

“Dude, that’s just *wrong*”: Mimesis, Identification, *Jackass*

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In memory of Miriam Bratu Hansen

1. In one of the most compelling documentary scenes I have ever seen play out on any screen, Johnny Knoxville and Steve-O willingly submit to paper cuts. First, Johnny announces he’s going to have paper cuts administered to the webbing of his toes and then his fingers: “I’m Johnny Knoxville and this is ‘Paper Cuts.’” An anonymous set of hands administer the iconic manilla envelope between his left pinky toe and the one next to it. He reacts, yelling, but then also laughing—and so does a roomful of twenty-something men, howling with the admixture of sympathetic pain and laughter and outright Schadenfreude that is the hallmark of the *Jackass* franchise. Johnny spreads his toes to make sure the audience sees the wound: a nauseating familiar little pink sliver between his toes. The manila envelope is then administered to his next toe-webbing. The same individual and group howling results. A voice out-of-frame suggests that he’ll forget about the pain in his feet when he spreads his fingers. The film obliges, cutting to the same envelope slicing open the webbing between his index and middle finger. About then, one of the cameramen loses it. Another camera—the one he’s not holding—fixes him in frame: he’s dropped his camera from his face, incapable of doing his job, looking ashen and beginning to gag. To great amusement, laughter, and loud, raucous fake-hurling encouragement from everyone else in the hotel room—and, if you’re into it, much to the amusement of the audience as well—he starts to throw up to cheers and laughter. He appears to pass out. This doesn’t last too long, as Steve-O one-ups Johnny. He’ll take his paper cuts at the corners of the mouth. And, as we see in an outtake under the closing credits, on the tip of the nose as well. In Steve-O’s words, laughing: “That sucked.”

I want to pose two rather stupid questions to this profoundly stupid (or stupidly profound) film. First, if all goes according to *Jackass*’s plan: what in God’s name could possibly be so pleasurable, so compelling and captivating, so human, and so *cathartic* about watching Johnny Knoxville willingly, even enthusiastically, submit to paper cuts? But then, second: what if it goes all wrong, and instead of finding catharsis, you find yourself terribly, totally averse, shivering, wincing, quelling a very unpleasant feeling of nausea, possibly running out of the room? Put otherwise, if you will allow a somewhat precious conceit as the occasion for this modest essay, I want to ask about *Jackass* in both of the possible tones of voice you might use when exclaiming, “Dude, that’s just *wrong!*”: sincere, sociable hilarity, and dead-serious, get-me-out-of-here sincerity.

2. I want to start with the two different, but related, bodily intensities we may have when seeing this unfold (or, for that matter, reading about its unfolding). On the one hand, there is what I just referred to as “sympathetic pain”: I register in my own body the wound inflicted on the body onscreen. But the frisson—that flash of squeamishness—that I feel does not register between my toes, nor my fingers, nor on my mouth, even as I may clench my fingers and toes defensively. Rather, I feel the hair on the back of my neck prickle and raise; I feel my throat close ever so slightly, or I swallow involuntarily; I wince, inhaling sharply, perhaps through clenched teeth; I might cover my eyes, put my hands out in a defensive posture, or draw my legs up into a fetal position; a knot tightens at the base of my sternum or in the pit of my stomach; and (since we’re being honest here), I feel a clenching in my perineum. I feel a mixture of pleasure and aversion—or better yet, I feel my aversion as the occasion for pleasure. Whatever my pleasure here is, it starts in, unfolds from, the involuntary reactions of, across, and in my body when I see Johnny sliced up. It’s not really sympathetic *pain*, then. Rather, it’s an impersonal and involuntary aversive reaction to the pain

of another that feels nothing like the pain which it nevertheless indexes. I want to call it *squeam*, but I think the correct and more precise term here is actually *qualm*. As the OED has it, qualm (among other things) names “a sudden feeling or fit of faintness or sickness. In later use: esp. a sudden feeling of nausea.”

And qualm like this can undo you, when it takes over. But when it does, you don’t hurt: you feel sick to your stomach. Not pain, but nausea: the camera guy loses it by losing his cookies. But a curious thing happens when I see him go ashen and puke. I actually begin to feel nauseated myself. The involuntary swallow and knot in my chest catch onto, and possibly blossom into, a much less pleasant, lightheaded feeling that I might just lose it myself.

