At first glance, Tony Conrad’s 1965 *The Flicker* seems to have much in common with Peter Kubelka’s 1960 *Arnulf Rainer*. They both present a series of alternating black and white frames, creating strobing effects when projected. Like other “structural” film (P. Adams Sitney), Kubelka’s film engages in a typically modernist play of medium specificity. *The Flicker*, however, was part of Conrad’s radically multimedia practice that included music, poetry, film, even philosophy, and a variety of other technical means—and, as Branden Joseph teaches us, whose controlling figure was John Cage, not Clement Greenberg.

Viewers routinely hallucinate watching *The Flicker*. The strobing elicits manifestly illusory visual percepts, such as evanescent green and purple spirals slithering over one another. It also produces a sensation of pleasurable or frightening surrender. The visual and sensual experience of the film exceeds what is physically given; the phenomenal exceeds the physical in a visceral, unstable way.

*The Flicker*’s hallucinatory illusion thematizes and aestheticizes not the poverty of embodied perception (its divergence from reality), but its constitutive excess. In place of the materiality of the medium, Conrad makes palpable the materiality of the body. I see what is nevertheless manifestly not there—not *visible*, in any straightforward meaning of the word. In Merleau-Ponty’s idiom, Conrad’s film elicits a visible experience of the *invisible*—it phenomenalizes what is constitutively beyond perception. By putting *The Flicker* under both art-historical and phenomenological scrutiny, this paper attempts to articulate a conceptual vocabulary commensurate to Conrad’s aesthetics of the non-phenomenal.

Scott C. Richmond is Assistant Professor of Film and Media Studies in the English Department at Wayne State University. His work lies at the intersection of film and media theory, phenomenology, and perceptual psychology. He has pieces forthcoming in *Postmodern Culture* and *World Picture*, and is currently working on a book entitled *Resonant Perception: Cinema, Phenomenology, Illusion*.