‘Me, Myself, and I’: On the Uncanny in Home Movies

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Abstract
The home-movie ‘attitude’ is one of Jean-Pierre Meunier’s three modalities of ‘filmic identification’ in The Structure of the Film Experience. This essay both challenges and pays homage to Meunier’s heuristic phenomenology. Accepting his invitation to elaborate upon it with specific cases, I thus focus on those instances when the home-movie viewer’s off-screen self-image suddenly encounters its on-screen image-self in a structure of identification quite different from identification with on-screen others. Often experienced as ‘uncanny,’ this confrontation with one’s ‘self’ not only adds nuance to, but also ruptures and/or transforms what Meunier considers the ‘essential’ characteristics and overall phenomenological function of the home-movie experience.

Keywords: Existential phenomenology; Meunier; filmic identification; self-preoccupation; self-image/image-self

I.

In a powerful summary of the essential phenomenological structure and meaning of viewer identification in the ‘home-movie attitude,’ Jean-Pierre Meunier considers the futility of its impossible intentional project. This is to somehow ‘evoke’ and ‘render present’ to ourselves those family members and friends who once existed for the off-screen camera – and more fully than they do in the film or the space-time in which we presently view them as ‘keepsake’ images. Indeed, our existential knowledge of their physical absence and temporal distance there and then is outweighed by our desire to be with them here and now as they were. Rather than looking at the film’s specific images in the home-movie attitude, we see through them in an
attempt to evoke these individuals more generally, and to ‘re-presence’ them in a present, yet paradoxically past, reunion of which we, ourselves, are an integral part. As ‘one of the poles’ of this desire to “render a person present,” Meunier emphasizes that “it is often our presence to the person that we try to evoke” (p. 123). Indeed, “seeking a relationship of real intersubjectivity,” it is “our own presence [that ] is constantly felt” (p. 123).

This realization of intersubjectivity in the home-movie attitude is, of course, impossible. The viewer’s failed attempt at evocation and reunion leads not only to disappointment and compensatory nostalgia, but also to a sense of the existential absurdity of such an identificatory project. Our “will for a personal engagement,” Meunier concludes, “is confronted with the void and remains suspended, without any possible outlet or any real signification” (p. 123). Given we are “incapable of being engaged,” our sense of self-presence becomes explicit, “felt all the more [and] entirely preoccupied with itself” (p. 123). In sum, as viewers trying to connect with familiar others as they were ‘elsewhen’ and ‘elsewhere’ (even while some of them might now be ‘as they are’ in the room), we are always already bereft – irremediably, and absurdly, alone with ourselves on our side of the screen.1

Nonetheless, there is more to be said about “self-preoccupation” in the home-movie attitude. Meunier acknowledges that “there would be a great deal of nuance to add, and numerous specific cases to examine” (p. 123). In what follows, I examine one such specific case of the home-movie experience that adds nuance to, but also challenges, the particular phenomenological structure that Meunier describes as essential to it. This is the not uncommon instance in which a significant number of viewers come ‘face to face’ with their on-screen ‘self’ in an identificatory experience that is sensed as ‘uncanny.’ However, before elaborating, insofar as I am in sympathetic dialogue with, and also adopt, Meunier’s phenomenological schema and filmic corpus, I need to address two related methodological issues that inform my discussion.

The first concerns the nature and scope of the film objects that, in concert with the viewer, Meunier considers co-constitutive of the home-movie attitude. These are “films made for private purposes, with the goal of acting as a keepsake or record of an event in the individual’s life, such as weddings, vacations, family gatherings, etc.” (Fairfax, fn. p. 155/156). Adopting this corpus allows me to ground my phenomenological variation both within and against Meunier’s descriptions, and also limits what would, if expanded, add yet another highly significant – and unwieldy – variable. Most important, however, is that, although films made only for ‘private purposes’ may now seem a somewhat dated circumscription, Meunier’s corpus is still culturally relevant today. Certainly, when The Structure of the Film Experience (Les Structures de
l’expérience filmique: L’identification filmique) was published in 1969, ordinary people did not go about their world as we do now, constantly recording and screening everything in sight – including themselves – for public as well as private consumption. Indeed, Super-8mm film cameras appeared on the mass market only four years before Meunier’s phenomenology. (Videotape and then digital camcorders were mass-marketed, respectively, in the mid-1980s and mid-1990s, and smartphones in the early 2000s.) His corpus thus includes the kinds of films made by most non-professionals at the time. These kinds of films are also commonplace today, if within a technologically expanded audiovisual context in which they – and their makers – have become increasingly available for public view. Thus, in certain circumstances discussed below, constant personal recording and ‘familiarized’ on-screen visibility may forestall the uncanny home-movie experiences I foreground here.