3. The most ready-to-hand and serviceable concepts to describe this kind of reaction (or complex of reactions) to an event in the cinema are, of course, *identification* and *mimesis*. We might say that we identify with Johnny and Steve-O and the cameraman, or we might say that we have a mimetic relation to them. Neither of these seem wrong, but they both seem manifestly inadequate to account for the complexity of the scene. To a first approximation (and, as we shall see, it is only an approximation), they miss both the difference between these two sorts of intensities, as well as the ambivalence between hilarity and sincerity.

In the first instance of my qualm, what I feel is in relation to Johnny and Steve-O, but is not similar to, or isomorphic with, what is occurring in their bodies. It is not in the same place, it does not have the same quality, it’s not even on the same trajectory. However, when the cameraman pukes, the nausea I have mirrors his: it might not be of the same intensity, and it hopefully does not have the same physiological result, but it’s part of the same complex, a stop on the way to where he is.

These reactions are two of three basic affects in *Jackass*’s vocabulary. (The third occurs in their prankier pranks, as when one of the guys strips down to a sparkly G-string and bow tie in various public places in Japan and dances until security shows up, or when another of the guys puts a live alligator in his mother’s kitchen. It’s emotional and social, embarrassed as well as embodied, and isn’t quite so stupid. It oscillates somewhere between “I can’t believe he had the balls to do that” and “get off my lawn, you damn kids.”) *Jackass* frequently presents these three affects separately, in purer iterations. “Paper Cuts” is exemplary in that it condenses the first two, sets them in relation to one another, and heightens both their continuity and their divergence.

4. How both identification and mimesis do fit the facts of the case, however, is instructive. Identification, as it is typically invoked in film theory, names an affective bond with another, the “emotional tie.” In this scene, and in this psychoanalytical idiom, if we say that we identify with Johnny, that names a complex that goes far beyond the resonance of my body with his. This is a well-known story, presented famously by Christian Metz and Laura Mulvey. In this now nearly threadbare story, the cinematic scene effects a certain unbinding of my body, what Metz calls a “geographically undifferentiated” diffusion of my ego across the surface of the screen.¹ This is *primary* cinematic identification: in order to be able to experience the images on the screen as comprehensible as a world (of the world), I must identify with a disembodied (and therefore dislocated) camera. This “geographic” unbounding of my body reproduces or reiterates the infantile plenitude I had before I, in Lacan’s (even more) famous mirror stage, identified with my body as a bounded and “orthopedic totality.”² But this becoming-undone is terrifying (as all forms of *jouissance* are). And so, to mitigate this terror, to tame it into mere pleasure, I identify (in one or several

secondary identifications) with characters onscreen: I use their (presumed) unity and self-identity to compensate for my own loss of identity, and use them as a kind of compensatory anchor.

Despite the criticism this story has been subjected to, I want to mine it for what it gets right. First, identification comes after (logically, existentially, or temporally) a destabilizing encounter with alterity. Second, such destabilization is endemic to (if not necessary to) the cinema (or, with *Jackass* as our scene of inquiry, also to TV). And, third, identification (even if we don't agree about or with the psychoanalytic particulars) is a moment of re-bounding, or re-binding, of coping with this destabilizing encounter with alterity.

5. Mimesis, on the other hand, is a name for this destabilizing encounter with alterity—any alterity whatsoever: with people, but also with trains and windmills.³ The most famous account of this in film and media theory is, of course, Walter Benjamin's notion of "the mimetic faculty," and the importance it has in his accounts of cinema (as Miriam Hansen and Susan Buck-Morss teach us).⁴ This mimetic faculty names our capacity for becoming unbounded or disorganized in collaboration with an other, and to become reorganized, at least for a time, by that other. And, in a rough and ready telling of this story, this mimetic faculty has been on the wane in urbanized modernity: we can't deal with constant overstimulation, and so we use consciousness to parry the blows of our damaged and damaging lives. We narrow our openness to the world in order to cope with the ever greater intrusiveness of the world. The importance of cinema to this story lies in its ability to break through our protective layers, eliciting, even seducing, our mimetic faculties once again: "people whom nothing moves or touches any longer are taught to cry again in the cinema"—or, for that matter, to howl in pain with another.⁵ But therein also lies its promise, its ambivalence, and its danger.

