Carnal Thoughts

EMBODIMENT AND MOVING IMAGE CULTURE

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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA PRESS
Berkeley Los Angeles London

University of California Press
Berkeley and Los Angeles, California

University of California Press, Ltd.
London, England

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Sobchak, Vivian Carol.
Carnal thoughts : embodiment and moving image culture / Vivian Sobchak.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 0-520-24128-2(alk. paper).—ISBN 0-520-24129-0 (pbk. : alk. paper)
1. Motion pictures—Philosophy. 2. Motion pictures—Psychological aspects. I. Title.

PN1995.S544 2004
791.43'01'5—dc22 2004006180

Manufactured in the United States of America
13 12 11 10 09 08 07 06 05 04
10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

The paper used in this publication is both acid-free and totally chlorine-free (TCF). It meets the minimum requirements of ANSI/NISO Z39.48-1992 (R 1997) (*Permanence of Paper*).

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What My Fingers Knew

The Cinesthetic Subject, or Vision in the Flesh

[M]y body is not only an object among all objects, . . . but an object which is sensitive to all the rest, which reverberates to all sounds, vibrates to all colours, and provides words with their primordial significance through the way in which it receives them.
—MAURICE MERLEAU-PONTY, *Phenomenology of Perception*

What is significance? It is meaning, insofar as it is sensually produced.
—ROLAND BARTHES, *The Pleasure of the Text*

Nearly every time I read a movie review in a newspaper or popular magazine, I am struck by the gap that exists between our actual *experience* of the cinema and the *theory* that we academic film scholars construct to explain it—or perhaps, more aptly, to explain it away. Take, for example, several descriptions in the popular press of Jane Campion's *The Piano* (1993): "What impresses most is the tactile force of the images. The salt air can almost be tasted, the wind's furious bite felt."[1] The film is "[a]n unremittingly sensuous experience of music and fabric, of mud and flesh."[2] "Poems will be written about the curves of the performers' buttocks as they're outlined by candlelight; about the atmosphere that surrounds the dropping away of each item of clothing; about the immediate tactile shock when flesh first touches flesh in close-up."[3] A completely different kind of film, Jan de Bont's *Speed* (1994), elicits the following: "Viscerally, it's a breath-taking trip."[4] It's "[a] classic summertime adrenaline rush."[5] "This white knuckle, edge-of-your-seat

1. Godfrey Cheshire, "Film: Auteurist Elan," review of *The Piano,* dir. Jane Campion, *Raleigh (North Carolina) Spectator Magazine,* Nov. 18, 1993.

2. Bob Straus, "*The Piano* Strikes Emotional Chords," review of *The Piano, Los Angeles Daily News,* Nov. 19, 1993.

3. Stuart Klawans, "Films," review of *The Piano, Nation,* Dec. 6, 1993, 704.

4. Daniel Heman, "It's a Bumpy Ride, but This Film's Built for Speed," review of *Speed,* dir. Jan de Bont, *Richmond Times-Dispatch,* June 10, 1994.

5. Henry Sheehan, "*Speed* Thrills," review of *Speed, Orange Country Register,* June 10, 1994.

action opus is the real thing,"[6] "[a] preposterously exciting thrill ride that takes itself seriously enough to produce gasps of tension and lightly enough so you giggle while grabbing the armrest."[7] "We feel wiped out with delirium and relief. The movie comes home in triumph and we go home in shreds."[8] Reviewers of Paul Anderson's film adaptation of the kung-fu video game *Mortal Kombat* (1995) emphasize "a soundtrack of . . . primitive, head-bonking urgency"[9] and endless scenes of "kick, sock, pow . . . to-the-death battles,"[10] in which "backs, wrists and necks are shattered with sickening cracking sounds."[11] And, of John Lasseter's full-length computergraphically animated feature *Toy Story* (1995), another says:

> A Tyrannosaurus rex doll is so glossy and tactile you feel as if you could reach out and stroke its hard, shiny head. . . . When some toy soldiers spring to life, the waxy sheen of their green fatigues will strike Proustian chords of recognition in anyone who ever presided over a basement game of army. . . . [T]his movie . . . invites you to gaze upon the textures of the physical world with new eyes. What *Bambi* and *Snow White* did for nature, *Toy Story,* amazingly, does for plastic.[12]

What have we, as contemporary media theorists, to do with such tactile, kinetic, redolent, resonant, and sometimes even taste-full descriptions of the film experience?

I

During earlier periods in the history of film theory there were various attempts to understand the meaningful relation between cinema and our sensate bodies. Peter Wollen notes that the great Soviet filmmaker and theorist Sergei Eisenstein, fascinated by the Symbolist movement, spent the latter part of his career investigating the "synchronization of the senses" and that his "writings on synaesthesia are of great erudition and considerable interest, despite their fundamentally unscientific nature."[13] Gilles Deleuze

6. Joe Leydon, "Breakneck *Speed,*" review of *Speed, Houston Post,* June 10, 1994.

7. David Ansen, "Popcorn Deluxe," review of *Speed, Newsweek,* June 13, 1994, 53.

8. Anthony Lane, "Faster, Faster," review of *Speed, New Yorker,* June 13, 1994, 103.

9. Stephen Hunter, "As Cosmic Battles Go, *Kombat* Is Merely Mortal," review of *Mortal Kombat,* dir. Paul Anderson, *Baltimore Sun,* Aug. 19, 1995.

10. Janet Weeks, "Is Faux Violence Less Violent?" review of *Mortal Kombat, Los Angeles Daily News,* Aug. 19, 1995.

11. Stephanie Griest, "*Mortal Kombat*'s Bloodless Coup," review of *Mortal Kombat, Washington Post,* Aug. 28, 1995.

12. Owen Gleiberman, "Plastic Fantastic," review of *Toy Story,* dir. John Lasseter, *Entertainment Weekly,* Nov. 14, 1995, 74.

13. Peter Wollen, *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1969), 57, 59.

writes that Eisenstein "continually reminds us that 'intellectual cinema' has as correlate 'sensory thought' or 'emotional intelligence,' and is worthless without it."[14] And, in a wonderful essay using the trope of the somersault to address the relation between cinema and the body, Lesley Stern describes how, for Eisenstein, the moving body was "conceived and configured cinematically . . . not just [as] a matter of representation, but [as] a question of the circuit of sensory vibrations that links viewer and screen."[15] This early interest in the somatic effects of the cinema culminated, perhaps, on the one side, in the 1930s, with the empirical work done in the United States by the Payne Studies—several of which quantitatively measured the "galvanic responses" and blood pressure of film viewers.[16] On the other, qualitative side, there was the phenomenologically inflected materialist work done in the 1930s and 1940s by Walter Benjamin and Siegfried Kracauer. Benjamin, in his famous "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," speaks of cinematic intelligibility in terms of "tactile appropriation," and elsewhere he speaks to the viewer's "mimetic faculty," a sensuous and bodily form of perception.[17] And Kracauer located the uniqueness of cinema in the medium's essential ability to stimulate us physiologically and sensually; thus he understands the spectator as a "corporeal-material being," a "human being with skin and hair," and he tells us: "The material elements that present themselves in films directly stimulate the *material layers* of the human being: his nerves, his senses, his entire *physiological substance.*"[18]

Until quite recently, however, contemporary film theory has generally ignored or elided both cinema's sensual address and the viewer's "corporeal-

14. Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image,* trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 159.

15. Lesley Stern, "I Think, Sebastian, Therefore . . . I Somersault: Film and the Uncanny," *Para*doxa* 3, nos. 3–4 (1997): 361.

16. For relevant research by the Payne Studies see W. W. Charters, *Motion Pictures and Youth: A Summary* (New York: Macmillan, 1933). In a related context Alison Landsberg, "Prosthetic Memory: *Total Recall* and *Blade Runner,*" in *Cyberspace/Cyberbodies/Cyberpunk: Cultures of Technological Embodiment,* ed. Mike Featherstone and Roger Burrows (London: Sage, 1995), writes that the Payne Studies "presumed that the body might give evidence of physiological symptoms caused by a kind of technological intervention into subjectivity—an intervention which is part and parcel of the cinematic experience" (180).

17. Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections,* ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken, 1968), 240; and Walter Benjamin, "On the Mimetic Faculty," in *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings,* trans. Edmund Jephcott (New York: Schocken, 1978), 333–36.

18. Quoted in Miriam Hansen, " 'With Skin and Hair': Kracauer's Theory of Film, Marseilles 1940," *Critical Inquiry* 19, no. 3 (1993): 458 (the translation is Hansen's). Hansen also goes on to note: "Pointing to the example of 'archaic pornographic flicks,' Kracauer comes close to describing the physical, tactile dimension of film spectatorship in sexual terms (though not in terms of gender); in striving for sensual, physiological stimulation, he notes, such 'flicks' realize film's potential in general" (458).

material being."[19] Thus, if we read across the field, there is very little sustained work in English to be found on the carnal sensuality of the film experience and what—and how—it constitutes meaning. The few exceptions include Linda Williams's ongoing investigation of what she calls "body genres";[20] Jonathan Crary's recognition, in *Techniques of the Observer,* of the "carnal density" of spectatorship that emerges with the new visual technologies of the nineteenth century;[21] Steven Shaviro's Deleuzean emphasis, in *The Cinematic Body,* on the visceral event of film viewing;[22] Laura Marks's works on "the skin of the film" and "touch" that focus on what she describes as "haptic visuality" in relation to bodies and images;[23] several essays by Elena del Río that, from a phenomenological perspective, attempt to undo "the rigid binary demarcations of externality and internality";[24] and forthcoming work from Jennifer Barker that develops a phenomenology of cinematic tactility.[25] In general, however, most film theorists still seem either embarrassed or bemused by bodies that often act wantonly and crudely at the movies, involuntarily countering the fine-grained sensibilities, intellectual discrimi-

19. Contemporary film theory as an academic designation usually refers to the period beginning in the late 1960s and early 1970s when semiotics, structuralism, and psychoanalysis were regarded as methodological antidotes to a "soft" and unscientific humanist film criticism, and Marxist cultural critique and feminist theory were regarded as ideological antidotes to bourgeois and patriarchal aestheticism. An extended critique of the contemporary theoretical oversight (if not repression) of the spectator's lived body, as well as a discussion of the historical and theoretical reasons for it, can be found in my own *The Address of the Eye: A Phenomenology of Film Experience* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992).