The second methodological issue involves both translation and terminology. Instead of using the common, and more inclusive, le film amateur, Meunier generically names his corpus le film-souvenir (a term I have found in no French dictionary). Apparently a neologism, the term foregrounds filmic objects whose primary solicitation is mnemonic, hyphenation both connecting and separating them from subjective acts of personal remembrance.2 Although le film-souvenir has preeminence in a previous essay I have written on Meunier’s work, here I privilege its English equivalent, ‘home movie.’3 Connotations of personal remembrance may be lost, but those of ‘home’ are gained: in particular, the sense of familiarity, intimacy, and comfort that the uncanny subverts. In this context, ‘home’ also calls up the uncanny through its subversive German opposite unheimlich, translated literally as ‘unhomely.’ Designating an experience in which what is familiar is suddenly turned disturbingly strange and secretive, the term is closely tied to key psychological and philosophical studies of the phenomenon (three later referenced here.) However, what follows is an existential phenomenology rather than a psychological etiology, psychoanalytic explanation, or philosophical extrapolation, and thus I have chosen to use the less affiliated, more generalized, and English ‘uncanny.’ It is also, dare I say, more ‘familiar’ to those who existentially experience its estrangement in the American cultural context this phenomenology describes.

II.

So now to those instances, in which we view ourselves in a home movie; when, in the existential gap between what I will call our objective ‘image-self’ and our subjective ‘self-image,’ ‘I’ comes suddenly face-to-face with ‘me.’
This is an identificatory encounter that a significant number of viewers find uncanny in its disconcertingly asynchronous reversibility and destabilizing reflections. Certainly, although common enough to generate public discourse, this experience is not inevitable. In particular, it seems less likely when the viewer’s own agency brings their ‘self-representation’ into existence, whether before a bathroom mirror or, increasingly, in Skype video calls, YouTube videos, and ‘selfies.’® In such instances, the viewer tends to retain a relatively comfortable sense of ‘self-possession.’ This is not the case, however, for those who come upon themselves in home movies and experience not ‘self-representation’ but a disconcerting ‘representation of one’s self,’ the latter filmed – and filtered – through someone else’s agency and cinematographic perception (even if of a close friend or family member).

This encounter with ‘one’s self’ on-screen suddenly disarticulates our usually transparent sense of ‘one self’ into two: a perceiving ‘I’ and a visible ‘me.’ In this regard, and given that his phenomenology greatly influences Meunier’s own, here I turn to Maurice Merleau-Ponty, who elaborates: “[A] sort of dehiscence opens my body in two, and […] between my body looked at and my body looking, […] there is overlapping or encroachment.”® Thus, an estranged self-consciousness arises at this intimate filmic reunion in disunion (and vice versa). The overlapping and encroachment of my image-self and self-image in their asynchronous difference and non-coincident reversibility not only preoccupies me (or is it ‘I’?), but also displaces and destabilizes me (or is it ‘us’?). For many viewers, this is an uncanny experience.

Certainly, this self-preoccupation affirms a phenomenological element Meunier considers essential to the home-movie attitude. Nonetheless, looking at one’s image-self rather than the image of someone else negates what, for Meunier, is the essential phenomenological function of the home movie: its service as a medium through which we constitutively generalize and transcend the specificity of those on-screen, who are personally, and more expansively, known to us. Indeed, even when experienced as pleasing or funny rather than uncanny, one’s own image on-screen tends to produce self-preoccupation, its ontic ‘thereness’ resistant to generalization and transcendence. When experienced as uncanny, however, this ‘thereness’ and its obdurate opacity intensifies and provokes three possible modalities of the uncanny, each of which is differently structured and thus experienced and responded to in different ways.

The first modality is what I call the ‘axiological uncanny.’ It arises as a crisis of self-perception in relation to the representation of one’s self rather than the home movie’s crisis of the unrealizable ‘presentification’ of others. The second, or ‘epistemological uncanny,’ is a cognitive crisis
of self-knowledge. The third, or ‘ontological uncanny,’ is an existential crisis of self-identity. Progressive movement is thus from a sudden and disturbing sense that one is only partially known to one's self to the sudden re-cognition that one is always partially unknown to one's self, and then to the transformative revelation that one is ultimately unknowable to one's self. Throughout, just as with on-screen others, one's own existence is posited as ‘real.’ However, given that we each live our self both inside and out, it is presumed more intimately and fully known than the existence of even the most familiar others.

