In Focus

Embodied Figuration and Character Emotion in Cinema: The Role of Embodied Affective Cues

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ABSTRACT

This paper engages with research on embodiment, cognition, and figurative meaning in cinema to develop a system for categorizing the cinematic cues that viewers use to gauge character affective experience. Many film theorists whose work is primarily focused on affective experience consider the relationship between the spectator and the character's facial and bodily expressions. However, films often convey the affective states of characters by integrating bodily expressions with cinematic techniques, such as lighting, framing, and editing. These cinematic techniques can provide insight into a character's affective states through their figurative associations with represented moods, feelings, and emotions. By exploring the metonymic, metaphoric, and similative properties of cinematic representations of affect, we can better understand how cinematic representations are understood by a community of viewers. Throughout this paper, I put forth the framework of "embodied affective cues" and identify behavioral, physical, and environmental cues to address how a character's affective experience is represented by cinematic cues external to their body.

KEYWORDS: affect, affective experience, cinematic empathy, embodied affective cues, emotion concepts, figurative meaning, film, metonymy, simile

"The lived body [is], at once, both an *objective* subject and a *subjective* object: a sentient, sensual, and sensible ensemble of materialized capacities and agency that literally and figurally makes sense of, and to, both ourselves and others."

Vivian Sobchack, *Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture*, 2004

INTRODUCTION

This article examines how we understand character emotions through embodied figuration in cinema. Recently, film theorists have shown that embodiment is crucial to our understanding of characters' affective experience (Bálint, Tan 2015; Coëgnarts 2019; Forceville, Paling 2018; Grodal 2009; Kappelhoff, Müller 2011; Müller et al. 2018; Ortiz 2015). Films offer a unique perspective on embodied meaning because they rely on the use of highly dynamic and figurative representations to convey a character's affective state. Recently, theorists have discussed figurative representations of emotions as emotion concepts (Kövecses 1990, 2000, 2010, 2020; Kövecses et al. 2015), embodied emotions (Hufendiek

2016, 2018), embodied emotion metaphors (Bartsch 2010, 2015), embodied metaphors of emotion (Ortiz 2015), and cinematic empathy (D'Aloia 2015, 2021). Drawing upon the work of these theorists, this article provides a categorical framework of embodied figuration in cinema, called "embodied affective cues," to show how we gain access to a character's experience (emotional or otherwise) through onscreen figurative depictions. Embodied affective cues are figurative constructions (metonymic, metaphoric, and similative) that we use to understand a character's subjective experience through intersubjectively accessible frames (both culturally salient frames and embodied frames). These cues become embedded within and are activated by the various cinematic modes. Moreover, they take the form of direct embodiment (actor's bodies, gestures, facial expressions) and indirect embodiment (editing, camera movement, music), and they can be represented internally (point-of-view, dreams, hallucinations) and externally (body transformations, sounds, images, and through the mise-en-scène). By highlighting the different ways in which characters' affective experience can be expressed through cinematic representations, I will show how embodied affective cues in the cinema provide access to a character's subjective experience through shared intersubjective frames. This is a pivotal step that reveals how the various cinematic modes make characters' affective states accessible through embodied figuration. It also highlights the embodied decision-making processes of filmmakers as they choose how to portray embodied meaning in the cinematic form.

Film scholars have explored spectators' embodied, affective, and emotional responses to characters in film (Carroll, 1990; D'Aloia, 2015, 2021; Gallese, Guerra 2019; Grodal, 2009; Ortiz; 2015; Plantinga, 2009; Smith, [1995] 2022, 2017; Tan, [1996] 2011). In fact, research on spectators' emotional and affective responses to cinematic representation is one of the most widely discussed topics in film studies, especially cognitive film studies. We know that we experience emotional responses to narrative film, and other types of artistic representations, but developing a framework that explores the exact mechanism of our emotional responses has proven difficult. This probably has to do with the underlying issue that we do not entirely know, from a biological or a psychological standpoint, the exact system of inputs that generates emotional responses, nor do we know how to talk about emotions in a precise way. There is always something lost when we attempt to communicate our emotions and experiences through language alone. However, artistic representations of emotions, at least, have shown the evolution of our ability to convey emotion as artists come up with novel ways to represent complex and nuanced sets of emotions. Specifically, advancements in technology have allowed filmmakers to devise interesting ways to convey character emotion by use of a camera that moves through space, mimics human perception, and can be manipulated in ways that figuratively portray human experience (Branigan 1984, [1992] 2007; Coëgnarts, Kravanja 2015a, 2015b). Additionally, editing techniques and arrangements of the mise-en-scène can further help to elaborate character experiences in highly figurative ways (Branigan 2006; Coëgnarts, Kravanja 2015c; Forceville 2015; Gallese, Guerra 2012, 2019, Ortiz 2014), especially when sound is involved (Chattah 2009, 2015; Coëgnarts 2019; Fahlenbrach 2008; Fahlenbrach, Reinerth 2018; Jackson 2022; Ward 2015).

Drawing upon several cinematic examples in this paper, I will outline the metonymic, metaphoric, and similative properties of cinematic representations that have been used to convey characters' affective experiences. First, I will look at film theory that has explored the relationship between the spectator's engagement with characters and the cinema. Knowing the connection between spectators and characters can help us to understand how we read emotions on characters' bodies and how we make sense of characters'

emotions in relation to on-screen events. Second, I will discuss theories from the field of embodied cognition to outline the intersubjective relations that arise between spectators and cinematic representations. The primary focus of this section will be on cognitive linguistic approaches to show how embodied figurative meaning contributes to our engagement with characters. Cognitive linguists have shown that the way we think about the world is primarily figurative (Fauconnier, Turner 2002; Lakoff, Johnson [1980] 2003, 1999) and that "figurative meaning is part of the basic fabric of linguistic structure" (Dancygier, Sweetser 2014: 1). Following this, I will provide a series of filmic examples that rely on embodied associations between characters and cinematic figurative representations. Charting a path through these examples, I will argue that cinematic emotions are representational, and we can make sense of such representations through our own embodied understanding. The purpose of representation, specifically of emotion, is to engage the spectator through figurative portrayals that are intersubjectively accessible using culturally salient or embodied frames. The cross-modal integration of frames has been explored by cognitive linguists researching figuration and multimodality to show how meaning emerges in creative artforms (Borkent 2017; Dancygier 2012; Dancygier, Sweetser 2014; Forceville 2017; Forceville, Urios-Aparisi 2009; Sweetser 2013). Combining several of the theories outlined in this paper, I will introduce the term "embodied affective cues" to categorize the ways that cinematic representations convey embodied emotions that affectively engage viewers by bringing them closer to the experience of characters through cinematic means.

