Long Live the Film’s Flesh
On the Expressive Physicality and Embodied Perception of Practical Special Effects in Society, Videodrome & From Beyond

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Abstract

There is an oscillating quality to the filmic display of prosthetic effects that pertains to the convergence of textual context and physical material, the latter being physically present in front of the camera at the time of filming. This thesis seeks to (1) articulate the perceptual processes that are guided by such practical special effects’ physical presence in the cinematographic space and to (2) conceptualize practical effects as autonomous agents of their inherent physicality, for which I will engage in visual analyses of Brian Yuzna’s Society (1989), David Cronenberg’s Videodrome (1983) and Stuart Gordon’s From Beyond (1986).

Practical effects are first placed within the theoretical framework of filmic reality, a concept developed by Richard Rushton that describes the intricate relationship of film to physical reality and that serves to explicate the photographic indexicality of film as a mimetic principle through which we engage with onscreen objects. This is followed by a discussion of practical effects in the context of embodied spectatorship, a tendency in contemporary film studies that explores the multi-sensory experience of film viewing, which leads me to introduce what I define as the tactile reality of practical effects. Society demonstrates how cinematographic features such as the camera’s movement and its proximity to the effect visually foreground practical effects’ physicality, which is studied in correspondence to Laura Marks’s concept of haptic visuality. Vivian Sobchack’s notion of film as viewing subject and Jennifer Barker’s mode of textural analysis are utilized to address the autonomous expressive physicality of Videodrome’s practical effects, alongside shot duration as a means of filmic foregrounding. The idea of mimetic experience as a way of coming into contact with onscreen objects is applied to From Beyond. This is concluded by a formulation of the transsubstitutional nature of practical effects, which conceptualizes how they display both text and texture, though with an emphasis on what I describe as their potential textural agency.
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Introduction

Cinema is at once a form of perception and a material perceived, a new way of encountering reality and a part of the reality thereby discovered for the first time.


There is something physically striking about the appearance of William Lee’s hallucinated ‘case officer’—an exceptionally large insect that appears to be talking out of its fleshy back—in *Naked Lunch* (1991), David Cronenberg’s adaptation of William S. Burroughs’ novel of the same name. Its legs’ static movement, leaving traces in the powder on which it lies; its antennae reluctantly moving along its head’s shaky motions; and its stale, bland skin, which reflects the set’s lighting: these visual signs indicate the insect’s physical presence in the cinematographic space (*Figure 1*). At the same time, they display the constructed nature of the insect as a practical special effect: an effect that is present in front of the camera at the time of filming and which is defined in contrast to a digital effect, which is added in postproduction. The type of practical effects that are used to produce fantastical creatures and severed limbs and the like consist mostly of rubber latex prosthetics and makeup. Such practical effects often seem to have a self-reflective quality about them, because, such as in this particular scene, their artificiality can be conspicuous. However, what surfaces along with this potential self-reflectivity is a resistance against mere textual intelligibility. In other words, the physical material of such effects demands to be noticed; not just to be understood as a subordinate to a film’s narrative, but to have its physical onscreen presence acknowledged, which potentially manifests itself independently from its textual function and context. A practical effect’s physical presence in the image can often hardly go by unnoticed; it is almost as if one could touch, or feel its material and textures.

In a time when digital special effects were already available and on the rise in mainstream cinema, Cronenberg, whose films of the late 1970s and early 1980s had been

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1 Within this thesis simply referred to as a ‘practical effect.’
known for their elaborate, spectacular display of practical effects, continued to use low-tech latex prosthetics, models and makeup to realize his cinematic vision for *Naked Lunch* and *eXistenZ* (1999). There is a certain aesthetic to practical effects, which is mostly due to their presence in front of the camera at the time of filming—commonly referred to as the *pro-filmic* space—but which can also be appointed to the effects’ physical material and visibly displayed textures; something for which digitally conceived effects are often too glossy or smooth. Cronenberg’s persistence on using practical effects can therefore be considered a conscious artistic choice.\textsuperscript{4} They are a means of visual signification that has its own set of aesthetics; its own ways of being present in a film’s imagery; and it deserves its own terminology.

Cinema has always attracted an audience by providing immersive spectacles. Special effects, be it in set design (sci-fi and period films), creature design (horror) or cinematography (such as crowd simulations or the use of models), are therefore the instruments of choice for directors to materialize their cinematic ambitions. Special effects, because of their function as reality-altering or fantasy-creating devices, have since the early days of film challenged the

\textsuperscript{2} Screenshots by me.
\textsuperscript{3} Hantke. (2004): 44.
\textsuperscript{4} One only has to take a look at the almost parodic, self-aware use of practical effects in Peter Jackson’s *Braindead* (1992), Sam Raimi’s *The Evil Dead* (1981), or the retro-character of films such as *Planet Terror* (Robert Rodriguez, 2007) and *The Green Inferno* (Eli Roth, 2013), to see the impact that the aesthetics of practical effects have had on directors and on filmmaking in general.
idea that film, because of its photographic, indexical relation to physical reality, is the medium par excellence that can represent reality. Note that this is indicates a reality of the camera’s mechanic reproduction of pro-filmic worldly referents, which is not to be confused with a cinematic realism that relates to the realism of plot- or character development. Lisa Bode recently wrote that “in Western cinema, transfiguring makeup has often been uncomfortably situated in relation to photographic conceptions of realism.” Though this is often the case with how film theory tends to treat special effects (as the quintessential devices of illusion) they are nevertheless one of the medium’s intrinsic components. The insect in Naked Lunch is one of the many examples, not just of how practical effects are employed to portray the impossible or fantastical, but also of how they embody a specific aesthetic of their own by being a part of a film’s indexical relation to the pro-filmic space.

Practical Effects in Context: Filmic Reality

For directors, special effects “figure as sites of possibility.” For the spectator, they hold the promise of spectacle, an immersive experience; “the promise of a certain type of aesthetic experience.” Over the course of the 20th century, technological advancements and overall innovation in the special effects industry increased the possibilities for directors to portray the ‘unreal,’ simultaneously increasing the verisimilitude of the effects’ appearance. It came to a point where special effects became the main attraction of a film’s release—in particular the 1970s and 80s films of the horror and sci-fi genres—thereby returning cinema “to its roots.” Cinema’s visual spectacle gained prominence in relation to its story telling capabilities and its ability to show became more of an attraction than its ability to tell. Special effects found themselves at the heart of this change, which is marked by the release of films such as George Lucas’s effect-driven Star Wars (1977). Such a film, with its highly illusive and immersive nature, can be considered the antithesis of the ideology-defying films of what has been

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7 ibid.
8 ‘Verisimilitude’ is used throughout this thesis to describe the appearance of films or things in relation to reality, or our expectations of what that reality looks like.
referred to as Political Modernism\textsuperscript{10}, which, starting in the 1960s, sought to reject and ultimately expose the illusion-inducing techniques of classical Hollywood cinema. Directors such as Jean-Luc Godard resisted continuity editing and the camera’s absence, thereby offering the medium a certain self-reflectivity that most film theory since then has considered to be a sign of realist film.\textsuperscript{11} Scott Bukatman writes how “spectacle, by actively disrupting narrative coherence, threatens the stability of the narrative system.”\textsuperscript{12} Many film theorists’ critique of mainstream cinema’s immersive spectacle comes from prioritizing the narrative over the spectacle, but since film is by definition a visual medium it would be a mistake to dismiss special effects as mere spectacle-creating devices.

Richard Rushton and Tamao Nakahara articulate two crucial principles of my approach to film, which relate to my intention to study practical effects in depth. Rushton, author of the book \textit{The Reality of Film: Theories of Filmic Reality} (2011), argues that while film theory has tried to move away from the dichotomy of reality-illusion that Political Modernism helped to install, it is still very much present in contemporary film theory. As an alternative to the judgment of films according to their adequacy to reality, Rushton proposes a theoretical approach based on \textit{filmic reality}, with which he intends “to see films as being part of reality instead of as representations of it.”\textsuperscript{13} Furthermore, as Nakahara puts it, “the image […] must be studied not only in relation to the narrative, but also as an independent artistic contribution to the film.”\textsuperscript{14} These views on film and film theory correspond with my approach to practical effects in the sense that I aim to explore the various facets of practical effects’ onscreen presence and the spectator’s experience thereof in a way that would address film as an intrinsic visual medium.

The idea of a filmic reality functions as motivation as well as a theoretical basis for my approach to practical effects in film. Rushton discusses a variety of key authors in the field, thereby meticulously building his case for filmic reality as a valid conceptual approach to an understanding of film’s relationship to reality. Among these authors are André Bazin, Stanley Cavell and Gilles Deleuze, all of which will be discussed in my contextualization of practical effects.

\textsuperscript{10} A term coined in retrospect by Sylvia Harvey (1982), which describes “the expression of a desire to combine semiotic and ideological analysis with the development of an avant-garde aesthetic practice dedicated to the production of radical social effects.” Rodowick. (1988): 1-2.

\textsuperscript{11} Rushton. (2011): 22.

\textsuperscript{12} Bukatman. (2006): 75.


\textsuperscript{14} Nakahara. (2010): 150.
effects within the notion of a filmic reality—mostly, and in the case of Deleuze solely through secondary literature. Each of these authors has different ideas on film’s relationship to (its own) reality, whether they relate to the medium’s indexicality (Cavell) or to a shared, social experience of what makes films realistic (Bazin).\textsuperscript{15} The reason I chose to base my methods on filmic reality as such, is that it grants me the possibility to primarily focus on film’s inherently visual levels of signification, rather than to have my visual analyses be dependent on textual interpretation, which is an aspect of film theory that I deem unnecessary for a study of practical effects’ physical onscreen presence, at least within the boundaries of this thesis. Acknowledging the limits of narrative theory is a way of saying that there is more to film than semiotics and psychoanalytical modes of thought might elucidate. That is to say, even though these effects often have a clear narrative function to fulfill, I want to emphasize their visual character. Textual interpretation is no less of a means to discern film’s complexities, but aside from distinguishing practical effects’ various ways of appearing in film—textually and physically—I will refrain from any account of how they might be textually interpreted in contexts that lie outside the film’s frame (which is a point I discuss more extensively in Chapter 1).

This is a thesis on practical effects, the perceptual processes that are informed by such effects’ physical onscreen presence, and what I aim to conceptualize as the inherent expressive physicality of those effects, which emerges from the effects’ autonomous modes of perceiving and being perceived. The paradoxical role of practical effects, of being devices of immersive illusion as well as disruptive elements to a film’s narrative structure by means of spectacle, is an incentive to study their onscreen presence in terms of filmic reality and spectatorship. Physical presence and textual context converge in this paradox, and even though an important part of my hypothesis is that both aspects function together in a dynamic interaction of perception, I will, when needed, make clear distinctions between the two. I argue that a practical effect is at once (perceived as) a carrier of textual information, imposed on it by a film’s narrative system, and the effect itself, which denotes nothing but its own physicality. The latter aspect is the focal point of this thesis, because I want to point out the ways in which this physicality manifests itself independent from its textual context.

\textsuperscript{15} ibid: 12-13.
Embodied Spectatorship

The physicality that I consider an inherent part of practical effects’ presentation and perception leads me to introduce the theoretical angle from which I will address practical effects in film. Even though Rushton’s experience is that contemporary film theory still resides within the illusion-reality opposition, there has been a recent paradigm shift in film studies that somewhat corresponds with his take on film’s relationship to reality; at least in terms of how that reality is perceived by the spectator. This change has been most notably initiated by Vivian Sobchack’s *The Address of the Eye: a Phenomenology of Film Experience* (1992). Though Sobchack’s writings clearly mark a shift from narrative theory to questions about the relationship between film and spectator in terms of affect and embodied spectatorship—a term I use to refer to the broad notion of how spectatorship relates to more than just vision—a similar academic interest in film’s materiality and the ways in which film can convey a sense of embodied involvement in the spectator can be traced back to the work of Henri Bergson and Siegfried Kracauer.16

Sobchack’s adaption of Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology of perception has been a major influence on the more recent advocates of embodied spectatorship, such as Laura Marks, Jennifer Barker and Anne Rutherford. These authors point out film theory’s lack of an understanding of spectatorship that would move beyond narrative theory and sheer optical-based notions of what film viewing entails. They propose that spectatorship is for a large part formed by an embodied involvement with film’s visual signs. This translates itself to a haptic or tactile sensation of onscreen action and objects, wherein ‘haptic’ relates to tactile as well as kinaesthetic sensation—a sensation that plays out on the surface of one’s skin, as well as within bodily structures of muscles and organs—and ‘tactile,’ or ‘tactility’ relates to just the surface level of touch and contact. Barker formulates a tactile sensation of film as follows: “[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.”17 How the two differ from each other in the context of embodied spectatorship will be discussed in Chapter 2. For now it should suffice to say that I intend to acknowledge the tactile sensations that practical effects potentially bring about in the

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spectator, as well as the tactile character or expressive physicality of the effects themselves
(which does or does not manifest itself, depending on the effects’ cinematographic display).

The various concepts of embodied spectatorship might not be directly conversing with
Rushton’s account of a filmic reality, but the insights that the two general ideas share are
demonstrative of the need for a specific terminology of practical effects’ paradoxical role in
ontological notions of film-viewing and making. Mimesis is one of those overlapping aspects,
for, as Michael Taussig explains, it is a two-layered notion: “a copying or imitation, and a
palpable, sensuous, connection between the very body of the perceiver and the perceived.”

The spectator’s experience of film’s mimetic qualities can therefore be considered an
experience of film’s intrinsic (filmic) reality, which simultaneously gives way to, in the words
of Rutherford, a “kind of embodied perception that opens itself up to tactile sensory
experience.” It is an aspect of film viewing experience that I consider crucial for an
understanding of how the spectator comes into contact with the materiality of onscreen
objects, in this case of practical effects. Furthermore, an experience of contact with the image
itself is “a mimetic blurring of boundaries between self and image.” This corresponds with
filmic reality as an indication of film’s intimate relationship with its spectator (see Chapter 2
and 5 for a more elaborate description of the connection between mimesis, filmic reality,
embodied spectatorship and practical effects).

Objectives and Significance

With this thesis I aim to address (1) the ways in which the presentation of practical effects
helps their material/physical/textural activity—autonomously emergent or reciprocal—to
surface, and (2) the spectator’s perceptual processes that are at once guided by that activity
and that grant it emphasis by sharing the camera’s view. I will ask of the following three films
how their ways of displaying practical effects potentially evoke a tactile sensation in the
spectator and how this relates to the effects’ onscreen physical (pro-filmic) presence: Brian
Yuzna’s Society (1989), Cronenberg’s Videodrome (1983) and Stuart Gordon’s From Beyond
(1986). By analyzing some of the practical effects used in these films I will explore what

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20 ‘Contact’ is a term generally used to describe the embodied involvement of the spectator with film’s images
(e.g. Taussig 1993; Marks 2000; Barker 2009; Rutherford 2011).
function practical effects have in the production of embodied spectatorship and how they consequently might be understood in terms of tactility and mimesis. These three films therefore serve both as objects of research and as case studies through which, by analyzing them, I will articulate my arguments.

Embodied spectatorship has been explored in various contexts, such as spatiality (Richmond 2016), intercultural cinema and affect (Marks 2000; Rutherford 2011), technology in/of film (Sobchack 1994), and texture (Barker 2009). The common denominator is an expressed interest in the recent discourses of embodiment in cinema and cultural studies. It could be related to the more broad and interdisciplinary field of study commonly known as ‘new materialism,’ which, illustrated by its contribution to the ‘material turn,’ aims to reconsider the prominence given to language. By pointing out the limits of linguistic signification and criticizing the power structures that are embedded in language-centered notions of representation, these schools of new materialism, mostly emerging from the fields of material culture studies, feminism, philosophy, science studies and cultural theory, seek to formulate alternative concepts and terminologies that would serve their material-based ontologies.22 The reconsideration of subject-object relations and the study of objects as sources of action—generally referred to by the term agency23—are outcomes of these modes of thought that are invaluable to my approach to practical effects. Even though notions of embodied spectatorship enjoy their own terminology and specific sets of interests and applications in film, they do bridge the gap between new materialism and film theory.

Practical effects have not yet been explored in these contexts, or at least not to the extent in which I will discuss them. Naturally, their onscreen appearance has led critics and academics to describe the visceral sensations that they evoke (Powell 2005; Seife 2015), but any further investigation into their expressive physicality remains absent, mostly because this viscerality is mostly discussed in terms of what these effects are meant to represent (Williams 1991; Shaviro 1993). I believe that by contextualizing practical effects as such, we might come to understand better how we engage with the physical onscreen presence of objects that

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23 Agency and agent (later also used in relation to practical effects as agents, or having an agency) are terms which meaning I take from the writings of Karen Barad, Bruno Latour and Jane Bennett. Albeit varying in their application of the term (or variations on it, such as Latour’s term actant and Barad’s intra-activity), what characterizes it is the description of a thing (human or non-human) being a source of action: it can do things and produce effects, as well as be acted upon. This is often thought of in terms of performativity and material-discursive practices, as the term originates from a critique upon anthropocentric and linguistic structures of thought. See: Barad (2003); Latour (2005); Bennett (2010).
serve as illusion-generating devices. By resisting the generally assumed subordination of these effects to their textual context, I want to address our embodied involvement with them, as well as their autonomous engagement with film and spectator. My application of various notions of embodied spectatorship might at times differ from their intentional premises, so a discussion on the applicability of these theories to specific instances of film might help to point out any gaps left open; which might be a valuable contribution to the field of embodied spectatorship in and of itself.

As to practical effects themselves, the academic attention they have received has mostly been focused on their technological characteristics and how these translate to a film’s narrative and influence directorial choices (Metz & Meltzer 1977; Bukatman 2003; Bode 2017). Another notable discussion on special effects in general is related to their genre-specific adequacy, or how effects are an inherent part of horror and sci-fi films and what this entails in terms of audience reception and film critique (Pierson 2002; Mathijs 2010; Nakahara 2010; Rehak 2018). A comparison to digital effects is never far away as well (Prince 1996; Pierson 2002), but this does not bear any significance to this thesis. Aside from a few exceptions that do specifically address practical effects’ aesthetics and stylistic presentation (Hantke 2004; Powell 2005; Seife 2015), most literature on films that are abundant in their use of practical effects is solely concerned with analyzing and interpreting thematic elements (e.g. Creed 1986; Trygg 2018) and therefore finds itself far removed from the effects themselves and their functions within film.

