apple-cheeked, through the idyllic countryside. In fact, four out of five of the episodes in this adaptation begin with Elizabeth or her sisters out on a country walk.

Lizzie meets with the disapproval of the more aristocratic folk at Netherfield when she arrives for a visit with muddy shoes. At Rosings Park, when admonished to stay inside for her health, Lizzie states, 'I think I've stayed indoors too long. Fresh air and exercise is all I need.' After the stillness of the woman at the window, Lizzie's walks evoke an audiovisual and corporeal pleasure in movement and possibility. These pleasures emerge more in *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice* than in the other Austen adaptations, particularly the sombre *Persuasion*. Embodying the movement-image of the country walk, Lizzie carries an independent, dynamic, freethinking force as a compelling heroine within the terms of the emergent middle classes favoured by Austen. Set against costume drama's predominant stillness and social constraint, Lizzie's enjoyment of the walk with its relative physical freedom – *for its own sake* – becomes particularly poignant, especially in a framing of the past through present exigencies. The historical battle over the demarcation of gendered and classed spaces described by Davidoff and Hall and chronicled by Austen is revisited through the shifting representational and social encodings of contemporary audiovisual adaptation.

The projection of the female body from a spot by the window outwards into the countryside represents an interesting contemporary

'updating' of Austen – a revision importantly informed, I have suggested, by the desiring frameworks of contemporary feminism. As suggested in the analysis of Elinor's and Edward's walk, this move retrospectively scripts these female characters into the restless, acquisitive project of middle-class men, while incisively recording their exclusion through gender. Yet on another more subtle reading of Elizabeth's walks, such physical mobility expresses a longed-for pleasure in physical movement for its own sake, something historically problematic for women both physically and in representation. To return to the woman at the window, she might be read as condensing a number of layered qualities of desire: a passive desire for romance and marriage; an acquisitive desire for property and the wealth and rights it imparts; and a class-based desire for social mobility and individual freedom. Such gendered retrospective desires are at once complicit with all of these power relations – indeed they cannot be conceived of except in relation to these class-based forms of constraint and mobility – and are also a form of potentiality that is at once corporeal, discursive and deeply felt.

If there is an ambiguity in these layered readings of gendered space and movement, it is deliberate. Through this detailed topographical approach, I hold that there is a tension between a critical reading of representational power relations as always already *relational* and the very pleasurable elements of 'movement' that captivate and transport the viewer. As Pam Cook says of historical costume drama, these qualities of escape, of fantastical identification and indeed 'transportation' are pivotal to feminist readings of cultural texts.²⁵ Indeed, costume dramas by definition transport the viewer into historical settings. It is fascinating that so much reproduction of the past works through a gendered sense of constraint – a constraint that gains cultural resonance and affective force only *in relation to* other historical trajectories, whether these enter the frame explicitly or not. Through the final movement-image of this essay, I examine the frame of colonial space that lurks just off the page of Austen's novels, just off the screen in the adaptations. This space can be read through the ghostly movement-image of the sailing ship that haunts the margins of Austen's domestic English narratives.

For Said, the colonies provide a significant register of imagined mobility and possibility in the nineteenth-century novel, even as early as Austen's period.²⁶ The question of colonialism forms a shadowy yet essential aspect of a retrospective audiovisual economy of constraint and movement. One way of thinking about the role of colonialism in these emphatically 'domestic' English texts is as 'out-of-field' or *hors-champ*. Deleuze uses this term in relation to the problem of framing to describe 'what is neither seen nor understood, but is nevertheless perfectly present'.²⁷ If reading class back into

25 Cook, *Fashioning the Nation*.

26 In his seminal reading of Austen and Empire, Said focuses on *Mansfield Park*, the novel most saturated with references to Empire. In the 1990 BBC television adaptation of this work, the colonial themes of Sir Thomas Bertram's Antiguan properties, and the seafaring adventures of Fanny Price's brother William, are indicated by the arrivals and departures of these characters, and by correspondence with them in their absence. See Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, pp. 80–97.

