The Exorbitant Lightness of Bodies, or How to Look at Superheroes: Ilinx, Identification, and *Spider-Man*

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The question that animates this essay is, quite simply, what is the relation between bodies in an audience and bodies onscreen?[1] And while I will not arrive at a categorical answer here (how could you?), I am proposing to trace the contours not only of the question but also of one possible set of answers. Obviously, we might think of a whole variegated field of different kinds of responses: desire, disgust, sympathy, empathy, hatred, love, care, indifference. But we might pose this question a bit more broadly. This question, several variations of it, and the whole messy field of possible resonances, intensities, and antimonies that we may or may not have with onscreen bodies have seen two major theoretical articulations in the history of film theory and cinema studies: identification and mimesis.[2] The first of these is *démodé* these days, while the latter is still in fashion. And so, this essay has two main aspirations. The first is to show that an untimely attention to identification really is necessary to properly address problems that have recently seemed more pressing (or at least interesting) to film scholars—to wit, embodiment and affect. The second is to show that thinking with one of these terms entails thinking with the other.

The force and salience of this question arises in the context of recent theorizing about the cinema in terms of embodiment and affect: such theorizing has yet to sufficiently pose the problem of identification in particular. This body of thought frequently makes recourse to some version of identification—for example, in any number of articulations of the confusion between a body in the audience and a body onscreen[3]—but without making it an explicit problem. And so, my aspirations are supported by a more concrete agenda. This agenda is twofold: to articulate identification as an explicit problem for theorizing about the cinema in an idiom consonant with contemporary theories of the cinema that stress embodiment and affect and to show the importance, and indeed the necessity, of such an articulation for embodiment-oriented theorizing about the cinema. In short, we overlook crucial aspects of our embodied encounter with the cinema if we aren't able to grasp identification as a problem.

The case at hand comes in director Sam Raimi's *Spider-Man* films (2002, 2004, and 2007). These films are what I think of as dramas of self-adjustment, a class of films that has seen its most recent and forceful iteration in a cycle of contemporary big-budget Hollywood films whose center of gravity lies in the recent bevy of comic book movies (especially but not only the second installment of the *X-Men* franchise, *X2* [directed by Bryan Singer, 2003]). The drama in these films stems from a situation in which the protagonist's capacity for action exceeds his ability to exert ethical control over this increased field for action. The resolution of the narrative problems of the film invariably takes the form, finally, of the protagonist coinciding with himself. I say "his" and "himself" advisedly here: these are frequently dramas of adolescent masculinity in particular and are almost exclusively about (white straight) men. These dramas of self-adjustment include the films of the *Bourne* franchise (directed by Doug Liman, 2002; directed by Paul Greengrass, 2004 and 2007) and the regrettable *Wanted* (directed Timur Bekmambetov, 2008), the bizarro-world Bond of *Quantum of Solace* (directed by Marc Forster, 2008), and even films such as *Avatar* (directed by James Cameron, 2009) and *How to Train Your Dragon* (directed by Dean DeBlois and Chris Sanders, 2010). The canon of these dramas of self-adjustment is large and a bit fuzzy and more often fun than interesting, but we may find interest in outliers, including *Kick-Ass* (directed by Matthew Vaughn, 2010), *My Life on Ice* (*Ma vraie vie à Rouen,* directed by Olivier Ducastel and Jacques Martineau, 2002), and *Hancock* (directed by Peter Berg, 2008).

In any event, it is not the generic narrative of these films that is of interest here. At both a narrative and a formal level, these films

must dramatize their protagonists' capacities for embodied enaction. And that fact makes them particularly fruitful sites of inquiry for encountering the relation between bodies on- and offscreen as a problem or a blockage. The cinematographic form of these films must accomplish a certain dilation of the diegetic world in which unforeseen—or perhaps just ordinarily impossible—possibilities for action open up. Here I want to emphasize that the narrative work of figuring a protagonist and his drama of self-adjustment is really inseparable from the formal work of manifesting a world onscreen; the dilation or transformation of the diegetic world is required by, and accomplished through, the augmented capacities of the protagonist. The mutual implication of protagonist and world will be decisive here, although this mutual implication will not redound to a narrative/form binary. Rather, this will divide along different lines, which I will shorthand as *affect* and *perception* (although this is a heuristic approximation).[4]

In fact, I will propose that Roger Caillois's well-known distinction in *Man, Play, and Games* between mimesis and ilinx (i.e., imitation and vertigo) as forms of play offers much more precise terms for this division between affect and perception, not only their division but also their relation.[5] In turn, I will align ilinx and mimesis respectively with Christian Metz's famous articulation of primary and secondary cinematic identification in *The Imaginary Signifier*. I have three interrelated reasons for doing so. First, as I have indicated, I am attempting to articulate a sense of identification in the cinema in which it is a productive problem for the contemporary film theoretical idioms of embodiment and affect, as opposed to the dead letter it has become since the putative passing of "grand theory." (There are a few babies in that bathwater.) I will not, however, offer any exegetical nuancing or psychoanalytical casuistry of cinematic identification and its particulars. Rather, I hope to show that by pairing a schematic simplification of Metz's identification with Caillois's types of play, we can arrive at a more accurate and productive understanding of the encounter between viewers, screens, and the bodies on them. Second, my questioning here may seem to swerve, becoming no longer about the relation between bodies on- and offscreen but instead about the relations between bodies and screens more generally. Here I will emphasize not affect but perception, not mimesis but ilinx.[6] However, my claim, and what I take *Spider-Man* to show, is that we will fail to understand our affective, mimetic transit with onscreen bodies if we do not first attend to the fundamental perceptual dynamics of our encounter with screens.

Finally, since my question here really is about the relation between bodies on- and offscreen, I take it that this sense of

identification is not only a problem for films on cinema screens but is also at work in any kind of moving image media in which bodies appear on screens, including television and video games. While my approach to theoretical concepts here is neither archaeological nor historical in any strong sense, its field of intervention certainly is the history of film theory; I want to insist that film theory's ways of construing identification hold lessons for understanding not only contemporary feature film production but also other moving image media. In short, in translating the problem of identification into more recent and recently productive idioms, I am hoping to open it up, once again, as a theoretical and interpretive issue for cinema studies but also for any studies of screens on which bodies appear.

Spider-Man and Us

Much of the sensational impact of Raimi's *Spider-Man* films stems from a figure that often comes in what amounts to connective tissue: sequences in which we follow Peter Parker/Spider-Man (played by Tobey Maguire) as he swoops through urban canyons in New York City. This figure is often used in an establishing or transitional function, moving us from one location to the next. Each time it appears, it consolidates the strong sense of identification that we have with Peter. In its transitional function, linking two locations, it also develops a richer sense of the world unfolding before us onscreen. Because this sort of figure has become extremely common in contemporary blockbuster filmmaking, we might very easily overlook what is in fact quite remarkable about it: even as it elicits strong character identification, it also exacerbates the sensational impact of the film. On the one hand, it enmeshes us ever deeper in the diegetic world by soliciting our identification with the protagonist. On the other hand, in exacerbating the sensational impact of the film, it elaborates and aestheticizes our embodied presence in the cinema.[7] Sensationally immersive and immersively sensational, these sorts of sequences are the common currency of recent action blockbuster filmmaking.

The most elaborated instance of this swooping figure in the *Spider-Man* films lies not in a transitional moment, however, but rather in a central narrative episode of the first film, in which Peter really becomes Spider-Man for the first time. The decisive importance of this moment both narratively and formally is no accident: for the narrative to move Peter from geek to superhero, the form of the film must work to expand Peter's capacity for action as well as our

Figure 1: First shot. Figure 1.1: Peter Parker running toward the camera; camera panning left to keep him in frame.

Figure 1.2: Peter running, with scaffolding in between; camera traveling left with Peter.

Figure 1.3: Peter starts climbing up the wall; camera tilting to keep him in frame.

perception of this expanded field.[8] It comes relatively early in the film (about forty-five minutes in, at the opening of the second act). And as the first and most elaborated instance, it is the prototype for the signature action figure of Raimi's *Spider-Man* films.

