

Introduction

Eye Contact

Film is the greatest teacher because it teaches not only through the brain but through the whole body.

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TACTILITY

Concentrate! Your attention is on your hands. Your hands are becoming tense. You are concentrating your will, your great desire to succeed, on your hands. . . . Look at your fingers. They're becoming tense. . . . I'll remove the tension now and you will speak clearly and effortlessly. You will speak loudly and clearly all your life. One. Two. Three!

Thus begins Andrey Tarkovsky's *Mirror* (1975). This brief preamble, in which a hypnotherapist attempts to cure a young man's stutter, immediately announces its concern with vision and touch and its insistence on the meaningful, material link between mind and body. The therapist touches the boy repeatedly, pushing, pulling, and palpating his temples, shoulders, back, face, and hands. By drawing the tension from his mind into his hands, she says, she can remove that physical tension and, with it, the mental tension that stifles his speech. The premise of this therapy session is that any stark division between mind and body is a false one, and that there is instead a fluid connection between the two.

Although her focus is resolutely on the hands (his and hers), the tension moves throughout the boy's entire body. He stumbles and is drawn toward the therapist or pushed away, and the muscles of his face tighten as she holds him in this hypnotic trance. The hands, then, are only the beginning, the contact point, of a mutual engagement of body and mind that extends deep into the body, involving the muscles and tendons as surely as the fingers.

Throughout Tarkovsky's film, emotion is inextricably bound up with motion and materiality. Love, desire, loss, nostalgia, and joy are perceived and expressed in fundamentally tactile ways, not only by characters but also, even more profoundly, by film and viewer. These embodied, emotional experiences

may begin in and on the surface of the body, but they come to involve the entire body and to register as movement, comportment, tension, internal rhythms, and a full-bodied engagement with the materiality of the world.

This book follows that deepening of touch from surface to depth, from haptic touch to total immersion. Its argument is that touch is not just skin-deep but is experienced at the body's surface, in its depths, and everywhere in between. The book begins at the surface and moves on through three regions—skin, musculature, viscera—to end with a kind of immersion and inspiration that traverses all three at once. I hope to show that touch is a “style of being” shared by both film and viewer, and that particular structures of human touch correspond to particular structures of the cinematic experience. In other words, the forms of tactility that filmgoers experience at the movies are shared—in complex, not always comfortable ways—by both spectator and film.

Exploring cinema's tactility thus opens up the possibility of cinema as an *intimate* experience and of our relationship with cinema as a *close* connection, rather than as a distant experience of observation, which the notion of cinema as a purely visual medium presumes. To say that we are touched by cinema indicates that it has significance for us, that it comes close to us, and that it literally occupies our sphere. We *share* things with it: texture, spatial orientation, comportment, rhythm, and vitality.

Touch need not be linked explicitly to a single organ such as the skin but is enacted and felt throughout the body, for “the body is borne towards tactile experience by all its surfaces and all its organs simultaneously, and carries with it a certain typical structure of the tactile ‘world.’”¹ As a material mode of perception and expression, then, cinematic tactility occurs not only at the skin or the screen, but traverses all the organs of the spectator's body and the film's body. As J. J. Gibson wrote, “vision is kinaesthetic in that it registers movements of the body just as much as does the muscle-joint-skin system and the inner-ear system.”² Tension, balance, energy, inertia, languor, velocity, rhythm—this book considers all of these to be “tactile,” though none manifests itself solely, or even primarily, at the surface of the body.

In this book, “touch” comes to mean not simply contact, but rather a profound manner of being, a mode through which the body—human or cinematic—presents and expresses itself to the world and through which it perceives that same world as sensible. Maurice Merleau-Ponty's approach to the general meaningfulness of matter, summarized here by Glen Mazis, bears on my description of tactility as a “style” or mode of being in and at the world:

A “manner of being” emerges as giving identity to a thing and the person(s) perceived in the “coition, so to speak, of our body with

things." This "manner of being" indicates what Merleau-Ponty calls "style." . . . It emerges as the thread running through all the properties of the thing and in my interaction with the thing. . . . The glasslike feel, brittleness, tinkling sound [of a drinking glass], and such have an accent, an atmosphere, that also encompasses the over-glass-sliding-movement-of-the-finger or the bent-shooting-out-finger-striking-tinkling-evoking-flick movement of the hand. Both perceived and perceiver are joined in that style of intercourse from which their identity emerges.³

Tactility is a mode of perception and expression wherein all parts of the body commit themselves to, or are drawn into, a relationship with the world that is at once a mutual and intimate relation of contact. The intimate and close contact between touching and touched, as well as the relationship of mutual, reciprocal significance that exists between them, are universal structures. Within those general structures, tactility contains the possibility for an infinite variety of particular themes or patterns: caressing, striking, startling, pummeling, grasping, embracing, pushing, pulling, palpation, immersion, and inspiration, for example, are all tactile behaviors.

Cinematic tactility, then, is a general attitude toward the cinema that the human body enacts in particular ways: haptically, at the tender surface of the body; kinaesthetically and muscularly, in the middle dimension of muscles, tendons, and bones that reach toward and through cinematic space; and viscerally, in the murky recesses of the body, where heart, lungs, pulsing fluids, and firing synapses receive, respond to, and reenact the rhythms of cinema. The film's body also adopts toward the world a tactile attitude of intimacy and reciprocity that is played out across its nonhuman body: haptically, at the screen's surface, with the caress of shimmering nitrate and the scratch of dust and fiber on celluloid; kinaesthetically, through the contours of on- and off-screen space and of the bodies, both human and mechanical, that inhabit or escape those spaces; and viscerally, with the film's rush through a projector's gate and the "breathing" of lenses. The following three chapters seek out the resonance and reverberation of tactile patterns between the human body and the cinema at these corporeal locales.

