

**Bettina Papenburg and Marta Zarzycka** are both Assistant Professors at the Graduate Gender Programme in the Department of Media and Culture Studies at Utrecht University, the Netherlands.

'*Carnal Aesthetics* contains a great number of exciting essays by a felicitous mix of established and emerging scholars. It offers a palette of visions and of artworks worth collecting like pearls that, strung together, open up the domain of art to approaches closer to experience than to past conventions.'

**Mieke Bal**, cultural analyst and video artist, University of Amsterdam

'*Carnal Aesthetics* attempts to induce a transformative encounter among critical theory, feminist and sexuality theory, affect theory, and art history. These mainly short, readable pieces survey and induce disturbances in the field through vibrant case study excursions. Read together, they show how open the discussions still are as to how to write the aesthetic, affective event in both a descriptive and a transformative way. It's a document of an exciting, transitional time.'

**Lauren Berlant**, University of Chicago, author of *Cruel Optimism*

'Papenburg and Zarzycka have assembled a stellar group of commentators to demonstrate new feminist paradigms for unpacking aesthetic experiences. Rejecting older linear and binary temporal and spatial models, these authors instead propose that an immersive, affective approach to art and culture can offer new modes of understanding and engaging these social practices. A new view of spectatorship, for instance, might reject the vision-centered distance between the body and the viewed object for what one contributor calls a "parabolic", immersive, embodied, and affective entanglement with art. These essays move us, its editors suggest, from representation to perception, profitably furthering Hal Foster's notion of the "anti-aesthetic". This exciting, important collection offers ethical, politically urgent possibilities for multiple feminist engagements with artistic and cultural practices, suggesting "alternative sensorial modalities" hearing, smell, feeling, and touch through which to reconfigure aesthetic encounters.'

**Jill Dolan**, Princeton University, author of *Utopia in Performance*  
and *The Feminist Spectator as Critic*

'*Carnal Aesthetics* is an important contribution to the interdisciplinary understanding of how art makes us *feel*, through sensory registers including but also beyond pure visibility, and thus potentially sparks political action and ethical ways of being. The book includes inspiring articles by experts in feminist, film, and art history and theory addressing a range of visual practices in their specific structures of viewing and larger social contexts to explore a politics of multi-sensorial interpretation. *Carnal Aesthetics* is a must have for anyone interested in phenomenological issues of identification, visibility, affect, meaning, and value in visual culture, the politics of art, and the ethics of interpretation.'

**Amelia Jones**, McGill University, author of *Seeing Differently:  
A History and Theory of Identification and the Visual Arts*

# Carnal Aesthetics

Transgressive Imagery  
and Feminist Politics

Edited by

**Bettina Papenburg and Marta Zarzycka**

**I.B. TAURIS**  
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# Introduction

*Bettina Papenburg and Marta Zarzycka*

Art's engagement with contemporary wars, geopolitical conflicts, the collapse of nation states, economic inequalities, ecological disasters, and with the consequences of revolutionary changes in communication technologies urges us to re-think the idea of artistic and cultural practices as a sphere separate from ethics and politics. *Carnal Aesthetics* builds on existing multiple discourses between aesthetics and politics within visual culture, gender studies, film and media studies, as well as critical theory. The book contributes to efforts to revise several terrains of inquiry: first, which ethical paradigms determine any encounter between a work of art and its audiences? Second, what affective dynamics emerge in the engagement with images, smells, textures, shapes and sounds? Third, how does the interlacing of sensorial experiencing complicate this engagement? And fourth, what are the very recent strategies of artistic intervention into processes of perception? The aim of this selective mapping of the challenges which aesthetics confront is to point to questions arising at various points of overlap in these diverse discursive fields and to outline new directions for future research on representational strategies and perceptual modalities. Key issues of such interventionist strategies and shifting modalities come into focus through the lens of interdisciplinary and intersectional approaches considering how various categories of difference such as gender, ethnicity, race, sexuality, (dis)ability, geopolitical location and (non)humanity are addressed.<sup>1</sup> Exploring a selection of resonances and fractures arising at these intersections, we hope to offer here a variety of ontological and structural paradigms through which the concept of 'carnal aesthetics' might begin to take on contours.