Peter has just come from the cage fight in which he is nominated as "The Amazing Spider-Man" (the name of the original comic book and the 2012 reboot) and in which he beats a meathead, WWE-type wrestler for a cash prize. When Peter goes to collect his prize, the crooked fight organizer stiffs him out of the money. Right after the organizer stiffs Peter, a thief arrives on the scene. He holds the organizer up at gunpoint and steals the fight money. Peter has the opportunity to stop the thief but declines, diffidently echoing the organizer's intransigence: "I missed the part where that's my problem." As Peter emerges from the arena where the fight took place, he discovers that his uncle Ben was carjacked and shot while waiting to pick him up. Ben dies directly in front of Peter. Enraged, Peter is in pursuit of whomever it was who killed Ben so he can exact revenge. It will turn out (of course) that the thief who stole the money from the fight organizer, whom Peter had the chance to stop but declined to, went on to carjack Ben as part of his getaway. Later, on the other side of the sequence at hand, Peter will let the thief fall to his death. And this complex of problems—Peter's exacting of revenge by inaction twice over, on the crook and on the thief—will open up the gap that it will take the rest of the film to resolve: Peter's capacity to act is greater than his ethical or moral capacity to put his physical power to right and proper use. The film is, of course, ham-fisted contemporary Hollywood action at its finest and admits of very little moral ambiguity (and we are more likely concerned, not with a drama, but instead with a melodrama of self-adjustment, but that is of little importance here).[9] In between these two moments of narratively and ethically significant inaction, Peter follows the thief in Uncle Ben's getaway car in a long, elaborately choreographed, viscerally sensational chase sequence through urban canyons. Expertly executed but formally unremarkable, this sequence will be my object of interest for the rest of this essay as well as my exemplar of the formal and aesthetic work of dramas of self-adjustment and recent action blockbuster filmmaking more generally.

The sequence begins in a series of long takes, opening in a static long shot of Peter running down an alley, toward the camera (see figure 1.1). As he approaches, the camera starts moving with him, first by traveling backwards and then straight to the left, panning to follow him in his sprint. Between the traveling camera and the sprinting Peter is some kind of scaffolding, which serves to

Figure 2: Second shot. Figure 2.1: Peter climbs the wall; note the textured brick surface.

Figure 2.2: Peter somersaults the flagpole, starting his flight.

accentuate our sense of kinetic speed as we move with Peter (see figure 1.2). The camera stops, pans, and tilts to keep him in frame as he jumps up to the wall and starts climbing (see figure 1.3). The next shot is yet another fantastic moving long take, this time less linear and more elaborately choreographed, that I will not attempt to describe fully. In this second long take, the camera's movements are often close to the brick wall that Peter is climbing, which, like the scaffolding, serves to give us a kinetic sense of speed by placing objects and textured surfaces close to the camera (see figure 2.1). The continual changes of camera angle and cant also give us a vertiginous feeling of disorientation, although this feeling is still

Figure 3: Peter's moment of indecision (shots 4 and 5). Figure 3.1:
On the dome, above the city.

Figure 3.2: Peter's moment of indecision.

small and incipient; it will become major and dominant later. And
then, in the same take, Peter jumps off the wall and starts his "flight"
down Fifth Avenue, somersaulting around a disused flagpole stick-
ing out from a wall (see figure 2.2). In the next shot, he jumps from
rooftop to rooftop, landing at the top of a dome for a pregnant
moment of decision (figure 3): Will he really do this, chase Uncle
Ben's attacker? Should he? Can he? Of course he does, using his
spiderwebs, swinging from building to building, catching up with
the thief in his car. The music gives us generic Hollywood orchestral
point and counterpoint to the intensity of the action. More impor-
tantly, however, over the music and the diegetic humdrum, we con-
tinually hear Peter's breathing, grunting, sighing, even yelping and

Figure 4: First POV figure. Figure 4.1: Reaction shot.

Figure 4.2: Immediately following POV shot of the approaching building.

yawping: the involuntary vocalizations that attend great athletic effort. These also reflect the frightening, giddy, out-of-control character of Peter's progress. The remaining portion of the sequence mostly alternates between two sorts of shots: close-ups of his mask-covered face (but with eyes uncovered, in an early iteration of his costume) (figures 3.2 and 4.1) and elaborate traveling shots that follow his movement from a variety of different angles, always oriented by his movement (Peter is always in frame) and always mirroring the direction, speed, and quality of his movement (figure 5). There are two direct, subjective point-of-view (POV) shots, both of which are of rapidly approaching surfaces (a building, a bridge), which, of course, Peter just manages to avoid (figure 4).[10]

Figure 5: Figures of swooping and following. Figure 5.1.

Figure 5.2.

Figure 5.3.

In order to understand this sequence, we must pass beyond the formal description and see (or rather feel) two interleaved aspects of it, which will recall my earlier heuristic distinction between perception and affect. These two sorts of shots—swooping and reaction—fairly clearly divide the two intertwined tasks of the sequence, which the two brief POV shots pull together. First, the segment gives us an intense, embodied intimacy and identification with Peter. Not only do we hear his breathing and grunting, but we also see repeatedly one of the most important figures for identification with a protagonist: close-up reaction shots. Even if his face is masked, his eyes are nevertheless quite expressive. At the same time, we also see his body in a variety of longer framings, the better to see his superhuman—if still uncertain, slightly frantic—feats of acrobatic athleticism. Second, and at the same time, we ourselves feel the dizzying, giddy vertigo of the illusion of our own body's movement through an alleyway, up a wall, down Fifth Avenue.[11] And so, we have two bodies here in a kind of dynamic polarity: Peter's athletic, powerful, impossible, out-of-control, diaphanous, laboring, and nearly ethereal body-in-motion onscreen and our own body at rest in the cinema but in a kind of quasi movement. In virtue of our illusion of bodily movement, our bodies are giddy, voluptuous, dizzy, and carnally dense, an object of an ongoing technical and perceptual manipulation by the cinema. How are we to think of the relation between these two bodies?

To be sure, this problem is complicated by the fact that here and elsewhere, Peter/Spider-Man's body is not, speaking literally, a single body. In order to manifest his unified fictional body, we in fact have (at least) three distinct bodies: Tobey Maguire, a stunt double (or several), and the computer-generated and animated body in flight through urban canyons (the visual-effects term of art for this is a "digital double").[12] And indeed, the complication here very well may become an unwieldy mess; describing or explaining our embodied intimacy with a computer-animated body in a live-action film touches on conceptual and historical issues of great anxiety for recent film scholars, including digital cinema but by no means limited to it.[13] While a number of ways of dealing with this issue are certainly possible, my sense is that the proper way of acknowledging the issue in this context is merely to affirm that we do identify with a unified fictional body—Peter Parker/Spider-Man—that is a manifold of live-action and computer-animated bodies. In this instance at least, our processes of identification are indifferent to any real or presumed ontological difference between Tobey Maguire and his digital doubles. In short, any concept of identification that we might propose or rework here must include,

at its center, the possibility of identifying with animated bodies (whatever technologies may be animating them) and even nonhuman bodies and objects.[14] Moreover, such identification takes place not only in the relentlessly hybrid production practices of contemporary action blockbusters but also in the completely animated world of *The Incredibles* (directed by Brad Bird, 2004) as well as in effects-heavy filmmaking of the predigital era, including, for example, the speeder sequence in *Return of the Jedi* (directed by Richard Marquand, 1983).[15] The thrill of such sequences stems in no small part from the human impossibility of the figures onscreen.

