

Journal Title: *Free Associations: Psychoanalysis and Culture, Media, Groups Politics*
Number 64, October 2013
ISSN: 2047-0622
URL: <http://www.freeassociations.org.uk>



HOW FAR CAN I MAKE MY FINGERS STRETCH?

A RESPONSE TO VIVIAN SOBCHACK'S 'WHAT MY FINGERS KNEW'

FROM A DEPTH-HERMENEUTIC PERSPECTIVE

Steffen Krüger

Abstract: By reviewing the acclaimed film scholar Vivian Sobchack's existential phenomenological approach to film interpretation against the background of Alfred Lorenzer's depth-hermeneutic cultural analysis – a psychoanalytically oriented approach – this paper will not only unfold a critical social dimension in Sobchack's concern of film and film critique, but also work out the points of contact in the two approaches. My attempt to understand and criticize Sobchack *through Lorenzer* thus aims first and foremost at cross-fertilization of the fields of psychoanalytically and phenomenologically oriented research. Bringing the central aspects of Lorenzer's conception of depth hermeneutic face to face with parallel lines of thought in Sobchack's 'What my fingers knew – The Cinesthetic Subject, or Vision in the Flesh', one of her central methodological statements, I will unfold how this critical social dimension has been present in her methodological conception all along. In closely following Sobchack's notion of the *chiasmatic 'third term'*, I argue that it is *within* the experience of a scenic, embodied response to film itself that this dimension can be retrieved.

Introduction

For over two decades, Vivian Sobchack has been one of the leading figures in film scholarship; her publications are widely read and canonically used in film studies classes. In her last major volume, the essay collection *Carnal Thoughts – Embodiment and Moving Image Culture* (2004a), she has continued from her earlier publications in making a powerful argument for an embodied approach to film. However, in *Carnal Thoughts* her applications and interpretations of the phenomenological approach in the tradition of Maurice Merleau-Ponty have taken on a decidedly personal tone grounded in explicitly subjective experience. These 'autobiographical and/or anecdotal' aspects, Sobchack (2004c: 6) emphasizes, are to make her writings 'relatively user friendly', as contrasted with her earlier *The Address of the Eye: A Phenomenology of Film Experience* (1992). The amputation of one of her legs due to

cancer ‘made my body ... a very real ... laboratory for phenomenological inquiry’, she states drily (2004c: 7).

The article ‘What my fingers knew – The Cinesthetic Subject, or Vision in the Flesh’, collected in *Carnal Thoughts*, is characteristic of this still most recent phase of her writing on film. What makes it particularly interesting for the article at hand is that Sobchack here sets out to give a step-by-step explanation and demonstration of her existential-phenomenological method of ‘thick description’ (2004a: 5). By zooming in on the possibilities of bringing our sensual and affective – in keeping with Merleau-Ponty: our carnal – foundations to bear on the act of interpreting cinematic communication, her text emphatically points to a theoretical-methodological problem prevalent in much of qualitative media research today, specifically, how to make use of the embodied, ‘Affective Turn’ (Clough, 2007) and meaningfully render our sensual being relevant to academic interpretations of media communication in general.

Yet, as I will show, the merits of this particular article lie more in pointing to this problem than in the solutions it offers. For all the admirable verve and nuanced sensibility with which Sobchack gives grounding to her call for embodied modes of making sense of movies, in the article’s central, albeit brief, example of a film interpretation – a take on *The Piano* (Campion, 1993) – she seems to shy away from developing this mode to its logical conclusion. In this respect, Sobchack’s overall argument has left the author of the present paper with an acute feeling of dissatisfaction as to the – rather untypical – timidity of its results, as well as to the premises and reasons for presenting this approach in the first place.

The following essay, then, is an attempt to trace this irritation in Sobchack’s article and gently extend the latter into the direction of cultural political commentary – a direction that is clearly indicated in the article’s overall argument but has ultimately remained unrealized.¹ In order to do so, I will assess Sobchack’s argument in ‘What my fingers knew’ from the perspective of the depth-hermeneutical tradition – a psychoanalytically informed approach to cultural analysis developed by the German psychiatrist, psychoanalyst and sociologist Alfred Lorenzer in the 1970s and ‘80s. Recently, this approach has received a remarkable increase in attention from social research outside Germany, with a 2010 special issue of *Psychoanalysis, Culture and Society* (Bereswill, Morgenroth and Redman, 2010), as well as a 2012 special issue of *Forum: Qualitative Social Research* (FQS) (Salling-Olesen, 2012a), introducing it to an English-speaking audience.

Now, I am well aware that by reviewing Sobchack’s approach, which is rooted in existential phenomenology, from a psychoanalytically informed perspective, I run the risk of

‘comparing apples with pears’, as the German proverb has it, i.e. for the case at hand: of making cross-referential judgments on and in academic fields that heretofore have been regarded as mutually exclusive and across which scholarly exchange has been minimal.² And indeed, in view of what Sobchack has to say about psychoanalytic approaches to film studies, this might appear to be the case.³

Curiously enough, however, my irritation with Sobchack’s text has not so much been triggered by the discovery of insurmountable differences, but rather by what I found to be strong, if not always explicit, parallels between her and Lorenzer’s approaches. Therefore, by reviewing Sobchack’s existential phenomenology of film against the background of Lorenzer’s depth-hermeneutic cultural analysis, I will not only be able to unfold a critical social and cultural dimension in Sobchack’s concern of film and film critique, but also work out the points of contact in the two approaches. My attempt to understand and criticize Sobchack through Lorenzer thus aims first and foremost at cross-fertilization of the fields of psychoanalytically and phenomenologically oriented research.

Such an attempt proves timely and in good company, with the compilation *Founding Psychoanalysis Phenomenologically*, edited by Dieter Lohmar and Jagna Brudcinska (both Husserl Archive, Cologne), literally being published while this article was in writing (2012). In this volume, specifically the texts by Brudcinska and Thomas Fuchs, can be seen as complements and parallels to the effort at hand. For instance, when Brudcinska in her approach to phenomenology makes space for a genetic perspective within phenomenological research, calling her approach ‘depth phenomenology of the emotive dynamic’ (2012: 23), she basically adds a twin phenomenological sister to Lorenzer’s depth hermeneutic approach (albeit not a one-egged one). With Thomas Fuchs, in turn, one can qualify this notion of ‘depth’ as it is used in both Lorenzer’s psychoanalytic-hermeneutic, as well as Brudcinska’s phenomenological conception. In contrast to the traditional, vertical notion of depth, writes Lohmar in his introduction:

Fuchs’ paper presents a phenomenological approach to the unconscious conceived as a horizontal dimension of the lived body, lived space and intercorporeality. This approach is based on a phenomenology of body memory which is not to be identified with a form of explicit memory. Body memory is defined as the totality of implicit dispositions of perception and behaviour mediated by the body and sedimented in the course of earlier experiences. In this view, unconscious fixations are considered as

restrictions in the potentiality of a person. These restrictions are caused by a past, including traumatic experiences, which is still effective in the present. (Lohmar, 2012b: xiv)

As I will proceed to show in relation to Sobchack's paper, the latter part of this description of Fuchs's approach can unproblematically be integrated into Lorenzer's conception of depth hermeneutics. In comparison, Fuchs's approach emphasizes how close Lorenzer's hermeneutic reconstruction of Freud's autochthon conception of drives into a relational, socio-somatic constellation comes to phenomenological concerns. And indeed, in Salling-Olesen's introduction to Lorenzer's method of 'scenic understanding' (1973: 138ff) one can even find an observation equivalent to Fuchs's conception of a horizontal unconscious: 'Within [Lorenzer's] theoretical framework', writes Salling-Olesen, 'it would be more appropriate to talk about a wider ... rather than a deeper understanding of the meaning under study than what is normally understood in hermeneutic interpretation' (Salling-Olesen, 2012b: 2).