1. BUILDING A REPRESENTATIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR CINEMATIC EMPATHY

Several cinematic devices have been described to foreground a character's emotional experience in moving images. For instance, cinematic empathy has been largely discussed from the perspective of a spectator's engagement with characters' bodies. The argument for cinematic empathy has focused on how engaged or disengaged a spectator is, or how encompassed they become in the life and experiences of characters. Certain theorists argue that moving images allow for a closer or more distant engagement with characters based on who we are meant to align our viewpoint with. For example, Murray Smith describes what he calls "the structure of sympathy" to show how we align ourselves with the actions of characters to determine what they "know and feel" ([1995] 2022: 83). Smith draws upon Richard Wollheim's definition of processes of "central" and "acentral" imagining to build a case for how we engage and sympathize with film narratives. Central imagining refers to those moments in film where we imagine what it is like to be a character and "it may also involve simulations of the internal states and values of the person or character functioning as the vehicle of the central imagining" ([1995] 2022: 76). Similarly, Carl Plantinga describes films that either encourage or discourage spectator's engagement with the character as "sympathetic" and "distanced narratives" (2009). Both Smith and Plantinga suggest that moving images can be shaped in ways that engage, move, or guide a spectator's response to the emotional states of characters. Moreover, they both use metaphors of closeness and distance to refer to how engaged we become with a character's experience. This is a compelling argument to make because it suggests that the cinematic mode has the capacity to elicit (or not) emotional responses from audiences based on a proximity constructed by cinematic means. Adding complexity to the argument, Smith later makes the distinction between *mind-reading* and *mindfeeling* (Smith 2017). Mindreading refers to moments in which the spectator empathizes with a character with limited narrative context. Mindfeeling, on the other hand, refers to moments where "empathy arises at the apex of [narrative] understanding" (2017: 194). The question

then is not whether films have the potential to evoke emotional responses from spectators – that seems obvious – but rather what cinematic techniques, especially beyond bodily and facial expression, cause us to have an emotional response? How do filmmakers draw us closer to the experience of characters? And, if filmmakers can generate emotional responses in us, then what aspects of the onscreen events contribute to generating a response?

As Smith notes, central imagining suggests that spectators develop mental representations, or simulate the experience of characters in ways that generate empathy from the spectator. In fact, many cognitive film theorists have argued for embodied simulation as one of the primary driving forces of film comprehension (Coëgnarts 2017; D'Aloia 2015, 2021; Gallese, Guerra 2012, 2019; Ward 2015). From a neuroscientific perspective, simulation theory suggests that "our brain–body system not only gives us experience of that [on-screen] virtual space and allows us to process a spatial cognition that we need to live a given experience, it also puts us in a position to share the situations, actions, gestures, and emotions that take place in that other dimension represented on the cinema screen" (Gallese, Guerra 2019: 44–45). For instance, D'Aloia has coined the term "cinematic empathy" to refer to "a pre-reflexive and 'immediate' psychophysical process through which the viewer experiences a character's perceptions, thoughts, actions, and emotions via embodied simulation" (2015: 187). He argues that "when conflating the bodily expression of the character and the perception of the viewer a 'shared experiential space' emerges… in which the viewer adopts the character's perspectives and deliberately reproduces their mental states" (2015: 187–188). Accounts of embodied simulation suggest that we understand the meaning of language by simulating, through mental representations, the experiences of the described events. Moreover, we derive an experiential understanding of others by modeling their behaviors and intentional experiences based on equivalences of what others do and feel and what we do and feel. D'Aloia captures this idea in his exploration of neurofilmology when he claims that the filmic experience manifests as "distance, proximity, distance again" and that "empathy allows this psychological 'round-trip' of approaching, fulfilling, and detaching" (2021: 79). In other words, cinematic empathy is a process wherein the spectator sees the character in front of an object, puts herself in the place of the character, and then detaches herself to see the object again. In so doing, the spectator is better able to understand the character's affective state based on a proximity constructed by the scene. This model of embodied simulation emerges as a product of intersubjective relations between subjects and objects and is the underlying basis for the theory of mind. I would like to extend the discussion of simulation theory beyond cases where bodily expression is the major focus to show how cinematic cues beyond the character's body are crucial for aligning the spectator's knowledge of a character's experience.

The embodied approach to cinema suggests that we become fully immersed in the lives of characters because our brains and bodies are actively engaged in the viewing process, a sentiment that is echoed by Ed Tan when he claims that "as a viewer I do not only entertain the illusion that I am present in the scene – the diegetic effect – I may even feel that to a greater or lesser degree the adventures of the protagonists are actually happening to me" ([1996] 2011). Although I cannot fully dismiss Tan's claims, I also cannot say that I have ever experienced a film as though it were happening to me. However, I would make the argument that there are intersubjective associations between spectator and character that become manifest in cinematic representations and show what it is "like" to have the experiences of a character. These associations make it possible to understand how a character feels based on our own embodied experience of the represented events. This account of embodiment

is similar to Gallese and Guerra's recent study of embodied simulation in cinematic representations in which they claim that we experience empathy through our embodied understanding of character perception, emotion, and sensations. They suggest that when we watch a film, "our interaction with the world is exclusively mediated by a simulated perception of events, actions, and emotions represented in the movie we are viewing. It is almost as if there were a form of emotional *transfer* between actors and spectators; the latter, being forced into inactivity, are more receptive to feelings and emotions" (2019: 43). Although I may not experience what happens to a character, there are moments when my engagement becomes fully tuned in to the emotions of a character because the film mediates my emotional engagement with the on-screen events. However, one aspect of cinema that many scholars have spent less time focusing on is that these moments are often accompanied by affective cues that draw the viewer into a deeper understanding by bringing them "closer" to the experience of characters, oftentimes in ways that disrupt the narrative flow.

The discussion of embodiment, especially as it pertains to closeness and distance, or empathy and sympathy, depends largely on the cinematic cues that have been embedded within a film narrative. There are those techniques that aid the narrative flow of a film, but there are also those that help us to understand how a character feels, which can both aid or disrupt the narrative flow. Much of the research on empathy treats cinematic cues as secondary to the facial expressions and movement of characters' bodies. However, cinematic cues guide spectators, not just to the character with whom they should align themselves but also to the appropriate emotional response. For instance, there are some film theorists who discuss the role of camera movement and embodied meaning for representing subjective experiences (Coëgnarts, Kravanja 2015a; Gallese, Guerra 2015, 2019). Although camera movement can play a crucial role in constructing the subjective experience of a character's perceptual experience, especially from the point-of-view of a character, it can also reveal moments of intense psychological turmoil for those characters. Moreover, when camera movement is combined with editing techniques, special effects, facial expressions, sounds, and so forth, it can heighten the empathetic experience for spectators by grounding the spectator in figurative representations of the character's emotional experience. This suggests that we do more than simulate the experience of characters because of their facial expression and bodily movement. Instead, we combine multiple cinematic cues that closely represent the feelings and emotions that a character experiences, and we understand these representations because of our own embodied experience. If we accept that there are cinematic cues that aid in the construction of our embodied understanding of character emotions, the next step is to question what strategies filmmakers use to bring us closer to the experience of characters. How, for instance, do filmmakers employ cinematic techniques to convey character experience? Moreover, how do we embody the emotions of characters who undergo experiences that we might never have had?