The aesthetics of such sequences are themselves rich and complex and perhaps more illuminating. *Spider-Man* shares its interest in flight with a number of contemporaneous films, including *The Matrix* (directed by Andy and Lana (nee Larry) Wachowski, 1999) and *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (directed by Ang Lee, 2000).[16] This widespread interest in flight may be part of a zeitgeist, enabled by new digital technologies of rendering, animation, and compositing, but it is not determined by them. *Spider-Man* just as obviously takes part in the long-standing antigravitational aesthetics of superheroes in films, comics, and other media.[17] The visual style of these sequences may be more to the point here. We might suggest that Spider-Man's cartoonishness is the visual evidence of his sometime computer-animated origin—but it is not only that. Departures from a literal or ideal photographic verisimilitude are not deficiencies (either technical or technological) but instead are in the service of an aesthetic that is at once exaggerated and counterfactual. As Raimi himself puts it, "We had to come up with a style that was real, yet had the slightest exaggeration—so audiences could still identify with the characters, and yet believe Spider-Man could actually swing through that world."[18] In fact, the very human impossibility of Spider-Man's athletic feats determined the visual effects techniques, not the other way around: because such acrobatics really would require superhuman strength, the film employs key frame animation, as motion capture could not give the proper effect of Peter's superhuman athletic effort.[19]

In any event, the display of Peter's superhuman athletic effort thematizes precisely our divergence from him. Identification takes place across this dynamic polarity between our body and his. Identification, of course, is precisely not a coincidence of bodies but instead always takes place across such divergence or polarity. Dramas of self-adjustment make this unavoidable, exacerbating both our identification with and divergence from their (super) heroic protagonists. Such films call for a theoretical acknowledgment of their sensational, visceral impact and do so in a manner

that can grasp the ways that such impact is profoundly related to, but also decisively different from, the processes of identification with their protagonists. In so doing, we shall see, they lay bare fundamental aspects of the processes of cinematic identification.

Roger Caillois: Mimesis and Ilinx

As I indicated at the outset, two concepts are readily available to describe the relation between bodies onscreen and off: identification and mimesis. It seems wholly uncontroversial to claim that in this sequence, and in the *Spider-Man* films more generally, we are identified with Peter/Spider-Man: we do, after all, hear his breathing, get his reaction shots, etc. The narrative and the visual design also work hard to consolidate this identification. But at this point, merely invoking identification may seem dissatisfying in some way: weirdly disembodied, obvious to the point of banality, stuffy and old-fashioned, or encumbered by too much psychoanalytical baggage. And so, we might take another tack. With reference to something like mirror neurons or Vivian Sobchack's concept of the "cinesthetic subject,"[20] we might say we have a mimetic as-if feeling of ourselves being Spider-Man at a deeply, richly embodied level. Neither of these is wrong, of course, but each is incomplete. With respect to *Spider-Man,* neither acknowledges the vertiginous sensational impact of feeling as though we ourselves are swooping through urban canyons that, while distinct from our identification with Peter, is nevertheless a crucial factor in such identification. And herein lies the problem or challenge of dramas of self-adjustment and other recent action blockbuster filmmaking. Like its cousins, *Spider-Man* insists upon this dynamic polarity between the bodies on- and offscreen. This divergence between bodies in the audience and onscreen is neither new nor unique to this type of film or filmmaking; it is perhaps not universal (many abstract films do not, at least in any obvious way, deploy this structure), but it is extremely general, a fundamental problematic of the cinema. *Spider-Man* thematizes it, roughens it, elaborates it, deploys it for sensational aesthetic effect.

French anthropologist Roger Caillois has offered two of the most influential articulations of mimesis in his 1935 essay "Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia" and in his 1958 book *Man, Play, and Games.*[21] In this later account, mimesis appears as part of a taxonomy of types of play divided into four types, themselves forming two pairs. The first pair comprises *agôn* and *alea,* or games of strategy and games of chance (i.e., chess vs. roulette). *Mimesis*

and *ilinx,* which will concern us here, form the second pair.[22] They correspond, broadly speaking, to the subtitle that Caillois's book carries in French: *le masque et le vertige* ("mask and vertigo"). Mimesis is a doing-as-if, comprising phenomena of mimicry and imitation. Ilinx is, instead, the "pursuit of vertigo."[23] To be sure, it is not so much Caillois's nomination or explication of these terms that matters here. If the name *ilinx* is his coinage, remarking upon the vertiginous aspect of certain types of play (or types of films) may not seem particularly important of itself. Rather, the originality and importance of Caillois's thinking comes in his pairing of mimesis and ilinx. Although this is frequently overlooked, in Caillois's account mimesis is essentially bound up with its partner ilinx.

As Caillois has it, "one can also escape himself and become another. This is mimesis."[24] Mimesis is fundamentally (and at this point familiarly) a doing-as-if in which the mimic puts on the behavior or appearance of another person or thing. Caillois's notion of mimesis is certainly broad enough to include Walter Benjamin's famous observation that "children's play is everywhere permeated by mimetic modes of behavior, and its realm is by no means limited to what one person can imitate in another. The child plays at being not only a shopkeeper or teacher but also a windmill and a train."[25] But here I do not think, quite, that we are in the realm of the sense that Erich Auerbach (or Aristotle for that matter) gave to the word, that is, a representation of reality.[26] We should note, however, that Caillois does suggest that the identification "of the moviegoer with the film star" is a form of mimesis.[27] In other words, Caillois's mimesis is an important antecedent to and very closely aligned with (if it perhaps does not quite coincide with) the contemporary sense of mimesis that we film theorists have inherited from Walter Benjamin and that has been expertly elaborated with respect to the cinema by Miriam Hansen.[28] Importantly, this sense of mimesis does not only or even centrally refer to mimetic relations with other humans, but also includes the mimetic relations with objects of various kinds, including those that are magical and technological, that the cinema enables or enhances.

Mimesis's partner, however, is much less known, or at least less often an object of commentary or theorizing.[29] *Ilinx* is the Greek word for "whirlpool." Caillois glosses its tendency this way: this "last kind of game includes those which are based on the pursuit of vertigo and which consist of an attempt to momentarily destroy the stability of perception and inflict a kind of voluptuous panic upon an otherwise lucid mind."[30] He goes on to describe ilinx as a kind of "pleasurable torture" and "a pure state of transport."[31] Ilinx is what children aim at in Ring around the Rosie; it's why we ride

roller coasters. And it seems to me that the voluptuous disorientation and vertiginous feeling of flight that *Spider-Man* (and other such films) offers viewers just as straightforwardly is ilinx.

In his earlier and better-known formulation of mimesis, "Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia," written more than twenty years before *Man, Play, and Games,* Caillois draws these two tendencies together under the single rubric of a temptation or attraction by space. He diagnoses "a common root to phenomena of mimicry, both biological and magical, and to psychasthenic experience, since the facts seem so well to impose one on them: this *attraction by space,* as elementary as are tropisms, and by the effect of which life seems to lose ground, blurring in its retreat the frontier between the organism and the milieu."[32] Despite the emphasis on the unity of mimicry and "legendary psychasthenia," this earlier essay anticipates his later scheme. Mimicry is, of course, the direct precursor to mimesis. Meanwhile, in legendary psychasthenia, "the living creature, the organism, is no longer the origin of [spatial] coordinates, but one point among others; it is dispossessed of its privilege and literally *no longer knows where to place itself.*" Callois goes on to state that "the feeling of personality, considered as the organism's feeling of distinction from its surroundings, of the connection between consciousness and a particular point in space, cannot fail under these conditions to be seriously undermined; one then enters into the psychology of psychasthenia, and more specifically of *legendary psychasthenia,* if we agree to use this name for the disturbance in the above relations between personality and space."[33] Legendary psychasthenia is very nearly an exact equivalent of ilinx and surely anticipates the later concept. While "Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia" is sometimes taken to be primarily an account of mimicry, imitation, or mimesis as a dissolution of identity or boundedness,[34] Caillois's emphasis here is instead on the spatial dynamics of the dissolution of self.

Caillois would go on to reject this account, writing in a footnote in the later work that "unfortunately [the earlier] study treats the problem with a perspective that today seems fantastic to me. Indeed, I no longer view mimicry as a disturbance of space perception."[35] He reserves this for ilinx. Furthermore, by distinguishing more rigorously between mimesis and ilinx, Caillois also rejects a single causal explanation for these phenomena, preferring instead a descriptive and explanatory, rather than causal, account. What in 1935 he assimilated to a single tropism inhering in organic life toward a specifically spatial process of becoming unbounded, in 1958 he resolves into two distinct, if profoundly related, tendencies to become unbounded.