20. See Linda Williams, "Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess," *Film Quarterly* 44, no. 4 (summer 1991): 2–13; "Corporealized Observers: Visual Pornographies and the Carnal Density of Vision," in *Fugitive Images: From Photography to Video,* ed. Patrice Petro (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 3–41; and "The Visual and Carnal Pleasures of Moving-Image Pornography: A Brief History" (unpublished manuscript); this latter essay was eventually incorporated into the epilogue of the 1999 edition of Linda Williams, *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure, and the Frenzy of the Visible* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989).

21. Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992).

22. Steven Shaviro, *The Cinematic Body* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).

23. Laura U. Marks, *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999); and *Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002).

24. Elena del Río, "The Body as Foundation of the Screen: Allegories of Technology in Atom Egoyan's *Speaking Parts,*" *Camera Obscura* 37–38 (summer 1996): 94–115; and "The Body of Voyeurism: Mapping a Discourse of the Senses in Michael Powell's *Peeping Tom,*" *Camera Obscura* 15, no. 3 (2000): 115–49.

25. Jennifer Barker's dissertation, "The Tactile Eye," (UCLA) is in progress; however, she has delivered two conference papers that draw from her research: "Fascinating Rhythms: The Visceral Pleasures of the Cinema" ("Come to Your Senses," Amsterdam School for Cultural Analysis, Theory, and Interpretation, Amsterdam, May 1998); and "Affecting Cinema" (annual meeting of the Society for Cinema Studies, Chicago, IL, Mar. 2000).

nations, and vocabulary of critical reflection. Indeed, as Williams suggests in relation to the "low" body genres of pornography, horror, and melodrama she privileges, a certain discomfort emerges when we experience an "apparent lack of proper esthetic distance, a sense of over-involvement in sensation and emotion." She tells us: "We feel manipulated by these texts—an impression that the very colloquialisms of 'tear jerker' and 'fear jerker' express—and to which we could add pornography's even cruder sense as texts to which some people might be inclined to 'jerk off.'" Bodily responses to such films are taken as an involuntary and self-evident reflexology, marking, as Williams notes, sexual arousal on "peter meters"; horror in screams, fainting, and even heart attacks; and sentiment in "one-, two-, or three handkerchiefs."[26]

For the most part, then, carnal responses to the cinema have been regarded as too crude to invite extensive elaboration beyond aligning them—for their easy thrills, commercial impact, and cultural associations—with other more "kinetic" forms of amusement such as theme park rides or with Tom Gunning's once historically grounded but now catch-all designation, "cinema of attractions."[27] Thus, scholarly interest has been focused less on the capacity of films to physically arouse us to meaning than on what such sensory cinematic appeal reveals about the rise and fall of classical narrative, or the contemporary transmedia structure of the entertainment industry, or the desires of our culture for the distractions of immediate sensory immersion in an age of pervasive mediation.

Nonetheless, critical discussions often also suggest that films that appeal to our sensorium are the *quintessence* of cinema. For example, writing about *Speed,* Richard Dyer relates the Lumière audiences' recoiling in terror from an approaching onscreen train to IMAX and Showscan, proposing that *all* cinema is, at base, a "cinema of sensation."[28] Indeed, he argues that the cinema's essence is to represent and fulfill our desire "for an underlying pattern of feeling, to do with freedom of movement, confidence in the body, engagement with the material world, that is coded as male (and straight and white,

26. Williams, "Film Bodies," 5.

27. Tom Gunning, "The Cinema of Attractions: Early Film, Its Spectator, and the Avant-Garde," in *Early Cinema: Space, Frame, Narrative,* ed. Thomas Elsaesser with Adam Barker (London: BFI, 1990), 56–62. Gunning comments: "Clearly in some sense recent spectacle cinema has reaffirmed its roots in stimulus and carnival rides, in what might be called the Spielberg-Lucas-Coppola cinema and effects" (61). It is worth noting that this move from use of the phrase "cinema of attractions" to designate a historically specific mode—and moment—of film production to its use as a more generic and transhistorical designation is seen as problematic. A thoughtful critique was offered by Ben Brewster in "Periodization of the Early Cinema: Some Problems" (paper presented at the annual meeting of the Society for Cinema Studies, Dallas, TX, Mar. 1996).

28. Richard Dyer, "Action!" *Sight and Sound* 4, no. 10 (Oct. 1994): 7–10.

too) but to which all humans need access."[29] However, although Dyer acknowledges the importance of the spectator's direct bodily experience of cinema, he is at a loss to explain its very existence. He tells us: "The celebration of sensational movement, that we respond to in *some still unclear sense* 'as if real,' for many people *is* the movies."[30] The dynamic structure that grounds our bodily response to cinema's visual (and aural) representations is not only articulated as a continuing mystery, but its eidetic "givenness" to experience is also destabilized by the phrase "as if real"—the phrase itself surrounded by a set of scare quotes that, questioning this questioning of givenness, further plunges us into a *mise en abyme* of experiential undecidability.

This "still unclear sense" of the sensational movement that, "as if real," provokes a bodily response marks the confusion and discomfort we scholars have not only in confronting our sensual experience of the cinema but also in confronting our lack of ability to explain its somatism as anything more than "mere" physiological reflex or to admit its meaning as anything more than metaphorical description.[31] Thus, the language used in the press to describe the sensuous and affective dimensions of the film experience has been written off as a popular version of that imprecise humanist criticism drummed out of film studies in the early 1970s with the advent of more "rigorous" and "objective" modes of description. Thus, sensual reference in descriptions of cinema has been generally regarded as rhetorical or poetic excess—sensuality located, then, always less on the side of the body than on the side of language. This view is tautological. As Shaviro points out, it subsumes sensation "within universal (linguistic or conceptual) forms only because it has deployed those forms in order to describe sensation in the first place." This elision of the body "making sense" in its own right is grounded in "the idealist assumption that human experience is originally and fundamentally cognitive." To hold such an idealist assumption, Shaviro goes on,

> is to reduce the question of perception to a question of knowledge, and to equate sensation with the reflective consciousness of sensation. The Hegelian and structuralist equation suppresses the body. It ignores or abstracts away

29. Ibid., 9.

30. Ibid., 8 (emphasis added).

31. Paul Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor: Multi-disciplinary Studies of the Creation of Meaning in Language,* trans. Robert Czerny, Kathleen McLaughlin, and John Costello (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977), discusses the status of the "as if" in relation to metaphor and reference; see esp. 248–56. He finds inadequate both "an interpretation that gives in to ontological *naïveté* in the evaluation of metaphorical truth because it ignores the implicit 'is not'" and its "inverse interpretation that, *under the critical pressure of the 'is not,' loses the 'is' by reducing it to the 'as if' of a reflective judgment.*" As he says, the "legitimation of the concept of metaphorical truth, which preserves the 'is not' with the 'is,' will proceed from the convergence of these two critiques" (249; emphasis added). Subsequent references will be cited in the text.

> from the primordial forms of raw sensation: affect, excitation, stimulation and repression, pleasure and pain, shock and habit. It posits instead a disincarnate eye and ear whose data are immediately objectified in the form of self-conscious awareness or positive knowledge.[32]

In sum, even though there has been increasing interest in doing so, we have not yet come to grips with the carnal foundations of cinematic intelligibility, with the fact that *to understand movies figurally, we first must make literal sense of them.* This is not a tautology—particularly in a discipline that has worked long and hard to separate the sense and meaning of vision and specularity from a body that, *in experience,* lives vision always in cooperation and significant exchange with other sensorial means of access to the world, a body that makes meaning before it makes conscious, reflective thought. Thus, despite current academic fetishization of "the body," most theorists still don't quite know what to do with their unruly responsive flesh and sensorium. Our sensations and responses pose an intolerable question to prevalent linguistic and psychoanalytic understandings of the cinema as grounded in conventional codes and cognitive patterning and grounded on absence, lack, and illusion. They also pose an intolerable challenge to the prevalent cultural assumption that the film image is constituted by a merely two-dimensional geometry.[33] Positing cinematic vision as merely a mode of objective symbolic representation, and reductively abstracting—"disincarnating"—the spectator's subjective and full-bodied vision to posit it only as a "distance sense," contemporary film theory has had major difficulties in comprehending how it is possible for human bodies to be, in fact, really "touched" and "moved" by the movies.

At worst, then, contemporary film theory has not taken bodily being at the movies very seriously—and, at best, it has generally not known how to respond to and describe how it is that movies "move" and "touch" us bodily. Instead, with some noted exceptions, film theory has attempted (somewhat defensively, I think) to put the ambiguous and unruly, *subjectively* sensuous, embodied experience of going to the movies back where it "properly"—that is, *objectively*—belongs: it locates the sensuous *on* the screen as the semiotic

32. Shaviro, *The Cinematic Body,* 26–27.

33. As Linda Williams, in "Visual and Carnal Pleasures," summarizes: "In psychoanalytic film theory this opposition between an excessive and inarticulate body and sensation on the one hand and a mastering spirit or thought on the other has been fundamental, giving rise to the concept of an abstract 'visual pleasure' grounded in a voyeuristic gaze whose pleasure presumes a distanced, decorporealized, monocular eye mastering all it surveils but not physically implicated in the objects of its vision" (n.p.). This "mastering" gaze has meant the privileging of Renaissance perspective and its Cartesian "carpentering" of the world as the explanatory model for describing cinematic space. For more discussion of this issue and alternative descriptive models see "Breadcrumbs in the Forest: Three Meditations on Being Lost in Space" in this volume.

effects of cinematic representation and the semantic property of cinematic objects or *off* the screen in the spectator's phantasmatic psychic formations, cognitive processes, and basic physiological reflexes that do not pose major questions of meaning. Yet as film theorists we are not exempt from sensual being at the movies—nor, let us admit it, would we wish to be. As "lived bodies" (to use a phenomenological term that insists on "the" objective body as always also lived subjectively as "my" body, diacritically invested and active in making sense and meaning in and of the world), our vision is always already "fleshed out." Even at the movies our vision and hearing are informed and given meaning by our other modes of sensory access to the world: our capacity not only to see and to hear but also to touch, to smell, to taste, and always to proprioceptively feel our weight, dimension, gravity, and movement in the world. In sum, the film experience is meaningful *not to the side of our bodies but because of our bodies.* Which is to say that movies provoke in us the "carnal thoughts" that ground and inform more conscious analysis.