Case Studies and Methodology

The films that Yuzna, Cronenberg and Gordon directed in the 1980s are generally known as pioneering works of the Body Horror genre. Although all three films feature bodies that mutate in one way or another, I would describe Yuzna’s Society as a ‘paranoia thriller,’ Cronenberg’s Videodrome as ‘surreal sci-fi,’ and Gordon’s From Beyond as a ‘sci-fi/horror’ hybrid. Each genre of film naturally matches its own set of academic interests, but because of my concern with film’s visual characteristics I wish to refrain from any implications that my choice of genre might have upon this study. That said, practical effects find themselves mostly present in the sci-fi and horror genres, which indicates that I am somewhat bound to matters of genre-study. However, since textual interpretation has no place in this thesis, I do not consider it necessary to involve any genre-specific implications that these films’ practical
effects might have. Body Horror has received plenty of academic attention over time (e.g. Williams 1991; Shaviro 1993; Reyes 2014; Trygg 2018), especially when it comes to Cronenberg’s earlier work (Grant 2000), and I want to stress that I do not intend to offer any contribution to those existing fields of inquiry, for the simple reason that I am studying these effects from a film theory point-of-view and have no interest in socio-cultural readings of what these films express at a narrative level.

*Videodrome*, as the most prolific of the three films in terms of critical acclaim, has received considerable academic attention ever since its release. However, it has been mostly examined in relation to the genre it so prominently advocates, Body Horror. I want to point out that, even though *Videodrome*’s practical effects—or rather the things that they give shape to—function as incentives for many academics’ approaches to the film, they have hardly, if at all, been discussed in isolation from what they represent in regards to the film’s narrative and thematic elements.24 *Society* has a place in the horror film discourse (Bartlomiej 2009; Kermode 2011; Towlson 2014), but its discussion does not transcend descriptions of its visual spectacle and its themes of paranoia and class struggles. These descriptions do entail its practical effects and even refer to the spectacle’s tactility-inducing appearance, but refrain from relating it to notions of embodied spectatorship. *From Beyond* is known for its excessive use of practical effects, but I have not been able to find any academic literature on the film, which is probably due to its relatively minor cult-status. I will now outline the content and methodology of the chapters that make up this thesis.

**Chapter 1: Filmic Reality** serves as stepping-stone to the other chapters. In it, I will examine numerous arguments that pertain to filmic reality, most notably those coming from Tom Gunning, Bazin, Roland Barthes and Cavell. Rushton’s book functions as secondary literature to these authors, but I will not hesitate to take his own arguments into question, as practical effects have only a minor role to fulfill in his hypothesis. Starting off with positioning practical effects within the historical context of the beginnings of film, I will set out to describe the theoretical premises that form the foundation of my approach to practical effects and filmic reality. This chapter can therefore be considered an extension to the introduction, but its content and arguments are a necessary means for me to proceed, for it

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24 See the selective bibliography on Cronenberg, compiled by Michael Grant, for detailed information about the academic interest in Cronenberg’s films over the years. Examples of titles include ‘David Cronenberg’s Surreal Abjection’, ‘Cronenberg and the Canadian Cultural Consciousness’, ‘The Gothic, the Body, and the Failed Homeopathy Argument’; (on *Videodrome*): ‘David Cronenberg’s Gore-Tech Visions’, and ‘Panic Pornography: Videodrome From Production to Seduction’. Grant. (2000): 193-211.
will lead me to introduce a notion of filmic reality that specifically pertains to the physicality of onscreen objects: tactile reality.25

Albeit appearing similar in design to the first chapter, **Chapter 2: Embodied Spectatorship and the Expressive Physicality of Practical Effects** takes on a more abstract theoretical tone in its discernment of embodied spectatorship as understood by Sobchack, Marks and Barker. Reviewing their core concepts (film as viewing subject [Sobchack]; haptic visuality [Marks]; and textural analysis [Barker]) is essential to formulate my theoretical approach. Furthermore, by critically evaluating their applications of these concepts, I will outline the methodological structure for the visual analyses of my case studies. Writing their prolific titles little less than a decennium apart, they each contribute something different to this thesis, which I will utilize in the visual analyses of the remaining three chapters.

**Chapter 3: Embodied Perception of Practical Effects’ Tactility in Society** focuses on the question how practical effects can evoke a tactile sensation in the spectator by ways of their presentation, which is why I will focus on the film’s final scene’s cinematography.26 Society is specifically suitable for this purpose, because its ways of presenting its practical effects take the attention away from their intended textual context. Similar to my analyses of the other two films, I will move between formal description and theoretical interpretation, all the while aiming to stay within the body of the film itself. Marks’s concept of haptic visuality is especially of relevance to this case study, because even though its premises differ from Society’s overall imagery, it alludes to the embodied response that cinematography incites; particularly camera movement and the camera’s proximity to the object. Besides offering a theoretical framework, Marks’s analytical application of haptic visuality serves as a methodological model that I use to point out and discuss cinematographic features.

Whereas the previous chapter deals with cinematographic presentation of practical effects and its effect on the spectator in terms of embodied spectatorship, **Chapter 4: Special Effects’ Textural Agency in Videodrome** aims to point out and articulate the inherently autonomous physicality of practical effects as agents of their own material textures. The three scenes that I chose to study are to some degree demonstrative of this, but they also function as examples for the sake of questioning my own assumptions regarding practical effects’

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25 Including ‘reality’ in this term, besides purposefully indicating the realness of experiencing practical effects through a tactile sensation, can also be seen as an indirect reference to Yuzna’s description of Society’s effect-spectacle as a “plastic reality.” Kermode. (2011): 92.

agential physicality. Cinematographic presentation still plays a role, though a minor one in comparison to \textit{Society}. Barker’s textural analysis, which seeks to explore the tendency of onscreen objects’ textures to evoke a tactile sensation in the viewer, functions as a guiding methodological principle in this chapter through which the textural qualities of \textit{Videodrome}’s practical effects will be analyzed.

\textbf{Chapter 5: Transsubstitution: Practical Effects and Mimesis in \textit{From Beyond}} reconsiders the tactility that is involved in mimetic experience by introducing the notion of \textit{transsubstitution}, which is a term I coin to describe the ways in which a practical effect is at once an effect (materially speaking) \textit{and} that what it is meant to represent according to its textual context. By analyzing \textit{From Beyond}’s practical effects—with an emphasis on how they appear onscreen; not by means of cinematography, but purely in terms of physical appearance—in relation to notions of mimesis (provided by Taussig, Marks [Walter Benjamin] and Rutherford [Kracauer]), I will explicate how textual and textural material oscillate in visual presence, and how the viewer experiences the practical effect as such. \textit{From Beyond} does not feature any filmic abnormalities that serve as incentives to my analysis of the film, but there is an excess to its practical effects that causes their physical appearance to surface and that directs the spectator’s attention towards their conspicuous artificiality.
Chapter 1: Filmic Reality

Méliès and his Selenites

“As movies use special effects to produce increasingly vivid sensations, they actually tend to become less lifelike.” Even though Joel Black is mostly referring to computer generated imagery (CGI) here, it would be just as easy to assume that the same goes for practical effects, because they too are created and used to help produce an illusion of reality. Along the same line, Black claims that digital technologies in filmmaking have caused a decrease of the photographic and the indexical in the image, thereby adding to the gap between the image and the worldly referents it contains. This does not seem so easily applicable to practical effects, because even though they serve a similar purpose, they are actually physically present in the cinematographic space, whereas CGI is added in postproduction. Paradoxically, it therefore seems that practical effects on the screen are no different than a common telephone or table, when it comes to the indexical nature of film as a photographic medium—despite the supposed resistance of special effects to being ‘lifelike’. Indexicality of the image; the illusion of reality: these terms might raise a couple of questions, one of them being: what does it mean to say that a film—or an effect for that matter, digital or practical—is more or less lifelike, or real(istic)? We all know that whenever we witness a fantastical beast, an onscreen death, or a limb being severed (or extended), that it is not real. Yet, we can shiver at the sight of gruesome images, at least when they seem very real. Seem, because even though we know it is not real and it does not appear as real—mostly for the simple reason of mediation—such imagery can trick us into believing that what we are seeing could be real. This would mean that ‘lifelike’ remains a criterion inherent to film, at least when the production value of special effects lives up to our expectations. However, Black implies that ‘lifelike’ relates to matters of indexicality; that direct referents to the physical world are needed for life-likeness. This judging of films according to their truthfulness to reality “and not according to what films themselves are,” is exactly what Rushton argues against, as he criticizes contemporary film theory for remaining within the binary opposition of illusion and reality, despite its attempts

28 ibid.
to move away from it. It is therefore that Rushton asks what films can do and what we can do with films; questions with which he aims to break with a representational view on film. As an opening to the extensive mapping of theories and ideas on film and reality, I will briefly reflect upon the reality-illusion dichotomy in the medium’s early days, as well as describe the paradoxical role of practical effects in the beginnings of film(making). The following paragraphs therefore function as an introduction to this chapter, as well as a demonstration of how and why practical effects challenge existing notions of film and reality.

The cinema of attractions—a term coined by Gunning in the late eighties to describe the earliest forms of cinema—was a cinema that “displays its visibility.” In other words, the cinema of attractions is a cinema that shows, or exhibits projected motion without the pretence of being an illusion; an illusion that would hide the constructed nature of the image. The cinema of attractions is put in contrast to the later emerging classical cinema of Hollywood, which has been criticized for passing off its exploits as representations, or reproductions of reality by immersing their audience into their illusory worlds, thereby creating the illusion of reality. This is not to say that the cinema of attractions shows either a reality or an illusion, but it is praised by Gunning for not tricking its audience into believing that the illusion is a reality. As I mentioned in the Introduction, Political Modernism tried to break with Hollywood’s illusions of reality in the 1960s by challenging illusion-inducing traits seen in Hollywood cinema, such as closed off narratives and continuity editing. The cinematic apparatus had to be made apparent to the audience, for it would reveal the ideological nature of classical Hollywood cinema. However, such a mode of thinking would confirm the dichotomy of reality-illusion in film, and, so Rushton’s argument goes, this limits the possibilities of understanding a reality of film that is based on the medium itself. Note that I use the article ‘a’ and not ‘the’ to address reality, which is to stress the open-endedness of the word in the context of film. An example might be in order, to illustrate and reflect upon the above.

Georges Méliés’s A Trip to the Moon (Le Voyage dans la Lune, 1902) is among the first films to use practical effects to show something fantastical and is regarded as one of the first sci-fi films. The film makes extensive use of a technique known as matte painting, where

30 ibid: 3.
31 Gunning. (1986): 64.
a landscape or location is painted and used as backdrop in the studio, aiming for a seamless transition between the illusion of location and the action that takes place onscreen. According to Gunning’s argumentation, Méliès’s audiences would be thrilled to witness the medium’s capacity to show such extraordinary, fantastical images, while being very well aware of its illusionistic character, instead of “mistaking” the illusion for reality.33 One of Gunning’s observations is that the actors in the cinema of attractions look at the camera, thereby establishing contact with the audience and creating a cinema that “displays its visibility, willing to rupture a self-enclosed fictional world for a chance to solicit the attention of the spectator.”34 Another aspect of early cinema’s “visibility,” is that people were just getting familiar with the newly arrived techniques of filmmaking—one obvious example being the well known story of The Lumière brothers’ Arrival of a Train at La Ciotat (L’arrivée d’un train en gare de La Ciotat, 1896), which first public screenings had people thinking a real life train was about to run into them. This type of characteristics, combined with the use of close-ups to expand on early cinema’s exhibitionist nature—instead of supporting the narrative—is what makes the cinema of attractions stand out in its use of illusory devices. However, when it comes to the use of practical effects, there seems to be rarely any difference when compared to matte painting or costumes as used in later cinema, at least not when it comes to studying film as film in itself.

Consider the difference between the appearance of alien beings (Selenites) in A Trip to the Moon and the surgery scene in Georges Franju’s Eyes Without a Face (Les Yeux sans Visage, 1960), during which the top layer of skin is removed from the face of Edna Grüber. If we would follow Gunning’s line of argumentation, we would have to consider the latter example an illusion of reality: the audience is made to believe that the surgery is real, provided that the seamless transition between cuts, close-ups, a linear plotline and the ‘absence’ of a camera cause the audience to forget that they are witness to a constructed reality. In both cases, however, the special effects are used to visualize something non-real—I am strictly speaking in a technical sense here, because Selenites do not exist in the real world, while the removal of a person’s face through surgery could be an actual possibility. It appears that what matters in separating the two films’ relation to reality, according to Gunning, is the ‘how’: how they present the special effects. A Trip to the Moon does not pretend to be anything else than a construct, because it keeps the audience from immersive illusion through

33 ibid: 25.
34 Gunning. (1986): 64.
static camerawork and the overall absence of a phonic narrative, while *Eyes Without a Face* pretends to show the real removal of a woman’s face: the removal of the face is intercut by shots of the surgeon and his assistant’s expressively tensed and seriously engaged faces. However, the fact is that if we are to think outside the dichotomy of reality-illusion, both films do present a reality; not a replication or a representation of the reality, but a reality (of film) in itself. Both instances of practical effects seem to say “see how real this looks!”, but whereas Franju’s audience had been accustomed to the medium’s representational capabilities and was provided no incentive to question these, Méliès’s audience, in its unfamiliarity with film, was too much struck by the modern techniques of projected motion, which, along with the absence of sound and the use of static camerawork, hindered the film’s illusory and immersive potential.

These fairly obvious historical nuances in the reception of film illustrate how people experienced film’s practical effects differently in different periods of time and in relation to different trends in filmmaking. Being more of a demonstration of technique and creativity with materials than a self-enclosed fictional world come full circle, *A Trip to the Moon* visually displays its practical effects as a means to visualize the fantastical. Méliès, whether unconsciously or not, thereby emphasized the constructed nature of the practical effects’ stylized reality. Over time practical effects increasingly became a means to display the fantastical and the impossible, but their visibly present constructedness became something for filmmakers to get rid of, as they aimed to further develop film’s immersive potential and verisimilitude. I believe that practical effects have maintained some of that visibility, in one way or another; in the eyes of film as well as in the eyes of the spectator. They play a crucial part in a film’s verisimilitude, but it is in the context of film’s own reality that they attain a status other than the subordinate function of narrative-supporting material. Before I can ask of film how it perceives and presents practical effects, I need to ask of film how it can produce a reality that can be considered its own. How do film’s indexical capabilities and the pro-filmic positioning of practical effects correspond with each other and with filmic reality? Questions such as these are my priority for this first chapter, because by asking of film how it relates to our/physical reality and what kind of reality film itself puts forward, I can formulate a frame of thought to position practical effects in, thereby eventually being able to approach an understanding of (1) the function of practical effects in the production of filmic reality and (2) their physical, independent onscreen presence.

Film’s potential to produce a reality on its own, a reality interwoven with worldly referents but independently active in its modes of perception and (re)presentation, is a rather
abstract and hence problematic aspect of film to emphasize in a study such as this. Throughout this first chapter I will discuss arguments and ideas from major thinkers in the field of film theory—both classical and contemporary—that can be related to filmic reality. It may be less about what the spectator experiences or sees in an image than about what films show, and even though I will discuss both sides of the screen—image and spectator—I will see to it that film and practical effects themselves remain the main focal point of this study. The first author I will discuss in depth is Bazin and some of his ideas on film and realism. Rushton argues that Bazin’s work on this topic has often been misunderstood by film scholars and it is Rushton’s alternative reading of Bazin that enlightens some of the complications surrounding film’s relationship to reality and whether or not film is able to represent reality.

**Bazin’s Realism and the Problem of a Social Reality**

In Rushton’s eyes Bazin has always been strictly read as a realist, causing his position towards film and reality to be simplified. Largely informed by Daniel Morgan’s (2006) writings on Bazin, Rushton writes that the common reading of Bazin is that he offers either a direct realism (by way of indexicality) or a perceptual/psychological realism (by way of seeming to be similar to the real world). Bazin’s supposed belief in cinema as a way to directly represent the real world has been criticized by way of emphasizing the inherent capacity of film to mediate. Simply put, the argument is that film cannot offer a direct copy of the world, because it offers mediated images. The problem with this critique is that it presumes that there exists something like an unmediated reality, while it should be obvious that there exists no reality without the meditative actions of our own sensory perception. Following Morgan, Rushton’s reading of Bazin reveals that Bazin’s realism in film “can only ever be a construction and never a straight replication, duplication or representation of reality.” The nature of this constructed reality is, according to Rushton, social. Similar to the social character of physical reality—a composition of objects and experiences that we generically share—the reality of film is a shared reality: “an aesthetic by way of which humans might reach a set of shared judgments about what constitutes reality.”

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36 ibid: 45.
37 ibid: 44.
38 ibid: 47.
understanding of Bazin’s realism is a move away from seeing film as a photographic medium that is able to seize reality in image and sound and that corresponds with “perception or with phenomenal or material reality.” 39 What Bazin’s realism amounts to, then, is a matter of film being “true to life, ‘life’ being a socially shared reality.” 40

Still, such an understanding of film’s relation to reality seems to be largely grounded in a textual understanding of the medium, because when Rushton admits to an example from film—Roberto Rosselini’s Germany Year Zero (1948)—he stays completely clear of discussing the film’s images, which had appeared to be his book’s foremost pursuit in the introduction. Instead, he uses the film’s plot to illustrate how a film can be true to life and in that way it would not have mattered if he were talking about film or literature. If I were to follow Rushton, it would seem obvious that he would discuss the how and not the what. Bazin’s belief in film’s inherent objectivity might be misunderstood according to Rushton, as it is precisely the medium’s artificiality which coproduces a certain shared acceptance of its reality, but seeing the reality inscribed by the camera as a social or shared one fails to help understand moving images as reality in itself, because, in my view, it is a notion too general and open-ended to be useful.

It therefore seems that a Bazinian realism is not what I am looking for after all. The reason I brought it up, knowing also that a full comprehension of the author is not at place here, is that its underlying argument still offers a point of discussion that is worth examining. The notion that guides much of the above, namely, is that, instead of offering a view behind or through the screen, film (re)presents its own reality, which is “independent of any prior reality that might be conceived beyond or behind it.” 41 Rushton devotes a couple of pages to the denial of this independency of a prior reality—which ties in with his critique of the supposed indexicality of pro-filmic images as a sign of a film’s realism—and it is a point I have to address, especially when it comes to practical effects. I will use Rushton’s own example of Steven Spielberg’s E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial (1982) in my discussion of it, even though Spielberg’s handling of practical effects is utmost normative and there are hardly any moments during which their visibility is really put on display.