In order to start off, I will first give a short outline of Sobchack's argument in 'What my fingers knew'. Secondly, I will introduce relevant aspects from Lorenzer's conception of depth hermeneutics by bringing them face to face with parallel lines of thought in Sobchack's article. Finally, I will clarify and develop further the latter's demonstration of her method by presenting it against the background of Lorenzer's methodical conception of 'scenic understanding' (1973: 138ff).

Scholarship devoid of experience

Sobchack delves right into the heart of her article's matter by pointing to what she perceives as a gap between the day-to-day film reviews published in newspapers and magazines on the one hand and academic interpretations of these films on the other. While she takes the film reviews to reflect 'our actual experience' of a given movie, she suspects the interpretations produced by academic film scholars to be symptomatic of a certain 'phobic reflex' triggered by this experience, the latter of which, as she suggests, being 'explained away' by it (2004c: 53).

Staying with the experience that she sees as being articulated in the reviews, Sobchack offers examples ranging from the quiet sensual art house movie, *The Piano*, to the

loud, action driven *Speed*.⁴ What the reviews of these films emphasize are the film's physical, somatizing effects on the viewers, or in Sobchack's words: the 'tactile, kinetic, redolent, resonant, and sometimes even taste-full' impressions that the films left on those who reported on them (2004c: 54).

'What have we, as contemporary media theorists, to do with such ... descriptions of the film experience?' Sobchack asks (2004c: 54), and her answer can be paraphrased as: 'not much.' Contemporary film theory, she holds, has constituted 'the spectator's identification with the cinema ... almost exclusively as a specular and psychical process abstracted from the body and mediated through language' (2000).⁵ Embarrassment and bemusement by bodies she sees as the typical causes and/or effects of this carnal abstinence. '[A] certain discomfort emerges when we experience an "apparent lack of proper aesthetic distance, a sense of over-involvement in sensation and emotion,"' Sobchack quotes Linda Williams to make her point (2004c: 57).

Interestingly, however, she discovers a contradiction within the attitude with which mainstream film scholarship approaches movies with overly sensual qualities. While these films are regularly devaluated as crudely stimulating and manipulating physical responses that escape intellectual assessment, they are often held to be 'the quintessence of cinema' nevertheless (2004c: 57).

It is here that Sobchack has finally set the stage for her own approach. Having established that film scholarship displays an 'increasing interest' for the 'carnal foundations of cinematic intelligibility' but has 'not yet come to grips' with these (2004c: 59), she suggests to 'posit the film viewer's lived body as a carnal "third term" that chiasmatically mediates vision and language, experience and image' as her solution to the misleading binary conception of previous scholarship (2004c: 60).

A 'carnal "third term" that chiasmatically mediates': it is no accident that Sobchack opens her article with quotations from both Roland Barthes and Maurice Merleau-Ponty (2004c: 53), for here, in this central conceptual statement, she presents a blend of the two thinkers. The notions of 'flesh' and 'chiasm' belong to the late Merleau-Ponty's idiom with which the philosopher attempted to delineate 'his new conception of the body, as a "chiasm" or crossing-over (the term comes from the Greek letter chi) which combines subjective experience and objective existence' (Baldwin, 2004: 1). The 'flesh', Merleau-Ponty explains correspondingly, 'is not matter, is not mind, is not substance. To designate it, we should need the old term "element"' (1968 /2004: 7). For the context of Sobchack's article this means that

every act of film critique has to be won from this ‘element’ in which subject and object are equivalently contained. Simply put, intellectual work on film has to start from the non-intellectualized, unwieldy body. Sobchack thus lays claim to a Merleau-Pontian paradigm of film scholarship – one that utilizes the scholar’s body, the element of the flesh, as a relay station between subjective-affective response and objective meaning of the film – i.e. as the very foundation of a sense-making process that is no longer understood as being in danger of becoming contaminated by the ‘sensual-making’, but rather as the latter’s elementary, enriched and energized outcome. In Sobchack’s words: ‘[T]he lived body both provides and enacts a commutative reversibility between subjective feeling and objective knowledge, between the senses and their sense’ (2004c: 61).

The tricky ‘third term’

The notion of the ‘third term’, in turn, belongs to Roland Barthes; as Sobchack writes by way of an explanation: it suggests a meaning ‘which escapes language and is yet within it’ (2004c: 60). Apparently, this notion was to add semiological weight to her approach – an interpretative tool that retains the intricate balance of Merleau-Ponty’s chiasm while at the same time directing the interpretation towards the significance of the cinematic experience, ‘insofar as it is sensually produced’, as it reads in her introductory quotation from Barthes’s *Pleasure of the Text* (1973).

‘[A]ny phenomenological analysis of the existential relation between human lived-body subjects and their technologies of perception and representation must be semiological and historical even at the micropereceptual level’, Sobchack writes in a similar context, elsewhere in her collection (2004b: 139). However, the attempt to integrate Barthes’s notion of the ‘third term’ into her fundamentally phenomenological approach might also have injected some of the problematic aspects of Barthes’s thought.

In a short paper, the Norwegian media scholar Liv Hausken (2001) closely analyzes this, in Sobchack’s words, “‘third’ or ‘obtuse’ meaning that Roland Barthes suggests’ (2004c: 60), pointing to the often doubtful function it has in Barthes’s writings. Whereas, in its several guises⁶ of ‘the obtuse’, ‘the angel’, ‘the grain’, ‘*jouissance*’ (which Barthes borrowed from Lacan), or ‘the punctum’, the ‘third meaning’ can be seen to serve the ethical function of principally withstanding closure of the process of signification. Hausken maintains that this notion of a principal openness and excess of meaning often discourages

authoritative interpretations and mystifies the meaning dimension of a given phenomenon (see 2001: 3).

While I do not intend to pursue the question of how problematic Barthes's 'third term' is any further, Hausken's radical questioning of Barthes's concept⁷ helps, pointing to some of the aspects in Sobchack's article that have remained underdeveloped. Since, for all the emphatic signifi-ance (Barthes) which Sobchack invests into the bodily roots of knowledge, its definitive socio-cultural significance remains open.

This can best be demonstrated in the passages in which Sobchack turns back to the movie *The Piano*, with which she started her assessment of the field of film scholarship, in order to, as she writes, 'ground my previous commentary "in the flesh". In my flesh, in fact – and its meaningful responsiveness to *The Piano*' (2004c: 61). 'In particular', Sobchack specifies, 'I want to examine my sensual and sense-making experience of *The Piano*'s inaugural two shots' (2004c: 62) – shots, that is, which confront the viewer with a particularly disorienting viewing situation by presenting her/him with a visually and figuratively "unidentifiable" image' (62). The camera moves from right to left and back to right along red-orange glowing bars, becoming darker at their centers, themselves slightly moving, swaying, with glaring whites flickering where the bars momentarily give way to a streaked, green texture.



Fig. 1: (Still from the inaugural shot of *The Piano* (1993). J. Campion [director])

The experience of perceiving this shot (Fig. 1) Sobchack renders as follows:

From the first (although I didn't 'know' it until the second [shot; S. K.]), my fingers comprehended that image, grasped it with a nearly imperceptible tingle of attention and anticipation and, off-screen, "felt themselves" as a potentiality in the subjective situation figured on-screen. ... I re-cognized my carnal comprehension into the conscious thought: "Ah, those are fingers I am looking at" (2004c: 63).

It is important to keep in mind here that Sobchack obviously chose these introductory shots of *The Piano* exactly because they seemed to offer to her the possibility of demonstrating the movement from the pre-reflective embodied sensuality to the conscious cognitive insight, without running the risk of this demonstration being complicated by wider contexts of meaning. However, while this narrow focus indeed serves to highlight the automaticity in her mimetic response, it, at the same time, drastically limits her examination of the 'sensual and sense-making experience' (2004c: 62, author's emphasis). Indeed, when she writes that, '[h]owever intellectually problematic in terms of its sexual and colonial politics, *Campion's* film moved me deeply and touched me throughout' (2004c: 61), this can well be seen as the fending off of dimensions of socio-cultural relevance. Such resistance is surprising; after all, the plea for the interdependency of sense and sensuality is one of the red threads running through Sobchack's essay. In light of this plea, identifying the dimensions of 'sexual and colonial politics' as merely 'intellectually problematic' (author's emphasis) seems to be counterproductive.