Thus, we need to alter the binary and bifurcated structures of the film experience suggested by previous formulations and, instead, posit the film viewer's lived body as a carnal "third term" that grounds and mediates experience and language, subjective vision and objective image—both differentiating and unifying them in reversible (or chiasmatic) processes of perception and expression.[34] Indeed, it is the lived body that provides both the site and genesis of the "third" or "obtuse" meaning that Roland Barthes suggests escapes language yet resides within it.[35] Thrown into a meaningful lifeworld, the lived body is always already engaged in a commutation and transubstan-

34. *Chiasm* (sometimes *chiasmus*) is the term used by Maurice Merleau-Ponty in "Eye and Mind," trans. Carleton Dallery, in *The Primacy of Perception,* ed. James Edie (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1964), to indicate a "unique space which separates and reunites, which sustains every cohesion" (187). In general, *chiasm* is used to name the ground of all presence against which discrete figures of being emerge; as such, it is the ground from which oppositions both emerge and fall away, on which they become reversible. Here I am suggesting that the enworlded lived body functions as our own chiasmatic site in the matter of meaning and the meaning of matter: that is, it sustains discrete and oppositional figures (such as language and being) but also provides the synoptic ground for the suspension of both their discretion and their opposition. See also Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "The Intertwining—The Chiasm," in *The Visible and the Invisible,* ed. Claude Lefort, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1968), 130–55.

35. Roland Barthes, "The Third Meaning," in *Image-Music-Text,* trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 52–68. Miriam Hansen, "Benjamin, Cinema, and Experience: 'The Blue Flower in the Land of Technology,'" *New German Critique* 40 (winter 1987), writes of this connection between "third meaning" and the lived body in relation to Walter Benjamin's reflections on the "mimetic faculty": "For Benjamin, the semiotic aspect of language encompasses both Barthes's 'informational' and 'symbolic' levels of meaning . . . while the mimetic aspect would correspond to the level of physiognomic excess" (198).

tiation of the cooperative meaning-making capacity of its senses (which are always acculturated and never lived as either discrete or raw)—a process that commutes the meaning of one sense to the meaning of another, translates the literal into the figural and back again, and prereflectively grounds the more particular and reflective discriminations of a "higher order" semiology. Put another way, we could say that the lived body both provides and enacts a *commutative reversibility* between subjective feeling and objective knowledge, between the senses and their sense or conscious meaning. In this regard Shaviro is most eloquent:

> There is no structuring lack, no primordial division, but a continuity between the physiological and affective responses of my own body and the appearances and disappearances, the mutations and perdurances, of the bodies and images on screen. The important distinction is not the hierarchical, binary one between bodies and images, or between the real and its representations. It is rather a question of discerning multiple and continually varying interactions among what can be defined indifferently as bodies and as images: degrees of stillness and motion, of action and passion, of clutter and emptiness, of light and lack. . . . The image cannot be opposed to the body, as representation is opposed to its unattainable referent. For a fugitive, supplemental materiality haunts the (allegedly) idealizing processes of mechanical reproduction. . . . The flesh is intrinsic to the cinematic apparatus, at once its subject, its substance, and its limit.[36]

II

At this point, given my rather lengthy critique of theoretical abstraction and its oversight of our bodily experience at the movies, I want to ground my previous discussion "in the flesh." In *my* flesh, in fact—and its meaningful responsiveness to and comprehension of an actual film, *The Piano*. However intellectually problematic in terms of its sexual and colonial politics,[37] Campion's film moved me deeply, stirring my bodily senses and my sense of my body. The film not only "filled me up" and often "suffocated" me with feelings that resonated in and constricted my chest and stomach, but it also "sensitized" the very surfaces of my skin—as well as its own—to *touch*. Through-

36. Shaviro, *The Cinematic Body,* 255–56.

37. For discussion of these politics see, e.g., Cynthia Kaufman, "Colonialism, Purity, and Resistance in *The Piano,*" *Socialist Review* 24, nos. 1–2 (1994): 251–55; Leonie Pihama, "Are Films Dangerous? A Maori Woman's Perspective on *The Piano,*" *Hecate* 20, no. 2 (Oct. 1994): 239–42; Lynda Dyson, "The Return of the Repressed? Whiteness, Femininity, and Colonialism in *The Piano,*" *Screen* 36, no. 3 (autumn 1995): 267–76; and Dana Polan, *Jane Campion* (London: BFI, 2002).

out the film my whole being was intensely concentrated and, rapt as I was in the world onscreen, I was wrapped also in a body that was achingly aware of itself as a sensuous, sensitized, sensible material capacity.[38] (In this context we might remember the reviewers who spoke of the "unremittingly sensuous experience of music and fabric, of mud and flesh" and "immediate tactile shock.") In particular, I want to focus on my sensual and sense-making experience of *The Piano*'s first two shots—for they, in fact, generated this essay. Although my body's attention was mobilized and concentrated throughout a film that never ceased to move or touch me carnally, emotionally, and consciously in the most complex ways, these first two shots significantly foregrounded for me the issue at hand (so to speak) of our sensual engagement not only with this film but, to varying degrees, with all others.[39] Most particularly, these inaugural shots also foregrounded the ambiguity and ambivalence of vision's relation to touch as the latter has been evoked here in both its literal and figurative sense.

In visual and figural terms the very first shot we see in *The Piano* seems an unidentifiable image. Carol Jacobs gives us a precise description and gloss of both this shot and the one that follows it:

> Long, uneven shafts of reddish-pink light fan out across the screen, unfocused like a failed and developed color negative of translucent vessels of blood. . . . Yet it is nearly no view at all—an almost blindness, with distance so minimal between eye and object that what we see is an unrecognizable blur. . . . The image we first see is from the other side, from Ada's perspective, her fingers, liquid fingers. . . . We see Ada's fingers pierced through with sunlight, apparently from her perspective, as we hear the voice of her mind, but then, imme-

38. I am certainly not alone in responding this way. See, e.g., Sue Gillett's "Lips and Fingers: Jane Campion's *The Piano*," *Screen* 36, no. 3 (autumn 1995): 277–87. Not only does Gillett open and conclude her unusual essay using first-person voice to "inhabit" protagonist Ada's consciousness, but, as the critic, she also tells us outright, in a description I find resonant with my own experience, "*The Piano* affected me very deeply. I was entranced, moved, dazed. I held my breath. I was reluctant to re-enter the everyday world after the film had finished. *The Piano* shook, disturbed and inhabited me. I felt that my own dreams had taken form, been revealed. . . . These were thick, heavy and exhilarating feelings" (286).

39. Certainly some individual films like *The Piano* and those films grouped by Williams as "body genres" foreground sensual engagement in explicit image and sound content and narrative focus, as well as in a more backgrounded manner—that is, through the kinetic activity and sensory experience of what I have, in *The Address of the Eye,* called the "film's body" (see note 48 below). Other films may show us bodies in sensual engagement but do so in a nonsensual manner, thus distancing us rather than soliciting a similar experience through the "attitude" of their mediating vision. Nonetheless, I would maintain that *all* films engage the sense-making capacity of our bodies, as well as of our minds—albeit according to different ratios (or rationalities).

diately thereafter, we see them from the clear perspective of the onlookers that we are, as they become matter-of-fact-objects to the lens of the camera.[40]

As I watched *The Piano*'s opening moments—in that first shot, before I even knew there was an Ada and before I saw her from *my* side of *her* vision (that is, before I watched *her* rather than her *vision*)—something seemingly extraordinary happened. Despite my "almost blindness," the "unrecognizable blur," and resistance of the image to my eyes, *my fingers knew what I was looking at*—and this *before* the objective reverse shot that followed to put those fingers in their proper place (that is, to put them where they could be seen objectively rather than subjectively "looked through"). What I was seeing was, in fact, from the beginning, *not* an unrecognizable image, however blurred and indeterminate in my vision, however much my eyes could not "make it out." From the first (although I didn't consciously know it until the second shot), my fingers *comprehended* that image, *grasped* it with a nearly imperceptible tingle of attention and anticipation and, offscreen, "felt themselves" as a potentiality in the subjective and fleshy situation figured onscreen. And this *before* I refigured my carnal comprehension into the conscious thought, "Ah, those are fingers I am looking at." Indeed, at first, prior to this conscious recognition, I did not understand those fingers as "those" fingers—that is, at a distance from my own fingers and objective in their "thereness." Rather, those fingers were first known sensually and sensibly as "these" fingers and were located ambiguously both offscreen and on—subjectively "here" as well as objectively "there," "mine" as well as the image's. Thus, although it should have been a surprising revelation given my "almost blindness" to the first shot, the second and objective reverse shot of a woman peering at the world through her outspread fingers really came as no surprise at all. Instead, it seemed a pleasurable culmination and confirmation of what my fingers—and I, reflexively if not yet reflectively—already knew.