Unlike other books that focus on aesthetics, affect, sensoriality or feminist interventions alone, this book pays particular attention to the new fields of study opening between these topics. All of the essays assembled here link to diverse

lines of inquiry, stimulating interconnections between different – and distinct – theoretical and methodological traditions. While critically reflecting on feminist scholarship, *Carnal Aesthetics* aims at deepening and broadening discussions on themes that arise at the crossing of questions of gender, the body, trauma and historicity. In so doing, the book hopes to add a much-needed tool of gender analysis to scholarship in cultural theory.

Moreover, this book sheds light on recent developments in the art world and puts forward a critical extension of these by way of an examination of various art forms. While all of the contributions remain critical towards the mechanisms and processes of cultural productions, they are simultaneously appreciative of the feminist questioning of frameworks and contexts that these have traditionally been placed in. Aesthetics as it is outlined in this book becomes a kind of cultural politics, which has the potential for fostering alliances between current and future feminisms, lesbian and gay activism, race and AIDS activism, as well as scholarly efforts in postcolonial critique. *Carnal Aesthetics* expands the field of cultural inquiry by offering new texts, objects and contexts for study, and new methods and approaches to study them. It consequently calls for the critical reassessment of the transformative potential of alternative sensorial modalities and of the various ways in which these unsettle viewers in the act of the aesthetic encounter. This reassessment points to directions that feminist scholarship might profitably take – directions we hope the readers will find useful.

*Carnal Aesthetics* is an outcome of the 7th European Feminist Research Conference organised by and held at the Gender Studies Department at Utrecht University, the Netherlands, in June 2009. The conference's general aim was to present and take stock of alternative ways of addressing societal issues and power dynamics through a consideration of a wide variety of examples from the arts in conjunction with feminist politics. The resulting book focuses on the thematic strand titled *Art, Politics and Imagination* and engages with emerging discussions around such topics as affect, embodied perception and the senses. Ultimately, it addresses the question of how these topics can inform feminist interventions into cultural practices, and in turn how feminist interventions can offer a different reading to those cultural practices. This book takes off from the contributions to this strand, presenting essays from eminent scholars solicited during the editorial process. Finally, in March 2011, the Carnal Aesthetics symposium was held at Utrecht University to foster dialogue between several authors, generating a number of guiding issues. These issues of future inquiry are reflected in the



book's title, *Carnal Aesthetics: Transgressive Imagery and Feminist Politics*, which we will clarify in more detail in the following.

## AESTHETICS

In the context of this book, we argue for an understanding of aesthetics as *aisthesis*, that is, as perception, sensibility or sensation, emphasising the cultural formation of the senses.<sup>2</sup> With this stress on *aisthesis*, we move away from the understanding of aesthetics as being concerned with 'beauty' and question the universalising claims that this concept implies. Instead, we seek to revive a notion of aesthetics that relies upon sensory perception and underlines the significance of cultural valuing of certain sense impressions and the dismissal of others. Many of the artworks our contributors engage with challenge the culturally inscribed 'hierarchy of the senses'. The inquiry into sense perception has been at the heart of aesthetic theory from its very beginning,<sup>3</sup> yet aesthetic apprehension has often been reduced to the visual only. Carrying the multiplicity of *aesthetics* in its title, this book seeks to contribute to efforts of reaching beyond vision alone. It takes into account the (often fearful) collapse of distance between the viewer and the art object, fostering an immersive approach where the viewer is no longer only a viewer, but rather the subject of an embodied encounter. Recent and ongoing research in fields as diverse as the anthropology of the senses,<sup>4</sup> performance studies,<sup>5</sup> film studies<sup>6</sup> and philosophy<sup>7</sup> has drawn attention to the politics of perception larger than looking. Building on a wealth of case studies, numerous scholars in these fields have challenged the idea of the dominance of vision prevailing in Western epistemes as well as the conceptual split of the sensorium into five senses. Particular emphasis has been given to cross-modal perception, including studies on 'synaesthesia' and 'co-enaesthesia',<sup>8</sup> stressing various forms of overlap between and leaps across the boundaries of clearly demarcated 'sensory channels'.<sup>9</sup> The contributions in this book address the political relevance of the empirical studies and theoretical reflections on perception. They underline the importance of sensorial faculties and affective forces shaping our encounter with art as well as of the various dimensions of embodied difference.

