

SHANE DENSON

Discorrelated Images



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Duke University Press Durham and London 2020

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Printed in the United States of America on acid-free paper ∞

Designed by Drew Sisk

Typeset in Portrait Text by Westchester Publishing Services

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Denson, Shane, [date] author.

Title: Discorrelated images / Shane Denson.

Description: Durham : Duke University Press, 2020. | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2019058965 (print)

LCCN 2019058966 (ebook)

ISBN 9781478009856 (hardcover)

ISBN 9781478010913 (paperback)

ISBN 9781478012412 (ebook)

Subjects: LCSH: Digital images. | Digital cinematography. | Motion pictures—
Production and direction—Technological innovations. | Motion picture industry—
Technological innovations. | Motion picture audiences. | Visual perception.

Classification: LCC TR860.D46 2020 (print) | LCC TR860 (ebook) | DDC 777—dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2019058965>

LC ebook record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2019058966>

Cover art: Karin Denson, *Glitchesarelikewildanimals! No. 1*, 2015. Acrylic on canvas.

Courtesy of the artist.

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*For Amy:
you have taught me
more than anyone else about
how to make sense
of dis correlation*

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book has profited from the support and encouragement of countless people. My colleagues at the Leibniz Universität Hannover, at Duke University, and most recently at Stanford University listened to me talk about the ideas elaborated here and read various bits and pieces of text that would eventually come together as *Discorrelated Images*. I am especially grateful for the detailed feedback that I received on two occasions at the Faculty Salon of the Stanford Department of Art and Art History, and for the opportunity to present this work to colleagues and graduate students at the Digital Aesthetics Workshop at the Stanford Humanities Center. Special thanks go to my colleagues for creating such a supportive environment at Stanford, particularly Scott Bukatman, Pavle Levi, Jean Ma, Karla Oeler, Usha Iyer, Alexander Nemerov, Jody Maxmin, Marci Kwon, Srđan Keca, Adam Tobin, Paul DeMarinis, Richard Meyer, Camille Utterback, Emanuele Lugli, Rose Salseda, Gail Wight, Nancy Troy, Fabio Barry, Jonathan Calm, Terry Berlier, Enrique Chagoya, Jan Krawitz, Jamie Meltzer, Bissera Pentcheva, Richard Vinograd, Xiaoze Xie, Beth Kessler, Henry Lowood, and Fred Turner. Directly or indirectly, all of you helped me find the strength to complete this project. Thanks also to former colleagues and mentors Mark B. N. Hansen, Ruth Mayer, and Peter Hutcheson, for whose continuing support I am forever grateful, and whose example encourages me to

pay it forward to the next generation of students. I am gratified to have had the opportunity to work with and learn from some amazing graduate students, including Hank Gerba, Ankita Deb, Ron Reichman, Amber Harper, Jeff Nagy, Doug Eacho, Annika Butler-Wall, Natalie Deam, Daniel Cohen, Helen Krüger, Juan Pablo Melo, Frank Mondelli, Michael Metzger, Daniel Hernandez, Corey Anderson Dansereau, and Andrea Capra—you all inspire me; thank you.

I have benefited from opportunities to present this work at a variety of conferences, including the Society for Cinema and Media Studies; the Society for Literature, Science, and the Arts; the American Comparative Literature Association; the Association for the Study of the Arts of the Present; the Modern Language Association; the German Association for American Studies; the Electronic Literature Organization; the Spiral Film and Philosophy conference in Toronto; the Media Fields conference at UC Santa Barbara; and several of the excellent conferences organized by Richard Grusin under the auspices of the Center for 21st Century Studies at the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee. Thank you to all the copanelists and audience members who engaged with this work and thus contributed to making the present book better. Thank you also to the many people who have invited me to speak on topics of post-cinema and dis-correlated images at various venues around the world: Lisa Åkervall, Chris Tedjasukmana, and Gertrud Koch for inviting me to speak at the Post-cinematic Perspectives event in Berlin; Reinhold Görling, Marie-Luise Angerer, and Hanjo Berressem for the invitation to speak in their Ecologies of Practice series in Cologne; Jo Ann Carson and Peter Hutcheson for the opportunity to speak at Texas State University; Natalie Roxburgh and Marcel Hartwig at the University of Siegen; Bruce Isaacs at the University of Sydney; Russell Smith at the Australian National University; Caetlin Benson-Allott at Georgetown University; Ina Habermann and Michelle Witen at the University of Basel; Morgane Ghilardi and Hannah Schoch at the University of Zurich; Kevin B. Lee at the Merz Akademie in Stuttgart; Ruth Mayer and the American Studies Colloquium at the Leibniz Universität Hannover; Kathleen Loock and Frank Kelleter at the Freie Universität Berlin; Steven Shaviro for having me Skype in at Wayne State University; Julia Leyda for figuring out a way for me to spend a week at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology in Trondheim; Ahmet Gürata at the University of Agder in Kristiansand; Brian Price at the University of Toronto; Katerina Krtilova, Dieter Mersch, and the Media-Philosophical Working Group at the Zürcher Hochschule der Künste; Radhika Natarajan at the Sprache, Migration, Vielfalt series in Hannover; Zenaida Osorio at the Universidad Nacional de Colombia in Bogotá, where my family and I spent a nonstop, event-filled week; Giselle

Gubernikoff and Edson Luiz de Oliveira at the Universidade de São Paulo; and Florian Hoof and everybody at the Institute for Advanced Study on Media Cultures of Computer Simulation and the Center for Digital Cultures at the Leuphana University of Lüneburg, where I completed this manuscript during a generous research fellowship in the summer of 2019.