Meanwhile, contemporary to Benjamin, and in the same Parisian milieu, Roger Caillois, in his famous "Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia," offered an account of mimicry as a modality of becoming unbounded that is fundamental to life.⁶ In this work, mimesis⁷ appears as an instance of a generalized capacity to attenuate one's boundaries (or to have one's boundaries attenuated by another), to become diffuse, in which psychasthenia also takes part: an "*attraction by space*, as elementary and mechanical as are tropisms, and by the effect of which life seems to lose ground, blurring in its retreat the frontier between the organism and the milieu."⁸ Later, Lacan would mention this essay with approval in his discussion of "heteromorphic identification" in the Mirror Stage essay, which is, after all, a story about how we become bounded in the first place.⁹

Caillois, however, would go on to revise this account substantially in *Man, Play, and Games*, in which mimicry is distinguished rigorously from this spatial unbounding—which he came to call *ilinx*, the "pleasurable torture" or voluptuous disorientation of roller coasters or Ring-Around-the-Rosie.¹⁰ On his later (and I think more productive, or at least precise) account, mimesis names not just any sort of unbounding, but a particular modality of becoming unbounded in which this transit with an alterity is localized in an other—and not the blurring of myself and the world which he names *ilinx*. As with Benjamin, this mimetic becoming-unbounded is not merely a transit with alterity, nor a kind of mutual dissolution. I do not merely become undone in collaboration with another, but find that my disorganization takes the form of a subordination to the other: this principle of disorganization is coincident with a principle of reorganization whose source comes from outside—whether this take the form of a person, or a windmill, or their figuration in the cinema. At the limit, as Caillois has it, mimesis can become possession.¹¹ Moreover, whatever canons of resemblance mimesis deals in need not be strict, and may take the form of what Benjamin calls "non-sensuous similarity": mimesis may

not be a mirroring. Mimesis is a modality of openness to the world in which I have the capacity to lose myself in another.

6. I tell these two very abbreviated and well-known stories in order to make two conceptual distinctions that will help sort out what's going on with those paper cuts, and not all of which can be unfolded here. First of all, I want to suggest (and here only suggest) that *ilinx* takes precisely the form of the geographic indifferentiation of the self, and thus has an affinity with Metz's primary cinematic identification. We are thus, at least in front of *Jackass*, primarily in the domain of secondary cinematic identification. What is at issue here is the rather concrete relation between my body and a body onscreen—and precisely *not* the conditions of possibility for the manifestation of such an onscreen body in the first place.¹²

Second (and more to the point here), while identification and mimesis are so very obviously related, I want to propose a heuristic distinction between the two which articulates the beginning of a theory of their relation—a theory neither novel nor controversial. But before I make this distinction, I want to draw out the little detail that in these two stories both identification and mimesis have moments of destabilization and restabilization—the unbalancing of one equilibrium in favor of another—organized around an other. Mimesis names the impersonal, destabilizing encounter with alterity, the involuntary (or, better, pre-voluntary) capacity I have for an embodied and affective resonance with an other. Identification names the binding of that affect, the process by which I am able to reorganize the self that was destabilized by a mimetic encounter with an other. Mimesis occurs at the level of the body; identification, the ego.

7. Well, almost: this sort of mind/body division just isn't tenable. So let me return to the phenomenon I'm trying to explain, this time, however, with the presumption that things will go wrong from the outset—and not just when I'm hit with mimetic nausea. Even if I'm not properly mirroring Johnny, not reproducing his pain in my body as such, my bodily resonance with him is just more than I can take: his paper cuts undo me. I'm in mimesis—but am I identifying with him? What would identification look like here? Making reference to any ordinary sense of the word, and not (yet) to psychoanalytical niceties (we'll get to those in a moment), identification would seem here to mean the ability to find the whole degenerate scene as amusing (and human and cathartic) as he: not merely to howl but also to laugh with him and the rest of the *Jackass* crew. To feel captivated, not captive.

