



Cinema's Bodily Illusions: Flying, Floating, and Hallucinating

Scott C. Richmond

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Do contemporary big-budget blockbuster films like *Gravity* move something in us that is fundamentally the same as what avant-garde and experimental films have done for more than a century? In a powerful challenge to mainstream film theory, *Cinema's Bodily Illusions* demonstrates that this is the case.

Scott C. Richmond bridges genres and periods by focusing, most palpably, on cinema's power to evoke illusions: feeling like you're flying through space, experiencing 3D without glasses, or even hallucinating. He argues that cinema is, first and foremost, a technology to modulate perception. He presents a theory of cinema as a *proprioceptive* technology: cinema becomes art by modulating viewers' embodied sense of space. It works primarily not at the level of the intellect but at the level of the body. Richmond develops his theory through examples of direct perceptual illusion in cinema: hallucinatory flicker phenomena in Tony Conrad's *The Flicker*, eerie depth effects in Marcel Duchamp's *Anémic Cinéma*, the illusion of bodily movement through onscreen space in Stanley Kubrick's *2001*, Godfrey Reggio's *Koyaanisqatsi*, and Alfonso Cuarón's *Gravity*. In doing so he combines insights from Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of perception and James J. Gibson's ecological approach to perception. The result is his distinctive ecological phenomenology, which allows us to refocus on the cinema's perceptual, rather than representational, power.

Arguing against modernist habits of mind in film theory and aesthetics, and the attendant proclamations of cinema's death or irrelevance, Richmond demonstrates that cinema's proprioceptive aesthetics make it an urgent site of contemporary inquiry.

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