In recent years, there has been a new appreciation for the sensual dimension of the cinematic experience, as many media scholars have turned their attention toward embodied spectatorship, examining the historical and theoretical implications of the viewer's (and in some cases, the cinema's) particular forms of embodiment. My own study builds on this trend in media studies toward what Paul Stoller calls "sensuous scholarship."⁴ It also draws considerably on the work of Vivian Sobchack, whose *The Address of the Eye* set out a framework for a distinctly existential phenomenological

approach to the cinema, one that grounds its description of the reversible and reciprocal correlation between film and viewer in the notion that consciousness is materially embodied.⁵ Sobchack reminds us that

as film theorists, we are not exempt from sensual being at the movies—nor, let's 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"—and even at the movies it is "in-formed" and given meaning by our other sensory means of access to the world: our capacity not only to hear, but also to touch, to smell, to taste, and always to proprioceptively feel our dimension and movement in the world. In sum, the film experience is meaningful *not to the side of our bodies but because of our bodies*.⁶

In this book, I seek to elicit and examine the specifically tactile structures of embodied cinematic perception and expression that are taken up by on-screen bodies (human or otherwise), filmgoers, and films themselves. Close analysis of sound and image will reveal certain patterns of texture, space, and rhythm enacted by films and viewers. Attention to these embodied structures and patterns allows for a sensually formed (and informed) understanding of the ways that meaning and significance emerge in and are articulated through the fleshy, muscular, and visceral engagement that occurs between films' and viewer's bodies.

THE FILM'S BODY

Mirror's opening scene, with the stuttering boy and therapist, is at once intellectually, emotionally, and physically discomfiting. This is in part because it is unclear exactly how the episode "fits" into the film as a whole. It begins abruptly, before the credits have started, and provides no narrative context or character identification; indeed, over the course of the film, we never return to either of these characters. However, more pressing, quite literally, is the question of how we viewers "fit" into the scene: we are drawn too close *not* to be involved somehow in the intensely charged encounter between the therapist and the boy, but the terms of our involvement are ambiguous, even contradictory. The scene's unsettling and unpredictable use of camera movement and framing establishes an intimate, tactile, and complex contact between three types of bodies—the characters', the viewer's, and the film's—that continues throughout the entire film.

The scene begins in color, as a young boy in a well-appointed apartment switches on a black-and-white television set. As he steps back to watch the



1. *Mirror* (Andrey Tarkovsky, U.S.S.R., 1975)

screen, the camera tracks with him, closing in on the back of his head. The movement leads us to expect that we might soon share his point of view, but the film cuts abruptly to a much closer framing of the scene; this shot eliminates the television set and screen altogether. We have no time to prepare for that cut, nor do we find a safe landing spot once we are plunged into the scene. The first shot we get of the scene is a close-up of a woman (the therapist) that is both too close and too quick for us to get our bearings: the camera barely glances over her face before panning swiftly in the direction of her gaze, moving rightward across a blank wall to land on a similarly tight close-up of an adolescent boy.

Facing the camera, the boy answers a series of questions asked by the therapist, who remains off screen for the time being. After this brief interview, the therapist announces, "We'll begin now." The boy turns right to face her, his movement setting into motion the camera's own slow pan to the left. The camera pans away from his body, across the expanse of gray wall behind them, and comes to rest on the woman, who urges the boy to "look right into my eyes." She touches her fingertip to the bridge of her nose, then positions it a hand's width from her face. As she begins to move it slowly, almost imperceptibly, toward her face (and to our left), the camera pans slowly in the opposite direction. Only when

the panning camera meets up with the boy do we discover that he is also moving, or being moved: he tilts forward in the opposite direction, very slowly, drawn toward her just as the camera is drawn away. She seems to exert a kinetic force on both the boy's body and the camera, albeit in opposite directions.

Something in this set of movements is physically and perceptually disorienting. At the moment that camera and boy cross paths, it is difficult to tell the difference between his movement to the left and the camera's movement to the right. This is not unlike the experience of being seated on an eastbound train, looking out the window at a westbound train and, when one train lurches into motion, being unable to tell who is actually moving, "us" or "them."

Moments later, the therapist stands and turns the boy away from her, placing her hand on the back of his head. "Concentrate on my hand," she says. "My hand is pulling you back." At this point, the boy is not yet moving: the therapist is merely setting up the scenario, indicating what he *will* do. But the camera (and with it, the viewer) is already doing it: the camera zooms out slowly to a long shot of both figures, as she speaks and the boy stands still. Occasionally, too, the camera will move in ways not clearly motivated by the therapist's instructions, zooming slowly in and out seemingly driven by its own intention and attention, without instruction from her. The camera's behavior throughout this scene, and the odd relationship between it and our viewing bodies, again begs the question, "who's moving?" or even "who's being moved?"

The unsettling nature of the scene derives from the fact that our experience of it is intimate, tactile, and kinetic in multiple directions at once. Tarkovsky's framing and camera movements place us too close to the characters for us not to be intimately involved in the scene, and yet it refuses us an "anchor" and a single direction that our intention and attention might take. Extreme close-ups of the boy and the therapist draw us toward them, but we're at the same time moved by the camera along its own path of attention, which is quite often away from the characters. We are immersed and involved in the space and time of the events of the film, but without a single body with whom to align ourselves unequivocally—be it a character in the scene or a neutral camera—we are moved, both emotionally and physically, in two directions at once. We are rendered conceptually and physically *ambi-valent*, drawn in two opposing directions at once.

