Taking the Smooth with the Rough: Texture, Emotion, and the Other Postmodernism

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WHAT WAS POSTMODERNISM? IF LARGELY ECLIPSED AS AN AESthetic practice, might it not yet teach us something as a critical object?[1] And, if so, what might postmodern aesthetics tell us about the emotional and affective formations that currently magnetize critical interest across the humanities? Probing these questions, I turn to the final scene of David Cronenberg's *Crash* (1996), the controversial screen adaptation of J. G. Ballard's no less controversial 1973 novella—and a film whose crystallization of canonical critical models of postmodernism makes it uniquely if unexpectedly useful to the effort to reappraise them. In keeping with the perverse spectacular and narrative predilections of the film as a whole, the scene in question finds the protagonists, James Ballard (James Spader) and his wife, Catherine (Deborah Kara Unger), in a carefully contrived car chase that culminates in James's deliberately driving his wife's silver coupe off the freeway and down a grassy embankment. Yet like many another ripple in what Jesse Fox Mayshark has christened the "cultural tide of pop postmodernism" (1), the scene's dramatically and morally inflammatory content is matched by a certain formal flatness (Adams; Dery 44; Jones)—the same "flatness or depthlessness" that Fredric Jameson, writing in 1990, traced to postmodern aesthetics' renunciation of hermeneutic depth (*Postmodernism* 9). The formal strategies through which the film sustains this flatness are readily isolated. Cinematographically, the scene favors the aloof, aerial detachment of the extreme long shot over the facial close-ups through which films conventionally secure meaning and identification. Whether descending toward the grassy median strip to disclose Catherine's bloodied body and mangled car or reascending into the end credits, the mobile, crane-mounted camera maintains a crisp, unimpeachable distance from its subjects that invites us to consider the

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image as an aesthetic surface rather than as a representation of a spatially and psychologically rounded world. Musically, the relentless, one-note repetitiveness of Howard Shore's spare synthetic strings muffles the tonal cues through which we are customarily asked to apprehend symbolic and psychological significance. Characterologically, meanwhile, Spader's stiff, mannequin's gait exudes none of the emotional "urgency" one might expect of a man who has just witnessed his wife tumble down a freeway embankment (Fisher 76). Any effort to infer motive or meaning from Spader's gestures is blocked by the "bored, abstracted, trancelike emptiness of expression" with which he surveys the battered interior of the car before finally turning his gaze to the prostrate Unger (Beard 394).

For Jameson, of course, as for the legion of critics who followed in his wake, the hermeneutic flatness of the postmodern image was the all too natural bedfellow of emotional flatness (*Postmodernism* 10).[2] This almost axiomatic equation of flatness and emotionlessness, in turn, has left an incisive impression on the reception of *Crash*. Informing scholarly consensus on the film's tone, now powerfully contoured by a critical rubric of "affectless alienation," "emotional vacuity" (Beard 384), "cool detached anality," and "boredom" (Harpold; Botting and Wilson 83), it also marks scholarly consensus on *Crash*'s narrative, which has congealed across repeated critical retellings into the story of a couple who enlist the help of a charismatic crash fetishist, Vaughan (Elias Koteas), to reinvigorate an emotional and sexual life impoverished by postmodernity's flat, depthless planes. Yet the consequences of this critical tendency to encode postmodern hermeneutic flatness in the register of emotional deficiency extend far beyond the reception of *Crash*. To the extent that "affect" and "emotion" have emerged as star terms in the diverse, interdisciplinary constellation of work perhaps best clustered under the rubric of "feeling theory," postmodernism's seeming resistance to emotion has helped hasten its recent fall from critical favor.[3] From Brian Massumi's dismissive "Fredric Jameson notwithstanding, belief has waned for many, but not affect" (27) to Ann Pellegrini and Jasbir Puar's announcement that "some thirty years after Jameson's first exploration of these questions [of feeling], it is *postmodernism* that has ceased to be sounded as a term of, and for, critical analysis," theorists of feeling regularly preface "new" work on affect and emotion with a ritual vanquishing of the "old" postmodern (36).[4]

It is not hard to grasp why scholars might construe the turn to affect and emotion as a turn away from a postmodernism now judged both chronologically over and critically moribund. Still under the scholarly sway of a long-dominant "cognitive-appraisal" paradigm—in which the blushes, throbs, and pulsations of emotion are imputed to a subject's hermeneutic judgment or interpretation of an object—our accepted account of emotion is singularly out of step with postmodernism's destabilization of hermeneutic depth.[5] Admittedly, many critics identified with the study of feeling have subjected the cognitive-appraisal model of emotion to sustained critique. For these critics, the priority that cognitive-appraisal theory accords depth interpretation elides forms of feeling that escape what Massumi calls the "capture," "closure" (35), and "mastery" of "sociolinguistic meaning" (17, 31).[6] Yet for most scholars this critique compels less a reassessment of emotion than a turn to affect—a mobile, organic, nonsubjective, and noninterpretative mode of feeling that acquired significant theoretical clout in the wake of work by Massumi and Sedgwick. With the notable exceptions of Rei Terada, who offers a radically nonsubjective model of emotion, and Sianne Ngai, who troubles the distinction between emotion and affect (25–29), scholars in feeling theory have tended to conscript *affect* as their primary terminological vehicle in efforts to rethink feeling's relation to individual

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and collective life,[7] evoking emotion only as affect's fusty theoretical foil.[8] Whether by default or by deliberation, then, emotion continues to bear the conceptual impress of the cognitive-appraisal paradigm, with its signature stress on emotion's relation to judgment or evaluation.[9] In this sense, it should come as no surprise that while a number of scholars have found a place in postmodern aesthetics and theory for a mobile, surface-oriented affect, squaring postmodernism's challenge to hermeneutic depth with the depth-dependent phenomenon still denoted by "emotion" seems a hopeless cause.

But are *postmodernism* and *emotion* really incompatible? And if not, how might the reconciliation of these two marginalized terms force us to reappraise them? In answering these questions, I want to return to *Crash*'s arresting finale. For closer scrutiny of this scene invites a modification of the critical consensus regarding the film's literal, hermeneutical, and emotional flatness—and thus, I will argue, a modification of orthodox understandings of emotion and postmodernism. This is not to deny that the film's parting image, the eerie triumvirate of husband, wife, and car, is wholly bereft of the hermeneutic depth that Jameson ascribes to the modernist text. Rather, it is to suggest that the image's lack of depth is so richly embellished by texture that *flatness*, with its connotations of matteness, evenness, and dullness, and *depthlessness*, with its negative specification of the surface as absence of depth, seem spectacularly inadequate to convey the unusual character of the film. The final low-angle shot that sets the lacquered metal of the overturned car's still-untarnished hood against the grisly, tenderized flesh of Catherine's bloodied body (fig. 1) is exemplary here. While resistant to an interpretation that would promise to plumb its symbolic or psychological depths, the image's riot of texture equally precludes an interpretation that would reduce it to mere surface lack.