Much of my interest in practical effects surpasses Rushton’s view of them as mere tools to provide the option to directors to show events and objects, of which the relation

39 ibid: 50.
40 ibid.
41 ibid: 44.
between appearance and materiality is incongruent with its real world referents. “What can be
defined as reality in the cinema is not the result of the mechanism or technology by means of
which images are produced and the supposed consequences of those mechanisms.”\textsuperscript{42} Rather,
as Rushton argues, what is real in film is “a consequence of what we see and hear, of what
we, as human beings, count and accept as being consequences,” with which he refers to
Bazin’s social reality.\textsuperscript{43} So when Rushton acknowledges the extra-terrestrial E.T. as a pro-
filmic reality—because there was no CGI involved in the creation of the creature—his logic is
that it would not have mattered if it were in fact digitally produced, because, in the end, what
makes E.T. real is a reality of friendship; friendship between E.T. and the young boy Elliot.\textsuperscript{44}
Besides the needless sentiment that resides in this logic, it, again, seems that Rushton
bypasses the image and instead focuses on film as a narrative device. Yes, E.T. is not a
creature of flesh and blood and yes, even though the audience is aware of this, it does not
matter because the creature still succeeds in producing empathy and sentiment. Rushton is not
wrong in his observations, but E.T.’s filmic flesh and blood—the literality of the puppet’s
material that is displayed on the screen—is just as much present in and of itself as the
Selenites’ costumes and masks of Mèliès’ film. The fact that we see both E.T., Elliot’s alien
friend, and E.T., a moving puppet, is what is at stake here. The relation between the
appearance of a practical effect such as E.T. and its material ontology that existed in front of
the camera at the time of filming might be congruent, as it is not a real creature of flesh and
blood that appears on the screen, but instead of discarding this discrepancy and, like Rushton,
highlighting the social (or textual) reality that E.T. puts forward, I want to emphasize that
E.T., the puppet/practical effect, is present not only in front of the camera, but on the screen
as well, there for the spectator to see. E.T.’s material properties coincide with its narrative
function, which removes most of the effect’s own visibility from the screen, but I want to
argue that what is left of this visibility is still enough for the spectator to, consciously or not,
experience the effect’s physicality. The film’s textual context lets E.T. appear as a friendly
alien, which corresponds with the film’s social reality, but the effect’s pro-filmic, physical
imprint leaves a visible trace that cannot simply be ignored.

In his 1948 essay \textit{An Aesthetic of Reality: Neorealism}, Bazin writes about the
substitution of an “initial reality”—a reality that exists prior to being filmed, in all its limitless

\textsuperscript{42} ibid: 55.
\textsuperscript{43} ibid.
\textsuperscript{44} ibid: 57.
existence—by film’s representative and reducing techniques (framing and other cinematic conventions such as montage). “It is a necessary illusion but it quickly induces a loss of awareness of the reality itself, which becomes identified in the mind of the spectator with its cinematographic representation.”\textsuperscript{45} Not only does film have the capacity to alter one’s process of perception; it can, in the words of Bazin, “introduce the unreal into the world of the visible”—even when it is in fact already real, it seems.\textsuperscript{46} In addition to this observation, it should be noted that it is precisely because of the medium’s ‘irresistible’ realism that the fantastic can be shown as something other than a fantasy alone. We might take the devices used to construct the fantastic in cinema for granted, as does Bazin, but when we are eventually “face to face with the unreal,” these devices express a certain independent materiality: a material reality revealed and shown by the cinematic apparatus, which has the capacity to disrupt any implicit acceptance of the image as an enclosed, fixed entity.\textsuperscript{47} It is a reality that simultaneously calls for narrative interpretation and for a certain intelligibility with regards to its literally superficial, material properties. Whether we (socially) share this reality or not is not important, because its photographic captivity is a fixed structure.

Nevertheless, as Stephen Prince noted in 1996 when he addressed the implications of CGI for representation and photographic realism in cinema, the “causal, existential relationship” between the real world referent and the image remains intact in (digitally produced) “unreal” imagery, as the image maintains to correspond to “the viewer’s audiovisual experience of three-dimensional space,” which seems to imply as well that an ‘initial reality’ in front of the camera is inferior to the overall perception of the image.\textsuperscript{48} Prince uses the term \textit{perceptual realism} to describe a realism that incorporates both “referentially realistic” and “unreal” images: “unreal images may be referentially fictional but perceptually realistic.”\textsuperscript{49} Similar to Rushton’s view on Bazin’s realism, it implies an understanding of film’s relationship to reality that is based on the spectator’s perception. Furthermore, Prince’s choice of words corresponds with Black’s assertion that, because of continual technological innovation of CGI, we are moving towards a cinema that is “a world of image and sound effects without worldly referents,” which then does not seem to take away

\textsuperscript{45} Bazin. (1948): 27.
\textsuperscript{46} Bazin. (1946): 73.
\textsuperscript{47} ibid: 74.
\textsuperscript{49} ibid.
any of film’s ‘realism,’ if we are to believe Prince and Rushton. An important nuance to note here is that CGI does in fact contain worldly referents, but, as Princes notes, they are “fictionally referential,” which indirectly confirms the pro-filmic status of practical effects as non-fictionally referential. The point I want to make by referring to Prince’s perceptual realism is that we can presume that a spectator does not judge the reality of an image in terms of objective reference; it is rather the judgment of an image’s overall referential reality that resides in the spectator’s viewing experience, which again is a sign of Bazin’s social realism. Any other presumption about perception might be overestimating the spectator’s power to view film self-referentially. However, as I hinted at in the paragraph above, I want to emphasize the image itself and its power to show, rather than to be viewed; which is not to say that the two modes are mutually exclusive—quite the opposite—but viewing filmic reality as such might provide an insight into the role of practical effects in the production thereof. This idea of filmic reality assumes film’s relation to reality to be existing independent from the audience’s shared perception of reality, which is to say that even though Rushton, Bazin and Prince do make valid points about our perception of film’s reality, their arguments do not completely comprehend film’s ability to produce a reality in and of itself.

The next part can therefore be seen as an attempt to specify the inherent aspects of practical effects in the context of filmic reality, for which I will briefly discuss how realism is understood to be achieved according to Barthes’ notion of the reality effect and Christian Metz’s basic normative typology of the appearances of special effects in film. Metz’s categorization gives an historical insight into the perception of special effects—his article ‘Trucage and the Film’ was published in 1977 and was among the first to make special effects into objects of theoretical reflection—and, most importantly, its premises incite a critical evaluation of how practical effects are often thought to be perceived.

A Lycanthropic Cloak – Barthes’ Reality Effect and Practical Effects’ Aesthetics

An easily overlooked, but overall determining factor in the establishment of a film’s realism, is an image’s presentation of details. Details, both qualitatively and quantitatively, can decide an image’s referential realism as well as influence and highlight an image’s simple textures.

The physical details of many kinds of practical effects, including makeup and prosthetics, are for a big part decisive of those effects’ verisimilitude. At the same time, depending on how these effects are presented in the cinematographic space, these details can call attention to themselves, thereby displaying their visibility independent from their initial and intended narrative function. Barthes’ notion of the reality effect is a useful concept in this context, particularly because, when applied to film, it supports the idea that details which otherwise go by unnoticed, actually can appear to serve a crucial role in the production of filmic reality.

Barthes’ concept might be intended to describe the way in which literature can stimulate a sense of reality, but its applicability is not limited to literature alone and, as a simple example will prove, it offers another point of entry for understanding practical effects in the context of filmic reality. Furthermore, Barthes specifies what to pay attention to, rather than just applying it as indication of a book’s resemblance to reality. I will use a scene from Joe Dante’s The Howling (1981) as an example to demonstrate the usefulness of Barthes’ concept to both categorize and clarify the role of the practical effects used in the scene.

About two-thirds throughout The Howling there is a scene in which the audience’s suspicions are visually confirmed: some people have been transforming into werewolves during the film. In this scene, during which a man purposely transforms into a werewolf, the film’s special effect budget is visibly depleted. The woman that the man tries to frighten with his transformation remains passive throughout the whole transformation sequence, which lasts about four minutes. When the transformation is complete, the man-turned-wolf roars and the woman has waited until this moment to take a bottle containing some sort of acidic fluid from a medical cabinet behind her and empty it on her attacker, after which she makes her escape. If there is one thing that this laughable anti-climax seems to say, it is that this scene exists solely for exhibiting the craftsmanship that went into producing the effect-ridden

[... ] eliminated from the realist speech-act as a signified of denotation, the “real” returns to it as a signified of connotation; for just when these details are reputed to denote the real directly, all that they do—without saying so—is signify it; [ ... ] it is the category of “the real” (and not its contingent contents) which is then signified; in other words, the very absence of the signified, to the advantage of the referent alone, becomes the very signifier of realism: the reality effect is produced, the basis of that unavowed verisimilitude which forms the aesthetic of all the standard works of modernity.52

transformation. The plot development of the film is halted during the entire scene (there is no reason why she cannot and should not act sooner) and the emphasis is instead put on the practical effects: bubbling motions on the skin surface, extending fingernails and ears, and other transforming facial features. Most remarkable is that after the transformation is completed, the werewolf does not even look a little bit like it started to look during the transformation. Obviously this seems in contradiction with the reality effect as described by Barthes, because if the scene takes the attention away from the flux and pace of the film’s plot, then it creates a distance between what is shown or told and what is perceived, instead of heightening a Barthesian realism. What is it then that can be extracted from Barthes’ concept that can help understand the role of special effects in the production of filmic reality, in regards to this scene?

One of the aspects involved with Barthes’ reality effect, is the useless detail: sequences of description that contain no “finality of action or of communication.” He asks whether everything in the narrative is to be considered significant and, if not, what the significance could be of that insignificance. What is the significance of The Howling’s transformation scene, if it does not contain any significance narrative-wise, but still is presented as part of the narrative? Besides the obvious function of showing off the technology that can produce such imagery, I believe there is something other to this insignificance.

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53 ibid: 143.
Barthes concludes that these useless details have a self-sufficiency about them—they do not need the support of speech and exist as referents independent from speech—and therefore give way to a “new verisimilitude […], which is precisely realism.” Of course, the spectator does not just see bubbling rubber latex, since it remains obvious throughout the entire scene that a werewolf-transformation that is taking place. Thus it is crucial to differentiate between a narrative-based perceptual realism, which denotes the special effect as a bearer of textual context, and a ‘new’ verisimilitude, which would address the specific textural properties of the practical effect as a useless detail. Although the entire transformation occurs uninterrupted by action or speech, the textual context is still too apparent for the practical effect to sever itself from its narrative function. However, the texture of its material and its movement—bubbling, stretching; being granted emphasis through textual stagnation—simultaneously enables the practical effect to display itself independent from its textual context, by means of the scene’s duration and lack of speech and action.

It is not so much that the scene produces what Barthes would refer to as a reality effect, but analyzing the scene’s practical effects through the eyes of his concept has pointed out how the specific material and textural details of practical effects are at least presented in a way that corresponds with the characteristics of a useless detail. The scene’s duration and halted narrative foreground the effects’ physicality and, more importantly, the bubbling and stretching effects attain the potential to sever themselves from their narrative function, which makes their materiality stand out. This, in turn, constitutes the (material) reality of the practical effects. They are no longer servants of the film’s plot, but rather have become carriers of their ontology, which, as far as we know, is above all physical. What this amounts to will be discussed in detail throughout the second chapter, because it is still an open question as to how we might interpret this certain independent materiality of practical effects and look beyond normative understandings of their role in film-viewing and making, without taking distance from them as the main objects of study.

This potential of practical effects, to throw away their textual cloak and to attract attention to their performance of their own physicality, can be enabled and stimulated by the film’s presentation—cinematography, as the leading factor in this, will be discussed in this context with regards to Society and Videodrome. How practical effects are filmed and displayed on the screen are aspects that enjoy a dominant responsibility when it comes to the spectator’s perception of practical effects. Metz’s typology acknowledges three types of

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54 ibid: 147.
effects (or as he calls it, ‘trucage’), all three pertaining to the manners in which effects are perceived: *imperceptible effects* (meant to be indiscernible, such as the use of a stunt man), *invisible effects* (we do not see it, but we perceive or sense its presence) and *visible effects* (e.g. slow-motion and superimposition). All three fall under Metz’s overarching two categories of *pro-filmic* effects (i.e. practical effects) and *cinematographic* effects (in-camera techniques or effects added during postproduction). The current context of my discussion of practical effects—their presentation and perception—does however not need an evaluation of this latter distinction; it is Metz’s classification of effects’ different modes of perception that requires a closer look, if not only for its lack of a fourth category which would address the kind of practical effects that I am aiming to conceptualize. For example, the way in which *The Howling* presents its effects during the transformation scene cannot be categorized according to any of the three kinds of effects’ characteristics, because it is an effect that is literally *seen*: it demands to be noticed and not just sensed, because they are visibly displayed. In my analysis of *Society* and *Videodrome* I will refer back to this mode of perception as the moment of noticing without knowing, which sets itself apart from Metz’s category of invisible effects by relating to a deeper, less cognitive and perhaps more physical intelligibility of an effect’s pro-filmic presence and appearance.

I share my critique on Metz’s lack of a fourth category with Michelle Pierson, who writes that, for Metz, there are no “effects that specifically solicit spectators’ aesthetic attention.” As I understand it, Pierson finds it problematic that Metz undervalues the pro-filmic presence of many kinds of special effects. She argues how the aesthetics of special effects can become in a sense extradiegetic, which is to say that even though they are part of the textual side of filmic reality, they can potentially be appointed a “reality as art and artifact beyond that usually associated with the conventions of cinematic realism.” What Pierson refers to as special effects’ aesthetics, is what I consider to be an encompassing description of what I would refer to more specifically as practical effects’ material characteristics, which are to be conceived as such. The next step is to consider alternative notions of filmic reality that

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55 ‘To sense’ is a problematic verb in this case, because whereas I understand Metz’s use of it to describe a way of sensing that is still informed by cognitive perception, I will later use the word often to describe ‘sense’ as pertaining to sensory inputs and sensations (i.e. the physical, perhaps even unconscious modes of haptic and tactile relations).


58 ibid: 105.

59 ibid: 109.
would support my emphasis on the physicality of practical effects’ reality—their reality being an autonomous status as aesthetic objects, set free from their textual purpose and consequential interpretation.

Before I will start to map out the various theoretical reflections on- and conceptualizations of how film and its perception are partially guided by notions of physicality and embodiment, I will further discuss the relation between filmic reality and practical effects’ aesthetics, because it connects directly to what it means for practical effects to be part of both the pro-filmic space and the onscreen space. I will discuss this by briefly reflecting upon Cavell’s ontology of film and, more specifically, how his understanding of film’s relation to reality—even though he might not address it so directly—is informed by the dynamics between the pro-filmic and the filmic (that what appears on the screen).

Cavell’s Reality of Becoming

Early on in his landmark book *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film* (1971) Cavell writes of film’s photographic nature that “the displacement of objects and persons from their natural sequences and locales is itself an acknowledgment of the physicality of their existence.”60 In the concluding remarks to his article *What Becomes of Things on Film*, writing seven years later, he adds to the above by writing that “objects on film are always already displaced […] (i.e. that we as viewers are always already displaced before them).”61 Therefore, as Cavell’s understanding of the ontology of a projected/screened reality informs us, the capability of film to mediate between pro-filmic and filmic realities is always and continuously met with the emergence of an *expressive physicality*—that of the filmed object. The most important observation that is to be extracted from this is that objects, in their transformation from objects in the world to onscreen objects, maintain at least something of what they are; they are not completely separated from their ontic being.62 Put into different terms, the relation between a presupposed independent reality—which we now know cannot in fact be described as such; something which Cavell briefly touches upon as well, but that I accept for the time being and for the sake of the argument—and the screened reality, as understood by Cavell, is, according to Lorenz Engell, a relation of *becoming*: “what becomes

of things on film is [Cavell’s] question, insinuating the idea that there is a continuous flow of 
material transformation that binds visually given things on film to the things just found by the 
camera.”

It seems to me that this continuous flow of material transformation lies at the core of 
Cavell’s exploration of film’s photographic nature. Barthes wrote of a paradox that exists 
within this nature, which corresponds with the material flux described by Engell/Cavell: the 
co-existence of a thing itself and the thing as projected/screened, simultaneously perceived as 
such. It is therefore no surprise that Rushton brings up Barthes’ concept of the “photographic paradox” in his discussion of Cavell, because it seems directly related to one of 
Cavell’s fundamental claims, namely that the world that is viewed is a world from which we 
are cut off; a world from which we are absent. The world has the capacity to project/screen 
itself on film, thereby existing independent from any person’s subjectivity. Yet, in our 
viewing of a filmic world, as Barthes’ photographic paradox alludes, we both perceive the 
filmed object as such, as well as the traces of its own ontic being. According to Engell, both 
realities—pro-filmic and filmic—inscribe themselves into each other. Rather than acting 
out- or being perceived as a hierarchical or representational dynamic, these realities are 
always referring to one another, and it is through their mutually generative qualities of 
inscribing a reality that the photographic paradox exists and acts as a bearer for filmed objects 
to be perceived as entities layered with materiality and interpretation. In my discussion of 
*From Beyond* and the mimetic experience of practical effects, I will introduce a notion 
(*transsubstitution*) that is similar to Barthes’ photographic paradox, to address the specific 
physicality that practical effects embed and potentially bring forth.

In relation to practical effects, the photographic paradox might not be enough to 
address the totality of aspects that are part of the process of displacement as Cavell describes 
it. There is a specific sort of aesthetic to practical effects, which expresses itself through the 
process of displacement and by virtue of an existence that is inherently physical. The material 
transformation that Engell speaks of is crucial to this idea, because by expressing an aesthetic 
independent from a pro-filmic ontology and a filmic narrative, practical effects obtain a 
cinematographic materiality as viewed objects. Engell calls this the *ontographic* nature of

63 ibid: 142.
moving images: “Moving images do [...] not write upon or about reality, but, as being real matter in themselves, they write reality itself by reality. [M]oving images are the matter-reality of matter-reality describing or writing itself.”

Seeing that practical effects are a part of what constitutes the notion of film’s ontographic nature, it supports the idea that filmic reality, as an overarching term for film’s production of a reality, is a useful concept for the study of practical effects’ function in the production thereof and their ontological, pro-filmic being. Engell’s idea of film’s relation to reality—which highlights the pro-filmic traces of an image’s ontic origins—provides a suitable notion to end this first chapter with, because eventually it is the reality of practical effects’ materiality (and hence their tactility) that I wish to foreground.

Throughout this chapter I have tried to provide a well informed notion of the function that practical effects have in the production and reception of filmic reality. Filmic reality remains a term that is open for discussion, but according to the sources I have discussed so far it could be best described as a reality of film that can be understood independent from its (more than often textual-based) out-of-context implications; a reality of film that is in the foremost place made up of its visual signs, which, though continuously in communication with it, cannot simply be conceptualized in relation to the physical world of which it bears marks of. Film’s potential to create/produce/construct a reality in and of itself, as the bulk of film theory on filmic reality indicates, is inextricably connected to the indexical character of the medium and is therefore continuously informed by the pro-filmic origins of onscreen objects. Whether it is Cavell’s notion of the expressive physicality of screened objects or Engell’s idea of the ontographic nature of moving images; what constitutes filmic reality seems to be a synthesis of the intelligibility of what is in front of the camera and of our real world surroundings. What follows is to ask of this intelligibility, in relation to practical effects as objects that are part of both the pro-filmic and the cinematographic space, is how it manifests itself on the screen/in the image and in the viewer’s perception.