I would also like to acknowledge my debt to the peer reviewers who offered their incredibly helpful and insightful comments on this work: two anonymous readers and a certain “Reviewer #3,” who turned out to be the incomparable Vivian Sobchack. I am beyond grateful for the work that you all put into helping me make this the best book it could be. Thank you also to the editors and reviewers at *Journal of Cinema and Media Studies*, where an earlier version of the first half of chapter 5 appeared (I am grateful for the permission to publish an expanded version of Shane Denson, “The Horror of Discorrelation: Mediating Unease in Post-cinematic Screens and Networks,” *JCMS: Journal of Cinema and Media Studies* 59, no. 4 [2020]). Thanks also to the editors and reviewers at *Media Fields Journal*, where earlier versions of ideas developed in chapter 4 and chapter 6 first appeared (as, respectively: “Edge Detection,” *Media Fields*, no. 14 [2019], and “Post-cinema after Extinction,” *Media Fields*, no. 13 [2018]). An earlier, shorter version of chapter 1 first appeared as “Crazy Cameras, Discorrelated Images, and the Post-perceptual Mediation of Post-cinematic Affect,” in *Post-cinema: Theorizing 21st-Century Film*, ed. Shane Denson and Julia Leyda (Falmer, UK: REFRAME Books, 2016). Portions of chapter 6 also appeared as “Pre-ponsive Gestures,” in *ETC Media* 110 (2017): 40–45. My thanks also to Grégory Chatonsky for permission to reproduce images of his incredible post-cinematic artworks.

My especial thanks go to Elizabeth Ault, my editor at Duke University Press, to editorial associate Kate Herman, and to project editor Lisl Hampton. It has been a true pleasure to work with you all, and I am extremely grateful for the effort, enthusiasm, and attention that you and everyone at the press have devoted to this project. Thanks also to Paula Durbin-Westby for her expert work on the index.

Finally, my deepest gratitude and love go to my family. Thank you, Karin, for supporting me like no one else could, certainly more than I deserve. You have several times picked up and moved around the globe with me, each time turning our new environment into a home. Every single day, I find myself again in awe of your energy, creativity, and care. And Amy: this book is for you. You’ve taught me some of the central lessons that inspire this book, though I can hardly hope to have communicated them in a way that will do justice to the unspoken, possibly unspeakable truths you’ve revealed.

INTRODUCTION

Discorrelation and Post-cinema



Discorrelated Images explores the transitional space-time between cinema and post-cinema. More precisely, it probes the transformational temporal and spatial articulations of contemporary moving images and our perceptual, actional, and affective interfaces with them as they migrate from conventional forms of cinema and enter the computational systems that now encompass virtually every aspect of audiovisual mediation. While the generation, composition, distribution, and playback of images increasingly become a matter of algorithms, software, networks, and codecs, our sensory ratios (as Marshall McLuhan called them) are being reordered, our perceptual faculties are being reformed in accordance with the new speeds and scales of imaging processes. In a post-cinematic media regime, that is, both the subjects and the objects of perception are radically transformed. Older relations—such as that between a human subject and a photographically fixed object—are dissolving, and new relations are being forged in the microtemporal intervals of algorithmic processing. With the new objects of computational images emerge new subjectivities, new affects, and uncertain potentials for perception and action.

At the heart of these transformations lie the generative dynamics of high-speed (often “real-time”) feedback and feed-forward processes, which introduce (and modulate) new contingencies at the heart of post-cinematic mediation. We

glimpse such processes in digital glitches, for example, which derail perception and inject the microtemporal misfirings of the computer into our subjective awareness. The underlying contingencies, however, are beyond the purview of subjective perception; the algorithms and hardware operations responsible for the glitch are fundamentally “discorrelated” from phenomenological processes of noetic intentionality. Moreover, the glitch reveals a more general instability attaching to computationally mediated images, which are highly volatile and always in danger of dissolution. Processed on the fly in an interval that is inaccessible to human perception, the images that populate our world are themselves discorrelated from human subjectivity—no longer tuned to the frequencies of human sensory access and thus no longer essentially bound to *appear* at all.¹ Nevertheless, various forms and manifestations of contemporary audiovisual media mediate to us these processes, providing sensory complements to subperceptual events, helping us in a sense to negotiate the transition to a truly posthuman, post-perceptual media regime.² These mediations and negotiations are the focus of the present book.

Discorrelated Images engages, in other words, with the transactions between human and machinic agencies as they together broker the ongoing transition from cinematic to post-cinematic media. Framed as such, the project must answer to a number of objections at the outset. Isn't the “death of cinema” a tired cliché? And isn't the very notion of post-cinema therefore superfluous? The machinery of cinema has changed, to be sure, but the cinema thrives even in a computerized world. Indeed, there is no hard break, no bright line between cinema and post-cinema; the vision of post-cinema advocated here is predicated not on cinema's “end” but rather on its envelopment within the larger space of an environment that has been thoroughly transformed by the operation of computational processing. There are real continuities between the experience of going to the cinema in the age of celluloid and that of watching movies stored and screened by way of digital apparatuses; we still consume moving images, and these moving images still mediate stories and other recognizably perceptual contents. But in focusing on these continuities, we risk overlooking the volatility or contingency of this correlation of subject and object, which in the age of computational processing teeters precariously atop microtemporal processes that are radically different in speed and scale from human perception. The perceptual correlation, in other words, pertains to a level of phenomenal experience that is abstracted from, and systematically blind to, the underlying discorrelation.

And yet, this book argues, the underlying discorrelation transforms our experience in important and far-reaching ways. Some of these effects are more

readily apparent, like the sensation of being “blown away” by the ostentatious display of new visual effects, or simply taking (perhaps slightly annoyed) notice of formal changes introduced through nonlinear editing and digital color grading. Other experiential effects are far less obvious—for example, the subtle confusion between diegetic and extradiegetic spaces introduced through a digitally simulated lens flare, which at once simulates the physics of an analog camera (that asks merely to be looked *through* in order that we may perceive the simulated reality beyond) while also embracing the goal of ostentatious display (begging to be looked *at* for its stunning simulation of reality, right down to the interplay of light and a nonexistent lens). Phenomena of this sort refuse easy resolution; in oscillating between invisibility and display—or between the subjective and objective poles of experience—the virtual camera defies traditional phenomenological analysis. The computer-generated imagery (CGI) lens flare points, therefore, to the disconnection of perceptual objects from viewing subjects and thus to the need to locate the experiential impact of contemporary images at a deeper level of affective materiality and embodiment.