This presumption is put into question by the centrality of asynchronous time in the home-movie experience. That is, when off-screen 'I' encounters on-screen 'me,' time is spatialized in my past image-self's visibly different appearance and comportment from that envisioned as my present self-image. While this asynchronous disparity may generate a sense of nostalgia, it also may generate an uncanny experience in which the viewer's general sense of self-knowledge and self-possession is suddenly destabilized. We might suspect that the wider the temporal gap between the image-self and self-image, the greater their estrangement and the more intense the 'sense' of uncanniness. Nonetheless, it is when the image-self and self-image are most temporally proximate to each other that the 'sensation' of uncanniness is most perceptibly felt. Here, sense and sensation do not have the same temporal structure – duration tends to mark the one while immediacy marks the other. Time thus modifies the quality of the uncanny, which moves from a perceptible sensation of sudden perturbation to a more reflective (if still unsettling) re-cognition of self-estrangement to an encompassing existential apprehension that this estrangement and lack of self-possession is the grounding condition of one's very being. (This progression bears some relation to, respectively, the psychological senses of the uncanny associated with Sigmund Freud and the earlier Ernst Jentsch, and its philosophical sense for Martin Heidegger, each referenced below in the description of a specific mode of uncanny experience.)

III.

The 'axiological uncanny' is so-called because its experience is dominated by aesthetic judgments and questions of self-value. It emerges in the unexpected gap between the viewer's internalized and taken-for-granted self-image and the exteriorized, 'in your face' image-self, and occurs most often when both are temporally proximate. (There is often a similar gap between the
sound of the image-self’s externally represented voice and the self-image’s internally heard one.) However, what is most uncanny and destabilizing is the sudden awareness of the disparity between subjective self-perception and objective representation. The emergence of the axiological uncanny thus not only undermines the viewer’s security in their self-knowledge, but also raises doubts about intersubjectivity, belying the belief in it which otherwise grounds the home-movie attitude. Articulated silently, the viewer asks, “Is that really me?” and “Do other people really see me this way?”

In this regard, the axiological uncanny is the most literally superficial of modalities, and the viewer’s self-preoccupation most apparent. The predominant response to its emergence is intensified attention to and excessive scrutiny of the image-self in all its specificity. Thus, opposite to the basic identificatory structure of the home-movie attitude, the viewer’s activity is neither highly constitutive nor more expansive than what the screen provides. Instead, it is completely screen-dependent. Indeed, the constitutive activity of generalization is replaced by the activity of comparison, this between the image-self’s external characteristics and those internally perceived – but now questioned – as constituting the self-image. Correspondingly, this activity of comparison also entails ongoing aesthetic and personal valuation aimed at some form of reconciliation or self-recuperation.

Although fixated on the screen, the viewer still retains the longitudinal intentionality central to Meunier’s home-movie attitude. This is a primary investment in the present moment of viewing, in which retention and protention play little part. Nonetheless, the viewer’s malaise modifies the quality of this investment. It is greatly intensified by the viewer’s close scrutiny, and (usually) negative judgment of what seems every specific detail and aspect of their on-screen image-self. Indeed, in an online forum titled “Do you feel uncomfortable watching yourself on video?,” many posters write that they ‘hate’ watching themselves because, as the initial poster puts it, “I just don’t look as I THINK I look [...] I literally squirm when I see myself [...] I look like someone I hardly recognize [...] I also pull very strange expressions and move my head more than necessary.” Almost all the respondents agree, one of them writing, “I hate my voice and my nose always overtakes my face,” and another, “I can’t bear watching or hearing myself on video [...] I tend to think ‘God, do I really look that bad?’” Only a very few posters do not have the same experience. However, as I have suggested earlier, all recorded themselves and, through this activity of ‘self-possession,’ feel sufficient familiarity to ‘own’ their on-screen image-self. One is an “actor/filmmaker”; another “recorded EVERYTHING” and put it
on YouTube, and so “got pretty used to the way I looked and sounded”; and the last, who otherwise finds his image-self “awful,” adds, “However, I think I look fine if I take it myself.”