*Carnal Aesthetics* focuses on multiple cross-fertilisations between feminist theory and cultural practices. In line with this focus, the collection advances a critical and politically engaged stance towards aesthetics as it is articulated by Hal Foster, among others. In his seminal collection *The Anti-Aesthetic*, Foster

questions the very term as ethically problematic as it reinforces the idea that aesthetic experience exists beyond history, location and the body. For Foster, the term *anti-aesthetic* marks a practice which is cross-disciplinary, tentative, politically engaged and subversive.<sup>10</sup> This resonates with feminist aesthetics, a movement that took shape in the 1970s, which gives precedence to the encounter instead of the artwork, declaring the collapsing of the divide between ‘art’ and ‘life’, and thus emphasising the political commitment of art.<sup>11</sup>

As this book aims to inquire into how we can engage more deeply with (anti)aesthetics as an effective mode of cultural analysis, the essays assembled here establish the importance of an approach which is dialogic and intersubjective, responsive and responseable to various modes of encounter. This approach is concretely dealt with in the contributions in various ways. Taking the cinema as her example, Patricia MacCormack moves away from those approaches in film theory that treat the image and the viewer as independent entities by developing a model of spectatorship that underlines co-constitution and co-emergence of image and spectator in the cinematic encounter. Reconsidering the current discussion on affect, Anu Koivunen argues in her chapter that affectivity cannot be addressed without considering history, location and embodiment.

## CARNALITY

The question of embodiment as a cultural and ethical force is a central theme across all the contributions. Embodiment as it resurfaces in the notion of ‘carnality’ articulates various sources of inspiration which have shaped and continue to shape our thinking. When Barthes wrote about his movie-going habits, he noted that he allowed himself to be fascinated both by the image on the screen and by everything else in the theatre, as if he had two bodies at the same time: a narcissistic body which gazes, and a body ready to grasp not the image but precisely what exceeds it – the sounds, the proximity of other bodies, the spatial positioning of the self.<sup>12</sup> This carnal simultaneity, taking the body as a ‘process-in-practice’ rather than as a fixed object, is the major thematic focus of this book.<sup>13</sup> We take further inspiration from Vivian Sobchack, who in her seminal book *Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture* combines a phenomenological stance towards cinema with the cultural implications of the sensory roots of metaphor. Her linking of bodily apprehension and cognitive reflection set the tone for many of the more recent studies which take the proximal senses as their focus.<sup>14</sup>

Moreover, our use of the term ‘carnal’ is in tune with Ann Laura Stoler’s book *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule*. With ‘the carnal’, Stoler refers to the representation of desire as it is implicated in complex configurations of power/knowledge. Her understanding has informed the discussion on the ‘colonised’ body as an object, subject and medium of representation and desire. Stoler’s stance is picked up in Papenburg’s contribution, dealing with the artistic subversion of stereotypical representations of the black female body. The theme of the female body as desiring and desired returns again in MacCormack’s chapter, examining how we may visually and theoretically conceive of female pleasure.

Consequently, the engagement with disparate phenomena, including images, rests on inquiring into the border between the somatic, the psychic and the conceptual. In line with the recent turn to affect in cultural and feminist studies,<sup>15</sup> this entails a rethinking of the notion of and research on embodiment as it becomes open to multiple sensory modalities and fosters a conception of desire that takes the female body as its referent.

## TRANSGRESSIVE IMAGERY

Since the beginnings of the feminist art movement in the late 1960s, transgression and inversion have been vital forces in questioning traditional roles assigned to women and have constituted political strategies for asserting and celebrating women’s agency.<sup>16</sup> In her influential collection *The Reversible World*, Barbara Babcock writes: “Symbolic inversion” may be broadly defined as any act of expressive behaviour which inverts, contradicts, abrogates or in some fashion presents an alternative to commonly held cultural codes, values, and norms, be they linguistic, literary, or artistic, religious, social and political’.<sup>17</sup> Babcock’s contentions emerged in dialogue with studies on such topics as ‘ritual rebellion’, ‘taboo’ and ‘liminality’, which were carried out in social and cultural anthropology in the 1950s and 1960s. One such instance is Max Gluckmann’s seminal work in which he pointed out that, counter-intuitively, transgressive behaviour is required in clearly demarcated periods in the life of the collective in order to ensure, celebrate and re-establish the continuity of the social order.<sup>18</sup> In a similar vein yet writing in different contexts, Mary Douglas and Mikhail Bakhtin elucidated the ambiguous and interdependent relation existing between social rules and their subversion.<sup>19</sup> Victor Turner referred to a liminal space and time, that is a spacio-temporal limbo opening up in-between fixed states, and drew attention