Nevertheless, and of crucial importance, for Caillois, the conceptual pairing of mimesis and ilinx is necessary in large part because they are both modalities of becoming unbounded, processes of an unraveling of the ordinarily self-possessed human. At the limit, working together, they cease to be play at all but instead effect "an indescribable metamorphosis in the conditions of existence." He goes on to state that "the association of simulation and vertigo is so powerful and so inseparable that it is naturally part of the sphere of the sacred, perhaps providing one of the principle bases for the terror and fascination of the sacred."[36] At the limit, they become full-on possession.[37] Now, two aspects of Caillois's thought bear emphasis. First, the distinction and relation of mimesis and ilinx seem to describe not only an aspect of play but also a fundamental capacity of the human in general to become unbounded. This capacity might be aimed at and activated in certain sorts of games, but it is not limited to play. In his earlier essay, fantastic as it may have come to seem in retrospect, Caillois went so far as to ascribe this becoming unbounded as elementary to organic life. Even if we do not follow him that far, we need not reduce or translate the act of viewing a film into play if these concepts are to give us purchase in the cinema. While we may or may not wish to perform this reduction (I am agnostic about its value), it does suggest a strong, even fundamental, affinity between films and television, on the one hand, and video games, on the other. Put otherwise, while important differences surely obtain between media that you watch and media that you play, both types of media are nevertheless subtended by the same processes, even if they modulate these processes in divergent ways.

Second, mimesis and ilinx are both modalities of becoming unbounded or self-disposession, but they are importantly different modalities. Caillois glosses the difference this way: "Mimesis consists in deliberate impersonation, which may readily become a work of art, contrivance, or cunning. The actor must work out his role and create a dramatic illusion. . . . Conversely, in ilinx . . . there is submission not only of the will but of the mind. The person lets himself drift and becomes intoxicated through feeling directed, dominated, and possessed by strange powers. To attain them, he need only abandon himself."[38] Now, we will probably want to take some distance from the version of mimesis implied here; even Caillois's account of mimesis includes such things as spectatorial identification, which does not resemble playacting in any obvious way. At certain moments in Caillois, but certainly for thinkers as far back as Plato and as divided on the subject as Benjamin and his evil twin Adorno, mimesis is a mode of transit with alterity, a

becoming unbounded in such a way as to let the other inhabit you, to incorporate the other.[39] Ilinx, on the other hand, does not name a transit with the other as such but instead names a modulation or dissolution of my boundedness with respect to the world. The formula is then this: *in mimesis I can't tell where you end and I begin, and in ilinx I can't tell where I end and where the world begins.*

According to this formula, as a viewer in a cinema I have my boundedness modulated in both modalities, mimesis and ilinx: in a mimetic and affective transit with another body, I am attuned to the body onscreen; at the ilinctic level of a perceptual and indeed proprioceptive unbinding, I find myself attuned to the world unfolding before me onscreen. (Proprioception here names the perceptual coordination of my body and the world, which is at the same time the perceptual procedure by which I arrive at a bounded sense of myself as a body located at a particular place in the world.)[40] In other words, the body offscreen, my body in the audience, must become unbounded in its proprioceptive aspect in order to coordinate itself with the illusory or fictional world that the cinema manifests onscreen. This ilinctic (spatial, perceptual) aspect of cinematic modulation here has a certain phenomenological priority over its mimetic (affective) counterpart: it refers to the process by which the cinematic world may appear, a world that the cinema must manifest as a general condition for the appearance of the body onscreen with which I may then have a mimetic, affective resonance.

Ilinx's phenomenological priority in the cinema may or may not be absolute; I do not (yet) wish to claim that ilinx is an ontological condition of the cinema.[41] More to the point here are the ways in which an ilincitc resonance with a world onscreen is frequently (even normatively) organized around a central, focalizing, mimetic investment in a character. The voluptuous ilinx that arises from swooping through urban canyons in *Spider-Man* is only heightened by our mimetic investment in Peter. His flight is not merely an occasion for our ilinx. The world onscreen in these instances is manifested in no small part through Peter's newfound capacities for embodied enaction and thus also the world's newfound affordances. In this context, *Spider-Man* and other dramas of self-adjustment do not only emphasize or exacerbate the cinema's capacity to provoke ilinx, but also emphasize and exacerbate the ways in which mimesis and ilinx are intertwined. In ilinx and mimesis, the cinema modulates our boundedness in two modalities that, while distinct, are mutually interfering, by turns positive and negative.

As a theoretical and analytical pair of concepts, mimesis and ilinx are not necessary accomplishments or tendencies of the

cinema. Rather, they are something more like fundamental problematics of it: in virtue of manifesting onscreen worlds and figuring onscreen bodies, all films must negotiate a relation to them in some way, but this relation is a large, even open-ended, field of possibilities of widely varying quantity and quality. The question is instead how a film deploys its possibilities for ilinx and mimesis. To be sure, this represents a shift from Caillois's use of these terms. No longer specific types of play, mimesis and ilinx become modalities or aspects of our ongoing resonance with the cinema in which we have our boundedness modulated but not (often) breached. The cinema offers a whole variegated field of different ways of engaging these aspects, including exacerbation and elaboration, moderation and minimizing, or withholding and ostentatious refusal. Not all possibilities of modulating our capacity for mimesis or ilinx call for theoretical or critical acknowledgment, but *Spider-Man* and its cousins, as dramas of self-adjustment, very certainly do.

All of this is to say that to grasp the mimetic relation that we might have with Peter, we must also take into account the ilinctic aspect of the film, particularly but not only in this sequence. The dynamic polarization of the two bodies, onscreen and off, lies precisely in the fact that my voluptuous, carnally dense body in the audience is thematized by the very perceptual and affective modulation of the cinema. Even—especially—in a moment of deep mimetic investment and identification, through an ilinctic, proprioceptive modulation, *Spider-Man* thematizes as pleasurable vertigo the fact of my body in the audience, the object of an ongoing technical modulation by the perceptual interface of the cinema. We can see this in the aspects of the sequence that exacerbate ilinx: the scaffolding between us and Peter and the way the camera moves close to textured surfaces, both of which accentuate the speed and movement of the camera, and the elaborate choreography of camera movements with its tilts, cants, and swish pans, its acceleration and changes of direction. All of this puts us less in the position of Spider-Man/Peter and more in the position of a dance partner, in a kind of superhero pas de deux. But if we are a dance partner, we are a passive one: not at all in control, flung around in often unexpected ways, and very probably enjoying our disorientation.

Christian Metz: Identifications, Primary and Secondary

The formula we derive from Caillois has a significant precedent in film theory in Christian Metz's famous distinction between primary

and secondary cinematic identification in *The Imaginary Signifier*. Despite differences in emphasis and style of description, Metz's framework is remarkably consonant with the one I have developed from Caillois.[42] In developing and elaborating this consonance, my agenda is threefold. First, I want to affirm the centrality of the ilinctic aspect of our processes of cinematic identification. Second, and directly against the grain of Metz's claims, I aim to restore to identification the sense it has of a becoming unbounded rather than a shoring up of our boundedness. And finally, I hope to emphasize what I want to call the media-theoretical aspect of Metz's formulation, that is, its emphasis on the technical infrastructure of the cinema.

As Metz has it, there are two levels or dimensions of cinematic identification. Secondary cinematic identification is the sort of identification that is ordinarily at issue in film studies (and more broadly): our identification with one or several characters. Whatever mimetic relation we may have with Peter/Spider-Man falls under this secondary identification. For Metz, this secondary identification has as its infrastructure primary cinematic identification, or, in an initial formulation, identification with the camera and its point of view. This is the process by which the spectator arrives at a sense of a cinematic world unfolding onscreen, and it is closely related to ilinx. This is because for Metz, primary cinematic identification effects a diffusion of the spectator's ego; in the cinema, I become "geographically undifferentiated, evenly distributed over the whole surface of the screen."[43] This diffusion or unraveling of the spectator's sense of self stems from two deeply related aspects of Metz's account. First, such unraveling follows directly from the perceptual arrangement of the cinema, which gives us a world from which we are constitutively absent and therefore in which I am "all-perceiving":

> All-perceiving as one says all-powerful (this is the famous gift of "ubiquity" the film makes its spectator); all perceiving, too, because I am entirely on the side of the perceiving instance: absent from the screen but certainly present in the auditorium.[44]

Second, and following from this perceptual arrangement, "the film is like the mirror" of Jacques Lacan's famous mirror stage.[45] With this famous and oft-repeated analogy, Metz is claiming that the cinema temporarily deforms and reforms our body image in its own image. Very schematically (and the schematic level is all that matters here, for Metz or for us), recall that Lacan's mirror stage is essentially a story about how, as young children, we move

from a fragmented body to an "orthopedic totality" by way of our identification with our mirror image.[46] By the same token, it is also a story about how we overcome, in Metz's words, "the primitive undifferentiation of the ego and the non-ego."[47] To be sure, it is finally a story about the loss of what in psychoanalysis goes under the name *infantile plenitude:* after the mirror stage, I am condemned to being a locatable, particularized subject, bound to and bounded by a self-possession (which is, in a typically Lacanian move, also always a dispossession). The film bears analogy to the mirror in the way that their frames rhyme and also in that it is an external (and indeed technical) source for my body image. But to the extent that my body has no image in the cinematic world onscreen, it becomes ubiquitous and geographically undifferentiated. For as long as I am in the cinema, I am relieved of the burden of being a subject.[48] Following Metz, we can say that by virtue of its technological and perceptual arrangement, the cinema effects a temporary unbounding of the spectator's ordinary perceptual and proprioceptive self-possession. For a time, the cinema offers us the chance to return to the infantile state of undifferentiation of the ego and nonego. Metz's primary cinematic identification is thus a perceptual becoming-unbounded endemic to the cinema and is a direct cognate for Caillois's ilinx.