This brings me to the content of the following chapter, in which I will ask of practical effects how the expressive potential of their physicality and specific material textures might be understood in a sense that would clarify and possibly offer an answer to the issue of intelligibility that I mentioned above. I will argue that what practical effects (help to) produce, or give prominence to, is a tactile reality: a notion of filmic reality that accentuates the

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67 ibid: 144.
physicality of filmed objects and the embodied modes of perception that are at once guided by the objects’ expressive physicality and that enable its textures to surface.
Chapter 2: Embodied Spectatorship and the Expressive Physicality of Practical Effects

Film as Viewing Subject

The examples of practical effects that I have brought up all seem to call, in one way or another, for an understanding of filmic reality that I have only hinted at so far. The reality that practical effects produce in those scenes does not only relate to an understanding of filmic reality in terms of the reality-illusion opposition, nor can its aspects be understood solely by way of declaring film’s capacity to produce a reality in and of itself in general. In other words, the specific material characteristics of these effects that I have tried to emphasize seem to relate to something other than just a (anti-)representational understanding of film. Besides challenging existing notions with regards to film and reality, practical effects seem to offer something on their own, which therefore demands its own terminology. The sort of inter-, or multisensory perception that is inherent to our perception of film has offered a starting point for many concepts that have emerged with the purpose of capturing this side of film (viewing) in an appropriate vocabulary, some of which I will discuss now with the aim of maneuvering between them and arriving at what I describe as the tactile reality of special effects. The phenomenological character of the studies involved with embodied spectatorship, as I briefly mentioned in the Introduction, does not withhold any alternative reading of the approaches to film that the authors share in their writings. It would be only logical to start with evaluating Sobchack’s accounts on the matter, if only because her name is prominently featured in the articles and books that refer to such an angle of film studies and studies focused on film experience (see: Marks 2000; Barker 2009; Rutherford 2011; Carroll 2016; Richmond 2016). From Sobchack’s notion of film as viewing subject I will move to Marks’s haptic visuality and from there on to Barker’s notions of onscreen objects’ textures.

Even though Sobchack does not directly hark back to a notion of film as either real, unreal or illusive, the observations that she makes throughout the first pages of The Address of the Eye are reminiscent of the ideas forwarded by Rushton; especially when she writes that a
film is “an act of seeing that makes itself seen, an act of hearing that makes itself heard, an act of physical and reflective movement that makes itself reflexively felt and understood.”68 However, later in the book she does briefly bring up the issue of realist cinema, when she counters such an understanding of film by writing that her insistence on vision as an embodied activity entails the “materialism of cinema,” thereby emphasizing the material relationship between the viewing subject and object—which relates to both film and spectator.69 In that sense, Sobchack understands the reality of film as a realism of perceptive experience, which, most importantly, is always embodied. Perception, rather than being a cognitive or biological process, therefore, in the words of Rutherford, “involves the positing of oneself as an embodied entity in a meaningful way in relation to the environment and what the environment offers.”70 This puts an emphasis on the environmental process of perception, which Rutherford takes from perceptual psychologist James Gibson’s ecological approach to perception. Perception takes place in relation to an environment, which makes it a relative act—more commonly referred to as proprioception. It is therefore no surprise that the idea that what we perceive does not exist of demarcated data ‘out there’, but is always given form in relation to our senses in the environment that provides it, is welcomed with open arms in debates on film experience and embodiment—Scott C. Richmond being one of the more recently published authors to dedicate a whole book to cinema’s perceptual powers.71 72

Turning towards Sobchack again, perceptive experience is processed as a sense of realism, because it is an experience of a “real act of perception.”73 This immediately sets the tone for her approach to film, with which she aims to describe the “cinematic signification and significance in the experience of vision as an embodied and meaningful existential activity.”74 Clearly Sobchack’s approach to film is one that is centered on perception and spectatorship, as the second part of her book’s title indicates. Besides her emphasis on embodied spectatorship, it is mostly her understanding of the medium—which precedes much

69 ibid: 133.
71 ibid.
72 Richmond proposes a theory of cinema as a proprioceptive technology: by adapting Gibson’s ecological approach to perception and Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology of perception he develops an account of the spectator’s embodied sense of space. However, his work is too much invested in the aspect of technology to be of direct use to my argumentative structure at this point. See Richmond (2016).
74 ibid: xvii.
of her argumentation—that I have an interest in: not the spectator’s act of seeing, but the film’s, which she aptly describes in this context as “life expressing life, as experience expressing experience.”

“Experience expressing experience” is a phrase that I will return to in my assessment of Marks’s *The Skin of Film* (2000), because it seems closely related to Marks’s emphasis on the role of (embodied) memory in film experience.

For now, I wish to focus on Sobchack’s understanding of film as a medium that “makes itself seen,” possibly best illustrated with the following quote, in which she both addresses the embodied nature of film viewing as well as the agency of film itself—its agency being the capability of film to express itself:

>[T]he film experience is a system of communication based on bodily perception as a vehicle of conscious expression. It entails the visible, audible, kinetic aspects of sensible experience to make sense visibly audibly, and haptically. The film experience not only represents and reflects upon the prior direct perceptual experience of the filmmaker by means of the modes and structures of direct and reflective perceptual experience, but also presents the direct and reflective experience of a perceptual and expressive existence as the film. In its presence and activity of perception and expression, the film transcends the filmmaker to constitute and locate its own address, its own perceptual and expressive experience of being and becoming.

This puts film’s potential of producing a reality in a slightly different perspective than I ended the first chapter with, making it more relatable to the perceptual experience of film itself, which consequently supports both the idea that film produces a reality of visual aesthetics on its own terms, and notions of the expressive physicality of film’s pro-filmic traces. Film’s ability to constitute its own expressive experience of “being and becoming” is an aspect of film that Anna Powell touches upon as well in her analysis of Clive Barker’s practical effects-ridden *Hellraiser* (1987): “[I]nsistent images stimulate our virtual sense organs of taste and smell, repelling us as we fill in the absent smell virtually by visual and aural clues.”

However, whereas Powell prescribes a certain psychoanalytical origin to the haptic effects caused by *Hellraiser’s* portrayal of flesh, blood, and the disintegration thereof (haptically inducing physical agony and “possibly masochistic pleasure” in the spectator), Sobchack’s terminology used in the quote above could be interpreted and utilized in a way that would

75 ibid: 5.
76 ibid: 9.
relate more directly to the film’s ability to express its own material being—the materiality that the spectator interacts with by virtue of an embodied state of perception. While Powell does accurately describe the opening sequence in *Hellraiser* during which the antagonist’s flesh is torn apart by metal hooks—a horror made increasingly poignant by “his glowing, warm-looking skin, slick with the sheen of sweat” and the “tactile smoothness of his naked flesh”—her use of the Deleuzian concept of a ‘body-without-organs’ in interpreting these images limits her to merely understanding them in a terminology that lies outside the boundaries of the image. This is not to discredit the applicability of Deleuze’s concept to film, nor to undermine Powell’s observations, since they do hint at a similar understanding of film as I intend to, but I hope to make clear with this that I am looking for an alternative reading of such instances of practical effects, in order to pin down what it is that we are seeing, and especially, I might add, what it is that film shows in those moments.

Sobchack would probably disagree with my use of the verb *to show*, because a big part of her argumentation suggests that film does not show; it views, and we as spectators view with it: “[I]t is only in the act of viewing that the film is given to our experience as meaningful, and it is only in the act of viewing that the film possesses existence for itself as well as for us.” Even though the nuances between view and show are not entirely dismissive, I will continue to use and differentiate between both words whenever an example or situation specifically calls for it—for now I want to see to it that Sobchack’s notion of film as viewing subject receives the proper amount of attention, because it connotes an imperative element of the linkage between filmic reality and embodied spectatorship. In his discussion of Deleuze’s work in the context of filmic reality, Rushton seems to briefly touch upon a similar notion of film when he writes that “our eyes and ears themselves become filmic,” hinting that the viewing subject perceives what films perceive, which is generally what Sobchack’s idea of film as a viewing subject is all about. The context in which Rushton writes this constitutes a sense of film viewing as perceptual selectivity, or how we, when viewing a film, select, focus upon- and attribute signification to the things that film itself perceives in similar manners—mainly through such techniques as zooms, framing, or selective and deep focus. This puts the notion of film as viewing subject in slightly more hands-on terms, seeing that Sobchack’s

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78 ibid: 84.
79 ibid: 84, 88.
terminology, even though she foregrounds the camera as a leading medium-specific element in film’s subjectivity, is heavily grounded in Merleau-Ponty’s existential phenomenology; a field of study that I cannot say I am familiar enough with to fully understand its terminology and applicability to film. Yet, the influence her conceptualization of film experience has had on alternative, more medium-specific conceptions of film theory, enables me to use her ideas as a stepping stone to the discussion of ideas that are more specifically related to the topic I am dealing with. For one, Sobchack’s notion of film as viewing subject exemplifies the correspondence between- and the mutual generative qualities of film, spectator and the filmed object—mutually generative in terms of expressive experience and physicality. Secondly, it assumes a bodily connection between spectator and screen, similar to the way in which Rushton referred to our senses becoming filmic.

I believe that what can be extracted from this, by purposively seeking a connection between Sobchack’s notion of film experience and filmic reality as described throughout the first chapter, is that, in Cavell’s terms, the “physicality of their [objects and persons] existence” is rejected at the surface, precisely because of film’s status as a viewing subject, but, more importantly, it is acknowledged as well at a deeper, perhaps more physical level. By persistently expressing themselves not only as objects to be viewed, but as objects existing in and by themselves as well, with which I mean the non-symbolical material properties that are projected, practical effects present an aesthetics of their own, thereby demanding to be viewed as objects other than the things that they are supposed to represent according to the textual context imposed on them.

Haptic Visuality and the Perception and Texture of Onscreen Objects

By evaluating some elements of Sobchack’s phenomenology of film experience, I have tried to ease the transition between modes of thinking—from filmic reality to the materiality of onscreen objects and the spectator’s embodied involvement with them. The following quote from Sobchack is a continuation of the preceding paragraphs in topic, but its terminology sets the tone for a focus on materiality, tactility and embodiment:

What is seen on the screen by the seeing that is the film has a texture and solidity. This is a vision that knows what it is to touch things in the world, that

understands materiality. The film’s vision thus perceives and expresses the “sense” of fabrics like velvet or the roughness of tree bark or the yielding softness of human flesh. It not only understands the world haptically but also proxemically, that is, in terms of a spatiality that is lived as intimacy or distance in relation to the objects of its intentions.  

Film’s vision as being familiar with the materiality of the things it touches in the world by viewing and consequently expressing them, brings about Sobchack’s notion of film as “experience expressing experience,” or how film, in other words, (re)presents something—i.e. practical effects as physical objects—by instantaneously referring to a prior contact with it. This is a view that seems to be very much in accordance with Cavell’s ontology of film, especially when Sobchack writes that “the act of seeing also suggests that the source of its activity shares a material equivalence with that which appears to it in the world it presents.”  

In close relation to the phrase “experience expressing experience,” Marks suggests that this notion of a prior contact does not only reside in the pro-filmic/filmic dynamic in film, but that objects in film and their (pro-filmic) materiality also relate to a prior contact between them and the spectator—something which Sobchack would undoubtedly agree with. Marks’s most direct mention of this comes up in her aptly titled chapter The Memory of Touch, when she recalls Benjamin’s notion of aura: “[T]he material trace of a prior contact, [which] enjoins a temporal immediacy, a co-presence, between viewer and object.” Another word that she refers to in this context is Deleuze’s term for images that hold the power to bring about (embodied) memories, the fossil. What both of these terms have in common, is that they describe the ability of an image to “recreate its object in the present.” But whereas Marks predominantly focuses on intercultural cinema, or how certain films embody the culture they represent through materiality, I want to adopt her conceptualization of embodied spectatorship and the materiality of film and apply it to the context of practical effects. Her notion of touch and memory provides an account of the haptics that reside within vision and within film itself, though she mostly focuses on the haptics of vision in terms of the spectator’s perceptual process. It is the same sort of texture and solidity of things in the world that Sobchack writes about, that leaves a trace when projected on the screen, causing an immediate, dynamic, and above all haptic mode of perception to emerge in the spectator.

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84 ibid.
86 ibid: 22.
Haptic visuality is Marks’s choice of words for how “vision itself can be tactile, as though one were touching a film with one’s eyes.” It seems to be a smart choice of wording, because, besides being in obvious debt to Sobchack’s work, it encapsulates both vision/viewing/seeing/to be seen, as well as the materiality that expresses itself in and through film, with the tactile character of its projected objects demanding a vision infused with haptics. The term might suit Marks’s objectives, but when it comes to my application of the concepts she provides, the term, by implying an emphasis on the spectator’s vision, only partially satisfies my goal to conceptualize the materiality of (practical effects in) images themselves—which notably causes haptic visuality to emerge in the first place. Marks’s description of haptic visuality connotes as well why the term embodiment is so prominently featured in Marks’s book, but by changing the focal point from spectator to film itself, it appears that the term can no longer function according to the intentions that initially brought it up. Discussing the possibility that vision is embodied, or how one’s perception is “informed by memory and actualized in the body,” opens up the way for the idea to emerge that perception, by being haptic, is inextricable from the “material presence of the image,” which is exactly the aspect of Marks’s haptic visuality that I intend to utilize in my analysis of practical effects.

Marks’s contribution to an embodied sense of film experience is to a great extent informed by the idea that these memories, however subjectively embodied they might be, are still embedded in social structures: “[T]he body is a source not just of individual but of cultural memory.” My refusal, if I can call it that, of the term embodiment is not to disagree with Marks’s application of the term, especially since the notion of embodied spectatorship is an inherent part of my approach to the materiality of practical effects, but by exploring alternative routes it can be made possible to evaluate the tactility of practical effects themselves, rather than putting the spectator at the centre of it all—which is an approach that corresponds with most of the output from new materialism: to take the object itself as starting point, rather than one’s experience of it. Essentially, what Marks hints at by proposing the term haptic visuality is not the tactile character that images might behold, but the viewer’s desire or tendency to perceive them by means of multisensory perception. The term and the

87 ibid: xi.
88 ibid: 163.
89 ibid: xiii.
degree to which the mutuality of film and spectator is present in film viewing—and, as Sobchack teaches us, there is no film without film viewing—are demonstrative of the textural or material properties that are inherent to film and film viewing.\textsuperscript{91} Without denying this mutuality then, it does seem that one could extract arguments from the image itself by dividing the attention.

This is also what Barker aims at in her book \textit{The Tactile Eye: Touch and the Cinematic Experience} (2009). Relying heavily on the ideas of Sobchack and Marks, Barker approaches film by means of what she describes as a textural analysis, which is an approach that “considers texture as something we and the film engage in mutually, rather than something presented by the films to their passive and anonymous viewers; in other words, I try to avoid reducing films to “texts” and viewers to passive receivers of them.”\textsuperscript{92} Her interest in the texture of film and onscreen objects coincides with an understanding of film that aims to acknowledge its potential to rupture existing notions of objective perception. By moving away from analyses centered on visual, aural, cognitive and narrative aspects, and instead highlighting the “tactile surfaces and textures involved in the film experience,” Barker aims to uncover any complexities of film and spectatorship that are otherwise possibly ignored, which is an approach to film analysis that I adopt in my discussion of \textit{Videodrome}.\textsuperscript{93} The value of Barker’s approach to onscreen objects becomes especially apparent when she describes how she sets out to use a textural analysis to study “films that pluck familiar objects from their everyday surroundings and from the safety net of narrative, rendering them unfamiliar to the eyes and newly perceptible to the fingertips.”\textsuperscript{94} Besides being indicative of her method’s utility for this thesis, this description clarifies the basic premises of my intention to conceptualize practical effects as agents of a tactile reality. They too are often set loose from their narrative function—though not existing completely independent from it—which renders them “unfamiliar to the eyes and newly perceptible to the fingertips.”

Marks’s notion of the memory of touch is therefore not to be overlooked simply because it presupposes a cultural context of embodiment. It is a conception of an idea that should be familiar to everybody: an image that (re)presents a certain texture immediately calls upon our senses to haptically understand and/or experience what is seen, by means of our

\textsuperscript{91} Sobchack. (1992): 171.
\textsuperscript{93} ibid.
\textsuperscript{94} ibid.
memories of encounters with that material in the world outside of film. The involvement of all of our senses in film viewing, rather than merely vision and hearing, describes a subject that is empathically involved in and with the world through embodiment and *mimesis*—which is a term that Marks often returns to throughout her writings.\(^{95}\) Besides, but also because of being indexical rather than symbolical or iconic of nature, Marks’s understanding of mimesis, which is largely influenced by Benjamin’s mimetic understanding of material reality, describes a relationship between subject and object that is mutually generative.\(^{96}\) It is a tactile relationship that involves the ears as much as the eyes and, being the crux of Marks’s research, the *skin*. The skin, in her, and in Barker’s view as well, is the primary factor by which we come into contact with, touch and perceive the world. It constitutes the flux of tactility that exists between subject and object—the interchangeability of those two being an important part of tactile epistemology when it comes to film and spectator. It is a way of thinking that aims to recognize “the intelligence of the perceiving body,” which is an intelligence that is mimetic and embodied.\(^{97}\) In the words of Barker: “[The skin] perceives the world as the world objectively expresses itself, and it expresses its own act of perception to the world by touching it.”\(^{98}\)

At this point it feels necessary to point out that the objectivity of perception that these writers argue against is not simply and completely eradicated to make place for an embodied understanding of perception. As is the case with most of the terms and concepts that Sobchack, Marks and Barker put forward, they do not deny the interpretative, cognitive processes that are an inherent part of spectatorship. This might best be clarified by Sobchack’s account of philosopher Don Ihde’s terms *microperception* (relating to the immediate, sensory/bodily level of perception) and *macroperception* (the textually-based hermeneutic level of perception).\(^{99}\) Rather than seeing the two forms of perception as independent from each other, Ihde sees the two as mutually generative, as dependent of each other; one cannot exist without the other. Without denying the intertwinement of the two, Sobchack and her affiliates want to see to it that microperception is being given the right amount of attention, as it seemed to them that it had been largely ignored in film theory. The place of practical effects in this conceptualization of the dynamics of spectatorship seems quite interesting. Ihde’s

\(^{95}\) Marks. (2000): 141.