When things are going well, I'm enmeshed in both mimesis and identification, that much is clear. But when things go wrong, their ordinary (or presumptive) alignment breaks down. The intensity of the mimesis is too great: I become saturated by aversion, whether nausea or qualm. But the funny (or precisely not funny) thing here is that, somehow, also, identification's failure to take place is at the same time a failure of affective resonance. When I am overwhelmed by mimesis, if I am fully saturated by qualm or nausea, I fail to share the uproarious laughter of both Johnny and his audience—and this is also a matter of affect.

The difficulty of making clear distinctions, or of finding the proper terms to describe the effects of this scene, suggests that we're at some sort of cusp, an inflection point, a convergence zone: the point at which an intensely embodied mimetic reaction is or is not bound by a process of identification. Which is, I think, just a more technical way of articulating the sense I may have that either *Jackass* is just plain *wrong*, or that its particular way of presenting and inhabiting (or forcing me to inhabit) wrongness leads the way to a profound sense of humanity and catharsis, of which

laughter is the index. This is, itself, perhaps just a too-elaborate way of saying that *Jackass* is probably just stupid: on its own terms, it neither calls for nor inspires discourse or reflection. What humanity it may have can only be expressed in inarticulate gross-out laughter. In any event, the invariant here is mimesis; the variable is the ability to manage that mimesis in a process of identification. The drama of the scene, then, is precisely that of the limit of identification, or of identification at the limit. But at what limit?

8. In “The Unconscious is Destructured Like an Affect,” Jean-Luc Nancy and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe propose an investigation of what they call “the affective nature of identification” in Freud.¹³ Their account can help clarify the nature and dynamics of identification here. More importantly, they offer up a way of thinking about identification generally that allows for a shift (or at least the beginnings of one) in how we can think about identification in film theory. Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe note that the Freud of the *Group Psychology* introduced identification as *Gefühlsbindung*, or “affective bond”: “the social tie *as such* is this affect.”¹⁴ Put otherwise, identification names an affective bond between myself and another: it is itself an affective resonance. But identification is not any sort of affective bond between me and someone else. It has three distinguishing characteristics: (1) “it is distinguished from the libidinal as a relation of *being* instead of *having*”; (2) it is identified in particular as an *Einfühlung*, literally *feeling-into*, a word borrowed from aesthetics; and (3) it is ambivalent.¹⁵ When it occurs, identification is an ontological state in which I find myself feeling with or into an other in such a way that I cannot say whether the feeling is in me or out there. Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe go on to point out that this ambivalence is properly the ambivalence of affect itself.

Identification is, at its core, at once a structure (or structuring) of, and a particular relation to, affect and affectivity. The ambivalence of affect here makes it the ground on which Freud mounts a theory of our inherence in the world: affect is the site of (if not the name for) my porousness, my receptivity, my resonance with respect to the world. But, as a question of identification, it is also the ground on which I must mount *my own* theory of *my* inherence in the world: when it arises, as “the unconscious as consciousness,” it is the occasion for my disorganization. The world, in the form of an other, intrudes, and it disorganizes me. Identification is the process by which I reassert myself in binding the affect, of reorganizing myself around my disorganizing porousness.

Affect is the name for the intrusion of the world and of others, a term for my insuperable openness. In Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe’s words, affect “puts us at the heart of a sociality, of an ‘unsociable sociability,’ as Kant’s phrase would have it. At the heart, we will say, of a *dis-sociation*. An affect is only the affect of a subject insofar as it operates the *dis-sociation* of that subject.” Even as it opens us to the world and to others, it is also emphatically private, is on the inside—it occurs or, in other words, in me. It is at once radically social and radically antisocial. “The affect is thus always the affect of a *dismemberment*, a *dislocation*.”¹⁶ Affect destabilizes, dismembers, dissociates: in the economy of the subject, it desubjectifies. *Identification always takes place “amidst a withdrawal of identity.”*¹⁷