Although this experience of my body's prereflective but reflexive comprehension of the seen (and, hence, the scene) is in some respects extraordinary, it is also in most respects hardly exceptional. Indeed, I would argue that this prereflective bodily responsiveness to films is a commonplace. That is, we do not experience any movie only through our eyes. We see and comprehend and feel films with our entire bodily being, informed by the full history and carnal knowledge of our acculturated sensorium. Normatively, however, the easy givenness of things for us to see at the movies and vision's overarching mastery and comprehension of its objects and its historically hierarchical sway over our other senses tend to occlude our aware-

40. Carol Jacobs, "Playing Jane Campion's *Piano:* Politically," *Modern Language Notes* 109, no. 5 (Dec. 1994): 769–70.

ness of our body's other ways of taking up and making meaning of the world—and its representation. Thus, what is extraordinary about the opening shot of *The Piano* is that it offers (at least on first viewing) a relatively rare instance of narrative cinema in which the cultural hegemony of vision is overthrown,[41] an instance in which my eyes did not "see" anything meaningful and experienced an almost blindness at the same time that my tactile sense of being in the world *through my fingers* grasped the image's sense in a way that my forestalled or baffled vision could not.[42]

Jacobs tells us that the initial image is "like a failed and developed color negative of translucent vessels of blood." Nonetheless, one senses that her bodily reference is derived less from *tactile foresight* than from *visual hindsight.* For, in an otherwise admirable essay that focuses on the film's narrative and visual emphasis on touch, Jacobs objectifies the site of touch far too quickly—rushing to reduce vision to *point of view,* hurrying to consider tactility and fingers and hands in terms of their *narrative symbolism.*[43] Thus, she tells us that Ada's fingers in that first shot (as well as throughout) are used symbolically to "render us illiterate" and "unable to read them."[44] Now, if vision were an *isolated* sense and not merely a *discrete* sense possessing its own structure, capacities, and limits, I suppose this might be true. But vision is not isolated from our other senses. Whatever its specific structure, capacities, and sensual discriminations, vision is only one modality of my lived body's access to the world and only one means of making the world of objects and others sensible—that is, meaningful—to me.[45] Vision may be the sense most

41. The normative dominance of vision and its mastery over the world as objective is most frequently overthrown in what is called experimental or avant-garde cinema. In this regard see also Marks's discussion of intercultural cinema in *The Skin of the Film* (see note 23).

42. The phrase "baffled vision" comes from Laura Marks, "Haptic Visuality" (paper presented at the annual meeting of the Society for Cinema Studies, Dallas, TX, Mar. 1996).

43. Here I cannot resist citing a rather derisive comment about Campion's next (and less critically successful) film, *The Portrait of a Lady* (1996), that is explicit about the filmmaker's own symbolic "fixation" on what was once a dynamic representation of touch. *Entertainment Weekly,* Feb. 7, 1997, has a sidebar called "Fixation of the Week" with the subtitle "Jane Campion's Hands-On Approach." The text reads: "Starting with the title sequence, in which *'The Portrait of a Lady'* is emblazoned on a middle finger, the director gives us 60-odd shots of fingers. There's fly flicking, ivory tickling, skin stroking, nose scratching, cigarette holding, and that all-too-*Piano* moment when Nicole Kidman's Isabel Archer says, 'I would have given my little finger.' Oh, Jane, please, not again!" (53).

44. Jacobs, "Playing Jane Campion's *Piano,*" 770.

45. This issue of the discretion of each of the senses and their nonisolated relation to each other is discussed in Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception,* trans. Colin Smith (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962), esp. 223–25. The philosopher writes: "[E]ach organ of sense explores the object in its own way, [and] is the agent of a certain type of synthesis" (223). And he elaborates: "The senses are distinct from each other and distinct from intellection in so far as each one of them brings with it a structure of being which can never be exactly transposed. . . . And we can recognize it without any threat to the unity of the

privileged in the culture and the cinema, with hearing a close second; nonetheless, I do not leave my capacity to touch or to smell or to taste at the door, nor, once in the theater, do I devote these senses only to my popcorn.

Thus I would argue that my experience of *The Piano* was a heightened instance of our common sensuous experience of the movies: the way we are in some carnal modality able to touch and be touched by the substance and texture of images; to feel a visual atmosphere envelop us; to experience weight, suffocation, and the need for air; to take flight in kinetic exhilaration and freedom even as we are relatively bound to our theater seats; to be knocked backward by a sound; to sometimes even smell and taste the world we see on the screen. Although, perhaps, smell and taste are less called on than touch to inform our comprehension of the images we see, I still remember the "visual aroma" of my experience of *Black Narcissus* (Michael Powell and Emeric Pressberger, 1946), the film itself named after a perfume, or the pork-noodle taste of portions of *Tampopo* (Juzo Itami, 1986). (And why should we be surprised at this when the very power of advertising cologne and food rests heavily on transmodal cooperation and translation within and across the sensorium?) Furthermore, as I engaged these films, I did not "think" a translation of my sense of sight into smell or taste; rather I experienced it *without a thought*. Elena del Río describes the phenomenological structure of this experience: "As the image becomes translated into a bodily response, body and image no longer function as discrete units, but as surfaces in contact, engaged in a constant activity of reciprocal re-alignment and inflection."[46]

In this regard we might wish to think again about processes of identification in the film experience, relating them not to our secondary engagement with and recognition of either "subject positions" or characters but rather to our primary engagement (and the film's) with the sense and sensibility of materiality itself. We, ourselves, are subjective matter: our lived bodies sensually relate to "things" that "matter" on the screen and find them sensible in a primary, prepersonal, and global way that grounds those later secondary identifications that are more discrete and localized. Certainly, my experience of the opening subjective shot of *The Piano* provides evidence of this prepersonal and globally located bodily comprehension, but such ambient and carnal identification with material subjectivity also occurs when, for example, I "objectively" watch Baines—under the piano and Ada's skirts—reach out and touch Ada's flesh through a hole in her black woolen stock-

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senses. For the senses communicate with each other. . . . [T]he experience of the separate 'senses' is gained only when one assumes a highly particularized attitude, and this cannot be of any assistance to the analysis of direct consciousness" (225). Subsequent references will be cited in the text.

46. del Río, "Body as Foundation," 101.

ing.[47] Looking at this objective image, like the reviewer cited earlier, I also felt an "immediate tactile shock when flesh first touches flesh in close-up." Yet precisely *whose* flesh I felt was ambiguous and vague—and emergent from a phenomenological experience structured on ambivalence and diffusion. That is, I had a carnal interest and investment in being *both* "here" *and* "there," in being able *both* to sense *and* to be sensible, to be *both* the subject *and* the object of tactile desire. At the moment when Baines touches Ada's skin through her stocking, suddenly my skin is both mine and not my own: that is, the "immediate tactile shock" opens me to the general erotic mattering and diffusion of my flesh, and I feel not only my "own" body but also Baines's body, Ada's body, and what I have elsewhere called the "film's body."[48] Thus, even confronted with an "objective" shot, my fingers know and understand the subjective meanings of this "seen" and this viewing situation, and they grasp textural and textual meaning everywhere—not only in the touching but also in the touched. Objectivity and subjectivity lose their presumed clarity. Which is to say, in this viewing situation (and to varying degrees in every viewing situation), "to situate subjectivity in the lived body jeopardizes dualistic metaphysics altogether. There remains no basis for preserving the mutual exclusivity of the categories subject and object, inner and outer, I and world."[49]

Again, I want to emphasize that I am not speaking metaphorically of touching and being touched at and by the movies but "in some sense" quite literally of our capacity to feel the world we see and hear onscreen and of the cinema's capacity to "touch" and "move" us offscreen. As philosopher Elizabeth Grosz puts it: "Things solicit the flesh just as the flesh beckons to and as an object for things. Perception is the flesh's reversibility, the flesh touching, seeing, perceiving itself, one fold (provisionally) catching the other in its own self-embrace."[50] Experiencing a movie, not ever merely "seeing" it,

47. Although only discussed generally rather than elaborated as a specific phenomenological structure of cinematic engagement, Marks uses the phrase "ambient identification" in her "Haptic Visuality" to suggest an identification with the image that is not located in a single subject position or self-displacements in narrative characters.

48. I use the phrase the "film's body" very precisely in *The Address of the Eye* to designate the material existence of the film as functionally embodied (and thus differentiated in existence from the filmmaker and spectator). The "film's body" is not visible in the film except for its intentional agency and diacritical motion. It is not anthropomorphic, but it is also not reducible to the cinematic apparatus (in the same way that we are not reducible to our material physiognomy); it is discovered and located only reflexively as a quasi-subjective and embodied "eye" that has a discrete—if ordinarily prepersonal and anonymous—existence.

49. Iris Marion Young, "Pregnant Embodiment: Subjectivity and Alienation," in *Throwing like a Girl and Other Essays in Feminist Philosophy and Social Theory* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 161.

50. Elizabeth Grosz, "Merleau-Ponty and Irigaray in the Flesh," in "Sense and Sensuousness: Merleau-Ponty," special issue, *Thesis Eleven* 36 (1993): 46.

my lived body enacts this reversibility in perception and subverts the very notion of *onscreen* and *offscreen* as mutually exclusive sites or subject positions. Indeed, much of the "pleasure of the text" emerges from this carnal subversion of fixed subject positions, from the body as a "third" term that both exceeds and yet is within discrete representation; thus, as Barthes has shown us, "it would be wrong . . . to imagine a rigid distinction between the body inside and the body outside the text, because the subversive force of the body is partly in its capacity to function both figuratively and literally."[51] All the bodies in the film experience—those onscreen and offscreen (and possibly the screen itself)—are potentially subversive bodies. They have the capacity to function both figuratively and literally. They are pervasive and diffusely situated in the film experience. Yet these bodies are also materially circumscribed and can be specifically located, each arguably becoming the "grounding body" of sense and meaning since each exists in a dynamic figure-ground relation of reversibility with the others. Furthermore, these bodies also subvert their own fixity from within, commingling flesh and consciousness, reversing the human and technological sensorium, so that meaning, and where it is made, does not have a discrete origin in either spectators' bodies or cinematic representation but emerges in their conjunction.

We might name this subversive body in the film experience the *cinesthetic subject*—a neologism that derives not only from *cinema* but also from two scientific terms that designate particular structures and conditions of the human sensorium: *synaesthesia* and *coenaesthesia*. Both of these structures and conditions foreground the complexity and richness of the more general bodily experience that grounds our particular experience of cinema, and both also point to ways in which the cinema uses our dominant senses of vision and hearing to speak comprehensibly to our other senses.