27 Deleuze, *Cinema 1*, p. 16.

Austen requires the deconstructive tactics of reading against the grain of 'narrative space', of amplifying details within the frame, the problem of colonialism necessitates examining the *hors-champ* of colonial space from outside the frame altogether.

Consider, then, a haunting movement-image from *Persuasion*, in which Anne Elliot (Amanda Root) gazes apprehensively out of a second-storey window of a town house in Bath. Shot from street level, the character is symbolically imprisoned behind a wrought iron grate as she anxiously peers down to the street below in quest of Captain Wentworth. The most sombre and socially critical of the 1990s Austen adaptations, *Persuasion* conveys a profound sense of the physical and social constraints of a certain feminine class experience. This gendered relation of stasis and mobility is made explicit by Anne as she describes the devotion of the 'weaker sex' to the men who come and go in their lives: 'We do not forget *you* as soon as you forget us. We cannot help ourselves. We live at home, quiet, confined, and our feelings prey on us. You always have business of some sort or another to take you back into the world.' In contrast to the attenuated yet inviting possibilities offered by the idyllic countryside outside Elinor Dashwood's, Emma Woodhouse's and Lizzie Bennet's windows, Anne's urban confinement is far more cruel. In a much more claustrophobic account of the social constraints of English middle-class life, Anne looks further afield for her escape, towards the spectre of Captain Wentworth's sailing ship. Roger Michell's adaptation pointedly foregrounds themes of class and gendered social constraint by juxtaposing the stuffy interiors of mannered society with the inviting, open horizons of the sea.

From the core 'knowable communities' nestled in the picturesque landscapes, colonial spaces and references seep persistently, if subtly, into the frame – from Margaret Dashwood's atlas to the offscreen adventures afforded male protagonists Colonel Brandon and Captain Wentworth. This play of location comes into frame in *Sense and Sensibility* in the scene with Margaret's atlas, where Edward feigns geographical ignorance to draw the girl out. Her ongoing play at 'pirates', as she spies with a glass from her treehouse – all sequences, incidentally, invented by screenwriter Thompson – further project Margaret as a dynamic, adventurous figure. Significantly, the adventures of travel and exploration are retrospectively extended to the female character, even if in an explicitly fanciful, playful way. In Elinor's and Edward's exchange noted above, for instance, Edward suggests that they may need to turn to piracy as an escape from the limits of conventional codes of behaviour.

Of all the adaptations, it is *Persuasion* that most explicitly deploys the possibilities of the sea and travel as an escape from conventional English bourgeois morality. In a departure from the domestic sphere of the novel's early pages, the film opens with a rowboat coming

ashore from a navy ship. Returning from the Napoleonic Wars, Admiral Croft, his wife and her brother Captain Wentworth, as well as the sailors at Lyme, extend the restless mobility of the emergent middle class from the English countryside out to the colonies. Aside from their pointed function as a foil to the decadent aristocracy, these kindly sailors offer a link with the exotic and exciting possibilities of the colonies – riches, adventure, war. Lacking the capital to marry Anne, Captain Wentworth joins the navy. Upon his return ten years later, he has made his fortune of twenty thousand pounds by bringing privateers to the West Indies. Said points out that such good fortune strikes a recurring chord within nineteenth-century novels: ‘As a reference, as a point of definition, as an easily assumed place of travel, wealth, and service, the empire functions for much of the European nineteenth century as a codified, if only marginally visible, presence in fiction.’²⁸

In parallel with the historical expulsion of the working class from the idyllic countrysides of the English novel described by Williams, the raw materials and cheap labour of the colonies were indispensable to the emergent wealth and culture of the middle class. As a career, a source of wealth for British younger sons, and escape from scandal, the fortunes of empire, like class, pervade the narrative economy of the nineteenth-century novel. Many of Austen’s male characters, from *Persuasion*’s sailors to Colonel Brandon in *Sense and Sensibility*, have reaped the experience of the wide world. In these two films particularly, military experience and colonial adventure shape the measure of a robust, worldly masculinity. Willoughby the dandy and gentle Edward the aspiring clergyman contrast with Colonel Brandon’s weathered military experience and hunting prowess; and Brandon’s manliness is echoed in Captain Wentworth’s tempered, inarticulate character as he returns to Anne in uniform after years at sea.