This affinity between primary cinematic identification and ilinx may seem evident once it is articulated, but it should also come as no surprise. Lacan himself refers to Caillois in the essay "The Mirror Stage": "We need but recall how Roger Caillois . . . illuminated the subject when, with the term 'legendary psychasthenia,' he subsumed morphological mimicry within the derealizing effect of an obsession with space."[49] Lacan's invocation of Caillois here may well suggest that even (or perhaps especially) for the psychoanalyst, the boundedness we achieve in the mirror stage is both susceptible and prone to dissolution. In any event, along with the later Caillois and with Metz's own distinction between primary and secondary cinematic identification, we must again affirm that ilinx and mimesis, while related, are distinct. Nevertheless, at least in the case of the cinema, we must also affirm a certain priority of the ilinctic (perceptual and proprioceptive) processes over the mimetic, affective ones.

Metz's account of primary cinematic identification offers an important lesson for attending to the cinema's perceptual work, one that Caillois cannot teach us. This lesson lies in the fact that primary cinematic identification is itself double, or ambivalent. In the cinema, on the one hand, "the spectator *identifies with himself,* with himself as a pure act of perception (as wakefulness, alertness)."

At the same time, however, "if it is true that he identifies with himself as look, the spectator can do no more than identify with the camera, too, which has looked before him at what he is now looking at and whose stationing (= framing) determines the vanishing point."[50] Metz's primary cinematic identification thus itself has two aspects: a self-relation and a relation to what has come to be known, in a reified and reifying phrase, as the cinematic apparatus.

To be sure, these two aspects, a reflexive relation and a technical one, really do form two aspects of a single process. This dual aspect does not, however, strictly speaking, follow from the fact that it is cinematic identification that is at issue. Rather, Lacan's mirror stage is itself not only a story about how we become bounded, locatable selves but is also fundamentally a story of how that process is itself fundamentally technical: the identity and boundedness that we achieve in the mirror stage is directly enabled by a relation to the mirror, as technical support. Mark Hansen has recently emphasized this in his account of the essential technicity of the flesh.[51] From a perspective oriented by thinkers such as Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Gilbert Simondon, and Bernard Stiegler, Hansen holds that technics form a necessary and vital infrastructure for human life. For Hansen, and indeed also for Lacan and Metz, the reflexive aspect of identification is not identical to its technical aspect, but it does depend upon technical infrastructure in a fundamental way. To be sure, this amounts to a radical revaluation of technology, which we might mark by no longer speaking of the deceptive or alienating cinematic apparatus but instead speaking of the technics of cinema.[52] Primary cinematic identification refers not only to an ilinctic process of perceptual unbounding, but also and simultaneously to the reflexive and specifically technical nature of that process.

So far I have drawn out the similarities between Metz and Caillois, but aligning their concepts in this way may nevertheless seem paradoxical if not flat out contradictory. In fact, Metz's processes of identification are not simply identical to Caillois's forms of play. Caillois's terms name the dissolution of subject, while the very idea of cinematic identification implies a shoring up of identity. To rescue ourselves from this difficulty, one possibility is to think of these two emphases as poles on a continuum. Mimesis and ilinx, on the one hand, as modalities of coming undone, lie on the side of the sensational, voluptuous dissolution or shattering of identity that the cinema is so clearly capable of (and of late quite interested in).[53] Identification, on the other hand, would then come to name the processes by which the cinema can recuperate this unraveling into an economy of the stable subject, whose stability is underwritten not by the intensities of the agitated body but instead

by a cinematically articulated subject position. In this scheme, mimesis and ilinx name the exacerbation of coming undone, with identification being its compensatory recuperation. According to a well-known scheme, the cinemas of attractions (both old and new) would have their aesthetic center of gravity in exacerbating mimesis and/or ilinx, while various classical cinemas (Hollywood or otherwise) would be marked by a set of techniques for and styles of minimizing them and consolidating identification (both primary and secondary). As a tool for analysis, I think this is certainly useful: we might speak of cinemas of ilinx (*Spider-Man* and other dramas of self-adjustment), cinemas of mimesis (*Jackass* or torture porn), and cinemas of identification (let's just say Hitchcock).[54]

At a theoretical level, however, I want to construe these as moments of a process. Mimesis and ilinx then name the moments of unbounding, and identification names the moment of rebounding, or rather, rebinding.[55] The value of this scheme is that it emphasizes that ilinx and primary cinematic identification are necessarily related, as are mimesis and secondary cinematic identification. Identification of either kind relies on a prior moment of dissolution, and these moments of dissolution, if they are not simply to become masochistic shattering, jouissance, or possession, must give rise to a process of binding whose name simply is identification. Rather than simply breaching or shoring up our perceptual, proprioceptive, or affective boundedness, the cinema is instead always involved in an ongoing, durational process of modulating our boundedness. We can also see that identification can only ever operate through its failure or withdrawal: identification, in short, is a way of managing a dissolution of identity, and it depends upon such dissolution. It does not only depend on such dissolution, but is itself a form of, and modulation of, this dissolution: any cinematic identification I may have itself arises from my ongoing modulation by the technics of the cinema. Cinematic identification may resemble a shoring up of my boundedness, but any shoring up that it offers comes from the outside, proceeding according to a logic and a principle of organization articulated by the cinema. Even as the processes of cinematic identification may moderate or consolidate the unbinding of ilinx or mimesis, I never simply coincide with the camera or the body onscreen. Rather, in the cinema I am caught up in an ongoing dynamic of a mimetic and affective unraveling and rewinding and an ilinctic and perceptual binding and unbinding (table 1). Moreover, to the extent that ilinx and mimesis refer to distinct but interrelated modalities of becoming unbounded, the

Table 1. Aspects of cinematic modulation

	Unbinding (Exacerbation)	*Binding (Consolidation)*
World (perception/ proprioception)	Ilinx	Primary cinematic identification
Body (affect)	Mimesis	Secondary cinematic identification

ilinctic process of primary identification and the mimetic process of secondary identification themselves are mutually inflecting.

Returning to *Spider-Man,* we can see this mutual inflection as a kind of positive (mutually reinforcing) interference but one that is manifold and complex. The ilinctic intensity of our illusion of bodily movement is captured and organized around—that is to say, compensated by—a mimetic identification with Peter. It is also motivated (but not exhausted) by such identification: the dizzying ilinx here is in the service of the dilation of the diegetic world, figuring Peter's expanded, superhuman (or just superheroic) field of action. Because of this our identification with Peter has a stabilizing rather than an unraveling effect. And yet, we see that it is nevertheless precisely this ilinctic unraveling that interrupts my identification with Peter. My voluptuously ilinctic body offscreen heightens my divergence from Peter and thematizes precisely my failure to coincide with him. And here we can begin to see the decisive importance of the dehiscence of the diaphanous superhero body onscreen and the voluptuous carnal body offscreen. It is precisely my failure to coincide with the superhero body onscreen, while nevertheless being affected by it, that enables (or rather names) a relation of identification here. The lesson we must draw from *Spider-Man,* from Metz and Caillois, is that the cinema is fundamentally a scene of becoming unbounded, of an irremediable exposure both to technics and to others.