If the scene makes us uneasy, then, it is because it refuses any easy identification, either physical or emotional, between viewers and characters. It does this by drawing attention to another body in the equation, which exists

in every cinematic experience but is rarely so visible and explicitly announced: here, the film's body is a palpable, if elusive, presence to be reckoned with. As the scene unfolds through a series of slow, seemingly unmotivated but intensely felt camera movements and cuts, the film's body makes its presence known. As the therapist speaks of tension, kinetic forces, bodily movements, and flowing speech, the film's body itself enacts these, leaving us to wonder whether she is addressing the boy or the film itself.

Earlier I had called this opening scene "discomforting," but "discomfitting" may be more apt: with its root in the Latin *conficere*, "put together," that term more accurately describes the way we and the characters are simultaneously aligned with one another and pulled apart. The easy separation we might ordinarily assume between human and cinematic bodies is impossible here. Seated in the theater but invested bodily in the actions on (and of) the screen, we must ask, "where are we in this picture?" The film complicates the notion of character identification and "objective" observation by calling into question, without entirely collapsing, the boundaries between "here" and "there," and between "us" (the viewers), "them" (the characters), and "it" (the film).

This sensual and structural ambivalence provoked Gilles Deleuze to call the film a "turning crystal."⁷ As he writes, "the crystal-image, or crystalline description, has two definite sides which are not to be confused. For the confusion of the real and the imaginary is a simple error of fact, and does not affect their discernibility: the confusion is produced solely 'in someone's head.' But indiscernibility constitutes an objective illusion; it does not suppress the distinction between the two sides, but makes it unattributable, each side taking the other's role in a relation which we must describe as reciprocal presupposition, or reversibility."⁸

I will draw again upon *Mirror*, in this chapter and in the conclusion, using it in precisely this way, as a "turning crystal" that allows me to reflect upon and think through the reversibility at play between films and viewers and between various dimensions of the body, both cinematic and human.

David MacDougall neatly outlines a range of ways in which films have been said to "be" or "be like" bodies, symbolically speaking, then asks, "to whose body do they correspond? Is it the body of the subject? Is it the body of the spectator or the filmmaker? Or is it an 'open' body capable of receiving all of these?"⁹ My usage of the term throughout this project will be neither symbolic nor completely "open," neither a Vertovian *kino-eye* nor a Deleuzian body without organs, for example. For me, the "film's body" is a concrete but distinctly cinematic lived-body, neither equated to nor

encompassing the viewer's or filmmaker's body, but engaged with both of these even as it takes up its own intentional projects in the world.

In *The Address of the Eye*, Sobchack mobilizes Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of perception to demonstrate that a film does indeed live an embodied existence in the world, and that, like the other whom we recognize through the gaze and through our mutual inhabitation of a certain mode of material being, the film's body shares with us certain modes of visual perception.¹⁰ She argues that both film and viewer are simultaneously and mutually engaged in the intentional acts of perception and expression, although the means by which they *enact* these will of course be different. "Watching a film," she writes, "we can see the seeing as well as the seen, hear the hearing as well as the heard, and feel the movement as well as see the moved."¹¹

She explains that a film is at the same time a *subject of* experience and an *object for* experience, an active participant of both perception and expression. As Sobchack puts it in her own reading of Merleau-Ponty, to perceive expression is to experience the world's significance, and to express perception is to signify. To exist in a lived-body is always to do both, and so the film is, essentially, perception and expression in motion. There need not be reflection about these correlated acts; indeed, reflection is an after-the-fact distancing from the whole of this dynamic behavior. In experience, perception and expression are in a dynamic relation of reversibility (i.e., expression is the visible gesture of perception), so that a lived-body is always in the act of perceiving expression *and* expressing perception.¹² That perpetual behavior constitutes the lived-body's active and mobile existence in the world among others. Gabrielle Hezekiah summarizes the unique role of the film's body this way: "It is presented to us as a technologically mediated consciousness of experience and to itself as an immediate experience of consciousness."¹³

As a lived-body in and for the world, then, "the cinema uses *modes of embodied existence* (seeing, hearing, physical and reflective movement) as the vehicle, the 'stuff,' the substance of its language."¹⁴ Thus, both film and viewer might engage in the act of looking closely, exhibiting doubt, or becoming enthralled, dizzy, or agitated, but each would enact those behaviors in a different way, because the "technologies" that enable those behaviors (e.g., the camera and the cornea, the zoom lens and the inner ear) are different, biological in the case of the viewer and mechanical in the case of the film. Viewer and film share certain ways of being in, seeing, and grasping the world, despite their vast differences as human and machine, one blood and tissue, the other light and celluloid.

Perhaps the most striking evidence of the film's body in Tarkovsky's opening scene is the shadow of the boom microphone, visible on the upper-left corner of the wall behind the stuttering boy in the latter half of the scene. That shadow is a visible sign of the film's body performing its own attention and attitude as actively as actors and viewers do theirs. As the therapist tells the boy to concentrate on his hands and speaks of the tension he carries in his fingers, the microphone's shadow quivers slightly: the film's body, in this moment, *perceives* (by listening and attending to) the characters' tense concentration and *expresses* tense concentration in its own embodied movements, in a visible quiver. As the boom microphone "stands at attention," the film's body both perceives and expresses tension and attention in tactile, muscular, and distinctly cinematic terms.

Sobchack is careful to point out that the film's body is not identical to the human body, filmmaker's or viewer's, and that it is not an anthropomorphic concept. Instead, her description of the film's body is built upon Merleau-Ponty's notion of a primordial subjectivity that acts in embodied, material, and irreducible relation with the world. The film's body that Sobchack posits is a lived-body (but not a human one) capable of the perception of expression and the expression of perception: the film certainly perceives, experiences, is immersed in, and has a vantage point on the world, and without a doubt the film signifies, or otherwise there would be nothing at all for us to see, hear, feel, or interpret.