2. FIGURATIVE MEANING IN THE CINEMA

To understand the representation of emotions in cinema, I turn to figurative meaning. Two levels of analysis need to be distinguished here. First, we can focus our analyses of figurative representations of emotion by highlighting the specific cinematic techniques that guide the audience's affective response to character emotion. Second, once we know the cinematic cues that guide our affective responses, we can address the various conceptual mappings that occur to produce an understanding of character emotion. Conceptual mappings in the study of moving images have largely been conceived of from the perspective of conceptual metaphor theory (Lakoff, Johnson [1980] 2003, 1999). Cinematic

metaphors are often useful for understanding certain aspects of highly complex emotional configurations. In fact, the dynamic interplay of moving images creates the space for multiple metaphors to become embedded within a single scene. The inclusion of multiple metaphors gives us a greater appreciation for the complexity and nuance with which to represent emotions. However, there is more than metaphorical meaning at play, and so we need to add a variety of tools to our analytical toolbox. Specifically, metonymy and similative meaning (Dancygier 2022; Lou 2017, 2021) have been shown to play as crucial a role in conveying emotions, especially in ways that closely align with a spectator's affective response to on-screen events. This section will build upon current affective theories of film to show how metonymy, metaphor, and simile each play a role in constructing the figurative portrayal of emotions through embodied affective cues.

Before moving on, it is useful to consider the number of scholars who have explored the meaning potential of cinematic cues and their evocation of emotions (Carroll 1999; Grodal 2009; Ortiz 2015; Plantinga 1999, 2009; G. Smith 2003; M. Smith [1995] 2022). For instance, Carl Plantinga has noted the role of facial expressions in *scenes of empathy* (1999), in which close-ups of a character's face in relation to sets of images allow the spectator to empathize with characters. Plantinga's work highlights that facial expressions do not happen in a vacuum, and it is necessary for combinations of cues to aid in the construction of scenes of empathy. Alternatively, Greg Smith has focused on the notion of *mood cues* to describe aspects of a film that help to build a specific mood (2003). Alternative to facial expressions, mood cues can be elaborated by visual, auditory, and environmental signifiers that help to establish the mood of the film. Mood cues correspond to a spectator's response to cinematic effects, but they do not necessarily need to represent a character's emotional state.

Embodied affective cues are in some ways similar to scenes of empathy and mood cues in that they focus on the cinematic construction of a spectator's response to the on-screen event. However, the focus of embodied affective cues is on establishing figurative similarity or alignment between the spectator and the character. Additionally, embodied affective cues provide a framework in which metonymy, metaphor, and simile play a role in the conceptual mapping of emotional frames in cinematic representations. Similarly, in *Emotion Concepts,* Zoltán Kövecses explores expressions of emotions that are figuratively conveyed through metonymic and metaphorical associations to concrete aspects of experience. Indeed, Kövecses makes the crucial distinction that "emotions are conceptually represented in the mind as cognitive or, rather, cognitive-cultural models" (Kövecses 2014: 22). In fact, Kövecses and others have shown that associations between the color red and abstract notions of anger, heat, passion, and love are pervasive in language and depiction (Kövecses, 1990, 2000, 2010; Kövecses et al., 2015; Prinz, 2006). For instance, people often describe "seeing red" when they are angry, which has deeply embedded cultural associations. They could also have more experiential associations between the color red and objects such as blood, fire, ripe fruit, or dangerous animals/insects. There are also physical associations as someone who is angry typically has a red face. In all these scenarios, we build metaphoric associations between the color "red" and "anger" so that the concrete source domain RED stands in for the abstract target domain ANGER (ANGER IS RED). This type of conceptual metaphor can be represented in language as we talk about someone "seeing red," or it can become activated across the various modes of representation, such that a red filter on an image can visually depict a character's anger (shown in **Figure 1**, from Powell and Pressburger's *Black Narcissus*, 1947). There are several ways that emotion concepts appear in cinema, and all of them depend on the integration of embodied affective cues that prime the conceptual structure. Therefore, filmmakers must



FIGURE 1. Visual depiction of the emotion concept ANGER IS RED in Powell and Pressburger's *Black Narcissus* (General Film Distributors, 1947). Screen capture by author.

be deliberate when choosing when, how, and why they convey emotion concepts to achieve the desired effect and ensure that the spectator makes the proper associations between the figurative representation and the emotion.

As the example in Figure 1 shows, the red filter is not just about establishing a mood; it is built into the scene to add to our understanding of a character's anger. However, there is much more built into the scene that we need to understand how and why a character might have an emotional response, including the narrative context in which the cue arises. We must also consider why the filmmaker makes a deliberate choice to enter the subjective viewpoint of a character. How, for instance, does this aid our understanding of the film? How do we know we have entered the subjective viewpoint of a character? There are various mappings that occur within a single scene that help to establish meaning. Oftentimes, we can understand the complexity of a scene on the fly because of the intersubjective frames and domains that are embedded within a variety of cinematic cues. Below, I will highlight two concepts that I have found useful for understanding the construction of emotion concepts in cinema, namely, visual frame metonymy and synesthetic simile. Visual frame metonymy shows how multiple conceptual frames can be embedded within a single image, and by extension how emotion concepts in cinematic depictions can be understood through the interaction of frames that are evoked cross-modally. Additionally, synesthetic simile can account for mappings where a sound or an image elaborates a character's experience through embodied similarity.