Rather, in closely following Sobchack's notion of the chiasmatic 'third term', I would like to claim that it is within her corporeal experience of 'Ah, those are fingers I am looking at' itself, that the dimensions of sexual and colonial politics might be retrieved. If it is true that all meaning is grounded in and borne out of bodily experience, also the above mentioned dimensions of postcolonial, sexual (sic!) politics have to be registered as woven into the fabric of our concrete existence.

Unfortunately, Sobchack does not return to this central point of her argument. Even when she turns to the concept of catachresis, which she presents as a most adequate linguistic mode for capturing and communicating the sense of the embodied film experience – '[I]n the act of "making sense" of the movies, catachresis is to language as the chiasmus is to the lived body', she writes – she refrains from demonstrating how this mode of embodied rhetoric facilitates the approach of the 'semiological and historical' (2004b:139) from out of the sensuous.

Lorenzer through Sobchack – Sobchack through Lorenzer

It was at this point of my initial reading of Sobchack's article that I found myself 'fired up' enough to venture into text production myself and draw on a method that, by similar means, would help push Sobchack's article beyond the overly cautious limits of interpretation that its author had set.

Alfred Lorenzer's approach of depth-hermeneutic cultural analysis, which draws upon psychoanalysis, historical materialism and critical theory, as well as basic concepts in symbol theory, has traditionally been used within pedagogy (e.g. Klein, 2008; 2011) and social field work (see Leithäuser and Volmerg, 1988; 1998). Recently, there have been remarkably fertile attempts to apply the depth-hermeneutic method to the psychosocial study of media communication (Prokop, 2006; 2009), and the present paper understands itself as a continuation of these attempts.

Interestingly, Lorenzer's approach refers to many of the same – or at least very similar – concepts as does Sobchack's outline of embodied film studies. Like Sobchack, Lorenzer insists on the centrality of embodiment – 'of sensual and affective experience – to human life' (Bereswill et al., 2010: 234). And like the former, the latter's approach can be seen as an attempt to counter the Cartesian dualism of body and mind, subject and object, something which becomes evident when Lorenzer in the central exposition of his methodology, 'Tiefenhermeneutische Kulturanalyse' from 1986, argues against theoretical approaches to cultural analysis that seek to separate 'physiological functions' from 'psychological content' (Lorenzer, 1986: 41). In fact, Thomas Fuchs's critique of Freud, specifically, that Freud conceived of the drives not as 'phenomena of the lived body, but objective-somatic quantities' (2012: 71), is anticipated by Lorenzer when he writes (also as a critique of Freud) that 'the drive is not external to the content of experience' (1981: 21; quoted in Bereswill et al., 2010: 230). Furthermore, when Lorenzer holds that the sensual and affective experience 'constitutes an autonomous register of being' (quoted in Bereswill et al., 2010: 230), namely 'the scenic', the parallels with Sobchack's thought reach much further than the theatrical metaphor, since this register shows itself in agreement with the latter's playful and punning definition of 'the scene', in which she includes her own embodied, 'prereflective but reflexive comprehension of the seen' (2004c: 63).

As expressed in Sobchack's notion of a 'carnal "third term"', this constellation of a mental state of perception that is 'prereflective but reflexive' is fundamental to her theoretical construction. In Merleau-Pontian fashion, she refers to '(pre)logical premises' (2004c: 72), to 'a body that makes meaning before it makes conscious, reflective thought' (2004c: 59), or to experience 'without a thought' (2004c: 65) etc., and these paraphrases all stress the spontaneous, affective nature of the embodied reactions and introduce a resource of knowledge which remains principally anterior to and, to a degree, beyond consciousness – even though it being one of the articulate objectives of Sobchack's text to show how this beyond can be captured and contained in the symbolic nevertheless.

Yet Sobchack abstains from using the term 'unconscious' with its psychoanalytic implications. After all, according to her understanding, it has been the linguistic psychoanalytic (i.e. Lacanian) tradition of film studies that has led to the unsatisfactory state of criticism without affective involvement in the first place. Her exemplary take on the two opening shots of the film *The Piano* demonstrate this clearly. As shown above, she takes utmost care not to attach any symbolic meaning to her physical reaction and even criticizes Carol Jacobs, whose text on the film she confers, for having derived 'her bodily reference' – an exuberant image of 'a failed and developed color negative of translucent vessels of blood' – 'less from a reflection on tactile foresight than [...] from visual hindsight' (2004c: 64) – something which, according to Sobchack, amounts to an intellectualization.

Lorenzer, by contrast, being a psychoanalyst by profession, has no such qualms. He presents a genetic model of human experience that does not only ally the scenic to the unconscious, but goes back to the earliest beginnings of childhood. In his model, 'the scene' is the primordial unit of an infant's experience. The newborn, Lorenzer holds, experiences its life-world (Husserl) in 'multiple sensory registers, affective tones, bodily responses' that, initially, are combined 'with little distinction' (Bereswill et al., 2010: 225). Only gradually does an awareness of individual objects, of time, and bodily borders emerge from – as well as on – the scene of the infant's perception. Nevertheless, Lorenzer emphasizes that the scenic remains the basic form of human experience.

Arguably, this developmental perspective seems to be far removed from Sobchack's concerns. However, it is this same state of little differentiated sensual experience on part of the neonate – this state of an unstable, fluid understanding of 'self and other, inside and outside' (Bereswill et al., 2010: 226) – that Sobchack claims for the experience of watching a movie when she, in quoting Steven Shaviro, states: 'There is no structuring lack, no

primordial division, but a *continuity between the physiological and affective responses of my own body and the appearances and disappearances, the mutations and perdurances, of the bodies and images on screen*' (2004c: 61, author's emphasis). In this respect, it is of interest that also Jagna Brudzinska, in her definition of the unconscious for a genetic phenomenology, chooses formulations that are very similar to Sobchack's. She writes:

The Freudian theory of unconsciousness is here interpreted as an area of subjective genesis that is given as a consciousness of the imaginary ... It appears as a *particular kind of phenomenon (emotive, phantasmatic, kinaesthetic) and not as a mere lack of experience*. (2012: 23, author's emphasis)

Therefore, while Sobchack might keep a terminological distance to the notion of the unconscious, it can be argued that her conceptual logic contains such a notion nevertheless.

'Specific Interaction Forms' and 'Styles of existence'

And the parallels continue. Indeed, by following the above-quoted passage in Shaviro's text a little further, Sobchack even delivers the next logical building block of the depth-hermeneutic approach, namely that of 'interaction':

The important distinction is not the hierarchical, binary one between bodies and images, or between the real and its representations. It is rather a question of *discerning multiple and continually varying interactions among what can be defined indifferently as bodies and as images*: degrees of stillness and motion, of action and passion, of clutter and emptiness, of light and lack. (2004c: 61, author's emphasis)

In accordance with the Shaviro quotation, Lorenzer, in building and expanding on his concept of the scenic, saw interaction – i.e. the concrete acts and practices of relating to and thereby constituting 'the scenic' (and as regards the fundamental mother/caregiver-child situation: the processes of negotiation and arrangement of their interplay) – as the basic structuring device of experience. According to this view, however, interaction is not only 'continually varying', as stated by Shaviro, but also routinized and thereby 'patterned' over time, as Bereswill et al. explain:

An important and distinctive part of Lorenzer's argument ... concerns the ways in which much early scenic experience ... is highly patterned. For example, the practices of care and nurture that punctuate a baby's life ... involve interactions that are repeated and, to some extent, routinised. ... These routinised interactions [...] constitute what Lorenzer referred to as "specific interaction-forms". (2010: 226)

Again it is interesting to consult Thomas Fuchs and his conception of a horizontal, embodied unconscious. When he writes in his article 'Body Memory and the Unconscious' (2012) that body memory 'is what perseveres, not in the form of an explicit memory, but as a "style of existence" (Merleau-Ponty)' (Fuchs 2012: 69), this extension of Merleau-Ponty's theory comes again very close to Lorenzer's conception of 'specific interaction forms' (Lorenzer 1986: 44).