I understand that given the current state of film theory, Christian Metz is hardly the most obvious authority for making speculative and fundamental claims about the nature of our encounters and involvement with the cinema. But it is the consequences rather

than the sources of this thought that matter. By way of conclusion, I would like to draw out two of these consequences.

The first—but, strangely enough, not at all one of my motivations when I began thinking about Caillois and his importance for theorizing about the cinema—is that this scheme draws the study of the cinema and video games much closer together. Caillois, while certainly known in cinema studies, has been taken up largely as a thinker of mimesis, often subordinate to a thinker such as Walter Benjamin. Meanwhile, and for obvious reasons, video game studies has taken Caillois rather more seriously.[56] This disciplinary rapprochement, however, serves as much to describe the differences between cinema and games as to highlight them. Scholars such as Alex Galloway and Bob Rehak have noted the similarity between first-person shooters and films such as *Lady in the Lake* (directed by Robert Montgomery, 1947) and *Enter the Void* (directed by Gapsar Noé, 2009), in which the camera is always "looking out" through the protagonist's eyes.[57] While Galloway and Rehak are certainly right to draw this connection, their lesson requires clarification. The dynamics of ilinx, mimesis, and identification are quite evidently different between games and the kind of process that is at work in *Spider-Man* and most narrative cinema. You could highlight the difference by observing that dramas of self-adjustment exacerbate the divergence between ilinx and mimesis or between primary and secondary cinematic identification, emphasizing the viewer's noncoincidence with their protagonists. Meanwhile, first-person shooters and cinematic experiments such as *Lady in the Lake* and *Enter the Void* attempt to collapse that difference. One reason why these films are generally considered unsuccessful (and they are unsuccessful) is precisely that they are unable to perform this collapse.[58] First-person shooters—as well as the third-person action/adventure style that is common among recent *Spider-Man* game adaptations, including *Spider-Man: Shattered Dimensions* (2010) and *The Amazing Spider-Man* (2012)—configure these relations significantly differently (to be sure, first-person–shooter and third-person games are themselves quite different in this regard). These games allow their players and their avatars to move and to act in their virtual worlds and, because of this, configure both ilinx and mimesis very differently from the cinema with its larger-than-life screen and its famous passivity.

Second, this account points in the direction of a more nuanced and complete understanding of the relation between affect and perception in the cinema. Or better, what we have learned is that this distinction is more precisely and productively thought of in terms of bodies and technics. In Metz's felicitous words, the

cinema is "*more perceptual*" than other art forms.[59] And if it is not somehow more affective (I do not know what that would mean), it is nevertheless a site where perception gives onto affect and even becomes indistinguishable from it. And indeed, my initial heuristic distinction between affect and perception more often than not breaks down: ilinx too, has its affects, mimesis has its perceptual aspect. We can see this in the profound interrelation and resonance between mimesis and ilinx, between primary and secondary cinematic identification. And yet, the cinema is also the site where a coupling between viewer and cinema, between a body and technics, gives on to fantastic, counterfactual worlds. Ultimately, Caillois and Metz give us concepts with which to think about the profound difference between and the profound inter-twining of our exposure to others (other bodies) and our exposure to technics (the cinema, other screens, the whole technical infrastructure of our lives). Grasping this relation is particularly urgent given the recent and unprecedented profusion of screens, those sites where we so often find ourselves thrown open at once to the obscurity of other bodies and to the "deep opacity of contemporary technics."[60]

Notes

[1.] Thanks to Genevieve Yue for inviting me to pose the question this way by inviting me to a panel at the annual meeting of the Society for Cinema and Media Studies in 2011 titled "The Body Offscreen" and to my copanelist Damon Young for his generous, incisive, and insightful commentary on several drafts of this essay. Thanks also to James J. Hodge for comments on a draft of this essay, to Anna Guercio for guidance on translating borrowed words, and to Julie Turnock for guidance on visual effects.

[2.] Identification really did structure a whole generation of film theory as the central problematic for studies of spectatorship in the 1970s and 1980s. Identification organizes such works as Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," in *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology,* ed. Philip Rosen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 198–209; Christian Metz, *The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and the Cinema,* trans. Celia Britton et al. (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1982); Theresa de Lauretis, *Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1984); Mary Ann Doane, *The Desire to Desire: The Woman's Film of the 1940s* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987); Judith Mayne, *Cinema and Spectatorship* (New York: Routledge, 1993); and much other feminist and psychoanalytical film theory besides. And indeed, versions of identification remain central to more recent work, including in studies of gay or African American film spectatorship. See, for instance, Brett Farmer, *Spectacular Passions: Cinema, Fantasy, and Gay Male Spectatorship* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000); and Jacqueline Stewart, *Migrating to the Movies: Cinema and Black Urban Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

Mimesis as a figure for the viewer's relation to the cinema originates in the Frankfurt School's critiques of mass culture and has been renovated as a counterconcept to identification (although it is also often yoked to alternative formulations of identification). In particular, it has been an important concept in work that sought to move past psychoanalytic film theory, especially in the early 1990s. For example, see Miriam Hansen, *Babel and Babylon: American Silent Film Spectatorship* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991); Linda Williams, "Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess," in *Film Theory and Criticism,* 6th ed., eds. Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 727–41; Steven Shaviro, *The Cinematic Body* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993); and Jackie Stacey, *Star Gazing: Hollywood Cinema and Female Spectatorship* (New York: Routledge 1994).

3. Here I am thinking specifically of Vivian Sobchack, "What My Fingers Knew," in *Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 53–84. However, versions of this figure are quite common and appear (among other places) in Sobchack, *The Address of the Eye: A Phenomenology of Film Experience* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992); Laura U. Marks, *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000) and *Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002); and Jennifer Barker, *The Tactile Eye: Touch and the Cinematic Experience* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009).

4. I want to emphasize that I really do mean this distinction between perception and affect both heuristically and approximatively. One candidate for a mediating term here would be a Bergson-inspired turn to *sensation* (although that is not without its problems) or even simply *the body*. Rough and ready guides for thinking about this messy relation in this context include Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), especially chapter 1, "The Autonomy of Affect," 23–45; and Mark Hansen, *New Philosophy for New Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004) and "The Time of Affect, or Bearing Witness to Life," *Critical Inquiry* 30, no. 3 (Spring 2004): 584–626.

5. Roger Caillois, *Man, Play, and Games,* trans. Meyer Barash (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1961).

6. In a sort of companion piece to this one, I have offered an account of identification that stresses mimesis rather than ilinx. See Scott C. Richmond, "'Dude, That's Just *Wrong*': Mimesis, Identification, *Jackass,*" *World Picture* 6 (Winter 2011): n.p.

7. The polarity that I am describing here has a long history in film scholarship and has seen a number of different figures in the history of film theory. The most relevant to my purposes here is Tom Gunning's famous distinction between the cinema of attractions and the cinema of narrative integration. See Gunning, "An Aesthetic of Astonishment: Early Film and the (In)Credulous Spectator," *Art and Text* 34 (1989): 31–43. See also Wanda Strauven, ed., *The Cinema of Attractions Reloaded* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006).

8. On the narrative importance of the closely related learning-to-fly sequences in recent action blockbuster filmmaking, see Sara Ross, "Invitation to the Voyage: The Flight Sequence in Contemporary 3D Cinema," *Film History* 24, no. 2 (2012): 210–20. Ross also describes the generic formal features of such sequences, many of which are in full effect in *Spider-Man:* the intensification of the camera movement over the course of the sequence, the extensive use of reaction shots, etc.

9. Melodrama's moral universe of the excluded middle is diagnosed and described in Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995).

10. The 2012 reboot, *The Amazing Spider-Man* (directed by Marc Webb), uses much the same formal structures for both narrative and sensational effect. However, at several points the film includes extended and elaborate traveling POV shots, which remarkably include Peter/Spider-Man's arms and legs in frame. This is quite unusual and is a marked difference from Raimi's versions of these sequences. Their presence does not impact my argument here but probably does bear on the relation of cinema to first-person shooter games, which I address in my concluding remarks.