2.1 Visual frame metonymies and emotion concepts in cinema

The above example reveals how emotion concepts are represented across modalities in cinema. It shows how the combination of visual cues, editing, narrative context, and character viewpoints can help to convey a subjective emotional experience. As both a multimodal and a dynamic artform, cinematic representation allows filmmakers to use sounds and images to construct meaning throughout their narratives. To understand the evocation of concepts across modalities, I have found Charles Fillmore's model of frame semantics to be useful. The theory of frame semantics takes as its main premise the idea that linguistic semantics relate to encyclopaedic knowledge and that frames are mental structures that organize our understanding of the world. They are made up of a set of conceptual elements that are related to each other and help us make sense of a particular idea or concept. Fillmore explains that frames involve "any system of concepts related in such a way that to understand any one of them you have to understand the whole structure in which it fits; when one of the things in such a structure is introduced in the text, or into a conversation, all of the others are automatically made available" (Fillmore 1982: 111). Take as an example our knowledge of the commercial transaction frame. Within the frame, the verb "buy" also elicits a buyer, goods, a seller, and a price. This suggests that buying cannot be construed without selling, distinguishing an object to be sold, attaching a price to the object, etc. As this example shows, when a discourse participant invokes any aspect of the commercial transaction frame (such as a buyer), the entire frame is made available so that any mention of an associated word will be in the context of the commercial transaction frame. The concept of framing makes clear the potential for discussing verbal and text-based analyses, but it has largely been underutilized in multimodal analyses, especially those regarding film semiotics.

Extending the role of metonymy in frame-based reasoning processes, Barbara Dancygier and Eve Sweetser argue that the frame-metonymic structure of cognitive processes allows for reasoning about visual imagery as well as verbal and text-based prompts because "metonymic projection is a basic foundation of figurative thought" (2014: 122). To account for the metonymic

projection of visual imagery, they introduce the concept of "visual frame metonymies." Visual depictions often rely on our knowledge of the combinatorial aspect of the frames evoked. For instance, Dancygier and Sweetser provide the example of Banksy's *The Grin Reaper*, which is composed of an image of the Grim Reaper sitting on a clockface with the hands of the clock positioned close to midnight. In addition, the face of the Grim Reaper is replaced by the yellow-faced Smiley symbol. To make sense of this artwork, one needs to have access to each of the frames that is metonymically evoked by the imagery. The cowl and the scythe metonymically evoke the frames that have become synonymous with the Grim Reaper as a harvester of souls, and the personification of death. Additionally, the clockface metonymically evokes the passage of time, with the hands of the clock positioned close to midnight, which is frame-metonymic of the passage to a new day or year. However, in this example, the combination of the clock striking midnight, the associations between the countdown of clock, midnight as a transitional period, and the Grim Reaper as the personification of death would suggest that someone is about to die. Lastly, the Smiley symbol is universally associated with "feeling good." Most Westerners would recognize the mocking nature of the image as the Grim Reaper sits atop a Doomsday clock awaiting an imminent rich harvest. Dancygier and Sweetser note that the meaning of the visual frame metonymy is dependent on the viewpoint of the observer, and their specific cultural understanding of the frames (Dancygier 2017, 2021; Dancygier, Sweetser 2014; Dancygier, Vandelanotte 2017; Sweetser 2013). They show how figurative thought allows us to make sense of multiple conceptual frames that have been embedded within a single representation, and by extension how we can make sense of the figurative meaning of cinematic representations.

In film, we often recognize frames evoked by the multimodal composition of sounds and moving images as opposed to static imagery. The dynamic nature of cinematic expression affords filmmakers the ability to compose meaning out of a multiplicity of devices that includes editing, camera movement, cinematography, performance, lighting, and so forth. Each of these cinematic tools provides a rich area of study that can be elucidated by an understanding of frame metonymic associations within multimodal representation. For instance, the metonymic structure of the camera and editing has been explored by film theorists to outline the crucial role that embodiment plays in our understanding of the camera. Making a case for the role of metonymies and metaphors of perception in film, Maarten Coëgnarts and Peter Kravanja suggest that shots of the eye are often used in film to highlight the perceptual experience of seeing (2015a: 226). For example, shot-reverse shot editing often depicts the face of a character looking somewhere offscreen (which can be represented as an extreme close-up of an eye), before cutting to an image of the perceived object. It is natural for us to accept that the camera functions as the eye of the narrator that reveals to us the most relevant information in the story. In the case of metonymies of perception, the characteristic parts of the frame can evoke the whole frame and even our embodied and intersubjective understanding of the frame of visual perception. The image of an eye, a camera, or a character looking at something offscreen are all visual cues that metonymically evoke the frame of visual perception, and the frame of visual perception is necessary for continuity editing, especially for editing devices that connect disparate shots, and represent character experience. As Coëgnarts and Kravanja have shown through their discussion of the metonymies and metaphors of perception, the shot-reverse shot is one of the most used frame metonymies, and one that is ubiquitous in constructions of subjective viewpoint.

Taking the image from Figure 1 as an example, we can unpack the multiple frames that have been embedded within the image to create the idea that the red filter signifies the focalized character's

anger. Not only does this example convey the role of visual frame metonymy but it showcases how imperative narrative context is for understanding a character's affective state. In the scene, Sister Ruth has confronted her love interest, Mr. Dean, after running away from a small convent of Anglican sisters; however, Mr. Dean denies Sister Ruth's romantic advances. Following this denial, the camera takes the point-of-view of Sister Ruth to show us her embodied experience of anger represented by the screen turning red. We know the context of the scene that has been built up to this point in the film and can easily recognize each character's viewpoint. When the camera takes the point-of-view of Sister Ruth, the camera becomes frame-metonymic of her visual perception. By virtue of the alignment of the camera and Sister Ruth's viewpoint, everything within the field of view of the camera becomes frame-metonymic of her experience. Moreover, when the screen turns red it is frame-metonymic of her physical reaction to Mr. Dean, which we understand through the emotion concept ANGER IS RED. Taken in isolation, the image of Mr. Dean with a red filter over his face would make no sense. However, the frame-metonymic associations, including the narrative frame, established throughout the scene allow us to easily make sense of both characters' viewpoints, the camera that takes the subjective viewpoint of Sister Ruth, and the red filter as a representation of her affective experience. Visual frame metonymies are useful for showing how multiple frames are evoked in multimodal cinematic constructions, and emotion concepts show how combinations of frames have the potential to depict a character's affective experience.

2.2 Similative meaning and synesthetic similes

An often overlooked and newly emerging category of figurative meaning is *simile* (Dancygier 2022; Lou 2017, 2021). Simile has developed a seemingly paradoxical relationship with metaphor, especially regarding multimodal figuration, given the proximity of the two terms. In fact, Adrian Lou alludes to the root of this paradox as being linguistic in nature "because in the absence of *like* or *as*, a simile becomes a metaphor" (Lou 2021: 1). However, he regards similative expressions as "principally statements of 'similitude,' while metaphorical ones are statements of 'categorization'" (2021: 1). Thus, similative meaning refers to "a mode of understanding one entity by construing it as being perceptually and/or emotionally similar to another" (2021: 2). Regarding perceptual and emotional experience in film, it is the figurative portrayal of emotions using perceptual equivalences that allows us to construe a character's affective state and know what it *feels like* to be that character. When we encounter multimodal similes, although the use of *like* or *as* may not seem like part of the construction, we often mentally represent similative meaning as if the *like* or *as* is present.