to importance of this liminal state for the transformation of an individual's status within a collectivity. What is key in all these studies is the concentration on liminality implying required transgression, which, although the associated subversive behaviour is socially prescribed, may potentially effect a transformation of the social order.<sup>20</sup> Taking our cue from these studies we shift the focus from transgressive *behaviour* to transgressive *imagery* and from ritual practice to the experience of art. We investigate the question of how viewers can performatively engage with artworks in a process that is co-constitutive and co-emergent. This inquiry opens up the query over whether and how this engagement can facilitate a transformation of both the viewer and the social structures.

Consequently, the transgressive imagery to which we allude in the subtitle refers not solely to challenge and provocation on the basis of pictorial content going against 'good taste'. Rather, it denotes the confounding of the boundary between ethics and aesthetics extending to the disruption of normative cultural frameworks and the breakthrough into new theoretical ground by way of exploring the transformative potential of alternative perceptual modalities such as multisensoriality, sensation and affectivity. Looking at digital photography, painting, video, film and multimedia art, we see a variety of transgressive movements that significantly reconfigure the relationship between the viewer and the image, which disrupt and can potentially transform the representationalist paradigm. This observation raises a number of important questions, which are addressed by all contributors: How can feminist research methodologies open up fresh perspectives on these artistic and cultural practices? How can we think differently about our encounter with art, allowing for alternative sensory modalities beyond the visual? How do the horrors of contemporary instances of war, conflict and violation of human rights, as well as inequalities based on gender, race, and (dis)ability change and inflect our perception? Can the paradigm of transgression still be applied in the face of rapidly changing contemporary societies and *vis-à-vis* a world order as it is marked by incessantly shifting boundaries? The contributions assembled in this book address these questions by considering the encounter with representations of the female body in light of instances of trauma (Pollock; Zarzycka); by emphasising the historicity and the 'affective and cultural weight' of this encounter (Koivunen); by attending to the role of the proximal senses such as and touch (Bennett; Beugnet) and smell (Sobchack; Marks) in aesthetic and cultural experience; through the matrix of the concept of 'the grotesque' as a generative form of subversion (Papenburg); and by exploring artistic practice through practices of surveillance (Pisters).

## FEMINIST POLITICS

What unites all the contributions in this book is the aim to challenge the conceptual boundaries of current research on perception as it is carried out in the humanities and beyond. Pointing to the transformative potential of alternative perceptual modalities implies turning to the body and to the politics of perception as recurrent themes in feminist theory and activism.<sup>21</sup> This is in line with a long-standing feminist tradition aimed at politicising representations of the female body and claiming agency over (self)representation, in both the artistic as well as cultural and political arenas.<sup>22</sup> Critical interventions from various groups of activists and scholars have brought into focus other intersecting dimensions of difference such as sexuality and race.<sup>23</sup> As a consequence, feminism can no longer be conceptualised as a unified movement of women's empowerment, but evolves into multiple feminisms concerned with, among others, queer and postcolonial theory.<sup>24</sup>

Contemporary artistic practice and theoretical inquiry following a feminist agenda drew attention to increasingly influential studies on difference, trauma, affect, (trans)cultural memory and the cultural configuration of the human sensorium.<sup>25</sup> On the basis of a variety of case studies ranging from (and across the boundaries of) film, video, photography, painting and collage, the assembled essays concentrate on the affective and multisensory dimensions of aesthetic experience. All of these dimensions, we argue, inflect current artistic expressions at the forefront of feminist politics. Engaging with questions of aesthetics, culture and politics, this book seeks to weave these research strands together.

## STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

The four parts of this book are as much independent as interdependent entities as they interweave and interleave. The concept of rhythm might be helpful when thinking about the structure of this book. Examples as diverse as installation art (as discussed in the contribution by Bennett), the use of sound in war coverage (as addressed by Zarzycka) and dance-like movements in an encounter between an autistic person and an animal (the focus of Manning's chapter) highlight the seminal role of rhythm in facilitating and organising any aesthetic encounter. The topic of rhythm reverberates throughout the book, resonating also with the contribution by Beugnet, who introduces the notion of pulsating celluloid for the

bodily experience of both the film and the spectator. It extends into the discussion between Steyerl and Olivieri on intervals, gaps and silences as principles of montage, the attractions and repulsions between shots generating novel imaginative patterns. Rhythm understood on a meta-level is not an externally imposed order of this book, but rather the articulation of concepts and approaches, objects and media, bodies and unanimated matter, memories and prognosis, (non)human agents and subjectivities, political relevance and affective pleasures, transgressive moments and fixed cultural beliefs.