Lorenzer, in turn, describes the patterning of interaction into 'interaction forms', which ultimately amount to a certain 'style of existence', by means of his notion of the engram, with which he extends Freud's psycho-physiological concept of 'memory trace'. Freud used this latter term 'throughout his work to denote the way in which events are inscribed upon the memory' (Laplanche & Pontalis, 1973: 274). In keeping with the materialist tradition, Lorenzer's term 'engram' puts particular emphasis on the procedural as well as physiological character of the inscription of memory. It implies that, from the very first in human development, social content, available in 'the scenic', i.e. the multi-sensory experience of the life-world, inscribes itself into the 'brain's physiologically determinable structures of the nervous system' (Lorenzer, 1986: 42). This again means that the physiological structure of every concrete human being's perception is molded by the scenic, situational experience of social interaction that is leaving its traces on the individual body. And while every human body has an 'individual profile', the way in which the specific experience leaves its emgrammatical traces, as well as the way in which these new experiences are met by the existing structure, which in turn is always already molded by prior experience, makes for a psycho-physiological set-up in which 'the body and the social are not easily separable', and indeed: in which 'the social is always present within it' (Bereswill, 2010: 227).

‘Taking up attitudes’

To my mind, it is only against the background of such a developmental model – a model which makes space for a socio-cultural dimension in the scenic unity of subject and object – that Sobchack’s insistence, again by way of quoting Shaviro, of the ‘flesh’ being ‘intrinsic to the cinematic apparatus’ and her denial of an opposition between ‘the image’ and ‘the body’ (2004c: 61) can be made relevant to film studies. Turning back to Sobchack’s exemplary interpretation of *The Piano*, one can say that, from a Lorenzerian perspective, the very dimensions of the postcolonial and/or of sexual politics, which Sobchack refrains from including into the rendering of her viewing experience, might already be contained in her feeling of ‘tactile foresight’, in the ‘specific interaction form’ that her fingers found to be familiar.

Interestingly, when Fuchs quotes from Merleau-Ponty that ‘I do not need to look for the others elsewhere, I find them within my experience’ (1974: 166, quoted in Fuchs, 2012: 74), it becomes clear that such a socio-genetic dimension of socio-cultural width is conceivable also within existential phenomenology, even if it might only be indirectly observable through the registering of ‘our permanent means of “taking up attitudes”’ (Merleau-Ponty, 1962: 181, quoted in Fuchs, 2012: 73). And moreover, in overlooking Sobchack’s work, one finds that such an evolutionary perspective is not generally missing here either. Quite to the contrary, she refers to it in central parts of her writing. In an important paragraph in *The Address of the Eye*, for example, she writes that ‘[i]n a full description of vision in the film experience, as elsewhere, the introceptive [sic] and invisible aspects of subjective embodiment cannot be overlooked – even if they cannot objectively be seen.’ And when she goes on stating that, ‘[p]aradoxically, it is the film’s own expression of introceptive perception and expression and their commutation that brings these subjective and invisible aspects of embodied existence to the only objective visibility they have’ (1991: 298), I take this to mean that the film brings out, again in Sobchack’s words, the ‘general and conventional’, i.e. intersubjectively negotiated aspects that are part of each ‘idiosyncratically’ lived ‘historical and cultural existence’ (2004a: 5). According to this claim, then, what is ultimately at stake in Sobchack’s experiential analysis is to tickle out these wider ‘historical and cultural’ dimensions of meaning that the viewer is opened up to by the primarily affective, scenic experience.

Challenging hierarchies and petrified circumstances

However, since, as pointed out above, Sobchack leaves aside all social concerns that might have gone into her experience, the little that one finds by way of the possibilities of the bodily response to demonstrate its social, semiotic relevance are notions, atomized and strewn across her text, such as ‘unruly’, ‘subversive’ or indeed ‘carnal’ (2004c: 59, 67, 57) which are to disrupt the established – the dualistic – mode of academic discourse. The closest Sobchack comes to a mission statement in this respect is when she, in referring to ‘the power of culture’ to regulate the boundaries and hierarchies between the ‘equally available senses’, points to the possibility ‘to challenge those boundaries and transform those hierarchies’ (2004c: 69).

Again, I think, this can be given a clearer profile when confronted with what Alfred Lorenzer conceived as the telos of the depth-hermeneutic method. In following the Frankfurt School theorist Ernst Bloch, he writes of a ‘utopian potential, which to uncover is the task of a hermeneutic that takes a critical stand against the ‘petrified circumstances’ (1986: 28). And while this formulation appears once more to be a far cry from Sobchack’s phenomenological concerns, it is the central point of Lorenzer’s approach that this ‘utopian potential’ resides in concrete life forms based on specific patterns of interaction – in ‘practice figures ... for which access to general consciousness was denied’ (1986: 28). Especially with regard to their utopian aura, Lorenzer’s conception of these life forms might be approximated to Barthes’s notion of an ‘obtuse’, ‘third meaning’ which Sobchack marks out as important for her embodied approach to film.

Sense and representation

Thus the question that both approaches have to face is how – how to ‘challenge those boundaries’ and bring out the ‘obtuse meaning’ with its ‘utopian potential’ in the ‘practice figures’ that have been denied ‘equal availability’ in the ‘perceptual’ ‘hierarchies’ that be. Bringing out this potential means articulating and representing the scenic experience by symbolic means. How else would Sobchack’s approach to movies, from and through the flesh, find its justification if it did not cater for the possibility of making the ‘matter that means’ bear on the ‘meaning that matters’ (2000)? That is, how else would film scholarship on the whole be able to profit from her approach if it did not find a way back from the ‘dynamic arrangement’ (2000)⁸ between embodied subject and cinematic object to a

meaningful interpretation of this arrangement? And how else would one be able to challenge the set boundaries and hierarchies of the sensual if not through a mode of symbolization to which others can relate – ideally again in a response leading from their own embodied reactions to a more reflected understanding of the socio-cultural conditions underlying and being reproduced by them?

Apparently, this is what Sobchack sets out to tackle when, in the final chapter of her essay, she announces to enter into a detailed analysis of the relation between ‘sense and representation’. ‘That is’, she writes,

we need to return to the representational side of the irreducible correlation of body and representation that constitutes “sense” to further understand how it is that language and body pervade and in-form each other and how language and representation in the film experience share with the body a reversible and reflexive intentional structure. (2000)

Yet, already the last part of this passage, ‘and how language...’ indicates a somewhat swerving interest on Sobchack’s part. Instead of returning here to the problem that she exposed at the beginning of her article and demonstrating how her carnal approach can improve on the failures of an overly intellectualized film scholarship by means of, in her words, ‘the sensual language most people [...] use to describe their cinematic experience’ (2004c: 79), she embarks on a search of a concrete foundation for her ‘carnal “third term”’, for an embodied link, so to speak, between the cinematic experience and its symbolic rendering. In other words, Sobchack searches for a mode of articulation that is true to the obtuseness of the signified, and while she finds it in the concept of catachresis (see above), she still refrains from putting this finding to practical use.