\(^{96}\) ibid: 138, 140.

\(^{97}\) ibid: 190.


terms imply that perception is always enabled between subject and object, rather than existing in either the viewing subject or as attribute to the viewed object. As I see it, practical effects have the potential to interrupt the flux between subject and object; between micro- and macroperception. This is not to say that they are an exception to the immediacy of the two intertwined ways of perception, but its dynamics might still be slightly off. Practical effects demand to be perceived hermeneutically, as they have a certain role to fulfill in the whole of a film, but it is their unmistakable physical texture that is hard to overlook. Sobchack’s intention with applying Ihde’s terminology to the technologies of cinematic representation is to suggest how the microperspectival aspects of our engagement with film inform and transform “our temporal and spatial sense of ourselves and our cultural contexts of meaning,” which therefore does not seem that far off from how I intend to investigate the physical onscreen presence of practical effects.100

Towards an Understanding of Practical Effects’ Tactile Reality

Having presented an extensive theoretical framework through which I can approach the presentation, perception and overall pro-filmic ontology of practical effects in the context of their physicality, I will now turn to analyses of Society, Videodrome and From Beyond. My intention regarding analyses of the practical effects in these films is to provide an understanding of practical effects’ potential to help produce the tactile reality that they are part of as onscreen objects. The pro-filmic origin of their material and their screened physicality are, so I will argue, accentuated by the films’ cinematographic mechanisms—filmic aspects that are at once part of what enables filmic reality to be perceived as such and that guide the objects’ expressive physicality to surface, thereby making it a matter of film itself as well as of the spectator’s perceptual processes. Filmic reality has functioned as the starting point from which I have chosen to approach practical effects in film, and it is by means of the various notions of embodied spectatorship and the materiality of the image and onscreen objects that I will analyze the presentation of the films’ practical effects and the consequences that it has for their perceptual reception.

While Barker’s method of textural analysis serves as a guiding analytical tactic—specifically regarding the Videodrome analysis—Marks’s haptic visuality functions as an overarching theoretical concept through which I will start to discern the haptic qualities of

100 ibid: 87.
practical effects, even though my application of the term deviates somewhat from the ways in which Marks uses it. Most of the discrepancy found between our applications of the term is the fact that most of the practical effects in my case studies remain textually discernible, whereas, in Marks’s case, it is the surface plane of the image that the term emphasizes, meaning that a haptic image is only gradually perceived as figurative, if at all.\textsuperscript{101} This clarifies her focus on proximity between subject and object, and shot duration; factors that I take with me in my analyses, but that are not of crucial importance to the crux of my argument. While Marks uses the term as a theoretical lens to examine how haptic perception, as compared to optical perception (which “depends on a separation between the viewing subject and the object”), “privileges the material presence of the image,” I will practice the fundamental premises of the term and its wider context—Sobchack’s notion of films as viewing subject and Barker’s textural analysis—by exploring how the physical presence and material textures of practical effects are granted emphasis through the film’s cinematography—shot length, framing, camera distance, and camera movement—and, albeit to lesser extent, mise-en-scène—color, scene space and lighting.\textsuperscript{102} Together these stylistic aspects of film support practical effects’ agency to bring forth what I have referred to as a \textit{tactile reality}: a notion of filmic reality that accentuates the physicality of filmed objects and the embodied modes of perception that are at once guided by the objects’ expressive physicality and that enable its textures to surface.

\textsuperscript{101} Marks. (2000): 163.

\textsuperscript{102} ibid.
Chapter 3: Embodied Perception of Practical Effects’ Tactility in *Society*

“If I scratch the surface there’ll be something terrible underneath.”

After having spoken these words to his therapist, protagonist Bill takes a bite out of an apple that appears to be filled with (real-life) worms. The disgust of the image—a close-up, point-of-view shot—is heightened by the contrast between the many red worms and the yellow skin and white flesh of the apple, combined with the squelching sounds that are high up in the audio mix, a sound which is reprised numerous times throughout the film. Yuzna’s *Society* tells the story of popular high school kid Bill, who, after a series of paranoia-inducing events—including a tape recording of his sister having sex with—or at least in front of his parents—comes to realize that all his fears are true and that things are worse than whatever he could have imagined. His family, his therapist, and his fellow students; they are all part of the ‘Society’: an upper class that enjoys to engage in orgy-like, utmost physical acts of perversion, sex, and the exchange of body parts and fluids. The “incredible orgiastic perversion of the upper classes,” as Yuzna described it, could be considered the film’s main theme as well as a fitting description of the film’s visual aesthetics.103

The opening scene—the apple and the worms—is foreboding of what is yet to happen to Bill’s blatantly banal, privileged life and his surroundings, and it is followed by the opening credits, which are set to a background of fleshy, limb-like substances—a facial feature can be made out now and then—that move in slow motion at a slow frame rate. The phrase “Surrealistic make-up effects by Screaming Mad George” is illustrative of the background imagery and eventually of the film’s climax sequence, which is central to my analysis of *Society*’s practical effects. Practical effects are almost entirely absent from the rest of the film, aside from some small exceptions that I do not consider worth discussing here. I have chosen to focus particularly on the camerawork (the camera’s distance to the objects, movement and leveling) and framing (which is, technically speaking, a result of camerawork as well, but here it is discussed as being slightly more independent, as its presence is less visible than aspects

such as movement), because these features of cinematography enjoy a large responsibility for the presentation of practical effects. My aim with this analysis is to point out the cinematographic features that enable and evoke an embodied perception of practical effects’ tactile presence as onscreen objects. Whereas the next case study predominantly centers on practical effects’ intrinsic physical expression, my study of Society’s effects mostly deals with the spectator-side, or how the spectator is drawn to the physicality of practical effects through embodied involvement and cinematographic foregrounding.

An hour and roughly eighteen minutes into the film, the stage is set for the film’s finale. After having found out that his suspicions about his family’s sinister affairs are justified, Bill arrives at his home only to be unpleasantly welcomed by his parents, sister and the other members of the Society. He is subdued and dragged to the living room, where the crowd has gathered around a man named Judge Carter, who appears to be the Society’s leader and is entertaining them with an opening speech of sorts while people start to undress themselves. Almost monochromatic, the lighting abruptly turns red as Blanchard, Bill’s friend who previously tried to inform him of the Society, is cornered, gets his clothes torn off of him and succumbs to multiple Society members touching, licking and biting him. The change in color is a pivotal visual effect that, along with the music’s gradually increasing volume, announces the Society’s flesh-orgy ritual. There are two quick shots (one close-up of Bill’s high school antagonist and member of Society, Ferguson, who is smiling, and one of Bill’s repulsed facial expression; both characters seeming to witness Blanchard screaming out in agony, which is suggested by shot/reverse-shots) that switch back to normal lighting, but after these shots the images remain red-colored for the rest of the ritual sequence. What follows, almost completely uninterrupted by plot developments, is a series of shots that puts the practical effects forward in the image. The frame is often filled with limbs and hands without the presence of their bodily origin and in these moments it is unclear who and what is shown, which, because of a lack of narrative guidance, helps to emphasize the image’s superficiality (Figure 3). It is an undoing of the representational facets of film that calls to mind Rancière’s sentence-image, which describes a disruption of the (usually seamless) linkage between text and the image’s “flesh and substance:”

The text’s part in the representative schema was the conceptual linking of actions, while the image’s was the supplement of presence that imparted flesh and substance to it. The sentence-image overturns this logic. The sentence-
function is still that of linking. But the sentence now links in as much as it is what gives flesh.\textsuperscript{104}

*Society’s* presentation of its effects overshadows the textual context that generally tends to occlude an image’s purely visual signs. Rancière’s concept is therefore relevant to the scene’s first moments in terms of the practical effects’ presence in the image as textual signs—as representations of what is intended to resemble flesh and skin—and with regards to the way in which their artificial substance surfaces by partially severing itself from its textual context. Text and image are democratized through the visual foregrounding of the practical effects, which is enough for them to bring forth their reciprocal tactility to the film’s surface; there for the spectator to touch with his/her eyes. This is the premise of my analysis of *Society’s* practical effects.

**Cinematographic Tactics in the Production of Haptic Visuality**

The first conspicuous practical effect appears when the camera moves from head to toe over Blanchard’s body, which is now covered in slime (as are the bodies of his attackers). One of the people surrounding Blanchard has his face stuck to Blanchard’s leg, which looks more

\textsuperscript{104} Ranciére. (2007): 46.
like a lumpy collection of meat-looking prosthetics than a leg. Instead of a mouth and a nose, the man’s face is solely made up of skin that seamlessly connects to Blanchard’s skin (Figure 4). Even though the spectator knows that the practical effect is meant to resemble skin—having been visually informed of its textual function by the actors’ actual skin connecting to it—the artificiality of the effect is obvious. In addition, the actors’ physical connection to the prosthetic material is emphasized by the reflection of (red) key lighting on both the actors’ skin and the makeup effects, leaving no doubt as to the pro-filmic presence of the artificial skin’s material. Can we therefore already conclude that the effects’ material properties bring forth a tactile experience that could be considered independently existent from the film’s narrative? A straightforward answer would be no, because even though the above might seem probable—I want to say palpable—it does not explain total independency, which, in this case, is impeded by the obvious intentional (textual) context of the special effects: its function as extended skin. In order to avoid endless speculations about how the visual characteristics of these effects render a certain kind of haptics, I will further discuss the manners in which the effects are visually presented by means of the scene’s cinematography.

The camera “amplifies the perceptual experience,” Sobchack writes, and here it does so by channeling a focus on the materiality of the image’s onscreen objects, thereby ‘amplifying’ the perceptual intake of the practical effects—not as carriers of narrative context,

Figure 4.
but as carriers of nothing but their own physical existence in the film’s cinematographic space.\(^{105}\) The lighting, predominating red tone and countless unidentified limbs and amounts of skin emphasize the materiality to a certain extent, but it is the camerawork that brings this combination of visual factors together and by that creates an effect of alienation in the spectator: the immersion of a supposed illusion of reality is interrupted by the artificiality, or the protruding constructed nature of the image. The point that I eventually want to reach, is to argue that it is not merely a question of illusion-reality, nor a matter of alienation—although the term does seem to apply in terms of affect—but that the camera’s display of the effects’ constructedness brings spectator and image closer together by means of a newly formed relationship that is essentially informed by haptics; whether it would be haptics involved in spectatorship, or produced within the film’s images themselves.

At the beginning of the scene the camera maintains a low angle, facing slightly upwards from just above the floor and with its level slightly canted. It is a feature that soon becomes practically meaningless in terms of analysis, because of the framing of many of the shots: fleshy contours and numerous hands and limbs, all connected through makeup effects—slimy, shiny substances—that rid the images from any point of reference whatsoever. The canted camera’s low angle and its medium close-up at the beginning therefore works as a crescendo, because it leads to images from which one could not tell anymore where and from what perspective they are looking. This is continuously aided by the frame’s composition of on- and offscreen space. Consequently, these factors make the depth of field of the frame considerably shallow—hence the term shallow-space seem to be of relevance, though not entirely, because the camera does in fact act selective in its focus now and then.\(^{106}\) Most of the time, however, the spatial characteristics of the image are one-dimensional in their appearance, which is encouraged by the camera’s framing. The scene’s lighting and its ever-present red tone even further democratizes the objects and effects within the frame, as there is nothing left to guide the spectator’s eye in terms of lighting. The only narrative that the spectator can assume is present is Bill’s observation of the scene that takes place, but he does not appear into the frame for quite a while and therefore the events that are shown take on a role of spectacle, derived from a clear narrative function. The result is that the constructed reality of the imagery surfaces, and with it so does the pro-filmic material of the limbs and skin, which in turn gives way to an embodied perception of the practical effects’ material. The


overall visual content, composition of frame and especially the camerawork can therefore be understood as amplifications of the spectator’s multisensory perceptual process, of which a tactile sensation is especially of relevance to this case.

There is one shot specifically that seems to evoke a (literal) tactile sensation, but there is more to it than it initially might seem. A hand is shown moving slowly into the skin of what appears to be someone’s buttocks, which fills up the whole frame (Figure 5). However, more than being a quite literal example of how the spectator’s memory of touch could be activated—the memory of a prior contact with that feeling of touching bare, soft skin—it demonstrates a practical effect’s own tactile experience. The ease with which the hand penetrates the skin—there is no ripping of skin and instead it pulls away at the hand’s fingers—is remarkably unreal, in the sense that what we see is a familiar human shape, but what the hand is touching is clearly the artificial material of a prosthetic effect. Any sense of haptic involvement by the spectator could be provoked in film by the depiction of touch, so what this particular image is distinguished by is the effect’s inherent physicality—which is unlike real skin’s physique—that surfaces through the unfamiliar appearance/result of a hand touching skin. The moment the hand enters the skin is then the moment that the spectator comes into contact with the practical effect’s material and texture, which manifests itself in a tactile sensation of the effect, rather than of the (textual) skin. I will now somewhat dispute the observations I have made so far by applying Marks’s concept of haptic visuality to

Figure 5.
Society’s presentation of special effects, with the aim of further explicating the terms on which we might understand the role of cinematographic presentation in practical effects’ emerging expressive physicality and the spectator’s embodied perception thereof.

In her discussion of haptics in perception-related research, Marks distinguishes haptic visuality from optical visuality, as the latter “sees things from enough distance to perceive them as distinct from in deep space: in other words, how we usually conceive of vision.”

Marks’s attribution of haptics to the question of distance, or proximity, seems to correspond with my observations of the increased superficiality of the image through framing and camerawork in Society’s ritual scene. However, it is key to Marks’s concept of haptic visuality that the image presents something to the spectator which s/he cannot (immediately) distinguish in terms of real-world references, thereby leading the spectator to move over the image’s surface plane, rather than to focus on its immersive depths: “[I]t is more inclined to graze than to gaze.”

Even though I have pointed out the democratization of objects within the frame in Society, its imagery fails to avoid the (re)presentation of distinct forms, because one can still easily point out bodily features in the scene. “[A] film or video (or painting or photograph) may offer haptic images, while the term haptic visuality emphasizes the viewer’s inclination to perceive them.” Clearly a shot like the close-up of numerous hands touching Blanchard’s naked body could be considered an image in which tactile sensation is evoked. The fact that the many hands can be distinguished as recognizable forms means that, according to Marks, it would be wrong to consider the image an incentive for haptic visuality. Yet, as Marks points out herself, perception is always dialectical, in the sense that both optical and haptical visuality are involved in processes of seeing, which does not necessarily omit an image’s potential of accentuating its material presence over its representational power.

The proximity of the camera to the practical effect (the bubbling, de-/inflating prosthetics that give shape to Blanchard’s body) and its almost random movement across it cause the material presence of the image to surface and therefore I still consider the shot a haptic image. Similar to Marks’s description of the haptic image—it “forces the viewer to contemplate the image itself instead of being pulled into narrative”—this shot appeals to the viewer’s tactile interaction with onscreen objects; in this case the prosthetic effect. The viewer realizes

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108 ibid.
109 ibid.
110 ibid: 163.
111 ibid.
what s/he is seeing—hands touching a body—but because of the overall cinematography and the conspicuous artificiality of the involved practical effects, the viewer is invited to bodily engage with the practical effects’ textures.

Haptic visuality and other, similar conceptions of embodied spectatorship relate to the stimulation of the “physiological substance” of the human being. A film’s style then functions as stimulus, which would make practical effects carriers of stimuli that are already there, which, in the case of *Society*, can be considered predominantly physical. My argument therefore finds itself somewhere between Marks’s notion of a haptic image (an image that demands more than mere vision, which, in the case of *Society*, is demonstrated by the presentation and displayed artificiality of the effects) and haptic visuality (the viewing of images that recall the memory of touch within the spectator, which is something that *Society* is simply too direct for, in its handling of textures that remain textually distinguishable). The most important aspect to extract from my reading of *Society* so far is then that we are in fact dealing with haptic images here; mostly because their visual context invites a sense of touch, but also because the practical effects that are employed and the way in which they are shown encourage the spectator to consider their texture and material details in no other context than their own—a context that still involves their textuality, but that gives prominence to their visible physicality. Throughout the following paragraphs I want to point out that despite *Society*’s practical effects’ textual context remains intact, they attain something other than their narrative function nonetheless in the spectator’s perceptual activities.

**A Slimy Orgy: Making Sense of *Society*'s Artificial Effects**

“And now we’ll get to the bottom… of this,” Judge Carter says before he thrusts his hand through Blanchard’s body, entering between his legs and exiting through his mouth. Shot/reverse-shots of Judge Carter’s and Blanchard’s face are followed by a medium close-up that shows Judge Carter’s hand appearing from within Blanchard’s head, grabbing his scalp, stretching it and eventually tearing it apart (*Figure 6*). In terms of real-life references, Blanchard’s soon-to-be-no-more head is visibly not a real head, because there is no blood and the skin does not tear like you would imagine real skin to do; it stretches rather than tears. Whereas Blanchard’s face and hair were already wet and shiny before, it is now drenched.

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in a shiny and slimy substance. The practical effect’s relation to reality and narrative is therefore two-fold: its function is to serve as skin-replacement and to imply that an actual head is torn apart, but it is the effect’s materiality that eventually really shows itself. Camerawork and lighting remain secondary factors, because it is the effect’s material that evokes the sense of touch in the first place—not because we see a hand ripping through an artificial head, but because the artificiality itself is visibly present. As its material details come to the foreground, the effect’s status as a non-textual (useless) detail becomes overshadowed by the image’s emphasis on the effect’s artificiality. Whereas, according to Barthes’s reality effect, details can pull the viewer into the immersive realism of a film’s narrative, this particular shot—emphasizing the material and textural details of the prosthetic effect—draws the viewer towards the reality of the effect’s stylization.

Furthermore, instead of creating distance between subject and object by virtue of self-reflexivity, the image draws the spectator and the effect’s materiality closer together because of the sensuous intelligibility that is demanded to make sense of it. Parallels could be drawn between this view on practical effects and Beth Carroll’s recent writings on embodied spectatorship in relation to spatiality. Similar to my reading of Society’s practical effects, Carroll wants to acknowledge our perception of what she labels as “abstract aesthetics,”
which are “removed from their narrative context.”\textsuperscript{113} More than merely providing a suitable term for my analysis of \textit{Society}’s practical effects, Carroll, by taking the leap as well to an approach of film in the context of embodied spectatorship, adds to the existing corpus on the matter by referring to \textit{synaesthesia}, or “how a single sensory input can encourage multisensory perception.”\textsuperscript{114} I want to argue that this is very much the case with \textit{Society}—with its practical effects causing a tactile sensation within the spectator, thus relating to more than just vision—which leaves the question open as to how this can be attained when there is no explicit visual foregrounding provided. For this I will turn to one last example taken from \textit{Society}’s final sequence: the moment where the camera shows the fleshy, effect-ridden tableau in full view for the first time.