Hardly isolated to *Crash*'s final, climactic scene, this kind of textural play is routine in a film in which narrative and character development are less subordinate to than strategically confounded with the loving delineation of bruises, scars, and gleaming metal. It is the film's glossy luster that first claims the viewer's attention, as the opening titles' glistening chrome font emerges out of a vanishing point into the glare of a light beam simulat-



FIG. 1
Frame from David Cronenberg's *Crash* (1996).

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ing oncoming headlights, and this slickly airbrushed aesthetic is quickly established as the salient feature of the film's set design, stamping everything from the sleek bent steel of the Ballards' Marcel Breuer dining set to the waxy buff of the hospital linoleum. Yet if *Crash* is a film captivated by the high polish of the glossy surface, it is at least as fascinated by its opposite: the rough, the broken, the bruised, and the fractured. The film's preoccupation with, say, the spiderwebbed glass of a shattered windshield or the vulva-like scar worming its way down the back of Gabrielle's (Roseanna Arquette's) thigh, makes the question of texture in assessing the film as seemingly pressing as it has been critically elided. Indeed, above and beyond its immediate spectacular power, the rough surface exerts a slower-burning narrative power across a film whose plot is animated primarily by the characters' efforts to secure Vaughan's vaunted but elusive "intensity of experience" by fragmenting, piercing, or generally manhandling key pieces of pro-filmic furniture. Admittedly, texture's profile in modernist aesthetics and philosophy precludes its identification as an exclusively postmodern phenomenon. Yet postmodernism's glossy and rough surfaces seem phenomenologically distinct from their modernist counterparts. In its second-hand, reflected gleam, postmodern gloss maps most effectively not onto the live body of a charismatic celebrity—as in the modernist "shine" or "incandescen[ce]" that Anne Anlin Cheng attributes to the fetishized bodily surfaces of the iconic modern "race beauties" Josephine Baker and Anna May Wong (1022, 1024, 1024)—but onto the inhuman, sterile, and mass-produced objects of what Sonya Shannon has called postmodernity's "Chrome Age," an age that finds its metonymic acme in the lustrous, mirrory magnetism of the car. Like its glossier surfaces, however, *Crash*'s ragged flesh wounds and planes of pulverized metal have little in common with their modernist analogues. Whereas the creased and tattered peasant shoes that Martin Heidegger celebrates in "The Origin of the Work of Art" remain untouched by the gleaming industrial dystopia they are set up rhetorically against, a tear in the steely polish of a car's side panel is inseparable from the glossy finish it disrupts.

All subtleties aside, though, the point to be telegraphed here is that if postmodern aesthetics is conventionally coded as "flat" or "depthless," in *Crash* this flatness is crosshatched by an almost entirely untheorized textural rubric, which counters a dominant model of surface as lack—lack of depth, lack of meaning, and lack of emotion—with a model of surface as variegated, complex plane. But what are the consequences of this peculiar profusion of texture for postmodernism and emotion? From Nigel Thrift's celebration of "the little, the messy and the jerry-rigged" (197) to Ann Cvetkovich's paean to "the textures of everyday experience" (*Archive*), recent work in feeling theory has afforded "texture" an unmistakable, if largely untheorized, critical pedigree that is best accounted for by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's contention that "a peculiar intimacy seems to subsist between textures and emotions" (17). As feeling theory's methodological watchword, specifying both the critical scale (close and detailed) and the critical mode (tactile and embodied) most congenial to grasping the affective specificity of a text (Sedgwick 13–17), texture has come to index the field's transcendence of older forms of postmodern analysis that ostensibly disregard affect and emotion. In this light, the prominence of textural tropes in a paradigmatically postmodern text like *Crash* tends to problematize texture's designation as the definitive switch point between a postmodern past and a feeling-oriented present. Given the tight critical fit between texture and emotion, in fact, it should come as no surprise that the film's texture-laden denouement is no more emotionally flat than it is physically flat. *Crash*'s critical reception records the fascination the film exerted over its viewers,

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from Mark Browning's "mesmeriz[ed] fascination" (145) to Janet Maslin's "grim fascination" and Robin Dougherty's account of the film as "pleasantly hypnotic," and the strange synthesis of fixity and animation, stasis and excitement, that marks this critical response is anticipated in James's own behavior. While wholly surface-oriented—to the extent that he seems to observe little distinction between the body of the smashed car and the body of his wounded wife—James's connoisseur-like absorption in the wreckage is at odds with the principle of postmodern emotionlessness, and as he runs his fingers over the car's jagged doorframe and dabs at the florid bruises on his wife's leg, it is clear that if he cannot "feel" in any traditional sense, he is also unable to look away. Looked at as "flat," postmodernism's depthless, metallic landscapes seem wholly impervious to emotion; looked at as "textured," however, these same depthless, metallic landscapes turn up a wealth of emotional possibility.

In what follows, I will argue that *Crash*'s eclectic patchwork of rough and glossy surfaces challenges us to thoroughly reassess both postmodernism and emotion. Yet while this essay will primarily pursue this argument through a close reading of *Crash*, Cronenberg's cinematic tribute to the tickle and titillation of postmodern texture cannot be interpreted in isolation. Rather, the film's engagement with texture must be understood as a rejoinder to the strategic *dis*engagement from texture that marks postmodern theory, whose frequent if unsystematic recourse to textural tropes is matched only by its efforts to quash texture's unsettling hermeneutic and emotional implications. This essay, then, will briefly chronicle texture's equivocal critical career in postmodern theory before returning to *Crash* to stake out two key lines of argument. First, recalling Sedgwick's observation about the "peculiar intimacy . . . between textures and emotions," I will argue that the film's preoccupation with scarred flesh and high-gloss metal confounds orthodox understandings of postmodernism's emotional life that cross-implicate hermeneutic and emotional flatness. Recoding postmodernism's notoriously flat or depthless surface as a richly textured plane, *Crash* brokers a distinctively postmodern emotional logic in which a hostility to cognitive-appraisal forms of emotion goes hand in glove with a receptivity to a more idiosyncratic emotional mode. In this sense, far from frostily emotion-free, postmodern aesthetics is ripe with emotional possibility. Yet, as this suggests—and as this essay will contend—the same critical affordances that allow postmodern texture to shake up sedimented models of postmodernism may also allow it to enrich our understanding of emotion. The unique, triangulated emotions yielded by an analysis of *Crash*'s rough and glossy surfaces, in fact, may enable us to salvage emotion from the cognitive-appraisal paradigm—and thus from its status as the dreary, pedestrian cousin of a mobile, noninterpretative, and nonsubjective affect.