Again, Lorenzer’s model, which once more shows considerable parallels, offers solutions that can be applied in order to give Sobchack’s approach a gentle push towards social, discursive relevance. Also Lorenzer has to answer the question of how representation enters his conception of scenically structured, engrammatical and interactional experience. By contrast, however, Lorenzer does not look for a stable link between the individual body’s interaction with its surrounding and the symbolic means by which to represent this interaction. Instead, he makes the principle unstableness of this connection the centre of his methodological conception. As Bereswill et al. write:

With the child's entry into language, he or she is said to learn how to link the scenic qualities associated with specific interaction-forms to sound-symbols. For example, a mother cuddling her small child may say the word 'Mum', thereby linking an abstract sound-symbol to the embodied and affective qualities of an existing specific interaction-form (being cuddled). (2010: 228)

Rather than painstakingly forging a connection between embodiment and representation through a specifically grounded, physically oriented register of speech, as Sobchack attempts, Lorenzer saw this connection as emerging from the socializing practices themselves. He argues that, 'through repetition, the sound-symbol will come to "contain" [the] scenic qualities' (2010: 229) – qualities that the child has learned to associate with the interaction. Therefore, according to Lorenzer, the grounding of the symbol in embodied practice, which Sobchack seeks to expose with her introduction of catachresis, can – in principle – be retrieved for all symbolism. With the act of naming the specific interaction, the given symbol itself has become part of that same interaction form which it has come to signify; symbol and interaction-form thus team up to build a 'symbolic interaction form'.

However, particular emphasis has to be put on my above parenthesis, in principle, since the connection forged between socialization practices and symbols can be severed again, or indeed, if things go wrong from the start, 'it can fail to ever occur'. 'The consequence of such phenomena', explain Bereswill et al., 'is that language is either stripped of its scenic content or is pressed on and interrupted by something that remains "outside" or in excess of it' (2010: 230).

Here, then, seems to be a viable link between Lorenzer's concept of 'symbolic interaction forms' and Sobchack's take on Roland Barthes's 'third term'. Yet, while Lorenzer indeed caters for the existence of an 'autonomous level of meaning' – a level which is latent, 'in some sense, beyond language' but 'nevertheless present within it and ... consequential in its own right' (Bereswill et al., 2010: 224) – this meaning's excessiveness and obtuseness becomes an issue only in those cases in which it points to a conflict in 'the relation between the individual figures of experience and the cultural discursive precepts' (Klein, 2010: 2, author's translation). Very much unlike Barthes, then, who kept his notion of 'obtuseness' principally open – as well as problematically vague – Lorenzer explicitly formulated the conditions under which the scenic is sufficiently contained by the symbolic:

[W]hen a sound-complex has obtained its place in the language-sign-context, and when the syntactic element of language has been added to its pragmatic and semantic substance [Wesen], the scenic praxis-figure has obtained its equivalent speech-formation. (Lorenzer, 1986: 52)

In turn, the character and potency of this kind of language, in which the scenic is sufficiently present, is described in Bereswill et al.:

From a subjective point of view, it suggests a state of mind in which, infused with scenic experience, the symbol is more alive to us, lending our encounters with other people and objects a greater affective richness and depth, allowing us to respond to them in a more creative and open manner, and enabling unconscious life to unfold and be metabolized. By the same token, the symbol itself is energised. Indeed, Lorenzer writes that, in such moments, ‘practice is – via language – fully at our disposal’ (1986: 50). In other words, the moments in which we are most able to inhabit symbolic interaction-forms are ones in which we are also most able to act in and on the world: to use language and the social practices in which it is embedded in a creative and effective manner and thereby to effect change. (2010: 231)

Now, even if Sobchack does not make the critical goals of her argument all too clear, I find it very probable that it is such a state of inhabitation,⁹ a state which ultimately carries utopian potential, that she aims for film scholarship to reach when she writes that ‘the film experience – on both sides of the screen – mobilizes, confuses, reflectively differentiates, yet experientially unites lived bodies and language’ (2004c: 84).

‘Wordplay’ and ‘Language Game’

Yet, as said, Lorenzer does not offer a standard linguistic recipe for energizing the affective charge of language. Rather, he focuses on the opposite cases, i.e. those in which the link between ‘sense and representation’ is non-existent or has been severed and where the hunch of something unarticulated or ‘obtuse’ points to a social conflict.¹⁰ ‘The interaction-engram which has been severed from its word turns into an unconscious interaction-form again. The

word itself loses the reference to sensual practice, it becomes emotionless, purely sign-like', Lorenzer explains the process of 'language destruction' (1986:53, author's translation).

According to him, this process sets in whenever specific interaction-forms collide 'with the collective norms and values' and 'can therefore be tolerated neither as patterns of thought nor as blueprints for action' (1986: 53, author's translation). And while such an intolerable interaction form, by means of its exclusion from the symbolic, becomes repressed and therewith barred from consciousness, the symbolic residue, or as Lorenzer puts it, 'the desymbolized speech-signs' remain in use, where they 'prove to be particularly prone to manipulation, because they are liberated from their connections to the blueprints for practice; they are the calculations of thinking and cold-rationalistic action that have no "original" quality of experience' (1986: 53, author's translation) – an assessment which might well be taken to bring Sobchack's suspicion against mainstream film scholarship to a head.

Summing up, what one finds in Lorenzer's depth-hermeneutic vision is thus a net of symbolizations that is essentially porous and whose symbolic gaps, occurring in the concrete uses, point to the injuries which collective norms and values have caused its users. And whereas Sobchack, in a passage that can be termed utopian in its own right, chooses the term 'wordplay' to point to 'the enormous capacity of language to say what we mean but also to reveal the very structure of our experience' (2004c: 74), Lorenzer, in modifying Wittgenstein's concept, uses the term 'language game' in order to point not so much to the revealing, but rather to the veiling functions of the symbolic, or put differently: he uses the term to point to the ways in which 'the very structure of our experience' can be stripped of or barred from the symbolic (compare Bereswill et al., 2010: 230).

In this case, then, Lorenzer and Sobchack seem to stand at opposite ends of the same idea. However, I find that it is exactly because of Lorenzer's focus on the problematic aspects of what concrete language use can or cannot be made to incorporate that his concept of 'language destruction' captures Sobchack's overall approach rather well. After all, this latter approach started out as first and foremost a critique of mainstream film scholarship – specifically, that this scholarship 'has located the sensuous' either 'on the screen [...] or off the screen' (2004c: 59–60), but not in the relation between on and off, i.e. the film and the viewer. And pushing things a bit further still, one could take Sobchack's observation that 'most film theorists still seem either embarrassed or bemused by bodies' (2004c: 56) as a general observation of film's capacity to confront its viewers with interaction forms that indeed collide with collective norms and values.

Scenically Understanding what Sobchack's fingers knew

It is at this point of my cross-reading of the two approaches that I can finally progress from the theoretical foundations to the methodical part proper. And, little surprisingly, in Lorenzer's method of 'scenic understanding' one finds further parallels to what Sobchack describes, or sometimes simply practices, in her text.

While Lorenzer thus differentiates between a manifest and a latent layer of meaning, Sobchack differentiates between what she calls 'the visible' and 'the invisible', or in more personifying terms, the 'conscious' and the 'carnal being' (2004b: 139). Both approaches set out to unfold the latent within the manifest, the invisible in the visible, and the carnal within the conscious in order to unfold the life practices and sensibilities that are no longer or not yet available to consciousness.

As with Sobchack, who describes how her phenomenological inquiry 'begins its description with an experience as it seems directly given' in order to then "'unpack" and make explicit the objective and subjective aspects and conditions that structure and qualify that experience' (2004a: 5), Lorenzer presents his approach in a tripartite of analytical steps, which, read in sequence, also make their way from the seemingly given to the relational. Lorenzer distinguishes between the modes of logical, psychological, and scenic understanding (1973: 138ff). The first comprises a simple, factual description of the manifest layer of the communication. The second is interested in how this manifest layer is presented and performed, i.e. meta-communicative hints: intonation, facial expression, gestures, speed of delivery – i.e. attributes that immediately refer to social interaction but which to my mind could be extended to media-aesthetic criteria, such as camera angles, specific cutting styles, special effects etc. But while both of these modes of understanding are available to conscious thought, it is the mode of scenic understanding that transcends the borders of manifestly expressed meaning. 'The approximation of latent, unconscious content of meaning is achieved through the reflection of one's own scenic participation in the latently virulent life practices that are pressed on in the language game', writes Regina Klein about the application of the depth-hermeneutic method (Klein, 2010: 7).