In strict medical discourse, psychoneurologist Richard Cytowic notes that synaesthesia is defined as an "*involuntary experience* in which the stimulation of one sense cause[s] a perception in another."[52] Synaesthetes regularly, vividly, and automatically perceive sound as color or shapes as tastes. One woman explains, "I most often see sound as colors, with a certain sense of pressure on my skin. . . . I am seeing, but not with my eyes, if that makes sense," and, as an example, she says that she experiences her husband's voice

51. Michael Moriarty, *Roland Barthes* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1991), 190.

52. Richard E. Cytowic, M.D., *The Man Who Tasted Shapes: A Bizarre Medical Mystery Offers Revolutionary Insights into Emotions, Reasoning, and Consciousness* (New York: Warner, 1993), 52. Subsequent references will be cited in the text. For more recent works on synaesthesia see John E. Harrison and Simon Baron-Cohen, eds., *Synaesthesia: Classic and Contemporary Readings* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1996); and Kevin T. Dann, *Bright Colors Falsely Seen: Synaesthesia and the Search for Transcendental Knowledge* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998).

and laughter not metaphorically but literally as "a wonderful golden brown, with a flavor of crisp, buttery toast" (118). "Synaesthesia," says Cytowic, "is the most immediate and direct kind of experience. . . . It is sensual and concrete, not some intellectualized concept pregnant with meaning. It emphasizes limbic processes [over higher cortical functions of the brain] which break through to consciousness. It's about feeling and being, something more immediate than analyzing what is happening and talking about it" (176). Nonetheless, this does not mean that synaesthetic experience as "more immediate than analysis" escapes culture—as evident in laughter perceived as the taste of "crisp, buttery toast."

Clinical synaesthesia is uncommon in the general population although, to some degree, a less extreme experience of "cross-modal transfer" among our senses is common enough to have warranted the term's use and the condition's description in ordinary language. Artists have long been interested in synaesthesia (as were the Symbolists and Eisenstein); indeed, quite a number of them also have been synaesthetes (novelist Vladimir Nabokov is but one example). Furthermore, in common usage synaesthesia refers not only to an *involuntary* transfer of feeling among the senses but also to the *volitional* use of metaphors in which terms relating to one kind of sense impression are used to describe a sense impression of other kinds. This move from an involuntary and immediate exchange *within* the sensorium to a conscious and mediated exchange *between* the sensorium and language not only reminds us of the aforementioned "synaesthesia-loving Symbolist movement"[53] but also points to a sensual economy of language dependent on the lived body as simultaneously the fundamental *source* of language, its primary *sign producer,* and its primary *sign.* Thus, in *Metaphors We Live By* linguist George Lakoff and philosopher Mark Johnson argue that figural language emerges and takes its meaning from our physical experience (however disciplined by culture),[54] and Cytowic, working with synaesthetes, concludes that "the coherence of metaphors . . . [is] rooted in concrete experience, which is what gives metaphors their meaning. . . . [M]etaphor is experiential and visceral" (206). This relation between the *literal sensible body* and metaphor as *sensible figure* is central to both our understanding of cinematic intelligibility and of the cinesthetic subject who is moved and touched by going to the movies—and it is an issue to which I will return.

The neologism of the film viewer as a "cinesthetic subject" also draws on another scientific term used to designate a bodily condition: *coenaesthesia.* Neither pathological nor rare, coenaesthesia names the potential and perception of one's whole sensorial being. Thus, the term is used to describe the

53. Diane Ackerman, *A Natural History of the Senses* (New York: Vintage, 1990), 291.

54. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980).

general and open sensual condition of the child at birth. The term also refers to a certain prelogical and nonhierarchical unity of the sensorium that exists as the carnal foundation for the later hierarchical arrangement of the senses achieved through cultural immersion and practice. In this regard, Cytowic notes, it has been demonstrated that young children—not yet fully acculturated to a particularly disciplined organization of the sensorium—experience a greater "horizontalization" of the senses and consequently a greater capacity for cross-modal sensorial exchange than do adults (95–96).[55] In sum, whereas synaesthesia refers to the exchange and translation between and among the senses, coenaesthesia refers to the way in which equally available senses become variously heightened and diminished, the power of history and culture regulating their boundaries as it arranges them into a normative hierarchy.

There are those instances, however, when we do not have to be clinically diagnosed synaesthetes or very young children to challenge those boundaries and transform those hierarchies. The undoing of regulatory borders and orders among the senses can occur in a variety of situations. For example, Elaine Scarry, pointing to our encounters with something extraordinarily beautiful, writes:

> A visual event may reproduce itself in the realm of touch (as when the seen face incites an ache of longing in the hand). . . . This crisscrossing of the senses may happen in any direction. Wittgenstein speaks not only about beautiful visual events prompting motions in the hand but . . . about heard music that later prompts a ghostly sub-anatomical event in his teeth and gums. So, too, an act of touch may reproduce itself as an acoustical event or even an abstract idea, the way whenever Augustine touches something smooth, he begins to think of music and God.[56]

In other instances involuntary cross-modal sensory exchange often becomes foregrounded in conscious experience through perception-altering substances such as drugs. As Merleau-Ponty notes in *Phenomenology of Perception,* "A subject under mescalin finds a piece of iron, strikes the window-sill with it and exclaims: 'This is magic': the trees are growing greener. The barking of a dog is found to attract light in an indescribable way, and is re-echoed in the right foot" (229).

In a critique of objectivist science that well might be applied to objectivist reductions of the film experience, the philosopher goes on to say: "Synaesthetic perception is the rule, and we are unaware of it only because scientific knowledge shifts the centre of gravity of experience, so that we have

55. See also Ackerman, *Natural History,* 289.

56. Elaine Scarry, *On Beauty and Being Just* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 4.

unlearned how to see, hear, and generally speaking, feel, in order to deduce, from our bodily organization and the world as the physicist conceives it, what are to see, hear and feel" (229). We could add that we are also unaware of synaesthetic perception because it *is* the rule, and we have become so habituated to the constant cross-modal translations of our sensory experience that they are transparent to us except in their most extreme instances. Exemplary here for its ordinary quality is the common experience of those of us who like to cook—and eat—of *tasting* a recipe as we *read* it. This commutative act between the visual comprehension of abstract language and its carnal meaning not only attests to a grounding synaesthesia that enables such translation but also again demonstrates "the subversive force of the body . . . in its capacity to function *both* figuratively *and* literally." My eyes read and comprehend the recipe cognitively, but they are not abstracted from my body, which can—albeit in a transformed and somewhat diffused act of gustatory sense-making—taste the meal. Why, then, is it not possible that we might partake even more intensely of *Babette's Feast* (Gabriel Axel, 1987)? And to what extent are we being quite literal as well as figurative when we describe the meals in *Like Water for Chocolate* (Alfonso Arau, 1994) as "a feast for the eyes"? Here, in a popular review of *Big Night* (Stanley Tucci and Campbell Scott, 1996), Lisa Schwarzbaum makes some apposite discriminations: "The difference between a movie that makes you admire food and one that makes you love food is the difference between a dinner table posed like a still life in Martin Scorsese's *The Age of Innocence* [1993] and a clove of garlic sliced so intently you can practically inhale its ornery perfume in Scorsese's *Goodfellas* [1990]. One engages the eye and the other arouses all five senses."[57]

This is not mere rhetoric. Philosophy aside, recent developments in neuroscience have indicated that "the boundaries between the senses are blurred."[58] Furthermore, a series of experiments has shown not only that the brain's visual cortex is activated when subjects—who are blindfolded—touch objects with their fingers but also that when researchers blocked the subjects' visual cortex, their tactile perception was impaired. Apparently, research has also shown that "the olfactory area of the brain also involves vision," particularly in relation to the perception of color.[59] We are, in fact, all synaesthetes—and thus seeing a movie can also be an experience of touching, tasting, and smelling it.

In sum, the cinesthetic subject names the film viewer (and, for that matter, the filmmaker) who, through an embodied vision in-formed by the

57. Lisa Schwarzbaum, "Four-Star Feast," review of *Big Night,* dir. Campbell Scott and Stanley Tucci, *Entertainment Weekly,* Sep. 20, 1996, 49–50.

58. Lila Guterman, "Do You Smell What I Hear? Neuroscientists Discover Crosstalk among the Senses," *Chronicle of Higher Education,* Dec. 14, 2001, A17.

59. Ibid.

knowledge of the other senses, "makes sense" of what it is to "see" a movie—both "in the flesh" and as it "matters." Merleau-Ponty tells us that the sensible-sentient lived body "is a ready-made system of equivalents and transpositions from one sense to another. The senses translate each other without any need of an interpreter, and they are mutually comprehensible without the intervention of any idea" (235). Thus, the cinesthetic subject both touches and is touched by the screen—able to commute seeing to touching and back again *without a thought* and, through sensual and cross-modal activity, able to experience the movie as both here and there rather than clearly locating the site of cinematic experience as onscreen or offscreen. As a lived body and a film viewer, the cinesthetic subject subverts the prevalent objectification of vision that would reduce sensorial experience at the movies to an impoverished "cinematic sight" or posit anorexic theories of identification that have no flesh on them, that cannot stomach "a feast for the eyes."

In a particularly relevant—and resonant—passage Merleau-Ponty elaborates on the intercommunication of the senses, not only as they provide us access to the rich structure of perceived things but also as they reveal the simultaneity of sensory cooperation and the carnal knowledge it provides us:

> The form of objects is not their geometrical shape: it stands in a certain relation to their specific nature, and appeals to our other senses as well as sight. The form of a fold in linen or cotton shows us the resilience or dryness of the fibre, the coldness or warmth of the material. . . . In the jerk of the twig from which a bird has just flown, we read its flexibility or elasticity. . . . One sees the weight of a block of cast iron which sinks in the sand, the fluidity of water and the viscosity of syrup. (229–30)

(Here, citing this passage, I recall *The Piano* and my own bodily response to the humid heaviness generated by Ada's skirt hem and boots as they are sucked into the viscous mud of the forest, or, later, the drag on my proprioception caused by the weight and volume of her layers of wet skirts and petticoats as she tries to drown herself.)[60]

Continuing this discussion of the cross-modality of the senses, Merleau-Ponty writes: "If, then, taken as incomparable qualities, the 'data of the different senses' belong to so many separate worlds, each one in its particular essence being a manner of modulating the thing, they all communicate through their significant core" (230). That significant core is, of course, the lived body: that field of conscious and sensible material being on which experience is gathered, synopsized, and diffused in a form of prelogical meaning that, even as it is diffused, nonetheless "co-heres." This is because,

60. For discussion of the way clothing (and touch) functions textually and symbolically in *The Piano* see Stella Bruzzi, "Tempestuous Petticoats: Costume and Desire in *The Piano*," *Screen* 36, no. 3 (autumn 1995): 257–66.

the philosopher says, "My body is the fabric into which all objects are woven, and it is, at least in relation to the perceived world, the general instrument of my 'comprehension'" (235). Thus, while the senses each provide discretely structured modes of access to the world, they are always already interactive and "transposable, at least within certain limits, onto each other's domains"—and this because "they are the senses of *one and the same subject, operating simultaneously in a single world.*"[61] We could say, then, that it is the lived body (as both conscious subject and material object) that provides the (pre)logical premises, the foundational grounds, for the cinesthetic subject, who is constituted at the movies as ambiguously located both "here" offscreen and "there" onscreen. Indeed, it is to its grounding in the corporeality of the spectator's consciousness that any theory of cinematic intelligibility must return.