Texture in Theory

Postmodern theory's reappraisal of the hermeneutic opposition surface/depth is encoded in a vividly textural vernacular that—running a reckless gamut from the glossy, shiny, and gleaming to the fractured, broken, and punctured—is as untheorized in postmodern theory as it is unremarked in retrospective critical discussions of the field. If the most heavily cited section of Jameson's analysis of Andy Warhol's screen print *Diamond Dust Shoes* (1980), for example, proclaims the picture's "new flatness or depthlessness," a subsidiary section invokes "the glitter of gold dust, the spangling of gilt sand" that attends that flatness (*Postmodernism* 10)—a "glitter" or "spangling" that shimmers with unexplicated significance. Jean Baudrillard, likewise, represents the rise of the simulacra through the trope of encroach-

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ing gloss, "the very last traces of marginality excised as if by plastic surgery: new faces, new fingernails, glossy brain-cells" (*America* 110); Andreas Huyssen refers to postmodernism's "gleaming facades" (128); and Ziaudden Sardar describes its "high-tech gloss" and its "glitzy yuppie euphoria" (146).[12] The question of just what kind of critical weight we should assign this "glossophilia" is formidable enough (Bora 103). Yet postmodern theory's recurrent reliance on the figure of the glossy, gleaming surface is matched by its repeated recourse to a series of variants on the rough surface—from the "moment of rupture" that, for Joseph P. Natoli and Linda Hutcheon, "mark[s] the birth of postmodernity" (194) to Jameson's "fragmentation" of subjectivity and cultural forms (*Postmodernism* 26), from Roland Barthes's "*punctum*" (26) to Baudrillard's "contusions, scars, mutilations and wounds" ("Simulacra" 314).[13]

As my reading of *Crash* will show, the makeshift opposition glossy/rough is rich with phenomenological and conceptual possibilities. Yet postmodern theory has not only failed to tap into these possibilities, it has also tended to restore this opposition to the conceptual embrace of the more conventional opposition surface/depth, by asking the glossy to figure depthlessness and the rough to figure depth. This former gesture, for example, catalyzes the glossy surface's long-standing lamination to the commodity—a figure that functions bilaterally as both source and symbol of postmodern superficiality. For Jameson, "the cult of the glossy image" constitutes "the ultimate form of the consumption of streamlined commodities" (*Signatures* 85); Angela McRobbie speaks of "the glossy objects provided . . . by consumer capitalism" (40); and Laura Mulvey refers to "the shiny, glossy surface fascination of the screen . . . [that masks] the process of production concealed behind it" (180). Though Baudrillard's reference to the way commodity culture caters to our "craving for the antique . . . the rustic, the artisanal, the handmade" reminds us that the actual commodity is rough as often as it is glossy (*Revenge* 36), the commodity's readiest metonym remains the "seductive sheen" of a burnished metal, a lacquered wood, or a high-gloss plastic (Mulvey 4). Consistently correlating the glossy surface with the superficiality of the commodity, however, postmodern theory has quite as consistently correlated the rough surface with hermeneutic depth. From Jacques Derrida's "wound" (65) to Baudrillard's "fragment" (*Intelligence* 209) and Jameson's professed yearning for "something both more ugly and less proficient or expert, more home-made and awkward" (*Signatures* 85), the rough surface seems the recognized conceptual currency for transacting claims about deep social or linguistic structures—whether *différance*, simulation, or social relations. Rather than concede the extent to which texture's glossy, grainy particularity imperils conventional conceptions of hermeneutics and emotion, therefore, postmodern theorists prefer to configure the "rough" surface as the site of hermeneutic depth, while dismissing the "glossy" surface as the site of hermeneutic deficiency.

Of greatest significance for our argument here, however, is the extent to which this consensus on the relation between texture and hermeneutics mandates a corresponding consensus on the relation between texture and emotion. Fully licensed by the snug cultural fit of emotion and depth, postmodern theorists routinely, even reflexively, marry the rough surface to genuine emotion and the glossy surface to emotional inauthenticity. This schema informs Barthes's panegyric to the photographic *punctum*, which, in a miracle of metaphoric efficiency, places the rough, "punctured" surface of the photograph and the state of being moved by that photograph under the semiotic umbrella of one word (42). This same schema subtends Baudrillard's fetishization of the "gash mark, [the] bruise, [the] scar" as a "vehement answer" to

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emotion's disappearance from postmodern life ("Ballard's *Crash*" 315, 316). In both cases, the rough, wounded, or punctured surface is yoked to the kind of emotional directness and dynamism that Philip Fisher ascribes to Western literature's "vehement passions" (35), the classic emotions of grief, rage, fear, and disgust whose form has provided the blueprint for a still-dominant cognitive-appraisal model of emotion.

Indeed, if this schema has seen some postmodern critics claim the rough surface for intense, direct, and dynamic emotion, it has seen others, like Jameson, stake out the glossy surface for a dubious antiemotion: fascination. Long condemned as a "zombie emotion" (Shaviro, "Life" 139),[14] fascination diverges markedly from the norms of cognitive-appraisal theory. Whereas the cognitive-appraisal paradigm takes "the state of being, in one way or another, moved" as one of emotion's necessary conditions (Ngai 91), *Collins English Dictionary* defines *to fascinate* as "to render motionless, as with a fixed stare or by arousing terror or awe" ("Fascinate"); whereas the cognitive-appraisal paradigm represents emotion as the effect of hermeneutic judgment, *fascination* connotes a certain suspension of judgment, as its origin in "the Latin *fascinare*, meaning to bewitch or enchant" suggests (Connor, "Fascination" 9).[15] And it is *fascination*'s status as a byword for inauthentic or "zombie" emotion that Jameson exploits in his dystopian evocation of postmodernism's "mesmerizing new aesthetic mode." "Endow[ing] present reality and the openness of present history with the spell and distance of a glossy mirage," nostalgia's capacity to "mesmerize" or fascinate is predicated, in Jameson's postmodern imaginary, on the twin deceptions—natural and supernatural—of "distance" and of a "spell," deceptions whose tropological insignia is the figure of the "glossy mirage" (*Postmodernism* 21). In postmodern theory, it seems, while the rough surface delivers genuine emotion, the glossy surface promotes only fascination's misleading—and ultimately deadening—emotional special effects.