Similative meaning can help us to understand what it feels like to be a character in a film based on similarity between perceptual experience and the figurative elements within a scene. Lou describes a specific type of similative meaning, synesthetic simile, to show how figurative elements form "a perceptual comparison by using the terms of one sense modality to describe another" (Lou 2021: 73). He argues that synesthesia is relevant to simile "because it shows that we are capable of using what we see to understand how we feel" (74). Similarly, Anne Bartsch expands on the notion of *audiovisual metaphor*s to suggest that "filmic devices such as music, color, lighting, camera movement, and editing can be used to express synesthetic qualities that are associated with the proprioceptive experience of emotions" (2015: 207). The description of synesthetic simile is useful for my categorization of embodied affective cues because it demonstrates how our minds make sense of multimodal figurative constructions that convey what a character feels like without having direct access to the character's experience. Instead, filmmakers have devised tech-

niques that allow them to depict a character's emotions through concrete experiential frames which can be mapped onto abstract emotions.

To show how synesthetic similes work, Lou gives the example of a specific type of internet meme, which he defines as a *when*-meme, that includes the caption "when you've been on the toilet for too long." Underneath the caption there is an image of someone sitting on a toilet while holding a smartphone and their legs have been replaced by an image of television static, implying that this is what it *feels like* inside the leg (130–131). The meme combines the intersubjectively accessible frames of paresthesia ("the sleeping leg") and television static to create an embodied understanding of the experience. What this example shows is that the frame of television static occurs in the auditory and visual modality and is not actually a feeling. However, our experience of television noise can be easily mapped onto the image so that we understand the audiovisual reference as paresthesia *feels like* my legs are television static.

In the context of cinema, synesthetic simile refers to the use of sensory and perceptual metaphors that connect different modalities to evoke a multisensory experience. It involves representing a concept from one sensory modality and creating a cross-modal figurative mapping. For example, we often encounter scenes where sound is used to represent or evoke a character's emotions. This can include the use of music, sound effects, or even silence to convey emotional states. By employing synesthetic simile, filmmakers figuratively map the emotions (typically associated with the domain of affect) onto the auditory modality, allowing viewers to experience emotions through sound. For instance, there is a famous scene in *Jaws* (1975) in which the camera zooms in on the panic-stricken face of the protagonist who witnesses a shark attack. In the scene, the camera movement (dolly zoom) and music emphasize the feeling of shock that is more directly observed in the character's facial expression. The sound of an intensifying violin is an extremely salient example of synesthetic simile because we can use it to



FIGURE 2. Synesthetic similes in Julie Taymor's *Titus* (Fox Searchlight Pictures, 1999). Screen capture by author.

represent what shock feels like through the auditory mode. In fact, musical sounds are often described by synesthetic words, such as *bright*, *blanketed, boxy*, *clear*, *fat*, *grainy*, *hard*, *soft*, *cold*, *warm*, and a host of other synesthetic terms.

Another instance of synesthetic simile could involve the use of visual cues to represent a character's mental or psychological state. This can be achieved through the manipulation of lighting, color grading, or visual effects to create a visual atmosphere that metaphorically captures the character's internal experience. Take, for instance, Julie Taymor's *Titus* (1999), a film that relies on synesthetic similes to show the emotional experience of characters during moments of intense inner turmoil. The image in **Figure 2** captures a figurative portrayal of Lavinia's memory of being raped and mutilated by the perpetrators, Chiron and Demetrius. The entire construction is composed of imagery that figuratively represents Lavinia's rape as a hunt, which also helps to maintain the similative associations between the imagery and her experience. Several shots depict Lavinia with the head of a doe and hooves for arms, while images of Chiron and Demetrius are intercut with images of tigers that leap forward and claw at her. The hunt frame allows for mappings to occur that position Lavinia as prey and the brothers as predators. Additionally, Lavinia is presented on a pedestal to show that she is on display and the object of male desire. Lavinia's facial expression and body language emphasize her vulnerability, and there are further frame metonymic associations that can be made between Lavinia's white dress and body language that are evocative of Marilyn Monroe in ***The Seven Year Itch*** (1955), an image in which Monroe is portrayed as an object of desire. Not only is this a hunt, but it is a hunt associated with the male gaze and sexual predation. Although the film cannot truly convey the experience of Lavinia, through the frame-metonymic associations the audience is able to gain insight into her emotional state and the physical violence enacted upon her.

Synesthetic similes in cinema leverage our capacity to associate and connect different sensory modalities. They tap into the embodied nature of our cognition, where our sensory systems interact and influence one another, allowing us to create complex meanings through figurative constructions. By employing synesthetic similes, filmmakers can evoke multiple meanings simultaneously that both enhance the viewer's knowledge of a character's emotional experience and develop their understanding of a character's subjective states.

2.4 Embodied cognition and character emotion

What I have been suggesting up to this point is that filmmakers use figurative meaning to build similarities between a character's emotional experience and the spectator's knowledge of concrete representational frames. Figurative patterns reflect cognitive ones, and filmmakers draw upon our cognitive capacity to make sense of figurative meaning by embedding emotion concepts within cinematic representations. Embodied figuration provides film analysts with a comprehensive set of tools with which to explore the intricate ways in which meaning emerges in films, particularly those that convey complex and creative expressions of characters' feelings and emotions. Understanding the specific contexts in which cinematic cues are employed and how they convey pertinent information for interpretation is crucial. Embodied figuration illuminates the metonymic evocation of frames in a film, shedding light on the connection between concrete and abstract domains, the comprehension of characters' affective states, and the integration of information through metonymy, metaphor, and simile. Bringing together these aspects of embodied figuration, embodied affective cues represent visual frame-metonymies that are characteristic of feelings and emotions. These frames are intersubjectively accessible because of their embodied cultural salience, and they depend on compressions of viewpoint that align the spectator

with characters. Embodied affective cues engage viewers and give them access to characters' subjective experiences. Developing a working understanding of embodied figuration enables a more focused examination of the various types of embodied affective cues and their manifestations in cinema. The next section synthesizes these distinct reasoning processes concerning embodied emotion in film to demonstrate the diverse ways in which we gain access to a character's affective experience.

3. EMBODIED AFFECTIVE CUES

Developing upon synesthetic effects and mood cues, embodied affective cues represent how emotional responses are evoked in audiences through embodied figuration. We may not know what it is to be a doe attacked by tigers, or to have steam blow from our ears, but these types of embodied affective cues give us access to a character's experience through embodied similarity. We do know what it is like to feel hot when we become angry, or what it is like to feel vulnerable. Figurative representations are useful for putting us in the place of the character so that we may construct their experience through intersubjectively accessible frames of reference.