Digital glitches, lens flares, and other such figures serve as concise emblems of disconnection, and I read the films and videos that employ them as parables, fables, and allegories of the experiential transformations that ensue as a result of our encounters with the underlying processes of computation and its altogether nonhuman affectivities.³ Across six chapters, this book explores a number of emblems and figures of disconnection in order to understand the ways that contemporary moving images mediate our transition into a world of media not cut to human measure. The three chapters of part I develop the theoretical foundations of disconnection as a theory of contemporary moving-image media and the experiential parameters of life that they inform. Chapter 1 sets out from what I am calling post-cinema’s “crazy cameras,” the irrationality of which is announced in their unsettling of subject/object (i.e., viewer/image) relations. Chapter 2 looks more closely at the images themselves, focusing especially on their material agencies and the forces that they harness across the divide between technical substrates and aesthetic forms. Next, chapter 3 builds on this foundation to rethink the notion of “screen time”—a figure that focuses our attention on the intersections between the generative temporality of computationally processed moving images and the time of human experience, thus culminating the argument for the transformative power of post-cinematic media.

Part II comprises three chapters that explore various aspects and implications of disconnection, connecting post-cinematic technologies, techniques,

and images to their modulation of affects in a range of (generic) forms. Chapter 4 probes the self-reflexive fascination evoked by acts of algorithmic “animation” in science-fiction films about artificial (computational, robotic, and holographic) beings. Chapter 5 looks at the displaced fear of new media, or of disconnection itself, at the root of recent horror films that foreground glitches and other artifacts of digital imaging (and similar dynamics at the root of the real-world horrors of terrorist propaganda and mediations of drone warfare). Finally, chapter 6 turns to the threat of extinction, the ultimate scene of disconnection, in post-cinematic productions about the end of the world. In all these forms, what is at stake is not only a statement of the fact of disconnection but a proposition regarding how we might learn to live with or “make sense” of a transformation taking place beneath the threshold of sensory perception. First, in the remainder of this introduction, I will briefly introduce the concept and the stakes of disconnection.

Correlation/Disconnection

Something strange happens in the opening minutes of the first episode of ABC’s hit television series *Lost*. “Pilot (Part 1),” which was directed by J. J. Abrams and originally broadcast on September 22, 2004, opens with an extreme close-up of a human eye, initially shut, as it twitches briefly before opening wide. The large dark spot of a dilated pupil shrinks rapidly, and the growing iris widens into a reflective surface speckled with light and shadows. There is a slight strain in the muscles around the eye, as the still-unidentified man struggles, we surmise, to comprehend what he is seeing. Indeed, such a shot, which holds the image of the man’s eye for a full five seconds or so, is not designed simply to make us *infer* that a man is trying to understand what he is seeing; rather, the shot of the straining eye mirrors and exacerbates our own attempts to comprehend, and it makes us want to *see for ourselves* whatever the object of the man’s vision might be. After several seconds, the camera relents and lets us see; it cuts to a lush, dense canopy of leafy bamboo crowns swaying in the breeze. This image answers the previous shot in several ways. First, it literally reflects the image we saw projected onto the man’s iris, thus establishing a clear physical relation between the eye and the treetops; the former is below, the latter is above. Beyond just clarifying the relative positionality of the two images in space, however, the sequence of shots is clearly also establishing a *perceptual* relation between them. *Here* is an eye; *this* is what it sees.

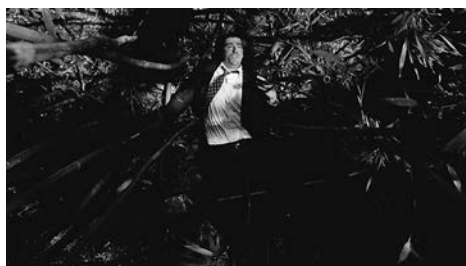
The second shot is thus attached to the first in a precise and obvious way, and in this moment we as viewers are drawn into a relation of complicity: we



Figures Intro.1 and Intro.2. Opening shots from *Lost*, season 1, episode 1 (2004).

instantaneously come to share this man's vision, and in so doing we begin to assist in the construction of a coherent diegetic space within which the spatial and perceptual relations articulated in these two shots make sense. The second shot's heavenward-pointed camera holds its view for a good five or six seconds, giving us time to close the loop, to complete the circuit between our perception and the vision of an on-screen character, and hence to carry out the man's silent struggle to comprehend, to perceive. If, during this time, there is any doubt that this view of the treetops is a subjective POV shot, it is put to rest in the following shot, which frames a man's head and shoulders diagonally across the screen before pulling back and slowly rotating in a clockwise direction to reveal the full length of the man's body; clothed in suit and tie, the man is lying on the dark earth, seemingly paralyzed, surrounded by bamboo stalks and partially obscured by the speckled shadows they cast. The man, whom we will later come to know as Jack Shephard, a medical doctor and soon-to-be leader of a group of survivors whose plane has just crashed on a desert island, is still unknown to us; at this point, he has no biography—but he does have a body. And that body serves, initially, as the only point of reference to anchor our perception of the diegetic world, which seems as unfamiliar to this man as it is to us. The camera is “correlated” with the man's embodied senses, and it serves to “correlate” ours with his.

The basic mechanism by which the camera functions as such an instrument of correlation was famously theorized, in the 1970s, under the heading of “suture”—a somewhat contentious but nonetheless enlightening psychoanalytical concept designed to explain our imaginative investment in filmic narratives as a basically ideological relation. In his classic text on the subject, “The Tutor-Code of Classical Cinema,” Daniel Dayan argues that suture is an “enunciation system” that “speaks the codes on which the fiction depends,”



Figures Intro.3 and Intro.4. The body as perceptual anchor.

a system of shot-to-shot relations that depends crucially on transparency or an *invisible* and unquestioned operation by which the viewer is positioned with respect to the diegetic world.⁴ For Dayan and others writing in the psychoanalytical-Marxist vein of so-called apparatus theory, the invisibility at question here is related to the workings of the Lacanian “imaginary,” according to which the integrity of one’s body and hence of a self or subject is guaranteed only through an act of misrecognition and according to which our contingent position in social space is “naturalized” or made to seem inevitable. “Being at the very center of what we perceive as our self, this [imaginary] function is invisible and unquestioned,” and it serves to situate us in linguistic and other representational or discursive systems;⁵ the naturalization of these relational positions is the very heart of ideology. In cinema, for Dayan, the invisibility of suture, as a function of our imaginary involvement and positioning with respect to the diegesis, is concretely embodied in the “invisible style” of classical Hollywood film, which is based in continuity editing practices such as the 180-degree rule (establishing an axis of action that the camera must not cross, lest the viewer lose spatial orientation) and the 30-degree rule (according to which subsequent shots must involve at least a 30-degree rotation of the camera around this axis, lest the illusion of diegetic space be destroyed, its constructed nature revealed by a jarring jump cut). When these rules are respected, according to this thinking, the spectator imaginatively closes the gaps between shots, perceiving through them a unified, coherent space; in the process, the subjectivity of the spectator is itself “sutured” into the narrative space of the film.