Ironically, then, given its self-proclaimed theoretical radicalism, postmodern theory has given short shrift to texture's implicit injunction that we reassess our assumptions about postmodernism and emotion. From Baudrillard to Barthes to Jameson, postmodern critics have regularly sought to press the rough and the glossy into the service of more traditional hermeneutic and emotional paradigms—condemning the emotional deficits of a glossy surface dismissed as depthless while celebrating the emotional bounty of a rough surface masquerading as modernist depth. In the effort, however, to enfold texture into a more familiar framework in which the depth-surface binary lines up readily with the binary emotional/emotionless, the figure of fascination sticks out—its protean semiotic possibilities resonating far beyond its ambit as an emblem of emotional lack. Its mesmerized origins at odds with the interpretative judgments central to cognitive-appraisal models of emotion and its deadening, spell-binding effects at odds with the physical changes that are meant to accompany cognitive appraisal, fascination will nevertheless become a mainstay of this essay's efforts to reconcile emotion with postmodernism's signature superficiality. Returning to *Crash*, I will argue that while fascination diverges from conventional, cognitive-appraisal models of emotion, the film not only provides persuasive evidence for fascination's status as an emotion but also limns its paradoxical affinity with the same glossy surface that boilerplate models of postmodern aesthetics suggest should rule out emotion altogether.

Fascination's credentials as an emotion in *Crash* are not, at first sight, very promising. Consider the film's opening scene, a thematic and visual set piece in which the crane-mounted camera makes a clinical inventory of the contents of an airplane han-

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gar—the glossy, phallic noses, gleaming floats, and streamlined fuselages of a series of light aircraft—before fastening on Catherine's fascinated face. From a conventional, cognitive-appraisal perspective, the cut to Catherine should inaugurate the film's shift in focus from the spectacular protocols of the establishing shot to the narrative protocols of character development, from inanimate backdrop to the animation or movement that, while not sufficient for this model of emotion, remains distinctly necessary to it. Yet instead of dramatizing the dynamism of human emotion, Catherine's fascination with the glossy veneer of the aircraft over which she leans seems to freeze and immobilize her. Faced with the "willed erasure of history" reflected in its mirrory, mass-manufactured finish (Sedgwick 15), Catherine's eyes are glazed and her face expressionless as she removes one breast from her bra and stimulates its nipple to erection against the cold, frosted metal in a gesture typical of what Iain Sinclair calls the film's "quiet pornography" (45). Indeed, the stultifying power of fascination quickly finds dramatic and narrative expression with the arrival of a male figure, whose entry into the frame, and then into Catherine, is greeted with indifference not only by his lover, whose attention remains riveted by the plane's glossy, pearlescent surface, but also by the film itself. Restricting his portrayal to a pair of polished business shoes and a single, grasping hand, the camera maintains an exclusive focus on the real liaison taking place between Catherine and the nose of the plane, the idiosyncratic two-shot effecting a kind of visual enjambment that conflates the strangely dehumanizing state of fascination with the literally inhuman prop that is its object (fig. 2). So compelling is this conflation, in fact, that critics of the film have tended to attribute the plane's textural properties to Catherine herself—William Beard, for instance, extols her "mirror-smooth surface," her "lacquered insentient beauty," and even her "glossy features" (403, 397, 397).

Yet Catherine's peculiar paralysis does not necessarily push fascination outside the purview of emotion. While the physical effects of emotion are typically tagged as vigorous and dynamic, there is nothing to say these physical effects cannot operate in an exclusively narcotic, negative register. If submitting to a seeming stranger's groping and fingering could be expected to prompt any



FIG. 2
Frame from *Crash*.

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sentient subject to some kind of reaction, erotic or otherwise, Catherine's silent stupefaction may be read as a token not of a lack of responsiveness to her partner but of the strength of her responsiveness to the glossy surface—prefiguring both Vaughan's paralysis before the heavily lacquered and period-perfect Porsche he will use to re-create James Dean's fatal collision and Ballard's fugue before the glossy silver coupe at the center of a celebrated set piece at a Mercedes-Benz showroom. Fascination, that is, may be an emotion in which we are moved, paradoxically, to stop moving. This near-narcoleptic model of fascination is corroborated in the work of the psychologist Silvan S. Tomkins, who correlates the way we are "passively caught" by fascination to "a cessation of breathing" (187). While substituting a "cessation" of breath for the quickening of breath we traditionally associate with emotion, fascination's physiological effects are no less consequential—which is to say, no less emotional—for that.

Indeed, *Crash*'s first scene proposes an answer to the taxonomic problems opened up not only by fascination's frosty immobility but also by its oddly depthless object. "Defiantly or even invisibly block[ing] or refus[ing]" all "information about how, substantively, historically, materially, it came into being" (Sedgwick 14), the plane's silken, mass-produced surface smugly resists the hermeneutic judgment that sustains conventional, cognitive-appraisal models of emotion—meaning that while fascination's physical paradoxes might be intelligible, its cognitive operation remains opaque. Closer scrutiny of the scene, however, reminds us that this tactile and hermeneutic lack coexists with a certain glistening visual exuberance. Granting little besides its glacial cool to Catherine's touch, the glossy surface is far more generous to her gaze, and the forensic intensity with which she traces the surface's subtle, shifting glow rivals the "predatory glide" (Sinclair 46) with which the cinematographer Peter Suschitzky's Steadicam close-up ogles Catherine herself. Cycling between hand and eye, between a lack of tactile stimulation and an excess of visual stimulation, Catherine may be unable to move, but she also cannot stop looking, caught in a visuo-tactile game loop that Jameson encapsulates in his evocation of the "gilt" postmodern surface's dual power to "seal . . . the surface . . . and yet continue . . . to glint at us" (*Postmodernism* 10). A sense of how the cognitive machinery powering this strange amalgam of motor diminution and ocular animation works is unexpectedly furnished by Slavoj Žižek, who enlists Jacques Lacan's theory of desire as desire of the other and René Girard's theory of mimetic desire in his contention that "the real object of [our postmodern] fascination . . . is not the displayed scene but the gaze of the naïve other, absorbed, enchanted by it" (114). For Žižek, as for his Gallic booster club, fascination should be traced not to the object itself but to its scintillating promise that for some other it proffers real meaning and emotion. And it is just such a promise that is held out by the glossy surface, whose tactile and hermeneutic lack, yielding neither meaning nor emotion, is offset by its subtle surface gleam, which avers that for someone, somewhere, its emotional bounty is abundantly accessible. Calling to mind Cheng's insistence that "[s]hine mobilizes the interstitiality between sight and feeling, visuality and textuality" (1034), fascination is a triangulated emotion that recuperates the feeling foreclosed by the failure of hermeneutic depth as an infinitely deferred and constantly glimmering promise whose horizon of possibility is the other.[16] Perfectly calibrated to the glossy surface, this triangulated structure is reflected in the ease with which *fascination*'s definition moves from denoting a generalized intransitive condition ("the state of being fascinated") to indexing a particular transitive power ("the state of being fascinating" ["Fascination"]). What fascinates, it seems, is always fascination itself.