What’s going on in this scheme is that identification is the management of an affect which arises as an unassimilable, destabilizing intensity—a dis-sociation. It is the binding of that which undoes me into a new organization: identity is not stable, but processural (one or several processes), and my identity is always already withdrawing. Identity is doubly *dis-located* (or perhaps geographically undifferentiated?). I disappear into the intensity of my affect—my body rises up as an undeniable *here* that is not yet me, and the overwhelmed *I* forms in the dissociation by which I can distance myself from, or bind, this intensity.¹⁸ But also, this dislocation, insofar as it is also *Einfühlung*, or an

ambivalent resonance with another body, means that there is a confusion (literally, con-fusion) of what is *in here* and what is *out there*, and identification is also a dissociation from this ambivalence: the assertion that what is *there* (but also nevertheless unaccountably *here*) is not-me. In Diane Davis's words, "as non-intuitive as this may sound, what Freud"—that is, Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe's Freud—"gives us to think is that *dissociation* is productive of the exteriority that sociality implies, that it is through disidentification, dislocation, depropriation that social feeling emerges and (so) something like society becomes possible. It's only in the failure of identification, each time, that 'I' am opened to the other *as* other."¹⁹

In other words, the conceptual pairing of mimesis and identification allows us to name distinct but intertwined moments of a process, or perhaps to trace the unfolding of an event. What I have here been calling mimesis names that moment of disidentification, dislocation, depropriation. As Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen has argued, phenomena of mimesis (trance, hypnosis, transference) are moments of self-alterity, of a precisely *altered* state, marked by depersonalization, and itself constituting an incommunicable lived experience, "since one cannot simultaneously *be* (an) other while distinguishing oneself from that alterity."²⁰ Mimesis disrupts identity, undoes me, and opens me radically, even subordinates me, to the other. Hence the difficulty or even pointlessness of being articulate about it, here as elsewhere: it is affecting, but also stupid.

Identification, then, is the moment of stabilization or equilibrium, the reassertion of self, but a self still in a relation of affective resonance. Identification is in this sense a disidentification, but only in this sense: I distinguish myself from the other as a condition of our connection across boundaries. Mimesis is the capacity to lose yourself in an other; identification is the capacity to recover yourself. Mimesis is, in Davis's words, an "a priori *affectability* or *persuadability*,"²¹ which to my phenomenologically-trained ear sounds better rephrased as "primordial *affectability*," or "primordial porousness," or even "primordial inherence in the world." These ways of glossing it all accent its aspect of passivity. We should keep in mind that Benjamin's name for it emphasizes instead its active moment, as a positive capacity: "the mimetic *faculty*."

9. The importance of this description here is twofold. On the one hand, I hope to have started the process of posing anew identification as a problem for theorizing about the cinema, to have demonstrated that it is a productive problem. I am leaving unfinished business here, of various kinds, and that is by design. I want this essay to be a can of worms.

On the other hand, even with this unfinished business, this description fits the facts of the case at hand so flawlessly, and sets its stakes in stark relief. In front of *Jackass*, sociality—my entrance into the society of jackasses, laughing, gagging, crying, howling—can only emerge in what Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe term dis-sociation, my ability to separate myself from a qualm or a nausea that comes in from the outside. That is, in my ability to manage my bodily intensity without coming wholly undone by it, to dissociate enough to bind the affect. If I fail to manage this, I become wholly undone—I have to leave. I find myself in something like pure mimesis, and thus in the pure presence of aversiveness: disidentification appears precisely as a *failure* of dis-sociation. Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe teach us that when *Jackass* appears as too much, when it's really just *wrong*, it's precisely mimesis's promiscuous and indifferent sociability that is too much: I am insuperably, unaccountably connected to and saturated by the bodies onscreen, *too* connected.

To answer my own starting questions, at least provisionally: what is (or can be) so cathartic and so human about *Jackass* is that it dramatizes—in hyperbolized and raw form, and as repeated

accomplishment—the process of successful entry into the social: the withdrawal of identity, primordial and ambivalent affectability, my insuperable and irreparable connectedness to others, and my ongoing management of that connectedness. This entry into the social is an accomplishment because such accomplishment is never a foregone conclusion in the exacerbation of mimesis. Sociality in *Jackass* is somehow a sociality reduced (as one might reduce a sauce) to an almost pure form: the intensity of my mimetic resonance, of my affective ambivalence, is so great that I must muster a feat of dissociation to bind the affect, even (or especially) when its occasion is only paper cuts and puking and passing out. That's why *Jackass* really is so stupid: when it works, its sociality is almost wholly formal. It enmeshes us in the drama of converting mimesis into identification, of moving from the weirdly antisocial saturation with an affect to the subordination of that affect and a dis-sociation from it.