At the core of suture, that is, we find a syntactical system of shot-to-shot relations that serves to correlate spectatorial vision and cinematographic images. Putting aside its ideological component for the moment, the notion of suture is rooted in the unobtrusive transparency of shot/reverse-shot con-

figurations, the question-and-answer relations that I have been describing, in *Lost*'s cold open, between a subjective (or quasi-subjective) perspective and an objective image to which it imaginatively (and conventionally) corresponds. We see an eye, we see the trees, we see a body with shadows on the ground, and we understand the spatial and perceptual relations established by the sequence of shots. We understand, moreover, because *we are perceptually involved* in their execution. And this involvement, as Dayan following Jean-Pierre Oudart emphasizes, is both a spatial and a temporal process; more precisely, the articulation of the diegetic world's spatial integrity depends on the imaginative integrity of the spectator over time, which serves to unite subsequent shots in a temporal process of relation and revision: the first shot initiates an anticipatory relation (what will the next shot reveal as the object of vision?), while the effect of subsequent shots is to retroactively stabilize earlier shots' meaning and the spatial/perceptual relations among them (decisively attributing a subjective shot to the character's vision and clarifying positionality through a shared perception).

In the pilot episode of *Lost*, this process of perceptual correlation is continued in the following shots: after we see the man's body from above, the camera cuts to a shot of his head, still pinned to the ground and thus framed horizontally, as he turns to look just to the side of the camera's lens. The following shot, from a camera situated close to the ground, hovers slightly to show blades of grass and the base of bamboo stalks; the framing suggests another subjective shot, and this is confirmed when the camera cuts back to a slightly longer shot of the man's still-prostrate body, as he gasps for breath and strains his eyes toward the camera. Yet another subjective shot follows, this time revealing a yellow Labrador retriever as it approaches and looks into the camera, which is aligned with both the man's point of view and our own. There follows another close-up of the man's face, with eyes wide and mouth open, and then another brief subjective shot as the dog starts toward the camera. A longer shot shows the dog rushing toward, then leaping over, the man's head, before it turns and runs off out of the frame. All this conforms to the perceptual conventions of classical cinema, where edits are closed or sutured in such a way as to ensure the integrity of the diegetic space, the closure of which depends crucially on the alignment of perspectives and our perceptual involvement.

But this is where things start to get strange. In a series of shots, the man struggles to rise to his feet, clearly in pain. He supports himself against the bamboo stalks and removes a small, airplane-size bottle of vodka from his pocket. Abruptly, the man begins racing through the thickets in a blur of shadows, stalks, and leaves. He exits the frame as the camera lingers on a shoe

hanging inexplicably from the knotty trunk of a thin tree. We then rejoin the man as he emerges from the forest and looks in bewilderment at the scene before him. Without cutting, the camera moves close to his face as he turns his head to the right to survey what is now revealed to us as an empty beach with whitecapped waves crashing in the blue-green waters beyond. The camera pans to the left, revealing to us the full expanse of the beach. There can be no doubt, following the careful training we have received in the syntax of suture over the past two minutes of screen time, that the camera is mediating to us the man's view as he scans the horizon. While not a literal POV shot (because there was no cut from the objective view of his face to this concentrated pan across the beach), we are clearly aligned with the man's vision; here, as before, the camera serves as an instrument of correlation. But as the camera completes its semicircular arc to the left, the apparent subject of vision, the as yet unknown man, reappears abruptly and unexpectedly in the frame as its object. A subtle shock: the subject faces itself, sees its own seeing body, thus dissolving the integrity of self—both the man's and our own. The correlation of vision is broken.

Something similar happens in Alfonso Cuarón's *Gravity* (2013). The film opens with a carefully orchestrated thirteen-minute sequence shot, in which we see several astronauts completing a space walk outside their shuttle, floating impressively in the massive expanse of outer space while orbiting around a looming Earth. About eight minutes into this spectacular scene, one of the astronauts, portrayed by George Clooney, looks up at Earth in wonder; we see the globe reflected in his helmet before the camera turns to follow his gaze across the expanse, rotating to the right in order to mediate to us his vision of the planet, its oceans and continents, and the interplay of light and dark as night and day roll across the celestial body that fills the entirety of the screen. As the camera pans across this sublime (digital) image, the astronaut's vision is correlated with ours, and spatial relations are established by means of the subjective perspective. But just as in *Lost*, this apparent correlation is shattered when, at the conclusion of the camera's slow and lingering rightward pan, the apparent subject of vision appears again as its object; the camera ends up focusing once more on the astronaut's helmet, the reflective surface of which doubles the object of vision (the planet) while also conflating it with its subject (the looking astronaut, as well as the spectator who shared his vision).

I dwell on these shots because they offer an entry point for thinking about what I am calling the “disrelated images” that characterize the shift from a cinematic to a post-cinematic media regime. Such shots subtly dismantle the



Figures Intro.5–Intro.8. The subject turns to face itself.

rational orderings of time and space that served, conventionally, to correlate spectatorial subjectivity with cinematic images. It will be objected, however, that such “false” point-of-view shots are nothing new; writing in 1975, Edward Branigan, in a short piece titled “Formal Permutations of the Point-of-View Shot,” describes a number of ways in which the spatial coordinates established by POV shots, and therefore also the relation of the spectator to the diegesis, can be subverted, disrupted, or destabilized—including a “deviant POV” shot from Carl Theodor Dreyer’s *Vampyr* (1932) that strongly resembles those of *Lost* and *Gravity*: “We see David Gray outside an Inn looking in a door toward camera; he glances up (shot A). We cut to a shot of the roof, then pan and tilt down to discover Gray walking along a wall *back* (?) toward the door and looking in the door again (shot B). Thus it is not clear what has been happening while we have been looking at the roof.”⁶