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The significance of this shimmering, spectral other to sustaining fascination is borne out in the final tableau of the film's opening sexual triptych—a scene that, in transporting Catherine from the ceaseless solicitations of public space to the supposed sanctuary of her and James's private dwelling, only appears to close down fascination's triangulated logic. Beginning with a prolonged close-up shot of James's eyes that establishes him as the source of a presiding gaze, the scene deftly transfigures marital dyad into perverse triad by depicting his disquisition into the details of his wife's earlier sexual encounter:

> JAMES. Where were you?
> CATHERINE. In the airplane hangar.
> JAMES. Did you come?
> CATHERINE. No.

Retrofitting the sexual scenario in the aircraft hangar as a performance stage-directed by and aimed at James, the scene casts James as an other whose putative power to take direct sexual pleasure in the shellacked forepart of a light aircraft mediates Catherine's indirect fascination with that surface. Yet this mediation cuts both ways. While the camera maintains its focus on James, the inquiry shifts its focus from wife to husband, as Catherine's question—"What about your camera girl?"—elicits James's confession that, in his own extramarital encounter, he too had failed to "come." As Catherine's cryptic consolation, "maybe the next one, darling, maybe the next one," echoes on the sound track, a long-awaited reverse shot reveals Catherine from James's point of view—a polished, skirt-suited centerfold whose semblance of obliviousness to her husband, as she leans seductively, her back to him, against the balcony of their apartment, is suspended only when she lifts her skirt to expose the curve of one perfectly toned, satiny buttock. Endowing her with precisely the "mirror-smooth surface" needed to make her an object of fascination for James, her posture prompts him to approach Catherine and enter her from behind, as the camera drifts tactfully over her shoulder and into a twilit vista of the asphalt flyover below. If James mediates Catherine's fascination, then, Catherine, in turn, mediates James's. In a series of emotional favors that Sinclair limns as performances "enacted by one partner and directed by the other" (47), each member of the couple contrives to occupy the position of an other who truly, intensely feels. In this light, Catherine's cheerless promise, "maybe the next one, darling, maybe the next one," sounds throughout the film's chrome-plated urban interiors as a pledge peculiarly apposite not just to fascination's status as an eerily triangulated emotion but also to the film's no less triangulated narrative trajectory, which seems to multiply continuously into new couplings and new permutations of mimetic desire.

While often dismissed as frigidly emotion-free, then, postmodernism's signature surfaces are graced by a complex textural grammar that is curiously congenial to emotion. The object of repeated, futile bids by prominent postmodern theorists to claim its grain and gloss for more conventional, depth-oriented models of emotion and hermeneutics, texture's emotional landscape confounds the cartological limits of the cognitive-appraisal program. Whereas cognitive-appraisal theory attributes emotion to hermeneutic interpretation, fascination entails a hermeneutic failure that is only latterly transfigured into feeling through the intercession of an insightful, intensely feeling other; whereas cognitive-appraisal theory identifies emotion with some form of physiological animation or arousal, fascination traffics in the physiological suspension of stilled breath and interrupted movement.

In what follows I seek to widen the reach of this texture-oriented, triangulated model of emotion in postmodern aesthetics by deconstructing our stock account of the "vehement passions" that are ordinarily opposed

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to fascination. For most of *Crash*'s critics, the film's narrative charts a shift from an emotional lack exemplified by the stiff, triangulated fascination of the glossy surface, avatar of postmodern superficiality, to an emotional fullness exemplified by the animated, ostensibly untriangulated emotions of the rough or broken surface, emblem of modernist depth. Seamlessly recapitulating postmodern theory, this reading contrasts a mediated, "zombie" fascination to a direct, "vehement" emotion. Yet doubling down on our attention to *Crash*'s formal economy discloses the subtle but insistent pressure the film puts on this opposition. While idiosyncratic in its cognitive structure and bodily effects, fascination provides a paradigm for all the emotions in *Crash*, which share its spectral, triangulated quality. In this sense, *Crash* becomes less a case study in the emotional atrophy of the postmodern surface than a meditation on the singular emotional formations that cluster around the surface's gloss and grain.

Between the Rough and the Glossy in *Crash*

Superficially, *Crash*'s visual economy seems to heighten the opposition between a zombie-like, inauthentic, triangulated fascination and the vigorous, more direct emotions attaching to the jagged, coarse, or craggy surface. If the film's extended opening sequence is dominated by the hypnotic fascination of the glossy surface, it is the repudiation of this strangely ossified emotion that propels the narrative, as the Ballards seek to locate in crushed metal, shattered glass, and scarred human flesh the emotional immediacy and animation that fascination lacks. The couple's investment in "battered and broken bod[ies]" finds clearest expression in a scene that sees James on the sunny balcony of his apartment after a midnight rendezvous with Vaughan (Botting and Wilson 84). James's afternoon reverie is interrupted by his wife's slightly narcotized whisper in his ear: "my car." A cut to the garage shows Catherine crouching next to her silver convertible, a dent blighting the otherwise perfectly streamlined panels of its right side. Her question to James—"Could it have been deliberate?"—is immediately answered by the audience, who can draw on its memory of Vaughan's repeated ramming of the side of James's car in the previous scene to infer that this, too, was Vaughan's doing. James, however, chooses to bypass the workings of psychological deduction and to rely, instead, on direct textural experience: pitting the personalized signature of the dent against the depersonalized anonymity of the mass-produced vehicle, he gets his own answer—"It was Vaughan"—by running his hand directly over its uneven surface (fig. 3). What follows, in fact, implies that in addition to its hermeneutic bounty, the simulacral depth of the crumpled surface provides a certain emotional premium: a close-up of James's face appears to radiate just the kind of vigorous, direct, untriangulated emotion that the glossy surfaces of the opening scenes militate against.