In *Persuasion*, the romance and promise of empire speak through the idyllic movement-image of the sailing ship that bookends the film.²⁹ From the naval frigate bringing the eligible sailors home to port at the outset, to Captain Wentworth’s ship bearing the happy newly married couple off into the sunset, the sea offers a horizon of freedom and possibility. While the sea never directly enters Austen’s novel, the romantic closure of the contemporary adaptation brings Anne on board Wentworth’s ship (whereas at the close of the novel she is implicitly relegated to port, with the threat of another war looming). In the film’s concluding sequence, the gendered dilemma of desire and movement is resolved in an (almost) egalitarian marriage which includes Anne in Frederick’s adventures, to a soaring romantic love aria. The romantic possibility of travel for women arises directly in a dinner conversation in the television movie. Admiral Croft’s wife Sophie recounts her seafaring adventures.

28 Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, p. 63.

29 The romantic possibilities of the sailing ship for female escape and adventure recur in two other contemporary costume dramas, *Angels and Insects* (Philip Haas, 1996), and *Moll Flanders* (Pen Densham, 1996).

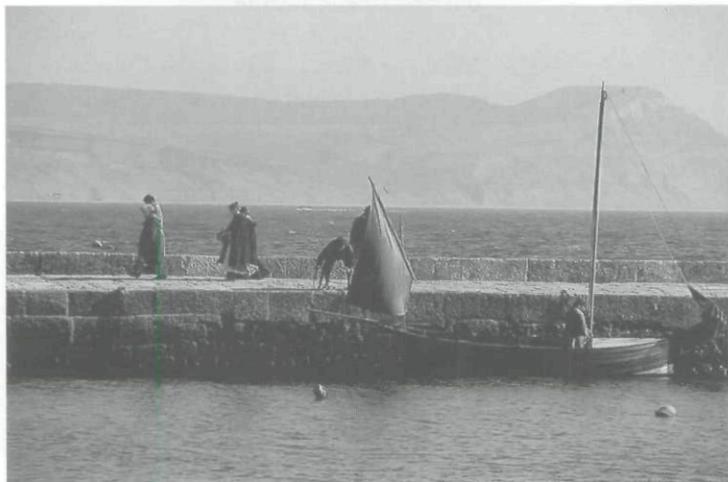
In the fifteen years of my marriage, though many women have done more . . . I have crossed the Atlantic four times, and have been once to the East Indies, and back again; besides having been in different places about home – Cork, and Lisbon, and Gibraltar.

Mrs Croft's account of her travels marks the arrival of the female adventurer on the high seas – a far cry from the safe spot at the window where Anne passes her time. Not merely contained in her domestic environment, this emergent feminine and feminist subject craves mobility, travel and adventure. But like the walk in the country, real and imagined access to such mobility and possibility is ambiguous, and fraught with difficulty and contradiction. If the woman at the window evokes both constraint and potentiality, the 'outside' to this constrained interior space – class relations, colonialism and, indeed, race and ethnicity – impinge on the costume drama's careful interiors.

On this theme, Inderpal Grewal considers a passage from George Eliot's *Middlemarch* in which Dorothea Casaubon looks out of her window on the agricultural workers below. She experiences an epiphany, realizing that she is no mere spectator in class relations, but that her 'luxurious shelter' derives from these people's labours. Looking down on the countryside from her window, Dorothea participates in the nineteenth-century aesthetic trope: 'I am the monarch of all I survey'. Eliot's careful reframing situates her protagonist in an ambiguous relationship with these power structures, even as Austen's heroines rest both inside and outside the entitlements of their class position. Grewal suggests that Dorothea's complex allegiance to structures of mastery, 'a denial of domination and a parody of power', arises in late nineteenth-century feminine rhetoric to create 'a subject position for middle-class Englishwomen that is gendered through discourses of class and imperialism'.³⁰ Through Eliot, Grewal evokes a later historical period than Austen. Her insights are nonetheless instructive in relation to the implicit treatment of colonialism in the Austen adaptations, and are rendered explicit in *Persuasion*. This influential 'subject position for middle-class Englishwomen' may still be identified within the contradictory liberal feminist longing for mobility at work in the Austen adaptations.