11. This illusion is, of course, nearly as old as the cinema, going back to Hale's Tours and phantom rides, and is common in attractions-oriented filmmaking throughout the history of cinema. For more on the history of this sort of effect, see Ross, "Invitation to the Voyage." For more on the phenomenology and perceptual psychology of this illusion, see Scott C. Richmond, "Resonant Perception: Cinema, Phenomenology, and the Illusion of Bodily Movement" (PhD dissertation, University of Chicago, 2010).

12. For more on digital doubles and other issues relating to synthespians, see Dan North, *Performing Illusions: Cinema, Special Effects, and the New Virtual Actor* (New York: Wallflower, 2008). North discusses *Spider-Man* and digital doubles in chapter 5, "The Synthespian," 148–78.

13. For example, the issue of stunt doubles here is as salient as that of digital technology. That is to say, digital technology is one small part of a broader field of problems, including the diegetic effect and the cinematic impression of reality. See, for a start, Christian Metz, *Film Language: A Semiotics of the Cinema,* trans. Michael Taylor (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), especially Part 1, "Phenomenological Approaches to Film"; Richard Allen, *Projecting Illusion: Film Spectatorship and the Impression of Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); and Tom Gunning, "Moving Away from the Index: Cinema and the Impression of Reality," *differences* 18, no. 1 (2007): 28–52.

14. To be sure, while this sense of identification went underground during the heyday of psychoanalytical film theory, it never disappeared entirely. It did, however, see fuller articulation in older theories of identification, which both have connections with surrealism. The French impressionist film theorists, especially but not only Jean Epstein, stressed identification with (but also the alterity of) objects in the 1920s. See Richard Abel, ed., *French Film Theory and Criticism: A History/Anthology,* Vol. 1, *1907–1939* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993). And, of course, at about the same time, Walter Benjamin touched on such identification in his writing on film and elsewhere, especially in three short texts from 1933: "Experience and Poverty," in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings,* vol. 2, ed. Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: Bellknap Press/Harvard University Press, 1999), 731–36 ; "Doctrine of the Similar," in *Selected Writings,* 2:694–98; and "On the Mimetic Faculty," in *Selected Writings,* 2:720–22. See also Miriam Hansen, "Of Mice and Ducks: Benjamin and Adorno on Disney," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 92, no. 1 (Winter 1993): 27–61.

15. The sequence from *Return of the Jedi* displays essentially the same structure of identification, but its formal, figural, and narrative work are quite different. Leia and Luke on speeders are precisely not superhuman or out-of-control; their flight is technologically enabled and so does not hold the same ethical burden as protagonists in dramas of self-adjustment. Moreover, Luke's path over the three films is more or

less the inverse of the superhero: he must work hard for his powers, and his mastery of the Force is entailed by a prior ethical commitment.

In any event, for more on the rise of effects-heavy filmmaking, including early use of computer technologies in the *Star Wars* franchise, see Julie Turnock, "Before Industrial Light and Magic," *New Review of Film and Television Studies* 7, no. 2 (2009): 133–56, and *Plastic Reality: Special Effects, Technology, and the Emergence of 1970s Block-buster Aesthetics* (New York: Columbia University Press, forthcoming).

16. On related aesthetic formations in recent effects-heavy filmmaking, see Kristen Whissel, "Tales of Upward Mobility: The New Verticality and Digital Special Effects," *Film Quarterly* 59, no. 4 (Summer 2006): 23–34; and Ross, "Invitation to the Voyage."

17. See Scott Bukatman, *Matters of Gravity: Special Effects and Supermen in the 20th Century* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), and "Playing Superheroes," in *The Poetics of Slumberland: Animated Spirits and the Animating Spirit* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 182–211.

18. Quoted in Joe Fordham, "Spider-Man: Spin City," *Cinefex* 90 (2002): 17.

19. Ibid., 20. Motion capture uses the movements of an actor's body to animate a computer model in a one-to-one way. In this instance, Raimi and his effects team attempted to use acrobats as motion-capture models for these swooping sequences. However, the acrobats, no matter how athletic, could not perform the humanly impossible movements of Peter/Spider-Man. Because of this, animators had to resort to using acrobats' movements as reference for key-frame animation, in which anima-tors design movement by using images that specify initial and final states, using the labor of assistant animators and the aid of computers to fill in the frames in between.

20. Sobchack, "What My Fingers Knew."

21. Roger Caillois, "Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia," *October* 31 (Winter 1984): 16–32, and *Man, Play, and Games*. In what follows, I have systematically modified Barash's translation (see the following note), relying on Caillois, *Les jeux et les hommes: Le masque et le vertige* (Paris: Gallimard, 1958).

22. My use of *mimesis* here modifies Meyer Barash's translation. My sole, but systematic, modification to his translation, here and throughout, is to render Cail-lois's use of the borrowed English word *mimicry* as *mimesis* and his use of the French *mimétisme* as *mimicry*. The rest of this note explains why.

I fear that this change may muddy the waters, although I offer it entirely in an attempt to clarify matters. Caillois's terminology here presents an unusual difficulty for translation, to which I fear there is no satisfying resolution. I am, perhaps para-doxically, employing *mimesis* to translate Caillois's use of the borrowed English word *mimicry*. Barash, in his translation, renders this in the obvious way, as *mimicry*. However, Caillois distinguishes between his borrowed use of the English *mimicry* and its French equivalent, *mimétisme*. Barash is thus forced to render this common French word with an unfortunate and obscure word, *mimetism*. (To make matters worse, the *OED*'s entry for *mimetism* simply equates it to mimesis.)

Caillois used borrowed words for all four of his play types. The other three (agôn, alea, and ilinx) come from ancient Greek, and so resorting to a word borrowed from ancient Greek to translate Caillois's use of the English *mimicry* seems at once apposite and problematic: problematic because if Caillois was mining ancient Greek for words (including the rather obscure *ilinx*), he must have been aware of *mimesis*

and its meanings and preferred the English *mimicry*. Employing *mimesis* in its stead may seem to suggest that I think I know better than Caillois. I do not.

Nevertheless, I contend that *mimesis* is apposite—and an improvement—because its current use in academic English more completely and correctly corresponds to how he uses his borrowed English *mimicry* in *Les jeux et les hommes*. Caillois's use of borrowed words evidently stemmed from an effort to get the terminological control and exactness that come from foreign loan words. As for *mimicry,* he writes, "Je choisis de désigner ces manifestations par le terme de *mimicry,* qui nomme en anglais le mimétisme, notamment des insectes, afin de souligner la nature fondamentale et élémentaire, quasi organique, de l'impulsion qui les suscite" ("I have chosen to designate these phenomena with the term *mimicry* [borrowed English; elsewhere rendered as mimesis], which in English names mimicry [French: *mimétisme*], especially that of insects, in order to underscore the quasi-organic fundamental and elementary nature of the impulse which subtends these phenomena") (*Les jeux et les hommes,* 39). Cf. *Man, Play, and Games,* 19. This, it seems to me, is exactly what we mean when we say "mimesis" nowadays and not at all what we mean when we say "mimicry." This scheme has the added benefit (particularly when it comes to insects) of consistency across his terms in *Man, Play, and Games* and his earlier essay, "Mimicry [*Mimétisme*] and Legendary Psychasthenia." I discuss the relation between these two essays below.

If, however, all of this is not convincing, you may read this as an instance of the practice, common among theorists of several stripes, of simply assimilating mimicry (and imitation) to mimesis. See, for example, Michael Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses* (New York: Routledge, 1993). This may or may not be problematic, but I take it that such a move does not require belabored explanatory footnotes.

23. Caillois, *Man, Play, and Games,* 23.

24. Ibid., 19.

25. Walter Benjamin, "Doctrine of the Similar," 694.

26. Aristotle, *Poetics,* trans. Malcolm Heath (New York: Penguin, 1996), 6 and passim; Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature,* trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1968). The Aristotelian use of *mimesis* may very well be the reason that Caillois preferred the English *mimicry.*

27. Caillois, *Man, Play, and Games,* 22.

28. Miriam Hansen, "Room-for-Play: Benjamin's Gamble with the Cinema," *October* 109 (Summer 2004), 3–45. See also her *Cinema and Experience: Siegfried Kracauer, Walter Benjamin, and Theodor Adorno* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011). For more on the historical relation between Caillois and Benjamin, see Joyce Cheng, "Mask, Mimicry, and Metamorphosis: Roger Caillois, Walter Benjamin, and Surrealism in the 1930s," *Modernism/Modernity* 16, no. 1 (January 2009), 61–86.