Embodied affective cues can be characterized as representations that evoke and communicate emotions, feelings, or states of being through various modalities, such as behavioral, psychological, and environmental cues. They leverage the audience's own embodied experience, such as their understanding of body language, perceptual equivalences, and psychological states, to make sense of and emotionally engage with characters' experiences depicted onscreen. Moreover, they consist of a combination of audiovisual elements, including cinematography, editing, sound design, performance, and narrative devices, to figuratively convey and evoke emotions, feelings, and subjective experiences, thus enriching the audience's understanding of characters' affective states.

In this next section, I will provide three examples that show how we align ourselves with the experiences of characters through embodied affective cues. The examples were chosen because of their highly stylized depiction of emotional states. They show how emotion concepts in cinema are constructed by integrating frames across multiple modes. Crucially, multimodal representations allow for greater cohesion in frame-based scenarios because they allow for higher degrees of coherence as more frames can be added in ways that help stabilize our reasoning about abstract ideas and information. In other words, we have a stronger understanding of a character's affective state as more frames depicting that state become embedded within the cinematic representation. Film is extremely effective at conveying multiple frames in close succession because of the ability of the camera to direct the attention of the spectator to the desired frame, both visually and auditorily.

3.1 Behavioral Cues

I will refer to affective states represented through the character's body (including facial expression and bodily gestures) as behavioral cues. In film, behavioral cues are often employed to enhance the viewer's understanding of a character's affective experience, thoughts, or intentions through the character's body. These cues can be subtle or overt, depending on the desired effect and the context of the scene. Moreover, there are various ways to convey a character's affective state through behavioral cues, but some examples can achieve higher degrees of coherence through figurative and edited configurations of sounds and images. Consider the sequence of shots in **Figure 3** from Lars von Trier's *Antichrist* (2009) in which the nameless protagonist falls into a deep depression following the death of her young child. The scene in Figure 3 is part of a dream sequence that shows several behavioral affective cues of the protagonist through extreme close-up shots of her rapidly moving eyes, increased breathing, pulsing veins, and trembling hands to reveal her heightened state of anxiety. Each image is further enhanced

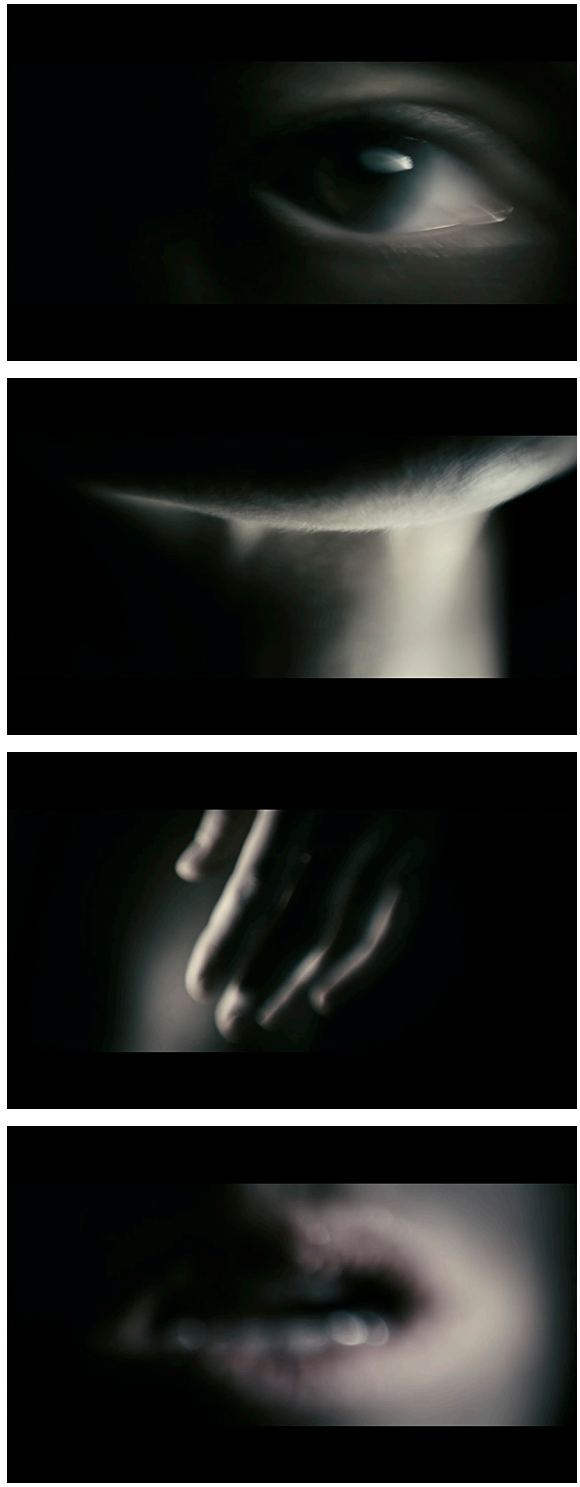


FIGURE 3 (A–D). Behavioral cues in Lars von Trier's *Antichrist* (IFC Films, 2011). Screen capture by author.

by the addition of sounds: the close-up on her mouth is accompanied by the sound of heavy breathing; her pulsing veins are accentuated by the sound of a rapid heartbeat; and the sound of gulping accompanies the close-up of her throat. Together, the sounds and images each metonymically evoke the associated affective frame and depict experiences that we can understand through our own embodied understanding.

These shared intersubjective frames of bodily experience can help us to understand how the protagonist feels. Each close-up shot of a specific behavior functions as a symptom of the affective state of the protagonist. In other words, the behavioral cue draws upon the metonymy EFFECT OF THE EMOTION FOR THE EMOTION, which implies that we can understand emotions through their physical manifestation on a person's body because behavioral responses function as metonymies in emotion concepts (Kövecses 1990, 2000; Lakoff, Kövecses 1987). By closing in on different body parts and accentuating the sound, each of the audiovisual images is frame-metonymic of a symptom of the protagonist's anxiety, thereby contributing to the associated affective frame. The embodied affective cues in this example heighten our knowledge of the protagonist's affective state, linking the abstract concept of anxiety to concrete bodily sensations and evoking the conceptual metaphor EMOTION IS BODILY EXPERIENCE. Moreover, the use of sounds that accompany each bodily cue further reinforces the metaphorical mapping, thereby aligning the viewer's auditory experiences with the bodily manifestations of the protagonist's affective state. By employing conceptual metaphors that use concrete behavioral cues to represent abstract emotions, the scene allows viewers to access and comprehend the protagonist's anxiety on a more visceral and experiential level, bringing the experience of the spectator closer to that of the character. In addition to the metonymic and metaphoric associations in Figure 3, each of the shots is indicative of similative meaning. We can know what the nameless protagonist's experience of depression *feels like* because of our embodied understanding of the behavioral responses depicted in each shot. Additionally, the monochrome color grading is a synesthetic simile that uses color to show visually what it feels like to have the experience of the nameless protagonist's depression. Each close-up shot, each sound, and the color grading is an example of an embodied affective cue that activates the associated emotional frames.