The first step in entering into such reflection is to detect one's own stumbling blocks in the reception situation. As explained above, the central idea of Lorenzer's method is to apply 'scenic understanding' to instances of communication where such understanding can be

found to be disrupted, i.e. where the affective, scenic content inherent in the specific interaction forms is split off from their symbolic means of representation, repressed and rendered unconscious. Lorenzer holds that such instances make themselves felt on part of the audience as irritations in the reception situation; the repressed scenic content presses on and pushes to the surface of the manifest articulations in the shape of ‘gaps, inconsistencies, unusual or disjointed language, narrative leaps and abrupt changes of subject [... or], remarks whose emotional tone or resonance feels in some way distinctive’ (Bereswill et al., 2010: 239).

It must have been such a moment of irritation that supplied Vivian Sobchack with the impulse to put together her essay – an essay which begins with her stating: ‘Nearly every time I read a movie review ... I am struck once again by the gap that exists between our actual experience of the cinema and the theory that we academic film scholars write to explain it’ (2004c: 53). Clearly, Sobchack practices here what Lorenzer preaches, taking her cue from an affective reaction to something emerging from the scene that her relation with the pertaining literature brought forth. In so doing, she can be seen to apply here one of the main tools of ‘scenic understanding’, specifically, the observation of processes of transference and countertransference in the reception situation.

In view of this finding, Lorenzer would most likely have suggested to Sobchack to stay with this initial irritation and focus on the particular passages in the texts that prompted it. Moreover, Lorenzer would have surely taken issue with Sobchack’s equation of ‘a movie review’ with ‘our actual experience’ as quite premature. He recommends that, instead of offering fast and one-sided judgments, we should ‘let the data speak to us’ (Bereswill et al., 2010: 223), thus approximating the process to what in clinical psychoanalysis is known as ‘evenly suspended attention’ (see Laplanche and Pontalis, 1973: 43). The analyst listens to the patient’s free associations, not with a preformed set of ideas or a fixed stock of theoretical concepts at the ready to be pulled over the patient’s vagaries, but rather in a suspended state of attunement to the emergence of her/his own pre-reflective responses.

However, since it is first and foremost the film and its scenically embodying effect on the viewer that Sobchack is interested in, it is justifiable to follow her once more into her analysis of *The Piano*. Here one can see how, in reflecting upon her own responses to the opening scenes, she enters into a dialogue with the other interpretations of the same scenes. ‘Each reader/interpreter can interact with the text in equidistant immediacy’, which allows us to extend ‘the circle of readers/interpreters at will’, writes Lorenzer accordingly (1986: 85).

And Sobchack, in disqualifying approaches she finds overly theoretical as well as calling to order those that tend to gloss over the primary sensual charge with intellectualizations, creates a situation which can indeed be compared to the work of interpretation groups in ‘scenic understanding’.

The interpretation group, the second central tool of ‘scenic understanding’, is the result of Lorenzer’s transfer of a means of psychoanalytic supervision, namely the discussion circle, into cultural analysis. In the interpretation group, the results of the various ‘symptomatic readings’ of its members – i.e. subjective associations, moments of irritation and other affective reactions are presented and discussed as to their validity and meaning in relation to the discussed material.

In this respect, Sobchack can be seen in the role of the moderator as Lorenzer describes it (1986: 87), who keeps overview of the lines of manifest meaning as well as of the emerging latent sense-correlations. This, however, only to a certain degree, since, whereas the interpretations of a given material are to be the direct, unpolished outcomes of the free associations of its members, the interpretations offered in the texts that Sobchack reviews, as well as the one she herself offers, can to a certain degree be expected to be defended (Hollway and Jefferson, 2013), i.e. in this case: cleaned of unscholarly, naïve, overly personal or unconsciously problematic associations, as well as implicitly carrying a professional agenda. The curious dearth of meaning in Sobchack’s interpretation might just indicate such a defence.¹¹ Additionally, the spatial-temporary absence of the other interpreters renders unavailable another important tool, namely, the observation of the dynamics within the group itself. Depth hermeneutic methodology holds that also the affects that arise within the group during interpretations – e.g., frustrations, lack of motivation, laughter, perplexity, the isolation of a member, or conflicts between two or more members whose interpretations appear to be irreconcilably opposed to each other – can all be taken to say something about the scenic aspects of the material at hand (see, for example, Bereswill, 2010). This assumption is the logical consequence of conceiving of social cohesion and/or conflict as being subjectively embodied: i.e. that it is transported through affective responses and, therefore, not merely retrievable in the affective but rather through the affective.

In Sobchack’s words, then, it is the sensing of ‘my own sensuality’ (2004c: 77) that builds the foundation and departing points on which the depth-hermeneutic inquiry is based. However, as stated above, this inquiry does not consist of an additive process in which – in Lorenzer’s words – ‘cultural-scientific results are simply added to a psychoanalysis that is

going on separately'; much rather the 'scenic presumptions have to be concretized in direction of this panorama' – i.e. in direction of their social and cultural content. 'In short, the crossing of the two epistemological perspectives has to be established in the analysis itself (Lorenzer, 1986: 70).

In this fashion, then, and in lacking an interpretation group, in which intersubjective dimensions could be sounded out, what I can offer as a conclusion is my own affectively rooted reflection and recognition of the inaugural shots of *The Piano*. As stated by Sobchack (see above), its first frame offers extremely little by way of manifest meaning – no clear vision, no figuration, voice, or text – although the music unfurls a psychological dimension – strings wallowing dramatically in a minor key. What is given to vision is the movement of, in Carol Jacobs's words, 'long, uneven shafts' in front of an 'unrecognizable blur' (quoted in Sobchack, 2004c: 62) creating fluctuations between fragments of flickering green and a fleshy red-orange glow. Indeed, Sobchack could hardly have found a better example than this scene to demonstrate the power of cinema to appeal to its viewers' embodied state of being, since it seems to be literally the scenic mode of experience itself that is being shown in the shot – in Sobchack's words, a 'prepersonal' state that allows for a merely "ambient" and carnal identification with material subjectivity' (2004c: 65).

In the attempt to orient myself within this enfolding wow and flutter, I found myself able to reaffirm Sobchack's 'tactile foresight' into the intuitive 'fingeriness' of the film's first frame, with the green-flickering fragments seemingly constituting an undefined outside and the red-orange glow creating an inside of where the fingers are closed just about enough to allow light, but not vision through. Apparently, this notion of a bodily inside is also what most affected Carol Jacobs and prompted her to refer to 'vessels of blood', although I here agree again with Sobchack that Jacobs's further associations of a 'failed and developed color negative' (quoted in Sobchack, 2004c: 62) seem to be misleading embellishments conceived in hindsight.

However, the point that I am driving at is that, at the very basic, prereflective stage of my experience, Sobchack's act of isolating the recognition of fingers from the rest of the scene, from what these fingers do and create, seems artificial. Rather I experienced the whole 'dynamic arrangement' (Sobchack, 2000) of fingers moving and playing with light and vision as one affectively meaningful gestalt. In other words, the peculiar style of the fingers' movement and this movement's luminous effects created the overarching impression of a vague, yet powerful intentionality that I felt to be implicated by.

What I am thus claiming to be scenically possible to experience in the inaugural shot is indeed the regressively childlike, sensory-motor act of shielding one's eyes with one's fingers so as to playfully change between the glow of sunlight through the fingers and shimmers of what might become visible behind them. Therefore, beyond Sobchack's experience of a 'prepersonal', purely 'material subjectivity', my own pre-reflective response challenged me on a personal level. Surrendering to the scene, I felt more played with than playing, being made to endure the interchanging sensations of, on the one hand, a primary – call it uterine [i.e. liquid, mellifluous and muted] – warmth and ease, and, on the other, an indefinable unease and anxiousness [cold and exposed] but also impatient curiosity of what might lie behind it.