It is important to differentiate between the "film's body" and the body of the boom operator or the cameraperson, for example. Although those individuals are certainly responsible for the quivering shadow and the unpredictable zooms, the quiver and the zooms taken together are behaviors of the film's own lived body, which is unified in time and space and which performs its own perception (of the world) and expression (to the world) in embodied ways that are muscular, tactile, and distinctly cinematic.

The film is more than a representation of the filmmaker's vision—or the boom operator's or cameraperson's—because what we see when we "see a film" is not merely a record and product of what the filmmaker saw at a given moment in a given space: that would be a photograph. Nor is it identical to the human filmmaker's own bodily forms of vision, because a filmmaker doesn't see the world in close-up in quite the same way that the film does, for example.¹⁵ What we do see is *the film seeing*: we see its own (if humanly enabled) process of perception and expression unfolding in space and time.¹⁶

In that same way, the film is also always more than a representation constituted by the spectator. Our experience of the film is not the film's

experience of itself. The camera perceives and expresses through dolly tracks, tripod, wide-angle lens, and so forth; viewers do so by means of posture, muscle tension, visual concentration, facial expressions, and human gestures. As the film pulls us toward and away from the scene of therapist and stuttering boy through tracking and zooming, for example, the viewer may move with or against the film's movements by squinting at the screen to counteract the shift in focal point, or leaning forward to resist the pull away from the increasingly distant figures. The point, though, is that all these bodies—characters', actors', viewers', and film's—are entities whose attitudes and intentions are expressed by embodied behavior.

Neither can the film be equated with or reduced to its physical body, any more than the viewer can. The technological body (or enabling mechanism) of the film is no more a *visible* mediator in the experience of a film than are the producers, directors, and camera operators who initiate it. The film's body is the mechanism through which its intentional projects in the world take shape. That enabling body is generally transparent: we see the perception and expression that it makes possible, but not the body itself. The film's subjectivity can be, and often is, foregrounded by particular films or filmmakers, but the fact of a film's subjectivity does not depend upon the film's being self-consciously aware of it or remarking upon it, although that possibility certainly exists.¹⁷

I'd like to point out a provocative difference between the microphone's shadow and unpredictable zooms in Tarkovsky's film and, for example, the sudden appearance of film catching fire in a projector's gate in *Persona* (Ingmar Bergman, 1966), or *Fight Club's* momentary glimpse of sprocket holes and projectionist's cues (David Fincher, 1999). In those cases, the films self-consciously shift our attention (and their own) directly toward one aspect of their mechanical bodies that enables their perception and expression: the celluloid. In contrast, *Mirror's* quivering shadow of the boom and its wandering zooms are *indirect* signs of the microphone and the camera lens, which partly constitute the film's body. The zoom is not the camera; it is the film's embodied expression of an attitude (perhaps discomfort or distraction) that is enabled by the camera. The quivering shadow is not the boom itself, but a visible enactment of the film's tension and attention that is made possible by the boom and visible by the camera, optical printer, and projector. Even in these moments of reflexivity, the film refuses to let us see its mirror image: we get only a shadow, a movement caught in the corner of our eye.

The film's body is a ghostly entity in Tarkovsky's film, more explicitly announced than in most narrative cinema but more elusive than in other

blatantly reflexive films. Perhaps it would be better to say, though, that it behaves in ghostly ways, eluding our direct gaze, slipping through our fingers, skirting past us as we approach it. Just as characters slip from the edges of frames, as the past slips into the present, and as memory slips into dream, the film's body slips from our grasp. In this way, a scene that seems to have no direct narrative relevance to the film turns out to foreshadow the precise embodied, tactile patterns by which the film will evoke and express its poignant theme of lost time, lost places, and lost love forever out of reach.

Phenomenological description seeks to identify the underlying structures of the phenomenon at hand by studying its intimate entailment with the intentional act of perception to which the phenomenon is present. When we approach a film experience this way, it is helpful to recall Mikel Dufrenne's point, that "aesthetic objects . . . call for a certain attitude and use on the part of the body—witness again the cathedral that regulates the step and gait, the painting that guides the eye, that poem that disciplines the voice."¹⁸ In these examples, the artwork's ways of being in the world resonate meaningfully with its beholder's ways of moving, looking, listening, and speaking.

I've suggested that, in a way that is thematically relevant, *Mirror* draws us toward but also pulls us away from on-screen characters, places, and events, leaving us always off balance, neither "here" nor "there." By shifting the focus to the embodied behaviors of the film itself—its ambivalent tracking and zooming, its tense quivering, its aimless wandering—I hope it becomes clear that this compelling, complex structure describes not only our relationship to characters and events but also, more profoundly, our embodied relationship to the viewing/viewed body of the film itself.

In his book *Sculpting in Time*, Tarkovsky recalls viewer responses to *Mirror*, which ranged from hostile bafflement to awed reverence. He quotes a letter written by a young woman attempting to explain just how and why the film affects her so profoundly. "There's another kind of language," she writes,

another form of communication: by means of feelings, and images. That is the contact that stops people being separated from each other, that brings down barriers. Will, feeling, emotion—these remove obstacles from between people who otherwise stand on opposite sides of a mirror, on opposite sides of a door. . . . The frames of the screen move out, and the world which used to be partitioned off comes into us, becomes something real. . . . And this doesn't happen through little Andrey, it's Tarkovsky himself addressing the audience directly, as they sit on *the other side of the screen*.¹⁹

Of course, Tarkovsky does not address the audience directly, but *through* the film's body. Otherwise, though, the letter-writer's description of the intimate engagement between viewers and images is quite apt. She speaks of communication "by means of feelings and images" as a contact that occurs between images and viewers. Chapter 1 will investigate the skin-to-skin contact between viewers and moving images and seek to understand exactly how it "brings down barriers." Her description of how "the frames of the screen move out, and the world which used to be partitioned off comes into us" suggests that the encounter has something to do with body contours and "frames" (both human and cinematic), something I discuss at length in chapter 2.