3.2 Physical Cues

Embodied affective cues that are shaped by a character's physical appearance can also figuratively depict a character's internal states. An example that uses physical cues to figuratively convey the emotional state of the main protagonist is Darren Aronofsky's *Black Swan* (2010). *Black Swan* portrays the protagonist, Nina (Natalie Portman), as a timid, fragile ballerina who struggles to embody the role of the Swan Queen in Tchaikovsky's *Swan Lake* (shown in **Figure 4**). Nina's appearance can be seen as frame-metonymic of her emotional state because it serves as a marker of her inner psychological and emotional experience. At the beginning of the film, Nina appears physically fragile, innocent, and controlled, with her hair tightly pulled back and her clothing conservatively modest. Her appearance is metonymic of her affective state, which is characterized by anxiety, self-doubt, and a rigidly perfectionist approach to her craft. As the film progresses, Nina's appearance undergoes a metamorphosis that reflects her emotional journey. She begins to embrace her darker, more passionate side, which is represented visually through her transformation into the black swan. Her physical appearance changes to reflect this transformation, with darker makeup, a more provocative style of dress, and even physical changes such as growing feathers and wings. Moreover, her costume transforms from the pristine, virginal white swan tutu to a darker, more revealing costume that emphasizes her sexuality. These changes in her appearance are visual indicators

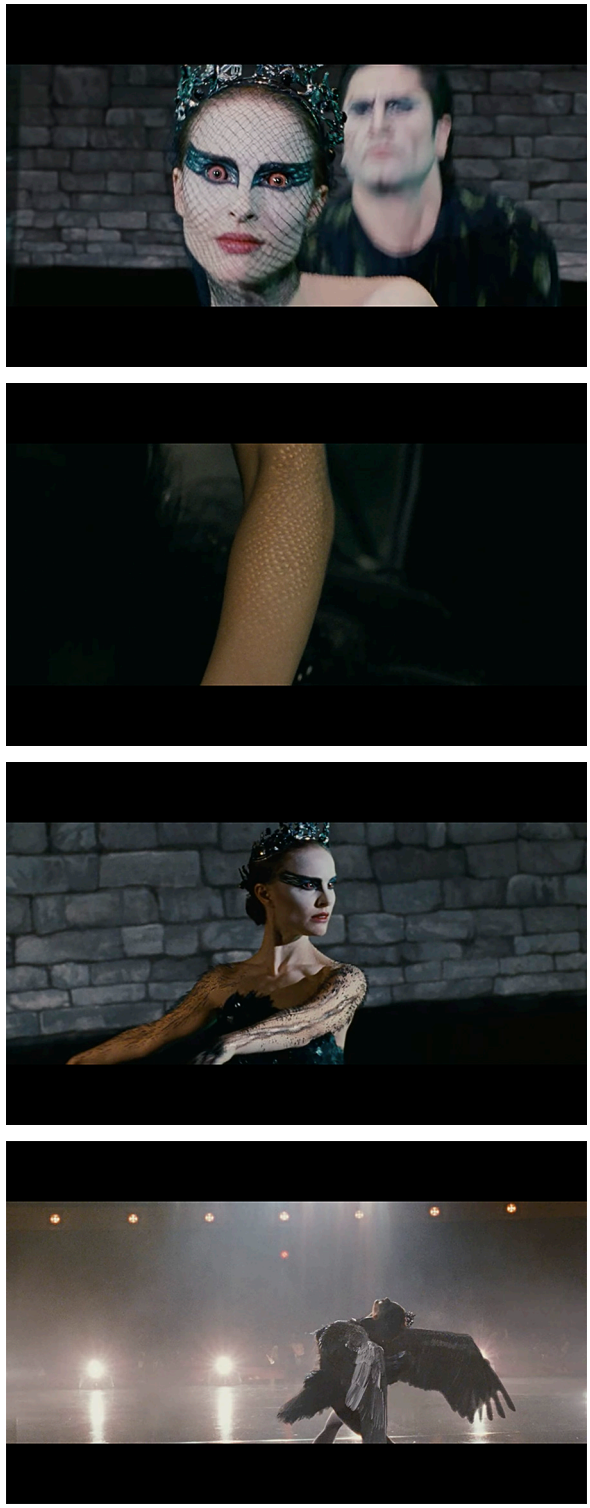


FIGURE 4 (A–D). Physical cues in Darren Aronofsky's *Black Swan* (Fox Searchlight Pictures, 2010). Screen capture by author.

of Nina's emotional transformation as she embraces her darker side. In addition, her eyes turn yellow and birdlike (**Figure 1A**), the skin on her arms forms into small lumps before they are shown bursting with blood and black feathers (**Figure 1B**), and she eventually completes her transformation as her arms turn into a pair of fully formed black wings (**Figure 1D**). The transformation of Nina's physical appearance thus serves as a metaphorical representation of her journey to embrace her inner darkness and break free from the constraints that have held her back. Her outward appearance represents this emotional transformation, allowing the audience to understand her emotional journey through the changes in her physical appearance.

3.3 Environmental Cues

In addition to embodied affective cues that are represented by characters' bodily expression and physical appearance, many films represent the emotions of characters through visual imagery and the mise-en-scène. I will refer to embodied affective cues that originate outside of the character's body but nonetheless represent their internal states as environmental cues. On the one hand, environmental cues can represent how the protagonist perceives the world, which can be an indicator of their affective state. For instance, in a film that depicts a character who is under the influence of drugs, the visual aspects of the character's environment may become distorted. On the other hand, they can take the form of highly figurative depictions such that aspects of the environment figuratively represent internal states. For instance, the introduction to Lars von Trier's *Melancholia* (2011) includes a highly stylized visual frame metonymy that conveys the experiences the characters will endure throughout the film. It encapsulates the themes of the film and the affective experience the characters will experience as the rogue water planet, aptly named Melancholia, travels on a crash course for Earth.