Now, while it would explode the scope of this paper to deliver a fully developed analysis of the semiotic dimension of this response, I can say that, at one end of the continuum of the scenic meaning, this ambivalent and ambiguous, defensively passive, yet playfully curious, and in many ways childishly regressive act, which the film took me to experience, forms the core of a relational style that in more than one way reverberates in my social life. At the other end, and of much greater relevance to the analysis at hand, this relational style is subsequently shown by the film to be closely connected to the protagonist, Ada, and her predicament as a young woman in mid-19th century colonial Britain – a predicament she not only surrenders, but also reacts to (by way of symptom formation: her cultivated muteness), and, in a limited way, even acts up against. The second scene cuts from the protagonist's own (non)view to a view of the protagonist, who is shown to withdraw her hands, choosing the outside, confronting the world.

Ending my interpretation provisionally here, it remains to be emphasized once more that this interpretation would be just one in a whole spectrum of affections and irritations brought into dialogue and 'diacritique' with one another. Ideally, in thus approaching the same material again and again, doing one hermeneutic circle after another, a meaning arises that is experienced by all participants as so rich in its explicatory scope and, most importantly, as so engaging, elating and liberating within the participants' own existence that it can truly be called utopian. Here again, I find that, in the case of the first scene of *The Piano*, what reverberates within me is the protagonist's will to emancipation. For, in the following scene, when Ada withdraws her hands, facing the world, this happens, in Sobchack's words, while my fingers still "[feel] themselves" as a potentiality in the subjective and fleshy situation figured on-screen' (Sobchack, 2004c: 63).

Conclusion

With the help of Alfred Lorenzer's depth-hermeneutic theory and method I have developed and unfolded in this essay a cultural political dimension lying dormant in Vivian Sobchack's key methodical article 'What my fingers knew' (2004c). This dimension is strangely omnipresent in the article – it is announced and heralded throughout in phrases such as the inversion of 'the matter that means / the meaning that matters' (2004c: 73–74) – yet, it is not consequently implemented and at times seems to be fended off or held back. Therefore, demonstrating how Sobchack's example of the two inaugural scenes of *The Piano* could be further unfolded in a scenic analysis aimed at honoring her claim that an approach to cinema from one's own affective interaction with film yields richer interpretations and an enlivened, existentially engaging film scholarship.

Furthermore, by systematically comparing Sobchack's existential phenomenological approach with depth hermeneutics, I have been able to point to a substantial number of concepts that both approaches hold in common; the most central of these are: the scene as an experiential space enveloping and containing both subject and object as dialectically related; the notions of interaction and specific interaction form; embodiment and the social character of the body; the entanglement with and growth of language out of scenic interaction; the unconscious, embodied, and affective as the basis for thinking, sense making, and thus interpreting film and media communication.

Finally, Lorenzer's materialist, Frankfurt School stance helps clarify some of the critical social positions that can be aligned with Sobchack's approach but which the latter tried to steer clear from, most eminently, the utopian character of scenic experience. In this respect, Sobchack seems to be caught in a struggle between wanting to retain the vagueness and openness of Barthes's 'third term', which, as she states, 'escapes language and is yet within it' (2004c: 60) and her willingness to render the embodied, carnal state of experience articulate, most clearly stated in her observation of 'the enormous capacity of language to say what we mean but also to reveal the very structure of our experience' (2004c: 74, quoted above). In comparison, Lorenzer is admirably clear and courageous in this point: for him the 'social determination of subjective structure' (Lorenzer, 197: 174), which seems close to the core of Barthes's 'third term', can and must be revealed, i.e. that which 'escapes language' must be captured in and borne by language nevertheless.

Casting a self-critical look over this essay, what has come short is the reverse perspective: i.e.: What lessons are there to be learned from Sobchack's phenomenological approach for the theory and method of scenic understanding / depth-hermeneutics? In this respect, I would say, it is particularly Sobchack's fine-grained observations of the qualities of film/cinema as a medium with which to practice scenic understanding – i.e. the mediating, aesthetic, in Lorenzerian terminology: 'sensual-symbolic', qualities that impact upon and facilitate the countertransferential flow. 'Certainly', Sobchack writes,

the sense I have of sensing at the movies is in some ways reduced in comparison with direct sensual experience—this because of my only partially fulfilled sensual grasp of my cinematic object of desire. But just as certainly, in other ways, the sense I have of sensing when I watch a film is also enhanced in comparison with much direct sensual experience—this because my only partially fulfilled sensual grasp of the original cinematic object is completed not in the realization of that object but through my own body, where my sensual grasp is reflexively doubled since, in this rebound from the screen, I have become not only the toucher but also the touched. (Sobchack, 2004c: 77)

In passages such as the above – in which, by the way, we find expressed the Merleau-Pontian notion of the 'touch that touches' (comp. e.g. Merleau-Ponty, 1964: 162ff) – Sobchack offers highly valuable insights into the allowances and shifting dynamics of applying scenic understanding to film.

Notes

¹ It would be interesting to trace in detail how, as well as in how far, other authors in the field, such as Lesley Stern, Laura U. Marks, Linda Williams, and Steven Shaviro (authors mentioned and quoted from by Sobchack), have dealt with this problem. However, it is Sobchack's authoritative position that, in arguing both, for an embodied, affective mode of film interpretation, as well as against psychoanalytic approaches to such interpretation, creates the peculiar basis for my argument in favour of depth-hermeneutics.

² For an overview see Lohmar (2012a).

³ She writes: '[T]heorists still don't quite know what to do with their unruly responsive flesh and sensorium—particularly insofar as these pose an intolerable question to prevalent linguistic and psychoanalytic understandings of the cinema'. However, as the combination of linguistic and psychoanalytic indicates, Sobchack here refers mainly to Lacanian conceptions

of film, which are quite distinct from the depth-hermeneutic approach, which, as Lorenzer emphasized, explicitly avoids (force) fitting psychoanalytic theoretical tools onto the cultural realm, but rather seeks to reassess the method of psychoanalytic therapeutic practice in order to determine the conditions under which this practice as a whole can be transferred into social sciences (see Lorenzer, 1970/3: 43ff).

⁴ Her choice of films suggests that the conception of her article must date further back than 2004, when it appeared in her collection *Carnal Thoughts*. Online one can find that she presented it for the first time in 2000.

⁵ This is an earlier version of her 2004 article, published with the online cinema studies journal *senses of cinema*, 4 April, 2000. The quoted sentence was taken out of the 2004 print edition. The overall argument, however, is retained in the latter version.

⁶ While Hausken warns against translating all of Barthes 'metaphors [...] into one, for instance "the obtuse"', she holds at the same time that 'it would be ridiculous to neglect the fact that they [...] have something in common' (3).

⁷ Specifically with regard to his final work, *Camera Lucida*, Hausken sees Barthes struggling with the 'punctum', 'which gets gradually more diffuse, until he gives up and changes strategy' (Hausken, 2001: 7). The result of this change, as Hausken observes it, is the birth of a second 'punctum', a remaking of the concept that 'is not easily paralleled with *the third meaning*' – a new conception, Hausken holds, that is more usable and more in line with phenomenological methodology. In concluding, she qualifies her critique and points to her fundamental accordance with Barthes's intellectual project, stating that 'we need alternatives both to the questions posed and the answers given in what Barthes sometimes has called "the civilization of the signified"'. Nevertheless, against the background of Barthes's reworking of the 'punctum', she raises the question if the notion of a third, 'a *supplementary meaning* cannot be avoided in a semiotic perspective' altogether (Hausken, 2001: 8).

⁸ In the 2004 version, Sobchack expands this to the 'dynamic investment, inclination, and arrangement of my material being' (76).