III

Thus we are led back to the question of the specific nature of the relation between the body and cinematic representation, between the literal and the figural. For all my argument about the cross-modal communication of our senses and the synthetic quality of the lived body that comprehends both our sensorium and our capacity for language, it is phenomenologically—and logically—evident that I do not touch the cinema, nor does it touch me in precisely the same way in which I touch or am touched by others and things unmediated by cinema (or other perceptual technologies). However hard I may hold my breath or grasp my theater seat, I don't have precisely the same wild ride watching *Speed* that I would were I actually on that runaway bus. I also don't taste or smell or digest those luscious dishes in *Like Water for Chocolate* (or, for that matter, in my cookbook) in the same way I would if, unmediated by cinema, they were set on the table before me. Where, then, does this leave us at the movies? Or as theorists of the cinema? Are we condemned to speak of our sensual engagement of the cinema as confounding—our material responsiveness to films understood only, as Dyer puts it, "in some still unclear sense 'as if real'"? And Dyer is not alone here: if we return to those popular reviews with which I began, his uncertainty and ambivalence are duplicated, albeit less reflectively. *The Piano*'s "salt air can *almost* be tasted" one reviewer tells us—at the same time he speaks of "*immediate* tactile shock." The reviewer of *Toy Story* says the plastic Tyrannosaurus rex "is so glossy and tactile you feel *as if* you could reach out and stroke its hard, shiny head"—at the same time he says that "the waxy sheen" of toy soldiers "strike[s] *Proustian chords of recognition,*" suggesting a sense memory less reflectively thought

61. Grosz, "Merleau-Ponty and Irigaray," 56n14 (emphasis added).

than reexperienced. This complex ambivalence and confusion about the literal and figural nature of our sensuous engagement with the cinema is wonderfully condensed in a review of *Eat Drink Man Woman* (Ang Lee, 1994), which tells us, "The presentation of food on-screen is, in all senses of the word, delectable."[62] Here, not only is onscreen food "presented" rather than "represented," but it is also experienced as "delectable" *both* literally in "all senses" *and* figurally in all senses of "the word."

In *The Rule of Metaphor* philosopher Paul Ricoeur writes: "If there is a point in our experience where living expression states living existence, it is where our movement up the entropic slope of language encounters the movement by which we come back this side of the distinctions between actuality, action, production, motion" (309). Clearly, these ambivalent articulations of the sensual experience of the lived body in relation to cinematic representation mark just such a point. I want, therefore, to consider the ambivalence and confusion of our sense at the movies of having both a "real" (or literal) sensual experience and an "as-if-real" (or figural) sensual experience. I also want to argue that this ambivalence has a precise phenomenological structure that is grounded in the nonhierarchical *reciprocity* and figure-ground *reversibility* of "having sense" and "making sense"—meaning thus constituted as both a *carnal matter* and a *conscious meaning* that emerge *simultaneously* (if in various ratios) from *the single system of flesh and consciousness that is the lived body.* This is another way of saying that the body and language (whether film language or "natural" language) do not simply oppose or reflect each other. Rather, they more radically *in-form* each other in a fundamentally nonhierarchical and reversible relationship that, in certain circumstances, manifests itself as a vacillating, ambivalent, often ambiguously undifferentiated, and thus "unnameable" or "undecidable" experience.[63]

What, then, might it mean to understand what is meant by "all senses of the word"? Or to describe our sensual engagement in the cinema as "real" and "as if real" *in the same breath*—and, more often than not, *in the same sentence?* Or for me to use such "wordplay" in describing our literal bodies as "matter that means" and our figural representations as "meaning that mat-

62. Leonard Maltin, review of *Eat Drink Man Woman,* dir. Ang Lee, *Cinemania 96,* CD-ROM (Microsoft, 1992–95).

63. I use the term *vacillate* rather than *oscillate* purposefully to distinguish between a rigid sense of alternation and one less binary and regular. On this see James Elkins, *On Pictures and the Words That Fail Them* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998). Quoting the work of Rosalind Krauss on what she calls the *informe,* Elkins writes of this schema: "The *informe* . . . is a 'disturbance . . . in the modality of *alteration,* of ambivalence,' so that there can no longer be a stable distinction between figure and ground, or any pair of 'alternating' opposites. Nothing is secure, and forms and figures vacillate or shimmer rather than oscillate in a regular motion. The *informe* is a principle that works against the concepts of antimony, binarism, opposition, structure, and ultimately, figure itself" (106).

ters"? Highlighted in these articulations—accomplished in and through language—is the very chiasmatic structure of *reversibility* that exists between but also subtends the body and consciousness and the body and representation. Whether perceived as an *ambivalent vacillation between* or an *ambiguous conflation of* the real and the as-if real or the lived body (matter that means) and representation (meaning as matter), this experience of the fundamental reversibility of body and language is deeply felt—and often articulated—in these unnameable and undecidable descriptions that nonetheless express quite clearly the ambiguous and ambivalent point at which "our movement up the entropic slope of language encounters the movement by which we come back this side of the distinctions between actuality, action, production, motion." Thus, the wordplay at work in popular reviews, in Dyer's comments, and in my own phenomenological descriptions is quite precise and empirically based in the structure and sense of embodied experience itself. Indeed, it helps us not only to understand the enormous capacity of language to say what we mean but also to reveal the very structure of our meaningful experience.

The chiasmatic relation in which the subjective sense of embodied experience and the objective sense of representation are perceived as reversibly figure and ground and thus both commensurable and incommensurable may, in fact, be especially heightened and privileged by the medium of cinema. This is because the cinema uses "lived modes" of perceptual and sensory experience (seeing, movement, and hearing the most dominant) as "sign-vehicles" of representation.[64] Using such lived modes, the cinema exists as an ambivalent and ambiguous sensual and perceptual structure. That is, the cinema simultaneously represents experience through dynamic *presentation* (the always verb-driven and ongoing present tense of sensory perception that, through technology, constitutes and enables the film for us and for itself)—and it also presents experience as *representation* (the post hoc fixity of already-perceived and now expressed images that stand as equivalent to noun forms). In this regard, although I have in this chapter emphasized the commensurability of body and representation because dominant theory has so long insisted on their incommensurability, I certainly do not deny the possibility of the latter—particularly in the film experience. Indeed, coming from an alternative perspective, Lesley Stern deals with this incommensurability by privileging the uncanny in—and of—cinema as an experience of disjuncture between the spectator's lived body and cinematic representation:

64. Umberto Eco uses the term *sign-vehicle* as distinguished from sign-content or meaning. This term seems to me more useful than the term *signifier* in reminding us of the active and various material nature of the "stuff" through which content and meaning are actively conveyed. See Umberto Eco, *A Theory of Semiotics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976), 52–54.

> The cinema, while encouraging a certain bodily knowing, also, and in that very process, opens up the recognition of a peculiar kind of non-knowing, a sort of bodily aphasia, a gap which sometimes may register as a sense of dread in the pit of the stomach, or in a soaring, euphoric sensation. . . . Out of these tensions are generated a series of differences, gaps or discontinuities between knowing and feeling that sometimes sharpen into a sense of the uncanny.[65]

Nonetheless, this sense of the uncanny is sufficiently occasional to be marked as a figure against the more necessary and continuous ground of our existence in which knowing and feeling are generally undifferentiated and generally lived as commensurable—this because we are incorporated *systemically* as embodied and conscious subjects who both "have" and "make" sense *simultaneously*. Indeed, it is an undifferentiated experience of sense that grounds and conjoins body and language, feeling and knowledge—their coincidence so ordinary in our experience that their sudden divergence is marked as frustrating or uncanny or, in the extreme, pathological. Emphasizing this intimate conjunction of the lived body and representation, Alphonso Lingis tells us: "My body as the inner sphere where representations are perceptible . . . and my body as an image seen by rebound from the world, are inscribed the one in [the] other. . . . The density of the body is that of 'pre-things,' not yet differentiated into reality and illusion. . . . [The body] is a precinct of signifiers."[66] And Ricoeur, emphasizing the intimate conjunction of representation and the lived body, tells us that language not only designates "its other" but also "itself"—and in so doing, it is not only referential but also radically reflective, bearing within itself "*the knowledge of its being related to being*." Ricoeur continues: "This reflective language allows language to know that it is installed in being. The usual relationship between language and its referent is reversed: language becomes aware of itself in the self-articulation of the being which it is about. Far from locking language up inside itself, this reflective consciousness is the very consciousness of its openness" (304). In that we are both embodied and conscious, in that we both have and make sense, the literal and the figural inform each other—as they inform us. The "matter that means" and the "meaning that matters" emerge in a reciprocal and reversible figure-ground relation that is the lived body *having a sense of the world* and *making sense in the word*. Thus the (figural) phrase "in all senses of the word" resonates with ambiguity and, in its "knowledge of its being related to being," it reflexively suggests its own reversal to the (literal) phrase "in all words of the senses"—and this without a loss of

65. Stern, "I Think, Sebastian," 356–57.

66. Alphonso Lingis, "Bodies That Touch Us," in "Sense and Sensuousness: Merleau-Ponty," special issue, *Thesis Eleven* 36 (1993): 162.

either reference or reflection, even as the focus and direction of the emphasis changes.