## Part I: Encountering (Aesth)Ethics

In line with this contention, the essays assembled in the opening part of the book take as their starting point the dissolution of the boundaries between ethics and aesthetics as addressed in critical theory and feminist discourse. They do so by focusing on traumatic experience and the way it is mediated through representational strategies. To witness trauma in artistic/cultural artefacts is to be affected by the absence and the loss through which images *fail* to show rather than represent. The aesthetics of trauma relies on the slippage between signification and materiality, on the *aporia* between the seen and the unseen. The question of encountering the pain, loss or perishing of others which challenges the threshold between self and non-self, is posed by all three essays in this part.

Art drawing on traumatic experiences ultimately challenges the split between the represented subjects, the artist, the art critic/art historian and the wider audience. The opening essay by Griselda Pollock takes trauma as an event beyond appearance that nonetheless haunts, returns and is processed on both the individual and collective level. Focusing on the artistic and theoretical work of the psychoanalyst, artist and theorist Bracha Ettinger, Pollock reconfigures the relations of the corporeal and the aesthetic through a new vocabulary. The bending of language to accommodate new spaces of understanding and experiencing outlines the processes taking place in art reception where art making and art viewing are intertwined in a relationship that oscillates between distance and proximity.

Yet trauma, whether carried, latent or recurring, in contemporary cultures is also broadcast globally and immediately to suit the diverse agendas of the media. Western societies have developed a veritable fixation on the visualisation of violence and trauma both for those who experience trauma as a real-life incision and those who witness it from afar. Marta Zarzycka takes up the question of accountable witnessing of such testimonies in her chapter on war photographs. Her concern is how the incorporation of sound into the still (in the sense of

‘inaudible’ as well as ‘immobile’) photographs changes our comprehensive and receptive capacities. Re-thinking the witnessing of human suffering as a combination of *both* images and sounds, her underlying question is: how can aesthetics, through the broadening of particular kinds of sensation in a gesture of *con-aisthesis*, help us find ethics and, consequently, also politics?

Moving away from sounds and silences in photographs, Erin Manning’s contribution explores the ‘silence between’, the unspoken activated in the trauma of radical difference as it is experienced by autistic people, where facial recognition in a human to non-human encounter is no longer applicable. Based on what she calls ‘autistic perception’, she examines the category of ‘the more-than human’, where what is human is no longer the starting point for meaningful experience. She postulates an ethics of becoming as ‘autistically perceptive’ as possible, moving beyond spaces we are allocated in a species-oriented world. In a different vein, yet akin to Bracha Ettinger’s art, Manning’s essay performs relationality, using the fluidity of language and meaning on many levels and interweaving the concrete example of autistic perception and philosophical theorising, as well as ideas about and practices of movement.

The ideas in the contributions assembled in this part can be categorised by their treatment of the unspeakable and unintelligible, that which precludes the capacity for communicating. Taking this incommunicability as a starting point, all of the essays argue for a style of perception wherein an encounter with the world does not begin by sorting the field into preconceived, general categories of *either* objects *or* subjects, images *or* sounds, humans *or* animals, but rather emphasises how new modes of attention are being activated which may counter established relations of power.

## Part II: Affective Imagery

Addressing various media and different genres, the essays assembled in the second part build on current debates within art criticism and visual studies, critically and creatively engaging with affect theory in regard to the practices of looking. Affect, an emergent term in cultural studies, is widely agreed to signal a correspondence between the psychic and the somatic, between the cultural and the biological, between feeling and knowing, between its resistance to representation and its appropriation by aesthetic discourse. Questioning linguistic models of subjectivity, feminist scholarship has recently turned to affect to consider the ethics of those conceptual and analytic apparatuses that aim to explore our bodily involvement with images, sounds, smells, tastes and feelings.<sup>26</sup>

Building on this scholarship, Eugénie Shinkle picks up on the transformation and circulation of affect in the fashion photographs of Juergen Teller, which present a flawed, unpredictable and disorderly body, instead of a normalised, desirable, socially coded body. Navigating away from the sort of semiotic analysis that has formed the basis of important work around fashion and fashion images, Shinkle argues that fashion imagery offers new configurations of ‘the affective’ as the refusal of meaning, inciting the emergence of new knowledges which contest normative judgements. Fashion images, she argues, explicitly address *embodied* subjects, and somatic or bodily responses are integral to the way in which they come to function.