At this point in the film the members of the Society are all intertwined through skin and flesh. The camera slowly pulls over lumps of flesh before the film cuts to a static medium long shot that shows the ritualistic flesh-orgy in its entirety (\textit{Figure 7}). Meticulously staged, it features thick strings of flesh and a vast collection of mutated body parts, with a row of people behind it either sipping on champagne and seemingly conversing with one another, or feasting upon the flesh that lies before them. The material characteristics of the prosthetics

\textit{Figure 7. The Society.}


\textsuperscript{114} ibid: 99.
and makeup effects in the image remain the same: shiny, slimy and glistening, highlighted by the lighting’s reflection on the effects’ textures. It causes an immediate tactile sensation, which is largely due as well to the constant squelching sound that is present throughout the scene. As I have mentioned before, Society does not completely satisfy as an example of film for which the intelligible capabilities of vision are overthrown and for which other senses are employed to make sense of what is seen. Yet, as I will continue to defend throughout this thesis, this cannot be all there is to it. Even with an image like this one, an image that does not necessarily obscure visible representation because of its distance to objects that are fairly comprehensible, there is an undercurrent present in terms of embodied spectatorship. The frame and the camera are then not merely tools of mediation and representation; they provide what Sobchack describes as “the premises for perception as expressed experience.” And, as Marks’s understanding of Benjamin’s mimesis informs us, the mutuality that exist in the production of haptics within the image and within the viewer signifies a deeply rooted affiliation between embodied spectatorship and the material presence of onscreen objects.

Society’s composition of practical effects could be made sense of solely through vision, but there is an ambiguity that derives from the presentation of these effects that, in the words of Sobchack, could be considered “subjectively “here” as well as objectively “there”, “mine” as well as the image’s.” Although the camera often works as an incentive for tactile experience to emerge, images such as Figure 7—which is still highly stylized in a way—provoke a sense of tactility just by showing the prosthetic effects in full view; their own ways of being at once recognizable shapes and unfamiliar material is enough for the spectator to notice them as physical objects in the cinematographic space. How this then translates to an experience of the practical effects’ tactile reality will be elaborately discussed throughout the following chapters, because even though Society is demonstrative of the ways in which embodied spectatorship is guided by practical effects’ physicality by means of cinematographic presentation, it does not offer images that allude to such effects’ inherent expressive physicality.

I have pointed out that the ways in which Society presents its practical effects to the spectator cause a democratization of their textual function. In addition, it causes the haptic qualities of the effects’ material to be distilled from their textual function. This, I have argued, gives way to a sense of touch or contact, which is partially due to indecipherability; not of

what is shown, but of how it is (re)presented. It did not turn out to be an example of film that
evokes Marks’s idea of haptic visua lity. Rather, it might better be described in relation to
Carroll’s abstract aesthetics: the experience of the practical effects functions on an aesthetic
level. The final scene’s tableau of lumps and strings of flesh (unfamiliar looking flesh, I
should add) is indicative of a practical effect’s potential to interrupt processes of textual
sense-making. The tone of color, the squelching sounds and the preceding disorientating
close-ups of the material appeal to a tactile way of sense-making. Marks’s notion of a
spectator’s memory of touch, and how framing and the camera’s movement and proximity to
an object can provoke it, has nonetheless proven itself useful as a methodological guideline to
my analysis of Society’s practical effects. To conclude: because film’s body and vision—in
this case framing and camerawork—are effectively shared by our own sense-making body, we
are drawn to a tactile experience of practical effects whenever their narrative reality is
obscured by visual foregrounding of the material presence of their pro-filmic physicality.
Chapter 4: Practical Effects’ Textural Agency in Videodrome

Cronenberg’s films, especially those that were received under the banner of the Body Horror genre, have gained a lot of attention over the years from various strands of academic interests, though mostly the ones connected to, unsurprisingly, gender, body and identity politics and psychoanalysis. As I have mentioned in the introduction, the subject matter of his films does indeed lend itself perfectly for a wide array of thought provoking ideas, but regardless of the magnitude of articles and books on the director’s work, I have encountered only a few scholars who have dealt with Cronenberg’s work within a framework of the medium of film itself, rather than applying contexts that lie outside of the films’ images. For example, these scholars have addressed aesthetics (Powell 2005) and practical effects (Conrich 2000; Hantke 2004; Mathijs 2009) in Cronenberg’s work, though none of them has attempted to fill the gap between the imposition of meaning onto the films’ aesthetics and a straightforward categorization of the effects that are undeniably a main feature of these films’ aesthetics. Videodrome is no exception to this. The academic attention the film has received has mainly been directed towards its apparently underlying theme of the human-technology relationship, with all its examples of technology integrating in- or fusing with the human body. However, what is often the case with this type of film studies—analyses directed towards socio-cultural contexts—is that it tends to ignore the medium-specific qualities that precede the actual production of the images; in short, the ground principles of filmmaking.

The problems, struggles and ethics of the human body/mind-technology relationship had already been well represented in literature ever since the time of gothic novels, such as Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein, so there is really no reason whatsoever that would motivate one to discuss the theme in the context of film when the medium-specific characteristics themselves are barely touched upon, besides a film’s contribution to the theme in terms of plot. What happened when Boris Karloff appeared for the first time as The Monster in James Whale’s film adaptation of Frankenstein in 1931 is that the audience got to see The Monster. Similarly, Videodrome does not just tell of human-technology relations, it shows it and it is able to do so because of practical effects, which were a courtesy of Rick Baker’s EFX
Incorporated.\textsuperscript{117} It is for this reason that I want to discuss the same scenes in \textit{Videodrome} that have been analyzed many times already, but rather than analyzing them on a textual basis, I want to study the textures of those scenes’ practical effects. As a start I will briefly discuss practical effects in Cronenberg’s oeuvre on a broader level, for which I will assess some overlapping thoughts that can be found within the existing academic corpus on their aesthetics. The remainder of this case study will then be built around a mixed-method approach to visual analysis, for which I will incorporate Barker’s \textit{textural analysis} as a guiding principle.

My take on Barker’s method might appear somewhat unorthodox, because whereas she addresses objects in film that are familiar, yet presented as \textit{unfamiliar} and which thereby become “newly perceptible to the fingertips,” making sense only “on the surface of the skin,” my examples include practical effects as objects that find themselves ontologically speaking on the edge of (un)familiarity, yet are presented without ambiguity. That is to say, there seems to be no refusal of the visual intelligibility of these objects’ textual layers, much alike the artificial skin in \textit{Society}.\textsuperscript{118} Where Barker and I meet is the consideration of texture as “something we and the film engage in mutually, rather than something presented \textit{by} the films \textit{to} their passive and anonymous viewers.”\textsuperscript{119} I want to add to this description that texture, in the context of \textit{Videodrome}, can be seen as both the reciprocal carrier of haptic information as well as the accommodating force of haptic qualities in this mutually generative interconnection that Barker writes about. In other words, the ontographic nature of moving images that Engell speaks of—as the material inscription of reality in and of itself, as well as being a part of that matter-reality—is for a big part mended by these simultaneously present aspects, or activities of texture. The incorporation of her textural analysis is then a means to discover indicators of a tactile relationship—tactile and not necessarily haptic, because of the specific emphasis that Barker puts on touch—between spectator and practical effects.\textsuperscript{120}

Nevertheless, in my case of considering \textit{Videodrome}’s practical effects as things similar to the objects that Barker speaks of, I will focus primarily on the object-side of this relationship.

\textit{Videodrome} is my main object of interest, but, as I did with \textit{Society} in terms of cinematography and haptics, I will specify my inquiry to the perception of practical effects as

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item[\textsuperscript{117}] Lucas. (2008): 77.
\item[\textsuperscript{118}] Barker. (2009): 25.
\item[\textsuperscript{119}] ibid.
\item[\textsuperscript{120}] ibid.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
standalone objects, or as independent from their narrative function. To attain answers to my questions I will have to deal with their textual presence nonetheless, but in the end I hope to approach a ‘pure’ ontological recognition of practical effects and their visually displayed material textures. The theoretical lens through which I will look at the effects is largely informed by Barker and Marks. However, because of their own extensive theoretical framework, I will address other authors as well, such as Deleuze and C.S. Tashiro, the latter whose writings on set design I have encountered more than once in my quest for an alternative terminology for practical effects and the embodied perception of film aesthetics.

Displaying Practical Effects with Cronenberg

The scenes I have chosen to analyze demonstrate the potential that is inherent to practical effects: to be experienced independent from their textual context. Sometimes this potential is occluded by narrative aspects, or, as it is often the case with special effects that are meant to shock the audience, by the short amount of time that is given to the spectator, leaving him/her unable to attain a physical awareness of an effect’s texture.\(^{121}\) We will see however, in the case of *Videodrome*, that the shock effect is mostly absent and that the length of the shots provides enough material to work with. This absence is due as well to a recurrent tactic of Cronenberg’s stylization of practical effects, which is an observation that I take from Steffen Hantke’s article (2004) on Cronenberg’s stylized manner of presenting special effects: “All elements draw attention to the sobriety and formality of the composition, to which Cronenberg seems willing to sacrifice shock and affective immediacy.”\(^{122}\) Here Hantke is addressing the final scene of Cronenberg’s *The Brood* (1979), but he follows it up by similar analyses of scenes from *Scanners* (1981) and *Videodrome*. Additionally, when he mentions the characterizing traits of Cronenberg’s stylized display of practical effects, he indirectly hints at how the materiality of the effects is consequently accentuated: “The formal composition of many of his special effects scenes, the camera’s retreat from an uncomfortably

\(^{121}\) Such short shots, often utilized within the horror genre to generate what is generally known as ‘jump scares,’ do cause a physical reaction in themselves, but it relates to a different physical ‘awareness’ than my reading of practical effects’ expressive physicality. For more information on the physicality of such shots, see: Diffrient, David S. (2004) ‘A Film is Being Beaten: Notes on the Shock Cut and the Material Violence of Horror’, in: *Horror Film: Creating and Marketing Fear*. Steffen Hantke (ed.). University Press of Mississippi.

close proximity to a more detached panoramic point of view, invite a gaze that lingers.”  

The aspect of proximity/spatiality (i.e. frame composition) in Cronenberg’s employment of practical effects is therefore an underlying theme of my approach to Videodrome’s effects. First of all because it is a topic of interest that already exists, which gives me some preconceived framework to work with, and secondly because it enables a lingering gaze, as Hantke mentions, which is directly indicative of the stylistic aspects that Marks deems crucial to the occurrence of haptic visuality.

Whereas what Ian Conrich has dubbed “Neo-Horror”—the wave of horror films in the 1970s and 80s, generally associated with directors such as George Romero, Tobe Hooper, Dario Argento, John Carpenter, Wes Craven and Brian De Palma—is dominated by special effects’ gradual exposure as a narrative device, thereby creating suspense, Cronenberg’s stylization of practical effects “destabilizes the mimetic surface.” However, instead of focusing on either the shock value or on the self-reflexivity that this calls for, he lets the spectator dwell in the theatricality of the practical effect’s staging. In their reception practical effects are first noticed, and then responded to in light of their textual context. It is in that moment of noticing, which is a moment that Cronenberg seems to play with and even emphasizes, that I believe that the pro-filmic physicality of practical effects surfaces. Support for this can be found in the following citation from Bukatman’s phenomenological account of special effects: “Special effects redirect the spectator to the visual (and auditory and even kinesthetic) conditions of the cinema and thus bring the principles of perception to the foreground of consciousness.”

What is brought to the foreground as well through this potential redirection of perceptual intake is the physical, material texture of the practical effects themselves. An often seen feature of practical effects in general, especially in regards to the use of prosthetics and makeup substances, is the unfamiliarity of the texture. To be clear, I am not referring to unfamiliarity in terms of abjection—of the body; the self; the other. Rather, it should be read as a sense of unfamiliarity that indicates a lack of tactile memory: the spectator cannot recall touching such textures. Besides the often featured materials of latex/rubber, plastics and foam in the production of practical effects, there is a material generally known as methocel, which

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123 ibid: 46.
124 ibid: 43.
is a versatile substance used to produce otherwise hard to come by substances such as oil, blood and slime. In his article *Ectoplasm and Oil: Methocel and the Aesthetics of Special Effects* (2015), Ethan de Seife uses the appearance of methocel as the paranormal substance ‘ectoplasm’ in *Ghostbusters* (Ivan Reitman, 1984) as an example of the substance’s inherent quality of being strange and unfamiliar.

*Any* special effects – lighting, composited animation, mechanized puppets – could have been employed by the film-makers to suggest the presence of a supernatural force or entity; yet it is methocel that fills this narrative need, precisely because it is readily adaptable to a variety of narrative situations: it can be made in small or large quantities, thicker or thinner, more or less reflective and so forth, while still possessing the essential quality of unfamiliarity.128

Methocel’s dissimilarity to the materials of daily life, so Seife’s argument goes, makes it “narratively analogous” to that which it is meant to represent, which, such as with its use in *Ghostbusters*, is often the paranormal or supernatural.129 The slimy substance that is so prominently featured in *Society* (of which I am quite sure it consists of methocel as well), covering all the bodies and prosthetics, is another example of how a practical effect can, through its texture, add a materially induced narrative dimension to film. The other side to Seife’s argument, in terms of aesthetics, is that, when such a substance (or any other practical effect for that matter) is used to reproduce and represent a familiar material, there emerges a sense of friction between the material’s physical properties and its analogous textual purpose. Both are actively perceived by the spectator, and, as I will demonstrate with my analysis of *Videodrome*, this results in a discrepancy between visual and tactile familiarity. The spectator has to span the gap between perceptual intake and a tactile awareness which is lacking a point of reference in terms of memory. This then potentially results in friction between the two and possibly a heightened multisensory intake of the image, which makes up for the spectator’s dilemma (which s/he might not experience as such) of not acknowledging that what is mimicked is real and not denying that it is there either. In that sense, when recalling Sobchack’s take on *macro- and micropereception*, the intertwining of textual interpretation and the bodily level of perception is disrupted by the materiality of a practical effect, which, in the case of Cronenberg’s films, is presented outside of the narrative norms of (horror) film.

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129 ibid: 24.
The immediacy that is inherent to microperceptual (embodied) aspects of film viewing fails to organize itself in relation to macroperceptual (textual) intelligibility, even if it is just for a moment—the moment of noticing but not knowing, if you will. This moment, as I have mentioned before, is a much featured aspect of Cronenberg’s presentation of practical effects and the spectator’s perception thereof, and it is that moment which I will point out and discuss in my analysis of Videodrome. I will now briefly summarize the film’s plot and provide an outline of my forthcoming analysis of the film’s practical effects.

Cronenberg casted James Woods as Max Renn, the film’s protagonist who the director describes as “a cable TV hustler who runs a small TV station and shows very strange and bizarre things on his station in order to compete, pushing taste to the edges of the law and community standards and all that.”130 At the beginning of the film Max stumbles upon the broadcast signal of ‘Videodrome,’ a television show that shows nothing but people getting tortured in a space surrounded by clay walls. It does not take long before he figures out that the events shown on the show are in fact real. The film then follows Max while he tries to find out all he can about Videodrome and the origin of the signal. The signal causes a series of hallucinations and Max finds out that Videodrome is used as a brainwashing method by the Spectacular Optical Corporation, which is led by Barry Convex. First Max is recruited by the corporation, but towards the end of the film he turns against them and eventually assassinates Convex, after which he kills himself in order to fully wipe out Videodrome. Following the film’s chronology, I will discuss three hallucination scenes—the degree of hallucination in these scenes is left open by the film, but this has no implications for my analysis—that feature Max and his gun, which is later to become his literal handgun. The first two demonstrates once again the power of cinematography in the foregrounding of a practical effect’s physicality, albeit this time discussed with the purpose of pointing out the specific textural qualities of the effects, and the significance that these have for an effect’s potential to push its own material being to the foreground. The third scene, which presents a prosthetic effect in a most conventional way, stimulates my intentions to articulate the reasons why I believe that a practical effect’s texture is capable of, completely autonomously, bringing forth a reaction in the spectator.

Filming Max’s Prosthetic Handgun

Max is alone at home on his couch in front of the TV when he starts to hallucinate: his stomach has opened itself up and Max, who already had his gun in his hand, starts poking it inside his stomach’s opening. After a struggle during which Max cannot seem to take his hand out of his stomach, his hand pops out, without a gun this time, and his stomach has closed itself. On paper one could imagine this to be a gruesome sight to behold, but, as Hantke points out, it is because of Cronenberg’s stylistic handling of the scene that the result deviates from the expected norms. It starts with cuts between Max’s facial expressions and normative close-ups of the prosthetic effect—the hand in the torso—but then, unexpectedly, Cronenberg cuts to a medium shot, centering Max in the frame horizontally and vertically (Figure 8). “Though it shows Max’s upper body now in full integration between prosthesis and actor’s body, animated by Max’s inserted hand rooting around inside the gash, it also removes the viewer to an emotionally more comfortable distance.”  

Marks speaks of the indecipherability of objects presented by an image as an incentive for the surface (or skin) of film to be brought into (haptic) contact with the viewer. The close proximity between subject and object

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seems to be the key to the production of haptic visuality, as it demands the moment of noticing-but-not-knowing to be lingering and deprived of focus, thereby letting the spectator “graze” over the textures of the film’s skin.\textsuperscript{133} In this particular scene the opposite is achieved by Cronenberg’s direction. The distance is increased, but at the same time this removes the spectator from the practical effect’s narrative function as well, because the expectancy of shock or disgust, which is heavily embedded in the perception of such effects in film, is opposed by the medium shot’s power of altering the balance between narrative and visual signs. Hence, the material presence of the prosthetic torso takes over its narrative function. Nevertheless, it is still a visual sign strong enough to be textually recognized as Max’s stomach. Rather than being unable to discern the pro-filmic traces of an onscreen object, which is what incites haptic visuality, the spectator is now fully aware of the reality of its stylization.\textsuperscript{134} It points out that the aspect of proximity is apparent in Cronenberg’s handling of practical effects, though its result is dissimilar to the effect of proximity that Marks and Barker write about. However, the film’s foregrounding of the practical effect’s physical presence—achieved through the distance-increasing medium shot—does indicate the potential independency of practical effects, which, for now, is all I was after.