In this regard, the experience of the axiological uncanny’s particular form of self-preoccupation significantly changes the viewer’s overall intentional project or objective by reversing its direction. For Meunier, even if doomed to failure, what is essential to home-movie identification is the viewer’s attempts to achieve ‘real intersubjectivity’ with on-screen others. Instead, here the viewer’s intentional objective is ‘real intrasubjectivity’ with ‘one’s self’ – that is, rather than overlapping or encroachment, the intimate integration of the estranged image-self with the presently familiar self-image. The achievement of this integration is also doomed to failure, for the desire that drives it is the fantasy of a fully-possessed and ‘unified’ self – a fantasy that the other two modalities of the uncanny progressively re-cognize and dis-solve. At best, then, viewers may achieve a reconciliatory, but less than equivalent, adequation of their self-image and image-self by re-solving the disparity between them.

Most often, this reconciliatory attempt at adequation is focused on superficial differences, such as hairstyle or weight, that are tied to and thus putatively ‘caused’ by the temporal gap between the image-self and self-image. These are differences that do not make much of an existential difference and so are used to ‘explain away’ the uncanny rather than lingering on its challenges to self-perception and self-knowledge. However, many viewers also appease the uncanny and repress their failure at fully integrating their off- and on-screen selves by adopting – as Meunier says of late French filmology – a “certain scientific attitude [...] consisting of [...] externalizing, in the domain of objective realities observable from the outside, phenomena whose reality is to be found internally, in the experience of the subject” (p. 33). Adopting such a “scientific attitude,” the viewer becomes actively engaged not in the evocation of known others but, rather, in the invocation of impersonal experts whose explanations of the viewer’s experience are objective. These are likely to reference the ‘uncanny valley’ hypothesis (influenced by Jentsch and Freud) that names the region of negative emotional response generated by humanoid robots very close to appearing human and yet not close enough, and/or the ‘mere-exposure effect’ hypothesis, which posits that one’s repeated exposure to one’s mirror image makes one’s screen image uncanny because the latter is reversed from the intimately familiar one seen every day. These objective explanations of the phenomenon do not ‘explain away’ the experience of the uncanny; rather, their rational surety is palliative and comforting. Nonetheless, for many viewers, the experience
of the axiological uncanny is recurrent and so repeatedly disturbing that they avoid home-movie screenings altogether. As one of the aforementioned posters writes, “I won’t even watch my wedding video.”

Avoidance, however, is definitely not a response to the ‘epistemological uncanny’ – indeed, quite the opposite. Although the viewer feels an initial frisson of estrangement from their home-movie image-self, this modality of the uncanny is dominated by a desire not to flee the image-self but to re-cognize it – that is, to learn and ‘comprehend’ it so as to regain the sense of self-possession. Moreover, given that the epistemological uncanny tends to emerge when the image-self is at a significant distance in time from the viewer’s present self-image, the viewer’s engagement is less screen-dependent than in the axiological uncanny, and feels less temporally urgent. This temporal distance also becomes spatial distance. That is, the viewer’s attention literally expands from judgmental scrutiny of the smallest details and perceived aesthetic defects of the image-self to its comportment, gestures, and overall behavior in a broader context. As well, there is no comparative activity, nor is the primary intentional objective either an impossible intersubjectivity with on-screen others, or an impossible intrasubjectivity that fully integrates image-self and self-image. Indeed, this spatialized temporal distance transforms the viewer’s home-movie attitude into one very much like – but not exactly like – what Meunier describes as the “documentary attitude”, in which the intentional objective is new knowledge of, among other things, someone posited as existentially ‘real’ who is not oneself (p. 124).

Given this transformation of attitude and intentional objective, the home movie is no longer temporally perceived only longitudinally, retention and protention subordinated to each present moment of viewing as irrelevant to evoking those absent others of whom we have more knowledge than their screen images give us. Rather, faced with our uncanny image-self which, though clearly familiar, seems suddenly distant and unknown to us, the home movie is now temporally perceived not only longitudinally but also, to use Meunier’s term, “laterally” (p. 108). As in the documentary attitude, the viewer is still intent on the screen in the present moment, but also actively engaged in the retention of past screen information – albeit still not concerned with some projected future. Thus, learning more about the self one thought one already knew becomes a cumulative process that has no necessary teleology. Responding to the epistemological uncanny, we could say the viewer becomes ‘apprenticed’ to their image-self, not to focus on how it looks or sounds, but rather to learn more about how it behaves in the world and with others.