⁹ Sobchack even uses the term in a key passage in her volume's introduction, when she outlines the means and ends of her phenomenological method: '[A]lthough it may begin with a *particular* experience, its aim is to describe and explicate the *general* or *possible* structures and meanings that inform the experience and make it potentially resonant and inhabitable for others.' (5)

¹⁰ However, Regina Klein (2004; 2010; 2011), by unfolding the hermeneutical potential of the concept of 'word image' [Wortbild], which Lorenzer found in Freud's early work, can be said to approximate that which Sobchack attempts with catachresis, when she writes that they 'create a kind of *in-between meaning*, in which the latent meaning is tied to the manifest one in an imaginary, sensual-symbolic and ambiguous allusion' (2011: 8) [German original: 'eine Art *Zwischensinn*, in dem sich der verborgene Sinn mit dem offenliegenden Textsinn zu einer bildhaften, sinnlich-symbolischen und mehrdeutigen Anspielung verknüpft'.]

¹¹ And, for that matter: the richness of mine, too.

References

- Baldwin, T. (2004) Introduction. In: T. Baldwin (ed.), *Maurice Merleau-Ponty: Basic Writings*, London and New York: Routledge.
- Bereswill, M., Morgenroth, C. and Redman, P. (eds.) (2010) Alfred Lorenzer and the depth-hermeneutic method. *Psychoanalysis, Culture & Society*, 15 (3): 221–250.

- Brudcinska, J. (2012) Depth Phenomenology of the Emotive Dynamic and the Psychoanalytic Experience. In: D. Lohmar and J. Brudcinska (eds.) *Founding Psychoanalysis Phenomenologically*. Heidelberg, London and New York: Springer: 23–52.
- Clough, P. T. and Halley, J. (eds.) (2007) *Affective Turn: Theorizing the Social*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Fuchs, T. (2012) Body Memory and the Unconscious. In: D. Lohmar and J. Brudcinska (eds.), *Founding Psychoanalysis Phenomenologically*. Heidelberg, London, New York: Springer: 69–82.
- Hausken, L. (2001) Roland Barthes and the conception of aesthetic experience. Paper presented at the 15th Nordic Conference on Media and Communication Research, Reykjavik, August 11–13, http://www.academia.edu/1167999/Roland_Barthes_and_the_conception_of_aesthetic_experience, accessed January 29 2013).
- Hollway, W. and Jefferson, T. (2013) *Doing Qualitative Research Differently: A Psychosocial Approach*. (second, revised edition). London: Sage.
- Jacobs, C. (1994) Playing Jane Campion's Piano: Politically. *Modern Language Notes* 109 (5): 769–70.
- Klein, R. (2004) Tiefenhermeneutische Zugänge. In: E. Glaser, D. Klika and A. Prengel (eds.) *Gender und Erziehungswissenschaft. Ein Handbuch*, Bad Heilbrunn: Julius Klinkhardt-Verlag.
- Klein, R. (2008) Tiefenhermeneutische Analyse. In: B. Friebertshäuser, A. Langer and A. Prengel (eds.) *Handbuch für Qualitative Forschungsmethoden in der Erziehungswissenschaft*, (second, revised edition), Weinheim/München: Juventa.
- Klein, R. (2010) Tiefenhermeneutische Analyse. In: *Fallarchiv der Uni-Kassel*, http://www.fallarchiv.uni-kassel.de/wp-content/uploads/2010/07/klein_tiefenhermeneutik.pdf, accessed 20 January 2013.
- Klein, R. (2011) Tiefenhermeneutische Fallrekonstruktion. In: R. Rätz-Heinisch and B. Völter (eds.) *Wörterbuch Rekonstruktive soziale Arbeit*. Opladen: Barbara Budrich-Verlag.
- Laplanche, J. and Pontalis, J. B. (1973) *The Language of Psychoanalysis*. London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis.
- Leithäuser, T. and Volmerg, B. (1988) *Psychoanalyse in der Sozialforschung*. Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag.
- Leithäuser, T. and Volmerg, B. (1998) *Anleitung zur empirischen Hermeneutik*. Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp.
- Lohmar, D. (2012) Introduction. In: D. Lohmar and J. Brudcinska (eds.) *Founding Psychoanalysis Phenomenologically*. Heidelberg, London, New York: Springer: pp. ix–xx.
- Lohmar, D. and Brudcinska, J. (eds.) (2012) *Founding Psychoanalysis Phenomenologically: Phenomenological Theory of Subjectivity and the Psychoanalytic Experience*. Heidelberg, London, New York: Springer.
- Lorenzer, A. (1973) *Sprachzerstörung und Rekonstruktion. Vorarbeiten zu einer Metatheorie der Psychoanalyse*. first published 1973, edition used in this text: Frankfurt/M: Suhrkamp 1995.
- Lorenzer, A. (1977) Lacan und/oder Marx. In: A. Lorenzer *Sprachspiel und Interaktionsformen. Vorträge und Aufsätze zu Psychoanalyse, Sprache und Praxis*. Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp: 162–179.

- Lorenzer, A. (1986) Tiefenhermeneutische Kulturanalyse. In: A. Lorenzer (ed.) *Kultur-Analysen: Psychoanalytische Studien zur Kultur*. Frankfurt/M.: Fischer: 11–98.
- Merleau-Ponty, M. (1962) *Phenomenology of perception*. Trans. Colin Smith. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Merleau-Ponty, M. (1968 / 2004) The Intertwining—The Chiasm, In: T. Baldwin (ed.) *Maurice Merleau-Ponty: Basic Writings*. London & New York: Routledge: 2–7.
- Merleau-Ponty, M. (1964) *The Primacy of Perception*. Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press.
- Merleau-Ponty, M. (1974) *Die Abenteuer der Dialektik*. Frankfurt/M: Suhrkamp.
- Morgenroth, C. (2010) The research relationship, enactments and ‘counter-transference’ analysis: On the significance of scenic understanding. *Psychoanalysis, Culture & Society*, 15 (3): 267–279.
- The Piano* (Country, Jane Campion, 1993), format: DVD.
- Prokop, U. (2006) *Doku-Soap, Reality-TV, Affekt-Talkshow, Fantasy-Rollenspiele : neue Sozialisationsagenturen im Jugendalter*. Marburg: Tectum.
- Prokop, U. (2009) *Geiles Leben, falscher Glamour. Beschreibungen, Analysen, Kritiken zu Germany's Next Topmodel; ein Projekt mit Studierenden am Institut für Erziehungswissenschaft der Philipps-Universität Marburg*. Marburg: Tectum.
- Salling-Olesen, H. (ed.) (2012a) *Cultural Analysis and In-depth Hermeneutics—Psychosocietal Analysis of Everyday Life Culture, Interaction, and Learning*. Special issue of *FQS – Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 13 (3), <http://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/issue/view/41>, accessed 29 January, 2013.
- Salling-Olesen, H. (2012b) The Societal Nature of Subjectivity: An Interdisciplinary Methodological Challenge. *FQS – Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 13 (3), <http://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/issue/view/41>, accessed 29 January 2013.
- Shaviro, S. (1993) *The Cinematic Body*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Sobchack, V. (1992) *The Address of the Eye: A Phenomenology of Film Experience*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Sobchack, V. (2000) What my fingers knew – The Cinesthetic Subject, or Vision in the Flesh. *Special Effects/Special Affects: Technologies of the Screen*, <http://sensesofcinema.com/2000/5/fingers/>, accessed 29 January 2013.
- Sobchack, V. (2004a) *Carnal Thoughts – Embodiment and Moving Image Culture*. Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press.
- Sobchack, V. (2004b) The Scene of the Screen: Envisioning Photographic, Cinematic, and Electronic ‘Presence’. In: V. Sobchack *Carnal Thoughts – Embodiment and Moving Image Culture*. Berkeley & Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press: 135–164.
- Sobchack, V. (2004c) What my fingers knew – The Cinesthetic Subject, or Vision in the Flesh. In V. Sobchack *Carnal Thoughts – Embodiment and Moving Image Culture*. Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press: 53–84.
- Williams, L. (1989) *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure, and the Frenzy of the Visible*. Berkeley: University of California Press.