The chapter by Anu Koivunen takes theories of affectivity as an explanatory framework for the viewing experience of Eija-Liisa Ahtila’s film *Love is a Treasure*. However, while Koivunen, along with Shinkle, proposes affective engagement with the image, she does not reject the film’s story-telling capacities, its historical context or its cultural implications. Koivunen holds that Ahtila’s images remain thoroughly invested with and embedded in the interpretive histories of identity and the gendered self, carrying ‘cultural weight’ and, because of this, forcefully and intensely ‘weigh’ against the viewer. Arguing for narrativity and intertextual and contextual frameworks in the work of fiction, Koivunen advocates a return to questions of cultural and historical force as framing devices that shape our affective response. Read against/along one another, the two chapters pose the following question: Does our bodily response to images preclude thinking or, conversely, does affectivity facilitate a reflexive process?

In her contribution, Jill Bennett presents several examples of art that directly challenge the polarisation of image and spectator in ways that modulate and redirect cultural preconceptions about affect. Bennett draws upon the sensory and affective experience using the example of air. Air, as both a portent and a sensory medium, enables both the investigation of questions of sensory perception and the exploration of the body’s interface with the surrounding environment. Taking Patrick Süskind’s novel *Perfume* as one of her case studies, Bennett argues for the affective power of smell which, through diffusion in and transmission via the air is capable of infecting and seasoning the social experience of an environment. A focus on air undermines the very notion of an ‘object of representation’ by turning to what is conventionally considered the ‘background’ for the process of representing, comprising the ‘natural’ and the social world. An aesthetic conception of air which entails the spatial, the invisible and the intrinsic challenges us to rethink the gap between sociocultural practices of framing and the embodied reactions in art and cultural practices.



At the crossroads between Part I and Part II thus the following question arises: How do the ethical meanings we attribute to the representations or traces of historically documented traumas, works of fiction and interpersonal encounters with atrocities, as well as our responses to those, shift when taking into account not only their historical and geopolitical mediations, but also their affects?

### Part III: Sentient Bodies

It is in the third part that we address this question by examining how the bodily entanglement of the viewer changes our understanding of the aesthetic encounter. Positing the body as sentient agent and contesting the notion of an independent viewer positioned *vis-à-vis* an ‘object of representation/perception’, the contributions assembled in this part take further the explorations of the transformative potential of alternative perceptual modalities. All of them put the synaesthetic and co-enaesthetic cooperation and manifold interlacing of the senses centre stage and address this cooperation, which is otherwise often precluded by the culturally coded and hierarchical arrangement of the ‘five channels’ of sensorial perception. One such instance of the blurring of sensory boundaries is the overlap of touch and vision, as it has been examined by both Vivian Sobchack and Laura U. Marks in their earlier work. The work of both scholars has been crucial in initiating a scholarly tradition which considers the importance of ‘the haptic’ in the experience of moving images such as film (Sobchack)<sup>27</sup> and video (Marks).<sup>28</sup>

Directing attention to *smell* and cinema, Vivian Sobchack’s contribution to the present collection addresses the moment when the visual reaches beyond the domain of vision and captures other sensory modalities. She studies audience responses to the representation and evocation of smell in Tom Tykwer’s film *Perfume: The Story of a Murderer* (2006), aiming to arrest film’s fleeting ‘visual aroma’. Putting Tykwer’s adaptation of Patrick Süskind’s novel in dialogue with phenomenological reflections as well as anthropological and neurological studies on smell, Sobchack provocatively attends to smell as interpenetrating vision. Her focus is on ‘inhabiting and breathing in – in *mediated* and *displaced* form – the atmosphere and scents of an alternate world’. Her discussion adds a new angle to Bennett’s engagement with the same novel, as Sobchack emphasises how smell is synaesthetically linked to *vision* and *hearing*. Grounding her argument in an analysis of the spectatorial experience of the film, Sobchack draws upon the affective power of visually-evoked olfactory sensations in the encounter between film and spectator. She develops her point by dwelling on film’s capacity

to speak to our 'sense memory and sensory imagination' and to play on an 'affective tonality' effectively enveloping the spectator in the 'atmosphere' of the film.