Later in the film Max’s stomach has opened again and he is able to pull out his gun, which is now covered in a familiar looking slimy substance (methocel?). After some shots of Max looking down and of his hand moving around inside his stomach, much in a similar manner as the scene described above, the camera follows his hand pulling out and holding the gun as Max slowly stretches his arm and points the gun away from him. What we get to see then is again a series of shots of Max’s face and of the gun, but the second time the camera cuts to the gun, something is different. His hand has been visibly altered by the addition of a prosthetic layer and metallic, screw-like cables have sprung from the gun and are making their way through Max’s hand and into his wrist. The amount of slimy substance has increased, probably to create a seamless transition from the prosthesis to the actor’s arm. The first shot of the prosthetic hand lasts only three seconds, but after a short shot of Max’s facial expression, the camera cuts back and lingers, in the same position as before, showing the prosthetic hand and the moving cables penetrating his flesh for about sixteen seconds (Figure 9).

\textsuperscript{133} Marks (2000): 162.
The narrative has halted at this time. We know Max has been brainwashed by Convex minutes earlier (by the insertion of a breathing videotape in Max’s stomach) and that something is about to happen, probably something involving the gun, but at this moment there is nothing indicating that we have to textually understand what is happening in order to follow the plot. For sixteen seconds the viewer is left alone with only this close-up of the ‘handgun’. The next shot shows Max’s face, from a sideways angle now, and without cutting the camera slowly pans towards the handgun, which is now derived of slime and the prosthetic characteristics are gone, or rather have been transferred to his upper arm where the cables have entered his flesh. The camera offers a more subjective look into what is going on by following Max’s line of sight as we see him moving his hand and lifting the sleeve of his jacket to reveal and see the effect of the gun’s cables entering his body. The scene’s stagnating effect in terms of narrative is eventually interrupted by a voice over of Convex, who orders Max to kill his partners at Channel 83, the TV station that Max works at.

It was very common for 1980s horror films to emphasize their practical effects—remember the five minute werewolf transformation in *The Howling*—but in the case of *Videodrome* the act of perceiving them becomes more than just awe for the practical effects team’s achievements. Rather, what happens here is that, through a stagnated narrative, the practical effect brings itself and through its material existence to the foreground/surface of the image. In comparison with more normative horror films, this manifests itself especially
because of a lacking narrative function of what is displayed. Showing a minute-long werewolf transformation is clearly done with the intent to shock/disgust/amaze. It seems that the effect of duration and narrative positioning of the handgun scene cannot be captured within such a one-directional framework, so how might we otherwise discern this image and its perception in terms of tactility, texture, and an object’s physical presence in the image?

Objects and the Optical Image

The perceptual dynamics that govern the mutually generative qualities of image and spectator are in this scene guided by the practical effect’s presentation and its texture. There is no relief offered from the effect’s appearance by a medium shot as it did before, but the shot’s length does cause the object in the image to attain a quality that cannot be made sense of merely textually; an independent-from-narrative, materially and texturally generated, tactile quality if you will. The change from the actor’s hand to a visibly displayed prosthetic replacement is the first sign of material presence. The second sign is the camera’s static lingering, which emphasizes the practical effect-as-object’s independent presence. Tashiro, writing about onscreen objects, explains how filmmakers can compensate for tactile sensations of taste and touch by visually stimulating it, for which—when implementing Marks into this—the filmmaker would have to rely on the spectator’s ability to trace visual signs back to memories of taste and touch. “As we enjoy these sensual moments for themselves, these objects are given inordinate emphasis, throwing the stories off balance and reversing traditional narrative values, leveling actors and objects to the same significance.”135 Similar to the details of set design that Tashiro speaks of, the shot’s static camerawork grants the prosthetic effect emphasis by virtue of the shot’s duration, which in turn corresponds with Tashiro’s description of how an “object’s visual appeal cannot completely be contained by narrative.”136

The visual takes over the textual and this brings the textural to the foreground, because it is the most direct visual sign present in the image: the shiny, un-flesh-like material of the prosthetic hand and the rupturing top-layer, which does not bleed and crack like normal skin would. This type of visual foregrounding brings to mind Marks’s account of Deleuze’s term optical image, which is categorized in comparison to the cliché. Whereas the latter describes a “commonsense, hegemonic image that extends unproblematically into action,” thereby hiding

136 ibid: 21.
the object in the image, the optical image makes the object visible. At first glance it therefore seems that the sixteen second shot of the handgun complies with this description, which supports the notion of Tashiro that an “inordinate emphasis” on such an object potentially increases the visual fascination for that object alone. However, when developing the notion of the optical image, Marks brings up the following aspect, which might partially contradict this interpretation: “The optical image, because it cannot be explained and mobilized into action, requires the viewer to puzzle over it.” Similar to the discrepancy found between the presentation of the open stomach in the previously discussed scene and the aspect of proximity in haptic visuality, the sixteen seconds shot of Max’s hand does not fully comply with the prerequisites of the optical image. The hand can be explained through hallucinations—which are still very vague in nature—but the duration of the shot keeps it from mobilizing into action, which lets the viewer puzzle over the image, rather than requires him/her to. Marks’s argument in relation to the optical image tells us that such images confront us with the limits of our knowledge and that, because the image refuses to explain itself through action, we are forced to claim other techniques of sense-making. However, whereas Marks follows this up with an account of socio-cultural histories in the perceptual process of what she by then refers to as attentive recognition—“the way a perceiver oscillates between seeing the object, recalling virtual images that it brings to memory, and comparing the virtual object thus created with the one before us”—I believe that what is referred to as the ‘thinness’ of the optical image—a lack of textual determination that is subjectively (and sensuously) to be made up for—is still present in this scene, be it to a minor degree.

“Unlike the immaterial delimitation of the digital effect, the “thereness” of the prosthetic effect enforces a recognition of the limits of materiality on the part of the filmmaker and the audience alike.” Here Hantke describes an inherent part of practical effects’ aesthetics, which, when read in the context of Barker’s writings on film’s texture as the plane of interaction between the spectator’s- and the film’s skin, demonstrates the tactile character of that interaction. The film’s skin, “as the perceptive and expressive boundary between self and other,” Barker writes, conceals its act of perception, but simultaneously

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138 ibid: 46-47.
139 ibid: 47.
140 ibid: 48.
141 ibid: 42.
expresses and reveals the world it perceives by showing it. In the sixteen seconds shot of Max’s prosthetic handgun, during which the effect’s material surfaces to the spectator’s attention through shot duration, perceptual signification finds its origin in the effect’s textures. The emphasis that the prosthetic effect enjoys is met by the spectator’s recognition of the effect’s material presence in the image. Both spectator and effect therefore interact on the surface of the film’s skin. The practical effect expresses itself, though it hides its ways of coming into being by having been filmed, while the spectator comes into contact with the effect through sensuous engagement with its texture. Why such practical effects bring about a sensuous engagement or tactile sensation can, besides the ways in which formal stylistic aspects can foreground effects’ physicality, be attributed to their texture as a source of active engagement with the spectator. By turning to another scene of Videodrome, in which there is no obvious cinematographic abnormality present to emphasize the effect’s physical onscreen presence, I will explicate this agency of practical effects’ textures.

The Tex(x)ture of Harlan’s Hand Grenade

Towards the end of the film Max meets with Harlan, the TV station’s satellite operator who had shown the Videodrome broadcast to Max at the beginning of the film. Harlan, who by then has already appeared to be working for the Spectacular Optical Corporation, inserts a flesh-videotape into Max’s stomach gash. Apparently in control of his stomach by now, Max refuses to let Harlan retrieve his arm from his stomach. When he finally lets Harlan pull his arm out, Harlan’s hand has disappeared and in its place appears to be a bloody lump, connected to his arm only by bone (Figure 10). Everything is covered in blood so it is hard to determine the exact (textual) nature of the material. Moments later the hand explodes, which suggests that the lump was in fact a (literal) hand grenade. The camerawork and overall cinematography are handled quite conventionally during this scene. There are no sudden cuts to relieving medium shots and the editing delivers constant shot/reverse-shots of Max and Harlan’s faces and of the videotape, stomach and flesh-grenade. As seen in Figure 10, the camera does selectively focus on the effect, transforming the background to a blur, but this type of ‘foregrounding,’ because it unequivocally steers the spectator’s vision towards the

object, does not take away any textuality. Whereas the previous scenes that I discussed display stylistic aspects that enable a manifestation of the practical effects’ tactile qualities through visual foregrounding, this specific scene, because of its normative character, forces me to concentrate on the textural/material characteristics of the practical effect as markers of its expressive physicality. Deleuze’s optical image and Marks’s haptic visuality could be seen as notions utilized with the purpose of pointing out the filmic techniques that act on a background level, but for the following part I will go outside the framework of film theory in order to acquire a tactile recognition of the practical effect’s texture, albeit much in the way that Barker writes about objects’ textures as well.

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, critical theorist and a pioneer in queer theory, provides some useful insights to the topic of texture when she refers to a former student of hers, Renu Bora, and his essay ‘Outing Texture,’ in which he makes a distinction between two kinds of texture: *texture* and *texture*.144 Without stating it as such, Sedgwick and Bora deal with many of the notions often discussed under the banner of new materialism, more specifically the perceptual processes that govern the relationship between us and the texture of objects and how both parties act and are acted upon.145 Questions of this nature are also what had me turn towards

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the material properties of practical effects in the first place, so it makes sense to make this leap with Sedgwick and Bora, even though it might seem that I am taking their writings out of their intended context of affect and emotion. However, I believe that any problematic that might emerge as a result from this friction weighs less than the value that their writings offer to my analysis, especially in the context of Barker’s textural analysis. Bora’s distinction between texture and teexture, here summarized by Sedgwick, offers a helpful tool to reflect upon the practical effect that is Harlan’s hand grenade:

Texture is the kind of texture that is dense with offered information about how, substantively, historically, materially, it came into being. A brick or a metalwork pot that still bears the scars and uneven sheen of its making would exemplify texture in this sense. But there is also the texture—one x this time—that defiantly or even invisibly blocks or refuses such information; there is texture, usually glossy if not positively tacky, that insists instead on the polarity between substance and surface, texture that signifies the willed erasure of its history.146

How could the textural character of Harlan’s hand grenade best be described according to Bora’s two categories? First of all, even though the spectator might wonder about what it is that the prosthetic effect consists of or how it was made, the film’s diegesis does not offer any explanation for it—this could be assumed for all of film’s special effects, but it should be pointed out nevertheless. Secondly, the effect’s material itself also does not contain any straightforward clues in regards to the effect’s material history. The same goes for the narrative, because it takes an explosion to figure out the intended textual representation of the prosthetic effect. Although the physical appearance of the effect can be described as everything but glossy, I am inclined to classify it as texture. It has the resemblance of something human, which would actually indicate a sense of texxture, but the uncertainty that emerges from the sudden appearance of the effect and a lack of textual motivation cause the effect’s texture to attain an autonomous status as an object that resembles nothing but its own material being. However, I would like to immediately question this interpretation by approaching the effect’s (pro-)filmic being on a more meta-level. That is to say, it could be argued that the effect came to being on the screen by being filmed.

The ontographic nature of the image—index-wise writing its reality by means of a preceding matter-reality—together with the filmic reality that the film produces, forms the

146 ibid: 14-15.
basic structure along which the effect’s texture comes into being. It is a filmed material, and by being filmed and presented as part of the cinematographic space (as well as the pro-filmic space), the effect’s texture demands its physical properties to be viewed (at least partially) independent from its textual texture. Therefore it is just as verifiable to conclude that texture is the fitting category: the prosthetic effect signifies its own material being, with its cinematographic presentation (especially the reflection of light on the effect’s material surface) signifying its history of having come into being as a filmed object. In terms of haptic visuality, it is the object itself within the haptic image that I am aiming to acknowledge through theoretical reflection. The effect’s expressive physicality is in this case not directly (or as clearly) caused by the scene’s cinematographic features. Instead, I am emphasizing the effect’s texture itself as an independent agent, of which its agency could be understood as the active source of a performance of its own materiality. Bora’s distinction between texture and texxture is therefore merely a way to specify the textural qualities of the effect itself as well as the implications for the effect’s texture’s perception. As I mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, I see the textures of Videodrome’s prosthetic effects (the handgun as well as the hand grenade) as both carriers of tactile information—the texture presents itself as something to be touched—and as objects that possess a textural agency: the practical effect’s texture can sever itself from its textual strings, thereby attaining a materially induced, active independency. Furthermore, these two features of practical effects as onscreen objects, as Barker suggests, are always and dynamically in communication with each other, let alone share a mutual generative relationship with the viewer in terms of embodied spectatorship.147

The point I have tried to make by applying Bora’s distinction between texture and texxture to this specific practical effect, is to formulate a conceptual understanding of what it is that makes such an effect’s texture stand out. Is it the texture of the material itself, the way that it is presented, or the textual context in which it is experienced? How might we understand the expressive physicality of a practical effect such as this when there is no direct emphasis offered through camerawork or shot duration? Questions such as these have guided me so far in my pursuit of a tactile/embodied notion of practical effects’ physicality. Albeit still open-ended, I hope to have pointed out (or at least approached an understanding of) the characteristics of practical effects’ expressive physicality in terms of haptic visuality, and especially a tactile recognition of practical effects’ textural agency.

Having granted it only a minimal amount of attention throughout the previous chapters, I want to expand on the role of *mimesis* (as understood by Marks’s reading of Benjamin) in the experience of practical effects’ texture, as well as extend the notion of mimesis in this context by incorporating Taussig’s and Rutherford’s notions of mimesis and mimetic experience—for which they are also in debt to Benjamin, though Rutherford draws mostly on Miriam Hansen’s readings of the author. By doing this I hope to make the circle complete; from recognizing the expressive physicality of special effects’ texture (as an independent agent) to a comprehension of the tactile involvement of the spectator in the perception of that physicality, together forming what I have referred to as the *tactile reality* of practical effects.

In this final chapter I will furthermore demonstrate how and why practical effects, regardless of their presentation, are perceived in a manner that relates to my notion of *transsubstitution*, a term I coin to describe the ways in which a practical effect is at once a practical effect (materially speaking) and that what it is meant to represent according to its textual context. Mimesis serves as a means through which the surfacing of a practical effect’s textural agency can be alluded and clarified, both in terms of film-viewing experience and the filmic reality that practical effects are a part of. It does so by a conceptualization of the spectator’s experience of- and relation to onscreen objects. This last chapter is therefore devoted to the following question: how might we understand the physical appearances of practical effects as manifestations of a tactile involvement between subject and onscreen objects, in terms of mimesis?

I will use theories of mimesis and embodied spectatorship to analyze the practical effects that are used to give shape to the monster that appears at the end of Gordon’s sci-fi/horror hybrid *From Beyond*. Through the various notions and aspects of mimesis we might come to understand the perceptual processes that govern an embodied perception of practical effects and therefore the tactile aspect that resides in the sensuous connection between subject and object; between spectator and practical effect, and vice versa. The film’s effects consist
mostly of prosthetic effects, along with some makeup effects (all together supervised by John Carl Buechler).

Roughly based on H.P. Lovecraft’s short story of the same name, *From Beyond* tells the story of Dr. Edward Pretorius (Ted Sorel), who invents a machine that stimulates the pineal gland through resonating waves, thereby enabling whoever is within reach to perceive realities beyond normal perception, and his assistant, Dr. Crawford Tillinghast (Jeffrey Combs), who is witness to all the events that follow and who first becomes a victim of the machine’s unforeseen effects and ultimately the story’s hero. The two discover that the machine, when activated, allows creatures from other dimensions to enter their reality. Pretorius develops an unhealthy attraction to the machine’s perception-altering abilities and he eventually becomes deformed as his body fuses with other-dimensional organic materials.

The final sequence of the film shows Crawford fighting Pretorius, who is now a full-grown monster. Of course there is much more to the film—other characters, a more ‘subtle’ plot development—but for my analysis of the film’s practical effects I deem it unnecessary to provide a concise account of the film’s plotline; the above should suffice as the minimal amount of plot information needed to follow my argumentation. It is not so much a specific scene or shot that I am going to analyze, or at least not as I did before, simply because the film does not seem to feature any specific or characteristic manners of presenting its practical effects—besides perhaps the dominating color tone (pink-ish purple), which is reminiscent of *Society*’s red tones. Instead, I choose to simply analyze the practical effect’s physical appearance: the huge amounts of rubber latex used to give shape to the monster and the methocel-like slimy, glistening liquid substance that covers it all. I should mention that there are hardly any signs of an actor involved whenever the monster enters the frame, except for some sporadic, quick shots of Pretorius’s face, which visibly connects via a long prosthetic neck to the monster’s body and which is covered in make-up and prosthetic features as well. Many moments in the film’s final sequence are therefore dominated by the presence of practical effects only: the camera often in close proximity to the effects, reducing the background setting to a minimal presence.
For Taussig, mimesis contains two layers: “a copying or imitation, and a palpable, sensuous, connection between the very body of the perceiver and the perceived.”148 This means that not only does the accumulation of prosthetic effects that is Pretorius appear as an indexical referent of the effects’ pro-filmic origins, it, because copy and contact merge “to become virtually identical, different moments of the one process of sensing,” appears as a visual as well as a tangible material, which the subject is brought into contact with: “seeing something or hearing something is to be in contact with that something.”149 Film’s photographic, indexical way of copying real world objects onto the screen does therefore not only amount to representation. It produces a copy or imitation that brings subject and object into contact with each other. The basic structure of this contact is, according to Rutherford, tactile.150 Simultaneously, tactility itself, as an aspect of mimesis, cannot be underestimated as just a result of the copy/contact duality of mimetic experience, which is an experience that Rutherford describes as “a kind of embodied perception that opens itself up to tactile sensory experience.”151 A tactile sensation of practical effects is what initiates embodied perception and hence evokes a mimetic dimension by itself—the fusion of subject and object—which in turn gives way to an experience of a practical effect’s material. However, nothing happens in isolation. Rather, the above could be described as an immediate dynamic that is inherent to mimetic and tactile experience.