Our embodied experience of the movies, then, is an experience of seeing, hearing, touching, moving, tasting, smelling in which our sense of the literal and the figural may sometimes vacillate, may sometimes be perceived in uncanny discontinuity, but most usually configures to make undifferentiated sense and meaning together—albeit in a quite specific way. Although watching *The Piano,* I cannot *fully* touch Ada's leg through her stocking, although the *precise* smells of fresh laundry and the warmth of the linens that I see in *Pretty Baby* (Louis Malle, 1978) remain in some way vague to me, although I cannot taste the *exact* flavors of the pork noodles I see in loving close-up in *Tampopo,* I still do have a partially fulfilled sensory experience of these things that make them both intelligible to and meaningful for me. Thus, even if the intentional objects of my experience at the movies are not wholly realized by me and are grasped in a sensual distribution that would be differently structured were I outside the theater, I nonetheless do have a *real* sensual experience that is not reducible either to the satisfaction of merely two of my senses or to sensual analogies and metaphors constructed only "after the fact" through the cognitive operations of conscious thought. The pressing question is, of course, what kind of "different" sensual fulfillment do we experience at the movies? That is, what is the structure of such fulfillment, and how does it occur so that, in fact, we experience films not merely as a *reduction* of our sensual being but also as an *enhancement* of it?

First of all, in the theater (as elsewhere) my lived body sits in readiness as both a sensual and sense-making potentiality. Focused on the screen, my "postural schema" or intentional comportment takes its shape in mimetic sympathy with (or shrinking recoil from) what I see and hear.[67] If I am engaged by what I see, my intentionality streams toward the world onscreen, marking itself not merely in my conscious attention but always also in my bodily tension: the sometimes flagrant, sometimes subtle, but always dynamic investment, inclination, and arrangement of my material being. However, insofar as I cannot literally touch, smell, or taste the particular figure on the screen that solicits my sensual desire, my body's intentional trajectory, seeking a sensible object to fulfill this sensual solicitation, will *reverse its direction* to locate its partially frustrated sensual grasp on something more literally accessible. That more literally accessible sensual object is *my own subjectively felt lived body.* Thus, "on the rebound" from the screen—and without

67. On relevant issues of mimesis see Shaviro, *The Cinematic Body,* 52–53; and Michael Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses* (New York: Routledge, 1992). Taussig, in particular, understands mimesis as a corporeal activity that does not require the translation of conscious thought to be enacted or understood. On this carnal empathy in relation to bodies and objects onscreen see also Williams, "Film Bodies."

a reflective thought—I will reflexively turn toward my own carnal, sensual, and sensible being to touch myself touching, smell myself smelling, taste myself tasting, and, in sum, sense my own sensuality.[68]

Certainly, this feeling and the sense I have of sensing at the movies is in some ways *reduced* in comparison with direct sensual experience—this because of my only partially fulfilled sensual grasp of my cinematic object of desire. But just as certainly, in other ways, the sense I have of sensing when I watch a film is also *enhanced* in comparison with much direct sensual experience—this because my only partially fulfilled sensual grasp of the original cinematic object is completed not in the realization of that object but through my own body, where my sensual grasp is reflexively doubled since, in this rebound from the screen, I have become not only the toucher but also the touched. (This sensual enhancement in which the body reflexively reflects—without a thought—on its own sensuality emerges in the most intense of direct engagements in which we "feel ourselves feeling": a fantastic dish or incredible glass of wine in which we reflectively taste ourselves tasting, great sex in which we lose ourselves in feeling ourselves feel.)

In the film experience, because our consciousness is not directed toward our own bodies but toward the film's world, we are caught up without a thought (because our thoughts are "elsewhere") in this vacillating and reversible sensual structure that *both* differentiates *and* connects the sense of my literal body to the sense of the figurative bodies and objects I see on the screen. Within this structure my experience of my sensorium becomes *heightened* and *intensified* at the same time that it is perceived as *general* and *diffuse*. That is, insofar as my lived body senses *itself* in the film experience, the particular sensible properties of the onscreen figural objects that sensually provoke me (the weight and slightly scratchy feel of a wool dress, the smoothness of a stone, the texture and resilience of another's skin) will be perceived

68. See Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "The Philosopher and His Shadow," in *Signs,* trans. Richard C. McCleary (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 166. Although he is discussing a more consciously reflexive experience of our lived body's capacity to sensually sense itself than our experience at the movies, the philosopher is still helpful to our understanding of the way in which our sensual engagement can be "turned back" on itself to both intensify sensual awareness and diffuse its specific content (a point related to our sense of the film experience to which I will shortly return):

> There is a relation of my body to itself which makes it the *vinculum* of the self and things. When my right hand touches my left, I am aware of it as a "physical thing." But at the same moment, if I wish, an extraordinary event takes place: here is my left hand as well starting to perceive my right. . . . Thus I touch myself touching; my body accomplishes "a sort of reflection." In it, through it, there is not just the unidirectional relationship of the one who perceives to what he perceives. The relationship is reversed, the touched hand becomes the touching hand, and I am obliged to say that *the sense of touch is here diffused into the body*—that body is a "perceiving thing," a "subject-object."

in a somewhat vague and diffuse way. This diffusion of the film object's particular sensual properties, however, does not diminish the sensual intensity of my engagement with them since they are what solicit me and are where my intentional interest invests itself. That is, insofar as I am sensually solicited, provoked by, and consciously located in figural objects that are *elsewhere* (on the screen where my senses partially grasp them), I am *not* focused on my own body's sensual particularity either. On the rebound from my unfulfilled bodily intentions to feel fully the figures onscreen but still consciously intending toward them and sensing them partially, my sense of my own literal and particular incorporation will also be general and diffuse—even as it may be quite intense. (The form of "self-touching" I'm discussing here—a form that is consciously "other" directed—is thus different in structure from forms of conscious self-touching in which both one's body and one's consciousness are self-directed; in this latter kind of reflexivity the doubled intention and attention toward oneself often become so highly reflective that despite one's autoerotic goals, it can undo carnal pleasure.)[69] In sum, my gesture of specifically intending toward the screen to rebound diffusely on myself ultimately "opens up" my body to a sensuality that is both literal and figural.

Watching *The Piano,* for example, my skin's desire to touch streams toward the screen to rebound back on itself and then forward to the screen again and again. In the process my skin becomes literally and intensely sensitized to the texture and tactility I see figured on the screen, but it is neither the particularity of Ada's taffetas and woolens nor the particularity of the silk blouse I'm actually wearing that I feel on its surface. On the one hand (so much for figures of speech!), I cannot fully touch taffeta and wool in this scenario although I can cross-modally grasp their texture and weight diffusely. On the other hand, although I do have the capacity to fully—and literally—feel the specific texture and weight of the silk blouse I am wearing, my tactile desire is located elsewhere in the onscreen taffeta and wool, and so, intending elsewhere, I feel the specificity of the silk on my skin only partially and diffusely. What is more, in this unthought carnal movement of an ongoing streaming toward and turning back of tactile desire, my sense of touch—"rebounding" from its only partial fulfillment on and by the screen to its only partial fulfillment in and by my own body—is *intensified.* My skin becomes extremely, if generally, sensitized. Indeed, this reflexive and reflective exchange between and diffusion of my "sense" of touch in both the lit-

69. Here we might think of states in which reflexively sensing ourselves cry, we stop; how it is nearly impossible to tickle oneself; how self-consciousness about our laughing results in it becoming forced. It also helps us understand how sexual desire is other-directed during masturbation and needs an object that is not only oneself so as to avoid a reflexivity that is so doubled as to cause conscious reflection on sexual desire itself.

eral and the figural has opened me to *all* these fabrics and their textures—indeed, has made the literal touch of even a specific fabric on my skin an overwhelmingly *general* and intensely *extensive* mode of being.

It bears emphasizing again that the bodily reflexivity I am foregrounding here is not consciously reflective. Indeed, in most sensual experiences at the movies the cinesthetic subject does not *think* his or her own literal body (or clothing) and is not, as a result, rudely thrust offscreen back into his or her seat in response to a perceived discontinuity with the figural bodies and textures onscreen. Rather, the cinesthetic subject feels his or her literal body as only one side of *an irreducible and dynamic relational structure of reversibility and reciprocity* that has as its other side the figural objects of bodily provocation on the screen. This relational structure can, of course, be refused or broken—and, indeed, it often is when the sensual experience becomes too intense or unpleasurable. However, leaving the theater because one has become literally sickened or covering one's eyes is hardly ever the outcome of a thought. It is a reflexive, protective action that attests to the literal body's reciprocal and reversible relation to the figures on the screen, to its sense of actual investment in a dense, albeit also diffuse, experience that is carnally as well as consciously meaningful—an experience, as Lingis notes, that is "not yet differentiated into reality and illusion." Watching *The Piano,* for example, because I might feel it too intensely on both my body and hers (both bodies, to a degree, "mine"), I could not literally bear to see Stewart figurally chop off Ada's finger with an ax. I therefore not only cringed in my seat but also covered my eyes with fingers that again foresaw—in urgency rather than thought—the impending violation.

IV

Let us recall Lingis's formulation: "My body as the inner sphere where representations are perceptible, . . . and my body as an image seen by rebound from the world, are inscribed the one in the other." Both body and language or figure pervade and inform each other in a reversible and reflexive intentional structure. Thus, having considered the literal and carnal aspects of the figural phrase "in all senses of the word" (figural because we "know" words don't really have senses), we need also to consider the figural and representational aspects of the phrase in the literality of its reversal to "in all words of the senses" (literal because we "know" words do, indeed, describe the senses).