Given the film's apparent allegiance to postmodern theory's reactionary hermeneutic and emotional grammar, it seems only natural that both scholarly and journalistic responses to *Crash* should also read like facsimiles of postmodern orthodoxy. On the one hand, the film's (mostly journalistic) detractors foreground the "glossy and neutralized" commodities that furnish its bravura opening sequences (Jameson, *Geopolitical Aesthetic* 180), seconding Jameson in condemning the glossy surface's impoverished emotional and hermeneutic lexicon as a betrayal of psychological and thematic depth.[17] On the other, *Crash*'s (mostly academic) advocates foreground the coarse, fractured surfaces that rise to prominence later in the film, ventriloquizing Barthes's and Baudrillard's visionary odes to the hermeneutic and emotional profundity of the "*punctum*" and the "gash" in a critical chorus that ranges from Botting and Wilson's suggestion that "from being a me-

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Fig. 3
Frame from *Crash*.

chanical failure of diminishing returns, sex is transformed by the crash and becomes, again, a liberating experience" (87) to Beard's contention that "the revitalization of the James-Catherine relationship" is "founded . . . on the abjection of crashes and crash-like injuries" (405). Opposite in their judgment of the film and divergent in their professional agendas, these two critical contingents are nevertheless identical in their capitulation to postmodern theory's hermeneutic and emotional credo.

Yet there are fractures in this apparently immaculate critical carapace. For if the calculus that cinches the textural opposition glossy/rough to the hermeneutic opposition surface/depth echoes postmodern edict, it also seems to do little more than transcribe into scholarly or journalistic terminology the sentiments of *Crash*'s characters. When Botting and Wilson observe that *Crash* locates in "the battered and broken body . . . the last remnant of a human erotic imaginary in the face of a fully automated form of desire," the reader is immediately reminded of Vaughan's proclamation—to Ballard, as the two men speed through the night in the derelict, open-topped Lincoln—that "the car crash is a fertilizing rather than a destructive event, mediating the sexuality of those who have died with an intensity that's impossible in any other form" (84). In fully identifying the film's rhetoric with that of its characters, however, Botting and Wilson leave no space for narrational irony, internal self-difference, or simple performative contradiction—no space, that is, for the "wounds," "*puncta*," or "fragments" that are the formal correlates of the literal rough surfaces that they reify. As this suggests, the widely sanctioned scholarly reading of the film may be rent by contradiction. The analysis of these contradictions, in turn, may help us deconstruct the textural, hermeneutic, and emotional logic of the postmodern theoretical doctrine to which *Crash*'s scholarly commentators appear to subscribe. To exploit these points of contradiction, however, we must shift our critical attention from narrative and character, the level at which texture is described and portrayed, to formal rhetoric, the level at which texture is experienced.

On first blush, *Crash*'s unique cinematic labor seems to corroborate critical dogma on the relation between texture and hermeneutics through a meticulously coordinated series of alignments between the formal and representational registers. Perhaps the most

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telling example of this tendency is the film's insistent cross-implication of the glossy surface and the tracking shot—a formal device that, in the oft maligned yet abidingly powerful paradigm of classic film theories of suture, impedes emotional engagement with the story world by converting the camera from a neutral, transparent observer of the scene into an ostentatious "accomplice" or "intruder" (Sinclair 47), arresting the spectator's gaze on the surface of the image (Heath 57). Relying on the "precise silent smoothness" of Suschitzky's tracking shots as the vehicle for its satin-smooth veneers (Beard 395), *Crash* transforms critical assertions about the glossy surface's "superficiality" into formal axioms (Cornea 6). As the camera dollies slowly into the Ballards' bedroom to disclose the couple copulating quietly against the backdrop of their gleaming bedroom set, for example, the different alienation effects we associate with the extended, unattributed tracking shot on the one hand and with the subtle glimmer of the postmodern consumer fetish on the other are consubstantialized.

Insistently identifying the glossy surface with a formal gambit that holds the spectator hostage on the surface of the image, *Crash* no less insistently associates the roughened, fractured surface with a formal device celebrated for its capacity to "suture" the viewer into a spatially and psychologically rounded world: the cut. In keeping with the cool, clinical visual style of the film up to this point, the film's first collision sequence opens with a prolonged pan along the rain-slicked hood of James's car before cutting to an equally sustained shot of James inside it. Yet as James's loss of control of the car propels him inexorably toward the scene's closing tableau of cut-glass stalactites, wounded flesh, and tarnished metal, we transition suddenly to a series of crosscuts between exterior action shots of the car sliding over the wet road and interior over-the-shoulder shots of James attempting to regain control of the wheel. This fusion of the "cut" of filmic montage to the rough, broken surface is further secured at a figurative level. With an unusual interior view of the crash capturing the exact moment at which the body from the car opposite penetrates James's windshield, the blur of flesh and fabric so completely obscures the view from the camera that the subsequent cut to a view outside the car reads as a sign that the body has pierced not just the glass of the windshield but also the surface of the lens. The implication here is that the car crash had licensed so raw a connection to the object that the camera was forced to seek relief in the distance of an exterior shot. In supposed sync with the provisions of postmodern theory, then, *Crash* not only endows its glossy surfaces with the patina of superficiality that attaches to the tracking shot but also bestows on its rough, broken surfaces the semblance of depth and immediacy that attaches to the cut.

Yet unsurprisingly, perhaps, for a director identified not with cinematic and theoretical orthodoxy but with "censorial apprehension and retribution" (Harpold), Cronenberg ultimately uses *Crash*'s fastidious formal and thematic ecosystem to promote a subtle critique of postmodern theory's proclamations on texture, emotion, and hermeneutics. As Marc Jancovich has shown in his careful rereading of New Critical rhetoric, New Critical paeans to the perfect confluence of form and content routinely rely on a rubric of "integrity" and "wholeness" whose capacity to connote a certain glossy luster holds even where the form and the content at issue are, to quote Vaughan, as "ragged and dirty" as they are in *Crash*'s many collision scenes (84). In all too faithfully synchronizing its representational and formal registers—that is, in trying to validate through a series of complementary cuts the hermeneutic and emotional profundity of, say, Vaughan's trademark facial scarring—*Crash* does not just foreclose the "fragments," "*puncta*," and "wounds" associated with direct or animated emotion, it actually transfig-

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ures itself into a flawless, shimmering object of fascination. Even as its characters extol the epistemic and emotional value of broken skin, torn metal, and shattered glass, *Crash* invites critical reflection on its glamorous celluloid polish. Almost invariably yielding some version of the observation that "for all of its macabre content, Cronenberg's film is a glossy affair, his car crashes varnished in celluloid" (Crawford) or that "Cronenberg's *Crash* aspires to a kind of fleshy, abject raggedness, but never quite makes it" (Harpold), reviews of the film were characterized less by the intense, quasi-Deleuzian excitement anticipated by the film's radical scholarly critics than by a certain "grim fascination" (Maslin). As a text, therefore, *Crash* seems to constitute the same glossy, streamlined postmodern commodity that its characters devote their screen time to fracturing, shattering, or generally roughing up.