A series of observations on the representational significances of space and movement is condensed in one movement-image from *Persuasion*. Reminiscent of *Sense and Sensibility*'s country walk, this moment transpires during a sea walk at Lyme. Anne and Henrietta stroll at a deliberate pace towards frame right along the sea wall. This long shot sets them against a luminous, wide open seascape, the

30 Inderpal Grewal, *Home and Harem: Nation, Gender, Empire, and the Cultures of Travel* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), p. 24.



The sea walk at Lyme, *Jane Austen's Persuasion* (BBC, 1995). © BBC.

glorious morning animated by a lively piano score. Away from the prying eyes of Kellynch Hall, the women seem freer, and yet more burdened with things unsaid. In the midst of this leisurely stroll, there is a remarkable moment: the camera, almost bored with the slowness, the agony of a romance that cannot seem to get started, deserts the narrative to follow a ragged young boy's headlong run as he passes them, moving swiftly to the right all the way along a pier. Digressing for a moment on this detail of pure movement, the camera briefly lights on another journey distinct from that of the narrative. In keeping with *Persuasion's* persistent foregrounding of the sea and its possibilities for respiration, equality and movement, this shot opens up the breadth of the seaside horizon as the boy runs past a tiny wooden sailing ship. This panning shot ends abruptly as

the boy passes Captain Wentworth and Lpuisa walking in the other direction and the camera, deserting the boy who runs off frame, then follows the protagonists back towards their encounter with Anne. At this juncture, the camera's movement is drawn back into the narrative.

This movement-image expresses several intersecting spatial power relations. As with the scattering sheep, the boy's headlong run (what or whom was he running to or from?) functions within the visual economy of the shot as a kinetic counterpoint in the plodding narrative progression, the class-designated perambulation of the protagonists. A few remarks about genre, tempo and movement are fitting here. Austen's deliberate country walks and dinner table conversations function visually (and also audially) against carefully backgrounded landscapes and people. With the key exception of the ballroom dances,³¹ these narratives unfold largely through careful conversation, and in precise diction: consequently, Austen's protagonists can never move too quickly. This narrative economy, in concert with the genre's constitutive pleasures of costume and mise-en-scene, contributes to costume drama's characteristic stillness. For the spatial choreography of scenes, we commonly enter and leave the library conversation on the coat-tails of a servant carrying a tray. In this way, the adaptation situates the novels' rather disembodied conversations and interior monologues, and inserts movement, passages between scenes. In class terms the entire setup, the beautifully-choreographed balls, the mouthwatering feasts, are anticipated through the frenetic bustling of servants; even the pointed dinner conversations are facilitated, 'moved along', by the gloved hand that reaches into the frame at the right moment to pour or clear away. In a sense, all of these precise, leisurely narrative moments are brought to us, both literally and formally, by the backgrounded labours of working people.

This account of the political stakes of presence and absence, the subtlety of audiovisual layering and emphasis, resonates within debates on heritage cinema. For instance, Higson argues that the genre's mise-en-scene overwhelms the social commentary carried by the dialogue, that 'at the level of image, narrative instability [the hybrid quality of Englishness] was overwhelmed by the alluring spectacle of iconographic stability'.³² But where Higson posits a contradiction between visual spectacle and the (importantly aural) level of narrative, I would suggest that there are many forms of continuity in the class-based treatment of voice³³ and character movement. Further, in detailing the contents of these 'alluring spectacles', the present essay untangles particular trajectories of desire related to class, gender, and colonialism – trajectories of desire that are not monolithic, but ambiguous and contradictory. In the process, I have pushed the discussion beyond the usual terms of national identity and sexual difference towards a broader

31 The recurring movement-image of the ball constitutes a fascinating set piece in the Austen adaptations, particularly the extended scenes in *Pride and Prejudice* and *Sense and Sensibility*. Offering a flurry of movement and spontaneity usually reserved for the exterior sequences, these highly-choreographed events provide a dynamic, complex, and largely nonverbal forum for Austen's trademark plays of gesture and glance – and the confusing switching of partners.