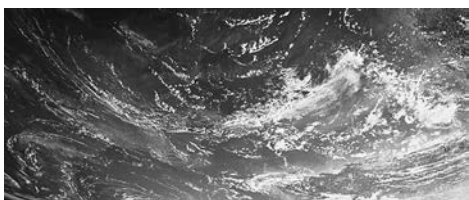
Of course, subversion of this type works only if there is a conventional or normative baseline in place, against which the deviation can be registered as an affront to our expectations. If suture names that baseline according to which classical cinema correlated spectators perceptually with the spatio-temporal construct of the diegesis, then these false point-of-view shots make common cause with avant-garde practices designed to subvert the ideological underpinnings of the Hollywood system. Clearly, though, these more recent

Figures Intro.9–Intro.11.
Discorrelated POV in *Gravity*
(Alfonso Cuarón, 2013).



productions, one a popular television series and the other a blockbuster movie, are far from the avant-garde. Yet both of these scenes thematize perception as much as they instrumentalize it. The free-floating camera, like free indirect discourse, makes perception into an object (or quasi-object), disrupting the subjectively perceptual correlation of suture. These are subtle but significant affronts to conventional moving-image forms, focusing our attention on visual mediation itself and questioning the correlation of eyes, visors, and cameras with the objects of vision—the mediated images—that present themselves to us in a post-cinematic landscape.

Such questionings and confusions of subjective and objective views are widespread today across moving-image media, from TV, to theatrically released movies, to interactive digital media. Another example is provided by the videogame *Metroid Prime* (2002), which opens with a cutscene (a noninteractive sequence sometimes referred to as a “cinematic”) in which we see asteroids hurtling toward an orangeish planet and blazing in its glowing blue atmosphere; a large spacecraft hovers off-planet, apparently rendered inoperative by the rock storm. A smaller craft arrives on the scene, from which a heavily armed and armored figure emerges. This is our first look at the game’s main protagonist—and player avatar—Samus. The virtual camera makes several passes at the figure from various distances: first a medium shot rotating to the right to reveal the colossal *Gestalt*, then a leftward-arc long shot that shows a vaguely sublime *Rückenfigur* facing the alien planet and emerging from behind a blinding (simulated) lens flare, before cutting to a close-up that fetishistically traces the figure’s armored physique—starting at the crotch and working its way up a sleek, heaving abdomen, across the powerful exoskeletal chest, oversized shoulders, and toward the head with its reflective green visor. Cutting back to a long shot of the figure atop its spaceship, we see the armored body make a powerful leap high into the air, somersaulting rapidly and landing close to the virtual camera, which has to back up in order to fully frame the kneeling figure. The camera then circles twice around the figure, displaying this body of uncertain gender and species from all angles, as it rises to its



feet and begins to survey the scene. Having reached the figure's backside once more, the camera retreats briefly to reveal a wider view and then swiftly zooms in toward the head, penetrating into the figure through the back of the helmet, and merging our perspective with that of the figure's digitally enhanced heads-up display.⁷

Video scan lines briefly appear and then fade as we assume the figure's subjective point of view. Framed by numerical readouts and control components, and with a laser cannon attached to the right hand accompanying every shift of perspective in the lower-right corner of the image, the viewer/player watches as the anonymous figure turns its head to inspect the objects in its environment. A magnifying window emerges at the center of the screen and locks onto an object, and forensic visualizations appear peripherally, while the readout above indicates, "Scanning." Information is flashed onto the screen, a new object is scanned, and the figure tries out its weapon as the heads-up display indicates: "Press and hold L to lock onto targets." The game is instructing the player in the use of its images, which are no longer "cinematic" but radically operational and subject to real-time recalculation. There follows a brief cut back to an external view of the armor-suited avatar, which we see manipulating its visor as our screen flashes momentarily as if our own digital visor had been switched into a different mode. The figure looks off-screen to its right (our left), and the camera pans over to discover the object of its vision. The ensuing perspective, which frames an image from a vantage point that is clearly outside the armored body, is then in fact revealed, enigmatically, as a subjective shot: we are back inside the helmet, and the heads-up display is instructing us to press the direction-pad or the "A" button on our controller "to return to the Combat Visor." From this point on, we are in control of the figure, which is to say that we are actively responsible for the images that appear on our screen. And the screen, which doubles for the heads-up display and therefore vacillates between diegetic and extradiegetic spaces (that of space-traveler Samus's extraterrestrial journeys and that of my earthly living room), continues to mediate a radically ambiguous, discorrelated vision.

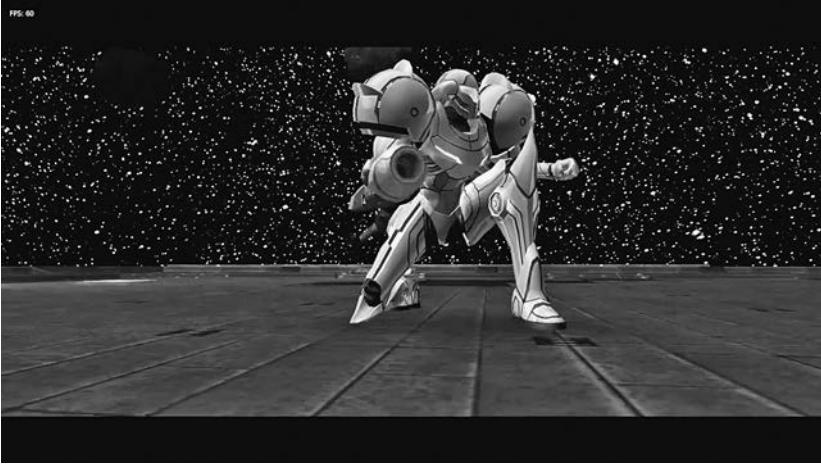
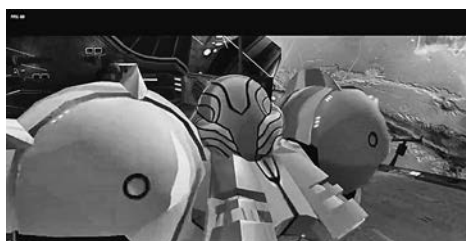


Figure Intro.12. Protagonist/player avatar Samus in *Metroid Prime* (2002).



Figure Intro.13. Cosmic *Rückenfigur* in *Metroid Prime* (2002).