But while the film's perverse predilection for New Critical form precludes the vigorous, direct emotions fetishized by Vaughan and his associates, not every moment in the film displays so decisive a mating of form and content—and nor, for that matter, is every review so deficient in animated, vehement emotion. The scene in the hospital immediately after James's first accident is exemplary. While the scene's mise-en-scène abounds with rough, abrasive surfaces, from torn flesh to florid bruising to ladderlike stitching, its cinematography is characterized by the smooth, uniform movement of the panning shot, as the camera glides slowly up the length of James's mutilated body. For many critics, this hyphenation of rough surface and glossy form thoroughly compromises the raw, bloody force of its characters' injuries. According to Beard, for example, as "Cronenberg's camera tracks over and cuts among these injuries with utter serenity . . . it requires every ounce of abjection emanating from James's wounds to prevent these massive bruises and contusions from being assimilated into the overpoweringly calm grey and violet design scheme" (39). Yet if, for Beard, the scene's formal "calm[ness]" and "serenity" substantially weaken the emotional clout of James's "massive bruises and contusions," it is, oddly enough, precisely this scene and scenes like it that excited the most intense emotion in the critics, a fact nowhere more evident than in Beard's own testimony. At the constative level, the passage is a jeremiad against the emotionally impoverishing effect of the tracking shot. At the performative level, however, Beard's vivid inventory of "injuries . . . wounds . . . massive bruises and contusions" actually indexes the emotion whose foreclosure it bemoans. An analogous performative contradiction underlies an influential article on the film by Barbara Creed, whose passionate parataxis of "sheaths of metal, shards of glass, ripped leather upholstery, blood glistening on a steering wheel, two crash survivors copulating in a car, a man fucking a wound in the leg of a female crash victim, repeated episodes of anal sex" segues irrationally into the reproof that "*Crash* is oddly and unexpectedly detached" (175). While both Beard and Creed condemn the gap between rough content and glossy form on the basis that it undercuts animated, dynamic emotion, the vehemence of their responses to this gap speaks in the unmistakable tongue of the emotion whose foreclosure they deplore.

Yet if Beard's and Creed's reviews seem to exemplify the kind of dynamic, direct response forecast by critics like Botting and Wilson, the peculiar provenance of that response forces us to reassess its structural and cognitive coordinates. For in both cases, the catalyst is not the rough surface itself but the suspicion that the putative emotional power of the rough surface is being blunted by the putative emotional deficiency of the film's glossy form. Beard's response to "the abjection emanating from James's wounds," for example, is triangulated through his conviction that the "utter serenity" of Suschitzky's

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camerawork threatens to absorb them into "the overpoweringly calm grey and violet design scheme," while Creed's response to the film's "sheaths of metal, shards of glass, ripped leather upholstery" depends on what she reads as the cinematography's incongruous "detach[ment]." These emotionally exorbitant responses to the film's jagged and torn surfaces rest on the critics' belief that *Crash*'s glossy formal strategies are emotionally inadequate to a mise-en-scène littered with "shards of glass" and "ripped leather upholstery." Numerous critics have championed the film's rough, broken, or punctured surfaces as incitements to direct, unmediated emotion. Yet to the extent that our response to James's grisly flesh wounds depends on their revelation through a series of cool, polished tracking shots that are ostensibly unable to do them justice, that response is no less mediated than the fascination fomented by the dull metallic glow of *Crash*'s saturation-blue lighting on a rain-slicked street.

If fascination and the more recognizably "vehement" passions are homologous in their structure, however, they carry very different semiotic burdens. Whereas the fascination of the glossy surface is actuated by the feeling that someone is experiencing the emotion that I lack, the more vehement emotions of the rough surface are fueled by the feeling that someone is lacking the real, direct emotion that I experience. While both the rough and the glossy, then, participate in emotion's triangulated structure, fascination conceives the other as the hidden repository of real emotion, whereas the vehement passions conceive the other as the graveyard of emotional lack. This opposition is best exemplified by the different conceptualizations of "traffic" with which the two emotional categories are subliminally associated. In their tentative early forays into Vaughan's ghoulish "nexus of car crashes and sex" (Beard 380), the Ballards' fascination with cars prompts them to attribute an inscrutable purpose to automobiles everywhere. As Helen Remington (Holly Hunter) puts it, describing an experience James excitedly recognizes, "When I left the hospital I had the strange feeling that all these cars were gathering for some reason I didn't understand . . . there seemed to be ten times as much traffic." Yet by the final few minutes of the film, James is moved to remark to Catherine as the couple coast down an empty stretch of freeway, "The traffic! Where is everyone? They've all gone away. . . ." If the fascination that animated the first section of the film depended on an other charged with a vigorous, empowered sensuality, an other "gathering for some reason I didn't understand," the characters' taste of the raw, animated emotion yielded by the rough surface evokes a deflated, empty other—an other who is, in James's words, "gone away." One of the benefits of this argument is its capacity to account for the outraged reception of the film by British and American conservative groups, whose efforts to have *Crash* banned otherwise seem oddly anachronistic in the light of the ubiquity that "perverted acts" and "sexual deviance" enjoyed in mainstream cinema by the mid-1990s (Barker, Arthurs, and Harindranath 1). In view of my analysis, however, these censorship campaigns can be traced not to the film's content but to the unsettling disparity between the film's content and its form, between the rough surface and its glossy packaging. After all, this disparity projects a specter that stirs the anxieties plaguing late-twentieth-century Western conservative movements more deeply than mere sex perversion itself—the specter of the evacuated, dehumanized, affectless subject who fails to register sex perversion's horror.