Critically assessing the commodification of smell in consumer culture, Laura U. Marks dialogues with and expands upon Sobchack's argument. Taking her cue from her visit to the perfume Souk in Damascus, she explores the generative potential of smell for creating communal experience. In a similar vein to that of Bennett's essay, Marks raises questions about the particular pleasures and knowledges to be obtained from different kinds of sensory experience. Focusing on the 'membrane between communicability and incommunicability' of sensation, Marks argues a case for the senses' potential for collapsing the divide between the public and the private, the social and the individual, and ties this to the capacity of the sense of smell, given its intimacy with emotion and memory, to mould our 'olfactory unconscious'.

Bettina Papenburg's chapter investigates practices of disordering, mixing and cannibalising as strategic disruption undermining both established forms of representation and conventionalised modes of perception. She engages with some of the collages by Kenya-born, New York-based artist Wangechi Mutu featuring the dis/assembled black female body. In so doing, she re-introduces the concept of 'the grotesque' as an anti-canonical force, which deliberately subverts notions of moral decency and visual beauty, to the cultural analysis of representations of the black female body. Papenburg points out how the artist's ironical embrace of derogatory representations gives transgressive imagery its force, effectively unsettling representational clichés of the racialised and gendered body. This challenge to stereotypical depictions, she argues, is posed through tropes of excess and inversion and by resisting fixed form, completion and closure. Shifting the concept of the grotesque from the arena of representation to the arena of perception, she proposes a *carnivalisation* of the hierarchy of the senses.

All three chapters revolve around the question of the aesthetic, cultural and political implications of the confusion of different sensory domains. While some of the contributions in Part I and II already consider how senses other than the visual become significant in shaping the cognitive-affective encounter with artworks (Zarzycka; Bennett), the contributions assembled in Part III detail alternative sensory modalities and pose the questions that tie the three parts together: How, in our encounter both with medium-bound (audio)visuality and cultural, sexual and species-based difference, can we move beyond the realm of

the visible and deliberately unsettle the certainty provided by the boundaries of subject and object? What are the losses and gains of this transition?

#### Part IV: Strategies of Disruption

As has become clear by now, all of the contributions in this book expound an understanding of the body as the locus of the sensing, perceiving and experiencing subject. Connecting this understanding to the interventionist tradition of feminist art leaves us wondering: how do certain sensory modalities intervene with conventional perceptual frames? How can these alternative ways of sensing and perceiving challenge and subvert socially inscribed structures of power and knowledge? Following from a tradition of critical intervention shaping the history of feminist art and criticism, the essays in this final part discuss the empowering and disempowering potential of erotic, remediated, elusive and monstrous body imagery and the sensorial and affective implications of the aesthetic encounter with such imagery.

Building on Sobchack's and Marks' earlier work on touch and vision, Martine Beugnet historically contextualises and critically reassesses a selection of pieces from experimental, art and feature film as well as installation and video art from the 1940s until now. In line with Sobchack and Marks, Beugnet's text maps out a trajectory of theoretical positions that shape the emerging scholarship on the politics of perception within film theory. It is the focus on the particular intersection of touch and vision that links Beugnet's chapter to Bennett's contribution. Yet, where Bennett concentrates on the most recent installation art, Beugnet extends her reflections to different media and across historical periods. Taking key examples from both feminist filmmaking and video art as the pivot of her reflection, Beugnet argues for the vitality of involving the *whole* sensorium, in particular the sense of touch, for the filmic creation of presence as opposed to more conventional, that is scopically orientated, representations of gender and sexuality on screen.

Zooming in on an excess of the scopic by directing the discussion to the problem of visual control of the public space, Patricia Pisters sets out to assess some of the registers of our submission to and resistance against a contemporary surveillance culture that monitors our bodies. This particular culture is formed by ubiquitous devices such as CCTV screens, satellite tracking grids, Sat Nav positioning on mobile displays, webcams and internet polling, among others. Pisters looks at how the theme of surveillance resurfaces in recent