From Beyond’s practical effects, its contours strongly emphasized by a reflection of the set’s lighting, are examples of how pro-filmic effects are essentially manifestations of the mimetic dimension that lies at the core of film-viewing. At the same time, as I have explained throughout my final paragraphs on Videodrome, these effects are independent agents that act out their own physicality on the screen, which can potentially be foregrounded through cinematography. The tactile sensory experience, which mimetic experience gives way to, is intimately related to film’s referential relation to the physical world, and thus to the physical and hence tactile reality that practical effects are part of. From Beyond’s quick shots of

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149 ibid.
151 ibid: 288 [footnote].
moving matter might be cognitively comprehensible as far as the spectator’s knowledge of the existence of Pretorius-the-monster goes, but more than that the practical effects present themselves—their movements, their textures—by ways of coming into contact with the spectator’s embodied perception of their visibly displayed physicality. Visibly displayed, because everything within *From Beyond*’s practical effects-ridden imagery suggests that the effects’ material is directly present in front of the camera (*Figure 11*). “The image is connective tissue,” Marks writes, and it is the spectator’s experience of that tissue that is at once tactile and evokes a mimetic dimension.152 Tactility, Rutherford writes, “has the capacity to enhance or arouse the mimetic faculty, the registering of a moment as an embodied sensory moment in all its dimensions,” which further explains the emergence of the attention-demanding, physical agency of practical effects.153

*Figure 11. Other-dimensional material in From Beyond.*

The result of a mimetic experience of practical effects and the involvement of tactility therein eventually unites viewer and viewed.154 In other words, the spectator is invited to mimetically embody the material structure of practical effects by taking in the feeling of what it means to touch- as well as to *be* a practical effect’s material.155 That is to say, through

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tactile involvement with the onscreen material of practical effects and because of the spectator’s embodied knowledge of the material’s texture—imaginatively emergent or not—the spectator comes into contact with the onscreen object and, vice versa, the effects’ material resonates with the modes of perception that it conveys by being viewed. Marks, though rather abstract in her description, puts it as follows: “Mimesis shifts the hierarchical relationship between subject and object, indeed dissolves the dichotomy between the two, such that erstwhile subjects take on the physical, material qualities of objects, while objects take on the perceptive and knowledgeable qualities of subjects.”¹⁵⁶ The visibly displayed artificial construction of the monster in *From Beyond* causes the textural surface of the practical effect that gives shape to it to be experienced in a most tactile manner. This then demonstrates the ways in which practical effects, as agents of their own material textures, can act- and are acted upon by the spectator.

These notions of mimesis, apart from being suggestive of the embodied perception of practical effects’ tactile character, supports Rushton’s description of filmic reality, since it demonstrates film’s status as a medium that transcends the representational character that has long been attributed to it. Therefore it makes sense to characterize the mimetic faculty of practical effects as a *tactile reality*, because they, as onscreen objects that act out their physicality, correspond with the physical reality that surrounds us outside the framed borders of film. The pro-filmic ontological being of these effects can be appointed a major role in this, but I hope to have made a strong case for their own expressive physicality as something that we come into contact with through the various facets of mimetic experience and by means of our embodied tactile knowledge of physical reality.

**Transsubstitution**

“Film is grasped not solely by an intellectual act but by the complex perception of the body as a whole. This view of perception implies an attitude toward the object, in this case a film, not as something that must be analyzed and deciphered in order to deliver forth its meaning but as something that means in itself.”¹⁵⁷ With these words Marks describes how our bodies and not just our intellect mediate perception and memory—memory being the configuration of our sensory experience of film’s mimetic facilities. The sensory information that practical effects

¹⁵⁶ ibid: 141.
¹⁵⁷ ibid: 145.
offer (physically experienced textures, slimy collections of latex in motion) is an element of film’s meaning-generating capacity, which would make mimetic experience the viewer’s act of making sense of that information through embodied involvement with the practical effects’ material. But, in the case of such films as *From Beyond*, there is always and still a narrative, textual interpretative factor present at the outset of the film-viewing experience. However, I beg to differ to the hierarchical understanding of the relationship between embodiment and a distanced, rationalized intellect, in terms of film viewing experience, as the following account of my proposed term *transsubstitution* will demonstrate. As a concept it echoes a lot of the same characteristics that make up Barthes’ photographic paradox—and to some degree Engell’s notion of moving images’ ontographic nature—though here it is introduced as a term that specifically relates to practical effects’ expressive/agential physicality/textures.

There is the object perceived and the object present, and, I plead, both are experienced by the spectator. This might seem paradoxical, because, according to Marks, the perceived image “isolates only that in which one is interested.” What I want to suggest is that whenever an object is perceived, the object present—the pre-mediated state of any onscreen object—makes itself known as well. That is to say, mediation (in terms of text and intellect) isolates an object from its pro-filmic status, but, at the same time, the spectator experiences the object in its completeness, merely isolated by camerawork and frame. No matter how much they might be occluded by a film’s plot, I insist that practical effects themselves are to be considered manifestations of onscreen objects that are guided by a sense of *transsubstitution*: a constant, immediate and above all dynamic interchange between text and texture; between practical effect as latex and as skin; between the object perceived and the object present, revealing itself analogous to the moment a painting falls apart into brushstrokes. It is a term that for one describes the mimetic principle of seeing a copy or imitation of an object and simultaneously coming into contact with it through its resonating materiality, and secondly it takes this principle a step further by describing the interrelation and constant dynamic (*trans-*) between the pro-filmic, utmost physical and tactile material of an object and its textual material. These materials continuously replace one another by virtue of their presentation and/or textual context (*substitution*), but more than that there is an oscillating quality to this dynamic that alludes to the material’s agency. In the way that mimetic experience dissolves the hierarchical dichotomy between subject and object, *transsubstitution* expresses the object’s active dynamic, which is at once autonomous and

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158 ibid: 146.
granted action by the viewer. The textural and the textual material of the object function as agents of interchange: they rely on each other’s presence to be perceived. Finally, it is a democratic dynamic, in the sense that both these states are never to be considered more or less present than the other. A practical effect appearing as itself is then a way of saying that the effect shows its constructed nature, which is experienced through embodied perception and results in a recognition of the physical and tactile properties of that effect—while never undermining the effect’s other meaning: that of its representational intention. From Beyond, in its excessive use of practical effects, features plenty examples of images that show the transsubstitutional nature of special effects and I will use a more specific example from the film to demonstrate the concept’s applicability.

The last time Crawford makes an appearance is when he tries to escape Pretorius’s insides after having been eaten by him only minutes before. He screams as he exits through Pretorius’s mouth—which stretches rather than tears apart, much like Blanchard’s head being torn apart by Judge Carter in Society and the metal cables entering Max’s wrist in Videodrome—and manages to briefly free his torso from the monster’s grasp (Figure 12). What looks like strings of flesh quickly get a hold of Crawford’s upper body and after he is forced to give up he is pulled back into the monster’s body. The frame does not deviate from the position shown in Figure 12 and the attention is thereby mostly drawn to the movement of Crawford’s efforts and of Pretorius’s limb-like fleshy strings. As my notion of transsubstitution adverts, the spectator perceives both Pretorius’s body and the practical effect that gives shape to it. As far as a tactile experience of that duality goes, it is the material of both bodies—housing the practical effect itself and its textual context—that is taken in by the spectator. The fact that the actor is covered in a wet-looking substance that comes from the practical effect’s materials helps the spectator to acknowledge the pro-filmic status of the effect, not to mention its affective function in terms of spectacle and intensity. Crawford touches the material and with him so does the spectator. The mimetic dialogue between subject and object further explains how this is experienced by the spectator: by coming into contact with the material that Pretorius is composed of, the spectator develops an embodied relation to that material, being at once aware of its pro-filmic ontology and its onscreen presence; both demanding a tactile as well as an intellectual acknowledgement of its material performance. In the words of Rutherford: “Affective intensity is not deflected onto intellectual contemplation, but diffracted, dispersed across all of the available sensory registers; it is not
It is not just contemplative awareness that guides the experience of special effects, it is the whole of the spectator’s sensorium that is attracted to the screen and to the objects within it. Furthermore, as Sobchack informs us, “film experience is meaningful not to the side of our bodies but because of our bodies.”

Although the shot of Figure 12 is by no means a ‘long’ take—i.e. there is no time for the camera to linger and for the spectator to graze instead of gaze—there is an incredible exuberance to the shot’s display of practical effects. This augmentation is mostly due to the strong reflection of light on the effects’ material, the monochromatic purple tone of the image which deletes any natural skin color—causing the actor’s skin to appear similar to the effect’s ‘skin’—and the fact that Crawford is covered in a slimy liquid that covers all of the effects as well. As an exemplary instance of what I would consider transsubstitution, it is thus characterized by immediacy: textual and textural material quickly oscillate in visual presence, and the viewer experiences the practical effect as such; as monstrous, organic material and as man-made, unfamiliar material (though s/he might be taken in too much by the film’s plot to

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160 ibid: 187.
161 Sobchack. (2004): 60. (my emphasis)
consciously notice it). It might not be that *From Beyond’s* display of practical effects self-reflectively reveals their artificial material, nor does the film seem to express their physicality through cinematography, but it does establish the grounds for practical effects’ inherent, dynamic duality of being more than a mere carrier of textual significance, though its impact on the viewer in terms of tactility is not comparable to the other two case studies. Rather than demonstrating film’s ability to foreground practical effects’ tactility (*Society*) or their agential texture (*Videodrome*), *From Beyond* exemplifies how a practical effect, by being filmed and perceived, can become more than the sum of its parts.
Conclusion

I have pointed out and discussed the various ways in which practical effects can evoke a sense of embodied spectatorship, whether it occurs by means of a film’s cinematographic presentation of them (*Society*), their own physical material (*Videodrome*), or by virtue of their perceptual relation to the viewer and vice versa (*From Beyond*). My underlying objective of this dissertation was to approach a conceptual recognition of practical effects’ expressive physicality, which my notions of textural agency, tactile reality and transsubstitution are the result of. In these final paragraphs I will summarize my findings, reflect on the methods and theory I have applied and offer a reconsideration of what it means to understand practical effects as such, as well as conclude what this entails with regards to the overarching concepts of filmic reality and embodied spectatorship.

*Society*’s practical effects’ physical onscreen presence is democratized in relation to its textual context, thereby attaining a certain independency from the narrative and consequently inviting the viewer to engage with them on a tactile level. That is to say, through visual foregrounding—i.e. cinematographic aspects such as camera position and movement—these effects are able to display their physicality and partially break with their textual ties, which in turn lets the spectator engage with the effects as such. Textual intelligibility moves to the background and makes place for a tactile sensation of the effects’ material characteristics. *Society*’s practical effects can be considered carriers of tactile stimuli, which is an aspect of their pro-filmic existence that the film’s cinematography highlights. This then appeared to give way to an emerging dynamic of the practical effects; of simultaneously appearing familiar (textually) and unfamiliar (materially). In terms of embodied spectatorship, *Society* demonstrates the potential of practical effects to, by means of their display, claim tactile modes of signification; not only because the spectator shares the camera’s selective ways of perceiving the pro-filmic scenario, but also because textual intelligibility is leveled with the spectator’s embodied perceptual intake of the practical effects’ visibly foregrounded material. In this case it is the camera’s placement and movement that accentuate the artificiality of the practical effects, making the reality of their stylization apparent to the spectator.

At first sight, *Videodrome* demonstrated a similar relation between spectator and practical effects in terms of their filmic display—especially with regards to formal composition, i.e. the camera’s framing—though the aspect of shot duration provided new insights in relation to practical effects’ autonomous expressive physicality. This enabled me to
demonstrate the applicability of the concept of tactile reality, for Videodrome literally shows the ways in which a practical effect’s physical presence can guide an emerging sense of embodied spectatorship, as well as express its physicality by revealing its material origins of having been filmed as part of both the pro-filmic and the cinematographic space. Consequently, the reality of their physicality is brought to the foreground and, additionally, the spectator’s experience of that materially constituted reality is real in and of itself. Moreover, Videodrome expresses practical effects’ agency, or how they perform their own material, pro-filmic being, simply by being filmed. Barker’s notion of onscreen objects’ texture provided the key to discerning this quality, which I consider an inherent part of practical effects. It helped to change the focal point from spectatorship to practical effects themselves and how they act on their potentially emerging independency. Videodrome’s practical effects exemplify how a tactile form of perceptual significance finds its origin in an effect’s texture, because it (1) expresses its material pro-filmic presence, thereby bringing the spectator into contact with its material, and, as a result of that, it (2) shapes a newly formed relationship between viewer and image; a connection that, because contact and referent converge, is physical. Composition of frame and shot duration were therefore considered to be secondary factors in the emergence of practical effects’ textural agency, as Videodrome demonstrates the potentially autonomous source of action in practical effects’ onscreen presence.

I further developed this notion of practical effects’ agential features by discussing From Beyond’s effects and how the spectator’s mimetic experience of, or contact with, the onscreen presence of practical effects informs the tactile sensory relationship between effect and spectator and vice versa. Whereas Society and Videodrome served both the purpose of research objects and as demonstrations of my arguments, From Beyond, because of its relatively normative presentation of its effects, was discussed from a larger distance in terms of the theory-analysis ratio. Although this might not have done justice to the film’s vast collection of prosthetic effects, it did enable me to reflect on the content of the previous chapters, and to bring the theoretical foundations of this thesis—filmic reality and embodied spectatorship—closer together. The term transubstitution was developed with this objective in mind. The chapter on Videodrome concluded how practical effects present themselves—their movements, their textures—by ways of coming into contact with the spectator’s embodied perception of their visibly displayed physicality. It is that understanding of practical effects’ onscreen presence in relation to the viewer that I tried to articulate more elaborately.
and develop by discussing *From Beyond*’s practical effects, with the notion of *mimesis* serving as a binding factor between the above and filmic reality.

The way in which *From Beyond*’s prosthetic effects present their textual material and simultaneously express their physical material—which is rooted in its pro-filmic presence—can be understood as the transsubstitutional character of practical effects. The mimetic relationship between the effect on the screen and the effect in front of the camera translates to a mimetic experience—of copy and of contact—in the spectator, who, as a result of that mimetic relationship, mimetically embodies the material structure of the effect by engaging with it. The spectator’s tactile sensation of a practical effect’s physicality therefore originates in viewing the effect’s material textures and coming into contact with it, which ultimately lets the spectator experience the effect’s own tactile sensation. *Transsubstitution* describes the way in which practical effects, as agents of their own material textures, can act- and are acted upon by the spectator.

Rutherford and Marks’s notions of mimesis, apart from being suggestive of the embodied perception of practical effects’ tactile character, support Rushton’s description of filmic reality, because it demonstrates film’s status as a medium that transcends the representational character that is often attributed to it. It therefore makes sense to characterize the mimetic components of practical effects as indicators of a *tactile reality*, because they, as onscreen objects that act out their physicality, correspond with the physical reality that surrounds us outside the framed borders of film. *Tactile reality* also implies the ‘realness’ of experiencing the physicality of practical effects, which is what connects it to notions of embodied spectatorship.

I have been mostly supportive of the various aspects of embodied spectatorship, as developed by Sobchack, Marks, Barker and Rutherford. Sobchack’s idea that the spectator is in constant communication with the film’s own viewing body has proved to be a useful notion of spectatorship in my discernment of what it means to experience practical effects as objects that are at once part of the pro-filmic space and that are produced and displayed with the intention of visualizing things that are fantastical or impossible. It is this dynamic of the effects’ status of being textually intelligible as unreal material and simultaneously appearing to be physically present in the cinematographic space that makes them a challenging factor of film experience in terms of filmic reality, and thus an even more interesting factor in terms of embodied spectatorship. On the one hand, cinematographic presentation can alter the modes of perception that guide the spectator’s experience of the practical effects; this is something that Marks’s concept of haptic visuality was applicable to. On the other hand, my application
of Barker’s ideas on onscreen objects and the two-layered understandings of mimesis, provided by Taussig and Rutherford, indicate that there is an inherent mimetic and consequential physical aspect to practical effects, which derives from their physical presence in the image and which potentially expresses itself autonomously. Society and Videodrome showed that this potential independent expressive physicality—whenever it is granted emphasis in the viewer’s perception—is largely due to cinematographic features. The moment the camera finds itself in close proximity to the practical effect its textures start to show and its physical features gain prominence over their textual context. When the camera lingers, the effect’s textures become increasingly reciprocal of the viewer’s tactile sensations of film viewing. However, as I set out to contend from the outset of this thesis, I believe that the manifestation of a practical effect’s agency is not completely dependent on such cinematographic stylizations. In my discussion of From Beyond I found that this can only be argued in the sterile environment of conceptual film theory, meaning that this discussion has to partially remove itself from the objects it wants to study, in order to claim any insights regarding a theoretical recognition of film’s intrinsic qualities, such as the autonomous expressive physicality of practical effects. At multiple moments throughout this thesis I have emphasized the importance of staying close to film’s images themselves, so as to maintain an egalitarian view on the study of film’s various levels of signification (which, as my use of Rushton’s filmic reality demonstrates, lie within the limits of a film’s frame). My plead for a recognition of practical effects’ agential structure therefore cannot move beyond a suggestive phase, but that does not have to be a negative connotation in the light of this thesis.

As for the overarching theoretical frameworks of filmic reality and embodied spectatorship, I believe that my observations have widened the scope of applicability of these concepts. In relation to embodied spectatorship, I have tried to demonstrate the applicability of the related concepts—Sobchack’s film as viewing body; Marks’s haptic visuality; Barker’s textural analysis—to visual analyses of practical effects. These authors have already dealt with physicality and onscreen objects, but since practical effects in particular serve a clear purpose of materializing and visualizing the fantastical or impossible, the angle of inquiry demanded their concepts to be contextualized in other contexts than mere embodiment, phenomenology and film experience. Rushton’s notion of filmic reality and related notions from Bazin, Barthes and Cavell served as focal points through which I could relate the physical experience of practical effects’ onscreen presence to a broader framework of film theory. The results from analyzing my case studies demonstrate how and why practical effects deserve such attention, because, as I hope to have made clear, they are a highly influential
factor when it comes to our experience of films that utilize mimetic principles for our
enjoyment, but that cannot simply be abstained as illusory devices.

Though I have made strong claims about what film viewing entails and about what it
means to study film in and of itself, I cannot deny that there have been moments where I
know I am overstepping boundaries. The thin line between an analytical approach grounded
in film theory and speculative interpretation is a line that is easily crossed. There is a
substantial amount of authors and concepts whose absence is indicative of my benighted
stance in the field of film study, but in my endeavors I have tried to see this as an advantage;
as a way to relate to filmic reality, for example, but also as an incentive to connect ideas that
are perhaps not traditionally seen as immediately relative to the study of film. My choice of
case studies has not been the most subtle, and if there is one thing that I personally feel is
lacking from this thesis, it is that a film which contains practical effects that are not
immediately and visibly discernible, or that do not resemble anything fantastical, could have
been an interesting point of discussion. What would my concluding arguments say about the
abundant presence of oil (methocel) in Paul Thomas Anderson’s *There Will Be Blood* (2007)
for example, where it surges, splashes on the camera and even sets the tone for the whole
film’s visual look? The theoretical angle of embodied spectatorship has opened many doors
for film studies, one of which I let myself enter to try and articulate a conceptual recognition
of practical effects’ physicality and the spectator’s tactile sensation of that physicality. They
are a paradoxical means of filmmaking when it comes to film’s mimetic (and indexical)
nature, but more than that they can become more than the sum their parts in the eyes of the
viewer, the results of which are not only important to film experience in general, but, as this
thesis hopefully demonstrates, to an understanding of what film is and what it can do as well.
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