In this regard, the viewer’s intentional objective in the epistemological uncanny is comprehension of the past image-self rather than its full
integration with the present self-image. The existential distance between the two is respected, and a spatial as well as temporal ‘long view’ becomes the favored way to observe and add specificity to the general knowledge of one’s comportment and behavior in a given context. Describing such identificatory engagement with documentary, Meunier uses the example of watching a film that focuses on a single doctor whom we see in the general and cumulative activities and contexts of ‘doctoring.’ In the documentary attitude, despite this doctor’s singularity and specificity, we tend to see him as representative of other doctors who comport themselves and behave in a generally similar way; he is thus engaged as what, in logic, is sometimes called a ‘typical particular.’ However, in the context of the home movie, such epistemological engagement with our own image-self takes a different turn (even if we also happen to be doctors). Qualified by the uncanny, our identification operates in a reverse direction from that in Meunier’s example. Here, then, I offer an example of my own: a home movie in which, in a distant past, I am playing with my then two-year old son. Given that, at the time, my focus was on him and not self-consciously on myself, I remember the experience only generally, if at all. Watching this long past maternal scene, my desire now is to ‘learn’ more of myself as a ‘mother’ through observation and comprehension of my image-self’s particular motor/postural comportment and affective behavior as I interact with my child. Quite unlike identificatory engagement with Meunier’s documentary doctor, whom I engage as ‘representative’ of many doctors, my identifactory intention in this home movie is to specifically ‘differentiate’ myself from other mothers within what I know as the activity and context of ‘mothering.’ Thus, in this mode of the uncanny, although my focus on my image-self’s specificity is less intense and narrow in scope than in the experience of the axiological uncanny, it tends to be more so than it would be in the documentary attitude, in which I watch and learn ‘real’ but personally unknown ‘others’ rather than ‘my self.’ Here, again, the experience of the uncanny modifies the characteristics of Meunier’s phenomenology.

In sum, this shift to a less urgent and affectively ‘cooler’ documentary attitude occurs within the home-movie attitude and is not a complete move from one to the other. Instead, it is a compensatory response to the uncanny that entails an epistemological re-cognition or taking up of one’s past image-self in a more impersonal than personal mode of identification. Thus, the crisis generated by the epistemological uncanny is not, as in the axiological uncanny, a present and urgent crisis of self-perception but a more broadly temporalized crisis that provokes disturbing awareness of our always incomplete self-knowledge. Here, Freud’s influential predecessor,
Ernst Jentsch, is apposite. For him, the uncanny emerges from "intellectual uncertainty, so that the uncanny would always, as it were, be something someone does not know one's way about in." In the experience of the epistemological uncanny, this intellectual uncertainty is articulated not in the sudden question "Is that really me?" but in an intentionally extended quest to acquire more 'objective' knowledge of 'myself' – even as it will never be enough.

This brings us to the 'ontological uncanny,' in which the existential question is "What really am I?" This is the most overwhelming and reflexive modality of the uncanny, although it need not be felt as a sudden physical sensation or as intellectual uncertainty. Rather, and recalling Meunier's summation of our heightened self-preoccupation in the home-movie attitude, the ontological uncanny is experienced as a "suspended" confrontation not only with one's "self" but also "with the void" (p. 123). This third uncanny modality of the home-movie experience, in which the self-image as 'I' comes face-to-face with the image-self as 'me', is the least screen-dependent and the most actively constitutive. Thus, of all the modalities, it would seem to best conform to the phenomenological characteristics that, for Meunier, distinguish the home-movie attitude from those associated with documentary and fiction. This, however, is not the case. With the emergence of the ontological uncanny, although the viewer transcends the screen's specificity and engages in highly constitutive activity, these operate in a radically opposite intentional direction from that of the home-movie attitude. Rather than looking outward and through the screen in the highly constitutive but vain effort to evoke the presence of familiar past others, the viewer's look rebounds from the opacity of the on-screen image-self and is directed back and inward. This sudden reflexive look away from the screen and into the depths of one's own 'being' is, in effect, the uncanny and invisible revelation of a 'voided' self. On-screen image-self, off-screen self-image, and the 'I' that purportedly subtends them all become "irremediably out of our grasp" (p. 124).