29. To my knowledge, only Scott Bukatman and Torben Grodal have deployed ilinx as a concept in the study of film, and neither has offered a sustained elaboration of it. Bukatman aligns it variously with special effects filmmaking (*Matters of Gravity,* 117–18) and superhero comics (and, I presume, by extension, films; *Poetics of Slumberland,* 189–90). Grodal merely notes in passing that it is an element in many action films. Torben Grodal, *Embodied Visions: Evolution, Emotion, Culture, and Film* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 172.

30. Caillois, *Man, Play, and Games,* 23.

31. Ibid., 26, 31.

32. Caillois, "Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia," 32 (emphasis in original).

33. Ibid., 28 (emphasis in original).

34. See, for example, Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity,* and Cheng, "Mask, Mimicry, Metamorphosis."

35. Caillois, *Man, Play, and Games,* 178.

36. Ibid., 76.

37. For more on the affinity, and even the identity, between mimesis and possession, see Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen, "Mimetic Efficacity," in *The Emotional Tie: Mimesis, Psychoanalysis, and Affect* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993), 98–121.

38. Caillois, *Man, Play, and Games,* 77–78.

39. For Adorno's take on mimesis, see Theodor Adorno, "On the Fetish-Character in Music and the Regression of Listening," in *The Culture Industry,* ed. J. M. Bernstein (New York: Routledge Classics, 1991), 29–60; and Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments,* trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002).

40. Here I am channeling the account of proprioception given by perceptual psychologist James J. Gibson. See especially "The Uses of Proprioception and the Detection of Propriospecific Information," in *Reasons for Realism: Selected Essays of James J. Gibson* (Hilldale, NJ: Lawrence Elrbaum Associates, 1982)*,* 164–70, and "The Optical Information for Self-Perception," in *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1979)*,* 111–26. See also Drew Leder, *The Absent Body* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), chapter 2, especially 39–49. For an approach to the cinema inflected by Gibson's ecological approach, see Joseph D. Anderson, *The Reality of Illusion: An Ecological Approach to Cognitive Film Theory* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1996). On cinema, ecological psychology, and proprioception in particular, see Richmond, "Resonant Perception," especially chapters 2–4.

41. As I hinted before, whether or not you take ilinx to be an ontological condition of the cinema turns on whether you think abstract films can withhold worlds or contain bodies without worlds or even bodies without figures. This, it seems to me, is first of all a question of the nature of abstraction, one that is far beyond the scope of this essay. Here we might make reference to Len Lye's scratch animations, such as *Free Radicals* (1958) and *Particles in Space* (1966). On abstraction in animated film and affect, vitality, and abstraction in Lye's body of work in particular, see Andrew Johnston, *Pulses of Abstraction: Episodes from a History of Animation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, forthcoming).

42. To be sure, the reading of Metz that I offer here is frankly revisionist and extremely schematic (perhaps excessively so). I am trying to mine his account for the lessons it continues to hold for students of contemporary cinema less enthralled with psychoanalysis and semiotics than once we might have been. For example, I will blithely (and intentionally) ignore the question of meaning, which might seem a bit tendentious (or even abusive) given Metz's emphasis on signification.

43. Metz, *The Imaginary Signifier,* 54.

44. Ibid., 48.

45. Ibid., 45.

46. Jacques Lacan, "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the *I* as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience," in *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English,* trans. Bruce Fink (New York: Norton, 2006), 78.

47. Metz, *The Imaginary Signifier,* 46.

48. Metz's point here finds perhaps unlikely ratification from Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film,* enlarged ed. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press).

49. Lacan, "The Mirror Stage," 77.

50. Metz, *The Imaginary Signifier,* 49 (emphasis in original).

51. The account of the mirror stage as a technical process is borrowed in large part from Mark Hansen, *Bodies in Code: Interfaces with Digital Media* (New York: Routledge, 2006). For a media-theoretical take on Lacanian psychoanalysis more generally, see Friedrich Kittler, "The World of the Symbolic—A World of the Machine," in *Literature, Media, Information Systems,* trans. John Johnston (Amsterdam: G+B Arts International, 1997), 130–46.

52. The notion of an apparatus entails a view of technology as fundamentally alien to human life, whereas much recent media theory emphasizes instead the necessity of technics as an infrastructure for living, or "the pursuit of life by means other than life." On the apparatus, see Jean-Louis Baudry, "Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus," in *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology,* ed. Philip Rosen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 286–98, and "The Apparatus: Metapsychological Approaches to the Impression of Reality in the Cinema," in *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology,* 300–18. On the concept of apparatus (*dispositif*) more broadly, see Giorgio Agamben, *What Is an Apparatus? And Other Essays* (New York: Zone, 2009). On technics as an infrastructure for life, see Mark Hansen, "Media Theory," *Theory, Culture, and Society* 23 (2006): 297–306; and Bernard Stiegler, *Technics and Time,* Vol. 1, *The Fault of Epimetheus* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998).

53. Steven Shaviro has famously offered a phenomenology of this shattering in *The Cinematic Body.* The name for this in psychoanalysis is, of course, masochism. See Leo Bersani, "Sexuality and Aesthetics," *October* 28 (Spring 1984): 27–42, and "Is the Rectum a Grave?," *October* 43 (Winter 1987): 197–222.

54. I am being glib here. To be sure, Hitchcock is the auteur most beloved by psychoanalysts, and indeed, I believe that his cinema calls out for such interpretations. Nevertheless, Hitchcock was also a master of shock and sensation. Here see Linda Williams, "Discipline and Fun: Psycho and Postmodern Cinema," in *Reinventing Film Studies,* ed. Christine Gledhill and Linda Williams (London: Arnold, 2000), 351–78. In this essay, Williams is tracking much the same dialectic as I am outlining here but in very different terms.

55. The importance of dissolution or unbounding to identification is a lesson from post-Freudian psychoanalysis. See Diane Davis, "Identification: Burke and Freud on Who You Are," *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 38, no. 2 (April 2008): 123–47; and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, "The Unconscious is Destructured Like an Affect (Part I of 'The Jewish People Do Not Dream')," *Stanford Literature Review* 6, no. 2 (1989): 191–209.

56. This is as much or more for his distinction between *paidia* and *ludus* as it is for the fourfold typology of play that I have drawn out here. Approximately, paidia corresponds to play, and ludus corresponds to games; paidia is unstructured, while

ludus is rule-bound. See Caillois, *Man, Play, and Games,* 13. Just as a start, for an indication of Caillois's canonical status in game studies, I recommend looking at his index entry in Mark J. P. Wolf and Bernard Perron, eds., *The Video Game Theory Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2003).

[57.] Alex Galloway, "The Origin of the First-Person Shooter," in *Gaming: Essays on Algorithmic Culture,* 39–69 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006); and Bob Rehak, "Playing at Being: Psychoanalysis and the Avatar," in *The Video Game Theory Reader,* 103–28. Both of these essays make explicit reference to *The Lady in the Lake.* For a substantial and very relevant treatment of *Lady in the Lake* and identification in a phenomenological idiom, see Sobchack, *The Address of the Eye,* chapter 3, "Film's Body."

[58.] The failure of *The Lady in the Lake* and *Enter the Void* is also instructive for understanding the failure of *Spider-Man*'s Broadway theatrical adaptation, *Spider-Man: Turn Off the Dark.* The theater deals primarily in mimesis. And so, while certainly the stunts failed of their own (sometimes disastrous) accord, their overreaching ambition stemmed in part from the attempt to engender ilinx in the theater. Unless one employs screens of various kinds in the design of a piece, the theater seems ill-equipped for the feats of ilinx that the cinema and other screens offer quite naturally. The evident Schadenfreude of the many reviewers who delighted in this failure, however, is a bit more difficult to fathom. See, for example, Ben Brantley, "1 Radioactive Bite, 8 Legs and 183 Previews," *New York Times,* June 14, 2011, http://theater.nytimes.com/2011/06/15/theater/reviews/spider-man-turn-off-the-dark-opens-after-changes-review.html.

[59.] Metz, *The Imaginary Signifier,* 43 (emphasis in original).

[60.] Stiegler, *Technics and Time,* 21.