Clearly, videogames—especially first-person shooters like *Metroid Prime*—have a different relation to subjective POV shots than film and television do. But what we see here is another example of just how pervasive and relatively commonplace these acts of disconnection have become. No longer particularly spectacular or exceptional, false point-of-view and similar violations of continuity and suture are now appearing all over the place. This would



Figures Intro.14–Intro.19. Entering the helmet and assuming the avatar's POV.

suggest, of course, that they may not be of much use against the ideological power of the apparatus to position its spectators in narrative or social space. Indeed, these images stand in relation to a very different apparatus and may, as in the case of *Metroid Prime*, serve not to undermine the subject of the imaginary but, arguably, to bolster it by making the viewing/playing subject into the bearer of a more versatile masterful gaze that can *both* fetishize the objectified body *and* inhabit that body as an instrument of subjective vision and action. So while the violation of continuity may point generally to a shift away from the correlative bond known classically as “suture,” it can tell us little else about the broader function and significance of dis-correlated images. Indeed, to define the parameters of dis-correlation in terms of classical continuity can only be a preliminary measure, one that alerts us to



Figures Intro.20 and Intro.21. Confusion of objective and subjective perspectives.

moments, such as the false point-of-view shots in *Lost*, *Gravity*, and *Metroid Prime*, that offer a first glimpse of something deeper—something that must be sought in the relations between images’ visible aesthetic forms, their underlying medial substrates, and the uncertain place of the viewer with respect to them.

Discussions of post-cinema that emphasize the visual “chaos” of editing practices in contemporary filmmaking, for example the rambunctious action of a Michael Bay, are not therefore wrong;⁸ but if they stop here without inquiring about the visible image’s relation to computational infrastructures and their transformations of spatial and temporal experience, then they remain at a superficial level of inquiry that can hardly shed light on more fundamental changes taking place. These changes, I am suggesting, are indexed but not defined or exhausted by continuity violations such as the false point-of-view shot, which has become more pervasive with the rise of digital imaging technologies.⁹ A videogame like *Metroid Prime* is of course unthinkable apart from these technologies, upon which its interactivity depends; in this medium, the false point-of-view foregrounds the viewer/player’s active role in constituting the image-object, which is no longer fixed in advance of viewing but generated on the fly at the time of playing. A noninteractive movie like *Gravity* seems less generative and volatile, in this respect, but its false point-of-view shots also gesture toward a changed relation between viewers and images that are composited with the help of greenscreen, motion capture, and extensive CGI; in this context, the ecstatic relation that the viewing subject comes to occupy, when the seeing body sees itself quite literally beside itself, both underscores the spectacle-nature of the visible image and foregrounds the viewing body’s material-perceptual imbrication and reliance on the digital processes employed in the execution of that spectacle. And the false point-of-view in the pilot

episode of *Lost*, while perhaps motivated narratively by the trauma of a plane crash or a dissociative disorder resulting from either natural or supernatural causes, cannot be divorced from the processes of digital video compression and transmission—either as the show was originally broadcast in 1080i widescreen format to be received by still-new digital TVs, or as it was later repackaged on DVD or streamed via YouTube or Netflix. When Jack Shephard runs through the bamboo forest, what might have been an analog blur of foliage and shadows is now more likely to render on-screen as a blocky mass of pixels and discrete digital artifacts, and when he surveys the beach only to discover himself looking, perhaps we too catch a glimpse of ourselves looking at an image that has been dis-correlated from our perceptual subjectivity by these underlying digital processes.

In pointing to the role of computational infrastructures and relating them not only to the image forms they support but also triangulating them with the spatial and temporal forms of spectatorial experience that they enable or modulate, I aim as well to shift the conversation away from well-worn discussions of indexicality and its supposed demise in the digital era.¹⁰ To understand dis-correlation, we must move beyond these debates, which circle around a basically privative conception of image/substrate relations. I ask instead about the robustly generative, transformative relations between contemporary material platforms and aesthetic forms—including both concrete image forms and, more broadly, the forms of experience (*aesthesis*) that are possible for embodied subjects today. Situated at the border between film studies and digital media theory, this book aims to remedy various scholarly compartmentalizations—for example, the relative lack of communication between fields like media archaeology, which tends to focus on material substrates and infrastructures at the expense of their experiential implications (sometimes even going so far as to dismiss the phenomenological side of things as mere “eyewash”),¹¹ and film studies, which tends to focus on aesthetic forms to the detriment of a rigorous engagement with underlying technical processes.¹² Thinking beyond questions of indexicality and continuity, and coming to terms with the transition to a post-cinematic media regime defined by the dis-correlation of images from human perception, requires that we take seriously both the phenomenological and the infrastructural vectors of this radical change.

Finally, and most importantly, it is not enough simply to establish a dialogue between the perceptual and the technical correlates of contemporary media, for the impact of dis-correlation is precisely a transformation of both; experience and its infrastructure are related to one another in a mutually determinative, or transductive, relation, according to which shifts must be

regarded holistically. It is imperative, therefore, that we approach the question of discorrelation neither as a purely aesthetic (e.g., formal or stylistic) nor as a reductively technological matter, but as a robustly philosophical problem. At stake in the question of discorrelation is not just a reshaping of cinema, or the development of new technical imaging processes, but a transformation of subjectivity itself. To treat discorrelation as a philosophical problem requires that we first understand correlation in a similarly philosophical fashion; concepts like suture point to relatively local or restricted mechanisms of correlation, whereby subjectivity is aligned with its objects in classical cinema, but the question that is broached in this model of the apparatus is one of more global import: it concerns the role of media more generally as the originary correlators of experience.¹³

Discorrelated Images therefore does not just concern the transformation of moving-image cultures and their implied spectatorial constructs; rather, it takes aim at rethinking the impact of contemporary media changes on what Edmund Husserl calls “the fundamental correlation between noesis and noema,” or the bond between perceptual consciousness and its intentional objects.¹⁴ This low-level phenomenological notion of correlation has been the target of attacks, recently, from proponents of “speculative realism” and “object-oriented ontology,” who see Western philosophy more generally, and at least from Kant onward, as constrained by “correlationism,” which seems to leave little room for thinking reality beyond its subjective determinations.¹⁵ But while I find these interventions useful, heuristically, for decoupling subjectivity from its objects and thinking about the contingency of experience within a larger environment, my goal in thinking discorrelation is not to treat post-cinematic media and images as completely independent of the experiencing subject; rather, the point of emphasizing the discorrelation of contemporary images from perception—or the transformation of post-cinematic images into something that is not exhausted by their appearance as noematic objects—is precisely to understand the determinative or modulating agency of contemporary media on the “fundamental correlation” itself.