For now, I'd like to consider the letter-writer's notion that the film somehow addresses viewers "directly, as they sit *on the other side* of the screen." Her description astutely points to the way that cinematic perception is both direct and distant at the same time. For existential phenomenology, perception always involves the coexistence of distance and proximity. As Hezekiah writes, "For Merleau-Ponty, vision is enabled by a certain *distance* between the seer and the thing. This distance constitutes the medium of access to vision."²⁰

Even when the distance and difference between film's body and viewer's body registers less strongly than in the experience of *Mirror*, the film's body is not easily or completely aligned with the viewer's body, despite the fact that the two take up similar structures of perception and expression. The relationship involves a mimetic relationship that is immediate, tangible, and yet tenuous; the possibility of tension, slippage, and resistance inheres.

Tarkovsky's admiring fan alternately describes the meeting place of film and viewer as a mirror, a screen, and a door. No one metaphor sticks, perhaps for two reasons. First, the "stuff" of the contact between film and viewer is too permeable and flexible to be described in quite these rigid terms. Second, what keeps us separate from the film isn't a "thing" at all, but our bodies' own surfaces and contours. Merleau-Ponty's "flesh" may be a better metaphor: the material contact between viewer and viewed is less a hard edge or a solid barrier placed between us—a mirror, a door—than a liminal space in which film and viewer can emerge as co-constituted, individualized but related, embodied entities.²¹

Watching a film, we are certainly not *in* the film, but we are not entirely *outside* it, either. We exist and move and feel in that space of contact where our surfaces mingle and our musculatures entangle. Jennifer Deger refers to this contact of image, imaged, and viewer as the "transformative space of betweenness."²² This sense of fleshy, muscular, visceral contact seriously

undermines the rigidity of the opposition between viewer and film, inviting us to think of them as intimately related but not identical, caught up in a relationship of intersubjectivity and co-constitution, rather than as subject and object positioned on opposite sides of the screen. Thus the cinematic experience involves what Anne Rutherford describes as a “movement or displacement of the self” that

is not conceived as a physical movement across a physical space: no empirical measurement can discern it, nor can an optical model define it. This is a movement interior to both the gritty materiality of the body's location in space, and simultaneously to the carnality of an idea or experience. It is a movement of the entire embodied being towards a corporeal appropriation of or immersion in a space, an experience, a moment. It is a movement away from the self, yes, but away from the self conceived as the subject, in so far as this concept is a cognitive or disembodied one—a movement out of the constraints of the definable, knowable—a groping towards a connection, a link-up with the carnality of the idea, the affect of the body, the sensible resonances of experience.²³

MOVING PICTURES

Our first glimpse of the field that surrounds the childhood home of Tarkovsky's narrator, to which he and the film will retreat in dreams and recollections, begins with a long shot of a fence that stretches horizontally across the frame. Seated serenely on the fence with her back to the camera is a woman, soon to be identified as the mother of the narrator, smoking a cigarette as she looks off into the distance across a green field. A man approaches in the distance. The camera tracks toward the fence and the woman, its slow, steady approach echoing her leisurely movements. Just as she lowers her cigarette, the forward-tracking camera performs a barely perceptible reverse zoom. Both movements, forward and reverse, continue for a brief few seconds, as the camera passes the woman and she disappears from the edge of the frame. Precisely at the same instant, the man in the field passes behind a distant tree, and we are momentarily set adrift, left for a brief instant without *anybody* whose solid presence might allow us to get our bearings. Finally, the camera comes to a stop, and all we can do is wait for the still-distant visitor to arrive. The slowness of the forward tracking motion and the slightness of the reverse zoom yield an effect that, though subtle, is dizzying.

Whereas the camera approaches the field in that first shot, it retreats from the field in the film's final shot, in which an old woman fetches the children home from the field. As they walk amidst the tall grasses, the

camera takes up a position in the adjacent forest. The human figures move in and out of our vision as they pass behind trees, as the male figure had done in the opening shot. As the woman and children walk toward the left of the screen, the camera tracks leftward alongside them, and backward, away from them, at the same time, pulling us further into the forest. Suddenly, and without provocation or narrative motivation, there's a brief but dramatic forward zoom. The trees seem to expand in front of us, bringing us perceptually closer even as we move physically further away from the human figures. Stranger still is the backward zoom that follows almost immediately on the heels of the forward zoom, this one much slower than the first. The camera continues to track gracefully backward throughout both these shifts in focal length. The effect is not only dizzying, but also poignant. It is as if the film's body acts on behalf of the (now silent) narrator, reaching forward even as it is pulled back, in a brief and unsuccessful attempt to grasp the human figures as they pass into the distance.

Describing the actress Margarita Terekhova's simultaneous "capacity at once to enchant and repel" in her dual roles as the narrator's mother and wife, Tarkovsky wrote, "It is not possible to catch the moment at which the positive goes over into its opposite, or when the negative starts moving towards the positive. Infinity is germane, inherent in the very structure of the image."²⁴ He may as well be describing these strangely compelling gestures of the camera: they move very slowly in opposite directions and, for a few moments, dwell in a space in between, in the utter absence of a human frame of reference. Like the actress's performance, these images are impossible to dismember, because each one is all things at once.