And yet, this ambivalence may not appear at all: I may find instead that all this can go unequivocally *wrong*. And it's not a matter of merely holding on to your cookies: you can puke through laughter and keep on going (as the *Jackass* crew frequently does). The index of whether it works is whether you're laughing when you do it, your tone of voice when you yell, "dude, that's just *wrong*." And when it goes wrong, what has gone wrong is that I find myself insuperably and irreparably exposed to an other who, in doing violence to himself is also doing violence to me.

This drama, its success or failure, is profoundly ambivalent. The insuperability of my affective porousness to others—which is to say, its primariness, the fact that it is in excess of my willing or even my ego—looks from one angle like a figure of a kind of primordial sociality, connecting me as it does to an other: I am thrown open to the other. And yet (which is to say, the other term of its ambivalence), the fact that it is in excess of my ego, rising up as it does, disorganizing me and tying me to the *here* of *this* affected body, looks like something I must transcend in order to enter the social. Mimetic affect is the ground on which the social is built, even a term for a primordial sociality (an ontology), but it is also the thing I must transcend in order to enter the social, a kind of impediment to moving beyond myself (a limit).

The ambivalence here is certainly an ambivalence in the term 'social,' but it is also the ambivalence of affect properly, in the sense Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe describe. The world, the other, the social, even my self (or, in a different order, and making reference to Jan Patočka, we could say: body, community, language, world²²) are all in excess of my willing and of my ego. I am bound to and bound for them, and yet their very intrusion can be the occasion for my withdrawal into myself—hence the paradoxical use of the term 'dis-sociation' in Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe, and Davis. If nothing else, we must learn from them that when we are in the realm of affect and mimesis and identification, we are moving in a space shot through with ambivalence.²³

10. I must admit, I don't (yet) know what to make of all this. An entry into the social prompted by cinematically (or televisually) mediated affect is itself ambivalent: if you're Benjamin, it may offer an opportunity to break through alienation and possibly to negotiate a less damaged life; if you're Adorno it's pure reconciliation to irreparably damaged life.²⁴ At this formal limit, I really do think that the ethics and the politics of the entry into the social that *Jackass* dramatizes are undecidable, or ambivalent. Which is to say that much of the ambivalence and unfinished business in this essay hinges on precisely what's not formal here: a scene dominated by adolescent masculinity; MTV's commercialization of it; in the context of the early 2000s; etc. History matters, and to mimesis and identification, as well.

What does seem clear to me, however, is that we need once again to take seriously both mimesis and identification as *problems*—both on their own and in their relation to one another. This is as much a question of our cinema as it is of our theory. Today we must feel as pressing, somehow, that there's something we don't yet know how to account for even (or especially) in the stupidest moments our media gives us. These moments may not seem to call for an accounting, on account of their stupidity. It has seemed to me for some time that our contemporary popular cinema has lost whatever faith it may once have had in articulateness or intelligence. It has placed its faith instead in a perceiving, affected, porous, and voluptuously and irreparably exposed body. This faith in the body is not new, but it is both increasingly intensified, the object of an aesthetic elaboration, and newly endemic, ubiquitous in our contemporary media.²⁵ By the same token, the forms of aesthetic acknowledgment appropriate to contemporary cinema are inarticulate and raucous and just about as stupid as the films themselves: laughter, groaning, crying, gasping. They may be gestural rather than vocal: flinching, clutching, holding breath. Our canons of aesthetic judgment seem increasingly exorbitant, excessive, misplaced—their use tantamount to a category mistake. How do we reckon in good faith with something which calls *only* for gasping, clutching, laughter?

I enjoy *Jackass* a great deal, but I don't know if I should feel good about that. When you do succeed in embracing its qualm, recuperating it with well-intentioned Schadenfreude, you really do feel, somehow, that something inarticulate and deeply human is in the offing in Johnny Knoxville's paper cuts. And yet, something sinister is almost necessarily at work in the commercialization and exploitation of not merely my attention or my affect but also something as fundamental to my sense of my humanity as my irreparable exposure to others. What I do know is that in order to sort any of this out, we must learn to be attentive to these sorts of riotously stupid scenes in ways that do justice to the intensity, ambivalence, and complexity of their effects, and of our own ways of living through them.