As I shall argue in part I, this agency is a broadly ecological one, as it pertains holistically to the correlation of subjects and objects and exerts its transformative force on them at a level of medial materiality that is both presubjective and preobjective. At stake, crucially, is a reorganization of temporality and its mediation. Apparatus theorists like Dayan emphasized the way that cinematic suture depended on an interplay between anticipations (what will the next shot reveal?) and revisions of past experience (retroactive stabilizations of meaning in the light of subsequent shots), whereby the diegesis and the viewing

subject alike derived their spatiotemporal continuity and integrity from the operation of the imaginary. But post-cinematic media operationalize a much lower-level microtemporal domain, categorically outside the window of conscious perception, whereby the more basic operations of retention and protention in what Husserl calls the “phenomenology of internal time-consciousness” are themselves subject to revision.¹⁶ And the role of embodiment is crucial to conceiving these impacts. Whereas cinematic subjectivity was theorized in terms of the correlative force of eyeline matches and similar perceptual alignments, the discorrelative force of post-cinematic images appeals to more basic embodied sensibilities as the site of microtemporal impacts that are divorced from integral subjectivity and perception altogether. Media, in this mode, become imbricated with the prepersonal “flesh” of the world, as Maurice Merleau-Ponty conceived it.¹⁷ Discorrelated images therefore exert a properly affective force, acting on and reshaping our senses prior to the synthesis of perception. As a result, they also give rise, as I go on to explore in part II, to forms that—despite or because of their post-perceptual nature—can help us to “make sense” of our new situation in a world of discorrelated images.

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NOTES

Introduction: Discorrelation and Post-cinema

- 1 It is important to emphasize that perception, in the phenomenological tradition on which I am drawing (and against which, to a certain extent, I am situating my analysis of digital imaging processes), is not simply reducible to that which is determinately, much less visibly, apparent. Phenomenologists who emphasize the embodied nature of subjectivity, such as Maurice Merleau-Ponty or Don Ihde, instead see perception more as a gestalt formation that includes prethematic groupings of sensations, affects, and relations that may not be directly present or visible to consciousness. They are therefore cognizant of the fact that intentionality is not limited to a purely “deliberative” relation, such that the subject is necessarily aware of and focused on its intentional objects but also includes pre-reflective, “operative” relations grounded in the body and habit. See, for example, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (New York: Routledge, 2002); and Don Ihde, *Technology and the Lifeworld: From Garden to Earth* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990). But even if perceptual phenomena are not reducible, in this tradition, to that which is actively or clearly intended by a conscious perceiver, they are necessarily situated in relation to the perceiver’s subjectivity—and it is this relation, above all, that is called into question by the microtemporal operations of computationally processed images. There remains an open question, which I seek to address in asking about how we “make sense” of discorrelation (the subject of part II of this book), about what it might mean for discorrelated images to become part of our operative intentionalities, if not our deliberative ones.
- 2 Here I am invoking the problematic prefix *post-*, which debates over postmodernism and postmodernity taught us to treat not as a marker of definitive beginnings and ends, but as indicative of a more subtle shift or transformation in the realm of culturally dominant aesthetic and experiential forms. See Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991). In the following, I argue that in the context of post-cinema, this suggests not so much a clear-cut break with traditional media forms as a transitional movement taking place along an uncertain time line, following an indeterminate trajectory, and characterized by juxtapositions and overlaps between the techniques, technologies, and aesthetic conventions of “old” and “new” moving-image media. I intend a similar temporal and ontological ambiguity in my use of other *post-* terms: the posthuman, postperceptual, or postphenomenological. Nevertheless, or accordingly, it is worth emphasizing that the alignment of these terms

is speculative and necessarily imperfect, certainly not subject to an easy sort of conflation.

- 3 Drawing on the historical example of early modern emblem books, Kristen Whissel has explored the allegorical and emblematic functions of digital visual effects, in terms of what she calls the “effects emblem.” For Whissel, the latter signifies the development of thematic, narrative, and signifying functions by way of digital effects, thus reversing long-standing trends to see spectacular effects in terms of their show-stopping, narratively disruptive effects, and shifting attention away from technological and affective dimensions back toward hermeneutic interpretation. Certainly, the reader will find some commonalities between our approaches, especially in part II, but in unfolding their emblematic and allegorical functions I place more emphasis on digital images’ self-reflexive relations to technical infrastructures and the larger material and ecological systems in which they participate. Ultimately, I see the two approaches as complementary rather than contradictory. See Kristen Whissel, *Spectacular Digital Effects: CGI and Contemporary Cinema* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014).
- 4 Daniel Dayan, “The Tutor-Code of Classical Cinema,” *Film Quarterly* 28, no. 1 (1974): 22.
- 5 Dayan, “Tutor-Code,” 24.
- 6 Edward Branigan, “Formal Permutations of the Point-of-View Shot,” *Screen* 16, no. 3 (1975): 61.
- 7 William Brown sees such images, wherein “the (virtual) ‘camera’ passes through ‘filled’ space (i.e. solid objects) with the same ease with which it passes through ‘empty’ space,” as indicative of digital cinema’s transformation of space and the figures it depicts, ultimately pointing toward a decentering of cinema’s anthropocentrism. William Brown, *Supercinema: Film-Philosophy for the Digital Age* (New York: Berghahn, 2013), 2. Indeed, Brown’s book treats many of the same topics as the present book, but from a different perspective (that of cognitive film theory, along with the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari) and with different emphases. The present book resituates the spatiality and temporality of contemporary moving images with respect to reorientations of agency and affect within the larger systems of mediated life.
- 8 Matthias Stork introduced the term *chaos cinema* in a series of video essays by that title: Matthias Stork, “Chaos Cinema: The Decline and Fall of Action Filmmaking,” video essay, *Press Play*, August 22, 2011, http://blogs.indiewire.com/pressplay/video_essay_matthias_stork_calls_out_the_chaos_cinema. Stork’s notion is positioned as a radicalization of David Bordwell’s “intensified continuity,” which sought to explain the shift to a postclassical style of filmmaking while showing that basic continuity principles, though strained, remain in place: David Bordwell, “Intensified Continuity: Visual Style in Contemporary American Film,” *Film Quarterly* 55, no. 3 (2002): 16–28.
- 9 Steven Shaviro’s notion of “post-continuity” goes some way toward connecting questions of continuity and related formal/stylistic matters with the underlying technological infrastructures of contemporary images, as well as the affective