Indeed, my argument here has emphasized that the sensual language most people (and even a few film theorists) use to describe their cinematic experience is not necessarily or solely metaphoric—hence my earlier mention of Lakoff and Johnson and Cytowic on the corporeal bases of meta-

phor.[70] Here, however, I want to go further and suggest that "all words of the senses" used so often to describe the film experience are *not* metaphoric. First of all, traditional rhetoric describes metaphors as emerging from a *hierarchical relation* between a primary and secondary context of language use: a word is understood as literal insofar as it is used in a normatively habituated context. The same word becomes understood as figural or metaphoric only when it is used in an unusually extended sense and transferred beyond its normal context (indeed, the word *metaphor* means "carried beyond").[71] If, however, we acknowledge that it is the lived body that provides a normative ground and context for experience and that it operates, from the first, as a synaesthetic system in which the senses cooperate and one sense is commutable to and understood as reciprocal and reversible with the others, then we cannot argue that—in the undifferentiated sensuality of the film experience—there exists the clear contextual hierarchy necessary to the structure and function of metaphor. That is, once we understand that vision is informed by and informs our other senses in a dynamic structure that is not necessarily or always sensually hierarchical, it is no longer metaphorical to say that we "touch" a film or that we are "touched" by it. Touch is no longer a metaphorical stretch in the film experience, no longer carried beyond its normal context and its literal meaning. Indeed, we could say that it is only in afterthought that our sensual descriptions of the movies seem metaphorical. Our received knowledge tells us that film is primarily a visual and aural medium; it thus "naturally" follows that its appeal to those senses other than sight and hearing are understood as figural rather than literal. By now, however, I hope to have shown that such habituated knowledge is reductive and does not accurately describe our actual sensory experience at the movies. When we watch a film, all our senses are mobilized, and often, depending on the particular solicitations of a given film or filmic moment, our naturalized sensory hierarchy and habitual sensual economy are altered and rearranged. In that experience the literal and figural reciprocate and reverse themselves as "sense"—primary and secondary contexts confused, hierarchy and thus the grounds of metaphor undermined if not completely undone.

Writing about the relationship between vision and touch in painting, art historian Richard Shiff tells us: "To speak of reciprocity is to eliminate the possibility of setting subjective (or deviant) metaphorical elements against objective (or normative) literal ones. *Within the flux of reciprocity either every-*

70. See also sociologist Jack Katz, *How Emotions Work* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), who points out in relation to metaphorical description: "It is the subject's experience and not the analysis that introduces the element of metaphor in the first place" (299).

71. Hubert G. Alexander, *The Language and Logic of Philosophy* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1967), 92.

thing becomes metaphorically figured or everything has the reality effect of the literal."[72] Evoking previous discussion here of the nature of the "as if real," particularly as its "not realness" is challenged by the scare quotes that always surround it, Shiff suggests that within this flux of reciprocity "[o]ne could refer . . . to a figurative literalness"—a usage that "would eliminate the need for quotation marks, which do no more or less than counter the normalizing of literality by adding a level of distance or figuration." Shiff then asks, "What kind of representation or linguistic construction conflates the literal and figural in such a manner?" (158). The answer is not metaphor but *catachresis,* "sometimes called *false and improper metaphor.*" Catachresis, Shiff tells us, "mediates and conflates the metaphoric and the literal" and is used "when no proper, or literal, term is available" (150). Thus, borrowing a term from one context to name something in another, we speak of the "arm" of a chair or the "head" of a pin for want of anything else we might appropriately call it.[73] Catachresis is differentiated from proper metaphor insofar as it forces us to confront and name a *gap* in language or, as Ricoeur puts it, the "failure of proper words, and the need, the necessity to supplement their deficiency and failure" (63). Thus, when we avail ourselves of catachresis, we are on Ricoeur's "entropic slope of language"—seeking some adequate linguistic expression of a real experience. Furthermore, insofar as the catachretic term substitutes a *body part* (the "head" of a pin, the "arm" of a chair), we are emphatically at the point where our movement up the "entropic slope of language encounters the movement by which we come back this side of the distinction between actuality, action, production, motion," that point "where living

72. Richard Shiff, "Cézanne's Physicality: The Politics of Touch," in *The Language of Art History,* ed. Salim Kemal and Ivan Gaskell (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 150 (emphasis added). Subsequent references will be cited in the text.

73. J. David Sapir, "The Anatomy of Metaphor," in *The Social Use of Metaphor: Essays on the Anthropology of Rhetoric,* ed. J. David Sapir and J. Christopher Crocker (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1977), elaborates:

> There is a great variety of expressions often used as examples of metaphor that are nevertheless hardly ever felt as tropes. One common set uses body parts to represent the parts of material objects: "leg of a table," "head of a pin," "eye of a needle," "foot of a mountain," etc. Their representation is that of a replacement metaphor; thus for the "head of a pin" we have *pin* as the topic and *head* as the discontinuous term. Unlike a true metaphor, however, it lacks the continuous term, although one might be provided by circumlocution: "spherical or blunt circular and protruding end of a pin," where the supplied phrase is simply an enumeration of the common features linking X with *head.* In most discourses the lack of a continuous term impedes us from sensing the juxtaposition of separate domains essential to a metaphor. We cannot easily answer the question "if it is not the head (of a pin), then what is it?" With a true metaphor we can. . . . William Empson prefers to call these expressions "transfers" and Max Black, along with most rhetoricians, considers them as types of *catachresis* which Black defines as "the use of a word in some new sense in order to remedy a gap in the vocabulary" (8).

expression states living existence." This kind of (dare I say) "throwing up one's hands" and naming something inadequately for want of a sufficient word involves "the *forced* extension of the meaning of words" rather than the linguistic play that is metaphor. In linguistic play we *voluntarily* use one term to substitute for another to create a variety of figural meanings. Thus, for Ricoeur, because its use is not voluntary, catachresis is not only a false metaphor but also should be excluded "from the field of figures" (53). Indeed, Ricoeur sees catachresis as "ultimately an *extension of denomination*" and thus "a phenomenon of language" rather than—as is metaphor—a phenomenon of "discourse" (180). Catachresis, then, functions neither as metaphor nor as figure. Rather, as Shiff writes, "Catachresis accomplishes precisely this: it applies a figurative sense as a literal one, while yet retaining the look or feel of figurality" (158). This is also precisely what cinema accomplishes through its modes of representation—and it is also precisely how the spectator's lived body reciprocates so as to make matter meaningful and meaning matter. Thus, as Shiff tells us, "The reciprocity or shifting produced by catachresis undermines any polarization of subject and object, self and other, deviation and norm, touch and vision" (150). Indeed, "touch and vision are caught in reciprocal figuration: it is touch that is figuring vision, and vision that is figuring touch" (158).

Reciprocating the figurally literal representations of bodies and worldly things in the cinema, the spectator's lived body in the film experience engages in a form of *sensual catachresis*. That is, it fills in the gap in its sensual grasp of the figural world onscreen by turning back on itself to reciprocally (albeit not sufficiently) "flesh it out" into literal physicalized sense. It is this same reciprocal relationship between the figural and literal that emerges also in our linguistic descriptions of the film experience. That is, trying to describe this complex reciprocity of body and representation, our phrases turn back on themselves to convey the figural sense of that experience as literally physicalized. For want of any more appropriate or sufficient way to name and convey the structure and meaning of the sensual experience of watching a film, reviewers reflexively turn back on language and apply its sensual figurations *literally*—both as a way to "flesh out" the image and as a way to adequate reflective description with the sense of actual cinematic experience. It is not particularly strange, then, that in both our film experience and our linguistic attempts to describe it, some ambivalent sense of metaphor and figurality remains—and we are caught up in a catachretic structure of sense-making that, because of its only partial sensual fulfillments but enhanced and intensified reciprocities in filling its own insufficiency, is experienced and described as *both* real *and* "as if" real.

Ricoeur discusses this tension between metaphorical and literal meaning

in relation to Wittgenstein's distinction between "seeing" and "seeing as," a formulation that parallels Dyer's "real" and "as if real":

> The "seeing as" is . . . half thought and half experience. . . . "[S]eeing as" proffers the missing link in the chain of explanation. "Seeing as" is the sensible aspect of poetic language. . . . Now, a theory of fusion of sense and the sensible . . . appears to be incompatible with the . . . tension between metaphorical and literal meaning. On the other hand, once it is re-interpreted on the basis of "seeing as," the theory of fusion is perfectly compatible with interaction and tension theory. "Seeing X *as* Y" encompasses "X is *not* Y." . . . The borders of meaning are transgressed but not abolished. . . . "[S]eeing as" designates the *non-verbal* mediation of the metaphorical statement. With this acknowledgment, semantics finds its frontier; and, in so doing, it accomplishes its task. . . . If semantics meets its limit here, a phenomenology of imagination . . . could perhaps take over. (212–14)

A phenomenology of the cinesthetic subject having and making sense of the movies reveals to us the chiasmatic function of the lived body as both carnal and conscious, sensible and sentient—and how it is we can apprehend the sense of the screen both figurally and literally. That is, the lived body transparently provides the primary chiasmatic premises that connect and unite the senses as both carnally and consciously meaningful and also allow for their secondary differentiated meanings, one carnal and the other conscious. Correlatively, a phenomenology of the expression of this lived "fusion" and differentiation in the film experience reveals to us—through the catachretic articulations of language—the reversible and vacillating structure of the lived body's both unified and differentiated experience of cinematic sense. Ambivalently subtending fusion and difference, ambivalent in its structure and seemingly ambiguous in meaning, catachresis not only points to the "gap" between the figures of language and literal lived-body experience but also reversibly, chiasmatically, "bridges" and "fills" it. As Ricoeur writes above, catachresis "designates the *non-verbal mediation* of the metaphorical statement." In the film experience the nonverbal mediation of catachresis is achieved literally by the spectator's lived body in *sensual* relation to the film's *sensible* figuration. Indeed, as Ricoeur concludes: "Half thought, half experience, 'seeing as' is the intuitive relationship that holds sense and image together."[74]

In the film experience, on the side of the cinesthetic subject experiencing a given film sensually, this reciprocity and chiasmatic (con)fusion of the literal and figural occurs in the lived body both having sense and making sense; and, on the side of reflective sensual description, this reciprocity and

74. Ricoeur, *Rule of Metaphor,* 213.

catachretic (con)fusion of the literal and figural occurs in language—whether cinematic or linguistic. Thus, the film experience—on both sides of the screen—mobilizes, confuses, reflectively differentiates, yet experientially unites lived bodies and language, and foregrounds the reciprocity and reversibility of sensible matter and sensual meaning. Our fingers, our skin and nose and lips and tongue and stomach and all the other parts of us understand what we see in the film experience. As cinesthetic subjects, then, we possess an embodied intelligence that opens our eyes far beyond their discrete capacity for vision, opens the film far beyond its visible containment by the screen, and opens language to a reflective knowledge of its carnal origins and limits. This is what, without a thought, my fingers know at the movies.