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Notes

1. Christian Metz, *The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and the Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), 54.
2. Jacques Lacan, "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the I Function as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience," in *Écrits: The First Complete Edition in English*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: W. W. Norton, 2006), 78.
3. Walter Benjamin, "On the Mimetic Faculty," in *Selected Writings, Volume 2, 1927–1934*, ed. Michael W. Jennings et al. (Cambridge, MA: Bellknap, 1999), 720.
4. Miriam Hansen, "Room-for-Play: Benjamin's Gamble with the Cinema," *October* 109 (Summer 2004): 3–45; and Susan Buck-Morss, "Aesthetics and Anaesthetics: Walter Benjamin's Artwork Essay Reconsidered," *October* 62 (Autumn 1992): 3–41.
5. Benjamin, "One-Way Street," in *Selected Writings, Volume 1, 1913–1926*, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: Bellknap, 1996), 476 (translation modified).

6. Roger Caillois, "Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia," trans. John Shepley, *October* 31 (Winter 1984): 16-32. Caillois's work was published in 1935, shortly after Benjamin composed his "Doctrine of the Similar" and "On the Mimetic Faculty," neither of which was published in Benjamin's lifetime. The question of influence here seems beside the point, in any event. For a consideration of Benjamin and Caillois together, see Joyce Cheng, "Mask, Mimicry, Metamorphosis: Roger Caillois, Walter Benjamin, and Surrealism in the 1930s," *Modernism/Modernity* 16, no. 1 (January 2009): 61-86.
7. Here, I am using *mimesis* as a cognate, and functional equivalent, of two words that Caillois used to indicate this particular complex: the French word *mimétisme*, and the borrowed English word *mimicry*. There is a complex philological reason for why I believe *mimesis* is not only the felicitous but correct term here, but that argument is abstruse, boring, and best left for another occasion.
8. Caillois, "Mimicry," 32.
9. Lacan, "The Mirror Stage," 77.
10. Caillois, *Man, Play, and Games*, trans. Meyer Barash (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2001), 178.
11. *Ibid.*, 75-6.
12. This essay is part of a larger project, at its early stages, on identification in the cinema. I have presented some work on ilinx and primary cinematic identification in provisional form in Scott C. Richmond, "The Exorbitant Lightness of Bodies, or How to Look at Superheroes: The Illusion of Bodily Movement in Sam Raimi's *Spider-Man* Films" (paper presented at the annual meeting for the Society for Cinema and Media Studies, New Orleans, LA, March 2011).
13. Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, "The Unconscious is Destructured Like an Affect (Part I of the Jewish People Do Not Dream)," *Stanford Literature Review* 6, no. 2 (1989): 196.
14. *Ibid.*
15. *Ibid.*, 196-97.
16. *Ibid.*, 199-200.
17. *Ibid.*, 201.
18. As a crucial footnote for the development of psychoanalytical thought, here we can hear echoes of Jean Laplanche's account of the drive in the opening chapters of *Life and Death in Psychoanalysis*, trans. Jeffrey Mehlman (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976).
19. Diane Davis, "Identification: Burke and Freud on Who You Are," *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 38, no. 2 (April 2008): 144.
20. Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen, *The Emotional Tie: Psychoanalysis, Mimesis, and Affect* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992), 101.
21. Davis, "Identification," 125 and passim.
22. Jan Patočka, *Body, Community, Language, World* (Chicago: Open Court, 1998).
23. This, I think, may be one way of notating the notorious indeterminacy of affect, the fact that it is prior (existentially) to the much more stable and fixed category of emotion. See, for example, Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press), 27-28.
24. Of course I mean Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility, 2nd Version," in *Selected Works, Volume 3, 1935-1938*, ed. Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: Bellknap, 2002), 101-133; and Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception," in *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 94-136. For the theoretical and philological elaboration of this, see Hansen, "Of Mice and Ducks: Benjamin and Adorno on Disney," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 92, no. 1 (Winter 1993): 27-61.

25. Here I am thinking of, among other work, Steven Shaviro, *The Cinematic Body* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).