The in-betweenness elicited by that shift in camera distance and focal length allows a fleeting glimpse at a something beneath, beyond, and within any one figure—field, fence, man, woman, child, camera, spectator—caught up in it. It may be a "presencing" of Being in a Heideggerian sense, or an instance of Deleuzian "becoming," or an evocation of what Merleau-Ponty calls the "intertwining." It is ontologically provocative and at the same time thematically relevant; indeed, it suggests that those two things are inseparable. By drawing us at once toward and away from the field and the figures passing through it, the dolly-zooms make "past" and "home"—the hallmarks of Tarkovsky's film—familiar and strange, elusive and palpably present at the same time. These two extraordinarily delicate gestures of the camera express through embodied motion the film's own ambivalent, emotional, and existential relationship to passing time, as well as to things and bodies in the world, including its viewer and itself. Indeed, the same pattern marks the film as a whole: it experiences and expresses emotion

through motion, drawing us temporally, spatially, viscerally, and emotionally back and forth, toward and away, so that we exist in a state of tension between here and there, now and then, presence and absence, body and spirit, memory and dream, childhood and adulthood. These brief scenes are but one example of the way meaning and affect emerge in the fleshy, visceral encounter between films and viewers.

In *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Sara Ahmed emphasizes the way “emotions shape the very surface of bodies, which take shape through the repetition of actions over time, as well as through orientations towards and away from others.”²⁵ Thus, love is lived as specific inflections of a general “towardness,” hate as an “againstness,” fear as an “aboutness,” disgust as recoil away from something or someone. The figures of the loved, the hated, the feared, and the disgusting do not in themselves possess qualities that make them the objects of these emotions; instead, they are shaped in and by these very movements toward, against, about, and away from them.

In her discussion of the discourse of multiculturalism, for example, Ahmed describes a humanist fantasy of universal love that is articulated as a hope for a distinct pattern and direction of movement: “*If only we got closer we would be as one.*” “Getting closer” is desired as a mutual movement of one toward the other, such that “at one level, love comes into being as a form of reciprocity; the lover wants to be loved back, wants their love returned.” I share Ahmed’s interest in “affective economies, where feelings do not reside in subjects or objects, but are produced as effects of circulation,”²⁶ and throughout this book I consider meaning and emotion not as residing in films or viewers, but as emerging in the intimate, tactile encounter between them. That encounter is a conduit of sorts, manifested as specific gestures and styles of behavior (film’s and viewer’s). I’ll consider the active, embodied encounter between film and viewer as a means of grasping the emotional, intellectual, and thematic aspects of any given cinematic experience.

So, for example, just as the film’s narrator attempts to negotiate the distance created by the passing of time, the film itself also repeatedly expresses, enacts, and elicits that simultaneous longing for an intimate, mutual towardness and return in its own gesture of reaching out toward something—a there, a then—even as it pulls itself away. The perplexing, incongruous but simultaneous movements of the film toward and away from its object are one of many iterations of a gesture akin to a child’s game of *fort-da*, which Sigmund Freud described as a means of coping with loss by reassuring oneself that what is lost (the mother or mother-substitute) can be brought back.²⁷ In its immediate gestures (tracking motions

that oppose zooms, for example) as well as in its larger narrative shift between a remembered past and the lived present, *the film* pushes away the past, brings it forward, and sends it away again. These ambivalent trajectories may be the film's own performance of love as a desire for a "getting closer" that is impossible; in this way, the film enacts anxieties and desires associated with time's passing.

Mirror thus moves and touches us emotionally precisely because it does so physically. Even before we can invest ourselves in the story of a man haunted by memories of his childhood home, peacetime, and a mother's love, we are *pulled* into a style of engagement with the film that palpably, viscerally produces those feelings—love, loss, desire, regret—as a simultaneous tug in opposite directions. Ultimately we feel and understand love and loss more profoundly by being immersed *in* and inspired by them than merely by thinking *about* them. The final chapter will discuss this inspiration in the double sense—being inspired creatively or emotionally as well as being in-spired, breathed in—as a way of thinking about film's and viewer's mutual embeddedness in something larger, something that moves beyond, beneath, and through both of them.

By emphasizing not bodies themselves but the contact between them, Ahmed understands emotions as emerging in and through that encounter.²⁸ They are not preexisting emotions brought into *contact*; rather, they are brought into *being* and given shape by the contact itself. It is through forms of movement, alignment, approach and retreat, for example, that the character of "loved," "feared," and "hated" objects is produced. Love isn't something a lover "has" for a loved one, but something that emerges in the encounter between lover and loved, just as "fear" isn't "in" someone fearful, but emerges in the contact between two entities, in which they take up a certain temporal and physical orientation toward one another. One cannot even say, as Ahmed shows, that this contact is between a "fearful" person and a "fearsome" object, because the object of love, hate, fear, and other emotions does not preexist the encounter as "loveable," "hateful," or "fearsome," nor even as an "object" separate from the "subject" who feels love, hatred, or fear toward the other. Instead, "emotions create the very effect of the surfaces and boundaries that allow us to distinguish an inside and an outside in the first place. So emotions are not simply something 'I' or 'we' have. Rather, it is through emotions, or how we respond to objects and others, that surfaces and boundaries are made: the 'I' and the 'we' are shaped by, and even take the shape of, contact with others."²⁹

Ahmed's approach incorporates a phenomenological emphasis on intentionality, which is the dynamic and directional organization of consciousness

such that it always irreducibly refers to and is correlated with something. Consciousness is always consciousness *of* something, and phenomenology insists that to describe any phenomenon it is necessary to describe *both* the objective and subjective aspects of this intentional structure; that is, we must attend not only to the object itself, but also to the conscious act through which we perceive it. Rather than examining just the structure of the object, or just the subjective act of our own looking or touching, we examine both together, with the understanding that they cannot exist separately. In this way, existential phenomenology recognizes “the role of subjective experience in co-constituting objects in the world.”³⁰