Similar to the example from von Trier's *Antichrist*, *Melancholia* incorporates visual frame metonymies that highlight the character's embodied experience of depression. However, rather than convey Justine's (Kirsten Dunst) experience through direct access to her bodily experience, *Melancholia* uses a combination of bodily expression, editing, and visual cues to highlight Justine's depression. One of the overarching visual motifs is the representation of stifled movement, or slowness. As the planet Melancholia gets closer to Earth, the characters are shown leaving deep imprints in the ground and Justine is shown with tree roots tied around her wrists and ankles as though she is immobilized by natural forces. The images are indicative of several emotion concepts, such as the metonymy DOWNWARD BODILY ORIENTATION FOR SADNESS, and the metaphors EMOTION IS A BURDEN (being weighed down by emotion) and EMOTION IS A PHYSICAL FORCE (Kövecses 2014). Moreover, the film establishes several visual motifs of gravity, drowning, and colliding planets that accentuate Justine's bodily orientation. Crucially, the visual motifs function as synesthetic similes that reveal what it feels like to have Justine's experience of depression. The increase in gravity reveals that Justine is weighed down by sadness, trapped by her depression, and drowning in sorrow. Additionally, the backdrop of the colliding planets is an attempt to show the immensity of Justine's melancholy. The visual motif of water highlights both the feeling of melancholy and the associated behavioral response (crying). Using visual imagery to figuratively convey a character's emotion is a useful strategy that uses intersubjective frames to draw similarities between a character's experience and the spectator's understanding of that experience. We may not have experienced firsthand what it feels like to have gone through a crushing depression, but we can come to a closer understanding of Justine's experience through the visually depicted embodied affective cues on offer.

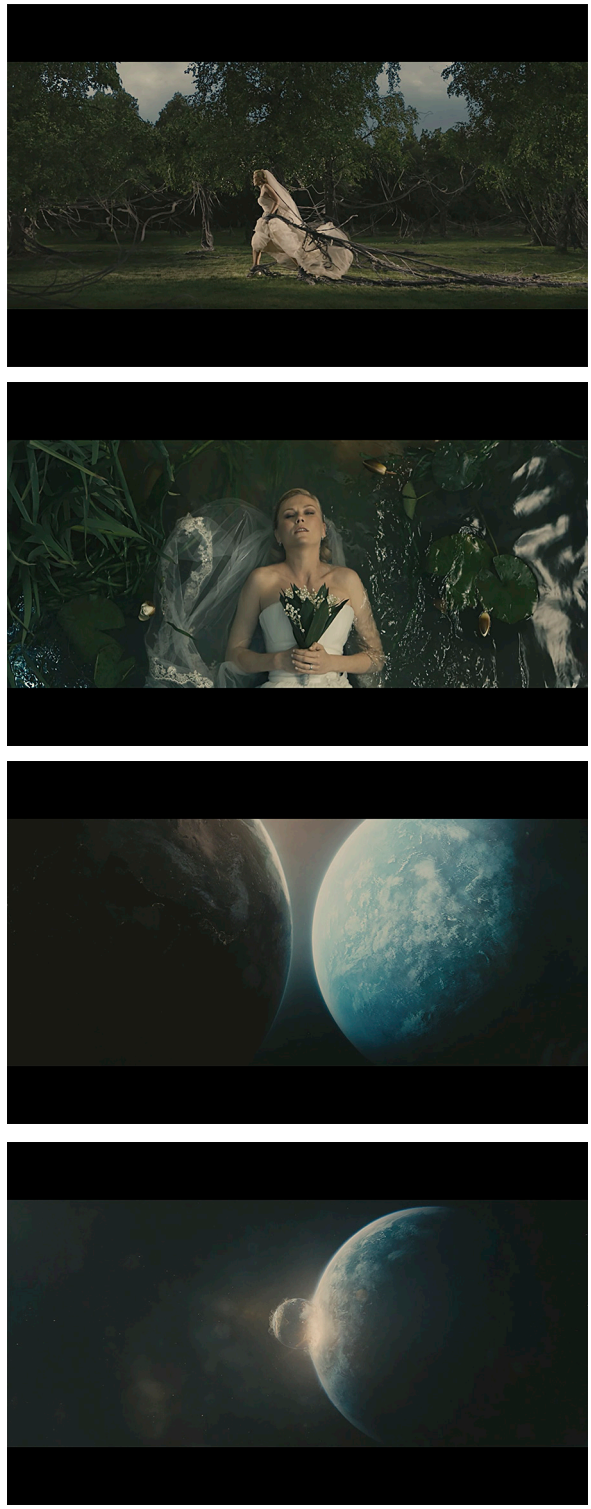


FIGURE 5 (A–D). Environmental cues in Lars von Trier's *Melancholia* (Nordisk Film, 2011). Screen capture by author.

4. CONCLUSION

This paper presents an examination of the figurative elements within film that convey character affect. Using insights from emotion concepts, visual frame metonymy, and synesthetic simile, I have argued that the emotional experience of a character can be represented cinematically through various embodied affective cues. Whereas other theorists have made attempts to show how viewers respond empathetically to characters from a phenomenological and neuroscientific framework, my analysis approaches character emotions through a multimodal and figurative framework to show how cinematic representations provide an understanding of a character's affective experience through shared intersubjective frames. These frames depend on experiential, cultural, and contextual information that is embedded within multimodal cinematic representations. Affective states are notoriously complex and ambiguous. Figurative meaning allows for the exploration of this ambiguity by focusing on the coexistence of multiple and sometimes contradictory emotion concepts within a representation. Approaches from the field of cognitive linguistics can elucidate the embodied processes necessary to understand the interaction between the various frames evoked within and across the available cinematic modes. Furthermore, they show how film allows us to understand character emotions through figurative depictions of emotions that are widely accessible.

This preliminary approach to embodied affective cues shows how a character's behavior and physical attributes as well as the cinematic environment can evoke their affective states. Furthermore, these affective states are easily understood because of their cultural, experiential, and embodied salience. Although I have identified how these cues work separately, it should be noted that they oftentimes work jointly. For instance, every example within this paper used behavioral cues to further establish a character's affective state. Thus, there is still a need to examine the relationship between multiple embodied affective cues evoked within a single scene. Moreover, there is still a need to analyze the unique ways in which filmmakers represent the affective experiences of their characters across a corpus of films to make explicit how and why they make decisions. Why might one director choose to depict an emotion in ways that other filmmakers may not? Does it depend on narrative context, or aesthetics? The goal of this paper is twofold. I have identified behavioral, physical, and environmental cues to account for three of the primary ways in which emotions arise in film, but this list is not exhaustive. Additionally, I have shown how figuration can elucidate how we understand abstract emotions through concrete cinematic portrayals. My intention is to link these two approaches to build an analytical framework that examines the role of figurative meaning in relation to a character's affective experience in cinema.

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