In the experience of the ontologically uncanny, the home movie's temporality is again altered – indeed, in this instance, radically transformed. Although it seems longitudinal, the presentness of the viewing experience provoked by the encounter with our on-screen image-self is not only intensified; it also becomes temporally extensive. That is, rather than excluding the temporal laterality of retention and protention, the present includes and condenses them. Thus, in Meunier's terms, we could say that, in the ontological uncanny, the viewer's constitutive activity lies not in generalizing the specificity of screen images but, rather, in generalizing the discrete segmentations of time itself. Suspended in this temporally dense and extensible
present, and with screen images now only the pretext to internal revelation, the viewer apprehends the import of the ontologically uncanny. This is the awareness that one can never catch up with one's 'self;' for 'it' – whatever 'it' is – is always both temporally behind and ahead not only our, but also its own being. 'It' is always becoming other than what it (never) was, is, or will be. Confronting Meunier's 'void,' it is the viewer's 'self;' wherever it seems located, that is voided. Bereft of security not only in self-knowledge but also in 'self,' the viewer now finds 'themself' (a particularly charged plural pronoun here) in a spatio-temporal chasm. This is also an asynchronous yet reversible ‘chiasm’ between one's visible image-self, imagined self-image, and invisible 'I,' in which their relative discretion and relational differences fall away and the ungrounded viewer falls with them.

In this regard, the ontological uncanny is more related to Heideggerian description than those of Jentsch or Freud. What Heidegger terms Unheimlichkeit (or uncanniness) is not a physical sensation, intellectual doubt, or psychological quality. These, for him, are derivative rather than ontological experiences of the uncanny. Indeed, uncanniness is originary for Heidegger; he regards it as the 'ungrounding' that is, if paradoxically, the grounding structure of human existence. For him, human being is fundamentally uncanny, strange, and unknown to itself as what it is: “an unstable blend of presence and absence, concealment and unconcealment, hiddenness and appearance, which constitutes man's having to be at home precisely in his not being at home in the world.”12 Certainly any film (or video) – by virtue of its function as medium – offers us an experience of precisely this unstable reversibility and oscillation of presence and absence, concealment and unconcealment, hiddenness and appearance. However, the home movie makes this instability not only its form but also its content. It thus progressively provokes, for many of us who suddenly encounter our ‘self’ on-screen, the uncanny fundament not only of home movies, but also of human being.

In closing, it need be said again that my exploration of this 'specific case' of engagement with the home movie is meant as an homage to Meunier's phenomenology of filmic identification. Despite his schematic brevity (or, perhaps, because of it), he grounds and describes the characteristics and 'coordinates' of our active engagements with the screen in clearly articulated intentional modalities of subjective knowledge, attitude, temporality, and affect. Meunier thus provides us a meaningful existential vocabulary that enables an illuminating comparative method of how the film experience is 'lived' and differentiated. Moreover, he has given us a powerful heuristic, and explicitly invited us to continue exploring this 'lived,' but always 'mediated,' experience in all its myriad historical, cultural, and aesthetic variations.
Notes

1. Even if some on-screen people are physically present, they are not now as they were then; hence, their present presence is subordinate to the memorialized space-time that absorbs us (and likely them as well).

2. In this volume, see Marie-Aude Baronian’s, “Remembering Cinema: On the *film-souvenir*,” which specifically foregrounds this neologism’s emphasis on memory.


4. In this volume, for a different approach to recording oneself, see Christian Ferencz-Flatz’s “You Talkin’ to Me? On Filmic Identification in Video-Selfies.”

5. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1969), p. 123. Merleau-Ponty is making the larger point that the world is not a discrete ‘object’ nor are we, as embodied, discretely ‘subjects.’


About the author

Vivian Sobchack is Professor Emerita at UCLA, where she was Associate Dean and Professor at the School of Theater, Film and Television from 1992-2005. At the beginning of the 1990s, she was the main driving force behind the recuperation of phenomenology as a viable methodology in film studies with her book *The Address of the Eye: A Phenomenology of Film Experience* (Princeton University Press, 1992). Insisting on the embodied as well as material foundations of film-viewing and film production, she has elaborated an existential-phenomenological approach to moving-image media ever since, perhaps nowhere more elegantly than in *Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture* (University of California Press, 2004). Her anthologized essay, “Toward a Phenomenology of Non-Fictional Film Experience” (1999), was the first major explication in English of Jean-Pierre Meunier’s phenomenology of filmic identification. The first woman electedPresident of the Society for Cinema and Media Studies (1985-1987), Sobchack was honored in 2012 with the Society’s Distinguished Career Achievement Award. She also served for two decades as the only academic on the Board of Directors of the American Film Institute (AFI). She still teaches a graduate seminar or two at UCLA each year and is currently working on an anthology of her own essays on popular moving-image media and American historical consciousness.