- and political implications of these changes. See Steven Shaviro, “Post-continuity: An Introduction,” in *Post-cinema: Theorizing 21st-Century Film*, ed. Shane Denson and Julia Leyda (Falmer, UK: REFRAAME Books, 2016), 51–64; and, more generally, Steven Shaviro, *Post-cinematic Affect* (Winchester, UK: Zero Books, 2010).
- 10 Key discussions of cinematic indexicality can be found in Mary Ann Doane, “The Indexical and the Concept of Medium Specificity,” *Differences* 18, no. 1 (2007): 128–52; D. N. Rodowick, *The Virtual Life of Film* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 110–24; Tom Gunning, “What’s the Point of an Index? or, Faking Photographs,” in *Still Moving: Between Cinema and Photography*, ed. Karen Beckman and Jean Ma (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 23–40; Philip Rosen, *Change Mummified: Cinema, Historicity, Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 301–49.
 - 11 Kittler writes: “The general digitalization of channels and information erases the differences among individual media. Sound and image, voice and text are reduced to surface effects, known to consumers as interface. Sense and the senses turn into eyewash.” Friedrich Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, trans. Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and Michael Wutz (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), 1. Other key texts in media archaeology include Wolfgang Ernst, *Chronopoetics: The Temporal Being and Operativity of Technological Media*, trans. Anthony Enns (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2016); Jussi Parikka, *What Is Media Archaeology?* (Cambridge: Polity, 2012); Erkki Huhtamo and Jussi Parikka, eds., *Media Archaeology: Approaches, Applications, and Implications* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011); and Shannon Mattern, *Code and Clay, Data and Dirt: Five Thousand Years of Urban Media* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017).
 - 12 Some notable exceptions include Stephen Prince, *Digital Visual Effects in Cinema: The Seduction of Reality* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2012); Sean Cubitt, *The Cinema Effect* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004); Sean Cubitt, *The Practice of Light: A Genealogy of Visual Technologies from Print to Pixels* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2014); Whissel, *Spectacular Digital Effects*; Markos Hadjiioannou, *From Light to Byte: Toward an Ethics of Digital Cinema* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012); Scott C. Richmond, *Cinema’s Bodily Illusions: Flying, Floating, and Hallucinating* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016); Barbara Flückiger, *Visual Effects: Filmbilder aus dem Computer* (Marburg, Germany: Schüren, 2008); and Giovanna Fossati, *From Grain to Pixel: The Archival Life of Film in Transition* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2009).
 - 13 I develop the idea of media as “originary correlators” in Shane Denson, *Postnaturalism: Frankenstein, Film, and the Anthropotechnical Interface* (Bielefeld, Germany: Transcript Verlag, 2014), 319–32.
 - 14 Edmund Husserl, *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*, trans. W. R. Boyce Gibson (New York: Routledge, 2012), 192.
 - 15 On correlationism, see Quentin Meillassoux, *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency*, trans. Ray Brassier (London: Continuum, 2008). Other key texts in speculative realism and object-oriented ontology include Graham Harman, *The Quadruple Object* (Winchester, UK: Zero Books, 2011); Levi Bryant, *The Democracy of*

Objects (Ann Arbor, MI: Open Humanities Press, 2011); Ian Bogost, *Alien Phenomenology, or What It's Like to Be a Thing* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012); and Steven Shaviro's valuable engagement with this strain of thought: Steven Shaviro, *The Universe of Things: On Speculative Realism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014).

- 16 See Edmund Husserl, *The Phenomenology of Internal Time Consciousness*, trans. James Churchill (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1964).
- 17 See Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "The Intertwining—The Chiasm," trans. Alphonso Lingis, in *The Visible and the Invisible*, ed. Claude Lefort (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1968), 130–55.

Chapter 1. Crazy Cameras

An earlier, shorter version of chapter 1 first appeared as "Crazy Cameras, Discorrelated Images, and the Post-perceptual Mediation of Post-cinematic Affect," in *Post-cinema: Theorizing 21st-Century Film*, ed. Shane Denson and Julia Leyda (Falmer, UK: REFRAAME Books, 2016).

- 1 Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 78; emphasis added.
- 2 Gilbert Simondon, "The Genesis of the Individual," in *Incorporations*, ed. Jonathan Crary and Sanford Kwinter (New York: Zone, 1992), 315; emphasis in original.
- 3 See Wolfgang Ernst, *Chronopoetics: The Temporal Being and Operativity of Technological Media*, trans. Anthony Enns (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2016). Here Ernst articulates the notion of time-criticality in relation to the microtemporal processing of technological and especially computational media.
- 4 Shane Denson, *Postnaturalism: Frankenstein, Film, and the Anthropotechnical Interface* (Bielefeld, Germany: Transcript Verlag, 2014), 26.
- 5 Denson, *Postnaturalism*, 182–83.
- 6 Here it is important to note that I am using the term *post-phenomenological* in a somewhat different, stronger sense than is implied by Don Ihde's employment of it. For Ihde, post-phenomenology marks a methodological turn from the priority of the subjective in traditional phenomenology toward a more materially entangled, pragmatically situated view of human-technological relations. See, for example, Don Ihde, *Ironic Technics* (Copenhagen: Automatic Press, 2008) and *Postphenomenology—Again?*, Working Papers from the Centre for STS Studies (Aarhus: University of Aarhus, 2003). But while I am fully in agreement with the need to see subjectivity as thus entangled and situated, I am less certain that the recognition of these conditions marks a significant departure from phenomenology proper—at least not from the existential phenomenologies of technology elaborated by the likes of Martin Heidegger and Maurice Merleau-Ponty. In any case, when I describe certain aspects of contemporary images as "post-phenomenological," I am suggesting a more radical departure from the phenomenal realm as such—the association of these images with the advent of a post-perceptual form of mediation—without thereby deprecating phenomenology as an important mode of philosophical inquiry.