I opened this essay with a question: "What was postmodernism?" For feeling theory, the answer is a foregone conclusion: postmodernism was a panoply of supine, depthless surfaces, resistant, even hostile, to the emotional formations that now captivate critical and cultural scholarship. Admittedly, many postmodern critics have ratified

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this reasoning, reinstating older, modernist paradigms of feeling by splicing the glossy surface to a model of icy, emotionless superficiality and the rough to a model of emotionally charged depth. Yet, as I have shown, neither of these alignments does justice to the specificity of postmodern texture's emotional structure or effect. Attention to the particularities of texture in *Crash* makes it clear that instead of merely retreading the emotional logic of the surface-depth opposition, the rough and the glossy have a unique—and uniquely postmodern—emotional syntax of their own. This is not to say that *Crash* is not hostile to emotions like fear, grief, or pleasure that fall readily into the descriptive ambit of cognitive-appraisal theory. Rather, it is to suggest that *Crash* entertains a distinctive, borderline species of emotion that should prompt us to reconsider our prevailing paradigms for understanding both emotion as a category of feeling and postmodernism as a now historical critical and aesthetic apparatus. As Sedgwick has suggested, "To perceive texture is never only to ask or know What is it like? nor even just How does *it* impinge on *me*? Textural perception always explores two other questions as well: How did it get that way? and What could I do with it?" (13). Texture, in other words, projects a series of social, discursive, and material worlds, and it is through reference to these worlds that it facilitates feeling. I experience fascination when the glossy surface's hermeneutic and thus emotional bounty magnetizes me with the promise of an other ostensibly possessed of the emotional immediacy I conceive myself as lacking. I feel more direct emotions, conversely, when the coarse, craggy surface's imagined hermeneutic and emotional wealth evokes an other ostensibly lacking the emotional immediacy I conceive myself as possessing.

Revealing the glistening, grainy consistency of a surface often dismissed as an empty, emotionless plane, this essay contends that just as modernism has metamorphosed under the "fresh eyes and ears" of the "new modernist studies" (Mao and Walkowitz 738, 737), so postmodernism may be ripe for an analagous reassessment. Yet if this analysis has used emotion to revamp our thinking about postmodernism, it has equally used postmodernism to push the envelope of our thinking about emotion. Much current scholarship on feeling reifies affect as a mobile, promiscuous, and liberating entity, while dismissing emotion as a stodgily subjective phenomenon. For most critics in feeling theory, in fact, it is affect—something "irreducibly bodily and autonomic" and "completely free of inherent meaning or association to [its] triggering source"—that is hailed as the theoretical "way forward" (Massumi 36; Gregg and Seigworth 5; Hemmings 550). Yet from the fascination of the glossy surface to the more intense emotions of the rough, the feelings that congregate around postmodern texture make an equally powerful claim for the transformative force of a phenomenon that we can now read less as a thing that a subject "has" than as a gleamingly impossible promise, less as an "old surprise to which we have become more or less accustomed" (Massumi 220–21) than as what Oliver Harris, describing fascination, dubs "an obscure attraction, an experience we can capture only in the process of being captivated" (6). In advancing this argument, my gambit is this: that precisely in its resistance to familiar models of emotion, postmodernism may be a priceless aesthetic and theoretical resource in their reappraisal.

Notes

1. In 2005 Bill Brown argued that far from being "over," postmodernism had only "just begun." Without disputing Brown's assessment of "*postmodernism* as a periodizing term" (735), my essay rests on the premise—most clearly articulated by the title of Brian McHale's article "What Was Postmodernism?," from which I lift my opening question—that the fortunes of postmodernism

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as an aesthetic and critical practice are on the wane. This position is substantiated not just by those committed to forms of thinking seemingly incompatible with postmodernism (Bourriaud; Kirby; Lipovetsky 11; Samuels 220) but also by postmodernism's former advocates (Connor, Introd. 1; Hutcheon xi; McHale).

2. It was Jameson's perception of this relation that provoked his formulation of a phrase now recited with slogan-like regularity in connection with postmodern thinking: "the waning of affect" (*Postmodernism* 15).

3. I use "feeling theory" here because it encompasses, with a modicum of neutrality, recent work on both "affect" and "emotion."

4. See also McCarthy et al. 274; Probyn 23–25; Woodward 761.

5. For cognitive-appraisal theorists, then, while physiological arousal is a necessary component of emotion, emotions originate in, and are largely classified through reference to, the cognitive interpretation of an object or situation. In this model, emotion is the product of the following sequence: I encounter an event or object, I evaluate its meaning for me, I experience an associated physical arousal. In the absence of interpretation or judgment, a physiological change—say, an eruption of tears—neither qualifies as an emotion nor can be distinguished as pleasant or unpleasant (both ecstasy and anguish, after all, can involve tears). De Sousa; Nussbaum; and Solomon offer key defenses of cognitive-appraisal theory.

6. Cvetkovich ("Everyday Feeling" 5), Gould (22), and Sedgwick (113) critique cognitive-appraisal theory from within feeling theory.

7. Berlant; Grossberg; Massumi; Sedgwick; Thrift.

8. Massumi 35; Shaviro, *Post-cinematic Affect* 3–4; Sedgwick and Frank 18.

9. Berlant 1–32; Grossberg 69–88; Massumi 1–45; Sedgwick and Frank; Thrift 1–26.

10. Buchanan 93; Pellegrini and Puar 37; Shaviro, *Post-cinematic Affect* 4–5.

11. Sedgwick 13–17.

12. For more on the varied cultural deployment of the glossy surface, see J. Brown; Cheng; Thompson.

13. While Roland Barthes's postmodern credentials are not indisputable, critics have identified *Camera Lucida* as part of his late-career "postmodernist turn" (e.g., Herman 39–40).

14. David Harvey argues that postmodernism's "evident fascination with . . . reflecting glass surfaces" effectively "draw[s] a veil over real geography through [the] construction of images and reconstructions, costume dramas, staged ethnic festivals, etc." (88, 87).

15. For more on fascination as a function of the failure of cognitive capacity, see Hume 74–75; Blanchot 32; Adorno 235–38.

16. My account of the fascination of the glossy surface deviates considerably from the account of the glossy's allure enshrined in the Freudian theory of the fetish. Whereas for Freud the glossy fetish object "ward[s] . . . off" (while unconsciously "memorial[izing]") the realization of the lack of the phallus (206), in my reading the glossy surface fails to ward off our awareness of the lack of intense emotion; rather, the fascinated subject's sense of lack is resolved into emotion only through the intercession of a ghostly, hypothetical other.

17. For more on this see Bellamy and Howard; Barker, Arthurs, and Harindranath 45; Johnson.

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