32 Higson, 'The heritage film and British cinema', p. 240.

33 In fact, moving from the widescreen experience of feature film to the small screen of television adaptation and video, sound, and particularly the voice, figure more prominently.

consideration of the ongoing and contradictory productivity of space and movement in representation.

A topographical approach to the analysis of cultural texts perceives the work of representation as the restless and ongoing charting of geographical, social and corporeal spaces. Michel de Certeau suggests that the work of the story is constantly to mark off space, symbolically to produce (and demolish) imagined social spatial structures. More than mere description, the story becomes a creative act of delimitation:

It even has distributive power and performative force (it does what it says) when an ensemble of circumstances is brought together. Then it finds spaces. Reciprocally, where stories are disappearing (or else are being reduced to museographical objects), there is a loss of space. . . . By considering the role of stories in delimitation, one can see that the primary function is to *authorize* the establishment, displacement, or transcendence of limits.³⁴

In this vein, the contemporary Austen adaptations may be seen as the latest charting of sedimented literary, painterly and audiovisual cultural traditions that continuously map the historical social space of early nineteenth-century England through the ever-shifting demands of the present. To fold these observations back into my core question of gendered space and movement, these texts, as part of a 'woman's genre' of costume drama, operate in de Certeau's terms to 'found' or even to 'authorize' the exploration of gendered places and experiences within a representational field still dominated by masculine stories. Given the durability of Austen's worldview for generations of audiences, especially feminine and feminist audiences, it is illuminating to consider the overlapping spaces and historical trajectories that impinge on the view and the desires of the woman at the window.

Through its investigation of the textual spatiality of costume drama, this essay has introduced a topographical approach to audiovisual analysis. This reading of the Austen adaptations suggests an intimate connection between genre, the spatial plotting of power, and the social choreography of movement. In dominant realist forms of British period and costume drama, relations of class and gender are signalled through a preferred mode and tempo of physical comportment and diction that may be read simultaneously as a type of constraint and an expression of profound entitlement.³⁵ Although I derive my insights from the specific instance of costume drama, these methodological moves may be productively extended. By foregrounding issues of corporeal and narrative movement, social space and tempo, this approach incorporates many key properties of audiovisual genres and texts. Combining Deleuze's movement-image with literary theory, geography and feminist theory, this mode of analysis draws from outside the traditional territory of film theory;

34 Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. S. Rendall (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984), p. 123.

35 As Richard Dyer's work on race in US cinema suggests, a more generalizable spatial sense of possibility, of freedom and social mobility, corresponds to the historical representation of 'whiteness'. See Dyer, *White*.

and in the process, it seeks to challenge and extend existing theoretical frameworks including psychoanalysis, semiotics, and genre analysis.

Guiding this topographical approach is a political and epistemological move that correlates the formal properties of space and movement in cultural texts with culturally complex struggles over imagined social space and human possibility. By no means a simple or straightforward proposition, topographical analysis, like any other framework, illuminates distinctive elements in cultural texts while obscuring others. My foregrounding of space and movement as analytical frameworks can generate a useful and necessarily flexible grid for the consideration of interlocking trajectories of social power and experience in a way that can broaden feminist film theory's often limited focus on sexual difference. At the same time, costume drama as object could usefully prompt other investigations: the extensive vocabularies of sexuality and desire drawn from psychoanalysis; a reading of memory or historical time; or a poststructuralist account of corporeal masquerade and performativity, for example. In this sense, different theoretical frameworks may well be complementary, and must certainly proceed in dialogue.

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