Existential phenomenology shifted the focus from Edmund Husserl’s “lived-world” and the structures of consciousness toward embodied experience. Merleau-Ponty, in particular, emphasized the notion of the lived body and its reciprocal, intimate relationship with the world: “Our own body is in the world as the heart is in the organism: it keeps the visible spectacle constantly alive, it breathes life into it and sustains it inwardly, and with it forms a system.”³¹ He held that it is the body that mediates between the interior world of consciousness and the exterior world of objects. The body is always at once a subject engaged in conscious projects of the mind and an object in the material world. Merleau-Ponty centered his philosophy around the body as the means by which we are inserted into the world and the means by which we relate to it and make sense of it. This is not to say that the lived body *constitutes* the world around it, or that it is acted upon by a world that is always already determined. Rather, the body is “meaning-giving” and “sense-bestowing”; that is, it makes possible my relations with the world.³² It is the context (historical and cultural, as well as material) within which I inhabit, interpret, and interact with a world that exists before “I” come into it, but to which my own and others’ presence gives meaning.

In *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty maintained that all perception is embodied perception, so that vision does not and cannot occur apart from the body that enables it, but is necessarily informed by the fleshy, corporeal, and historically specific structures of the way we live in and through our bodies and in and through the world. The reciprocal relationship between viewer and viewed is a hallmark of his philosophy: “Like Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty suggests that objects of vision are co-constituted by subject and object. . . . But for Merleau-Ponty, the object responds.”³³ Existential phenomenology and its method thus not only invite us to attend to the material, lived world in order to better understand the lived structures of the emotional, the social, and the historical, but also

give us a means of embodied analysis that respects the co-constitutive, reciprocal relationship between the perceiver and the perceived.

Merleau-Ponty's description of perception insists on its pre-personal nature. Though it is the means by which I express my subjectivity, the phenomenal body precedes my knowledge of myself *as* a subject. In his view, "perception is not something I do or something that happens to me—because the I is the product of reflection and perception is older, more primordial than reflection."³⁴ Perception takes place in the world of phenomena; we are immersed in it as we are immersed in materiality. It does not require a will and desire on our part as subjects to put it into play.

In seeking to describe the reciprocal relationship between subjects and objects in the world, Merleau-Ponty wrote extensively on the relationship between artist or viewer and the work of art. Perhaps his most famous example is the painter whose "gestures, the paths which he alone can trace and which will be revelations to others . . . seem to emanate from the things themselves. . . . Inevitably the roles between him and the visible are reversed," so that the painter feels himself to be seen by the trees he paints.³⁵ Philosopher Mikel Dufrenne applies these ideas of reversibility and intertwining to the interaction between perceiver and artwork, as well, where he also places the emphasis on prereflective experience. He writes that "objects do not exist primarily for my thought but for my body," and argues for the notion of a "corporeal intellection" that enables the perceiver to make sense of the work of art. "What I experience as expressed by the aesthetic object possesses a meaning and can be identified," he argues, "because of the echo it awakens within me—which . . . is not the work of an act of reflection."³⁶ Moreover, Dufrenne insists that artwork and spectator not be considered as isolated entities, but as mutually invested in one another, so that to understand the work of art, it is necessary to study the aesthetic experience constituted by the intimate relationship between its subject and object.

In his only essay on cinema, Merleau-Ponty wrote, "for the movies as for modern psychology dizziness, pleasure, grief, love and hate are ways of behaving."³⁷ These feelings and sensations are not perceived, expressed, and made meaningful first through mindful reflection, but through the viewer's and film's embodied enactment of them. A phenomenological approach to the cinematic experience, then, focuses neither solely on the formal or narrative features of the film itself, nor solely on the spectator's psychic identification with characters or cognitive interpretation of the film. Instead, phenomenological film analysis approaches the film and the viewer as acting together, correlationally, along an axis that would itself constitute the object of study.

In *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty articulated the notion of reversibility in distinctly tactile terms by using the image of a person's one hand touching the other. When I touch one hand with the other, he explained, each hand plays the role of both the touching and the touched, but my experience of touching and being touched is not quite simultaneous.³⁸ *Either* I feel one hand touching the other as an object, *or* I feel subjectively one hand being touched by the other, but I can't feel both at once. The two hands are never identical, nor is my experience of them confused. Instead, they each vacillate between the role of touching and touched, just as the self and other alternate between the role of seer and seen. This structure of reversibility does not collapse the distinction between the two hands or between self and other, nor is it simultaneous. It involves a shifting of attention and intentionality from one aspect of the encounter to another.

"I am always on the same side of my body," Merleau-Ponty wrote, even as I recognize that there is an other perceiving me from another perspective with the same organs of vision that I have, or that one hand is touching the other in the same manner but from a different place.³⁹ The relationship is one of difference within identity; there is always slippage that prevents the two entities from eliding or collapsing their material boundaries altogether, even as both touching and touched, seer and seen, take up the same modes of being and each are immersed in the same constant flux of materiality. For Merleau-Ponty this double sensation provoked by one hand touching the other is the archetype for the subject/object relations in the world: irreducible one to the other, but embedded in a constantly mutual experience, constituted of the same "stuff."

This book holds that the film and viewer are in such a relationship of reversibility and that we inhabit and enact embodied structures—tactile structures—that are not the same, but intimately related and reversible. We do not "lose ourselves" in the film, so much as we exist—emerge, really—in the contact between our body and the film's body. It is not a matter simply of identifying with the characters on screen, or with the body of the director or camera operator, for example. Rather, we are in a relationship of intimate, tactile, reversible contact with the film's body—a complex relationship that is marked as often by tension as by alignment, by repulsion as often as by attraction. We are embedded in a constantly mutual experience with the film, so that the cinematic experience is the experience of being both "in" our bodies and "in" the liminal space created by that contact.

In his unfinished final work, *The Visible and the Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty offered the terms "intertwining," "chiasm," and "flesh" to refer to the

primordial materiality in which we and all phenomenal objects are immersed in that relation of reversibility. "Flesh" is a precondition of difference, value, and subjectivity. Though "flesh" is not literally human flesh, Merleau-Ponty's choice of this term indicates the crucial role of materiality and touch in the overall concept of reversibility and pre-personal intersubjectivity toward which he had been moving from his earliest projects.⁴⁰

In the chiasm, subjects and objects mingle but never lose their identity. M. C. Dillon sums up the notion of a tactile reversibility within the chiasm:

Merleau-Ponty claims that there is a continuity between my body and the things surrounding me in the world I inhabit. Indeed, I can touch worldly things precisely because I am myself a worldly thing. If I were an incorporeal being, I could not palpate the things around me or interrogate the world with my hands. My hand "takes its place among the things it touches, is in a sense one of them, opens finally upon a tangible thing of which it is a part." For me to touch the table, I must be touched by the table. Yet, there is also a difference: touching the table and being touched by it is not the same as touching my right hand with my left and feeling with my right hand the pressure of my left. Reversibility obtains in both cases, but I cannot experience the table touching me in the same way the hand touched can take up the role of touching. The plain fact of the matter is that the table is neither part of my body nor sentient in the way my body is.⁴¹

I take very seriously the tactile model with which Merleau-Ponty's career began and ended, and that model informs my description of the relation between the spectator's lived-body and that of the film. They are in a relation of reversibility and sensual connection that exists somewhere between that of hand-touching-table and right-hand-touching-left-hand. That relationship is nowhere more evident or deeply felt than in the experience of *Mirror's* unusual opening scene, which highlights the fully embodied reversibility between film and viewer and provides ample material for a clearer understanding of the film's body as an entity intimately engaged with the bodies of characters, filmmakers, and viewers.

TOUCH AND GO

In order to explore this tactile, reversible relationship, *The Tactile Eye* identifies and describes very specific styles or modes of tactility experienced by filmgoers and shared by films, however tenuously or problematically. Each of the three central chapters illustrates a few of these modes of tactile behavior as they occur within three locales of the spectator's body and the film itself: the skin, the musculature, and the viscera. (These terms are not

used here metaphorically, but are stretched beyond their literal, biological meanings to encompass their more phenomenological significance.) These categories helpfully lead us through a complicated terrain, but their boundaries are pliable and permeable. Sensations and behaviors constantly bleed, vibrate, dissolve, cut, infect, meander, or muscle their way from one dimension into the next.

Chapter 1 ("The Skin") discusses caressing, flaying, pricking or piercing, shock, texture and temperature, some of which may involve what Laura Marks has termed the "haptic" qualities of cinematic perception: "Haptic looking tends to rest on the surface of its object rather than to plunge into depth, not to distinguish form so much as to discern texture."⁴² Chapter 2 ("The Musculature") addresses things like gripping, grasping, holding, clenching, leaning forward in one's seat or pulling away, and being physically startled by the images. I'm interested here in what David MacDougall refers to as a "'prehensile' vision" called for by the cinema, which Michael Taussig describes as a kind of "sentient contact that is another mode of seeing, the gaze *grasping* where the touch falters."⁴³ Chapter 3 ("The Viscera") describes a tension between continuity and discontinuity in the internal rhythms of film's and viewer's bodies (heartbeat, breathing, and film's motion through the projector's gate, for example). Following Walter Benjamin's metaphor of the cinema and the surgeon's hand, Taussig eloquently describes the phenomenon that is the focus of this section: "the new form of vision, of tactile knowing, is like the surgeon's hand cutting into and entering the body of reality to palpate the palpitating masses enclosed therein. . . . It comes to share in those turbulent internal rhythms of surging intermittencies and peristaltic unwindings."⁴⁴

Like Tarkovsky's film, Michel Gondry's *The Science of Sleep* (2006) insists on the union between mind and body, and between vision and touch, albeit in a more exuberantly, irreverently playful way. The film's hero is a frustrated artist with a penchant for quirky handmade objects and stop-motion animation. He falls in love with a woman who, though annoyed by his childish approach to romantic relationships, indulges his sense of child's play. Gael García Bernal's lovestruck Stéphane has one particularly provocative speech that encapsulates the question I seek to answer in this book: "I love her because she makes things, with her hands. It's as if her synapses were married directly to her fingers. Like this," he says, staring at his own wagging fingers in amazement, "in this way." This comment aptly describes his artistically inclined love interest, but it could as easily be applied to the stuttering boy in Tarkovsky's opening sequence, or even to the hypnotist who cures him.

More important, though, this line is perfectly suited as a description of the spectator, not just of these two films but also of moving pictures in general. I will argue that synapses and fingers *are* married—as are mind and body, and vision and touch more generally—in the experience of cinema. I also argue that to think, to speak, to feel, to love, to perceive the world and to express one's perception of that world are not solely cognitive or emotional acts taken up by viewers and films, but always already *embodied* ones that are enabled, inflected, and shaped by an intimate, tactile engagement with and orientation toward others (things, bodies, objects, subjects) in the world. If these things are married in the experience of cinema, my challenge is to describe exactly *how so*. This book winds its way through the skin, the musculature, and the viscera, hoping to show that vision is married to touch “like *this*, in *this* way.”